

The Patterning of Obsessive Love in Cecelia Ahern's *P.S. I Love You*

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Abstract

This study proposes that human beings display three types of emotions in intimate relationships: 1) the sex drive or lust 2) attraction 3) attachment, accompanied in humans by feelings of calm, comfort and emotional union with the mate. So, this study offers reading of Cecelia Ahern's *P.S. I Love You*. She has depicted the concept of love in a different and unique way. This study is contextualized within the textual analysis of *P.S. I Love You* by Ahern in order to explore and analyze the ways in which love is different from previous eras as compared to the twenty first century. In order to highlight and expose the different forms of love, the concept of marriage and friendship in regard to modernization and to find out the major differences among love, friendship and infatuation. The critical analysis reveals that love nowadays has been seen in myriad of forms and ways and every individual considers himself/herself on the right track irrespective of opinion given by others around him or her.

Keywords: Romance, Love, Modern Love, obsessive Love

1.1 Background of the Study

The idea of love is as old as this universe. It has always been remained an important, crucial and inevitable part of human beings since the beginning of this world. Many generations of writers as well as artists and their offspring are plagued by the mysterious idea, understanding and appeal of love. In an attempt to define love at the outset is to provoke the manure of language because it is related to that frenzy area of the language where language can be considered excessive and at the same time spontaneous. There is no doubt that it is love and, on the other hand, lack of love that helps in the establishment of nucleus in terms of the consciousness of human existence. The notion of love, when it is discussed within the domain of modern era, is distant from the classical idealization and as an alternative it aims to unearth the consumerist representation of relatedness that makes it possible to comprehend the human reality of love coupled with the paradoxes, failures and multiplicities that it possesses.

Love is one of the most important and inevitable elements of our daily lives. The idea of love is ongoing and ever changing since long back when human beings started to live on this earth. In the same way, it has gone through considerable changes in 20th century because of the emergence of technology and other innovative inventions in this world, especially it has been changed and perceived in a totally different way when it is analyzed in 21st century when globalization and technology are at their peaks. Keeping in view the current gross conditions of technology, materialism, capitalism and globalization prevailing throughout this world, the international scenario, constant debate and revamping or overhauling of major conceptual frame works of love and friendship to which we adhere, it is the need of the hour to address the issues and concepts that are major concerns to acquire the broad idea about the working of love, friendship, marriage and infatuation in the current age.

1.2 Life and Career of Cecelia Ahern

Cecelia Ahern was born on 30th September in the year 1981. She was born and bred in the famous part of this world, Dublin, Ireland. Her father name is Bertie Ahern who is the former prime minister of Ireland. She is worldwide well recognized Irish novelist. She has published a number of novels and her first novel was published in 2004 when she was only twenty-one years old. Her works are published almost in fifty countries of this world that is considered as a great achievement from her. Her first master piece, that was entitled as *P.S. I Love You* and published in 2004, received very positive response throughout this world. Her second piece of

fiction, that was entitled as *Where Rainbows End* and got published in 2005, also received praise from everywhere. Her other works include *The Gift*, *How to Fall in Love*, *The Year I Met You*, *Flawed* and *Lyrebird*.

In order to get a deeper understanding of the analysis and discussion on the idea of love that is revisited by Ahern and presented in a unique and different way, it is compulsory to have some knowledge about the narrative of the stories of the selected fictional works. A brief summary of the selected novels is given below:

1.4 Brief Overview of the Selected Novel:

1.4.1 P.S. I Love You:

This is the debut novel of Cecelia Ahern and it was published in 2004. The book becomes successful because of its strong appeal to the feelings and emotions of the readers as well as critics as the narrative of the novel is based on a beautiful and enticing love story. This piece of fiction is poignant as well as comical. The book can also be taken as introspective and farcical at the same time. The main characters of this novel are Holly Kennedy and Gerry Clark. Other significant characters include Sharon McCarthy who is the best friend of Holly and Elizabeth who is the mother of Holly. Holly is the protagonist of the book who marries Gerry and both live a happy and peaceful life together. The setting of the narrative is set in Ireland (like other novels of Ahern) the couple lives in Dublin, the famous city of Ireland. In the course of their life they often fight with each other, but their love overcomes everything.

The story of the novel begins when the husband of Holly, Gerry, dies because of brain tumor that was started to effect long ago but the family did not know about it. Holly's life is very much gets affected by the death of Gerry because he was not only her husband but also her soul mate, lover and best friend. Her life entirely changes from happiness to some kind everlasting sadness and miseries. Holly loses the interest and charm in her life in terms of everything and starts spending her days and nights aimlessly. She continuous to live such boring and miserable life untill she received an envelope that was given to her mother just before when Gerry dies. This envelope contains some kinds of tips and tasks for every month that starts from March to December. These letters are written by Gerry when he was alive as he knew that someday he will die before her soul mate Holly and he did not want her to suffer. Advises and suggestions for every month are given to make Holly's life better and to move forward by living a happy and peaceful life. Gerry instructs Holly through his letters. In first letter he instructs her to visit a shopping mall in order to get her dress changed and gets rid of her dirty jeans and the shirts of Gerry she used to wear after his death. She is allowed to open one letter for each month. The notes regarding the month of July send her to have a trip out of Dublin. Gerry suggests her to visit Spain for a few days with her best friends such as McCarthy.

Gerry continuous to instruct her through his letters and in the month of September, he asks her to get such kind of good job that she never had. She tries her best and makes herself busy in the search for a good and attractive opportunity and ultimately, she gets it. Because of these tasks and instructions, her life becomes the center of happiness and she feels peace in her mind as well as in her body. As she is supposed to must do what Gerry instructs her in the letter in order to make him happy, in the last letter that opens in December, Gerry encourages her to be never afraid of being bound in the bond of love again. He asks her to search for the love of her life as he was no longer available physically.

