The relationship between love and violence is uncanny. Love and violence are both powerful forces that stem from deep, unyielding emotions. When love is confined, it destroys and enslaves. When love is unrequited, it confuses and defeats. Moreover, when violence is destructive, it creates a hole that can only be filled with affection. The relationship between love and violence is displayed in life as well as literature. In literature, love and violence are often directly connected and influence the plot of the novel. When love exists in a novel, it is usually the root of sadness, anger, or revenge, which fuels physical and emotional violence. Moreover, when violence exists in a novel, it habitually forges deep connections between characters, which commonly results in the development of love. In various literary works, such as *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and *Bloodchild* by Octavia Butler, love does not exist without violence and violence does not exist without love.

In the novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Diaz uses the relationship between love and violence to develop the plot of the novel and complexity between characters. Physical or emotional violence is often the result of excessive love between characters and love between incompatible characters. The violence then breaks the bonds formed between characters and allows the plot to develop so that new relationships form. For example, in Yunior’s account of Oscar’s life, Oscar repeatedly and excessively loves people who do not love him back, including Maritza.
and Ana. Oscar always endures emotional violence from these unbalanced relationships, and even occasional physical violence, once he realizes that he has no chance of developing mutual feelings with these women. However, Oscar always moves on to develop feelings for another character, which ultimately leads to his demise when he is killed for his love for Ybón. Oscar’s story is similar to the stories of other characters in the novel, such as Beli and Lola, as their lives are extremely influenced by the dynamics of their relationships in the novel.

Moreover, violence in the novel is often a product of love, which Diaz uses to build complexity between characters. Oscar’s relationship with Ana provides an example; when Oscar’s irrevocable feelings for Ana overcome him, he makes plans to shoot Ana’s boyfriend, Manny, to ensure Ana’s well-being. Although Ana does not share the same feelings that Oscar develops for her, Oscar’s intense feelings of love motivates this violent outburst. The way in which Ana’s character influences Oscar to become uncharacteristically violent adds another layer of complexity to their relationship, as other characters do not make Oscar feel and behave the same way.

The same type of connection between love and violence can be seen earlier in the novel in Oscar’s relationship with Olga and Maritza. Oscar is only physically attracted to Maritza, and more emotionally connected to Olga, which causes their relationships to progress to different degrees before they are terminated. Specifically, Oscar describes the differences between Maritza and Olga by saying “Maritza was beautiful and Olga was not; Olga sometimes smelled like pee and Maritza did not” (Diaz 15). However, Oscar likes to spend time with Olga because she allows him to “throw her to the ground and wrestle with her” (Diaz 13). This playful physicality between Oscar and Olga is the product of an emotional connection between Oscar and Olga that surpasses the physical attractiveness that Oscar feels towards Maritza. Oscar’s relationship with Olga is significant because it is one of the few relationships in the novel where Oscar’s feelings are not completely
rejected by the other person. From this mutual connection between Oscar and Olga, Diaz develops complexity in Oscar’s character, as he provides insight on the relationship dynamics that result in a successful relationship for Oscar.

In *The Hunger Games*, Collins uses the thematic relationship between love and violence to strengthen Katniss Everdeen’s relationships with Gale Hawthorn and Peeta Mellark and create tension between these characters in the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Gale and Katniss are introduced as best friends who hunt game together, as they have done for many years, to provide food for their families. Katniss and Gale are portrayed as equals and companions in their relationship, sharing an unequivocal bond that they forge through their hunts. Although Katniss does not realize the extent of her feelings for Gale at first, their hunts bring them together and spark a romantic relationship that becomes more apparent later in the novel.

Katniss develops her relationship with Peeta in the novel when they are both fighting for their lives in the Hunger Games, a fight to the death among twenty-four tributes that the Capitol holds every year to serve as a reminder for the consequences of rebellion. The Hunger Games embody the definition of a hunt, as tributes are forced to hunt down and kill each other in the arena in the efforts to survive and be the victor of the Games. While Peeta reveals that he has always loved Katniss, Katniss’s feelings for Peeta grow during their shared experiences of violence in the Hunger Games arena. When Peeta shows affection towards Katniss in the arena, trust and reciprocal feelings of affection easily form between the characters because Peeta symbolizes vulnerability and hope for Katniss from their lives in District Twelve. Katniss associates Peeta with vulnerability and hope from District Twelve because he saves her from starvation by giving her burnt bread and inspires her to hunt as a method to obtain food. In the novel, Katniss describes her relationship with Peeta prior to the Hunger Games by saying, “To this day, I can never shake
the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope, and the
dandelion that reminded me that I was not doomed” (Collins 32). This mutual affection between
Katniss and Peeta is shown in the arena when Katniss devises a plan that saves both herself and
Peeta from death when they are the last two tributes standing in the Hunger Games. Although the
dynamics of the formation of Katniss’s relationships with Gale and Peeta are different, their
feelings for each other develop the same way; through the violence of a hunt.

