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Women Look into Love: Reimaginings of Heterosexual Love in Contemporary Women's Fiction

Melina Karekla

Thesis Abstract

This thesis explores how contemporary women writers write about heterosexual love, considering not only the ways it has been implicated in patriarchal models and traditional romance plots, but also its portrayal in light of developments in feminism and fiction in the 1990s and 2000s. The thesis examines Carol Shields's *The Republic of Love* (1992), Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992), Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1993), Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* (2001), Ann Patchett's *Bel Canto* (2001), Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and Doris Lessing's *Love, Again* (1995). In this study it emerges that as well as illustrating continuities, the scope of the treatment of love is opened up further in recent fiction as aspects like age or social, economic and historical factors are centralised and considered in interesting ways. The thesis also identifies some positive approaches to heterosexual love, as in, for example, the emphasis on men's capacity for emotions. However, this is not always the case, as a writer like Lessing further develops a vision of love without providing an affirmative view. Thus, the contemporary women writers' work can be said to contribute to understandings of heterosexual love on many different levels, even as feminist criticisms of repressive, patriarchal forms of romantic relationship continue to remain relevant.

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Department of English Studies

Durham University

2013

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Statement of Copyright

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Introduction

Heterosexual love has been a source of disquiet for feminists in the patriarchal Western world, where men have power over women. The traditional romance plot, to which the heterosexual relationship is arguably integral, has also been perceived as limiting and repressive by feminists. Yet, what will emerge in this thesis is that approaches and attitudes to romantic love and heterosexual relationships in fiction have of late been subject to change; developments within feminism in the 1990s and 2000s, such as the emergence of postfeminism and third-wave feminism, in addition to the increasing appeal of popular genres such as chick lit, have led to a re-evaluation of women's lives and their relationships with the opposite sex. An earlier generation of feminists, like bell hooks, also began to call for the start of a new discussion of love as early as the 2000s.

In light of how reconfigurations of heterosexual love began to be foregrounded in the 1990s and 2000s, a close examination of the ways in which women writers chose to portray romantic relationships between the sexes during this period seems urgent. How women writers are reimagining heterosexual love is illuminated by consideration of feminist writers' and theorists' responses to conventional romance narratives and a more general reflection on the kinds of concerns that have been raised with regard to heterosexual relationships within contemporary patriarchal society. While it is clear that feminists' work on homosexual love is vitally important and has allowed for considerable subversion of traditional expectations of romance, this thesis focuses on heterosexual love as mediated in the writing of selected contemporary women writers. Heterosexual love has received considerable and diverse critical attention, and the focus on how women writers have engaged with such debates and

considerations promises to throw important light on significant preoccupations of contemporary women's fiction.

This study therefore examines seven novels published in the 1990s and early 2000s, each chosen as representative in some way of debates around the nature of contemporary romantic love. It asks are these writers critical of heterosexual love, or do they take a different, and perhaps more positive, approach? Are the selected writers reimagining non-patriarchal and non-traditional approaches to heterosexual love? What aspects of the romantic relationship between the sexes are foregrounded? Have there been any developments in literary treatments of romantic love?

A wide array of writers has been chosen to help address these questions, so that there are some diversities among them; for example, the writers come from a range of different backgrounds such as the US (including more than one ethnic minority), Canada, Britain and South Africa (here the particular author, Nadine Gordimer, is of European descent). In another form of difference, Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer among others have achieved more critical recognition and acclaim than say Ann Patchett, even as they can all be said to be established 'literary' authors. Moreover, it was decided to examine writers from the West or with a Western perspective, as the questions raised here arise in response to feminist debates on romantic love within the Western world and out of Western cultural traditions.

It must be mentioned that although the chosen terminology is heterosexual *love* rather than romance, this is not to suggest that romance is divorced from a discussion of love between the sexes. In fact, later in this introduction it will be seen how fundamental the genre of romance has been to the modern novel, so that any discussion of romantic love in fiction arises out of this context. Moreover, the

heterosexual relationship is an instrumental aspect of the traditional romance plot, so that an exploration of love between men and women is inevitably connected to this, even where a writer may seek to rework or renounce romance's conventions. However, although it is clear that romance comes into this examination, the thesis emphasises *love* as a more helpful and open term; this is because it is able to encompass non-conventional elements that are not usually tackled in the romance genre (for instance, the topic of race or age or communal bonds). So, love provides more scope to cover diverse explorations of men and women's romantic relationships, while it also allows for more flexible extensions to representations of heterosexual love (for example, the efforts of a number of selected writers to move away from patriarchal models and explore alternative ways of loving).