After passing of some months, Holly makes herself strong enough to break the shell of disappointment, sadness and despair. She gets a good job as an in charge in a trendy magazine and indulges in the work. She always feels pleasure in the company of her friends who are portrayed in a comical sense throughout the narrative. Her friends also support her to make her life better and peaceful as they drag her into different hang outs such as hen parties and shopping in various malls of the city to refresh her mind. Holly's family is also discussed in the plot and the way they behave with Holly at the time of despair and happiness. The novel is full of the various themes of friendship, marriage and family within the time period of our contemporary circumstances. All of the characters in the novel, including male and female characters, can be considered as the figures of romance because we see in-laws as unsympathetic, tear-away siblings, puzzled and confused as well as supportive parents throughout the narrative of the book.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

The researcher will focus on the idea of love that is entirely changed in our modern world as depicted in Cecelia Ahern's *P.S. I Love You* by taking into account the connection of love with friendship, marriage and infatuation.

1.6 Research Objectives

1. To explore and analyze the ways in which love is different from previous eras as compared to the twenty first century.
2. To highlight and expose the different forms of love in which love is presented and understood in our contemporary era.
3. To discuss in detail the concept of marriage and friendship within the context of modernization.
4. To find out the major differences among love, friendship and infatuation.

1.7 Research Questions

The present research is comprised of the following research questions;

1. How far the concept of love is bonded within the complex nexus of friendship, love and marriage as portrayed in *P.S. I Love You* by Ahern?
2. How do the selected fictional works represent and expose the role as well as need of love in modern milieu in the construction of love, friendship and infatuation in twenty first century?

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

The research is delimited and focuses only three works of Cecelia Ahern, *P.S. I Love You* which is explored from the perspectives of love, friendship, marriage and family.

1.9 Significance of the Research

There already exists a long history of artistic and textual interpretations of love and other elements related to it but this body of research which is being undertaken is still unappreciated. There is also a need to reach out for more balanced view in frenzy of theory wars in terms of the exploration of love and to understand its mysterious nature. Living in the era when urban life culture is experiencing tremendous transformations and the old age beliefs and theories are being challenged, it is necessary to generate a fruitful discussion on it. Therefore, this study will be of great significance as it addresses some of the issues related to the understanding and comprehension of love, friendship and infatuation and will be trying to generate an academic debate on this sensitive, emotional as well as logical and inevitable part of our lives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review chapter is based on the ideas of love, marriage and the available literature. This section of article contextualizes the development of the idea of love coupled with its historical developments with its positive as well as negative aspects. In order to know about the contemporary concept of love, it is necessary to take into account the previous developments of love within the fields of psychology and sociology because these two fields are very much relevant with the idea of love being social phenomenon. For the purpose of better comprehension of the concept of love, the cross-cultural perspective of love is also discussed in the first section of this chapter. The second section gives a comprehensive idea about the concept of marriage in our contemporary era including its positive and negative impacts, especially negatives ones because of the modern upheaval and unrest in every field of life including marriages. Especially, those points are explored and critically analyzed which are related to the conceptual framework of this present study.

2.1 Contextualizing the Development of Love

“Though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains, and have no love, I am nothing.”(Corinthians)

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”(Browning)

“Love is the state in which man sees things most widely different from what they are. The force of illusion reaches its zenith here.”(Nietzsche)

The above quotations are undoubtedly demonstrating the idea of love that is represented through the support of literature in ancient times to the modern era. These quotes also elucidate the omnipresence of this concept that is depicting the living and thinking of human through different regimes. Falkowski in his article critically evaluates the idea of love in our lives and asserts that “in the various art forms, which include mass media, music, books etc. commonly possess the concept of love which illustrates the significant place of love in all the fields of our lives” (16). The idea as well as the importance of love also occurs in some other common topics of our lives such as religion. Because of these art forms and the commonly occurring of famous topics, love has become an inevitable part and topic of discussion in modern societies. Throughout this orb, especially the countries which have industrialization at its peak such as United States of America and other western nations, love has a different place because in these countries it is condemned, conferred, promoted and as well as glorified. Falkowski, furthermore adds that “in such areas of the globe, it has become an entity that is advertised

by the people who belong to different spheres of life such as psychologists, novelists, poets, critics, scholars, researchers and sociologists” (15).

Love seems to play a crucial role in the lives of parents when they raise children, in lives of individuals when they select their mates and then divorce them and the common people who make their own choices, and then religion promotes the idea of love “to live a happy and peaceful life, on the other hand, philosophers and poets presaged in terms of the dangers it possesses and at the same time pay tribute to its virtues” (16). The presence of love can also be seen in the Bible as well as in the writings as well as teachings of Plato and Aristotle. It is important to mention that in the middle ages the literature started booming due to which the concept of love also prevailed to a greater extent (Kirk). Then there are advertisers, in our modern era, who use love for their own benefits as they sell their commodities by using the very concept of love. In one way or the other way, at every stage of our life love is an important part of our lives.

