Love in Literature and Its Effect on Relationship Expectations

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Introduction

Fairytales and folklore have been passed down through generations. Initially, with literature such as the Brothers Grimm tales, the stories were more realistic. They sometimes included death and tried to convey a moral message, like the importance of being honest.

However, during the 1800s, stories became more romanticized. While stories from the past were still unrealistic, new fairytales painted a life full of everlasting love and fortune for children. Two common themes can be found in different works of romantic literature over a variety of eras in history. *Romeo and Juliet, Cinderella, Pride and Prejudice, and The Notebook* reflect these two common themes and can be used to analyze the effects of unrealistic depictions of love on current-day perceptions of relationships.

*Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare in 1595; it begins with a fight between the servants of two warring families, the Montagues and the Capulets, in the city of Verona. These two families have a deep hatred for one another, and their feud is known throughout the city. The daughter of Capulet, Juliet, has caught the eye of a kinsman of the Prince, Paris. Capulet is thrilled with Paris’ offer and asks him to wait two years until Juliet is ready to marry but invites him to a feast so the two can meet. However, at the feast, a young man by the name of Romeo catches Juliet’s eye. Romeo, who has just recently realized that the “love of his life,” Rosaline, will never love him back, asks her for a kiss. The two fall quickly in love and get married, despite the fact that their families are sworn enemies and just the day before Romeo was in love with Rosaline. Soon after, Romeo is sent into exile and Juliet goes to Friar Lawrence with a plan for the two to be united and run away together. Friar Lawrence advises Juliet to drink a sleeping potion on the night before her sudden marriage to Paris so that her
family will think she is dead. The Friar will then send word for Romeo to revive her in the tomb. However, Romeo never receives Friar's letter, so when he hears about Juliet’s “death”, he buys poison and vows to kill himself in her tomb. After Romeo poisons himself next to her sleeping body, Juliet awakes to find him dead and decides that she would rather die than live without him. So, she stabs herself with his sword.

In 1697, about one hundred years after Romeo and Juliet was written, the story of Cinderella was imagined by the Brothers Grimm. This fairytale focuses on the journey of a young woman, Cinderella, whose mother died at a young age. After her father remarries, Cinderella is treated like a servant by her stepmother and stepsisters. One day, the family hears that the Prince is throwing a ball to find a wife, and Cinderella pleads with her stepmother to let her go. Her stepmother gives her almost impossible chores to complete and says that if she finishes them in time, she can go. Cinderella finishes these chores with the help of some birds, but then her stepmother says no because she has nothing to wear. Devastated, Cinderella begins to weep under a tree in the yard, and suddenly a beautiful gown appears. She puts on the dress and arrives at the ball where she instantly catches the eye of everyone in the room, including the Prince. The Prince dances with only her, and to meet her again, the Prince throws more balls. At each one, Cinderella’s dresses grow more and more beautiful. At the last ball, she loses her shoe, and the Prince decides to travel the Kingdom looking for the girl that it fits. When the Prince arrives at Cinderella’s home, the two stepsisters attempt to cut off parts of their feet to fit into the slipper, but the animals chant that he has the wrong girl as he rides away with each of them. Finally, he notices soot-covered Cinderella and figures out this is the woman he has been dancing with each night. Then they ride away together.
In 1797, *Pride and Prejudice* was written by Jane Austen. It depicts the story of Elizabeth Bennet and her family, who will lose all rights to their land once their father passes. Elizabeth only has sisters, so even though her father is a gentleman, their estate will go to the next male heir, their cousin Mr. Collins. Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth’s mother, worries about her children, so she is feverishly trying to marry them off. When she hears that a very wealthy and eligible young bachelor named Mr. Bingly has bought an estate near them, she wastes no time trying to match him with one of her girls. Mr. Bingley meets Elizabeth’s older sister, Jane, and almost as soon as they lock eyes, they are inseparable. Mr. Bingley even tries to set his friend, Mr. Darcy, up with Elizabeth, but Mr. Darcy decides that she is plain. Elizabeth hears Mr. Darcy say those cruel words about her and starts to loathe him. Elizabeth goes to visit her best friend Charlotte, who has just married Mr. Collins. As it turns out, Mr. Collins lives on the grounds and works for Mr. Darcy’s aunt, Lady Catherine de Borough. Elizabeth runs into Mr. Darcy there and is shocked when he expresses how much he loves her. He even proposes to her, but Elizabeth refuses based on his actions towards her and her family. However, eventually, Mr. Darcy redeems himself through his kindness to her when she tours his home, Pemberly, with her aunt and uncle and when he rescues Elizabeth’s sister from disgrace. After all of this, Elizabeth sees how kind Mr. Darcy can be, and she agrees to marry him. This story juxtaposes Elizabeth and her sister’s relationships, one marries after love at first sight while the other does not.

