



Interpretation of the concept of love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre"

Interpretación del concepto del amor en la novela "Teatro", de W. Somerset Maugham

Abstract. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyse the interpretations of the concept of "love" in Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre" through the prism of literary, philosophical, and linguistic analysis. The study is conducted on the basis of the printed edition of the novel from 1937 and its electronic version from 2001, presented on the Internet Archive platform. A detailed analysis of more than 100 text fragments is conducted, in which the concept of love is revealed in various forms, including romantic love, pragmatic relationships, love as manipulation and maternal affection. The analysis shows that the author conveys the concept of love through theatrical symbolism, reflecting the duality of human feelings. Frequency analysis demonstrates that the key lexemes associated with love occur more than 200 times in the text, with love being the most commonly used term. Lexico-semantic analysis reveals the dominance of emotionally intense expressions of love, including intense epithets, complex syntactic constructions, and theatrical metaphors. The conducted study deepens the understanding of the philosophical and literary aspects of the work and may be useful for researching the evolution of interpretations of love in English literature, analysing theatrical metaphors, and comparing national models of love in different cultures.

Keywords: artistic concept, theatrical metaphor, gender images, emotional expression, philosophy of feelings, symbolism of relationships, literary discourse.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es identificar y analizar las interpretaciones del concepto de «amor» en la novela «Theatre» de Somerset Maugham a través del prisma del análisis literario, filosófico y lingüístico. El estudio se basa en la edición impresa de la novela de 1937 y en su versión electrónica de 2001, disponible en la plataforma Internet Archive. Se lleva a cabo un análisis detallado de más de 100 fragmentos de texto, en los que el concepto de amor se revela en diversas formas, incluyendo el amor romántico, las relaciones pragmáticas, el amor como manipulación y el afecto maternal. El análisis muestra que el autor transmite el concepto de amor a través del simbolismo teatral, reflejando la dualidad de los sentimientos humanos. El análisis de frecuencia demuestra que los lexemas clave asociados con el amor aparecen más de 200 veces en el texto, siendo «amor» el término más utilizado. El análisis léxico-semántico revela el predominio de expresiones de amor emocionalmente intensas, incluyendo epítetos intensos, construcciones sintácticas complejas y metáforas teatrales. El estudio realizado profundiza en la comprensión de los aspectos filosóficos y literarios de la obra y puede ser útil para investigar la evolución de las interpretaciones del amor en la literatura inglesa, analizar metáforas teatrales y comparar modelos nacionales de amor en diferentes culturas.

Palabras clave: concepto artístico, metáfora teatral, imágenes de género, expresión emocional, filosofía de los sentimientos, simbolismo de las relaciones, discurso literario.

1. Introduction

Love in literature is traditionally perceived as one of the key conceptual concepts that form the narrative and artistic images of characters. However, its interpretation in various works varies depending on cultural, historical, and social contexts. In the literature of the XX century, especially in English-language prose, there is a tendency to complicate the image of love, which ceases to be an exclusively romantic experience and becomes an element of a broader social and philosophical structure. In this sense, W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre" is of particular interest because it demonstrates love not only as a feeling but also as a form of adaptation, manipulation, and theatrical performance.

Modern research confirms that love in literature and theatre is influenced by social and cultural norms, which makes its interpretation ambiguous. A number of works emphasise the dual nature of love, which acts as a sincere experience and simultaneously as a manipulation tool determined by the stage context (Kristensen, 2023; LaFlamme, 2022; Roberts, 2023). In theatrical texts, love images are formed depending on dramatic models and socio-cultural ideas about romantic relationships (Yang, 2023; Peck, 2023). In this context, W. Somerset Maugham's novel is an example of a literary work in which theatrical metaphor is used to convey the ambivalence of love feelings.

The theatrical nature of love also correlates with the issues of subjectivity and objectness of love experiences. The publications consider love as a cultural construct formed under the influence of social norms and dramatic models (Dowd et al., 2021; Stümer, 2021; Poulain, 2020). The researchers conclude that love in theatre, cinema, and literature is subject to certain canons of representation, which makes it not only an interpersonal experience but also a form of social interaction.

The gender aspect of love is also an important area of research. Modern studies analyse the influence of gender stereotypes on the perception of romantic relationships in art (Schneller and Motasedian, 2022; Lect et al., 2023). It is emphasised that traditional love images in literature consolidate certain models of female and male emotionality, while modern interpretations tend to deconstruct them. In this sense, W. Somerset Maugham's novel is a landmark work since its main character, Julia Lambert, simultaneously obeys traditional ideas about love and destroys them, using love experiences as part of her acting.

Studies on the influence of theatre and cinema on the formation of love images also confirm that love often acquires a conditional character and adapts to social expectations. The articles stress that cinematic and theatrical productions shape the perception of romantic relationships by creating stable narrative constructions (Ndanyi, 2023; Saliot, 2020). This is especially important for the analysis of W. Somerset Maugham's novel, in which the characters' love experiences are influenced by theatrical codes and the aesthetics of scenic art.

The relationship of love with theatrical techniques can also be traced in a broader literary and philosophical context. The studies examine various ways of representing love in drama, reveal the connection of love discourse with the processes of social transformation (Rocca, 2024; Shevchenko-Hotsuliak and Casado-Gual, 2024). Similarly, other studies underline that love in art can be seen as a reflection of social and philosophical changes (Dahms, 2020; Serttaş, 2020). In this context, W. Somerset Maugham's novel demonstrates that the characters' love exists both within their

personal emotions and as a cultural mechanism embedded in a system of social norms and theatrical tradition.

Despite the wide range of studies devoted to the representation of love in theatre and literature, questions remain about how theatrical metaphor affects the perception of love in prose and how the subjectivity of characters is formed through it. This study examines the ways of theatrical modelling of love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre", analyses the linguistic means of expressing this concept and its connection with philosophical and gender interpretations.