In turning now to an outline of subsequent chapters, the first, "Reclaiming Love in Contemporary Western Culture", looks at *The Republic of Love* (1992), a novel by Carol Shields, a US American based in Canada. This section of the thesis examines how *The Republic of Love* deals with the protagonists' search for love in the modern-day, Western city of Winnipeg, something that encompasses also looking at the subject of the single life and separation. The chapter seeks to identify how romantic love is still underlined as a particularly significant human experience in spite of the Western world's tendency to trivialise and diminish it.

In the next chapter, "Ethnic American Women Turn to Love", Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which considers the damaging effects of racism and white standards of beauty upon her protagonists, will be briefly examined before a turn to *Jazz* (1992), in order to gain a sense of development regarding the author's attitude to love. This chapter looks at how Morrison's vision of romantic love is connected to the

oppression of African Americans, something that is seen here as pointing to the author's socially and historically informed perception of love. The chapter examines how racism, as well as patriarchal beliefs, have an effect on love, whilst also considering how the protagonists' love relationships serve them within such a context.

The second part of "Ethnic American Women Turn to Love", considers how Louise Erdrich, who is partly of Native American descent, views romantic love in the context of a Chippewa community in her novel *Love Medicine* (1993). The chapter brings attention to the way romantic love is presented in relation to the communal and collective, which allows for an unorthodox imagining of heterosexual love.

The first section of the third chapter, "Approaching Difference: Interracial Love Relationships", shows how the South African writer Nadine Gordimer's portrayal of the relationship between a white, affluent woman and an underprivileged, Arab man in *The Pickup* (2001) reveals the importance of openness to difference in love. The chapter delineates how Gordimer points to the significance of woman balancing self-love and love for the other, even as she confronts complexities within this relationship and provides readers with a less than positive ending.

The second part of "Approaching Difference: Interracial Love Relationships" deals with the American Ann Patchett's novel *Bel Canto* (2001), in which an unusual hostage holdup serves to bring together an international, multilingual group of people, with the chapter highlighting the fiction's affirmation of openness to difference within the space of love. Although this section reveals how Patchett does at times take a traditional view of love, it is also seen how patriarchal attitudes are resisted and how the romantic relationships, as well as communal connections, created in captivity permit the cultivation of an alternative way of life.

Chapter Four "Rejecting Patriarchy: Narratives of Alternative Love", first takes a brief look at Canadian author Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976), where she critically engages with the Gothic romance genre, before focusing on *The Blind Assassin* (2000). This chapter identifies how, whilst continuing to resist traditional and patriarchal models of love in her 2000 novel, Atwood also explores the possibility of unconventional love between the sexes that provides some sense of fulfilment and agency for woman outside the space of marriage.

In the final chapter "Age and Love Again: Confronting Prejudice and Unearthing Complexities", Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), a novel widely recognized for its feminist agenda and condemnation of patriarchal relationships between men and women, is considered as a prelude to a fuller exploration of Lessing's *Love, Again* (1995). This last chapter demonstrates how, in her 1995 novel, Lessing challenges perceptions of romantic love by considering how older women still fall in love and have emotional, as well as sexual, needs and wants. Additionally, the chapter sheds light on how Lessing emphasises the complexity of love by creating a formative link between adult romantic investments and primary family relationships.

Firstly though, by way of context, the thesis will begin by examining Virginia Woolf's influential view of women's roles within patriarchal society and their representation in fiction and will go on to explore some second-wave feminists' takes on romantic love. Subsequently, work published in the 1980s on the literary heterosexual romance by Nancy K. Miller, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Tania Modleski and Janice A. Radway will be looked at. Following this, after considering the feminist backlash in the 1980s, such developments as postfeminism, third-wave feminism and

chick lit are outlined. Finally, the introduction evaluates some new approaches to romantic love within current feminist theory.

