

“Separation of Love and Morality”

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The issue of morality is a gray area all its own; when love is thrown into the equation, can a definitive statement concerning morality truly be made? Love comes in many different incarnations, and while it is generally accepted that certain types of love are wrong, is it really the love we are condemning or its expression? In fact, is the love that we perceive as immoral even truly love at all? Is it merely the manifestations of love that can be fairly judged in the end?

The varying degrees of love and the types of relationships that involve love do not readily lend themselves to moral labeling. While the man who abuses his wife is immoral for the pain and trauma he inflicts on her, can the love he feels for her be deemed immoral? Martin Luther, in On Christian Liberty, makes the comparison that “...fruits do not make trees either good or bad, but rather as the trees are, so are the fruits they bear...” (40). In saying this, Luther means that a good, true man will do good things, and that it is his innate goodness that manifests itself in his works. Going back to the analogy of the abusive husband, it is *not* his love that is untrue, as it is his wickedness or perhaps learned behavior as a result of past abuse against him that leads him to do such horrible things and not the emotion of love itself. In fact, this husband most likely loves his

wife very much; he just has not learned how to express his anger in a healthy manner or does not realize his tendencies to overpower his wife have such a damaging effect on her. However, if you subscribe to the belief that the character of a love is responsible for the acts performed in its name, then naturally, in the case of an ideal mother-daughter relationship, the mother is kind and nurturing; the bond between them is nearly unbreakable and the love that the mother has for her kin is palpable. This is a moral love, by proxy, because it has instigated a multitude of generous, loving acts. If it were immoral, then the bond between the mother and her daughter would be strained and tense. In Like Water for Chocolate, the relationship that exists between Tita and her mother, Mama Elena, depicts the latter. Mama Elena and Tita fight and hurt each other on numerous occasions, which is not helped by their obstinacy and fixed sets of values. Despite this, however, I feel that Mama Elena truly loves her daughter. Mama Elena keeps Pedro and Tita apart for a number of reasons, and the arrangement of Pedro and Rosaura's move to San Antonio was a measure taken not only to preserve Rosaura's image in the community but also Tita's. Though there is no concrete evidence to suggest it, Mama Elena could very well have denied Pedro's request for Tita's hand in marriage in order to protect her. Pedro's intentions appear awfully dubious at times, and Mama Elena is wise to the matter. Her watchful eye does not wander

too far from the separated lovers, and this protective measure shows that Pedro and Tita's love should remain forbidden for a reason. As rooted in tradition as Mama Elena is, she still wants Tita to excel as witnessed by the fact that Mama Elena continues to criticize her though she surpasses her sisters in many skills. While the harsh, non-constructive criticism is hard for Tita to handle, it is an act of love on Mama Elena's behalf. However, setting such unreasonable standards for her daughter puts quite a rift between them and generates a lot of hostility in Tita. The impositions placed on Tita are clearly wrong, but that does not mean that Mama Elena's love for her is immoral just because it is often expressed in negative feedback. Familial love is very complicated in this respect. Parents and siblings tend to hurt each other and do terrible things, but this does not make them bad people, nor can it be used to judge the morality of the love they share. In fact, familial love is so abstract that I do not feel it can be labeled moral or immoral; rather, it is the person who expresses this love that can be either moral or immoral. Love is just a vessel through which we can accomplish great or terrible things. It is not a tangible, physical entity, and based on that, it is nearly impossible to judge an emotion's morality. They say, after all, that it is the thought that counts, meaning that the intentions of a person matter more than the actual act they commit. Therefore, it is the person who loves that can be judged morally rather than the love they hold. Another example of love that

cannot be judged in moral terms is the “agape” that Martin Luther King, Jr. shows for his enemies. This love “for thy neighbor” does not manifest itself the way other loves do. There is no deep, complex relationship between King and the white men that scorn him. The love for these people is really a formality; it was used as a means of curtailing the violence and ire of his oppressors. That is not to say that this love is not genuine of course, but that the implementation of it is meant to be a morally superior move to the violence and hatred of the white people. King’s actions show that he and his people are above violence and that they do not want to conquer White America so much as to level the playing field as Americans. This tactical move appealed to the hearts of America by showing more clearly the injustices faced by the black people, who were loving and trying to peacefully (and fairly) coexist with the rest of the nation. The love they showed in itself is neither moral nor immoral; it is the person behind this Civil Rights movement that is moral and making moral judgments not necessarily for the sake of love, but for justice.