In the last fifty to eighty years, the investigations of love have been conducted in a proper systematic way because in the previous ages love had not been interpreted in such new systematic ways. Historical, psychological and sociological aspects have been taken into these recent analysis and investigations of love. In all of these various aspects, the concept of love is taken in a romantic way. The idea of romantic love is defined in various ways by different people. As Goode in his book, on the idea of romantic love, elaborated the definition of romantic love and stated that “durable emotive accessory, a cat Alexis that is existed between young people or grown person having opposite sexes, with at least the mechanisms of sex desire and tenderness” (51). The aforementioned systematic investigations are comprised of the historical, social and psychological development of love which are discussed below:

2.2.1 Historical Development of Love:

To describe the notion of love, historical development of love is very important. In this development, an idea related to the development of love is understood and taken in a romantic type of love. Various historians have taken into account the historical studies on the progress of the concept of love and tried to explore its development in terms of romantic love. For instance, two historians, Halverson and then there is Albert, have outlined the fundamental beginnings of romantic love and claimed that this type of love started to emerge in France in twelfth century. In the same way, Biegel stated that the occurrence of romantic love goes back to the twelfth century southern France when *troubadour poets* composed the elements of love in their lyrical works. According to the initial manifestations of love, romantic love was understood or termed as *courtly love*. The reason behind the giving a name to romantic love as courtly love was that the early manifestations of love were presented according to the people who were associated with nobility and how they thought and acted. The people who belonged to the lower social classes were totally ignored including their thinking and actions. Some particular kinds of rules and conventions, in terms of the courtly love, were set by the members of nobility.

2.2.2 Cross Cultural Perspective on Love

In order to have a better understanding of love, it is necessary to analyze it throughout this world. Here, at this point, cross cultural perspective of love is the need of the hour to be discussed. Several enquiries have been made and investigations done in order to compare and contrast the idea of romantic love within the various countries of this globe. Kharchey and Gluckman have conducted some investigations on the topic of love in terms of cross-cultural scenarios and they examined the working and roles of love in different non-western countries. According to the old ideas and analysis of non-western countries, it was found that love did not have much importance in these societies. But, according to the recent analysis which are done by Gluckman on the topic of love in these countries, give enough evidence to know that the idea of romantic love is completely changed in these non-western societies as well. He finds out that love has started to get much importance within the matters related to marriage.

The seeds of this big change in the understanding of love are seen in the work of Goode. His work can be taken as an example within the paradigms of cross cultural comparison of love. After reviewing the findings on love, he observed that love is taken as a fundamental motive that contributes a lot before the marriage in various societies of non-western countries. He, furthermore, conveys that in western countries it is believed as wrong doing if the marriage is taking place without the presence of love. He discusses the comparison of different non-western countries and reports that in Japan and China the thing is required for the happening of marriage is the respect between the couple, nothing else (Goode). As compared to these countries, the idea of love is entirely changed in India. The bond of marriage is based on this fact that love is not prerequisite for the happening of marriage, but it is necessary that love should be developed between husband and wife after some years of marriage (Kirk 2). At the end of his article, he concludes that love is present in western and non-western societies in one way or the other way but in a different way when the comparison is made between these

two societies and he confirms that in industrialized cities love has an immense and significant role to play in the lives of common people and they take this thing seriously.

2.2.3 Sociological Analysis of Love

It is a universally accepted fact that love is a very significant component of any society in this world. Including the historical and cross-cultural analysis of love, in order to comprehend the idea of romantic love, it has also been discussed and interpreted from sociological point of views. Goode has explored the concept of romantic love and remarks that it plays very important role being a factor in the reservation of family ties and status in the society. Greenfield in his article analyzed the sociological importance of love and unearths that it is a force that binds the individual in the domain of the social system. In the same way, Rosenblatt observed that love is predominant in such kinds of societies where husband and wife live closely to their other family members and it also plays the work of a shield against the exerted pressure from the relatives (Rosenblatt).

On the other hand, it is also important to mention that love is also taken negatively by some critics and it is blamed to create disturbance and anarchy in the society. In such kinds of dimensions, the studies conducted by Albert and Casler get attention to discuss. They are totally against the praise and values of love which are given by other critics or philosophers. Social psychologists as well as sociologists claim that love is possesses many negative traits. They argue that love is exaggerated in terms of its value and importance and point out that love is one of those central reasons which leads to unfortunate as well as unhappy marriage and then plays its negative role for the divorces too.

The above negative arguments have been countered by Biegel and Greenfield. Both of these sociologists give their point of views regarding the constructive role of love. They proposed that love is one of those satisfying elements of human lives which are fundamental requirement of human peaceful psychology, it is also used to decrease the dissatisfaction resulting from everyday work and it is only love that can overcome the importance of wealth in life. Sometimes, love becomes a symbol as well as hope for the people who are living pathetic and desperate lives which are full of disappointments.

2.2.4 Psychological Views of Love

As far as the role of psychologists is considered in the understanding of love then it is argued that love is interpreted in various ways by different psychologists. They tried to interpret and discover the matters of love on scientific levels. Lepp has given his ideas on the topic of love and explored its “origins by giving his theory of love in terms of sexual dimensions” (22) and these ideas were entirely based on his personal experiences with his patients. Menninger, another psychologist, has given his stance on the discussion of love and claims that “love is one of our basic needs which are compulsory in our everyday life” (12). He has described all of the ways in which the need of love can be quenched. These ways include proper work, sports and involvement in various kinds of institutions. The idea of love is not new in this world because it is present in this world since the beginning of this world. In our contemporary era where technology has overcome our feelings and emotions, still in this scenario, love is a dominant force that is used to unite this world as well as our feelings and emotions. Even in the age of materialism, love can win the hearts of other people.