Feminist Frameworks

Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Germaine Greer

Woolf's shadow is cast over most subsequent feminist writing on the nature of relationships between the sexes and although this thesis concentrates on the writing of women from the 1990s and 2000s, an initial reflection on Woolf's work will provide some sense of the understanding of heterosexual love from the 1920s and its legacy to later generations. In the essay "Professions for Women", which was delivered to the National Society for Women's Service in 1931, Woolf emphasises that woman has been forced to undertake a self-deprecating and self-sacrificial role for the benefit of her husband and children. These demands made upon woman by patriarchal society are envisaged by Woolf as a female phantom that she dubs the Angel in the House, a term she borrows from Coventry Patmore's nineteenth century poem. According to her, this Angel in the House "was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily...she was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own...she was pure".[1] Although she does not specifically refer to romantic love here, Woolf highlights how woman, who only exists in relation to her husband and children, is expected to behave in a self-sacrificial, virtuous manner.

In addition to outlining how woman is supposed to act as the Angel in the House, Woolf discloses, in her well-known essay "A Room of One's Own" (1929),

[1] Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women," Appendix II, *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas,* ed. Michèle Barrett (1993; London: Penguin, 2000) 357.

that "all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day...seen only in relation to the other sex" .[2] As well as shedding light on the way women had only been valued in relation to men, Woolf reveals in her 1929 essay how such limited portrayals result in an odd representation of the female sex: "Hence...the peculiar nature of women in fiction; the astonishing extremes of her beauty and horror; her alternations between heavenly goodness and hellish depravity-for so a lover would see her as his love rose or sank" (75). Woman, who is perceived in relation to the stereotypes of a patriarchal mindset, swings between being 'good' or 'bad', something that also points to the problematical nature of heterosexual relationships in fiction. Yet, Woolf reveals that there are also contradictions between women's representation in history books and real life, and their place in literature and poetry. She writes of these discrepancies in "A Room of One's Own":

> Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger...in real life she ...was the property of her husband. (40)

In highlighting these divergences between real life and fiction, Woolf is able to criticise once again the way in which women are treated in patriarchal culture. However, while Woolf stresses women's absence from history, she lays particular emphasis on marriage, which she evidently views as the predominant form of suppression of women in real, everyday life. In fact, the placing of words such as slave

[2] Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own," Barrett 75.

and ring, as well as husband and property, side by side in the same sentence points to Woolf's criticism of heterosexual relationships and marriage, as it is through this traditional union that woman is made subordinate to man.

Such early feminist writing foresees some of the later reactions against love and marriage that entered feminist history most markedly with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), which could be said to indicate the beginning of the second-wave feminist critique of romantic love.[3] Indeed, de Beauvoir not only initiated this critique of romantic love, but pioneered by writing at a time when feminism was not a particularly powerful and widely disseminated movement.[4] De Beauvoir drew on Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy for the writing of *The Second Sex*,[5] something that allowed her, according to Toril Moi, to develop the claim that "patriarchal ideology presents woman as immanence, man as transcendence" (90). In effect, with *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir "constructed an epic account of gender division throughout history, examining biological, psychological, historical, and cultural explanations for the reduction of women to a second and lesser sex".[6] Such

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[3] According to Susan Ostrov Weisser, "The second-wave feminist movement brought romantic love back to public discourses on feminism, beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's classic in 1952 and continuing to mid-1970s." Susan Ostrov Weisser, "Second-Wave Feminist Theory," *Women and Romance: A Reader,* ed. Susan Ostrov Weisser (New York: New York UP, 2001) 111. In Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2007), Tolan maintains that "second-wave feminism as it is generally recognised refers to the explosion of a highly theorised feminism in the 1960s and 1970s" (10). However, in considering how Margaret Atwood locates second-wave feminism as rising in "the late 1960s", Tolan explains that there is "an element of interpretative freedom in the chronology of the movement", so that the "appearance of de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949 and Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* in 1963 cannot be considered protofeminist anomalies, but rather expressions of an ongoing...developing contemplation of gender relations" (10). Thus, while the 1960s and 1970s are generally accepted as referring to the period of second-wave feminism, these dates cannot be rigidly determined, something that helps explain why de Beauvoir's work is considered by Weisser as marking the start of second-wave feminist discussions of romantic love.

[4] See: Mary Evans, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin* (1985; London: Tavistock, 1986) 60.

[5] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 2nd edition (1985; London: Routledge, 2002) 90.

