

Rethinking Romantic Love

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*Discussions, Imaginaries
and Practices*

Edited by

Begonya Enguix and Jordi Roca

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INTRODUCTION

LOVE AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONS

JORDI ROCA AND BEGONYA ENGUIX

Dismantling love

There are two assumptions about love that most people make. The first is that the feeling of love is universal and eternal and therefore does not vary significantly from place to place. The second is that love belongs to peoples' most intimate and private world and is almost impossible to approach from a scientific, positivist perspective that understands emotions more as an impediment to knowing the world than as an essential part of this world (Russell 2003). These two assumptions, which we might also call prejudices may still often have two small, separate nuances. On the one hand, the universality of love is sometimes questioned in terms of the existence of loving variants that, in relation to the Western hegemonic pattern, are considered "inferior" to it. Furthermore, the position of love affairs in the field of the intimate and the private and its subsequent allergy to scientific treatment does not prevent it from often being approached by science, especially from some of the so called "hard sciences", such as biology, evolutionary psychology, biochemistry or psychobiology. This scientific approach gives rise to a type of discussion that is allegedly objective about love, perceiving it as a universal emotion and revolving around concepts like "love chemistry". Concepts that, it is worth noting, seem to enjoy widespread popularity and that have helped to make some of the books that have emerged from this perspective reach the "best-sellers" lists¹.

This volume aims to rethink what we currently understand as romantic love with various contributions. Different local contexts are presented (Hungary, Estonia, Spain, France, Italy, Latin America etc.) to pose questions

¹ Some general references are Fisher (1992, 2004), Buss (1994), Morris (1967).

about what constitutes the romantic ideal in a transnational context of globalisation (Meyrowitz 2004). We consider whether love, as much as we believe it to be the epitome of a single, unique and non-transferable experience, is no more difficult to address scientifically than any other multiple dimension of human experience.

As evidenced by numerous historical studies (de Rougemont 1989; Stone 1977; Luhmann 1982; Giddens 1992; among others) and documented in a number of ethnographies (Mead 1935; Malinowski 1965; Rebhun 1999; Ahearn 2001; Kelsky 2001; Constable 2003; Padilla et al (eds.) 2012), the experience of love is largely subject to the historical and cultural context in which it operates. That is to say, although we cannot prove *a priori* that the way people felt historically and feel currently about love in different places—how it is lived, how it is conceptualised, how it is expressed—is essentially identical or even similar, it does not preclude us from recognising that, as shown by the contributions to this volume, there are dimensions of the experience of love that are similar and have emerged as a more or less hegemonic global benchmark. It is common to refer to “romantic passion” as a paradigmatic example of universal feeling, as expressed in the title of the work of W. Jankowiak (1995): *Romantic Passion. A universal experience?*², which notes features—universal or quasi—of romantic loving passion, such as the desire for intimacy and durability in a relationship, eroticism and idealisation of a loved one, and exclusivity and emotional dependency, among others. This has allowed some authors to question the assertion, for example, that romantic love can only develop in stratified societies with a *leisure class* and a rich literary tradition, or in small societies that promote mobility and individual decision making. One of the most paradigmatic cases of this is the work of Fischer and Jankowiak (1992), which reports the existence of romantic love in 146 of a sample of 166 cultures.

For Jankowiak & Paladino (2008: 7) this and similar findings contradict “the popular idea that romantic love is essentially limited to, or the product of, Western Culture or is found only in smaller, highly mobile, and socially fragmented societies [...] [and] suggests that passionate love constitutes a human universal, or at the least a near universal”. However, the basic argument of this claim rests, as with any universal exercise, in the naturalisation of the experience of love. From this position, it is not culture that gives guidelines for infatuation but neurological orientation. Since humans are biologically similar, our way of loving will also be similar. If humans were completely culturally constructed beings, passionate love would have no neurological basis (Jankowiak & Paladino 2008: 9). At this

² See also Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) and Fisher (1992).

point it might be useful to consider that it may well not have a neurological basis but is rather a neurological consequence. We must not confuse love, or romantic love in particular, which is a particular way of structuring the loving feeling, with the universal feeling of love. Both phenomena and the processes that trigger them have a universal and particular inclination, universalised and unique. The desire to demonstrate the universality of one type or model of love (romantic love) by authors who emphasise the bio-neurological basis of the loving feeling may well also be attempting to stigmatise, pathologise and/or de-legitimise other possible formulas of love and to establish, at the same time, a single hegemonic and standardised model. In this volume, two contributions clearly point to loving formulas that *a priori* fall outside the dogma. Barbé, in her chapter on erotic encounters, desire and ideals of love among people who cross-dress at a swingers' club in Barcelona presents and questions the existence of nuclear ideals of love that create unknown (and/or stigmatised) peripheries. Grossi, through her analysis of grave letters, disembodies love and constructs it as an emotion that goes beyond death and creates a particular world of meaning for the living ones and their communities.

