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Love in Literature

The theme of love has been a recurrent one in the history of literature. Love is an interesting subject in literature because love, unlike other themes, has many twists and turns and many different endings. Love has been present in early works of literature, such as Greek and Roman mythology, and has continued through Victorian and contemporary times. Love is unique in that it is a constant: while it goes on through different decades and different centuries, the elements stay the same. In addition, love is used in literature in a way to complement other themes, such as violence or sadness. It is useful as it gives common ground to otherwise unrelatable individuals. Many times, literature exhibits love in an unrealistic manner, usually portraying a happy ending, but it has been said that this occurs as the author wishes to exhibit to the reader what love would look like in a perfect world.

It has been said that early medieval writers and poets used the term "love" to suggest "moral, ethical and social phenomena which were deeply connected with friendship and the development of morals." In the 12th century, love is seen more as a bond between the genders and an emotional force. It has been suggested that by this time, writers were using love as a way of exhibiting freedom from enemies of that time and to show that there was now a "leisure class" who could enjoy the pleasures of love.

William Shakespeare (1564--1616) was an English poet and playwright who used love in the context of all angles. He suggests that lovers are not bound by space and time or the surrounding world. In The Merchant of Venice, he writes: "Lovers ever run before the clock, quite unaware of what others think of them as people committing mistakes." Romeo and Juliet, a love story between two star-crossed lovers, is the classic tragic romance. It has been said that Romeo and Juliet is the ultimate symbolic example of the story of young love and doomed love. Shakespeare interestingly breaks from traditional courtship views of his day with Romeo and Juliet, as Juliet does not adhere to the "rules of the day" that a woman should be shy and modest but rather, after knowing each other for just one night, the couple confess their love for one another and make plans to marry. Shakespeare did not always applaud love though; he is quoted as saying, "Love is merely a madness."

The New York Public Library has published a list of some of the top love stories of all time. The following are a sample of these:

Wuthering Heights (Emily Bronte) is the story of the lovers Heathcliffe and Catherine. Their love story has been described as one that expresses the idea of "giving oneself unreservedly to another and gaining a whole self or sense of identity back, to be all-in-all for each other, so that nothing else in the world matters, and to be loved in this way forever." They are described as soul mates, as Heathcliffe declares after Catherine's death, "I cannot live without my soul."

Romeo and Juliet (William Shakespeare) -- see above for description.

In Anna Karenina (Leo Tolstoy) love is used in several ways. It is used both positively and negatively in the central character's life. Anna Karenina does not have love within her marriage so she seeks it elsewhere. However, this in turn leads to her committing suicide. The book also explores the duality between the love for family and romantic love.

Sense and Sensibility (Jane Austen) uses love to exhibit that love does not come without some discomfort. While the main protagonists end up with happy endings, they endure sadness and tragedy in the pursuit of love.

Pride and Prejudice (Jane Austen) explores the theme of love by exhibiting that love is not always a primary ingredient for marriage. Instead Austen suggests that love is a "privilege" and not something that marriages are based upon. Instead, marriage is built upon economic necessity. She opens Pride and Prejudice with the following line: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

— with [Lakshmi Rao](https://www.facebook.com/Lakshmi.G.Rao) and [Yuni Ta](https://www.facebook.com/yuni.ta.104).

The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs Brothers Grimm

There was once a poor woman who gave birth to a little son, and as he came into the world with a caul on, it was predicted that in his fourteenth year he would have the king's daughter for his wife. It happened that soon afterwards the king came into the village, and no one knew that he was the king, and when he asked the people what news there was, they answered, a child has just been born with a caul on, whatever anyone so born undertakes turns out well. It is prophesied, too, that in his fourteenth year he will have the king's daughter for his wife.

The king, who had a bad heart, and was angry about the prophecy, went to the parents, and, seeming quite friendly, said, you poor people, let me have your child, and I will take care of it. At first they refused, but when the stranger offered them a large amount of gold for it, and they thought, it is a child of good fortune, and everything must turn out well for it, they at last consented, and gave him the child.

The king put it in a box and rode away with it until he came to a deep piece of water, then he threw the box into it and thought, I have freed my daughter from her undesired suitor.

The box, however, did not sink, but floated like a boat, and not a drop of water made its way into it. And it floated to within two miles of the king's chief city, where there was a mill, and it came to a halt at the mill-dam. A miller's boy, who by good luck was standing there, noticed it and pulled it out with a hook, thinking that he had found a great treasure, but when he opened it there lay a pretty boy inside, quite fresh and lively. He took him to the miller and his wife, and as they had no children they were glad, and said, "God has given him to us." They took great care of the foundling, and he grew up in all goodness.

