

Romantic and
passionate love in ”
enduring love”



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In both "Twelfth Night" by William Shakespeare and "Enduring Love" by Ian McEwan, the pursuit of love is presented within the main characters. Their attempts to pursue a relationship could be seen as romantic and passionate; however, it could also be argued that the pursuits verge on being obsessive. In the case of "Twelfth Night", it could be argued that obsession is simply a continuation of infatuation; something that expresses deep love and true emotion. However, in "Enduring Love", the reader is introduced to obsessive love extremely early on, with the idea of romantic love being disregarded by the reader due to the unreliable narrator. There are arguments to suggest that pursuing romantic love and obsession are both similar and separate concepts.

In "Twelfth Night", Orsino's pursuit for Olivia is arguably more romantic than obsessive. His pursuit for romantic love is seen to be innocent and harmless, indicating that there is a clear divide between pursuit and obsession. When Curio asks 'Will you go hunt my lord? The hart.' Orsino replies by saying "Why, so I do, the noblest I have." The image of Orsino hunting deer juxtaposed with the image of Olivia implies that Orsino is attempting to portray an impression of masculinity and power by referring to the killing of animals, which was a feature of courtly love commonly practiced. As this form of pursuit was so prominent in Shakespeare's era, it could be argued that Orsino was not in any way obsessive at this point. The pun in 'The hart' implies that Orsino is also attempting to bring comedy to the situation, which the audience watching the play would have found more humorous than obsessive. The concept of Courtly Love often includes males having to earn the love of a lady, which is clearly seen with Orsino's romantic pursuit for

Olivia as she "till seven years' heat, Shall not behold her fact at ample view."

Similarly, in "Enduring Love", it could be argued that at some points, Jed Parry is attempting to pursue Joe romantically, with little evidence of obsession. In his first letter to Joe, Jed begins by saying "I feel happiness running through me like an electrical current." Later, he says "Then I got it. You had touched them in a certain way, in a pattern that spelled a simple message. Did you really think I would miss it, Joe!" Jed using stereotypical and conventional love letter language such as abstract nouns, similes and metaphorical language to convey his adoration to Joe implies that Jed's pursuit for love is innocent. The chapter being in the form of a love letter has implications that Jed is aware that his love for Joe is not reciprocal, therefore must resort from communicating from a distance. The use of direct address in "Did you really think I would miss it, Joe!" denotes how personal and deep rooted this romantic pursuit is. As "Enduring Love" is a postmodern novel with a metanarrative, the reader is made aware of the extent of Jed's obsession, therefore they are unable to see the romantic and innocent nature of the letter. The reader's perception of Jed is seen to be negative from the start of the novel, as the narrator is not only telling the story from hindsight, but also with the notion that it is a narrative in mind.

It could also be argued that there is a fine line between pursuit and obsession, and that obsessive love can be seen in both texts. In "Twelfth Night", Viola's drastic measures to be in close proximity to Orsino could be seen as an example of obsessive love. When Orsino asks Viola to charm Olivia on his behalf, Viola says "I'll do my best to woo your lady. (Aside) Yet,

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a barful strife! Who'er I woo, myself would be his wife." The use of aside to voice Viola's inner thoughts is symbolic of how deceiving she is willing to be in order to pursue a romantic relationship with Orsino. The rhyming couplet of "strife" and "wife" is reflective of the end of a love sonnet, symbolising how Viola's obsessive pursuit for Orsino is based around a romantic infatuation. The extent to which Viola is willing to change her identity to fit the expectations of a man she has just met demonstrates her obsession with Orsino. The idea of obsession is also explored in "Enduring Love", as Jed suffers from de Clerambault's syndrome. In a letter to Joe, Jed says "Joe, Joe, Joe.... I'll confess, I covered five sheets of paper with your name." "Confess" has religious implications, with connotations of sin and wrong doing. This religious imagery juxtaposed next to "I covered five sheets of paper with your name" implies that although Jed believes his pursuit for romantic love with Joe is feasible, it is immoral. It could be argued that in Jed's case, because of his condition, the pursuit for romantic love cannot happen without obsession being involved. Religious connotations can be found during the balloon accident when Jed asks Joe to pray with him. "Parry wasn't giving up. He was still on his knees" could be seen as foreshadowing the nature of his romantic pursuit for Joe. Jed not letting go of the balloon, a symbol of chaos, reflects how he is unable to let go of his obsession with Joe. This image being so early on in the book implies that Jed's pursuit for Joe was in fact, always obsessive.

In "Twelfth Night", it can be suggested that Orsino has an obsession with the idea of love, which is far greater than his obsession with the woman he is attempting to pursue. When telling Viola what message to deliver to Olivia,

he says "O, then unfold the passion of my love, Surprise her with discourse of my dear faith". Orsino's repetition of the personal pronoun 'my', as well as his use of empty adjectives such as 'faith' and 'passion' imply that he is more concerned with making himself look good than attempting to engage with Olivia. It could be suggested that Orsino's constant pursuit of love has caused him to become self-obsessed, as well as forming an obsession with love itself. This is mirrored when he says "Away before me to sweet beds of flowers. Love thoughts lie rich when canopied with bowers." The rhyme in 'flowers' and 'bowers', reflective of a love sonnet, has implications of love and passion. However, 'love thoughts lie rich' implies that he is not thinking of Olivia, but simply love as a whole. In contrast, in "Enduring Love", Jed's obsession is purely based on an individual; however he attempts to disguise his true pursuit. Although Jed's true purpose is to romantically pursue Joe, he uses his faith to disguise the true intent of his obsession. In a letter, Jed says "To bring you to God, through love. You'll fight this like mad because you're a long way from your own feeling? But I know that the Christ is within you. At some level you know it too." The use of religious lexis such as "Christ" and "God" indicate how Jed not only has an obsession with Joe, but also with religion. He is so involved with both concepts that he believes it allows him to use his faith as an excuse to obsess over Joe in the way he does. However, his use of interrogative indicates how tentative he is in his pursuit as he perhaps doesn't believe in his own intentions. However, unlike any other characters in the novels, his disorder means that this behaviour is uncontrollable; therefore he must disguise and manage it in any way he can.

Whereas it is clear that romantic love is pursued in both "Twelfth Night" and "Enduring Love", whether or not this pursuit has the potential to become an obsession varies from the two novels. Jed in "Enduring Love" clearly shows evidence of obsession over Joe, however the existence of his disorder could imply that his pursuit for love is simply a way of feeding his obsession. On the other hand, Orsino in "Twelfth Night" demonstrates how he may be pursuing Olivia romantically, however the obsession that he experiences is more self-obsession. Both novels indicate that although romantic pursuit can often lead to obsession, there is a clear divide between the two.