The last primary source, *The Notebook*, written by Nicholas Sparks in 1996, is a novel about Noah and Ally, two people who fell in love as teenagers over a summer. Ally was from a wealthy family who had just moved there for a short time, and Noah was a country boy that had grown up in the small town. Ally’s mother did not approve of the match and started to hide
Noah’s letters when they moved away. Many years later, Ally is a grown woman and is engaged to be married to Lon, a lawyer from a well-respected family. She finds a picture of Noah in the paper, and it sparks something in her. Ally lies to Lon and tells him she is going antiquing, but in reality, she is going to see Noah after all of these years. When she finally finds him, she spends two days with him and a flood of feelings return to her. Ally realizes that she has never felt that way with Lon but is still conflicted about who to choose. Noah, who has spent his whole life unsuccessfully trying to forget Ally, attempts to make these two days with her count. These two days make him start to realize how much he hates life without her. Lon begins to grow suspicious and decides to check on Ally, but her mother shows up at Noah’s house to warn them before his arrival. Ally knows she has to make a choice and returns to the hotel to see Lon. The story is told from the point of view of Noah as an old man who is taking care of Ally as she slowly loses herself to dementia. He reads the notebook to her every day in the hopes that she remembers their fantastic love story and life together.

Two themes of love can be found in these four stories: love begins at first sight and love conquers economic class. The reason it is important to highlight and analyze the repetition of these themes in our literature and entertainment is because they can have damaging effects on the expectations of relationships. Since these themes and couples are so widespread in media and literature that people see and read, it leads to unrealistic perceptions of love. Outside research shines some light on expectations that might not be feasible in common relationships and how literature throughout history has influenced it. The research suggests love at first sight is really just attraction, the common characteristics of attraction, statistics regarding marriage between economic class, and the common misconceptions that lead to relationship failure. The romantic
literature and research coincide to show how writers often use the themes of love at first sight and love conquering economic class as a way to evoke emotional responses. These responses make the audience feel as if they are a part of the story, thus making them more invested in the story itself. These stories and their themes lead readers to confuse the illusions and realities of love well into adulthood.
Chapter One: Love at First Sight

The most commonly used theme in romantic literature is love at first sight. The scenes in which a prince first locks eyes with his princess or when a man vows he has just met his future bride after one night are widely overused, but somehow still entrancing. The idea that two people are so perfectly matched that they know they want to spend their lives together from the instant they meet is so unrealistic it seems almost magical. *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare, *Cinderella* by the Brothers Grimm, and *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks feature the theme of love at first sight, but each story portrays it differently. Perhaps this is because they were all three written in dramatically different time periods. The question is, why has love at first sight been such a compelling theme in romantic literature consistently throughout history? And how does its portrayal in literature compare to love in real life?

Love is defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary as, “warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion”. The use of words like attachment and devotion imply that love takes time to develop. You cannot develop real attachment or devotion in an instant. The initial reaction that is commonly misconstrued as “love at first sight” in literature refers to a phenomenon in reality known as attraction. Attraction causes many changes, both chemically in the brain and behaviorally. *Human Nature* by Helen E. Fisher says that two common characteristics of attraction for all mammals are “increased energy and focused attention” towards the relationship (Fisher 31). Chemical surges in the brain cause these behavioral changes. Attraction triggers the body to flood the mind with dopamine, a chemical that is known to be “addictive” because it triggers positive emotions (Brookshire). Most people have severe addictions to dopamine releases in the brain when using drugs, like methamphetamine, but it could be possible that the
dopamine released during attraction would cause a type of “addiction” also. This reaction could explain why love stories that involve “love at first sight” have been popular even since the 1500s. Reading about attraction could cause people to have the same chemical reactions in the brain, which would make them more invested in the relationships of these novels and become “addicted” to the feelings that they provoke — thus causing people to be drawn to this type of story.

While that is the more animalistic part of attraction, there are other, more human-specific characteristics that scientists have observed for the past 25 years. In 1995, Larnelle Harris compiled them into a twelve item list:

1. The loved person takes on “special meaning.” As one of Tennov’s information phrased it, “My whole world had been transformed. It had a new center, and that center was Marilyn” (Tennov 1979:18). This phenomenon is coupled with the inability to feel romantic passion for more than one person at a time;

2. Intrusive thinking about the loved person;

3. Crystallization, or the tendency to focus on the loved person’s positive qualities and overlook or falsely appraise his/her negative traits;

4. Liable psychophysiological responses to the loved person, including exhilaration euphoria, buoyance, spiritual feelings, feelings of fusion, increased energy…

5. A longing for emotional reciprocity coupled with the desire to achieve emotional union with the loved person;

6. Emotional dependency on the relationship with the loved person, including feelings of hope and preoccupation with the beloved…;
7. A powerful sense of empathy toward the loved person, including... a willingness to sacrifice for the loved person;

8. A reordering of daily priorities to be available to the loved person coupled with the impulse to make a certain impression... including changing one’s clothing, mannerisms, habits, or values;

9. An intensification of passionate feelings caused by adversity in the relationship;

10. A sexual desire for the target of infatuation;

11. The precedence of the craving for emotional union;

12. The feeling that one’s romantic passion is involuntary and uncontrollable (Fisher 32-33).

There are many parallels between this list and the typical patterns of the “love at first sight” relationships in Romeo and Juliet, Cinderella, and The Notebook.

