
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Comparative Study of Love in Eastern and Western Literature: From Rumi to Shakespeare

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares and contrasts the writings of William Shakespeare and Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi to examine the issue of love in both Eastern and Western literature. Shakespeare, an English playwright and poet from the 16th century, and Rumi, a Persian poet and Sufi mystic from the 13th century, both present complex and nuanced depictions of love that are a reflection of their distinct philosophical and cultural backgrounds. Love is portrayed in Rumi's poetry as a means of achieving unity with God, with an emphasis on spiritual enlightenment and divine love. Shakespeare, on the other hand, frequently captures romantic love in all its complexities in his plays, emphasizing both its tragic and profoundly joyful aspects. By examining the perspectives of Eastern and Western literature on love, the study offers insights into the varied yet interconnected ways love is portrayed in these two literary canons. It draws on primary texts such as Shakespeare's plays as well as Rumi's "Masnavi" and "Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi." It also illustrates how their perspectives on love are similar and different, as well as the universal qualities of love that are shown in their writings, as well as cultural and philosophical ideas. This study concludes that despite the difference in the views of both regarding love, there are some kinds of similarities and closeness as well.

KEYWORDS

Cross-cultural themes, Love, Poetry, Rumi, Shakespeare, Spirituality.

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1. Introduction

Throughout history and all cultural contexts, literature has addressed the universal issue of love. Love appears in many forms and has great philosophical, spiritual, and emotional value in both Eastern and Western literary traditions. The purpose of this article is to compare how the concept of love is presented in the writings of two great writers: William Shakespeare from the West and Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi from the East. We can learn more about the philosophical and cultural backgrounds that influenced their works by looking at how they view love.

Love is primarily portrayed as a supernatural, spiritual power in Rumi's poetry. Love is portrayed in his works as a way to transcend the mundane world and selfishness and to achieve unity with the divine, particularly in "Mathnavi Ma'ani" and "Divan Shams Tabrizi". Rumi's conception of love is closely related to Sufism, in which the soul's desire for God is represented by the lover's longing for the beloved. The transformational power of divine love and its function in spiritual awakening are highlighted in this mystical perspective on love. (Schimmel, 1975).

Shakespeare, on the other hand, frequently emphasizes the earthly and romantic aspects of love in his plays and sonnets. Shakespeare's plays, explore the complexities of romantic relationships, emphasizing the happiness and tragic possibilities that come with human interactions. Shakespeare's examination of love is complex, showing it as a strong feeling that may have both incredibly positive and terrible outcomes (Bloom, 1999).

This study tries to illustrate the philosophical and cultural settings that influence Rumi and Shakespeare's works by analyzing the different yet intersecting ways in which they treat the issue of love. Despite the disparate cultural myths, it also aims to emphasize how universal love is as a basic human feeling. To give readers a thorough grasp of how love is portrayed in Eastern and Western literary traditions, the comparative analysis will draw on primary texts, academic interpretations, and pertinent literary criticism. Moreover, this work is important for its cultural ramifications as well as its literary insights. Gaining insight into the various ways love is interpreted and manifested in various cultural settings helps promote a deeper awareness of the variety and universality of human experiences. Though deeply ingrained in their respective cultural contexts, Rumi and Shakespeare's writings have a timeless quality that enables them to offer insights about the nature of love that are relevant across time and space.

2. Literature Review

The exploration of love as a central theme in literature provides rich insights into cultural, philosophical, and emotional dimensions across different traditions. This literature review examines existing scholarship on the concept of love in the works of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, a key figure in Eastern literature, and William Shakespeare, a prominent figure in Western literature. By comparing the treatment of love in their writings, we aim to uncover both universal and culturally specific aspects of this enduring theme.

Love in literature is often a reflection of the cultural values, philosophical inquiries, and human experiences unique to a particular tradition. In Eastern literature, particularly within the Persian Sufi tradition, love is frequently depicted with mystical and spiritual undertones, as evident in the works of Rumi. Conversely, Western literature, as exemplified by Shakespeare, tends to portray love in its varied human forms, encompassing romance, tragedy, and comedy (Bloom, 1999; Schimmel, 1975).

The analysis of love in Rumi's and Shakespeare's works is supported by distinct yet complementary theoretical frameworks. Rumi's poetry is deeply embedded in Sufi mysticism, where love is perceived as a path to spiritual enlightenment and union with the divine (Schimmel, 1975). Shakespeare's portrayal of love, influenced by Renaissance humanism, emphasizes the complexities of human emotions and relationships (Greenblatt, 2004).