It happened that once in a storm, the king went into the mill, and asked the mill-folk if the tall youth were their son. No, answered they, he's a foundling. Fourteen years ago he floated down to the mill-dam in a box, and the mill-boy pulled him out of the water.

Then the king knew that it was none other than the child of good fortune which he had thrown into the water, and he said, my good people, could not the youth take a letter to the queen. I will give him two gold pieces as a reward. Just as the king commands, answered they, and they told the boy to hold himself in readiness. Then the king wrote a letter to the queen, wherein he said, as soon as the boy arrives with this letter, let him be killed and buried, and all must be done before I come home. The boy set out with this letter, but he lost his way, and in the evening came to a large forest. In the darkness he saw a small light, he went towards it and reached a cottage. When he went in, an old woman was sitting by the fire quite alone. She started when she saw the boy, and said, whence do you come, and whither are you going. I come from the mill, he answered, and wish to go to the queen, to whom I am taking a letter, but as I have lost my way in the forest I should like to stay here over night. You poor boy, said the woman, you have come into a den of thieves, and when they come home they will kill you. Let them come, said the boy, I am not afraid, but I am so tired that I cannot go any farther. And he stretched himself upon a bench and fell asleep.

Soon afterwards the robbers came, and angrily asked what strange boy was lying there. Ah, said the old woman, it is an innocent child who has lost himself in the forest, and out of pity I have let him come in, he has to take a letter to the queen. The robbers opened the letter and read it, and in it was written that the boy as soon as he arrived should be put to death. Then the hardhearted robbers felt pity, and their leader tore up the letter and wrote another, saying, that as soon as the boy came, he should be married at once to the king's daughter. Then they let him lie quietly on the bench until the next morning, and when he awoke they gave him the letter, and showed him the right way.

And the queen, when she had received the letter and read it, did as was written in it, and had a splendid wedding-feast prepared, and the king's daughter was married to the child of good fortune, and as the youth was handsome and friendly she lived with him in joy and contentment.

After some time the king returned to his palace and saw that the prophecy was fulfilled, and the child married to his daughter. How has that come to pass, said he, I gave quite another order in my letter.

So the queen gave him the letter, and said that he might see for himself what was written in it. The king read the letter and saw quite well that it had been exchanged for the other. He asked the youth what had become of the letter entrusted to him, and why he had brought another instead of it. I know nothing about it, answered he, it must have been changed in the night, when I slept in the forest. The king said in a passion, you shall not have everything quite so much your own way, whosoever marries my daughter must fetch me from hell three golden hairs from the head of the devil, bring me what I want, and you shall keep my daughter. In this way the king hoped to be rid of him for ever. But the child of good fortune answered, I will fetch the golden hairs, I am not afraid of the devil. Whereupon he took leave of them and began his journey.

The road led him to a large town, where the watchman by the gates asked him what his trade was, and what he knew. I know everything, answered the child of good fortune. Then you can do us a favor, said the watchman, if you will tell us why our market fountain, which once flowed with wine has become dry, and no longer gives even water. That you shall know, answered he, only wait until I come back.

Then he went farther and came to another town, and there also the gatekeeper asked him what was his trade, and what he knew. I know everything, answered he. Then you can do us a favor and tell us why a tree in our town which once bore golden apples now does not even put forth leaves. You shall know that, answered he, only wait until I come back.

Then he went on and came to a wide river over which he must cross. The ferryman asked him what his trade was, and what he knew. I know everything, answered he. Then you can do me a favor, said the ferryman, and tell me why I must always be rowing backwards and forwards, and am never set free. You shall know that, answered he, only wait until I come back.

When he had crossed the water he found the entrance to hell. It was black and sooty within, and the devil was not at home, but his grandmother was sitting in a large arm-chair. What do you want, said she to him, but she did not look so very wicked. I should like to have three golden hairs from the devil's head, answered he, else I cannot keep my wife. That is a good deal to ask for, said she, if the devil comes home and finds you, it will cost you your life, but as I pity you, I will see if I cannot help you.

She changed him into an ant and said, creep into the folds of my dress, you will be safe there. Yes, answered he, so far, so good, but there are three things besides that I want to know - why a fountain which once flowed with wine has become dry, and no longer gives even water, why a tree which once bore golden apples does not even put forth leaves, and why a ferryman must always be going backwards and forwards, and is never set free. Those are difficult questions, answered she, but just be silent and quiet and pay attention to what the devil says when I pull out the three golden hairs.

As the evening came on, the devil returned home. No sooner had he entered than he noticed that the air was not pure. I smell man's flesh, said he, all is not right here. Then he pried into every corner, and searched, but could not find anything. His grandmother scolded him. It has just been swept, said she, and everything put in order, and now you are upsetting it again, you have always got man's flesh in your nose. Sit down and eat your supper.