The classic and tragic love of Romeo and Juliet reflect all twelve of these characteristics. Their story corresponds with the first characteristic of attraction, the beloved taking on “special meaning” or transforming their center of focus, when they have the classic first meeting. Romeo spots Juliet from across the room and states, “O she doth teach the torches to burn bright... Beautify too rich for use, for earth too dear... Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight. For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night” (Shakespeare 1.5.44-53). Juliet becomes almost perfect in his eyes, like an angel, and he swears that he has never known love until that moment. Their meeting changes his life and “transforms” his perception of love. They reflect attraction characteristics two and ten, having intrusive thoughts about one another, by being compelled to kiss each other only seconds after they had just met.
Both characters tend to focus on each other’s positive traits by glorifying one another and also overlooking the fact that their two houses are enemies in Verona, so their union would be forbidden: “Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love and I’ll no longer be a Capulet. ‘Tis but thy name that is my enemy: Thou art thyself, though not a Montague” (Shakespeare 2.2.35-39). This obstacle fuels their love, and it just makes them work harder to be together. This motivation is described in attraction characteristic number nine, an intensification of feelings caused by adversity. Romeo and Juliet also believe that because they fell in love despite their warring houses, their love is uncontrollable. Juliet even acknowledges that how quickly she confesses her feelings is silly, but she cannot help but fall genuinely and passionately in love with him (Shakespeare 95-105). Lastly, they reflect the rest of the characteristics directly through their actions within the upcoming days. Romeo vows to marry her on the night they meet, Juliet refuses to marry the man that was courting her, and they even try to fake Juliet’s death so she and Romeo can run away together (Shakespeare 2.6.1-30). Their dedication shows that they are willing to interrupt their lives in order to be emotionally united. Characteristic nine, the willingness to sacrifice themselves for one another, is realized when Romeo, who has not been told of the plan to fake Juliet’s death, mistakenly believes she has passed away and poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo lying dead beside her and no longer sees life as worth living. She, in turn, stabs herself with Romeo’s blade (Shakespeare 5.3). Shakespeare’s depiction of their short-lived love aligns perfectly with the observed characteristics for initial attraction but would never meet the realistic standards for a long-term relationship. Even if they survived, their love never would’ve lived past initial attraction.
Cinderella’s story, like Romeo and Juliet’s, is also sparked by love at first sight and occurs within a brief time frame. She and the Prince have their classic, life-changing meeting when she arrives at the ball: “She looked so beautiful in the dress of gold that they thought she must be the daughter of some foreign king… The Prince didn’t intend to dance with anyone else there and never even let go of her hand” (Brothers Grimm 122). Once again, their first encounter causes the beloved to take on a “significant meaning”. After she runs away, the Prince’s hunt for Cinderella shows that he hopes she reciprocates his feelings, and he works tirelessly to be united with this woman he has only met a few times. He puts everything else aside to find her and even comes back after her stepsisters cut off parts of their own feet to be with him (Brothers Grimm 115-127). Similar to Romeo and Juliet, the obstacles Cinderella and the Prince have to face in order to be together, like Cinderella’s evil stepmother and stepsisters, only make their love grow stronger.

This idea of competition and obstacles boosting attraction in characteristic nine is even referred to by Charles Darwin. He believes that mates become more attractive if they are harder to obtain because that means they have more desirable characteristics (Fisher 30). All three stories, including The Notebook, have some competition or obstacle that makes them grow stronger. Romeo and Juliet have Juliet’s suitor and their conflicting houses; Cinderella has competition with the rest of the kingdom, including her sisters, and overcomes her lowly place as a housekeeper to win over the Prince; and lastly, in The Notebook, the two main characters, Noah and Ally, have to overcome the obstacles of social class from a young age, but later in life they also have to face the fact that Ally is engaged to another man.
In addition to having to overcome adversities, *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks features many of the aspects of attraction between the two main characters, Noah and Ally. This novel is different from the last two stories because even though the two experienced love at first sight as teenagers, they are separated during high school and reunited many years later as adults. This break causes their relationship to take place during a much longer timeframe than Cinderella and Romeo and Juliet, which means their “love at first sight” story is more realistic and complex. Noah and Ally have two “love at first sight” scenes, one when they were in high school and the other when Ally, who was lost and confused about her engagement to Lon, felt the need to figure out what could have been with Noah. On the night Noah first saw young Ally at the carnival, he knew he was going to marry her (Sparks 5). This assumption was the start of their unintentional summer love: “I didn’t plan on falling in love with you. But once we met, it was clear that neither of us could control what was happening to us. We fell in love, despite our differences, and once we did, something rare and beautiful was created” (Sparks 102). However, Ally’s parents did not see their relationship in the same way. They liked Noah, but frowned upon Ally getting involved with someone of a lower social status. So when Ally moved away after the summer was over, her mother cut all ties between her and Noah (Sparks 58). While this adversity tears them apart at first, overcoming it helps Ally to see that they genuinely love each other. Noah’s love for her is so strong that even after they had not spoken for years, he never grows close to another woman. Noah knows that he had once loved another with all his heart and feels that if he can not have Ally then he would rather be alone (Sparks 10). So, after only one summer together, he spends the majority of his life trying to forget the woman that will never reciprocate his feelings, but he is never able to get over her. Little does he know, Ally has also spent her
adult life wondering about him. When she finds Noah, it is like love at first sight all over again, “Being here, seeing him. She felt something twitch inside, something deep and old, something that made her dizzy just for a second… she felt as if all her dreams could come true” (Sparks 38).