2.1 Love in Eastern Literature: Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

Rumi, also known as Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, was a Persian poet, theologian, and mystic who lived from 1207 to 1273. His poetry addresses the idea of divine love and its transformational power, especially in the poems "Masnavi" (Mathnawi) and "Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi."

Rumi often explores the transformational power of love in his writings. Franklin Lewis claims that Rumi's Sufi beliefs—which regard love as a way to reach spiritual closeness to God and purify the soul—are closely entwined with his understanding of love (Lewis, 2008). Schimmel further emphasizes how love is frequently portrayed in Rumi's poetry as a power that subdues the ego and promotes a deeper comprehension of both the divine and the individual (Schimmel, 1975).

Rumi's conception of love is essentially mystical and spiritual. Lewis (2008) portrays love as the force that unites all components of life in Rumi's works "Masnavi" and "Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi," and is said to be the driving force behind the universe. According to Rumi, love is a heavenly power that is necessary for enlightenment and spiritual development.

"Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along" (Rumi, 2004).

The deep intertwining of love and death in Rumi's worldview is illustrated by his notion that love transcends physical and worldly limitations and symbolizes the soul's longing for reunion with God or the night of union (Schimmel, 1975).

2.1.1 Divine Love in Rumi's Poetry

2.1.1.1 Nature of the divine love

Divine love is presented in Rumi's poetry as an all-pervasive, transformational energy that binds the human soul to God. This love is a spiritual path that leads to oneness with the divine rather than just a feeling. To illustrate this deep bond and emphasize that true love transcends the material world and enters the spiritual world, Rumi frequently employs metaphors and allegories.

The idea of union with the divine, in which the lover (the human soul) aspires to dissolve into the beloved (God), is one of the central themes in Rumi's portrayal of divine love. The ultimate objective of the spiritual path is believed to be this oneness. As Rumi writes, "The minute I heard my first love story, I started looking for you, not knowing how blind that was. Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along" (Rumi, 2004, p. 12). This quotation perfectly captures the idea that the pursuit of God is a process of self-realization and that divine love is an innate aspect of the human soul.

2.1.1.2 Love as a Path to Enlightenment

For Rumi, love is a route to spiritual knowledge as well as a feeling. One can experience the divine and transcend the ego via love. In one of his Ghazals, Rumi writes: "Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray." (Rumi, 2004, p. 45). This illustrates the Sufi view that love is a guiding principle that directs a seeker toward enlightenment and union with God.

2.1.2 Expressions of Divine Love in Rumi's Poetry

2.1.2.1 Metaphors and Symbols

Rumi makes significant use of symbols and metaphors to convey the indescribable quality of heavenly love. A recurrent metaphor in his poetry, the Ney (reed flute) symbolizes the yearning of the human soul for the divine. In Mathnawi's first verses, Rumi compares the soul to a reed, "Listen to the reed how it tells a tale, complaining of separations" (Rumi, 2001, p. 1). The lament of the reed represents the soul's desire to return to its source.

2.1.2.2 Love as a Transformative Force

Rumi's poetry speaks of divine love as a transformational force that brings about inner cleansing and spiritual awakening. Love, according to Rumi, can see past the ego and disclose the actual essence of the self. He writes, "Through love, thorns become roses, and through love, vinegar becomes sweet wine" (Rumi, 1994, p. 45). This metamorphosis represents the deep metamorphosis of basic traits into noble ones in the human soul brought about by divine love.

2.2 Love in Western Literature: William Shakespeare

Most people agree that one of the best playwrights and poets in Western civilization is William Shakespeare (1564–1616). He explores love in a variety of ways, including platonic, familial, and romantic love. Shakespeare's portrayal of love is frequently intricate, mirroring the complexities of the human condition. Shakespeare's plays, including "Romeo and Juliet" and "Othello," portray love as a strong, complex feeling that may result in both intense delight and tragic sorrow. Shakespeare's portrayal of love, according to Harold Bloom, captures a spectrum of human feelings and experiences, from the naiveté and passion of youthful love to the deadly force of envy and betrayal. (Bloom, 1999).

Shakespeare examines the ardor and immaturity of young love in "Romeo and Juliet," emphasizing both its beauty and its potential for disaster (Evans, 1997). The darker sides of love—jealousy and mistrust, for example—are highlighted in "Othello," showing how manipulation of love can have disastrous results (Honigmann, 2006). Shakespeare's intricate depiction of love in his plays captures the intricacies of emotional connection and human interactions.

Shakespeare's representation of love is nuanced and multifaceted, capturing the whole range of human emotions. His writings emphasize the idealistic and practical facets of love with a blend of tragic, humorous, and romantic components (Bloom, 1999). In the story "Romeo and Juliet," love is portrayed as a tragic yet ferocious force that defies social boundaries: "These violent delights have violent ends and in their triumph die, like fire and powder, Which, as they kiss, consume" (Shakespeare, 2004).