The following tasks were solved in the framework of the study:

1. A lexico-semantic and stylistic analysis of the expression of the concept of love in a novel is conducted, identifying key linguistic constructions and their role in creating an image of love.
2. An interpretation of love in the novel with philosophical and literary theories, using a comparative analysis of the concepts of love in classical and modern studies.

2. Materials and methods

The study was conducted on the basis of several key editions of W. Somerset Maugham's (1937) novel "Theatre", including the printed version of "Theatre" and the electronic text presented on the Internet Archive platform (Maugham, 2001). The use of both original printed and digital sources allowed providing a comprehensive examination of the language, stylistics, and semantic structure of the work. The review was conducted in the period from October 2024 to December 2024 and included the consistent application of methods of qualitative literary analysis, which enabled a deep exploration of the interpretation of the concept of "love" in the context of historical, philosophical, and linguistic traditions.

In the first stage of the study, a detailed selection and manual encoding of fragments containing references and figurative descriptions of the concept of "love" took place. The fragments were selected from various sections of the novel, which ensured that the sample was representative, considering linguistic, stylistic, and thematic criteria. The principles of discursive analysis were applied, which reveals the connections between text structures and their ideological, philosophical, and cultural contexts, as well as content analysis, which allows systematising the ways of expressing a key concept.

Special attention was paid to the frequency analysis of lexemes related to the concept of love (love, affection, adore, passion, and their variations) to identify the dominant ways of verbalising love experiences. Thereby, a contextual analysis of the use of these lexemes was implemented, which determined the difference in their meanings depending on the position in the text, the nature of the characters' interaction, and the general dynamics of the plot.

Additionally, metaphorical and symbolic ways of representing love were analysed, which helped identify how the concept of "love" correlates with theatrical motifs, ideas about personal and social identity. Theatrical metaphors (stage, performance, illusion) were accounted for, revealing their role in creating ambivalence in the characters' love experiences.

In the second stage of the study, a comparative analysis of the interpretations of love in the novel was conducted from the perspective of classical and modern theoretical approaches in the field of literature and philosophy. The inclusion of the study by Mardiev (2020) in the theoretical framework expanded the analysis of the

concept of love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre", revealing the specific features of its linguistic representation and cultural features.

The paper of Mardiev (2020), which examines the concept of love in English and Uzbek, helped to determine which lexico-semantic features are characteristic of the expression of love experiences in English-language literature and how they compare with the Uzbek tradition. In particular, the tendency towards expressive expression of love through hyperbolised emotional constructions (madly in love, deeply affected) is highlighted, which corresponds to European literary traditions, but differs from the more restrained and metaphorical forms of expression of feelings characteristic of Uzbek fiction.

Sang (2022) devoted a study to the lexical composition of the structural field of the concept of love, providing for a more detailed analysis of which linguistic means W. Somerset Maugham uses to convey various shades of love. The analysis of the novel showed that love in it is expressed through theatrical images (stage, performance, illusion), which correlates with the idea of the performativity of feelings reflected in other literary traditions.

The works of authors from various countries were used to expand the analysis. The study by Giuliano (2023) analysed the influence of R. Barthes on the novel "A Lover's Discourse" by Xiaolu Guo, which allowed comparing the interpretation of love in the literary traditions of Great Britain and China. The work of Schopenhauer (1986), "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love", provided a philosophical basis for considering the concept of love as a metaphysical phenomenon, as well as its connection with the evolution of relations between men and women in culture.

In addition, the analysis of theoretical sources was conducted through critical reading and comparison of different standpoints, which justify the interpretation of selected text fragments, considering the historical and cultural context of England in the 1930s. Special attention was paid to the image of a woman in W. Somerset Maugham's novels, which allowed establishing a connection between the author's view of love and the social changes of the era. The internal features of the text were also compared with modern models of interpretation of this concept presented in literary criticism.

Thus, a comprehensive methodological approach, including content analysis, discursive analysis, frequency analysis, contextual usage analysis, metaphor analysis, and comparative analysis of philosophical concepts, provided a comprehensive understanding of the variety of interpretations of the concept of "love" in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre". The use of these methods has provided a deep qualitative analysis, contributing to the expansion of ideas about the influence of historical and cultural codes on the interpretation of the main images in the literary heritage of the author.

3. Results

The analysis of lexical units related to the concept of "love" revealed the specific features of the use of key terms, their frequency distribution, and contextual meanings in the text of W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre". The study showed that the author used a wide range of words to express different shades of love, demonstrating its complex nature and dependence on social dynamics, personal experiences, and theatrical imagery of the work. An additional analysis of the translated versions of the novel indicated that, depending on the language of translation, variations in the number of mentions of key lexemes and the degree of emotional saturation are

possible, which, in turn, affects the interpretation of the characters' love experiences. Particularly, in the Russian translation, there was a decrease in the frequency of use of certain expressions and a smoothing of the ironic subtext, which emphasises the importance of the original context in analysing the semantics of love.

During the content analysis, the main lexemes reflecting the concept of love were identified: love, affection, adore, passion, as well as their variations. The most common term turned out to be the word love, which is used both literally and figuratively, reflecting a wide range of emotional states of the characters. It is used to describe romantic attachment, family relationships, and dedication to art. The frequency of its use is especially high in Julia Lambert's dialogues, which stresses the central role of love in her life but simultaneously demonstrates its instability and variability depending on circumstances.

The term affection is less common and, in most cases, characterises relationships based on respect and attachment rather than passion. This word is used to express a benevolent attitude towards other characters, without carrying the emotional intensity that other terms convey. Adore, on the contrary, is noted in dialogues where the characters seek to express strong emotional dependence, but this word is more often found in the context of admiration than deep love.

The word passion occupies a special place in the text since it is used not only in the meaning of love passion but also to describe professional passion, which is especially characteristic of the image of the main character. Julia's theatrical life is closely intertwined with her personal feelings, and the frequent use of "passion" highlights this relationship. Interestingly, in a number of episodes, it occurs in a negative context, indicating the destructive nature of excessive attachment and dependence.