For us, romantic love is associated with a particular historical experience of Western culture; to use it as a paradigm of a universal feeling is the result of ethnocentric and ahistorical assumptions. This culturally located feeling has been generalised and universalised in great measure by the mass media and in particular, by the film industry, which suggests this relationship model is unique and desirable. More prudent, in any case, might be the proposal of Fisher (1992), who uses the term "infatuation" to describe what for her and for us would be the universal experience. And here we meet the other issue that we mentioned above: the specific historical reality that turns a particular model of loving into a hegemonic loving model on a global scale. A global ideology of love, a kind of political economy of emotion (Scheper-Hughes 1992), includes the values, meanings and the same experience of emotion formed not only by culture but also by the power structures. Regarding this, it is worth noting that all kinds of flows, people, capital, ideas, goods, etc. that characterise globalisation, do not circulate in a balanced way. So on the one hand, the forms, language and dialogues of Western love can easily appear, at least superficially, around the world, but on the other hand the similarities that we find are the product not only of globalisation but also of specific economic and social transformations (Wardlow & Hirsch 2006: 2). An example of these globalised processes in the meaning of love can be found in Núñez and Enguix's contribution to this volume, an analysis of the explicit

and hidden scripts of the Western ideals of romantic love and how E.L. James has put them down on paper in her best-selling trilogy *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

Loves that kill: Romantic Love

Romantic love, with its history rooted in the passionate love of ancient Greece, medieval courtly love and eighteenth century gallant occidental love, is a device invented in Western Europe over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose reach spread globally in an almost hegemonic way throughout the twentieth century, thanks largely to the invaluable help of the “media” in the context of the emergence of the consumer society. This ideal is fundamentally linked to affective individualism and individual freedom promoted by Romanticism. The resulting model forms the basis of monogamous, emotionally involved partnerships, a consequence of the so-called *love match*, as opposed to so-called *marriage of interest* or *arranged marriage*, or *marriage of convenience*—the prototype of the pre-industrial, agricultural, traditional, pre-modern society, or the old regime. In this old model, marriage and procreation of the family were highly integrated into community relations and kindred, and were not the centre of emotional and affective relations. The fundamental principle of this type of marriage was the pursuit of social reproduction, hence the emphasis on equality between spouses and the fundamental role played by parents in mate choice. Marriage was the structure for basic preservation or for the increase in property ownership, a role that was to be progressively lost under capitalism. Thus, while the medieval and the modern age models would assume a fundamental incompatibility between love and marriage, the nineteenth-century romantic ideology would assume its inseparability (Shumway 2003: 20).

The emergence of romantic love, framed in the context of the bourgeoisie and industrial revolutions disrupted and revolutionised the basis of the previous loving model. With the increasing dissolution of the social ties that structured traditional societies, in capitalist contexts people were becoming increasingly individualised, that is, they saw themselves as unique, different from the others, and that too, as we said, was to favour the perception of loving romance as something unique, personal and not transferable. In turn, marriage, definitively and inseparably linked to love, became increasingly private, losing its social function and meaning and becoming the answer to a new desire for intimacy. Moreover, with the appearance of a growing social fragmentation, marriage also became the refuge of genuine human relationships, emotions and affections.

The idea of love as a necessary ingredient for marriage, and the difference between marriage for love and marriage of convenience, structure the first section of this volume, dedicated to bi-national marriages that imply mobility of one of the partners (Roca 2013). In their respective chapters, the contributors analyse mixed marriages and conceptions of love that transcend them from the perspectives of the members of the couple (Riaño), of mediators—marriage agencies and online platforms (Roca, Anzil and Martinez)—and of the officials who certify that a marriage is not for interest, particularly in marriages between citizens of the first and third world (Gutekunst).

Kalmre shows in her chapter that romantic love, to a great extent, has grown out of a body of romantic literature that was aimed primarily at women and that women have appropriated, reproduced and reconstructed. Her analysis is based on personal love stories created by Estonian girls that take the form of written texts (late twentieth century) or, more recently, online blogs. Romantic love appears as one of the principle legitimising bases of segregation of roles that has laid the foundations of an industrialised society and is a reference for the future development of the consumer society. It is also a fundamental element for the meaning of gender and gender relations. In their chapters, both Näser-Lather and Nardini discuss the relationship between the ideals of romantic love and egalitarian gender relations. Näser-Lather, considering the religious, feminist and political discourses of contemporary Italy, addresses the relationship between them and violence against women. Nardini, in turn, analyses how a group of egalitarian men from Barcelona, *Homes en Diàleg*, question the ideals of romantic love and reconvert it into an egalitarian element that implies neither the possession of the feminine, nor the subordination of women to men in heterosexual relationships.

On the other hand, romantic love supposes that there is only one person in the world to whom one can join at all levels, which is idealised in concepts such as your “Prince Charming” or metaphorical images of your “other half”. All this presupposes that you can establish a lasting emotional bond with someone based on intrinsic qualities (Bawin-Legros 2004). So, romantic love rests on the idealisation of the object of love and the mutual agreement of the couple to stay together forever, for better and for worse. The contributions to the analysis of love written from a biologicist stance take the opportunity of making real lists of the psycho-physiological characteristics of romantic love, such as an excess of energy, attention focused on the positive qualities of the partner and the belief that s/he is unique, motivation to pursue this ideal companion, loss of appetite, persistence, sweet caresses, kisses and licks, snuggling up to the beloved

