

Eulogies of love in symposium and the sorrows of young werther



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In Plato's Symposium and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werther, the two protagonists are overcome by their love and dedicate an eulogy in the form of a speech or a series of letters to their beloved. The multitude of letters composed by Werther to Lotte is praised as one of the great loves in literary history worthy of inspiring a new trend of blue coats; while the drunken speech composed by Alcibiades to his love Socrates is deemed yet another "common love" dominated by nothing more than lust and passion. Despite seemingly irreconcilable differences between the two loves exhibited by Alcibiades and Werther, both eulogies delivered by the two men are ultimately testaments to love's ability to free them from constrictions, inspire, elevate, and bless them with a livelier existence. The power love possesses does not discriminate between common and celestial love as demonstrated by Alcibiades and Werther's newfound ability to break the confinements that previously limited their actions and speech. Both Plato and Goethe uses a state of intoxication to describe the freedom of speaking and acting without the limiting constraints of internal and external social standards. Alcibiades admits that "truth comes from wine" (Plato, 64) and yet no one has ever seen Socrates drunk. A contrast is established between Alcibiades, a man in love, and Socrates, a man merely in the presence of love. The power of love permeates only the mindset of Alcibiades and destroys the emotional defenses that previously controlled and limited his actions. Werther also recognizes society's derision of actions that are "remotely free or noble or out of the ordinary" by attributing the cause to intoxication, and in turn places the shame upon the "sensible" people (Goethe, 61). Love grants the necessary strength for those in love to erode away their defenses and enables them to become true to their actions and

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words. Love's power extends beyond the ability to give strength to those in love and allow them to become true to themselves, but rather elevates those in love to an inspired and divine state. Plato and Goethe both utilize music to illustrate the divine effects of love. When Socrates exhibits his enchanting abilities on his instrument, Alcibiades depicts the effect as the equivalent of "casting a spell" and demonstrates Socrates's ability to "[reach] for the Gods" (Plato, 61). The memory of Lotte playing the piano is equally enchanting for Werther as he describes her musical abilities as "angelic skill" and capable of dissipating all of Werther's pains and sorrows (Goethe, 53). Alcibiades and Werther both recognize the powerful effects of love when it is elevated with the effects of spell-binding music. While music heightens the experience of love, love heightens the mortal states of the two men in love. Alcibiades and Werther both use descriptions of heaven to indicate their transcendence beyond mortal human limitations into a magical state of celestial divinity rooted in the inspiration from their loved ones, Socrates and Lotte. Once Alcibiades and Werther has experienced the strength and divine inspiration attributed to the power of love, the two men become incapable of living without love. Alcibiades proclaims his dedication to Socrates by promising his willingness to spend the remainder of his life "sitting there at [Socrate's] feet" since Alcibiades claims his life was "saved by one man and one man alone- Socrates" (Plato, 68). Since Socrates demonstrated his power to inject a newfound liveliness into Alcibiades's life, Alcibiades refuses to live without love in his life, and becomes willing to dedicate the rest of his life just to be in close proximity with the one he loves. For Werther, the mere effect of hearing Lotte's voice is power enough to help him "recover [his] self-possession" and Werther demonstrates his appreciation for Lotte's divine

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effects upon him by proclaiming “ what an Angel! I shall live for you!” (Goethe, 49). The power love and Lotte yields has outweighed his own ability to control his “ self-possession”, therefore Werther praises Lotte’s divine powers to elevate him beyond mortal constraints when Werther is in Lotte’s presence. Lotte’s ability to grant Werther the strength and elevation he cannot provide for himself causes Werther to dedicate his life to Lotte’s existence since it is worthless without her. Both Alcibiades and Werther becomes dependent upon love for providing their newfound inner-strength and temporary elevation into euphoria that the two men deem their mortal life unworthy without the presence of their lovers. Love permeates the lives of Alcibiades and Werther and injects strength, inspiration, and a livelier existence into their lives, however, while Alcibiades is truly in love with Socrates for who he is, Werther’s love towards Lotte is based selfishly upon what Lotte can do for him. Both Socrates and Lotte’s words exert such a great influence upon Alcibiades and Werther that the two men in love shed tears from the power of their words. Alcibiades admits “ tears flood” from his eyes because the words of Socrates yields the power to “ change my outlook” and cause Alcibiades to look inward and deem the life he leads not “ worth living” (Plato, 61). Werther also sheds tears from the words of Lotte. When Lotte exclaims the name of an ode “ Klopstock”, Werther “[remembers] the glorious ode” and in turn “[sheds] tears of the greatest joy” (Plato, 43). Plato claims only men in love are capable of experiencing shame out of fear of disappointing their lovers. Socrates is the only man capable of causing Alcibiades to experience shame, and Alcibiades sheds tears out of the powerful and life-changing context of his words. However, Werther thinks only of the happiness Lotte brings him and sheds tears of