Although Katniss forms meaningful relationships with both Gale and Peeta through violence
in the novel, she is ultimately conflicted as to whom she loves more. For example, Katniss and
Peeta’s tactic of playing “star-crossed lovers from District Twelve” in the arena of the Hunger
Games was necessary to gain sympathy from sponsors, but once Katniss is out of the Games, she
is unable to distinguish between the acting she performed in the interest of entertainment in the
arena and her true feelings towards Peeta (Collins 247). She later tells Peeta when they are on the
train back to District Twelve that “The closer we get to District Twelve, the more confused I get”
(Collins 372). In this context, District Twelve represents Gale, and as Katniss gets closer to
reuniting with him, she becomes more and more confused about her feelings towards him as well.
Before she left for the Hunger Games, Katniss had thought of Gale as a friend. However, when
reflecting on those she loves during the traumatizing experience of the Hunger Games, Gale is
among them; “Home! Prim and my mother! Gale! Even the thought of Prim’s scruffy old cat makes
me smile” (Collins 358). Since Katniss holds intense emotions for both Gale and Peeta, she
experiences inner conflict as well as emotional and physical violence, which Collins uses to create
tension between these characters in the novel.

In the short story Bloodchild, Butler uses the relationship between love and violence to
strengthen the relationship between the radically different characters portrayed in the novel.
Although the characters in the story are literally from different worlds, a love story still transpires between Gan, a young Terran boy, and T’Gatoi, a member of the Tlic species. The predominant way in which Gan and T’Gatoi develop their relationship is through the violent birth of the Tlic in the Terran species. Since the birth of the Tlic is too dangerous for the Tlic to perform themselves, the species develop a relationship with the Terran where Terran males are impregnated by the Tlic and give birth to Tlic young. As evidenced in the story, the grisly birth of the Tlic in the Terran species brings the Tlic and Terran together to form a special bond that other Terran characters do not feel. Gan and T’Gatoi develop this special bond even before he is impregnated by T’Gatoi. For example, when T’Gatoi holds Gan and his family close to her on the couch by wrapping her limbs around them, Gan says that he “always found it comfortable to lie that way”, but “no one else in the family liked it. They said it made them feel caged” (Butler 6). Moreover, when Qui, Gan’s older brother, tries to comfort Gan about the horrifying birthing process he recognizes the special relationship that Gan has with T’Gatoi by saying, “Look, it probably won’t be that bad with you. T’Gatoi likes you. She’ll be careful” (Butler 22). This unique relationship that Gan and T’Gatoi develop throughout the story is catalyzed by the violent process that they must go through in the birth of the Tlic and strengthens the interspecies relationship displayed in the story.

The thematic relationship between love and violence in literature is evident in the novels *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, The Hunger Games,* and *Bloodchild*; love without violence and violence without love is inexistent in these narratives. As exemplified above, authors of these narratives use this relationship to enhance plot development, character complexity, character tension, and the strength of character relations. The relationship between love and violence in literature and in life is significant because it provides contrast and validation of these emotions. In a life with only love and no violence, the value of love is diminished. In a life with only violence
and no love, the impact of violence is diminished, as it becomes the norm in society. The worth of either one without the other is extremely reduced.

However, the prevalence of literature with explicit thematic relationships between love and violence is problematic in nonfictional romantic relationships. According to a study on the normalization of violence in heterosexual romantic relationships, “humans rely on narratives to make sense of their lives” (Wood 241). However, this is problematic because “women who seek to sustain a relationship that is fraught with chaos have available to them culturally legitimated narratives that reconcile what is not reconcilable, make sense of what is not sensible” (Wood 244). Furthermore, in allowing woman to make sense of violence from these narratives, these narratives “simultaneously license women’s oppression” (Wood 244). Therefore, to decrease the violence and oppression of women in heterosexual romantic relationships, society must develop literature that challenges the normalization of violent partners.