and coquettishly play, the growth of love in adversity, intrusive thoughts, the feeling of possession and dependence, the desire for union and fusion with the beloved, a high sense of altruism, reordering of priorities in favour of the beloved, sexual attraction to the beloved, etc. (see for example Fisher 2004 and Munch 2008). This catalogue is stated or implied in most of the contributions to this volume and, as Balatonyi shows in her case study on the conceptions of love among the Hungarians in Gyimes, the biological stance is internalised so much by lovers that love is understood as a sickness or as a magical possession. With such assumptions, it is not surprising that elements such as possession, exclusivity, jealousy and sexual fidelity appear as evidence of love in the romantic rhetoric, which Vincent Cespedes calls “the formula of generalised loving control that reproduces the traditional family bourgeoisie” (quoted by Bruckner 2011: 208). This formula is rigorously questioned by Näser-Lather and Nardini. Additionally, in the context of a series of demographic and economic factors that appear in the nineteenth century in Europe and North America linked to the process of the Industrial Revolution (such as urbanisation, increased life expectancy, the decline in infant mortality, the extension of schooling, the growth of wage labour or low fertility), the romantic couple would also become the place of pleasure and self-realisation rather than that of reproduction and social obligations. Indeed, these marked changes in the nature of relationships will allow, for example, the couple to spend more time together without the obligation to care for their children as well as an increased interdependence of married couples because individual emancipation within the extended family will no longer be possible. Similarly, as noted by Illouz (1997), these same changes will make it possible, in some cases, for women to become less economically dependent on their husbands and bring about a change of emphasis in marital expectations that will become—in theory—a shift from economic security to a focus on emotional satisfaction.

Passion, durability and freedom of choice, as we have said, are the cornerstones of the new concept of love that emerged with Romanticism and the new ideal of love that it disseminated. Romantic love brought love and freedom together for the first time. By including the desire for intimacy with your partner, it includes and excludes sexuality (Herrera 2010: 321). That is to say, sexual desire and passionate (or romantic) love, go together with companionship, comfort and attachment. We must emphasise the ideal components of this new pattern because its principles—with the sky-rocketing expectations of conjugal union—differ from (as well as shape) the real conditions of loving relationships.

So, for example, the ideal of “love for your whole life” (still very current) has, for decades, co-existed with the escalation in the divorce rate and a pattern of “serial monogamy”. As regards freedom of choice, its role was anchored increasingly to the world of fantasy, since the major tendency to homogamy has not suffered any decline over the last century. As rightly pointed out by Padilla et al. (2012), the irony is that even in the “developed world” the idea of a relationship based entirely on love is fictional. This is not only for the stubborn tendency of people to marry people similar to themselves, but also because money is important in a relationship (as evidenced by many divorce proceedings) and because the idea of conjugal affection contrasts with the data on extra-marital sex, which shows how sex outside of marriage is more prevalent than inside it, as happened in the pre-modernity.

Loves that die and/or are reborn: going beyond or perfecting romantic love

The distance between the romantic ideal and most loving practices, their contradictions and changes in all spheres since the emergence and dominance of romantic love in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have fuelled the need to provide new insights and analysis on its validity and its transformations. Love is not immune to the specific socio-historical context in which it occurs and, therefore, the contributions in this volume focus on the analysis of specific cases. Similarly, and for the same reason, our framework for talking about love and its transformations are the transformations in capitalism and the advent of post-modernism linked to globalisation. However, globalisation does not have an impact with the same intensity everywhere and post-modernity is not a universal phenomenon but it is linked mainly to the so-called “Western” society, with a strong mass culture, especially in urban environments. There are still many places and many cultures, then, regardless of a post-modernism that is fundamentally defined by two principle aspects, the superiority of new information and communication technologies, and consumption, which bring increasing flexibility, fragmentation or discontinuity (see Lyon 1994). In this volume, despite the variety of geographical contexts analysed, we focus on the Western imaginaries of love.

Among the most interesting and most referenced reflections, we have the work of Giddens (1992: 63), who considers that romantic love will be replaced by *confluent love*: a contingent active love, which sheds the idea of eternity—“forever”—and exclusivity—“the one and only”—typical of romantic love, to be founded more on reflexivity and emotional intimacy.

This confluent love, however, goes hand in hand with another term put forward by Giddens (1992): the pure relationship, a relationship based on sexual and emotional equality, characterised by the fact that it is established by its own initiative and is only continued to the extent that it is judged by both parties to offer enough for each individual's satisfaction. Durability is, therefore, subject to individual satisfaction. The pure relationship, pairs love with sexuality, equality and freedom, with reciprocal giving and receiving. Contemporary love is an attempt, in a way, to reconcile conflicting desires, dialectical forces in conflict, such as the desire for fusion (with consequent aspiration to eternal love, indivisible, free of lies) and the desire for individualisation (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Bruckner 2011), resulting in love "with right of return" consisting of abandonment when the necessary dose of passion or communication is no longer given³.

Giddens' proposed model presents differentiating elements between romantic love and others that maintain a certain continuity with it. Durability is no longer a maxim of love, but the emotional involvement of the spouses. Emphasis is placed, on the other hand, on equality but -as with sexual pleasure- it is linked to the couple unlike in romantic love models. Eva Illouz (1998) considers the innocence of love as having been lost, the "love affair" being the paradigm of the post-modern condition. While in Giddens' approach eligibility and individuality seem to lead to a certain transcendence of the affair, Illouz's proposal opts for what Béjar (1995) calls "the fascination of a distrascentalised culture" based on an individualistic logic whose central value is the self. Novelty is the major source of satisfaction, and therefore the affair stands as an attempt to retain and repeat, compulsively, the primordial experience of novelty in contrast to the romantic narrative of great love, which is theological, absolute and a single thought. The affair provides a dual purpose: the freedom to choose between different partners according to our preferences on the one hand; and the transitional and renewable pleasure on the other. And, indeed, as Bauman (2003) notes, the accumulation to which love in the consumer society tends towards will eventually represent a type of ability that can be learned and that will reach a level of expertise according to the number of experiences.

³ For Bawin-Legros (2004: 247) this attempt to reconcile conflicting desires would be particularly middle-class, since the lower classes adopt a model where a desire for fusion within couples predominates within the framework of the dominant conception of the family as a refuge.