The analysis demonstrated that the frequency of use of these terms is unevenly distributed throughout the text. In the first chapters of the novel, there is a substantial amount of mention of love and passion, which corresponds to the emotional uplift of the heroine. However, by the end of the work, the frequency of their use decreases, giving way to more restrained expressions such as affection, which reflects a change in the emotional state of the characters and their reassessment of love values.

The analysis data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The frequency of use of key lexemes related to the concept of love in the text of the novel

The lexeme	Frequency (number of mentions)	The main contexts of use	The dynamics of usage in the text
Love	124	Romantic relationships, family love, dedication to the theatre	The frequency is higher in the first half of the novel, decreasing towards the finale
Affection	38	Friendly attachment, respect	Mainly in the middle of the text, it increases closer to the end.
Adore	29	Admiration, idealisation, emotional dependence	Used in climactic scenes, unevenly distributed
Passion	67	Love passion, passion for a profession, emotional intensity	Most active in scenes with Julia, falls in the last chapters

Devotion	25	Deep affection, dedication to a partner or art	It is rare, but the main value is in the descriptions of feelings.
Desire	41	passion, and physical attraction	Outbursts in scenes of passion and conflict
Longing	22	yearning, emotional feeling of missing someone, waiting	It is more common in scenes of melancholy and separation.
Fondness	18	Warmth, sympathy, positive emotions	Rarely used, more in scenes of friendly conversations
Romance	14	Romantic aspect, artistic love	Minimal use, focuses on theatricality
Obsession	31	Excessive attachment, destructive feelings	High frequency in emotionally intense scenes

Source: compiled by the authors based on Somerset Maugham (1937, 2001).

An analysis of the contextual uses of key lexemes related to love has shown that in W. Somerset Maugham's novel *The Theatre*, love is presented in several forms, each of which acquires different semantic shades depending on the circumstances, the characters and their social status. Firstly, the text clearly highlights the romantic love embodied in the relationship between Julia Lambert and Thomas Fennell. This type of love is presented as a combination of passion, admiration, and illusions, but as the story progresses, it transforms, exposing the insincerity of feelings and dependencies inherent in this relationship. The use of the word love in this context is most often accompanied by expressive vocabulary, underlining the emotional involvement and desire of the heroine to preserve this love, contrary to logic and common sense.

Another important type of love in the text is love as a social construct, expressed in the marriage of Julia and Michael Gosselin. Unlike the romantic line with Thomas, this type of love relies heavily on calculation and societal expectations. Marriage is presented as a partnership in which feelings play a secondary role, giving way to career ambitions, respect, and social status. In this context, the affection lexeme is used much more often than love, which indicates a more restrained and rational nature of this relationship.

A special place in the novel is occupied by maternal love, reflected in Julia's attitude towards her son Roger. Unlike romantic passion or marital union, maternal love turns out to be the most sincere and deepest feeling of the character. However, there is also a certain ambivalence here: Julia perceives her love for her son through the prism of personal ambitions and a desire for self-realisation, which sometimes leads to conflicts and misunderstandings. In the texts describing their relationship, the words devotion and fondness are often used, stressing emotional warmth, but at the same time showing a certain distance between the characters.

The last important variation of love in the novel is love as manipulation, which is especially evident in Julia's theatrical and personal life. Her ability to use feelings as a tool to influence others is expressed in her ability to play with emotions, which makes her image both charismatic and pragmatic. In this context, the words passion and obsession occur in scenes where love develops into control, submission, or the heroine's desire to maintain power over the situation. This is evident not only in her relationships with men but also in a broader sense – in her interactions with the public, colleagues, and even the theatre itself. For each of these interpretations, the lexical

and stylistic features of their expression are analysed. The contextual analysis is presented in Table 2

Table 2. Contextual variations of the interpretation of love in a novel

The type of love	The main characters	Lexemes associated with this type of love	Features of contextual usage
Romantic love	Julia Lambert and Thomas Fennell	Love, passion, adore	It is described as passion, illusion, and admiration, gradually giving way to disappointment
Love as a social construct	Julia Lambert and Michael Gosselin	Affection, devotion, respect	Marriage is a partnership based on respect and career interests, feelings are secondary
Mother's love	Julia Lambert and Roger	Devotion, fondness, care	The most sincere type of love, however, with elements of distance and misunderstanding.
Love as manipulation	Julia Lambert and the people around her	Passion, obsession, control	Using feelings to manipulate others, especially in a theatrical environment

Source: compiled by the authors based on Somerset Maugham (1937, 2007).

In the course of the discursive analysis, it was revealed that love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre" is closely connected with theatrical metaphors symbolising the duality of emotions and the nature of human relationships. The author uses stage images to convey the idea that love is not only a sincere experience but also a social role that the characters play depending on the circumstances.

The most striking is the metaphorical perception of love as a play, where the characters, like the actors, play their prescribed roles. Julia Lambert, being a professional actress, transfers the principles of theatre into her personal life, demonstrating the ability to skilfully express emotions depending on the situation. Her love for Thomas Fennell turns out to be not just a passion, but part of a carefully constructed image based on the illusion of reciprocity. Even in moments of sincere feelings, the heroine realises that her emotions are both reality and a game, and the viewer (reader) is witnessing this dual experience.

Another important theatrical metaphor is love as a script. The characters not only experience feelings but also adapt to the given circumstances, following the rules of social drama. Julia and Michael Gosselin's marriage is based not so much on passion as on a balanced partnership dynamic, where everyone plays their part for the sake of external well-being. This highlights that in W. Somerset Maugham's world, love often turns out to be a formal construct adapted to the demands of society.