Evidence of a natural relationship between codependent partners and nonviolent partnership is apparent in the three texts examined above. In Bloodchild, although the Tlic and Terran species develop relationships through the violent births of the Tlic, this interspecies relationship is symbiotic, so the risk of violence in their relationships decreases. The peaceful interaction between the Tlic and Terran in the Preserve is a mutually beneficial relationship, as the Terran provide a safe birth method for the Tlic and the Tlic provide protection for the Terran in the Preserve as well as a planet on which the Terran can live because the Terran’s original planet is inhospitable. However, the cohabitation of Tlic and Terran families in the Preserve did not always exist, and this is when there was violence between the Tlic and Terran. In the story, Gan explains how there were shootings of Tlic “before the joining of families began, before everyone had a personal stake in keeping the peace”, which in turn resulted in “whole Terran families wiped
out in reprisal during the assassinations” (Butler 12). Because of the violence, guns were made illegal in the Preserve. However, later in the story, Gan and T’Gatoi argue about the secret guns kept in the house in which Gan says, “If we’re not your animals, if these are adult things, accept the risk. There is risk, Gatoi, in dealing with a partner” (Butler 26). In these lines, Gan addresses the risk of violence associated with dominant relationships, but also notes that if they are true equals in their relationship, T’Gatoi does not have to worry about the risk of violence. In the end, T’Gatoi allows Gan to keep the gun in the house, which demonstrates her commitment to their relationship as well as the strength of the bond they have formed. Gan later recognizes that T’Gatoi does not know of the other secret guns in the house, but he says that “In this dispute, they did not matter” (Butler 26). This statement proves that this argument was not only about the guns, but the increased risk of violence associated with imbalanced relationships.

Furthermore, in *The Hunger Games*, the codependent relationships between Katniss and Peeta and Katniss and Gale do not create violence within their relationships, but rather empower Katniss to carry out acts of rebellion against the oppressive Capitol. For example, in the Hunger Games when the Gamesmakers announce that there can be two tributes as victors, Katniss and Peeta become dependent on each other for survival. Subsequently, when the two-victor rule is revoked and Katniss and Peeta are the final two tributes left in the arena, they argue about who should live because of the extent to which they care for each other. However, instead of one of them dying to leave a single victor, Katniss and Peeta both agree to commit suicide in an ultimate act of love and rebellion. Even though their plan is stopped by the Capitol, it contributes to the start of a violent rebellion between the Districts and the Capitol. Additionally, Gale and Katniss are equal and codependent in their relationship because they rely on each other’s hunting methods to provide food for their families. Therefore, when Gale expresses his dislike for the Capitol and the
unfairness of the social hierarchies within the Districts, Katniss recognizes his frustrations, but she does not see the point in his rants because, she says, only yelling at the Capitol “doesn’t change anything” and “doesn’t make things fair” (Collins 14). However, when Katniss is selected as tribute in the Hunger Games, she comes to see the unfairness and brutality of the Capitol that Gale despises and is inspired to act in rebellion for the benefit of the people she loves in District Twelve, including Prim, her mom, and Gale.

Contrastingly, in The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, Diaz commits to evolving unbalanced relationships with violent Dominican males, which increases the prevalence of violence in the novel and depicts the discrimination of females in Dominican culture. For example, Dominican masculinity is characterized in the novel as having social and economic power and charm as well as being physically attractive, sexually active, and violent. Diaz communicates these cultural characteristics to readers through the characters’ relationships with one another. Oscar’s lack of “Higher Powers” usually seen in the “typical Dominican male” results in his inability to develop requited love with females in the novel (Diaz 19-20). Beli, Oscar’s mother, demonstrates this cultural connection between love and violence when she gives advice to the young Oscar after Maritza gives him an ultimatum. Beli says to Oscar, “Dale un galletazo, she panted, then see if the little puta respects you” (Diaz 14). From Spanish, “dale in galletazo” and “puta” translate to “give her a slap” and “whore” respectively. Clearly, Beli does not think that Oscar is exuding enough of his Dominican masculinity, so her advice to him is to be physically violent with Maritza so she respects him and so his relationships with both girls will not be compromised. However, when Oscar does not conform to the violent masculine gender role prevalent in his Dominican culture, his relationships with both Maritza and Olga dissolve, and Oscar is unable to experience mutual love at all. Therefore, in Oscar’s inability to develop love because of his resilience to the typical
violent Dominican male, Diaz omits the development of nonviolent relationships in the novel, which enforces the idea that equal heterosexual relationships do not exist in Dominican culture. Although Diaz’s application of Dominican culture can also be examined as a critique for the culture, the novel nevertheless offers a narrative that ultimately reinforces an oppressed female role in heterosexual relationships.

The novels *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Bloodchild*, indisputably display a strong connection between love and violence, but upon further analysis, also present an innate relationship between codependent characters and reduced violence. As seen in *Bloodchild*, Butler uses symbiotic relationships to decrease the risk of violence between species and enhance the strength of their bonds. In *The Hunger Games*, Collins develops nonviolent, codependent relationships with Katniss, Peeta, and Gale, which empowers Katniss to fight the oppression of society by the Capitol. Contrastingly, throughout *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Diaz commits to evolving relationships with dominant Dominican males, which creates relationships where genders are not equal and women are oppressed. Although love and violence are currently intertwined in literature and in life, the development of literature where partners are portrayed as equal and co-dependent on each other is the first step in challenging the norm of masculine dominance and achieving peace, love, and equality in not only romantic relationships, but all aspects of life. However, the separation of the relationship between love and violence in literature and in life begins with a break-up for the books.