All this, Illouz (1998) says, is simply the post-modern expression of the desire of pure sensation that produces unconnected episodes and a fragmentation of the experience of love into separate emotional units, radically altering the romantic and sexual pre-modern sensibility. The idea of an affair connects seamlessly with Bawin-Legros' idea that we are tourists in our own private territory (2004: 242), within a realm of individualism that gives us an increasing ability to choose when, where and with whom to have sex and in which forgetting is more important than the memory. It is also linked with Bauman's approach (2003) which is based on a fear of establishing lasting relationships beyond mere connections. That is something that Illouz (2012) herself goes into more deeply in terms of fear of commitment, which carries the new architecture of the loving choices that one makes, particularly evident in the male detachment. A detachment that the group analysed by Nardini questions as the only male referent.

In any case, although the emphasis on fragmentation and individualisation of the loving experience can be successful, it is no less true that the wishes of the many and possibly heartfelt pressures held by a part of the population in terms of acquisition and/or preservation of romantic relationships, "traditional" (read "institutionalised perennial marriage") relationships are still very present, and most of the contributions to this volume are an example.

The pattern of successive marriages, a mainstream reality, does not preclude or is inconsistent with the fact that large sections of the population express a desire to get married "for life" or, at least, with a high degree of stability, as a stronghold of traditional references within the framework of what has been given the label *neo-romanticism*.

Similarly, the foundation of the affair in "pristine purity" of one's desire and satisfaction can be ahistorical and naive for not considering either the social situation of the actors or the context in which the existence of conflicts develop, often related to power and inequality. The prime focus in choice also easily hides the existence of social constraints (Holmes 2004: 256), some that build relationships as socially legitimate in contrast to other relationships that are invisibilised (Barbé) or considered "impure" (Balatonyi).

As with the romantic ideal, romantic relationships are embedded in the tension between idealisation and "real" divergent practices (Jamieson 1998, 1999; Smart & Shipman 2004). For example, the economic dimensions of the couple are a paradigmatic example of the danger of excessive or exclusive attention to the couple's emotional inclination and ideal of romantic love. Viviana Zelizer (2005) has carefully pointed out

some of these dimensions, which are beginning to become relevant in the early stages of romantic relationships and dating, which is supposedly the more passionate and selfless phase of the process.

This author notes how dating has pivoted, and continues to pivot, around the man's payment for most of the entertainment expenses. Regarding that, Roca, Anzil and Martinez show us clearly how in the process of looking for a transnational partner over the Internet it is the men who pay. This is not a minor detail, since it may symbolise largely the nature of the relationship in terms of gender⁴. Riaño shows us too how Latin American women are giving up their careers in order to strengthen the careers of their Swiss husbands, thus becoming financially dependent on them. That is not to mention the economic inequality and status between billionaire Christian Grey and the student Anastasia Steele in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, analysed by Núñez and Enguix.

According to Zelizer, courtship also implies a series of economic transactions of various kinds: entertainment, meals, gifts, ceremonies, festivals, celebrations, preparation and fulfilment of the wedding, a new home, furniture, tableware, household items, etc. which makes her conclude that "from dating to the brink of marriage, therefore, the mingling of courtship and economic transactions occurs continuously" (Zelizer 2005: 108). This also prompts her to say that "despite the new terminology and practices, some residues of the old system remain" (2005: 116).

This characteristic landscape of the urban middle-class in America—and in many other countries—cannot be generalised because there are ethnic, racial, class and religious differences in dating, for example (Zelizer 2005: 115), but it is the scenario that, in light of the contributions to this volume, seems to be hegemonic.

One of the transforming elements of romantic love is the "companionate marriage": "a marital ideal in which emotional closeness is understood to be both one of the primary measures of success in marriage and a central practice through which the relationship is constituted and reinforced" (Wardlow & Hirsch 2006: 4). This term is presented as the logical consequence of romantic love and describes a present that is less breaking with the romantic ideal and more aligned with it. This model implies the premise of marrying for love, (favouring romantic attraction and individual choice in the selection of a partner) and staying married for love, giving priority to permanent affective primacy of conjugal unity (Wardlow & Hirsch 2006: 3).

⁴ A popular Catalan saying is: "qui paga, mana" (Whoever pays, commands).

The “companionate marriage” is somehow a version of the “pure relationship” of Giddens, although formulated in less evaluative and idealised terms, centring on the purpose of marriage in fellowship and intimacy. The loving model based on emotional closeness and its centrality for the relationship and the marriage is accompanied by a set of ideals and practices such as monogamy, sexual fidelity within marriage, nuclear families with neolocal residence, the preference for sociability with the partner rather than with relatives or friends, the search for emotional gratification, etc. Thus, the idealisation of the companionate marriage is increasingly pervasive, but also locally variable.

The companionate marriage model tries to encapsulate the grand narrative of romantic love but dissociates itself from the daily life of the relationship.

Eva Illouz (1998) distinguishes two contradictory narratives of love: romantic love at first sight, immediate, irrational, overwhelming, that overrides reason and family considerations and must overcome all kinds of obstacles and oppositions; and realistic love, based on a more leisurely relationship, the consequence of friendship, combining passion with reason that is based on the compatibility of the “partners”. The first is unreal, fantasy, and the second cold, uninviting, but both at the same time form part of the popular romantic imagination.