Noah and Ally’s story, while being much longer than the typical “love at first sight” plot, still adheres firmly to the rules of attraction composed by Harris. They both fulfill a “special meaning” to each other that no one else can fill, must overcome obstacles in order to be together, crave emotional union with one another throughout the story, and even mention how their love is involuntary throughout the novel. The last attraction characteristic that is exhibited is the willingness to sacrifice for one another. Towards the end of their time together, Ally suffers from Alzheimer’s and Noah is losing mobility in his hands, but Noah composes a story of their love and reads to her every day to try and help her remember (Sparks 5). Reading to her pains him, because the most he ever gets is a few hours with the Ally he once knew and the next day she forgets about him. It is an endless cycle, but he is willing to sacrifice his last few years of life dedicated to the woman he loves.

While there is a correlation between love stories and the behaviors commonly associated with human attraction, these stories have not addressed whether or not the stories adhere to the idea of “love” itself. Fisher states that there must be three phases to love in reality and attraction is only one of them. These three phases, the desire to find a mate, initial attraction, and attachment, are all needed to have an entirely meaningful relationship (Fisher 24). Romeo and Juliet, Cinderella, and The Notebook all heavily focus on the idea of attraction because the beginning phase of a relationship is characterized by an increase in excitement, energy, and dopamine in the beloved. This depiction makes the plot more enticing to readers. However, the
most significant part of love is attachment. Attachment is the trust and devotion built by shared experiences. This phase is something couples can only have if they spend an extended amount of time together. Over time, many couples misconstrue memories of how they met into deeper connections and fairy tale “love at first sights” (Fletcher and Kerr 306). They insert their current perception of their partner, whom they have gotten to know and grown to love, into the memory instead of their actual perception of their significant other that moment. So, instead of an awkward encounter with a “kinda” cute person at a bar, it turns into the most charming conversation they have ever had with the most attractive person in the world. This illusion is why so many people mistake attraction for “love at first sight”. While some believe that love at first sight is still possible, the reality of love is that it takes time, and all three phases, to build a meaningful and lasting relationship. The brief journey of initial attraction in romantic stories can hardly be called love until the couple proves the solidity of their relationship over time.
Chapter Two: Love Between Economic Class

Another common theme in literature is the idea of love beyond economic boundaries. This breach of economic classes is an enchanting idea, but unlikely in the real world. People do not usually establish relationships with others outside of their class, and even if the relationship begins there is little chance of it working out. *Cinderella, Pride and Prejudice,* and *The Notebook* all feature romances that are prohibited by economic class but are overcome by the two main characters’ love for one another. These relationships are then assumed to lead to a “happily ever after” with no further issues relating to their opposing backgrounds. In reality, studies have shown that these across-class relationships are much less likely to be successful than marriages within economic status. This is largely the result of the difference in religious beliefs, child-rearing techniques, and work ethic that comes with economic class.

*Cinderella* is probably the most well-known rags-to-riches love story. She is treated no better than a common servant by her step-mother and sisters after the passing of her birth mother; she is forced to clean the house, serve her step-sisters, and live in the background of their daily lives (Brothers Grimm 116). She is even given the name “Cinderella” because she seems to be eternally covered in cinders after cleaning the fireplaces for so long: “In the evening, when she was completely exhausted from work, she didn’t even have a bed to lie down in but had to sleep at the hearth in the ashes. She began looking so dusty and dirty that everyone called her Cinderella” (Brothers Grimm 116). The Brothers Grimm wrote her story to appeal to the common people of the early 1800s. Fairy tales shared moral messages that were easy to follow and sold for lower prices than common books during that time (Tartar 19). Her marriage to Prince Charming symbolized the ability to overcome the constraints placed on those of lower
economic class, which resonated greatly with the common people (Brothers Grimm 127).

However, marriage between economic status is not as frequent in reality, especially when the title is of a high status, like royalty.

A real world example of marriage into the royal family is the union of Prince William and Princess Kate. Their union has been equated to a “Cinderella” story because of the fact that a member of the royal family, William, chose to marry a commoner, Kate. While Princess Kate was not a part of the royal bloodline, she was in no way “common” in English society. Seattle Times revealed that her family's fortune was “larger than many of the landed gentry” in England and that she even attended the same prestigious schools throughout her life as the royal family (Faiola). Advertisements to promote the Prince’s wife mentioned that her great-grandfather was in fact a coal miner, but Princess Kate herself had been a part of the very upper class of England (Faiola). This background makes it extremely difficult to compare their love story to Cinderella's. Without her money, she would not have attended the same schools as William, she would not have a good reputation among the upper class of Britain, nor would she have the same air of “grace” and “class” that made her acceptable to marry into the royal family. Therefore, Prince William may not have married her if she did not grow up in her economic class because they wouldn’t have developed similar interests or personality types. They probably wouldn’t have even met. So, the idea of a servant woman covered in ash marrying her Prince Charming, just on the basis of love, seems incredibly unlikely. However, the gorgeous dresses that the tree provides for Cinderella and her upbringing as a lady when her mother is alive may help her win over the Prince. Similar to Kate Middleton, with her resources she is able to give the appearance of being equal to royalty without actually having the title. This facade allows the Prince to notice
Cinderella and begin to develop feelings for her, before he knows of her lowly lifestyle. Without the fancy dress or the reputation of her family, Cinderella may have not even gone to the dance. Even if she had gone and shown up to the ball in her rags, the Prince would most likely have dismissed her, and there would not be the enchanting story we know today.

