



ERIC SEGAL'S "LOVE STORY" AND ITS POPULARITY: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The novel "Love Story" has been selected to study the reason of its popularity. It is interesting to point out the elements present in the novel that make it so popular. "Love Story" became the top-selling work of fiction for all of 1970 in the United States, and was translated into more than 20 languages. The novel stayed for 41 weeks in The New York Times Best Seller list, reaching the top spot. "Love Story" is a Romance novel written by American writer Erich Segal. The article aims to focus on the use of elements that makes the novel so entertaining and popular.

Key Words – Popularity, Entertainment, Romance.

INTRODUCTION

The novel "Love Story" has been selected to study the reason of its popularity. "Love Story" is a Romance novel written by American writer, screenwriter and educator Erich Segal. The novel was released on February 14, 1970, Valentine's Day. "Love Story" became the top-selling work of fiction for all of 1970 in the United States, and was translated into more than 20 languages. The novel stayed for 41 weeks in The New York Times Best Seller list, reaching the top spot. A sequel, Oliver's Story, was published in 1977.

Main Text:



Erich Segal's "Love Story" has many of the romance elements which stem from traditional romances. The typical formula for the romance narrative is that a boy and a girl meet, they fall in love, the course of their relationship encounters obstacles but the couple eventually solves the problems, marry, and the narrative ends with the impression that they will live happily ever after. But "Love Story" breaks the illusion of a happily ending story right at the beginning with its very first sentence.

"What can you say about a twenty-five-year-old girl who died?

That she was beautiful. And brilliant.

That she loved Mozart and Bach. And the Beatles. And me."¹

The prominent theme of "Love Story" is love, the same as the title. The romantic element on this novel makes it perfect. Oliver who is wealthy shows his true love to Jennifer who is poor. He expresses his feeling to Jennifer and gets married without Oliver's father agreement. They show that love is strong enough to go through their hard times. They sacrifice everything and they must support themselves financially to go on their marriage. The novel also includes a love between son and his father, as we can see at the last chapter of the novel. Oliver's father realizes that Jennifer has leukemia and Oliver borrows money for her. Finally he comes to the hospital and finds that Jennifer dies. Oliver forgives his father. After that Oliver cries in his father's arms. Oliver and his father are reconciled.

"Love Story" in Erich Segal's own words, "Actually, I have always felt this to be a book about a young couple, but even more about a father and son. When I wrote it America was in the midst of a total generation war. The relationship between Jenny and Phil contrasted sharply with that of Oliver and his father, and I think that the universal appeal may have lain in the reconciliation of the generations at the end of the book."²

One of the crucial social concerns and themes raised by the novel is the question of an ideal marriage. Does such a marriage exist? The parents of the wealthy young man object to the match because the young lady is a commoner; will love alone be strong enough to sustain the marriage, without the parents' blessing? In spite of initial disapproval, Jenny's self-sacrifice and hard work bring about a greatly successful marriage, almost idealistic in nature.

This question of ideal marriage leads Segal to an examination of the important theme of love and of growing up. In that sense, "Love Story" can be seen as a variation on the bildungsroman with both central characters coming from extremely different backgrounds. These polarities represent wealth and poverty. Even after marriage the process of growing up continues since the couple must support themselves financially. Oliver, too, has learned the meaning of responsibility, the pains and tribulation of poverty, and the triumphs of success.



The internal conflict is about Oliver and his mind. Oliver suffers because of Jennifer's illness. They consult a doctor because they want to have a baby. After that, the doctor informs that Jennifer has leukemia and instructs him not to tell Jennifer. It can be seen from the following quotation: 'Finally I realized that I couldn't just sit in this man's office forever. So I asked him what to do. I mean, what I should do. He told me to act as normal as possible for as long as possible. I thanked him and left. Normal! Normal!'³

Based on the quotation, the readers can see that Oliver tries to hide Jennifer's illness from her as suggested by the doctor. Furthermore, the external conflict is about Oliver and his father. Oliver's father wants his son to live by Barrette Tradition and having the name Oliver Barrette IV. Oliver's conflicts that the author gives in the novel are interesting and make the readers want to read from the beginning to the end of the novel.

According to English novelist E. M. Forster plot as the cause-and-effect relationship between events in a story.⁴ The plot of "Love Story" is easy to understand for the readers because it uses flash forward plot. It can be seen from the first chapter until the last chapter of the novel. Every chapter is connected and in good order. The readers can enjoy the story from beginning to end without feeling confused. The author also gives suspense in the story to make the readers interested and curious about the course of the story. The suspense can be seen when Jennifer is diagnosed that she has leukemia. The readers wonder what will happen to Jennifer after she knows that she is sick, can she fight her sickness or not. The readers also wonder what will Oliver does when he knows the person that he loves so much will die soon.

The language style that the author used to narrate "Love Story" is simple and easy to understand. The author uses modern English to narrate the story. One outstanding technical accomplishment of the novel is its simplicity, remarked upon by many critics. In fact, simplicity in terms of plot, construction, and subject is the hallmark of this novel.

As far as style is concerned, the diction is contemporary and collegiate. Segal has been praised for his sensitive, flashy, endearing ear for dialogue. Indeed, the entire novel is built upon dialogue. The writing style is economical, tight and well-constructed, leaving much to the reader's imagination. Segal's originality is superb, with excellent characterization. Almost all protagonists are smart, or rich, or brilliant, or beautiful, or cultured ladies and gentlemen.