The idea of love has been also used as a weapon to criticize others to get personal benefits. For instance, the opponents, who were against the traditional system in terms of arranged marriages from fifteenth to seventeenth century, started to attack the traditional system by using the idea of love as a weapon (Halverson). These opponents claimed that it was only love that was considered for the requirement of marriage, all other things like status, personality, family and wealth were totally irrelevant in the bond of marriage. They argued that love is the only supreme force which will hold the bond of marriage for a longer period of time and it is the guarantee for a peaceful and happy life, not other extravagant things. This change and opposition in the idea of romantic love has a great significance in our contemporary world, especially in the western countries.

2.3 Understanding the Concept of Marriage

We as a whole need to be infatuated, to be adored, to be unique to another person and feel that inclination of desire as well as passion that supersedes the logical and rational aspects of this world and make us together under one umbrella. By going through the tides which are full of love and lust, shifting the burden of our souls to other ones and then sharing the deepest parts coupled with feelings and emotions prompts a coupling of selves and regularly a converging of lives in the lawful contract of marriage. But after spending some years, our energy in the form of passion gets disappeared, sex becomes occasional thing, exhausting and then completely out of the lives of beloved ones. And at end, the marriage just pushes ahead under its own force with one or the two accomplices yearning for either to live a life that they were living before marriage or they want to start a new life because they are totally fed up with previous one.

A number of critics and philosophers have discussed this concept in their works or they have criticized the other people's arguments on the topic of marriage. In order to get a better as well as comprehensive understanding of the idea of marriage, Laura Kipnis' *Against Love: A Polemic* is the best choice to explore. This book takes into account the contemporary circumstances of human beings in terms of love and marriage. She has closely observed the modern society and its working within the conceptual understanding of marriage. She criticizes the negative aspects of being married person and does it in a very humorous way. With the use of humor, she highlights the bitter realities of our modern era related to marriage and love.

Constantine in her review on *Against Love: A Polemic* observed the elements of criticism about the idea of marriage and love in our contemporary era. She states that "Kipnis very skillfully has portrayed the elements of romantic love in a funny way and by criticizing the prominent engine of American society that is romantic love" (1). Kipnis' ideas and arguments are based on the various kinds of social criticism, political philosophy and theory of psychology in order to discuss and criticize all of the ways and scenarios in which romantic love gets interacted with political economy. Constantine remarks that different kinds of instances have been used by Kipnis to point out that romantic love is purely a *modern reconstruct*.

Emily critically analyzed the master piece of Kipnis that is *Against Love: A Polemic*. Emily is of the view that Kipnis makes it very obvious that:

Every human being in this world wants to be involved in the circle of love because love is considered as a mysterious force which possesses immense power to manipulate thinking and decisions of our lives. This force cannot be destructed as far as human beings are living here in this world.

(Emily1)

Greer in his article on *Against Love: A Polemic* has given his stance in a very comprehensive way to get to know about the ideas which have been portrayed in this book. He argues that Kipnis has given detailed account of our contemporary circumstances by limiting these conditions to the idea of love and marriage. He puts that "Laura Kipnis' *Against Love* is a well written non-fiction book in which she has elucidated and enlightened the modern-day readers with the ideas of love, marriage and infidelity" (1). Kipnis makes it very much clear at the beginning that this book is a polemic as it obvious from its title. As far as the idea of Polemics is considered, it can truly be elaborated in the words of Greer as he puts that:

Polemics don't tell 'the two sides of the story.' They exaggerate the case. They hurl out incitements and sporadically joke, as a rule since they're contending against something so undeniable and profoundly dug in, it's the best way to make even a gouge in the typical story.

(Greer2)

Greer probes the ideas which have been put by Kipnis in her book and claims that she is not against love straightforwardly, but from the close observance, it can be argued that there exists a logical order and sequence which leads Kipnis to become against love. He proposes that Kipnis' opinions are largely against marriage and then arguments become against fidelity and at the end she give her point of view that is against love (Greer). Marriage and fidelity are the driving forces which lead the Kipnis to go against love in her master piece.

Kipnis has built out her arguments logically by taking the support of other philosophers and critics regarding the human beings social and economic life. Her book is comprised of so many quotations, which especially include Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. By building her stance on the ideas of Freud and Marx, she exposes that in our contemporary era marriage can be considered as an institution that is used to control as well as govern common people and this institution is used to keep people working on some kind of work job and off (Kipnis49). In the first chapter of her book, the eyes of the readers glaze because of the abundance of philosophical references as well as academic arguments.

After this, Kipnis shifts her focus towards the life of adulterers. She compares the life of a person who is bonded with another person through marriage and an adulterer. Kipnis calls the adulterers as *rebels* because they do not want to get prisoned in the traditional system of marriage in order to fulfill their need of romantic love (Kipnis50). It is also important to mention that she doesn't regard adulterers as heroes or tries to lionize

them. She comments that these adulterers should be considered as the unavoidable byproducts of an unsustainable institution which advocates the permanent monogamy.

In her book, *Against Love: A Polemic*, Kipnis has devoted a large portion in order to explicate the modern relationships of our societies, especially the western societies. In this regard, Greer states that if half of the marriages result in divorce and other half are not in a stable or happy relationship then it can be argued that the modern-day marriages are truly in crisis (Greer4). Kipnis unearths that there are many reasons due to which the bond of marriage results as a total failure. In her book, a long list of all those things has been given which you unable to do if you are married or you are having a relationship with some other person. She presents a list of all those things. She states that:

You can't leave the house without saying where you're going.
You can't say what time you'll return. You can't stay out past midnight, or eleven, or ten, or dinnertime, or not come right home after work. You can't go out when the other person feels like staying home. You can't go to parties alone.