*Pride and Prejudice* also focuses on the relationships between economic classes during the late 1700s and early 1800s. The story is set in England, and there are two marriages in this book that are initially prohibited by the differences in income. In Britain, a larger income meant a higher status in society, so marrying someone whose family had less money meant that they were marrying below their status. This was deeply frowned upon in English society, but a huge change was occurring during the time Jane Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice*. The French Revolution had begun and England feared that a revolution of the common people would soon take place in their own country. So the upperclass “consented to accommodate the aspirations of the rising middle classes by permitting intermarriage with commoners” (MSS Research). *Pride and Prejudice* depicts this social change through the relationships between Jane and Mr. Bingley and Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy.

Jane Bennet lives in the country with her father, who is granted the title of a gentleman, and her mother, whose lower-middle class upbringing casts a shadow on the family. They are not exceptionally wealthy and their only children are five daughters, so the girls’ male cousin, Mr. Collins, will inherit the property after Mr. Bennett’s death. Property itself during the time Jane Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice* was held in high regard. It was a symbol of power and class that is passed down through a family line, so this property would be given to the next male heir instead of being split between the children. That way the value of the property would remain
intact. The Law of Primogeniture, which states that the next male heir is given the full value of the land after the previous owner’s death, was utilized during this time to prevent the reduction of the worth of the land (Weiner). However, this meant that all of the Bennet women would be forced out of their home after Mr. Bennet's death. So, Jane’s mother is seen at parties forcing her daughters onto wealthy men, in the hopes of them marrying well and having someone to support them when the time comes for them to leave Longbourne (Austen 99). Jane, however, is one of the most beautiful girls in the countryside and is known for carrying herself with grace despite her background. She soon catches the eye of a wealthy young man named Mr. Bingley who has just recently bought an estate known as Netherfield near the Bennets. As they grow closer, opposition to the relationship from Mr. Bingley’s sisters and close friend, Mr. Darcy, gets stronger. Eventually, Mr Darcy splits them up. His reasons are that he is not convinced of Miss Bennet’s feelings for his friend and her lesser background. He states, “The situation of your mother’s family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father” (Austen 196). Jane and Mr. Bingley’s relationship is torn apart because of her family's “uncivilized” appearance in public, despite the fact that Mr. Bingley has expressed a love like no other when he is around Jane (Austen 195).

Despite Mr. Darcy’s obvious disdain for the Bennet family, he then falls in love with Jane’s sister, Elizabeth. Although he initially states that he is not interested in her, he soon develops feelings. Mr. Darcy comes to her in a hurry and states, “you must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you” (Austen 188). This was not the end of their conversation though. He could not simply tell her he loved her: “His sense of her inferiority, of its being a
degradation, of the family obstacles which judgement had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on” (Austen 188). Mr. Darcy struggles with the idea of her lower economic class and what people will say about their marriage. However, despite these obstacles both couples end up together. Mr. Darcy apologizes for his insulting words and Elizabeth realizes her feelings for him. Their love then overcomes Mr. Darcy’s concerns about economic status. Mr. Bingley and Jane also find each other again and they too get married despite Mr. Bingley’s much higher class.

Jane Austen was also known for promoting ideals that were forward for her time. For example, Elizabeth’s initial refusal of a man as wealthy as Mr. Darcy was unheard of during the late 1700s, but Austen was trying to promote the beginning of the feminism movement in England (Austen 189). Her refusal symbolizes a woman’s right to choose who she marries and stand up for herself when she is insulted. However, in reality, ideas of marriage between economic classes and feminism were at their early phases and not fully recognized by society (MSS Research). So, the marriages between the two young country girls and two of the most wealthy and well-known men in England would be highly unlikely at the time. They would have married within their classes to avoid clashing with the other conservative gentry families. Austen chooses to include these unrealistic relationships to encourage and show that change is possible.

While The Notebook was written 200 years after Austen’s novel, its depiction of Noah and Ally’s relationship still shows the struggle between economic class and status. It is a more modern story in the idea that it uses more descriptive language and gives insight on the feelings that the characters have for one another more than Pride and Prejudice or Cinderella. Noah was from a small town and the son of a lumber yard worker (Sparks 23). Ally came from a very rich and well-known family that had moved to Noah’s small town for the summer (Sparks 36). Ally’s
parents let them have their summer fling, but eventually they moved away and Ally’s mother barred any contact between her and Noah. Years pass, and Ally finds another man, a lawyer named Lon, whose wealthy family is also well-known and would be able to support her lifestyle (Sparks 27). Right before their wedding, Ally cannot help but wonder what happened to her summer love, Noah, and why they lost touch. She tells Lon she is going antiquing and tries to find Noah (Sparks 32). She succeeds and discovers her mother has hidden letters Noah has been writing to her for years, “These are the letters that Noah wrote you. I never threw them away… I was just trying to protect you.” (Sparks 136) Her days with Noah make her realize she loves him more than her accustomed lifestyle or status. The two then go on to live happy and full lives, with no issues, despite their different backgrounds. According to Jessi Streb, an assistant professor of Sociology at Duke, this ending is unrealistic for marriage between economic classes. Her article focuses on how different economic backgrounds usually lead to failure in relationships due to differences in beliefs. She writes about Christina and Mike, a couple that married between economic class:

“People like Christina- born into the working-class but now college educated- tended to prefer taking what I call a laissez-faire approach to their daily lives. They preferred to go with the flow, live in the moment, and live free of self-imposed constraints. People like Mike- born into the middle class- instead tended to prefer to take what I call a managerial approach to their daily lives. They preferred to plan, organize, monitor, and oversee” (Streb 42).