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happiness once Lotte validates their similarities with the shared love of an ode named Klopstock. While Alcibiades experiences deep emotion from words that originate from Socrates, Werther is deeply moved by their shared appreciation for an ode composed by a different man. While Alcibiades appreciates Socrates for being original and the man he is, Werther appreciates Lotte for the similarities she shares with Werther, as well as past lovers of Werther. Alcibiades speaks to the originality Socrates possesses by claiming he is so “out of the ordinal” that no one “remotely resembles him” (Plato, 69). However, when Werther describes Lotte, the adjectives Werther uses are reminiscent of the adjectives he used to describe a previous lover. Werther describes both Lotte and his previous love as possessors of “so much simplicity with so much understanding, so much goodness” (Goethe, 46). The only difference between Lotte and his previous love is that Lotte contributes “true life and vitality” whereas the woman he was previously in love with is dead (Goethe, 46). Werther subconsciously falls in love with Lotte in order to provide a replacement for the woman he previously loved up until her death. Werther also constantly refers to Lotte as an angel and associates her with heaven, showing his overwhelming fascination with the celestial divinity and God-like abilities to transcend the limitations applicable to human beings. The love exhibited by Alcibiades also differs in the love shown by Werther past originality but also in elements of independence and longevity. While Alcibiades strives to become the best man he can become and looks to Socrates for guidance since “no one offers more effective assistance in this” (Plato, 65). However, Werther loves the way Lotte increases his self-confidence and creates a mirage of celestial ability since Werther “worships myself ever since she loves me” (Goethe, 53). This <https://assignbuster.com/eulogies-of-love-in-symposium-and-the-sorrows-of-young-werther/>

elevated state of false greatness is only temporary until Lotte reminds Werther of her love for Albert, and then Werther suffers and “ feels as if I had been stripped of all honour” (Goethe, 53). Alcibiades is willing to independently achieve self-greatness whereas Werther relies purely upon Lotte for a mirage of self-greatness. Alcibiades strives to become a better man for Socrates to avoid shame but Werther is only concerned with his own feelings of self-worship. Finally, Alcibiades strives for permanent improvement in his character and morals while Werther shows his concern for the temporary improvement. Even though Werther claims he needs to be constantly around Lotte, it is not to better her existence but rather to prolong the image of his own elevated self worth. While Alcibiades selflessly dedicates his life to the man he loves by pledging to spend the remainder of his life at Socrates’s feet, Werther selfishly depends on Lotte for replacing a former love Werther lost to death, injecting liveliness into his previously dull life, and for lending him the power to transcend human limitations and temporarily achieve a God-like state. Even though the power of love permeates the lives of all of those in love, only certain men in love are worthy of the benefits love provides. Both Alcibiades and Werther demonstrate similar symptoms of being in love and share the strength, inspiration, and celestial elevation love lends. However, the differences between the way they describe their relations with their loved ones distinguish the difference between Alcibiades who is truly in love with Socrates for his originality and power to inflict shame upon Alcibiades, from Werther, who loves immortality and the benefits love provides more than he loves Lotte. Lotte is merely a tool used to provide a replacement for previous loves, transcend mortal limitations and achieve a God-like state, and act as a <https://assignbuster.com/eulogies-of-love-in-symposium-and-the-sorrows-of-young-werther/>

validation for his own life. The true gauge of the worthiness of lovers depends on whether they dedicate their lives to love, or seek love in order to temporarily resolve issues and indulges in the pleasures it provides.