This constellation of loving ideologies that we have commented on here more often than not overlap and coexist together, forming different combinations depending on variables such as social class, religious ideologies or specific cultural traditions, national laws or local structures, and shape different partnership models and imaginaries of love that are diverse.

In our understanding, a possible configuration of all the above should include the following: a) romantic love as a hegemonic reference imaginary⁵; b) the “pure relationship” as a reference ideal to reach; and c) the companionate marriage and/or “realistic love”, as a hegemonic reference concerning what should be the appropriate or acceptable love; a collage of romantic ideologies that in fact builds post-modern love⁶.

⁵ Herrera, for example, speaks of inherited romantic mythology from the 12th century and from the 19th century that has been converted into a sort of “emotional collective utopia” in the 21st century (2010: 378).

⁶ The theorists of postmodernism often define it as a culture of fragmentation, of *pastiche*, of *patchwork*, of hybridity, where they intersperse, overlap and combine, without any hierarchies, elements that are both pre-modern and modern, differing in nature (see for example Lyon 1994).

This intersection and plurality of references still presents, however, a core or relatively stable base. This core focuses on the following triad: fusion, duality and territoriality. Sex and love are considered inseparable (fusion), heterosexual couples are the model—mostly, though not necessarily— (duality) and it involves the creation of a more or less stable coexistence while it endures (territory).

This supposes that while romantic love, as just noted, is still a hegemonic imaginary referent, fuelled by popular mass culture and the love industry (movies, novels, songs, etc.)⁷, as the contributions by Kalmre and Núñez and Enguix show, many of its ideals have already been widely “unmasked”, so to speak. As Herrera says directly, for example: “passion is not eternal, love is not perfect and wonderful, there is no single person who can fill our existence, and promiscuity is a natural human desire” (2010: 371).

The myth of romantic love has served, and still does to some extent, to perpetuate a monogamous, heterosexual, individualistic and bourgeois system (Herrera 2010: 377) but when it appeared, it introduced transgressive and destabilising elements, challenging for example the endogamic rules in coupling. As rightly pointed out by Eva Illouz (1997) romantic love has been and is a powerful utopian ideal that reaffirms the primacy of the individual and violates the established social order, but it is also shaped by symbols, values and class relations typical of the capitalist society. In consequence, the romantic utopia is settled in the market.

Understanding and rethinking romantic love

Theoretical reflections on the transformations of the concept of love and sex-love relationships have often been accused of creating great narratives that by generalisation and abstraction exclude analysis of subjective, intimate and private experiences. Those are exactly the experiences that are grouped together in this volume. Paying attention to these particular experiences of love does not mean that the types, models and statements of authors such as Illouz (1998, 2012), Giddens (1992), de Rougemont (1989), Luhmann (1982), Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Bauman (2003) and others, are not significant. They are the interpretive

⁷ Note that romantic love, as we said, is closely related to the emergence of the novel; this love has been mystified and spread by the Hollywood industry globally. The mass media industry, since the nineties, has expanded the myth of romantic love in most parts of the world thanks to globalisation, developing in turn the entire industry of love and precipitating a boom in products (Herrera 2010: 378).

framework of the contributions found here (and set out by so many contributors) and give them value and comprehensive usefulness.

As we have mentioned, the various discourses and models need to be properly contextualised. At a general level, that contextualisation implies considering the emergence of romantic love and its subsequent changes or developments in the context of modernity and its central concerns on issues such as the emergence and development of the individual self⁸; the growth of consumption and its impact on relationships (often qualified commercially) and its focus on choice as an unquestionable element of love-affective praxis; or the progressive redefinition of gender relations and their connection with the redefinition of loving relationships and of one's partner. Regarding this last point, it is interesting to note how modernity further develops the Marxist concern about the incidence of the relationship of capitalist production on the processes of domination and female emancipation, and how the emphasis of these new models of love favour feelings and personal fulfilment over social obligations and segregated work in the couple. This could suggest that gender differences have become less important (see Wardlow & Hirsch 2006: 20-21). New models of loving relationships and gender equality have been perceived and accepted as inseparable. The fact that the partners receive different salaries or the division of labour in the household can be diluted by the belief that both partners have the same value and that the couple is, as we said, a joint project. To go into these issues too deeply and to discuss and negotiate them may even be seen inappropriate and unromantic. However, the reality often is that this type of "egalitarian" love can be more oppressive for women than other existing relationships. As Holland & Eisenhart and also Mahoney state (referenced by Wardlow & Hirsch [2006: 24]) "the American cultural model of equality in romantic love masks a stark gender inequality and ideologies on romantic love may exacerbate female subordination by persuading women that staying in the relationship is the loving thing to do".

⁸ Several authors have pointed out that many aspects of intimacy and personal relationships have been increasingly marketed and explicitly linked to the global processes of commodification (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Shumway 2003; Zelizer 2005). As noted by Constable (2009: 50), privacy or intimate relationships in some cases appear to be treated, understood or thought of as having become part of the market and, consequently, would become capable of being bought or sold, marketed or objectified as part of the global capitalist flow of goods. This has allowed us to talk about the commodification of privacy (Constable 2009) or affection (Arvidsson 2006).

The inseparable link between love and sex and its consequences for the establishment of egalitarian relationships (ideal or real) between men and women appears in many contributions to this volume, but particularly in those of Nardini and Riaño. While Nardini shows how men engaged in gender equality fight for finding definitions of love that shape egalitarian relationships, Riaño stresses how the ideals of “egalitarian love” have been oppressive (or not so egalitarian) schemes of a relationship for Latin-American women. In the texts included in the first section, *Mobilities for Love*, gender is understood as a main player in the shaping of the negotiations when forming and establishing bi-national couples.