She relates that these different personality types cause a difference in opinions about what a “good life” would be like, how to raise children, work ethic, and other important factors in
marriage (Streb 42). These differences cause an increasing number of fights in the marriage, which eventually lead to divorce. Marriages between economic classes face many hardships, so the longevity of Noah and Ally’s relationship would be unusual, but not impossible, in the real world.

The reality of *Cinderella, Pride and Prejudice, and the Notebook* can all be challenged with this research presented by Streb. All three of these stories end with a “happily ever after”, but Streb’s research shows that there is a low likelihood of real relationships having the same ending. However, it is not impossible. For instance, Ally loved the way Noah lived in the moment, which is a perfect reflection of the personality type predicted by Streb for lower classes, and married him partly for that reason. In this instance, his *laissez-faire* attitude would not be a detriment to the relationship. In *Pride and Prejudice* the two young men might have actually believed in the reform of economic class marriages. Even in *Cinderella*, the prince might still have fallen in love with her if she did not have the beautiful dress. However, these examples are all contrary to what has been observed in society since the 1700s and earlier. So, the stories of love conquering economic class are exactly that, wishful stories.
Chapter Three: Romantic Literature’s Effect on Expectations

The stories *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cinderella*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *the Notebook* are all popular to this day, but the normalization of their cliches can be destructive. Love at first sight and love overcoming economic class affect expectations of real relationships. Fairy tales cause people to anticipate more from their partners. They want anything from grand romantic gestures to undying and unconditional love, something that is not plausible for the ups and downs of a real-world relationship. On the contrary, fairy tales tend to skim over the subjects of divorce and disappointment in order to appeal to their audiences through the classic “love story” format. The formula for the perfect romance usually includes the idea that opposites attract. This idea is even used in contemporary entertainment like the infamous Countdown to Christmas Hallmark movies. While some complain about them, the general consensus is that the love stories are a guilty pleasure for over 3.5 million viewers per year because they employ a feel-good romance plot.

One of the main problems with contemporary American relationships is that we expect too much from our partners. Robert Johnson reflects on the effect fairytales have on our perception of a good relationship in *Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love*. He writes, “Romantic love doesn’t just mean loving someone; it means being ‘in love’... We feel we are finally completed, that we have found the missing parts of our life... Life suddenly seems to have a wholeness, a super plain of existence. For us, these are sure signs of ‘true love’” (Johnson XII). Johnson lays out the general western feeling towards marriage and being “in love.” While he agrees that they are enchanting notions, he follows up with reasons why modern-day relationships cannot survive with these expectations:
“But if we Westerners are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that our approach to romantic love is not working well. Despite our ecstasy when we are “in love,” we spend much of our time with a deep sense of loneliness, alienation, and frustration over our inability to make genuinely loving and committed relationships. Usually, we blame other people for failing us; it doesn’t occur to us that perhaps it is we who need to change our own unconscious attitudes— the expectations and demands we impose on our relationships and on other people” (Johnson XII).

He continues to explain this phenomenon as it correlates to various love stories. His analysis of Western marriage for “love” does seem to reign true; partners are feeling increasingly lonely and disappointed by their significant others. Then, the blame seems to fall on the other person for not caring or trying enough. This is because it is hard to even determine what a real relationship is when we have been surrounded by fairytales of romance and “happily ever afters” all our lives. This dissatisfaction with relationships built on the idea of “being in love” is probably one reason that divorce rates are so high in American marriages.

Joseph Epstein, a Ph.D. in psychology from Harvard University, comments on the effect that romantic movies and literature have on divorce: “Today, we are bombarded daily by unrealistic messages about love and marriage — messages that make us think about leaving a relationship the moment our romantic expectations are dashed. As a result, nearly half of first marriages in the U.S. end in divorce” (Epstein). He claims that the main reason for these failures results from Western cultures placing too much faith in the fairytale ideals of what “love” is. His solution is to look to arranged marriages for ideas. While he is not suggesting that we start to
arrange marriages in Western society, he does think we should try to match ourselves using the same criteria that a family would use to arrange a marriage. They are organized based on compatibility both as individuals and as families. Factors such as beliefs, future career goals, personality type, and family relationships are all considered when making a match. While we must consider that divorce is sometimes looked down upon in societies where arranged marriages are common, the divorce rate for these marriages is only four percent, and the partners in these relationships rate satisfaction and love for their partner higher over time while American marriages only seem to decrease: “Our beliefs about relationships hobble us with expectations that are almost certain to be violated — the kiss of death for romantic relationships. A couple of years into a marriage, studies confirm that, on average, our love is about half as strong” (Epstein). So, why is it that in every story that ends with marriages based on love the couple lives happily ever after?