Erich Segal originally wrote the screenplay and sold it to Paramount Pictures. While the film was being produced, Paramount wanted Segal to write a novel based on it, to be published on Valentine's Day to help pre-publicize the release of the film. When the novel came out, it became a bestseller on its own in advance of the film.



The film is among the highest-grossing films in the United States and Canada, grossing \$106,397,186. It grossed an additional \$30 million in international film markets. At the time of release, it was the 6th highest-grossing film of all time in U.S and Canada gross only. Adjusted for inflation, the film remains one of the top 40 domestic grosses of all time.

“Love Story” and Oliver's Story have been adapted for film. The screenplay of “Love Story” actually prefigured the novel, and although very popular, only readers of the novel and viewers of the movie would have noticed minor variations. The remorse and tenderness stressed in the novel give way in the movie version to a much more aggressive, macho Oliver. Even the concluding reconciliation scene lays the burden of guilt more upon the father than the son.

The movie Oliver's Story is a more faithful reproduction of the novel, again with only minor variations: In terms of the characters, Joanna Stein was a medical intern, but in the movie she is a furniture designer. The movie lays more emphasis on Oliver's psychological problems as well as his philanthropic activities, ending in reconciliation between Oliver and his father, when Oliver decides to return to his hometown to run the family business. What both versions stress are the basic problems of a seemingly perfect and ideal family couple.

For writing 131 pages of fiction my father became world famous - beloved by the reading public, pilloried by an envious academic community who believed that professors out not to venture into popular culture. And I missed it all. But I know the novel, and I was lucky enough to know its extraordinary author. My father was such a gentle man, and as a result he wrote an innocent, tender novel. It has his heart and soul and honesty and humor and that combination, rarer than it should be, is alchemical.⁵

- Francesca Segal

Erich Segal's “Love Story” is a perfect romance. Oliver Barrett won every reader's heart by being the typical rich boy who can think beyond the wealth inherited from his family. Jennifer Cavalleri was the quintessential high school. The characters were relatable, real and likeable. Segal credited with giving every reader the world of love and romance. Though the story is just in the pages of a book it still stands the test of time when it comes to classic romances.

The essence of the book was that it taught us about love in a day and age when that emotion was desperately needed in the world. It taught us how to escape from grim political realities and believe in something so simple, pure and innocent; it remained untarnished by the realities of the times. It made readers believe in love, in finding a Jenny and an Oliver. In finding a middle ground where two people could love and be loved without being torn apart. Readers learned that love was not just about feelings and emotions related to individuals; but,

DR. KULDEEPSING K. MOHADIKAR

SACHIN H. TELKHADE

4 Page



that it was so much more—that love was about being the strength and the inspiration to overcome troubles together and become better human beings.

Erich Segal's "Love Story" taught us that essentially, at the heart of it all, love means never having to say you're sorry. And every relationship that we nurtured ever since became measured by the value of that one sentence. Today, as a reader, when I look back to the moment when I read those words, for the first time ever, it strikes me in the most revelatory way possible. Back then, it seemed a bit odd; why wouldn't we say sorry to the people we loved? Wouldn't we be apologetic for having caused them hurt? And then, some 12 years down the line, it struck me that, in love, hurt is not really hurt. And so, there is no reason for an apology. Because love is understanding, even when there is a lack of it. And in that understanding, we accept and acknowledge all that is said and not said between two people. When you love someone, the way that Jenny and Oliver did, in "Love Story", you don't do anything to hurt them. None of your actions are meant to hurt either person. When you love someone you don't have to say sorry. There is no room for an apology in love.

And somehow, when you read Erich Segal, you learn about love—how you fall in love, how you love and how you stay in love, long after it's over. That's what he showed me in "Love Story". That love as an emotion, all by itself is, undoubtedly monumental. But, when expressed and reciprocated between two people, it can be ageless.

Mel Zerman, a former Harper & Row executive, appeared on American Legends web site in December 2006, replied to a question - "The book burst on the scene one morning when Barbara Walters, who was a TV hostess, began her program by saying, "I was up most of the night reading a book I couldn't put down, and when I finished it, I was sobbing. I cried and cried." That's all the women of America had to hear. By the time bookstores were opening all over the United States they were getting calls for a book called "Love Story" by someone you never heard of named Erich Segal. Harper went crazy. We were out of stock within hours".⁶

"Love Story" also has four strengths and three weaknesses that make it good to read. The four strong points of this novel are the plot, theme, conflict, and language style. While the weaknesses of this novel are this novel does not explain about Jennifer's clearly, dialogues in the novel are written in a slang words and unclear words, and for the readers who are not critical, "Love Story" may become an inappropriate novel.

CONCLUSION:

Through this review the readers can learn that "Love Story" is different from other modern romance novel which are mostly about woman and man falling in love, getting married, and has a happy ending but it is the "Love Story" between married couple and it has a sad ending.

DR. KULDEEPSING K. MOHADIKAR

SACHIN H. TELKHADE

5 Page



Oliver and Jennifer are the spirit of true love from different world. Their love which must end too soon has changed everything. This novel is still recommended to be read. The readers can enjoy the whole of the story. Moreover it can touch the reader's heart.

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