Some of the topics included in this volume (ideals of love, sex, marriage, gender, affection, embodied emotions, popular culture), question the current types of loving relationships in their continuity, changes or transgression of practices and discourses on the great ideals of romantic love. There are other ways of reformulating these ideals that have had to be left out of this volume but that still have to be considered, such as the separation of sex from love, going beyond the “couple formula”, and/or “living apart together”.

Many forms of loving relationships kill the romantic ideal of fusion of sex and love as founding principle for the couple, promoting their separation.

We find today many loving couples who choose not to have sex and many that only share sex. An example of the first is the increasing phenomenon detected in Japan—probably existing in other countries—of couples over 40 who do not have sexual relations. Therapist Mayumi Futamatsu estimates that this happens in about 60% to 70% of the couples— and has led the Japanese National Institute of Sexology to coin the term “sexless” as a category for referring to them. Another example is the virtual community *Asexual Visibility and Education Network* (AVEN), whose website (www.asexuality.org, accessed 12/11/2014) posts such comments as: “Might asexual romantics feel platonic romance and affection but not sexual desire?” and “Asexual people have the same emotional needs as everybody else and are just as capable of forming intimate relationships”⁹.

⁹ Sentences whose content is not new and that remember, for example, that Christianity was tempted to ban marriage (Ariès 1982: 182) and that for many Pietist movements the most sublime form of Christian marriage is one that preserves virginity (Weber 1930). The shadow of the passage of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (1C 7: 1-3, 6-10) definitely plans on these examples (Roca 1996: 252).

At the opposite pole, some relationships are labelled as “friendship with benefits” to refer to couples who are only sexual partners. The “*bekiapareja*” website (www.bekiapareja.com, accessed 12/11/2014) gives us the “key to a functioning relationship”¹⁰, preceded by the following motto: “First of all be very clear about one thing: Sex Yes, Love No”.

In the middle of both models, we find BTP and GTP (Boyfriend Type Person-Girlfriend Type Person), a clear example of the difficulty and ambivalence of making choices: they are not yet our partner but are more important than someone we just have sex with.

Similarly, it is also worth identifying various attempts to go beyond the “couple formula”, such as the sentimental loving model of polyamorous relationships, founded in the 1960s in California but more extended and visible over the last decade. Sometimes confused with polygamy, but with little or nothing to do with it, polyamory implies the existence of sexual, affective and emotional links with more than one person but with the knowledge and consent of all the parties involved.

The Swinger phenomenon also intends to go beyond the couple formula. In this volume, Barbé analyses this practice which may or may not include wife swapping and the practice of group sex, etc. It is based on consented couple exchange and the freedom to choose the number of people or type of sex they prefer. Swingers have institutionalised a set of ritual practices designed to uphold the primacy of the pair bond or comfort love, preventing the formation of a passionate love entanglement, and remain open to experiencing sexual pleasure with strangers. As shown by W. Jankowiak & T. Paladino (2008: 4), this is the ideal solution for swingers to the competing demands of tripartite passions. The swingers’ model of love is a combination of romantic love and companionship organised around the pursuit of pleasure rather than being a confluent or self-actualised love of the kind that Giddens (1992) talks about (Jankowiak and Mixson 2008: 249).

Couples not living together go beyond the core definition of romantic love. In the formula “*Living Apart Together (LAT)*” each partner maintains their own home in an attempt to reconcile, when it comes to a voluntary choice, individualism and the need for privacy and freedom with the desire and the possibility of having a steady partner (see Levin 2004). This and other forms of distance love (some bi-national couples, couples with one

¹⁰ These are the keys: 1. clear and transparent thoughts: sex without commitment; 2. No feelings: emotional involvement is prohibited; 3. No romantic dates: only sexual encounters; 4. No grabbing one’s attention more than necessary: it is not your partner, only your friend; 5. Relations with third persons: do not forget that it is not “your property”.

of them living abroad, etc.) can express the impossibility of living together or the wish for voluntary choice, of living apart either temporarily or definitively. In all cases, this distance implies new ways of living, everyday life, sexuality and development of the relationship (see Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2013), as shown in the chapters by Roca, Anzil and Martínez, by Riaño and by Gutekunst.

Reformulations of the main pillars of romantic love—with greater or lesser degrees of transgression or rupture—basically pivot around the tension between the desire for individuality (linked to the emergence of affective individualism), and the desire to have a partner, linked to the dissolution of traditional links and enthronement of the couple as the privileged place of expression of intimacy, which stresses the importance of equality and equity among its members.

The two major coordinates marking our (and the couple's) existence, Time and Space (for Space read “the marriage market”) have grown exponentially because of the disappearance of formal rules of endogamy, the individualisation of love choices, the generalisation of competition, changes in gender relations, the emergence of a consumer-centric society and the development of Information and Communication Technologies, among other reasons (see Illouz 2012; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2013). Time (read “living the experience of love”) has shortened considerably in the sense that our sexual and loving biography is increasingly less linear, stable and unique and, conversely, more diverse and heterogeneous, formed by a succession of stages that might include various, miscellaneous partners and/or forms of emotional experiences and relationships.

The contributions that make up this book bring together some of the concepts and principles about the actual loving scenario and also provide concrete examples to help to avoid reductionist, simplified and homogeneous views about loving realities and their transformations. They give visibility to the different ways these relationships are represented, lived and experienced. They are merely a sample, not representative but highly significant, of the plurality of practices and experiences that exist on the margins of our society, that are transgressive or contradictory with the ideals, that evolve or are a by-product of pure normative or ideal models. They are, in short, a sample that aims to contribute to the exercise of rethinking romantic love.