3. Research Methodology and theoretical Framework

The current research falls into the category of qualitative research in which data has been analyzed theoretically. According to Patton, qualitative research is related to the understanding of the social life and its data analysis approach uses words rather than numbers or figures. As the research at hand deals with understanding different aspects of modern love in the selected literary texts, insights for designing the framework have been drawn from Laura Kipnis's theory of love. Definitions of love abound in myriad forms, sexual, spiritual, parental, brotherly, divine, and many more; terms such as romantic, neighborly, reciprocal, selfish, altruistic and ethical, variously prefix the concept and appear to suggest a vital difference in their diverse descriptions. Under the theory of Laura Kipnis, the following aspects of love has been discussed;

3.1.1 Love or Subjugation

Kipnis has a different approach to explain the cynical romantic love and practicing couples. She states humans are free under the command of a powerful dictator romantic partner. She believes ownership of love is not that easy often it demands sacrifices and priority on your own needs and humans are doing it without complaining. They think their love is more important to bring happiness in their lives. Kipnis states likely they gain less and give up more than they have. They do not only scarify but that brings happiness to them.

For Kipnis love works differently. Modern lovers claim that they do anything to attain love but actually they drag themselves into despair and unhealthy relationship. They scarify their freedom and self for the sake of true love. Kipnis states however, this type of feelings is fleeting and makes them disillusioned. Such kind of love sharing marriages grab a lot give nothing. Eventually couples become rebellious, try to find ways to go out of it. Moreover, the marriage that often accompanies this "modern love" is merely a social institution committed to "maximizing submission and minimizing freedom". Thus, with this mindset, adulterers can only be seen as rebels who are trying to assert their freedom from the "domestic confines of love". Finally Kipnis gives her words to it by saying that anything worthy to you takes effort, kills your self-respect and makes you couple from individual. She declares relationship does not mean to be romantic only, it can be platonic. For many couples relationship means understanding, sharing happiness and sorrows as well as victories.

3.1.2 Essence of old love:

Kipnis's book *Against love* has many important and interesting points to expounds upon. I found it interesting the way she gives a different idea of platonic love. She declares love can be shared in any form. It can be shared by individual to his or her pet. They can even get love by their family members, siblings and parents. I even like her idea of Mutuality. She speaks that mutuality is that component which can bind up a couple into a strong relationship. I personally keep this thought up because mutuality is something that can make relation stronger. To accept every merit and demerits of one's personality is a key to make relation stronger. Trust is something which builds a bridge in a boundary free communication between two. It is more important to build a smooth relationship than feeling of love which couples have for each other. Although majority of people in the society are still single but they do not accept uncoupling. They think to be in relationship is more important than being in a love. Kipnis smashes this idea with opinion.

3.1.3 Love or freedom:

Love according to Kipnis is something which bounds one from doing anything. Kipnis throughout named love as game of losing everything even freedom. Love costs your whole self. You cannot even think different than your partner. You think what partner thinks, you speak what partner wants to listen, you move where he allows you to go. You forget your whole self. Overall her writing was not against love but society. She scared of society that it will not accept this kind of love. For that reason, she gives a very pessimistic and less optimistic approach of love. Kipnis describes all kinds of love individual, couple and marital love.

4 Textual Analysis of *P.S. I Love You*

This chapter gives a comprehensive idea of love by taking into account the narrative of Cecelia Ahern's debut master piece, *P.S. I Love You*. The narrative of the book revolves around the main characters of the book that include Holly, Gerry, Holly's mother and some close friends of hers. The story takes into account the incidents of the life of Holly who is compelled to live alone after the death of her husband, Gerry. Some flash backs have been used by the author to give a clear picture and make the comparison between Holly's previous and present life in order to realize how Holly is spending her present life without her soul mate, husband, friend and her other half, Gerry. The contribution of Holly's family and friends has been depicted in the age of materialism in terms of playing a constructive and positive role in the life of a person who is devastated emotionally as well as physically. All of the circumstances are explored by taking love as a central theme of the story coupled with the contemporary innovations in the field of technology and how modern man is being influenced by his contemporary milieu. The beauty of the novel lies within the domain of storytelling, linguistic ability and the portrayal of various themes.

The life of Holly changes when she comes to know about the letters that were left by Gerry to help Holly in improving her life style and feeling alive even without Gerry. This is the only effect of these letters which gives Holly a new life as Gerry helps to push Holly into a new future where she will be able to live a peaceful and happy life. Through these letters, he also supports her to set off for a journey where she will become successful to discover her own self coupled with the idea and practical life without Gerry. The strong and firm bond of love is also reflected in the present life of Holly because she never forgets Gerry at every breath of her life. Even though she tries to forget her husband, but everything goes in vain because of their attachment and robust feelings which they had when Gerry was alive. As Holly never agrees and makes herself ready to leave Gerry and on the other hand circumstances demand her to forget him, ultimately, she falls a victim of inner conflict.

The novel under discussion is comprised of so many instances in terms of the narrative of the book in which pure love has been pointed out by the author. The ideas about love which have been written by Gerry in his letters, which he wrote for Holly, truly depict the picture of having an ordinary and true lover. Gerry is a true lover of Holly but at the same time he does not want to bound Holly to suffer alone that is why he encourages her to move forward in her life even when he is not with her. As Gerry, in one of his letters to Holly, points out the idea of love coupled with highlighting the difference between a lover and a soul mate. Gerry writes to Holly by claiming that "finding someone you love and who loves you back is a wonderful, wonderful feeling. But finding a true soul mate is an even better feeling" (Ahern 95), her furthermore elaborates this difference and states that "A soul mate is someone who understands you like no other, loves you like no other, will be there for you forever, no matter what" (95). Gerry is one of those true believers who argue that pure or true love never dies even when the lovers are not physically together. He wants Holly to start a new life, as he points out that "They say that nothing lasts forever, but I am a firm believer in the fact that for some, love lives on even after we're gone" (96). According to the ideas of Gerry related to love, it is claimed that people can physically vanish, but they can always live forever in the minds and hearts of others just because of the love that they showed in their lives while living with these people. The same thing happens with Holly and Gerry because Gerry is always alive in the heart and mind of Holly just because of the love that he had and still has for Holly.

