

Dark Writings For Dark Readers- A Plea For Artistic Integrity

R.Spadikha^{1*}, Dr. Vinodhini Chinnaswamy²

^{1*}Research Scholar, Presidency University, Bangalore, Karnataka, Email: spattykaravi99@gmail.com ²Associate Professor, Department of Languages, Presidency University, Bangalore, Karnataka, Email: drvinothini@gmail.com

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Dark romance is an enthralling subgenre in the creative world of literature, complicatedly designed with exciting themes of love with engaging elements of danger, obsession, and moral ambiguity. Its historical roots are traced back to Gothic literature in the late 18th century, where works like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* introduced the readers' society to the spine-chilling ideas of horror, the paranormal, and complex emotional panorama. This laid the groundwork for Romanticism, which characterized strong emotional articulation, popularly found in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Brontë, whose fictional tales often featured forbidden love and tragically painful fates.

During the Victorian era, writers like Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens expanded the exploration of dark romance within a framework of social constraints and moral dilemmas. Their works portrayed the psychological depths of love, struggles, and stormy relationships. In the early 20th century with the rise of modernism, authors like D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf examined the complexities of identity crisis and desires.

The postmodern era witnessed the strongest dark themes, often imbued with irony and metafiction, as exemplified by Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* exploring sexuality and power dynamics. In the 21st century, contemporary dark romance has gained significant popularity, particularly in young adult and adult fiction, with New York's Best-selling writers like Colleen Hoover and Anna Zaires navigating themes of obsession and psychological manipulation.

Throughout its history, dark romance has consistently centered on themes such as obsession, forbidden love, psychological complexity, and Gothic elements, appealing to readers' allure with the twisted facets of human relationships. This paper is an attempt to explore the evolution of dark romance writers and their reading society. This paper also strives to throw light on how it reflects and challenges societal boundaries and psychological norms.

Dark, twisted romances like *Haunting Adeline*, *The Ritual*, *Sins of Our Father*, etc. have received recent hype among young audiences, especially teens and people in their early twenties. Keeping the technical power of apps like TikTok, Shots and Reels in mind contemporary dark romance writers enjoy gracious media attention through book-influencers and PR teams by following a specific pattern of 'Unholly' narratives that is popularly termed as Trends. Though most adults consider this as a glory to enhance the reading habit among fresh readers, there is also a huge issue of concern to debate regarding what the book glorifies and what keeps the 'young, amateur readers' obsessed with the pattern of such weirdly dark and tabooed writings.

Haunting Adeline and *Hunting Adeline* is a dark romance sequel by H.D. Carlton. The story intensely explores the themes of obsession, trauma, love and intimacy. It also tests the water between borderline creep and the thin silver line of romance. Adeline, the female protagonist after inheriting her grandmother's old estate encounters a creepy stalker, also the male protagonist Zade. Intense passion and complex power dynamics happen to be the utmost basis of Adeline's obsession with her stalker and kidnapper Zade.

It is important to keep the target audience in mind. According to Goodreads and Book Riots, A significant percentage of teen readers, aged 13-18, enjoy darker themes. More often than not, the dark theme is not the psychological Grayness of the leads. Taking *Haunting Adeline* as an example, apart from the themes of power mongers, attachment patterns etc the book also has explicit descriptions of extremely dark sexual scenes that

involve gun, dominance and violence. Considering the emotional maturity of such readers in mind, the unsafe concept of romance is normalised as the actual romance.

The pattern of the narrative of such books is also deliberately written in such a way that it is very much possible for naive minds to idealise such as abnormal romance. 'There's a fine line between love and madness, and I'm dancing on it' adds testimony to the above-mentioned statement. The lead Adeline falls further in love with Zade after getting kidnapped forced and harassed by him. Zade, in this novel, is the CEO of a company that works against sex trafficking yet he assaults Adeline thus is a huge contradiction.

"The Ritual" offers an emotionally charged experience, allowing readers to engage with Sloane's internal conflicts. The novel's focus on trauma and obsession potentially glamorizes strong toxic relationship dynamics. Carlton's portrayal of Sloane and Jaxon's relationship serves as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it provides a dramatic exploration of attraction and the struggle for autonomy. On the other hand, it raises ethical concerns regarding the depiction of possessiveness and emotional manipulation. For innocent teen readers, the line between passion and obsession can blur causing very concerning safety issues both mentally and physically.

The problem with contemporary dark romance is that it glorifies toxic masculinity, petite femininity, domestic abuse etc. This glorification also stands as the epitome of heroism to the young audience. Having a grey-shaded male lead might sound very familiar to adhered readers but the shade painted here is much more than any fictionally romanticized male characters or the set-up.

Though the field of literature gracefully holds flawed characters like J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*, Erin Morgenstern's Lena from *The Night Circus* etc. The flaw is very much human-like jealousy, depression, alienation etc. While, H.D. Carlton's traumatic, dangerously flawed heroes and the selflessly obsessed heroines question the safety and understanding of the reality of the teen readers who fantasise about such a fictional character in real life. It should be mentioned that the Goodreads survey states that 30-40% of girls express intense interest in dark, adult romance.

Erotica as a subgenre has always got its crazy audience. Tracing from the start of the Renaissance, the writers of erotica have enjoyed the readers and at times non-readers' attention due to its extremely personal themes that play with hidden human desires. The narratives beautifully weave love, lust and beauty together yet distinctly create a sense of satisfaction for the readers. Works like *The Golden Ass* ideally deal with love and desires with very humane follies to the characters. Later in the 20th century Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin explored sexuality openly, challenging societal norms. Even in contemporary erotica, novels like *Fifty Shades of Grey* narrate freely about a traumatised hero's sexual interests yet justify the dark past behind it.

Since books don't come with an age limit, anybody who can read and understand or misunderstand can have access to it. Hence, it is very important to stand clear about what books are popularised under what genre. Though books like *Haunting Adeline* come with clear trigger warnings, the media glorifies those too. This causes disharmony in the conception of what a dark romance should actually be. Early exposure to extreme vulgarity in the name of dark romance will gradually create an unhealthy misunderstanding of real-life love romance and safety causing discontent with the peacefully safe reality among teens.

Youngsters reading such novels usually avoid discussions on it. They tend to carry a sort of natural secrecy about it. They grow with irresistible fascination for such falsified exalted erotic romantic experience and suffer silently as nymphomaniacs. Is Artistic integrity becoming an old fashioned word, a thing of the past?

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