When he had eaten and drunk he was tired, and laid his head in his grandmother's lap, and told her she should louse him a little. It was not long before he was fast asleep, snoring and breathing heavily. Then the old woman took hold of a golden hair, pulled it out, and laid it down beside her. Oh, cried the devil, what are you doing. I have had a bad dream, answered the grandmother, so I seized hold of your hair. What did you dream then, said the devil. I dreamt that a fountain in a market-place from which wine once flowed was dried up, and not even water would flow out of it - what is the cause of it. Oh, ho, if they did but know it, answered the devil, there is a toad sitting under a stone in the well - if they killed it, the wine would flow again.

The grandmother loused him again until he went to sleep and snored so that the windows shook. Then she pulled the second hair out. Ha, what are you doing, cried the devil angrily. Do not take it ill, said she, I did it in a dream. What have you dreamt this time, asked he. I dreamt that in a certain kingdom there stood an apple-tree which had once borne golden apples, but now would not even bear leaves. What, think you, was the reason. Oh, if they did but know, answered the devil. A mouse is gnawing at the root - if they killed it they would have golden apples again, but if it gnaws much longer the tree will wither altogether. But I have had enough of your dreams, if you disturb me in my sleep again you will get a box on the ear.

The grandmother spoke gently to him and picked his lice once more until he fell asleep and snored. Then she took hold of the third golden hair and pulled it out. The devil jumped up, roared out, and would have treated her ill if she had not quieted him again and said, who can help bad dreams. What was the dream, then, asked he, and was quite curious. I dreamt of a ferryman who complained that he must always ferry from one side to the other, and was never released. What is the cause of it. Ah, the fool, answered the devil, when anyone comes and wants to go across he must put the oar in his hand, and the other man will have to ferry and he will be free. As the grandmother had plucked out the three golden hairs, and the three questions were answered, she let the old devil alone, and he slept until daybreak.

When the devil had gone out again the old woman took the ant out of the folds of her dress, and gave the child of good fortune his human shape again. There are the three golden hairs for you, said she. What the devil said to your three questions, I suppose you heard. Yes, answered he, I heard, and will take care to remember. You have what you want, said she, and now you can go your way. He thanked the old woman for helping him in his need, and left hell well content that everything had turned out so fortunately.

When he came to the ferryman he was expected to give the promised answer. Ferry me across first, said the child of good fortune, and then I will tell you how you can be set free, and when he reached the opposite shore he gave him the devil's advice. Next time anyone comes, who wants to be ferried over, just put the oar in his hand.

He went on and came to the town wherein stood the unfruitful tree, and there too the watchman wanted an answer. So he told him what he had heard from the devil. Kill the mouse which is gnawing at its root, and it will again bear golden apples. Then the watchman thanked him, and gave him as a reward two asses laden with gold, which followed him.

Finally, he came to the town whose well was dry. He told the watchman what the devil had said, a toad is in the well beneath a stone, you must find it and kill it, and the well will again give wine in plenty. The watchman thanked him, and also gave him two asses laden with gold.

At last the child of good fortune got home to his wife, who was heartily glad to see him again, and to hear how well he had prospered in everything. To the king he took what he had asked for, the devil's three golden hairs, and when the king saw the four asses laden with gold he was quite content, and said, now all the conditions are fulfilled, and you can keep my daughter.

But tell me, dear son-in-law, where did all that gold come from - this is tremendous wealth. I was rowed across a river, answered he, and got it there, it lies on the shore instead of sand. Can I too fetch some of it, said the king, and he was quite eager about it. As much as you like, answered he. There is a ferryman on the river, let him ferry you over, and you can fill your sacks on the other side. The greedy king set out in all haste, and when he came to the river he beckoned to the ferryman to put him across. The ferryman came and bade him get in, and when they got to the other shore he put the oar in his hand and sprang over. But from this time forth the king had to ferry, as a punishment for his sins. Perhaps he is ferrying still. If he is, it is because no one has taken the oar from him.

Agatha Christie Biography

Agatha Christie was the best-selling mystery writer of all time. She wrote ninety-three books and seventeen plays, including the longest-running play of modern-day theater, The Mousetrap. She is the only mystery writer to have created two important detectives as characters, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple.

Childhood and family

The daughter of an American father and a British mother, Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was born at Torquay in the United Kingdom on September 15, 1890. Her family was comfortable, although not wealthy. She was educated at home, with later studies in Paris, France. Christie taught herself to read at five years old. She grew up in a family environment full of stories—from the dramatic, suspenseful tales her mother told her at bedtime to her elder sister's frightening creations. She began creating her own fictions, too, with the help of her nanny, her dolls, and her pets. In 1914 she was married to Colonel Archibald Christie, with whom she had one daughter.