In this debut novel by Cecelia Ahern, the pure and true nature of love has been explored. This type of love is not just restricted to friendship or infatuation, but it is comprised of the different forms of love which make it pure in a true sense. The people who believe in the spirit of love are not coward as they are ready to make sacrifices in order to achieve what they intend. As a matter of fact, such kinds of ideas about love are expressed by Ahern within the circle of her observation and experiences. A Gerry expresses his views about love and encourages that "shoot for the moon, even if you fail, you'll land among the stars" (Ahern 190). Gerry and Holly also shoot for the moon and somehow, they land on the moon as it is reflected in the true love story between them. Gerry continuous to care and love Holly through the letters and encourages her to live a life in which love must be a part of it as, according to Gerry, life always remains incomplete if it is devoid of love.

In the course of marriage and friendship there is no doubt that some moments come when people fight over stupid things but because of the strong bond of love, afterwards, these fights also become a source of pleasure and peace. In the same way Holly misses the stupid fights with Gerry that she used to have at some different occasions. As Ahern puts that “they seldom fought, and when they did it was over stupid things that amused them after, like who had left the porch light on all day or who had forgotten to set the alarm at night” (7). All of the negative habits are overcome by the intensity of love between the true lovers. It is Gerry who makes her laugh when she is depressed and disturbed by the over work at job and, in the same way, Gerry is also comforted by Holly when he feels tired and unhappy. It is nothing else but love that is helping them to live a balanced life. It is the force that can overcome the minds and hearts of human beings. They are almost living a perfect life that is full of happiness and peace of mind and heart.

Holly takes the love of Gerry not from only one perspective but in various kinds of forms in which love was presented and expressed by Gerry. At some points the element of infatuation is also seen in the character of Holly when she wants Gerry physically with her. As at one-point Holly points out that “what a luxury it was for people to hold their loved ones whenever they wanted” (Ahern 341). These feelings from the character of Holly can be also comprehended in the form of a pure love as she misses her husband after his death. There is no doubt that Holly suffers from inner as well as outer problems in life when she becomes alone after her husband. A significant part has been played by the friends of Holly in order to make her life better and give Holly courage to live her life again. Sharon, one of her best friends, tries to console Holly throughout the narrative of the novel. Sharon also becomes worried after the death of her best friend’s husband and talks about the strong bond between them by claiming that “their plan had been very simple: to stay together for the rest of their lives” (Ahern 175). It is important to mention that the bond of pure love also exists between friends, as it existed between Sharon and Holly. As a matter of fact, Sharon is a true and sincere friend of Holly because “Sharon was never one to beat about the bush, but that’s why she loved her so much” (16). Holly loves Sharon because of her honesty and purity in the relationship. It is Sharon who tries to help Holly after the death of her husband. At one point, Sharon says to Holly about it and argues that “I’m your best friend, Hol; if I don’t help you then who will? Sharon said, squeezing her hand and giving her an encouraging smile” (16). Here, at this point, Ahern conveys the idea related to the importance of having friends in your life.

The character of Holly has a prominent place in every kind of analysis of the selected fictional work. Her character cannot be considered as a flat character rather she falls into the category of round characters. The situation of Holly that is depicted in the beginning of the story becomes entirely different in the end of the book. A new kind of energetic and lively character emerges from a dull and frustrated human being. She was a lady who committed errors, who once in a while cried on a Monday morning or during the evening alone in bed. She was a lady who frequently wound up exhausted with her life and thought that it was difficult to get up for work toward the beginning of the day. She was a lady who as a general rule a messy hair day had, who looked in the mirror and asked why she couldn’t simply drag herself to the exercise center all the more frequently; she was a lady who some of the time addressed what reason she needed to live on this planet. Being a human being, sometimes some things were misunderstood by her. Holly was flexible character who loved to accept her mistakes. The character of Holly is found as a lady with a million glad recollections, who recognized what it resembled to encounter genuine romance and who is prepared to encounter more life, more love and gain new experiences. Regardless of whether it occurred in ten months or ten years, Holly would comply with Gerry's last message. Whatever lay ahead, she knew she would open her heart and take after where it drove. Meanwhile, she would simply live.

The relationship that is existed between Gerry and Holly is a unique one that lasts even after the death of Gerry and this bond starts becoming more and more stronger as the basis of this kind of love is totally based on pure love. She misses Gerry in such a way that she forgets about her own self and present devastating situations. She seems to be in search for escapism in order to overcome the memories of Gerry because Gerry’s memories become the suffering and torture for Holly that affected her psychologically as well as physically. She becomes restless and confused at every breath of her life whose half soul departed with Gerry. As her best friend, Sharon, points out the restlessness and loneliness of Holly and states that “she couldn’t remember the last time she hugged someone, really hugged someone” (Ahern 84). After the death of Gerry, Holly indulges into a bottomless pit of miseries and sufferings, ultimately, she can truly feel her helplessness and vulnerabilities. She locks herself in a room by totally coming off from her family and friends. Here, it is important to point out that friendship has a very significant role to play in the common living of human beings. This point is also taken into account by Cecelia Ahern in her debut novel, *P.S. I Love You*, when Sharon takes care of her sincere friend Holly. Sharon helps Holly to lessen the sufferings and miseries after the death of Gerry as she claims that “she needed to talk, she needed to cry, she needed to vent all her frustrations and disappointments” (Ahern 136).

