

Hidden Treasure-Historical Truth  
What is Love, Valentine?  
By Katherine Bone

To be loved is the eternal desire of the soul. Love dominates shadow. It is the ultimate journey from mortality into the eternal realm. As Novalis, a Romantic German poet, once said, “Love was not made for this world.” Yet, we long for it as deeply as we dare. To know love is to know peace, happiness, and security from birth. To be deprived of it is to experience immense sorrow.

Love has many faces, that of parent, sibling, lover, child. Love has many defining images, the earth illumined during Creation, the face of Christ during the Passion, Odysseus’ Homecoming, Hamlet’s Melancholy, and the Fate of lovers like Mark Antony and Cleopatra, or Ali MacGraw and Ryan O’Neal in the movie, *Love Story*.

Love in the Old English comes from a German source. The word *lufu* has an Indo-European root shared in Sanskrit *lubhyati*, which means ‘desires’ and the word *libido* comes from the Latin word *libet*, which means ‘it is pleasing’. According to the Oxford Dictionary of World Histories, the word ‘love’ found it’s way into our lives as an endearment from Middle English.

Throughout history we are given examples of everlasting love, sacrifice, and denial. Who was more skilled than the ancient Greeks at weaving tales of love laced with mystery and awe? The Greeks themselves invented mythic Gods to impart philosophy and lore to the masses. These legends arose at a time when questions were being asked about life from inception to end. Aristophanes described love’s origin thusly—

...Black-winged Night  
Into the bosom of Erebus dark and deep  
Laid a wind-born egg, and as the seasons rolled  
Forth sprang Love, the longed-for, shining, with  
Wings of gold.

Plato said, “Love was divine madness.” The Greeks wrote of dark love and used Admetus and Alkestis to illustrate that point. Having helped the god Apollo in a time of trouble, Admetus was told he would be granted a reprieve from death if he could find someone to take his place in the underworld. As instructed, when Death came to call, Admetus asked his parents to take his place but as old as they were, they still desired to live and so refused. Love led Alkestis, Admetus’ wife, to offer herself as a willing sacrifice. She traveled with Death into the underworld only to be rescued by an infuriated Hercules who wrestled Death to win her freedom. Here, Alkestis’ submission exemplifies the deepest form of love, a willingness to give up everything for another at the expense of life.

We love what is beautiful. The Greeks were no different. They loved sweet, laughing, Aphrodite, also known as Venus. Daughter of Zeus and Dione, she was known as *Aphrodite Pandemos*, Aphrodite of All the People, the patroness of physical love, and *Aphrodite Urania*, Aphrodite of the Sky, who inspired spiritual and intellectual love. *Aphros* means foam, highly fitting since Aphrodite was born from sea foam near Cythera. As the goddess of fertility, her liaisons with Eros, the god of love, Hephaestus, the lame and malformed blacksmith of the gods, Ares, the god of war, Anchises, a Trojan prince,

and Adonis, a handsome young hunter, proved irrefutably she was also the 'goddess of love'.

Yet even a goddess suffers. After Adonis was killed by a wild boar, Aphrodite begged her father to restore Adonis' life. Zeus agreed, returning Adonis to her on the condition that he spent six months of every year in the underworld. To this day, temperatures plunge when Adonis lives below, but when he returns to Aphrodite's arms, warmth radiates from the heavens. Could this explain our changing seasons?

Aphrodite's name is synonymous with love and Valentine's Day is a day set aside to declare it. Like birds, we celebrate this day as a testament of commitment and hope not so unlike pagans of long ago who worshiped Juno, also known as Hera, the protectress of marriage and women.

Valentine's Day gets its origins from two saints named Valentine. During Claudius II's reign, young men were forbidden to marry because single men made better soldiers. Our first saint, a priest named Valentine broke that law knowing which fate would befall him and performed secret ceremonies to unite couples in marriage. The second saint loved children but was imprisoned for refusing to worship Roman gods. Eager to ease his suffering, children passed notes through the bars of his cell to express their love. While imprisoned, this same Valentine healed a jailor's daughter of blindness before being unmercifully clubbed to death on February 14, 269 A.D.

Pope Gelasius named February 14, Valentine's Day in 496 A.D. Some confusion however may have been given the name Valentine during the Middle Ages when Norman French was spoken in Normandy. The word *galantine* means gallant or lover. This translation may have led generations to believe that St. Valentine was the saint of lovers. In any case, the association stuck and the name Valentine has been forever linked with endearments of love.

Methods of celebrating Valentine's Day have evolved through the years. Rhymes were exchanged in England as early as the 1400's. During the 1700's, women wrote names of perspective suitors on pieces of paper, rolled each in a piece of clay and dropped them into water to see which would float up first to convey the name of their true love. Women also pinned leaves to the center and all four edges of their pillows in hopes of dreaming of their future husbands while they slept.

Men wrote women's names on paper and put them into a jar. When a name was drawn, a man doted upon his 'Valentine', offered gifts, a pair of gloves, or a fancy ball. During the 1700's, groups of friends gathered and drew names. Each name was selected then tied to the sleeve, in plain sight, for several days per Iago's words in Othello, i, 6.

When my outward action doth demonstrate  
The native act and figure of my heart  
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after  
But *I will wear my heart upon my sleeve*  
For daws to peck at: I am not what I am.

Have you succumbed to Plato's 'divine madness'? If so, give your lover a submissive offering this Valentine's Day. It worked for Alkestis, Aphrodite, Cleopatra, and Ali. Perhaps with Hercules waiting to wrestle Death, it will work for you, too.