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Harry Potter, Master of Love

Charles S. Holland

Abstract: *Love can be differentiated into two main categories: “action love” and “emotion love.” “Action love” spurs us to act for the betterment of some cause, but it is empty without “emotion love,” which encompasses the feelings we have for those close to us. Likewise, “emotion love” by itself is not true love, either. As Harry Potter shows, the ultimate love combines these two categories.*

More thoughtful individuals seem to value passionless, emotionless love that acts out of a sense of duty over one’s obsession with another or even mutual intoxication. When we differentiate certain types of love from one another, we can draw three main categories. They are, in ascending order of supposed merit, eros, philia, and agape. In “Choosing Love: The Redemption of Severus Snape,” Catherine Jack Deavel and David Paul Deavel explain that “Eros, or erotic love, is the type of love found in romantic relationships.” They continue with, “Philia is friendship love” and comment, “In fact, for ancient Greeks and Romans, friendship was generally believed to be superior to romantic love.” Finally, they say, “The third type of love, agape, is universal, self-giving, and unconditional love. When the Gospel writers tell us that ‘God is love,’ it is agape that they have in mind.”¹²¹ This is a rather clear statement that the less emotionally involved one is in one’s relationships, the more loving one is. Similarly, the “Love” article in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy differentiates the types of love in this same way,

¹²¹ Catherine Jack Deavel and David Paul Deavel, “Choosing Love: The Redemption of Severus Snape” in *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy*, ed. Gregory Bassham (John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 2010), 55.

denigrating the passions in favor of the passionless. It says, “Such an understanding of *eros* is encouraged by Plato’s discussion in the Symposium, in which Socrates understands sexual desire to be a deficient response to physical beauty in particular, a response which ought to be developed into a response to the beauty of a person’s soul and, ultimately, into a response to the form, Beauty.” Passionless, dutiful “action love” is indeed important, but true love requires both “action love” and “emotion love.” That is, as this paper will argue, eros, philia, and agape are all needed for the ultimate love. By possessing all three of these, Harry Potter is the true master of love.

As we see in the example of Severus Snape, “action love” is useful, but cannot be called true love on its own. Snape clearly puts down “emotion love” when he says to Harry in his Occlumency lesson, “Fools who wear their hearts proudly on their sleeves, who cannot control their emotions, who wallow in sad memories and allow themselves to be provoked this easily -- weak people, in other words -- they stand no chance against [Voldemort’s] powers! He will penetrate your mind with absurd ease, Potter!”¹²² However, it is Harry’s “emotion love” for Sirius that saves him at the end of *Order of the Phoenix* when Voldemort tries to possess him. Furthermore, Harry’s love for Dobby eradicates Voldemort from his mind when Harry digs Dobby’s grave. As is stated, “He had learned control at last, learned to shut his mind to Voldemort, the very thing Dumbledore had wanted him to learn from Snape. . . . Grief, it seemed, drove Voldemort out. . . . though Dumbledore, of course, would have said that it was love. . . .”¹²³ Here, the emotion of grief is so tied to the philia aspect of love that the

¹²² J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, accessed at hp-lexicon.org, 24.

¹²³ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Scholastic, 2007), 478.

reader cannot be sure which of the two Harry is really experiencing, or if there is even a difference in this context. In typical Gryffindor fashion, Harry wears his heart on his sleeve, much to the dismay of Snape, which shuts evil out from his mind. In situations like this, and like the deaths of Sirius and Dumbledore, Harry wonders if he'll ever feel cheerful again. As Iris Murdoch states, "In such cases there is a sense of emptiness, a loss of personality, a loss of energy and motivation, a sense of being stripped, the world is utterly charmless and without attraction."¹²⁴ This indicates that "emotion love" is not always a positive thing and can become quite debilitating especially in moments of intense loss.