Early characters

In Christie's first book, The Mysterious Affair at Styles (1920), she introduced one of her two best-known detectives, Hercule Poirot. Poirot's character also makes clear Christie's debt to the mystery writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), the creator of the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes. Like Holmes, Poirot is a committed and convincing spokesman for a rational (reasoned and unemotional) approach to solving mysteries. (Poirot places his faith in his brain's "little grey cells"). Poirot's friend and companion, Captain Hastings, also shares much in common with Holmes's friend Dr. John Watson. Hastings, like Watson, is a retired military man who is too trusting and often foolish, but he occasionally stumbles upon some observation that inspires the far-more-intelligent Poirot.

While writing in imitation of Conan Doyle, Christie experimented with many other versions of the sleuth, a term for a detective or solver of mysteries. Some of Christie's early sleuths included the married couple Tuppence and Tommy Beresford, whose specialty was hunting down spies. The Beresfords first appeared in her book The Secret Adversary (1922), where their breezy and almost offhand approach to detection provided a sharp contrast to the methods of Poirot. Another Christie detective, Colonel Race—a mysterious man of few words—first appeared in The Man in the Brown Suit (1924). However, since his principal area of activity was in the English colonies (territories then under British government control), Christie only used him occasionally afterwards.

Superintendent Battle, who was strong, dependable, and hardworking, came onto the scene in The Secret of Chimneys (1925) and later solved The Seven Dials Mystery (1929). He was not a greatly attractive character, however, so Christie only used him as a minor character after that. Other sleuths who first appeared during this experimental period were the weird pair of Harley Quin and Mr. Satterthwaite, as well as the clever Parker Pyne. Pyne specialized not in solving murders, but in influencing the lives of others so as to bring them happiness or adventure. Pyne was often fortunate enough to have the assistance of Mrs. Ariadne Oliver, a mystery novelist who bore an uncanny resemblance to her creator, Agatha Christie.

A mysterious breakdown

The year 1926 was an important one for Christie. It saw the publication of her first hugely successful novel, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, in which the narrator (the character in whose voice the story is told) is the murderer. It was also a year of personal tragedy. Christie's mother died in 1926, and Christie discovered that her husband was in love with another woman. She suffered a mental breakdown and on December 6 she disappeared from her home, and her car was found abandoned in a quarry. Ten days later, acting on a tip, police found her in a hotel in Harrogate, England, where she had been staying the entire time, registered under the name of the woman with whom her husband was having his affair. Christie claimed to have had amnesia (severe memory loss), and the case was not pursued further. She divorced her first husband two years later.

In 1930 Christie married Sir Max Mallowan, a leading British archaeologist. She often accompanied him on his expeditions in Iraq and Syria and placed some of her novels in those countries. In Come, Tell Me How You Live (1946) she wrote a humorous account of some of her travels with her husband.

Major works

In 1930 Christie also produced what is believed by many to be her best-written novel, Murder at the Vicarage. This mystery also marked the first appearance of Jane Marple, who became one of Christie's favorite sleuths and who showed up frequently thereafter in her books. Miss Marple was one of those complicated characters in whom readers delight. Behind her old-fashioned, grandmotherly appearance, Miss Marple's mind was coldly aware that all human beings are weak and that some are completely immoral.

In the mid-1930s Christie began to produce novels that bore her special manner. In them she arranged a situation that seemed highly unrealistic or unlikely, and then she placed characters, who acted for the most realistic of reasons, into this framework. In Murder in the Calais Coach (1934) the murder is committed through the planning of a dozen people. In And Then There Were None (1939) nine murderers are invited to an island by an ex-judge who kills them out of an unshakeable sense of justice. In Easy to Kill (1939) four murders are committed in a tiny town without any suspicions being aroused, while in A Murder Is Announced (1950) the killer notifies others that the crime will occur in advance. Also interesting in these books is Christie's philosophy that it is quite acceptable to kill a killer, particularly one whose crime is especially horrible.

Christie wrote several works in addition to her fiction, including seventeen plays. Her favorite play was Witness for the Prosecution (1953), but the public disagreed. The Mousetrap opened in London in 1952 and was a huge success, playing there for over thirty years. In addition, many of Christie's mysteries were made into movies. In 1998 her play Black Coffee was adapted into a novel by another writer, Charles Osborne.

In 1971 Christie was named a Dame of the British Empire—a title given by the English king or queen in honor of a person's extraordinary service to the country or for personal merit. Five years later Christie died on January 12, 1976.