Finally, love is presented as an illusion, which is most clearly manifested in the line of Julia and Thomas' relationship. The gradual disappointment of the heroine shows that her feelings were built on an image that did not correspond to reality. In this metaphor, love is likened to a stage act: what seems great and beautiful at a distance loses its magic upon closer inspection. Just as in the theatre, the viewer is immersed in an illusion, but realises its fictitiousness, Julia goes from a romantic dream to the realisation of the truth. The main metaphors and their meanings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The main metaphors related to the interpretation of love

The metaphor	Description	Key scenes
Love as a performance	Characters play roles in life, just like actors on stage. Julia Lambert skilfully expresses emotions depending on the situation, creating the image of an ideal lover.	Julia's dialogues with Thomas, moments of her self-reflection, scenes on the stage of the theatre
Love as a scenario	Love obeys a preset scenario where the characters follow the established rules. Julia and Michael's marriage is built on a social contract, not on passion.	Episodes of Julia and Michael's married life, their professional interactions
Love as an illusion	Love is presented as an illusory experience based on an imaginary ideal. Julia's disappointment in Thomas shows the gradual destruction of this illusion.	The development of Julia's relationship with Thomas, the awareness of the imitation of feelings, and scenes of the heroine's reflections

Source: compiled by the authors based on Somerset Maugham (1937, 2001).

An analysis of the dynamics of love lines in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "The Theatre" has shown that the perception of love by the main character, Julia Lambert, undergoes radical changes throughout the narrative. At the beginning of the novel, love is presented to her as an absolute value with unconditional significance. During this period, Julia perceives romantic relationships as a source of inspiration, emotional fulfilment, and personal happiness. Her feelings for Thomas Fennel are accompanied by idealisation, admiration, and faith in the sincerity of his affection. The vocabulary used in these episodes is saturated with the words love, adore, and passion, which emphasises the power of emotions that she lives by.

However, as the story progresses, the heroine begins to perceive love differently – as a tool for managing people and a way of self-affirmation. Julia realises that her ability to make men fall in love with her and control their feelings is part of her influence as a woman and an actress. During this stage, her love relationships become more calculated, strategic, and largely subject to rules similar to a theatrical game. Manipulation-related expressions begin to prevail in the character's speech, and love takes on a pragmatic connotation. Feelings are transformed into a kind of social mechanism that Julia uses to retain power over the situation.

By the end of the novel, love finally loses its original meaning for Julia and begins to be perceived as a convention – a phenomenon devoid of universal value. This stage is characterised by her rejection of illusions, awareness of the illusory nature of her past experiences, and acceptance of herself beyond romantic attachments. Her disappointment in Thomas Fennel becomes a turning point, finally confirming her new outlook. Now, for her, love is just one of the social games in which she once took part, but no longer wants to be a part of.

The dynamics of the development of love lines in the novel clearly demonstrates the transition from a romanticised perception of feelings to a pragmatic one, and then to a complete rethinking of them. This process highlights the main motive of the work: love, like theatre, is not only an expression of sincere emotions but also a stage production that depends on the context, roles, and audience. The development of Julia's attitude to love is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The change in Julia Lambert's attitude towards love throughout the novel

Stage	Perception of love	Key episodes
The beginning of the novel	An absolute value, a sincere feeling, a source of inspiration and happiness	Getting to know Thomas, idealising feelings, believing in sincere love
The middle part of the novel	A management tool, a way of self-affirmation, a social mechanism	Disappointment in Thomas' sincerity, awareness of his power over men
The end of the novel	Conventionality, loss of significance, awareness of illusory experiences	Breaking up with Thomas, abandoning romantic illusions, accepting independence

Source: compiled by the authors based on Somerset Maugham (1937, 2001).

The results of the comparative analysis showed that the interpretation of love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre" has clear parallels with philosophical theories that consider love as a complex, socially determined phenomenon. Love in the work is presented not only as an emotional experience but also as an instrument of power, a social strategy, and a form of self-affirmation.

One of the most substantial philosophical concepts related to the interpretation of love in the novel is presented in the work of A. Schopenhauer (1986), "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love". According to A. Schopenhauer, love is a biologically and evolutionarily programmed mechanism that influences people's behaviour and their choice of partner, but remains an illusion hiding instinctual motives. In W. Somerset Maugham's work, this idea is reflected in the behaviour of Julia Lambert, who realises the conventionality of her romantic feelings and eventually comes to the conclusion that her affection for Thomas Fennell was not a sincere feeling, but rather part of a broader mechanism of interaction between the sexes. She gradually realises that her love was a means to achieve emotional and social superiority, not a genuine need.

The concept of love as an intellectual game and a discursive construct is presented in the works of R. Barthes, who describes love as a rhetorical phenomenon in which emotions are subordinated to linguistic structures created by culture (Giuliano, 2023). In this context, the novel "Theatre" demonstrates how the characters form their feelings through language and stage practices. Julia, being an actress, perceives love through theatrical codes, and her relationship with men is a kind of dramatic construction, subject to the rules of the script. Relationships in the novel are built as a dialogue between characters who experience feelings and formalise them into linguistic forms, setting the tone for their relationship.

Another important philosophical correlation is the idea of love and independence of women, presented in the works of de Beauvoir, especially "The Second Sex" (McCall, 1979). According to de Beauvoir, traditional love in a patriarchal society often becomes a form of dependence on a woman, limiting her personal development. However, in W. Somerset Maugham's novel, the heroine demonstrates an evolution from perceiving love as the meaning of life to accepting its conventions and rejecting dependence. Julia goes from emotional submission and self-deception to self-sufficiency, which makes her image close to the ideal of female emancipation described by de Beauvoir. The comparison of philosophical concepts is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of the interpretation of love in W. Somerset Maugham’s novel with philosophical theories

The philosophical concept	The main idea	The interpretation of love in the novel “Theatre”
A. Schopenhauer “The Metaphysics of Sexual Love”	Love as an illusion hiding biological and evolutionary mechanisms	Julia’s love for Thomas turns out to be an illusion masking her social and personal ambitions
R. Barthes “A Lover’s Discourse”	Love as a discursive construct subordinated to linguistic structures	The feelings of the characters are shaped through theatrical codes, love is presented as a language game
S. de Beauvoir “The Second Sex”	Love as a form of female dependence in a patriarchal society	Julia goes from being dependent in a relationship to realising her independence

Source: compiled by the authors based on Somerset Maugham (1937, 2001), Schopenhauer (1986), McCall (1979), Giuliano (2023).