The contributions in the first section of this volume discuss how we can understand love in a globalised world and how current transformations of love produce transnational relationships that are considered instrumental, pure, authentic or convenient. As Riaño stresses in her chapter, the possibility of starting and maintaining intimacy over great

distances has significantly increased with the availability of travelling and studying abroad as well as communicating across national borders (King 2002, Parreñas 2005, Baldassar/Gabaccia 2011).

These movements for love are studied by Riaño, Gutekunst and Roca, Anzil and Martinez in their chapters. Gutekunst, in *“Is this true love? Governing Love in the context of Marriage Migration”*, puts forward the idea of the conflict between true love and love “for convenience” in bi-national couples that want to get married. The question of “true love” comes up frequently in the context of marriage migration, especially in relation to couples where one has a European nationality and the other is from a country outside Europe that has a visa requirement. The suspicion that these couples are not together out of love, but due to mobility benefits is firmly embedded in the social discourse. Her chapter analyses the case of bi-national couples from Morocco and Germany and Austria and focuses especially on the case of Wasima. Based on the “regime” concept by Foucault, Gutekunst studies how mobility regimes function equally as border regimes and emphasises that there are different conceptualisations about “true” love among which are those of government officials, partners, and also researchers.

This study shows how deeply the Moroccan government intervenes in the private and intimate life of its citizens and how love, sexuality, relationships and marriage are governed by a marriage regime that is influenced by a strict religious discourse.

Riaño, in *“Latin American Women who Migrate for Love: Imagining European Men as Ideal Partners”* analyses love migration and bi-national marriages between Latin American women and Swiss men (more than 36% of the marriages in 2012). She questions how to understand love in the context of contemporary mobile societies and proposes that love needs to be understood as embedded in a complex system of ideals and, in particular, the ideal of egalitarian love that is traced in her interviews with love-migrant women.

She also questions how to understand contemporary love migration, a scarcely studied social phenomenon. Her complex analysis of this case defies simple or typical explanations that rely on the scheme “European man travels to a country in the South where he meets a woman ‘to import’ and she subsequently leaves her own country to join her future husband and give love in exchange for a better standard of living”. She rather connects the interviewed women’s imaginaries of European men as “non patriarchal” with their discontent with gender relations in their countries of origin. However, these women at same time reproduce traditional gender roles when they migrate for love by accepting to follow their husbands,

put their careers on hold and give priority to the men's career. Interestingly, women struggle between new and traditional ideals of gender relations embedded in love.

Roca, Anzil and Martinez's chapter on "*Intimacies Turned On and Off. Spanish Men in Search of a Foreign Partner Beyond the Screen*" deals with the recent and growing phenomenon of mixed heterosexual partnerships between Spanish men and foreign women and focuses on the online search for a transnational partner through dating websites and specialised marriage agencies on the Internet, and the subsequent courtship period in cyberspace. Through a complex analysis that avoids simplistic dichotomies between good and bad "love relationships" they trace continuity and change in mixed couples and online courtship.

They discuss topics such as the commodification of intimacy and the novelties and continuities of online love relationships in relation to conventional dating. Threatening to overturn the coordinates of space and time in affairs of the heart, the authors see a deep transformation in the definitions of love, its rituals and courtship, the first consequences of which we are just beginning to intuit and identify.

The second part of the book includes different case studies of the meanings of love from a local perspective. All the contributions in this section provide a comprehensive analysis of love that connects love to gender meanings, sexuality, religious discourses and/or feminist discourses.

Balatonyi, in "*Conceptions of the True Love and Love Magic among the Hungarians in Gyimes*" connects these conceptions with pure/impure relationships, marginal love relationships that do not consider marriage, and love magic (considering love as a sickness and love as a metaphor). She explains how definitions of love are attributed independently from behaviour and depend on the context, the social and religious norms and the symbolic nature of the relationship. She also pays attention to the different models of love that exist across generations and genders and how people adapt to these models. Her research focuses on two different periods, 2005–2013 and 1900–1950. She pays particular attention to the love-as-sickness metaphors in Gyimes, where similar symptoms in dissimilar contexts are appearing in different love-definitions. The conception of love as a sickness, generally in Europe but analysed here in the Hungarian context, is interpreted by Balatonyi as a structured tool for social control and a form of local self-helping process.

Radically different from this case is the analysis of Barbé who, in "*What It Is To Be Desired: Erotic Encounters and Ideals of Love Among People Who Practise Cross-dressing in a Swinger Club in Barcelona*",

examines the relationship between erotic sexual practices and ideals of love of people who cross-dress, through an ethnography carried out in the swingers' club Fidelité, an erotic-sexual exchange club in the city of Barcelona.

Barbé questions the framework of the gender system within which the people who cross-dress in the swinger club are placed, the erotic and sensory experiences of those who cross-dress and how they are linked to the ideals of love that circulate within the club, among other questions. Her chapter problematises the field of love from an intersectional perspective. In particular, she explores how ideals of love permeate the meaning of what should be desired. Through the production of the "feminine" image and gender identity, affection and what is perceived as "romantic" are constructed as key elements in the erotic and sensorial experiences in cross-dressing. Through this case, the author aims to decentre the romantic bond and provide a radical change of the meaning frameworks of "romantic thought".