The Notebook follows Noah and Ally up until their death, and they never fall out of love during the length of their marriage. The classic line when Noah starts to tell their story at the end of their lives is, “I’ve loved another with all my heart and soul, and to me, this has always been enough” (Sparks 2). Their love does not dwindle over time. Instead, it thrives. Pride and Prejudice also presents the “happily ever after” ending for both Jane and Elizabeth: “and Jane and Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other” (Austen 373). It goes on to detail their lives and the success of their marriages, both socially and personally. However, not many romance stories go on to mention everyday life after the couple is united. Cinderella, for example, talks about the two riding away to the castle and getting married (Brothers Grimm 127). The reader is left to assume that the two will have a
happy and healthy life together. *Romeo and Juliet* also does not touch the subject of life after they fall in love. Instead, Romeo and Juliet’s passionate and everlasting love will be remembered as it was the moment they sacrifice their lives for one another. That way, the reader never even has to think about how their story turned out; they just idealize the magnitude of their love when they passed away. The “happily ever after” ending, or lack of, is a common plot point in most classic romantic literature, so common that this ending and several other plot points tend to make a “formula” for a successful love story.

One other plot point that seems to occur in every classic and contemporary romance is the idea that opposites attract. Many Hallmark movies use this formula to draw in so many viewers each year. Three typical plots employ the “opposites attract” that are used each season and, of course, the classic cheesy “happily ever after” ending Hallmark is known for. The first plot is when a person from the big city is forced to move to the country and falls in love with a small-town character, like in the movie *Christmas Under Wraps*. This plot is incredibly similar to *Pride and Prejudice*, when Mr. Darcy is forced to leave London to spend some time at Netherfield and falls in love with Elizabeth Bennet. A movie made in the 21st century has almost the same plot as a novel written in the 1700s, which just proves that love plots have been reused for their ability to engage audiences for hundreds of years. Another notoriously used plot in the Countdown to Christmas is when the character, whose family has never really celebrated Christmas, falls for someone who has grown up adoring it. This difference in familial beliefs is somewhat similar to *Romeo and Juliet*. The couple grew up in entirely different households with different views, and despite this, they fall in love. Granted, a difference in Christmas tradition is not as serious as warring households; but there are still parallels between the two plots. This
again proves that there has been a constant use of romantic literature plots since the 1500s. The last common “opposites attract” scenario used in Hallmark movies is where a family, usually of the royal or upper class, resents their son or daughter for getting involved with someone from the lower class until the love interest proves them wrong. This plot is also used in *The Notebook*. Noah and Ally split up because Ally’s parents do not feel like this boy from the lower class can provide a life for their daughter. However, Noah proves them wrong by showing how dedicated he is to her. He spent his life writing her letters and even hangs one of her paintings up in a house he built himself. There are evident parallels between the just small number of classic books I have presented and the plotlines of contemporary Hallmark movies, which begs the question of how many other stories follow these same ideas.

There must be a reason for the repetition of the “love story formula” for so many centuries, and the reason is that these stories sell. The idea of opposites attracting has engaged audiences since Pyramus and Thisbe. This story originated in Greek mythology and featured the journey of two star crossed lovers whose parents forbid them to be married. They only communicated through cracks in walls until one day they decided to meet in person under a Mulberry tree. Thisbe arrives but is scared off by a lioness with a mouthful of blood. She accidentally leaves her veil as she escapes and the lioness tears it to pieces. Pyramus sees her tattered veil, assumes the lioness killed his love, and stabs himself. Thisbe returns only to find her lover dead, so she too kills herself. This plot sounds incredibly similar to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and it features the “opposites attract” theme that is seen in almost all romantic literature and entertainment. The reason for this is because many writers have used the popularity of Pyramus and Thisbe as inspiration for their own stories. Perhaps the popularity of the
star-crossed lovers archetype comes from a natural human desire to overcome the odds, even if it results in death. Two people coming together who were not intended to be together breaks the rules of those oppressing them and shows the power of human free will. The power to break rules and gain freedom are incredibly thrilling to people of any place or time.

The classic plots of love stories are designed to draw readers in. However, these idealistic plots, despite being engaging, cause people to set expectations too high for modern-day relationships. Western society is increasingly lonely, and their relationships have less success because of the need for partners to make them continuously feel “in love”. In reality, the feeling of falling in love is hard to maintain. Instead, partners need to focus on long term compatibility, trust, and respect as the determining factors of the quality of a marriage. By doing this, our society can stop focusing so much on trying to recreate their favorite fairy tales and create strong, lasting relationships.
Conclusion

Love is utilized in literature in many different ways, and more often than not it affects the way we perceive relationships and love overall. One definition of love given by Merriam Webster Dictionary is “warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion,” but the truth is that love is hard to define. It is different for every individual and every relationship. That is why basing perceptions of love on romantic literature can be problematic. Romance stories follow a specific pattern that is proven to engage viewers and readers. These audiences, seeing so many stories follow the same format, believe that this is the best and only way to have a relationship. Two important themes in this “love story format” are love at first sight and the idea that love can conquer economic class. These two themes heighten expectations of relationships therefore lowering relationship satisfaction over time.