An analysis of literary sources has shown that the perception of love in English literature of the first half of the XX century has substantial differences from its interpretation in the Uzbek artistic tradition. As part of the comparative study, the works of Mardiev (2020) and Sang (2022) were used, which allowed identifying specific features of the concept of love in English-language prose, especially in the novel by W. Somerset Maugham “Theatre”, in comparison with Uzbek literary texts. The main differences are evident in the approach to expressing feelings, the role of love in character development, and the gender aspects of romantic relationships.

One of the key differences is the way emotions are expressed in the text. In English literature, as the analysis of W. Somerset Maugham’s novel shows, love is often presented as a subtle game of semitones, depending on social codes and situational contexts. The characters express their feelings not so much through open confessions as through actions, intonations, and subtexts of dialogues. On the contrary, in the Uzbek literary tradition, according to Mardiev (2020), the expression of love more often has a pronounced emotional character, which is associated with the cultural specifics of eastern poetics, where the feelings of the characters are transmitted through rich metaphor, symbolism of nature, and folk wisdom.

Another aspect is the role of love in character development. In the novel “Theatre”, love functions not as the only dominant force determining the fate of the characters, but as one of the components of their social and personal lives. Julia Lambert goes from romantic idealism to pragmatism and awareness of the conventionality of love experiences, which demonstrates the complex dynamics of her character. In Uzbek literature, as Mardiev (2020) notes, love lines often have a more stable and unchanging nature: love either completely elevates the hero or becomes their tragic fate, which is associated with the influence of eastern ethical and religious traditions.

Of particular interest is the gender perception of love. In English literature of the first half of the XX century, including W. Somerset Maugham’s work, female characters like Julia are becoming increasingly independent in their choices, even if this is accompanied by emotional disappointments. In the Uzbek literary tradition, as follows from the analysis by Mardiev (2020), love is more often considered in the context of family and kinship relations, and the role of women is largely subordinated to social norms. In this sense, English literature demonstrates a more modernised approach, while the Uzbek tradition retains elements of the traditional love concept, focusing on

devotion, sacrifice, and collective values. The analysis of national and cultural characteristics is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparative analysis of the concept of love in English and Uzbek literature

The comparison aspect	English Literature (W. Somerset Maugham, “Theatre”)	Uzbek literature (T. Mardiev, T. Sang)
A way of expressing emotions	Love is expressed through subtexts, social codes, intonations, and actions, rather than open confessions.	Love is expressed through vivid emotionality, poetry, folk proverbs and the symbolism of nature.
The role of love in character development	Love is one of the components of the characters’ lives, not the only dominant force. The characters undergo dynamic development.	Love lines often remain unchanged: love either elevates the hero or becomes his tragic fate.
Gender aspects of romantic relationships	Female characters such as Julia Lambert demonstrate independence and the evolution of views on love.	Female characters are more often subject to social norms, and love is viewed in the context of family and kinship relationships.

Source: compiled by the authors based on Somerset Maugham (1937, 2001), Mardiev (2020), Sang (2022).

Text analysis of the novel by W. Somerset Maugham “Theatre” has shown that the expression of love is based on certain linguistic means that convey the emotional richness, intensity of feelings, and the inner struggle of the characters. The text actively uses intense epithets such as “madly in love”, “deeply affected”, underscoring the extreme degree of emotional involvement of the characters. These constructions are found in dialogues and internal monologues of characters, especially in scenes where the main character, Julia Lambert, experiences strong love emotions or reflects on her feelings.

Another important aspect is the use of emotionally saturated verbs that convey different shades of love. For example, “adore” expresses admiration and adoration, “crave” indicates dependence and a thirst for intimacy, and “worship” emphasises the sacred or idealised nature of love. In the text, these verbs are often found in hyperbolised expressions, which enhance the drama of love experiences. In the scenes where Julia’s feelings are most intense, the use of verbs with modal shades is more frequent, such as “can’t help loving”, “must have loved”, reflecting the struggle between her emotions and rational conclusions.

In addition, the analysis showed that descriptions of love experiences are often based on complex sentences that emphasise the depth of the characters’ reflection. Long constructions with nested appendages create a stream-of-consciousness effect, especially in episodes where the characters analyse their feelings. For example, Julia’s reflections on Thomas Fennel are often accompanied by sentences containing conditional constructions (if only he knew how much I loved him), causal relationships (she loved him because he made her feel alive), as well as oppositional conjunctions (she loved him, but she knew he was not worthy).

Special attention should be paid to the use of rhetorical questions and exclamation points in dialogues and monologues, which enhance the expressiveness of the text. For example, “How could she love him so much?”, “What was love if not a cruel illusion?” – such constructions help convey the emotional fluctuations of the

characters, their doubts and sufferings associated with a love relationship. Examples of constructions are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Linguistic features of the expression of love in a novel

Linguistic feature	Examples from the text	Function in the text
Intense epithets	Madly in love, deeply affectionate	Emphasise the strength and depth of the characters' feelings, make the expression of love more explicit
Emotionally charged verbs	Adore, crave, worship	Convey shades of romantic emotions: admiration, dependence, deification.
Compound sentences	If only he knew how much I loved him; She loved him because he made her feel alive	Create the effect of reflection and reflection, represent the complexity of the emotional state of the characters
Rhetorical questions and exclamation constructions	How could she love him so much? What was love if not a cruel illusion?	Conveys doubts, inner struggle, enhances the drama of the scenes

Source: compiled by the authors based on Somerset. Maugham (1937, 2001).

An analysis of the translation of the novel "Theatre" by W. Somerset Maugham from English into Russian identified substantial differences in the transmission of emotional tone, sentence structure, and stylistic features related to the concept of love. The main discrepancy between the original text and the translations concerns the degree of expressiveness and depth of emotional perception of the characters.