[6] Fiona Tolan, "Feminisms," *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide,* ed. Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006) 320.

work that "attempted to examine the underlying causes of sexual discrimination was an invaluable starting point for feminists who wanted to progress beyond the demand for civil rights and educational opportunities that had characterized the first-wave" (Tolan, "Feminisms" 320). Hence, de Beauvoir's seminal piece of writing can be seen as helping further develop understanding regarding women's inferior position within patriarchal society.

Nonetheless, what is of particular interest in this thesis is de Beauvoir's writing on romantic love between the sexes, as she shows how woman sacrifices herself for her male partner: "For woman...to love is to relinquish everything for the benefit of a master".[7] Such a stance, echoing Woolf, clearly came as a reaction to the patriarchal suppression of women and the way in which love helped maintain women's subordination. De Beauvoir clarifies how within patriarchal structures the female sex is led early on to believe in the superiority of the male sex, something that helps explain why women adopt such a troubling conception of love:

> Shut up in the sphere of the relative, destined to the male from childhood, habituated to seeing in him a superb being whom she cannot possibly equal, the woman who has not repressed her claim to humanity will dream of transcending her being towards one of those superior beings...There is no other way out for her than to lose herself ...in him who is represented to her as the absolute. (653)

De Beauvoir sheds light on the way patriarchal society idealises the figure of the male and cultivates woman's low sense of self-worth from childhood. As woman is socialised in this manner, she is taught to deny her own self and desire a "complete

[7] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (1949; London: Vintage, 1997) 653.

destruction of self, abolishing the boundaries that separate her from the beloved" (660). Woman is made to believe that value is only to be found through her relationship to man, who is superior. De Beauvoir understands how woman's idealisation of the male, as well as her own self-destructiveness, cannot allow for the cultivation of a fulfilling love experience; in order to illustrate this she states: "Every woman in love recognizes herself in Hans Andersen's little mermaid who exchanged her fishtail for feminine legs through love and then found herself walking on needles and live coals" (664). In making reference to Andersen's little mermaid, de Beauvoir denunciates an essentially patriarchal experience of heterosexual love and one disseminated through literary tradition.

A number of other feminists in the 1960s and 1970s followed de Beauvoir's example of criticising romantic love between men and women. Yet, it is necessary to understand why this period saw such condemnation of male dominance and power, as well as patriarchal constructions of love. According to Toril Moi, female civil rights activists and protestors against the Vietnam war helped launch the "more specific organization of women as feminists" (21). Indeed, in examining how the politically charged period of the 1960s and 1970s helped women organize themselves in an effort to express their own sense of marginalisation within patriarchal society, it is important to also consider the sexual revolution in the Western world during this same period, since, as Juliet Mitchell explains, it instigated the formation of the Women's Liberation Movement:

> For women...the 'sexual revolution' has meant a positive increase in the amount of their sexual (and hence social) freedom; it has also meant an increase in their 'use' as sexual objects. The tension produced by the

> inevitable consequence of the one on the other has, in itself, been a motivating force behind the creation of a Women's Liberation Movement.[8]

Such changes impelled women with a feminist consciousness to unite and rebel against the constraints patriarchal society had imposed upon them. As a result of this politically charged climate, more and more feminist thinkers and writers began to follow de Beauvoir's footsteps in being more openly critical of romantic love between men and women.

This focus on the personal realm of romantic relationships is linked to the emergence of radical feminism, which came out "as a powerful oppositional discourse during the late 1960s".[9] Indeed, while "socialist and liberal feminists embarked primarily on a discussion of social structures and women's unequal position within them, radicals tended to focus on the personal lives of women" (Whelehan 73). The radical feminist Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1969) expresses her opposition to patriarchy, which she perceives "to be the fundamental oppressive force" (Whelehan 15), whilst also challenging the idea that "Western patriarchy has been much softened by...romantic love".[10] As Millett does not want romantic love to disguise "the patriarchal character of Western culture" (37), she highlights how men may exploit women and how love can mask the actual reality of women's position within patriarchal culture:

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[8] Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate* (1971; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1981) 142. Similarly, see Lynne Segal's discussion of the male defined sexual revolution and the feminist reaction to this: Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure* (London: Virago P, 1994) 21-30.

[9] Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'* (1995; Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005) 69.

[10] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (1969; London: Virago P, 1985) 36.

