

Love and Behavior in Deir el-Medina

The ruins of Deir el-Medina provide many insights into the daily lives of tomb-builders. The people who lived in Deir el-Medina left many clues as to what their daily lives were like. One of these was the abundance of poems found in a well, carved into shards of broken pottery. Many of these poems describe romantic relationships and its effect on the speakers' behaviors. Whether the speaker feels lovesick, obsessive, or excited, the behavior of the speaker is different than it was when he or she was not in love. These love poems from Deir el-Medina depict the effects of a romantic relationship on the behavior of the people involved.

Many of the poems found in Deir el-Medina compare being in love to a sickness, thus affecting the speakers' behavior. For example, in the poem, "Sickness Invaded Me", the speaker uses phrases such as "...heavy in all my limbs," and "...rejects [the physicians] medicines," to express the feeling of being lovesick. These excerpts suggest that being in love has physical side-effects, as evidenced by the speaker's "heavy limbs." The speaker also mentions that nothing that the physicians and magicians have tried has been effective. His body and heart "rejects their remedies," suggesting that the illness is not physical, but an ailment of the soul. This recurring theme of lovesickness is also shown in the poem, "My Brother Torments My Heart," when the speaker mentions that the man she is infatuated with "makes sickness take hold of [her]." Unless she caught a cold from him, the speaker is referring to lovesickness. These comparisons of love to an illness offer insight as to how the people of Deir el-Medina felt about the concept of love. By linking love and sickness, the poems suggest that falling in love is not always easy. The speakers in the poems liken their love to an ailment of the soul that has both physical and behavioral effects.

Plenty of the speakers in the poems show borderline psychotic and obsessive behaviors when it comes to their partners. In the poem, "I Wish I Were Her Laundryman," the speaker discusses his desires to "touch those finespun things lying closest the body I love," disturbingly suggesting that he wants to touch and hold the clothing that belong to the woman he loves. This behavior is obsessive in the way he describes the clothing as the "finespun things lying closest the body I love," hinting that the speaker is possessive of the girl he loves. The poem continues in a similarly creepy way, when the speaker says that he'd "dry [his] own flesh with the towels she yesterday held to her face," indicating that he takes pleasure in touching the same things that she touched, no matter how long ago. Likewise, in the poem, "The House of My Beloved," the speaker says "I would make like a child in the face of her anger," referring to how he accepts his sweetheart's anger towards him, as long as she is acknowledging his existence. The image that comes to mind when reading the poem is a woman angrily yelling at a man while he stands there and smiles, oblivious to his lover's anger. Any attention from her is better than her being unaware of his presence. This behavior shows the speaker's obsessiveness because although his beloved screams at him and is angry, he doesn't shy away. The relationships portrayed in some of the poems from Deir el-Medina had some manic effects on the people involved in the relationships.

The poems also portray the effect of the relationships on the excitement expressed by the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina who were in love. In the poem "I Passed before His House," the speaker uses the word "rejoice" multiple times to describe her reaction to her lover's attention. Because "rejoice" means to show or feel that you are very happy about something, the excessive use of the word in the poem emphasizes the speaker's excitement about her beloved's attention. Furthermore, in "My Heart Flutters Hastily," the speaker references her heartbeat multiple times; the titles suggest that even the mere thought of her lover is enough to make her heart beat faster. This concept can be explained scientifically: her hearts beat faster because her adrenaline was

pumping throughout her body. Adrenaline is a chemical that is released in the body of a person who is feeling a strong emotion (such as excitement, fear, or anger) and that causes the heart to beat faster, perfectly matching the speaker's description of her feelings for her lover. The speakers of both poems are excited, either about receiving attention from their beloved or just thinking about their lover.

The poems suggest that being involved in a romantic relationship affected the behavior of the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina. The speakers grew more excited, more obsessive, and became lovesick more easily than if they weren't currently involved with someone. These changes in their behaviors indicate the large impact of relationships on the day-to-day lives of the people of Deir el-Medina. The people's daily routines might have, in turn, affected their ability to work. The people in love wouldn't have been able to focus on their work, and might have gotten penalized for their divided attention.