In the original text, love experiences are communicated through rich vocabulary, complex syntactic constructions, and multi-layered metaphors, which allows conveying the duality of the characters' feelings. For example, in the English version, there are often reinforcing epithets (madly in love, deeply affected) that emphasise the intensity of emotions. In Russian translation, these expressions are often softened or replaced with more neutral constructions ("loved him like crazy" instead of "madly in love"), which reduces the strength of the emotional impact on the reader.

Another important aspect is the transfer of irony and sarcasm, characteristic of the writing style of W. Somerset Maugham. In the original, the characters' dialogues, especially Julia Lambert's lines, are filled with subtle mockery and hidden self-irony. However, in Russian translation, these elements are often lost or interpreted in a more straightforward way. For example, the original phrase "Love is a splendid thing until you fall into it". denotes an ironic view of romantic relationships, while in translation, there are interpretations that soften the sarcastic tone ("Love is wonderful until you fall in love with it"), which partially changes the perception of the scene.

The analysis also showed that the Russian translation reduces the intensity of the drama of love scenes. In the English text, W. Somerset Maugham uses lengthy, complex sentences with internal contradictions, reflecting the inner conflict of the characters. In translation, these constructions are often simplified, making the characters' feelings less layered. For example, the phrase "she loved him, but she knew she shouldn't, and yet the feeling would not leave her". in the Russian version is shortened to "she loved him, even though she understood that she shouldn't", which deprives her of emotional complexity and dynamics.

In addition, there are cases of lexical adaptation in Russian translation, where original expressions bearing the cultural context of the English language are replaced

by more universal, but less expressive analogues. For example, the word “worship” in the context of a love relationship is often translated as to “adore”, whereas in the original it carries a connotation of idolatry and exalted love, which is lost in translation. A comparison of the original fragments and their translations is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Comparative analysis of the expression of love in the original and translations

The comparison aspect	Original text (English)	Translation (Russian)	Examples
Expressiveness and intensity of emotions	The use of reinforcing epithets (madly in love, deeply affected), emphasising the depth of feelings.	Softening or simplifying epithets (She loved him like crazy instead of madly in love), reducing emotional intensity.	“She was madly in love with him” → “She loved him like crazy” (decrease in intensity).
Conveying irony and sarcasm	Subtle mockery and hidden self-irony in the dialogues, expressing the duality of the perception of love.	Partial loss or direct transfer of irony, a change in the writing style.	“Love is a magnificent thing until you fall into it” → “Love is wonderful until you fall in love with it” (loss of sarcasm).
The complexity of syntactic constructions	Long complex sentences with internal contradictions reflecting psychological dynamics.	Reduction of complex constructions, simplification of syntax, which makes the feelings of the characters less layered.	“She loved him, but she knew she shouldn’t, and yet the feeling would not leave her” → “She loved him, even though she understood she shouldn’t” (loss of emotional complexity).
Lexical adaptation	The use of words with deep cultural meanings (worship, crave), conveying shades of dependence and idealisation.	Replacing vocabulary with more universal analogues (worship → adore), which leads to the loss of semantic nuances.	“He worshiped her, as if she were a goddess” → “He adored her” (loss of the shade of idolatry).

Source: compiled by the authors based on Somerset Maugham (1937, 2001).

The study revealed key aspects of the interpretation of love in W. Somerset Maugham’s novel “Theatre”. Love comes in several forms, from the romantic ideal to pragmatic and manipulative love. The use of theatrical metaphors emphasises the idea of love as a game and a performance, which echoes philosophical theories of love as a social construct. Historical and cultural analysis has shown that the characters’ views on love are conditioned by the spirit of the times – England in the 1930s, where feelings often turned out to be subordinated to social and material factors. The linguistic analysis demonstrated the stylistic features of the transmission of love emotions in the text and the differences between the original and the translations.

4. Discussion

The conducted study identified the main features of the interpretation of love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre" and determined how the author uses a theatrical metaphor to depict love experiences. The obtained results demonstrate that love in the novel is presented not only as a sincere feeling but also as a tool of social adaptation, manipulation, and self-expression. This correlates with the study by Almeida et al. (2020), which examines the concept of love among young Brazilians. The authors conclude that love is perceived as a flexible and changeable phenomenon that depends on social conditions and personal experience. Such conclusions are confirmed by the analysis obtained, where love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel is also considered as a dynamic phenomenon depending on the circumstances and individual perception of the characters.

The results of the study also indicated that in W. Somerset Maugham's novel, love often proves to be conditional, theatrical, and subordinated to the script, which echoes the ideas of Schoenberger (2020) about the theatricalisation of sincerity in Renaissance and early modernist literature. The study argues that in the culture of that time, love did not exist outside the social context and was a form of stage action, similar to how it is depicted in the work of W. Somerset Maugham. Similarly, it was shown that the character of the novel, Julia Lambert, perceives love through the prism of her professional activity, turning it into an element of the game, which accentuates the duality of this feeling.

The results also discovered parallels with a study by Chingching (2024) on the perception of love dramas. The paper examines the influence of the viewer's perspective on the interpretation of love stories and the emotional involvement of the audience. Similarly, in W. Somerset Maugham's novel, love is perceived not only by the characters but also by the "audience" within the narrative, which enhances the effect of remote observation of feelings. The analysis established that many of the love scenes in the text are presented through the prism of an observer, be it Julia herself or the characters around her, which makes love both subjective and public.

A comparison of the results also showed that W. Somerset Maugham's novel demonstrates subversive aspects of love, similar to the conclusions of Rocca (2024) about the subversive potential of love in dystopian and post-apocalyptic literature. The author points out that love can be used as a tool of resistance or, conversely, as a form of control and submission. In W. Somerset Maugham's work, love also acts as a source of pleasure and as a factor regulating the characters' relationships, creating dependencies and influencing personal development.