Whether in this depressing way or in an obsessive way, "emotion love" is not by itself true love, either. We see many instances of obsession in the Harry Potter universe, none of which turn out to be true love. When Professor Slughorn teaches Harry's class about Amortentia, the most powerful love potion in the world, he warns that it cannot create true love, only infatuation or obsession. From the Amortentia, Harry smells those things with which he is obsessed: a broomstick handle, treacle tart, and Ginny's hair. At this point, Harry's love for Ginny is unconscious and purely emotional, without any commitment to action. Love potions surface several times subsequent to this in *Half-Blood Prince*, with Merope's and Romilda Vane's manipulations as particularly prominent. Merope is obsessed with Tom Riddle Sr. in a selfish and emotional way, just as Romilda fancies Harry without readiness to act or sacrifice for him. Besides Ginny, Harry's other obsessions blind him to "action love." When he is obsessed with the Deathly Hallows after learning about them from

¹²⁴ Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), 503.

Xenophilius Lovegood, he falls away from the task of finding and destroying the Horcruxes. This is a task of "action love" that he has undertaken to ensure a happier life for those in the Wizarding World. However, his obsession with the Hallows, although still directed at defeating Voldemort, distracts him from the here and now reality of the surefire way to defeat Voldemort. Likewise, Snape's obsession with Lily blinds him to the bigger reality of defeating the Dark Lord. As Harry notes in the penseive, "There was undisguised greed in his thin face as he watched the younger of the two girls swinging higher and higher than her sister."¹²⁵ Later, Snape asks Voldemort for mercy for Lily in exchange for Harry, which disgusts Dumbledore. Through his years of protecting Harry in memory of Lily, Snape shifts from his obsessive love for Lily to an "action love" for the greater good of the Wizarding and Muggle worlds alike.

Now that we have seen that "emotion love" can be both a positive and a negative force, we must ask of its relationship with "action love." By the end of the series, Harry synthesizes his emotion and action love to produce the ultimate protection for his loved ones. In Harry, these two types of love are so intertwined that they seem to motivate him equally. Harry here is not obsessed with a concept or even really a person. He often acts out of anger or head-over-heels devotion for something, such as when he somewhat foolishly reveals himself in the Ravenclaw common room and uses the Cruciatius Curse on Amycus Carrow for spitting in the face of Professor McGonagall. No, now his emotions would be tempered by logical action. As is stated, "This cold-blooded walk to his own destruction would require a different kind of bravery."¹²⁶ In fact, Harry feels oddly

¹²⁵ J.K. Rowling, 663.

¹²⁶ Rowling, 692.

distant from his body, noticing the legitimacy of his emotions while not altogether feeling them so keenly. This is the ultimate way to love: to have emotions, to value them, but not to be so wrapped up in them that they paralyze you from action or spur you on to foolhardy endeavors. Here, Harry allows his emotions to fuel his actions in a new way. When he approaches Neville about killing Nagini, he again recognizes the legitimacy of his emotional concern for Ron and Hermione but continues with his action love anyway. When he considers that Ron and Hermione might die, it is stated, “The awfulness of that possibility smothered him for a moment, made it impossible to keep talking. But he pulled himself together again: This was crucial, he must be like Dumbledore, keep a cool head, make sure there were backups, others to carry on”¹²⁷. Finally, Harry combines his emotion and action in a sound way when he offers himself to Voldemort in the forest. As is stated, “...Harry thought inexplicably of Ginny, and her blazing look, and the feel of her lips on his—.”¹²⁸ His love for Ginny is his final comforting emotion as he acts to sacrifice himself. As is said in the Gospel, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”¹²⁹ In such a situation, one must have both the emotional connection to those for whom he is sacrificing himself and the courageous action of giving himself up.

Through his synthesis of emotion and action, Harry procures the greatest of possible loves. His love is superior to Snape’s, who begins with emotional love and ends with action love, but does not unify the two. Harry has learned to love, and therefore, learned to save.

¹²⁷ Rowling, 696.

¹²⁸ Rowling, 704.

¹²⁹ *New American Standard Bible* (The Lockman Foundation, 1960), Online, John 15:13.