When love, an essentially pure and good emotion, produces so much pain and torment, does this make the love immoral, or does it mean that the love is something less than that? It is true that love can make you do some irrational things, but Pedro, in Like Water for Chocolate, goes to hurtful extremes for the love of Tita. He marries Rosaura so that he can remain

close to Tita, but he does not consider the ramifications a drastic action like that has on Tita. She feels betrayed, and even though he continues to assert his love for her, he is bound to Rosaura and is obligated to care for her before Tita. Pedro is wracked with jealousy and a sense of ownership when he finds that Tita has found love in John Brown, and his possessiveness tortures his long-suffering lover. His actions are performed in the name of a love so all-consuming that it burns the De la Garza family ranch down, but does his love, purportedly so right and true, excuse his poor behavior? Does it have the power to prove that all transgressions on his behalf can be ignored? Or does this mean that all the passion adds up to something less, something that demands too much of Tita and offers her too little in return. Again, this is a case in which a bad tree bears bad fruit, but does that make their love immoral? Certainly Pedro does some horrible things, but if he is sincerely in love with Tita, then how can that be immoral? On the flip side, however, would not true, heartfelt love produce something more substantial than just great sex? John Brown treats Tita with kindness and respect; he professes his love for her and considers her an equal. He does not crave only her body but her love and respect as well. While Pedro does little else but gawk at Tita's curves and plan less-than-innocent rendezvous with her, Dr. Brown sacrifices his desire for her comfort and his love manifests itself in more positive ways. Even when Tita admits to him that she has been

unfaithful, his understanding character shines through when he says, “What you’ve told me hasn’t changed the way I think; I’ll say again, I would be delighted to be your companion for the rest of your life—but you must think over very carefully whether I am the man for you or not. If your answer is yes, we will celebrate our wedding in a few days. If it’s no, I will be the first to congratulate Pedro and ask him to give you the respect you deserve” (223). While I do not feel that one love is capable of being “more right” than another, I do feel that one man can be more morally sound than another and that one love can be stronger than another. Pedro feels intensely for Tita, and while his lust may overpower him, I believe some degree of love for her exists. The harm that he inflicts on her certainly is not moral, but his actions reflect on him as a person and an entity fully capable of taking responsibility for their consequences; his love cannot be held accountable for his transgressions because love did not force him to hurt Tita. The love, therefore, is not what should be judged, but the person instead. This is because Luther is right in his opinion that it is not works that can prove one’s morality; rather, it is faith and the inner workings of the soul that can be judged from a moral standpoint. The inside of one’s soul extends outward; works are done through the soul, which explains both why it is good people who do good things and how the misconception that one’s works make them moral arose in the first place. Good people are innately good. They perform

good works as a result of their souls and faith and not the other way around. Because Pedro is not a good person, he does not express his love in a “good” way; his actions condemn him, but not his love.

Nothing can condemn love, for it is simultaneously the root of all good and evil in this world, for it is a love of money that damns the greedy miser and a love of food that damns the glutton, but it is a love of humanity that commends the righteous. Horrible acts are committed by horrible people, not by horrible love. Conversely, the love of a morally upstanding citizen is no more right or true than the love of a malignant convict – only the manifestations of these loves can be judged in such a manner. An emotion like love is abstract and an extension of the soul; there is no way to judge the quality of a feeling, but there *is* a way to judge the quality of the person responsible for it.

Questions for discussion: There is a lot of thinking going on in this piece, stemming from the author’s agreement with Martin Luther’s premise. If Luther’s premise is rejected, however, would that necessarily mean the opposite conclusions about Pedro and Tita? Should there be people who shouldn’t fall in love?