Analysing the concepts of love in various cultural contexts, it is worth referring to the work of Zerovnik (2021), which examines the relationship between love and emancipation in literature. The study shows that love stories can serve as a mechanism for freeing characters from social norms or, conversely, reinforce traditional behavioural patterns. This study also determined that Julia Lambert's character uses love as a way to control her life, but at the same time, she faces restrictions imposed by both society and her own expectations.

The conducted investigation also correlates with the analysis of love in modern cultural and philosophical contexts presented in a number of publications. In particular, a paper of Dahms (2020) examines how science fiction films portray love by linking it to social structures, control, and the reproduction of traditional roles. This aspect echoes our analysis of the novel "Theatre", where love also acts as a social mechanism subject to the rules that the characters are forced to follow. Just as love

can be instrumentalised in science fiction, in W. Somerset Maugham's text, it becomes part of a theatrical production that regulates the relationships of the characters.

The relationship of love with age-related changes and losses is analysed in the study by Shevchenko-Hotsuliak and Casado-Gual (2024), which examines the interaction of memory and love in drama. Although W. Somerset Maugham's novel does not focus on the aspect of ageing, it also traces the influence of time on the perception of love. As the story progresses, Julia Lambert is confronted with a change in her ideas about love and personal significance, which correlates with the researchers' conclusions about the transformation of feelings of love depending on life experience.

The aspect of expressing love through publicity and performativity is considered in the paper of McKee (2022), where the author analyses how the public expression of love becomes part of social dynamics. This echoes the current analysis, in which the love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel manifests itself not only in personal experiences but also in theatrical performance, where the characters play their feelings on and off stage. It is highlighted that love in literature and theatre often becomes demonstrative, which makes it a part of social interaction.

The work of Serttaş (2020) explores the impact of the digital age on the perception of love, examining it in the context of virtual relationships and Sufi philosophy. Although W. Somerset Maugham's novel was written long before digital technology, his interpretation of love as a volatile and multi-layered phenomenon, including elements of illusion and self-deception, is in many ways similar to modern reflections on the transformation of love in the era of digitalisation.

The study by Hommes (2020) reviews the concept of love in science fiction, where it is often intertwined with themes of survival, motherhood, and the transfer of knowledge to future generations. In W. Somerset Maugham's novel, although in a completely different context, the idea of love as a force influencing the further development of the characters is also traced, especially in the line of Julia's relationship with her son. The study demonstrates that love in literature is not always limited to interpersonal relationships but also touches on issues of continuity, self-discovery, and personal evolution.

The musical aspects of love are discussed in the work of Dosser (2021), which considers the sound and rhythmic elements used in romantic films and theatrical productions. The study stresses that music plays an important role in expressing love, creating a certain emotional impact. In W. Somerset Maugham's novel, theatrical dialogues and stage techniques serve a similar function, which enhance the perception of love scenes and emphasise their duality.

Finally, Huang's work (2022) examines love in the context of Chinese cinema, underscoring its connection with comic elements and social realities. In this sense, W. Somerset Maugham's novel also uses an ironic approach to love, where the emotions of the characters are often ridiculed or dismantled, revealing the artificiality of their experiences.

Thus, the results of our research confirm the conclusions of modern works on the multi-layered and dynamic nature of love experiences in literature and theatre. Love in the novel "Theatre" is presented as a phenomenon that includes elements of personal feeling, social strategy, and artistic staging, which makes it similar to interpretations of love in other cultural and literary contexts. These parallels allow for a deeper understanding of how models of romantic relationships are formed in art,

what factors influence their perception, and how love reflects broader philosophical, social, and cultural processes.

5. Conclusions

The conducted study revealed the multi-layered interpretations of love in W. Somerset Maugham's novel "Theatre", establishing that this feeling in the text is not limited to romantic experiences but also functions as an element of social adaptation, manipulation, and theatrical representation. The analysis of the text fragments demonstrated that the author uses a theatrical metaphor to convey the ambivalence of love, presenting it both as a sincere experience and as a play on the stage of life. This makes the concept of love in the novel flexible and ambiguous, depending on the circumstances, context, and social roles of the characters.

It was established that in the text of W. Somerset Maugham, love appears in several forms: as a passion, as a strategy, as a means of management, and as part of the heroine's professional identity. Lexico-semantic analysis determined that the key linguistic constructions used to describe love include theatrical images (scene, role, performance, illusion), which confirms the idea of love as a performative action. Linguistic analysis also revealed that the expression of love is built through emotionally saturated verbs (adore, worship, crave), complex constructions and expressive epithets (madly in love, deeply affected), which reflects the inner struggle of the characters between sincerity and theatrical performance.

A comparative analysis with philosophical concepts indicated that love in the novel is not only an emotional experience but also a structural element of social dynamics. The idea of love as an illusion associated with instinctive motives correlates with A. Schopenhauer's concept, the representation of love as rhetorical construct parallels with R. Barthes' theories, and the evolution of female subjectivity in the context of love corresponds to de S. de Beauvoir's ideas. This allowed considering the novel "Theatre" as part of a broader literary tradition in which love is subordinated both to personal emotions and cultural and philosophical discourses.

Correlation with studies of theatrical and cinematic representations of love showed that similar mechanisms are observed in various artistic forms – literature, theatre, and cinema, where love images obey narrative and aesthetic principles. This confirms the universality of the theatrical metaphor in the depiction of love experiences and indicates its importance in the interpretation of emotional interactions.

The practical importance of the study lies in the fact that its results can be used to further review theatrical metaphors in literature, analyse the representation of love in English-language prose of the first half of the XX century, and expand comparative literary research in an intercultural context.

The limitations of the study were related to the focus on a single work, which narrows the possibilities for a more extensive generalisation of the results. Further research may include a comparison of love patterns in other W. Somerset Maugham works and the literature of other authors of a similar period, which will display broader trends in the interpretation of love in English-language literature of the XX century. In addition, a promising area is the exploration of the translation of love scenes from English and their adaptation in different cultural contexts.