Love at first sight is used in literature as a hook to draw readers in and it misleads them on what “love at first sight” really is. Secondary sources prove that “love at first sight” is really just an initial attraction. For instance, when the Prince sees Cinderella he is not instantly in love. He just thinks she's beautiful. The same goes for when Romeo first saw Juliet. There is very little chance of two people being in love from the moment they first meet. The definition of love given above uses words that insinuate an amount of time is needed to develop a loving relationship. Words like “devotion” and “attachment” typically involve an abundance of time or experiences dedicated to something. However, initial attraction can be incredibly strong. It is the phenomenon that causes people to feel butterflies when they see the other person or to ignore their significant other’s faults. It is dangerous to confuse initial attraction with love at first sight because it confuses people into thinking that they are no longer “in love” when their relationship
does not continue to live up to the excitement that is initial attraction. Couples try to replace sustainable qualities in a relationship like trust, respect, loyalty with something that is falsely advertised as the symbol of “true love.”

All of the primary sources also express the common theme of relationships breaking the barriers of socioeconomic class. Romeo and Juliet marry despite their families' varying status in society; Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy marry despite the fact that he is one of the wealthiest men in London while she is just the daughter of a gentleman from the countryside; Cinderella and the Prince marry despite Cinderella being a humble servant; and Noah and Ally marry despite her coming from a family with old money while he is a country boy from a small town. These repeated scenarios encourage readers to believe the relationships in these stories are common. The social constructs surrounding the economic classes are stronger than most people anticipate. People from varying economic levels tend to have different beliefs when it comes to practicing religion, managing money, and working. The ability to relate to a partner’s opinions is an important factor in a successful marriage, and many people who foster relationships between economic classes end up reporting conflicts that cause them to split up. For example, marriages between middle classes and lower classes have the most difficulty because middle classes are more likely to want to save money and carefully plan out finances. In comparison, those from the lower class are more likely to want to enjoy what they have while they have it. Finances are one of the biggest problems within marriages and households, and relationships between economic status would just amplify those issues. However, this is not to say that relations between economic classes are impossible. Many successful marriages have broken that barrier, but they
certainly face more difficulty than others. These difficulties are almost never portrayed by literature.

The real question is why do people need to be aware of these common themes in romantic literature? These love stories, told to society from a young age, amplify unrealistic relationship traits, and are causing a dramatic decrease in western relationship satisfaction. The reliance on “love at first sight” causes people to dismiss partnerships that could suit them very well, simply because they were not infatuated with the other person from the moment their eyes first meet. It also leads people to feel like they are falling out of love when, in reality, it is just an initial attraction dwindling. If relationships rely too much on initial attraction because they believe it is “true love”, then they will not build the qualities of a connection that will stand the test of time.

The difficulties and limitations of economic class differences are also essential to know. It is unlikely that a romance novel or fairy-tale will portray the financial, religious, and ethical differences of a prince marrying a peasant or a gentleman marrying a middle-class woman. So, people go into marriages expecting their household to run smoothly when, in reality, relationships between economic classes only amplify existing household problems. These barriers do need to be broken though. The divide between economic classes should not be as great as it is, and beliefs between financial status should not be as different as they are. Couples should never let the economic class prevent them from marrying someone they love, but they also need to be aware of the struggles that might come with it.

By being able to spot these common themes and misconceptions from romantic literature, people can take a look at their approach and attitude towards relationships. They can also employ
tactics to ensure that their relationship grows over time, rather than dwindles. For instance, many Eastern countries practice arranged marriages. Parents choose a match for their child based on similar family environments, values, and complementary personalities. Many of these pairings report having a greater satisfaction over time compared to Western marriages. While there is no need to implement arranged marriages in Western society, people can attempt to choose partners based on similar factors instead of being blinded by the perfect relationships portrayed in literature and the media. By changing expectations and perceptions, people could build relationships on sustainable qualities and possibly help to solve the growing issue of relationship dissatisfaction in western society.


“The Love Story of Pyramus and Thisbe.” *Arizona University*,


[www.math.grinnell.edu/~simpsone/Teaching/Romantics/josh.html](http://www.math.grinnell.edu/~simpsone/Teaching/Romantics/josh.html).
Wealth and Its Effect on Individual in the Light of Great Expectations

Wealth and its effect on individual is so much serious that it can change everything and deviate a man from his own right track of life as is found in Great expectations, a renowned novel of 19th century, written by Charles Dickens who wrote a lot of novels about the contemporary society. These are the good effects of wealth. But the effect of wealth on individual is transient as is found in every case. Pip gets wealth and behaves like a gentleman. 2. The Norton Anthology of English Literature (W.W.NORTON and COMPANY, London, 7th edition) 3. Hardy, Thomas: Tess of the D’Urbervilles, Norton Critical Edition. 4. www.gradesaver.com/classicnotes/titles/greatexpectations/essay1.html Page 6 of 6. Despite any literary controversy over Dickens’ style, most critics agree that Great Expectations is his best book. The story, while set in the early part of the. The different ending has been a point of controversy for readers and literary critics ever since. George Bernard Shaw felt the happy ending was an "outrage," especially because "apart from this the story is the most perfect of Dickens' works." Controversy aside, Great Expectations "with the happy ending" was a major success for both Dickens and his magazine. In July, 1861, Great Expectations was published in book form in three separate volumes, corresponding to the three stages of Pip's growth in the novel. It was published as a single-volume book in November 18