Shakespeare examines the paradoxical nature of love, which has the power to evoke both great delight and deep grief. As demonstrated in "Othello," where the darker sides of love, such as jealousy and treachery, are heavily highlighted, his plays frequently depict the conflict between society's standards and personal aspirations (Greenblatt, 2004).

2.2.1 Love and Tragedy

Shakespeare frequently examines the darker side of love, showing how it can result in treachery, tragedy, and jealousy. In "Othello," the main character's love for Desdemona is corrupted by deception and jealousy, leading to a terrible conclusion: "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock The meat it feeds on." (Shakespeare, 2006, 3.3.165-167)

This quote from Iago underscores the destructive power of jealousy within the context of love, a recurring theme in Shakespeare's works.

2.2.2 Romantic Love in Shakespeare's Plays

Shakespeare's plays frequently show romantic love as a potent, transforming force capable of both tragedy and joy. Romeo and Juliet's passionate love in "Romeo and Juliet," one of his most well-known works, transcends social and familial expectations and finally results in their terrible demise:

"My bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep; the more I give to thee, the more I have, for both are infinite." (Shakespeare, 1997, 2.2.133-135)

This piece emphasizes how their love is unbounded and unselfish, despite the rivalries and conflicts that surround them.

2.3 Key Studies and Contributions

Schimmel, Annemarie. (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*: Schimmel's ground-breaking study offers a thorough examination of Rumi's mystical poetry with an emphasis on how he represents spiritual and heavenly love. This book is essential reading for comprehending the spiritual background of Rumi's love poetry (Schimmel, 1975).

Bloom, Harold. (1999). *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*: Shakespeare's characters and ideas are explored in depth in Bloom's critical work, particularly the complex ways in which love is portrayed in his plays (Bloom, 1999).

Lewis, Franklin D. (2008). *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*: This research provides a thorough analysis of Rumi's life and poetry, highlighting the importance of love and its spiritual meaning throughout his works (Lewis, 2008).

Greenblatt, Stephen. (2004). *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*: Shakespeare's life and works are examined by Greenblatt, who also offers insights into the cultural and personal factors that shaped Shakespeare's portrayal of love (Greenblatt, 2004).

Afroogh, Mohammad Reza. (2021) *Love in two horizons: Shakspeare and Rumi*: According to his research, Rumi and Shakespeare share several crucial ideas regarding how they understand this universal theme: According to Rumi, love is a fundamental, heavenly power that appears in all facets of life. Shakespeare's viewpoint presents love as an enduring energy that is essential to life (Afroogh, 2021).

Akramov, Izzatulla Ikromovich. (2024) *A Parallel Examination of the Aphorisms of Love by Shakespeare and Rumi*: According to this article, Shakespeare composed his works on human elegance, but Mevlana's understanding of love is based on divine love. Both agree that love is a situation that is difficult to comprehend in an abstract context and nearly impossible to communicate (Akramov, 2024).

Even after various research, there are still gaps in our knowledge of the cross-cultural aspects of love in the literature. Furthermore, there aren't many comparative studies of Rumi and Shakespeare; instead, most studies have concentrated on each author independently. Even when studies have been conducted in tandem, they haven't examined the similarities and differences between the two. In light of this research, an attempt has been made to highlight the similarities and contrasts between the perspectives of Shakespeare and Rumi on love.

3. Results and Discussion

A comparison of Shakespeare and Rumi uncovers interesting commonalities as well as important contrasts. Shakespeare's love is deeply entrenched in the human experience, exploring the pleasures and sorrows of romantic relationships, but Rumi's love is largely spiritual and aims to transcend the earthly reality. This distinction draws attention to the various philosophical and cultural contexts in which they wrote.

3.1. The Role of Suffering in Love

Shakespeare and Rumi both recognize the importance of suffering in love, but they take distinct stances on the subject. Suffering, according to Rumi, is a necessary component of the spiritual path. It draws the lover closer to the beloved (God) and purifies the soul. Writing in the "Masnavi," Rumi says: "Suffering is a gift. In it is hidden mercy." (Rumi, 2004, p. 83).

Shakespeare, on the other hand, frequently portrays sorrow as a result of the imperfect nature of humans and the difficulties of interpersonal relationships. As seen in plays like "Romeo and Juliet" and "Othello," suffering in love may bring about tragedy and loss as well as opportunities for human development.