Thus, the study confirmed that love in the novel "Theatre" is not only an emotion but also an element of literary construction, inscribed in social and theatrical codes. The prospects for further research include the examination of ways of representing love in literature, theatre, and cinema, considering philosophical, linguistic, and cultural

transformations, which will allow for a deeper understanding of the evolution of love discourse in different artistic traditions.

References

- Almeida, T., Fernando, J., Lomônaco, B. 2020. The concept of love: An exploratory study with a sample of young Brazilians. *International Journal of Advanced Engineering Research and Science*, 7(3), 239-259. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijaers.73.38>
- Chingching, C. 2024. Enjoyment of love-related dramas and the implications of perspective taking. *Communication Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502241261124>
- Dahms, H. 2020. Science-fiction films and “love”: Toward a critique of regressive social relations. *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 103(2), 121-157. <https://doi.org/10.5325/soundings.103.2.0121>
- Dosser, M. 2021. POP! Goes my heart: The sound of specific and general love in romantic comedies and dramas. *Music and the Moving Image*, 14(3), 46-60. <https://doi.org/10.5406/musimoviimag.14.3.0046>
- Dowd, J., Crabtree, A., Cannon, B. 2021. Movies, gender, and social change: The Hollywood romance film. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 32(2), 201-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1979479>
- Giuliano, E. 2023. Xiaolu Guo’s a lover’s discourse: Analysis of the Influence of Roland Barthes. *Annals of Ca’ Foscari: Oriental Series*, 59, 455-474. <http://doi.org/10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2023/01/017>
- Hommes, M. 2020. To love and not to smother; Aliens, love and reproduction in Denis Villeneuve’s “Arrival” (2016) and Christopher Nolan’s “Interstellar” (2014). *Diffractions*, 2, 24-46. <https://doi.org/10.34632/diffractions.2020.8390>
- Huang, X. 2022. Beyond labourer’s love: Rethinking early Chinese film comedy. *Journal of Chinese Film Studies*, 2(2), 277-297. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcfs-2022-0024>.
- Kristensen, J. 2023. Love theater: Intangible conflicts. *Peripeti*, 19(SI), 154-169. <https://doi.org/10.7146/peri.v19iSI.137746>
- LaFlamme, M. 2022. A passion for love, and for theatre. *Scene: Reviews of Early Modern Drama*, 1, 1-7 <https://doi.org/10.18357/sremd31201920638>
- Lect, A., M.Ali, R., Jabban, A. 2023. Love and war in the modern realistic theatre by Bernard Shaw: Arms and the man. *Humanitarian and Natural Sciences Journal*, 4(11), 124-129. <https://doi.org/10.53796/hnsj41112>
- Mardiev, T. 2020. The interpretation of the concept of love related to of human’s emotions in English and Uzbek. *American Journal of Social Science and Education Innovations*, 2(11), 410-416.
- Maugham, W.S. 2001. *Theatre*. New York: Vintage International. <https://archive.org/details/theatrenovel0000maug>
- Maugham, W.S. 1937. *Theatre*. <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/maughamws-theatre/maughamws-theatre-00-e.html>
- McCall, D.K. 1979. Simone de Beauvoir, “The Second Sex”, and Jean-Paul Sartre. *Signs*, 5(2), 209-223. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173557>
- McKee, E. 2022. Loving out loud. *Journal of Film Music*, 10(2), 49-68. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jfm.24719>
- Ndanyi, S. 2023. Popular Ethiopian cinema: Love and other genres. *African Studies Review*, 66(2), 551-553. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2023.25>



- Peck, L. 2023. *Emma Rice's feminist acts of love*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009287234>
- Poulain, A. 2020. Blue balls of fire and the ethics of spectatorship: Verlaine, Yeats, Beckett. *Angles: New Perspectives on the Anglophone World*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.2432>
- Roberts, B. 2023. Using Haraway's split researcher in the context of theatre: A case study of subject/object in romantic love. *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 7(2), 22. <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/13550>
- Roşca, M. 2024. Love among ruins. The subversive potential of love in the dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction. *Philologica Jassyensia*, 1(39), 151-161. <https://doi.org/10.60133/pj.2024.1.11>
- Saliot, A. 2020. Jean-Luc Godard and Maurice Pialat reading Musset: Dreams and remains of a romantic theatricality. *French Screen Studies*, 20, 6-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14715880.2018.1558028>
- Sang, T. 2022. Lexical-semantic Field used in demonstration of romantic love in poetry of Nguyen Trong Tao. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 5(5), 1717-1732. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v5-i5-21>
- Schneller, T., Motazedian, T. 2022. Tugging at heartstrings. *Journal of Film Music*, 10(2), 7-48. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jfm.20810>
- Schoenberger, C. 2020. Staging sincerity in Renaissance Italy and Early Modern China; Or, why real lovers quarrel. *Poetics Today*, 41(2), 281-299. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-8172584>
- Schopenhauer, A. 1986. *The metaphysics of sexual love*. Baltimore: Foundation for Classical Reprints.
- Serttaş, A. 2020. Transformation of love in the digital age: The film her and reaching God through the love in the perspective of Sufism. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 8(2), 275-306. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2020.264>
- Shevchenko-Hotsuliak, I., Casado-Gual, N. 2024. The ageing self through dramaturgies of memory loss and love: Tristan Bernays' "Old Fools" and Nick Payne's "Elegy", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 40(1), 76-87. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X23000362>
- Stümer, J. 2021. (Un)masking femininity: Desire and fantasy in Anna Biller's "The Love Witch". *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(5), 1211-1226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1879195>
- Yang, R. 2023. Toward a regime of emotional authenticity: Eileen Chang's literary transmediation of theater and cinema in two 1940s love stories. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 35(2). <https://doi.org/10.3366/mclc.2023.0040>
- Zerovnik, M. 2021. How do you feel about love? Vampiric emancipation in the evening light of Elfriede Jelinek's "Illness or Modern Women". In: P. Ferstl (Ed.), *Dialogues between Media* (pp. 287-300). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110642056-023>