Holly loves Gerry so much that she remembers him at every breath of her life. Her likeness and dis-likeness are entirely dependent on the ideas how Gerry would think about it. This is the reason due to which he follows each and every step that is instructed in the letters by Gerry. She believes that Gerry will be happy if she follows his instructions even though he was not along with her physically. Ahern points out that when Holly locks up herself in her room then she starts changing her way of living just because of departed Gerry, as she thinks that “Gerry would not be happy with this, she thought. She took a deep breath, dried her eyes and tried to shake some sense into herself. No, Gerry would not be pleased at all” (2). This thing truly reflects the true and deep attachment of Holly with Gerry in the form of love. She does not care about her body as well as outlook but when she thinks that Gerry will not like this then she gathers all of her courage and tries to change herself or in the way that will be liked by Gerry. There is no one else who is springing all of the energy and passion to make herself better but Gerry who is, even after his death, a source of inspiration for her.

Whenever two persons or people in the form of family get involved in a pure relationship then it becomes very difficult to lose one of the members. In the same way, where there is pure love between two lovers then it hurts to be away from each other, but on the other hand, when this happens then the life of the living persons becomes the abode of agitation, melancholies and miseries. In the current novel when friends and family members console Holly and try to forger about what happened in past then her true and best friend Sharon says to Holly that “don't mind all those people who say that you should be back to normal in a month or two. Grieving is all part of helping yourself anyway” (Ahern 83). Sharon believes and knows that it is not easy to lose and forget a person who was your best friend as well as soul mate. She also acknowledges that grieving will help Holly to always remember her husband, friend and soul mate. Holly loves Gerry from her heart and mind due to which it is becoming difficult for her to lessen the memories of her late husband who also takes away her soul as well.

The feelings of a true and a pure love lie torpid in every last one of us, and when these feelings and emotions are aroused just for once then they will make us glad and dignified as compared to the other happiness of this world. While taking into account some humble measures and at the time when unselfish love is acknowledged then the idea of understanding things entirely changes as weakness turns into strength and the ignoble things take the forms of loftiness. In the same way, in *P.S. I Love You*, after the death of Gerry, Holly nostalgically remembers all of the habits of Gerry even those habits which were not liked by her earlier when Gerry was alive but now she loves those habits as well as the memories of them. True and unselfishness love is reflected in the characters of Gerry and Holly even in the age where people do not have the sympathies for each other. The true love also requires that it should take the form of friendship as well. Holly and Gerry were also not just lovers but true and honest friends who were living happily in their own world.

The bond of friendship between Gerry and Holly is illustrated by Ahern when she depicts that after the death of Gerry Holly cannot fight at the point that “whose turn it was to get up and turn the light off” (1), she will not be able to “run her fingers through his soft hair, never share a secret joke across the table at a dinner party never cry to him when she got home from a hard at work” (1). At the same time, Ahern takes into account the love when she expresses that “she would never share a bed with him again” (1). Gerry and Holly were nothing else but “best friends, lovers and soul mates, destined to be together” (Ahern 1). According to Ahern, unfaithfulness and selfishness are carry their own curse for the people who possess such bad qualities. She calls them a starving bad habit. The finest and true feelings of people get contaminated because of such habits. The individual who does no great, does not receive anything good in return. They resemble the heath in the desert, neither yielding natural product nor seeing when great as well as good things come. And they are just like hopeless bushes. In the case of Gerry and Holly, there is not unfaithfulness and selfishness instead their love is based on purity as well as sincerity.

Ahern has very beautifully elucidated the material aspects of this world which are directly related to the everyday life of human beings. These aspects also have a very important role to play in the relationship that is based on love. After the death of Gerry, friends and family members of Holly's family try their best to get Holly's attention diverted by taking her into different shopping malls of the city and other attractive places. Ahern believes that in a pure relation such kinds of things do not matter, and these worldly things are not enough to make the person happy and peaceful. In the narrative of the novel, Denise becomes the mouthpiece of Ahern in order to convey this idea when she gives her stance about Holly's situation and claims that “her best friend was gone, and nobody understood that no amount of makeup, fresh air or shopping was going to fill the hole in her heart” (Ahern 253). The presence of the one lover for other is no less than the blessings and this thing is truly felt by Holly when Gerry is no longer near her. Holly accepts that those people are very luck in this world that can hold their loved ones at any moment when they intend to do so. She is also of the view that such

luxury cannot be found anywhere in this world. The internal conflict of Holly can only be understood by those people have lost their loves ones.

In the age of materialism, globalization and technological advancement, it is very difficult to find true persons to whom you can make friendships and then marry that person. After reading the story of Gerry and Holly, people must start believing that pure love existed in earlier ages, it exists in our contemporary era and it will continue to be the part of human relationships till the end of this world. Gerry and Holly is a perfect couple in this modern age whose relationship is constructed on the basis of true feelings and emotions. Gerry also realizes this thing when, in one of his letters, he says to Holly that there are many people in this world who spent their entire life in search for a soul mate but at the end they never find any one. You and I found each other but unfortunately it was for a shorter period of time. It is really sad for us, but you know this is called life” (Ahern 372). Here, at this point, Ahern depicts the panorama of human lives that are comprised of happiness and sadness, nothing never lasts forever but memories, as this happens to Holly and she is carrying the memories of her late husband, Gerry. In terms of our contemporary circumstances we see that modern-day society began to wind up progressively intricate and heterogeneous and it keeps on doing as such. Particular circles for particular useful issues began to rise, encouraging the improvement of present-day science, the economy that is totally based on money and a mass-intervened open circle coupled with the babble of globalization. In the meantime, a particular circle of protection and closeness developed. Furthermore, sentimental love was and still is a fundamental piece of it.