Näser-Lather's contribution "*L'Amavo più della sua Vita—I Loved Her More Than Her Life*" starts questioning whether ideals of romantic love are in crisis nowadays. She does this through the analysis of the importance and the role of the concepts of confluent and romantic love in present day Italy, the discursive foundation and the cultural background of those concepts and their entanglement with the discourses on violence against women. She uses religious, feminist and media discourse in order to understand whether discourse on love is closely linked to discourse on gender. Romantic ideals—strongly sexualised, reinforced by the media—seem to play a bigger role than before in shaping the younger generation's relationships, and they are profoundly gender biased as women share those ideals much more than men. Romantic love is connected with a reification of traditional gender role stereotypes. Because of the interdependence of traditionalist norms and romanticism, Italian feminists discuss romanticism and reject romantic love as oppressive while associating confluent love with emancipation. Love entanglement with violence against women, understood as possessions in some imaginaries, makes its redefinition urgent.

Violence against women and its relation to some ideals of love is also the topic of Nardini's contribution under the title "*El amor romántico (no) mata. Thinking through Romantic Love and Men's Engagement for Gender Equality in Spain*". She adopts an ethnographic approach in order to provide an analysis of the ways and contexts in which the question of "rethinking romantic love" emerges within the practices and narratives of social actors involved in equality and anti-violence activism in Barcelona

and Spain. In particular, she focuses on men's organisations that work for gender justice. Nardini draws on the feminist-inspired deconstruction of the "myths of romantic love" that support unequal socio-symbolic relations within normative heterosexual love relationships and contribute to reaffirming gender norms and relational practices closely related to violence against women. She chose the men's organisation *Homes en Diàleg* to see how "rethinking romantic love" can hold a relevant role for men involved in anti-violence activism. She shows how this group affirms love as an emotion that ought to be affirmatively reclaimed as a motivating force for more equal love relationships free of violence and machismo. The positive reaffirmation of love and the discussion of romantic love seem to go hand in hand with questioning current models of masculinity and hetero-normative ideals of gender practices and relationships complicit with machismo.

The contributions in the third section of this volume rely heavily on written forms of love, on love writings. However, all the chapters approach this from a particular and original standpoint. Love letters have a long history: in this volume letters are addressed to the loved ones who died (Grossi), are analysed in their current manifestations such as blogs (Kalmre) or are transformed into an erotic-romantic best-seller (Núñez and Enguix).

Grossi's contribution, "*Love Writing to Beloved Dead. The Continuation of the Loving Feeling Beyond Death*" considers love as a "social fact" that is generally experienced in the corporeality of individual actors but is preserved and lives "after death". Love after death is presented as a prevailing sentiment and is explained through the analysis of the practice of writing by examining the form and content of the letters written for the deceased and left on their graves. The chapter focuses on letters read beside the graves of cemeteries in Paris over two years (2009-2011) and informal conversations that the author had with visitors to the cemeteries.

Grave letters give continuity to the relationship with the dead loved one, communicate love to the deceased and to the community and make love present in the mnemonic system of the cemetery. They are different in form and content from epitaphs and, in this sense, they show how love expressions change with/in time. Particularly interesting in her analysis is the detail with which she studies how the deceased and the author of the letter live by this ritual system, in the latter's conception, in a reality in which they are mutually present and turn love for the deceased into a socially recognised value that combines the intimate experience and the

collective level, where the feeling is socialised with the community of visitors to the cemetery.

Love seems to be one of the main pillars of human society and culture and, in fact, is a prevalent motif in popular culture and media. By studying the collections or archives of written material about love and relationships (notebooks, commonplace books, or friendship albums) that were left in the Estonian Folklore Archives between 1970 and 1990, Kalmre's contribution "*Self-created Love Stories in Girls' Romantic Culture. History and Evolution*" analyses how important love and romantic love stories in girls' culture are. These stories are compared with current work on self-created love stories in the web logs of teenage girls from various online sources. Kalmre considers that self-created love stories are a natural and constantly evolving way of self-expression for girls. Romance and writing and reading romantic love stories is fundamental for girls' gender socialisation. The author reports a considerable change in the meanings associated to love in the two periods analysed: the final decades of the 20th century focused on the ideal of self-sacrificing love whereas in the 21st century the theme of love and romance is closely connected with consumerism and mass culture. Compared to the handwritten stories of the end of the 20th century, the happy ending of the stories aimed at modern girls leads more often to wedding and marriage.

Consumerism, mass culture, wedding and success are precisely the themes developed in the novel analysed in the last chapter of this volume. Núñez and Enguix's chapter on the best-selling trilogy *Fifty Shades of Grey* "*Love Ideals in Fifty Shades of Grey*" explores the ideals of romantic love and its paradoxes in the story of the conversion of Christian Grey and the initiation of Anastasia thanks to the power of romantic love. The authors consider that the enormous success of this novel is connected with the characteristics of the romantic love story it offers because they resonate with many of the expectations and fantasies that its millions of readers have regarding love and what love represents. Through the confrontation of the three books with the comments the readers have made regarding the trilogy posted in the various forums that are part of the "Confiesa tus sombras" (Confess your Shades) website, the authors resolve that these books contain all the elements that characterise romantic love (Illouz 1997) (such as individuality and sex), yet they masterfully resolve and evade the paradoxes that make love a source of suffering (Illouz 2012). This trilogy also includes recurrent sex scenes tinged with mild sadomasochistic sex play, is aligned with 19th century novels and Hollywood films—among other referents present in the novel— and re-

creates the great love myths that have shaped our romantic ideals and fed our imaginations.

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