3.2 Spiritual vs. Romantic Love

Focus is one of the main ways that Rumi and Shakespeare approach love differently. The main theme of Rumi's poetry is spiritual love, with an emphasis on the soul's journey toward connection with the divine. Shakespeare, on the other hand, frequently addresses romantic love and how it affects interpersonal relationships and feelings.

Shakespeare presents love as an earthly experience full of nuance and complexity, whereas Rumi sees love as a way to transcend the material world and achieve spiritual enlightenment. The philosophical and cultural divide between the literary traditions of the East and the West is reflected in this dichotomy.

3.3 The Universality of Love

Shakespeare and Rumi both express the universality of love despite their varied styles. Shakespeare's examination of romantic love connects with the general human experience of seeking and struggling with intimate relationships, while Rumi's emphasis on divine love relates to the universal human need for connection with a higher force. Rumi's perspective is captured in the following verse: "Love is the bridge between you and everything." (Rumi, 2004, p. 105)

Shakespeare's depiction of the transformational power of love is also apparent in "A Midsummer Night's Dream": "The course of true love never did run smoothly." (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1.134)

Both acknowledge that one of the essential components of the human experience is love, in all of its manifestations.

Sufi mysticism, which views love as a route to enlightenment and unity with the divine, had a profound influence on Rumi's poetry (Schimmel, 1975). Shakespeare's interpretation of love highlights the complexity of human emotions and relationships, drawing on Renaissance humanism (Greenblatt, 2004). The parallels and distinctions between these two greatest were noted through research into the poetry and plays of Rumi and Shakespeare; we will go over each of these points in different sections below.

3.4 Similarities

Despite their disparate cultural upbringings, Rumi and Shakespeare depict love in several comparable ways. They both see love as a transforming power that takes people above and beyond their everyday realities. They also stress how closely related fundamental human events like spirituality and death are to love.

1. **Love and Death:** Shakespeare and Rumi both examine the complex connection between love and death. Rumi's idea unites love and death into a single, profound experience by symbolizing the soul's reunion with the heavenly beloved after death (Schimmel, 1975). Shakespeare depicts love and death as interwoven in plays such as "Romeo and Juliet," with love frequently leading to tragic consequences (Greenblatt, 2004).
2. **Transformative Power of Love:** Shakespeare and Rumi both portray love as a strong, transforming force. According to Rumi, love is the heavenly force that creates the cosmos and leads to enlightenment (Schimmel, 1975). Shakespeare, too, presents love as a force that has the power to deeply affect people's emotions and to transcend both social and personal bounds (Bloom, 1999).

3.5 Differences

Shakespeare's and Rumi's conceptions of love are very different, despite their obvious parallels. These distinctions stem from their different philosophical and cultural backgrounds.

1. **Idealism vs. Realism:** Rumi's portrayal of love is frequently idealistic, expressing a perfect, heavenly bond that is above and above worldly worries (Schimmel, 1975). Shakespeare, on the other hand, presents a more accurate picture, recognizing both the virtues and vices of love. His characters experience love in a variety of ways, ranging from the destructive jealousy of "Othello" to the idealized romance of "Romeo and Juliet" (Greenblatt, 2004).
2. **Spiritual vs. Earthly Love:** Most of Rumi's love is spiritual in nature, emphasizing the soul's path to God. Lewis (2008) highlights that the poet's poetry focuses on the mystical side of love, using earthly love as a metaphor for divine love. Shakespeare, on the other hand, gives a more realistic depiction of love. He examines the social, emotional, and physical aspects of love, frequently bringing out its paradoxes and complexities (Bloom, 1999).
3. **Cultural Context:** Rumi's image of love as a route to enlightenment, intricately entwined with Islamic mysticism, is influenced by his Sufi upbringing (Schimmel, 1975). Shakespeare's writings, which were influenced by Renaissance humanism, provide a more secular and human-centered view of love by reflecting the complexity of human nature and the social dynamics of his day (Greenblatt, 2004).

4. Conclusion

The comparative study of love in the works of Rumi and Shakespeare reveals the rich diversity of perspectives on this universal theme. According to the research, both Rumi and Shakespeare have somehow the same perspective related to issues like the transformative power of love and death and love. Despite having these similarities, Rumi's focus on spiritual love and the soul's journey toward the divine contrasts with Shakespeare's exploration of romantic love and its emotional complexities. Furthermore, Rumi's depiction of love is often idealistic while Shakespeare, paints a more realistic picture, acknowledging both the good and bad aspects of love. Lastly, they have distinct cultural perspectives as well. This cross-cultural analysis enhances our appreciation of these two literary giants and their enduring contributions to the exploration of love in literature.

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