The letters which had been written by Gerry to Holly have greater importance in the comprehensive idea of the narrative. All the flashbacks have been depicted through these letters. Flashbacks also help the readers to know about the intensity of love and feelings that Gerry possessed in terms of loving Holly. He loved her that much that he wanted her to leave the pathetic life and move on in order to make herself happy, comfortable and peaceful because after his death she became devastated internally as well as externally. Readers come to know about the past and present life of Holly and Gerry because of these letters. He also wanted to make Holly’s pain as little as possible. As a matter of fact, these letters carry a symbolic significance as these are purely symbol of love from Gerry. The joy that is found related to unselfish love cannot be found anywhere else in this world. This kind of euphoria truly appeals deeply to one’s feelings and emotions. The delight of unselfish love is the most perfect satisfaction that one can have in the age of materialism where feelings and emotions do not matter to a greater extent. The delight of flawless benevolence is the most elevated satisfaction that mankind can have. This kind of joy is open for all of us and it’s up to us to have its taste. Gerry encourages Holly to leave and do not be miserable for what is gone and cannot be controlled by human beings.

Ahern very skillfully has handled the dialogues between the characters. Her art of characterization is also very helpful in order to understand a particular situation. Dialogues have great importance in order to convey the feelings and emotions of the characters to the readers. Readers become able to understand what is happening and sometimes become the characters themselves because of the true appeal of dialogues to the feelings and emotions of the readers. In the story of this novel dialogues also play a crucial role in the understanding of various circumstances. When Holly argues with her mother, Elizabeth, it can be explicitly found that how much Holly loves Gerry and how much she is preoccupied with the letters which were written by her friend, husband and above all her soul mate. Because of the great appeal of the art of characterization and dialogues, this novel leaves a great impact on the minds and hearts of the readers as this book is combination of happy as well as tragic view of life.

It is argued that this is not good for a man that he should be alone in this world as this is also necessary for the common goodness of society and only peace will prevail in the society if people do not live alone but live together bonded with the force of true love. Historically, it is also found that human beings are not living alone but they join each other’s communities, cultures and tribes just because of the development of loving relationships between them and afterward they feel secure by creating such kinds of relationships. In the current novel, *P.S. I Love You*, the main characters Holly and Gerry are also bonded with a true love and they feel secure while living with one another. The feelings of insecurity come into existence after the death of Gerry and when Holly remains alone without her friend and soul mate. In the very beginning lines of the book, the reader is told about the attachment and love that Holly has for Gerry. She wears the T-Shirts of Gerry in order to feel secure and comfortable as Ahern points out that “Holly held the blue cotton sweater to her face and the familiar smell immediately stuck her, an over-whelming grief knotting her stomach and pulling at her heart” (1). Memories of Gerry start haunting Holly right after his death due to which she detaches herself from the world and loves to be indulged in the remembrance of her other half, Gerry.

After the death of Gerry, Holly comes to know about the importance of Gerry being with her in ups and downs of her life. As Ahern portrays that after the death of her loving husband "Holly just felt as though she was missing a vital organ from her body" (9). This is the reason due to which they claim themselves as soul mates for each other and after Gerry we see that Holly is nothing else but a body without a soul. They love each other so much that they never think to be away from each other. At this point, Ahern claims that even death cannot help to make your love die forever. According to her, true and pure love is immortal. The feelings and emotions of Holly in terms of loving Gerry become more intense when she confronts Gerry's things in her home. She loves her trousers, shirts and other stuff that Gerry used to have when he was alive. She even loves the envelope that is comprised of letters because she believes that Gerry touched this envelope and she feels comfort and satisfaction while moving her fingers on this envelope. She recognized the handwriting of Gerry and loves to see it. As Ahern depicts that "she ran her fingers over Gerry's handwriting, knowing that the last person to have touched the page was him" (32). She reads the letters with tears in her eyes which also reflect how much she is missing her love. Right after when she realizes that these letters are written by Gerry and he is talking to her, she bursts into tears. As Ahern portrays this scene very beautifully and writes that "her tears turned to laughter, as she realized her Gerry was back!" (33). If the love is based on true feelings and emotions and sincerity, then the presence of the person is not necessary and does not matter in order to feel and love the other person.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be asserted that Ahern has portrayed the idea of love in an alternate and special way that is totally extraordinary when contrasted with alternate writers of past and in addition our contemporary age. This research has contextualized inside the literary investigation of the selected fictional works which are *P.S. I Love You* by Ahern. After the analysis of the novel we come to know that she has presented the idea of love that is unique in terms of its appeal and representation. There is no doubt that it is love and, on the other hand, lack of love that helps in the establishment of nucleus in terms of the consciousness of human existence. The notion of love, when it is discussed within the domain of modern era, is distant from the classical idealization and as an alternative it aims to unearth the consumerist representation of relatedness that makes it possible to comprehend the human reality of love coupled with the paradoxes, failures and multiplicities that it possesses. The study has explored the idea of love by giving weight to both text(s) and the socio-historical time period that has affected the text and the writing of the author as well. The novel carries double meaning one is direct which focuses on the love of all the selected novel. This research is productive to explore the real picture of the people who has loved or want to involve in this relationship. It is also remarkable to describe that there are some common themes and conflicts that run through these narratives. The analysis further establishes that Ahern has revisited the idea of love as compared to the traditional depictions of love.

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