> The concept of romantic love affords a means of emotional manipulation which the male is free to exploit, since love is the only circumstance in which the female is (ideologically) pardoned for sexual activity...Romantic love also obscures the realities of female status and the burden of economic dependency. (37)

Millett takes issue with romantic love, as she sees it as preventing women from recognizing their marginalised position within male dominant society. Thus, within this unequal society, romantic love is regarded in pessimistic terms, as it stops woman from attaining true feminist consciousness. Additionally, in underlining that romantic love is an opportunity for man to exploit a woman sexually, Millett attempts to show that the patriarchal male is not inherently interested in love itself.[11] It is therefore evident in *Sexual Politics* that Millett rejects a patriarchal model of love.

Millett goes on to clarify that a patriarchal attitude is also evident in literature, as seen in her analysis of the male author Henry Miller:

> Miller has given voice to certain sentiments which masculine culture had long experienced but always rather carefully suppressed: the yearning to effect a complete depersonalization of women into cunt, a game-sexuality of cheap exploitation, a childish fantasy of power untroubled by the reality of persons or the complexity of dealing with fellow human beings. (313)

Millett's raw sense of degradation and depersonalisation indicates her awareness of the problematic of masculine culture, which the author Miller represents here. Yet, in

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[11] In Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970; London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), she also expresses the view that men have a troubling relationship to love; as she says "Men can't love" (153). Firestone sees this as having to do with "the psychosexual organizations of the two sexes" (152). It is evident that Millett and Firestone both locate a problematic male stance to love within patriarchal society.

looking at literature, Millett also identifies a turn away from love, which she sees to be the result of the existing 'hostility between the sexes':

> It would appear that love is dead. Or very likely in a bad way...hostility between the sexes has handily outdistanced romance in interest, a development due less to the inherent faults of the romantic myth (a sentimental idealism and traditionally, a rather inhibited sexuality) than it is to the animus toward women which their gains in this century have provoked from jealous patriarchal sentiment. (336)

While it is evident that Millett is aware of the 'faults of the romantic myth,' she understands how it is women's opposition to patriarchy that has caused men to experience animosity towards the female sex, something leading to this perceived literary distancing from romantic love.

Like Millett, Germaine Greer appears eager to dismantle patriarchal models of romantic love in *The Female Eunuch* (1970). Greer, for instance, confronts women's tendency to self-sacrifice within their romantic relationships to men: "it is hard to think of a male/female relationship in which the element of female self-sacrifice was absent".[12] In making this point, Greer follows directly in the footsteps of her predecessor, de Beauvoir, who also saw self-sacrifice in the space of love as one of the main problems for women. In fact, Greer also looks back to how little girls are socialised in an attempt to explain women's behaviour:

> Their concepts of themselves are so confused, and their cultivated dependency so powerful, that they begin to practice self-sacrifice quite early on. They are still expiating their primal guilt for being born when

[12] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (1970; London: Harper Perennial, 2006) 171.

> they bravely give up all other interests and concentrate on making their men happy. (170)

Greer recognizes how women's self-sacrificial behaviour towards their male partners is connected to this confused, unsure sense of self that defines them early on in life and only allows them to find value in being pleasing to the opposite sex.

Moreover, Greer tackles the topic of marriage in *The Female Eunuch*. While in Western society "the gender roles...found acceptable for women...focused on marriage, mothering and domesticity",[13] Greer critically examines these traditional roles, as she states that the "housewife is an unpaid worker in her husband's house in return for the security of being a permanent employee...But the lowest employees can be and are laid off, and so are wives" (272). In trying to contradict the notion that a marriage is necessarily 'forever', Greer questions whether this kind of a union functions as a permanent form of security for women: "If marriage were a contract with safeguards and indemnities indicated in it it would still not provide emotional security" (272). Greer emphasises that woman's role as wife is not to be regarded as one that will necessarily provide her with any kind of emotional, or financial, security.

In *The Female Eunuch* Greer is evidently conscious of the "domestic romantic myth" which "remains the centrepiece of feminine culture" (211). However, marriage, which is critically examined here, functions only as one part of the plot or story that is continuously recycled in women's publications. Greer maintains that "Women's magazines treat the same story over and over again...falling in love, the kiss, the declaration and the imminent wedding are the staple of the plot" (211). In making

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[13] Helen Dennis, "Gender in American Literature and Culture," *The United States in the Twentieth Century: Culture*, eds. Jeremy Mitchell and Richard Maidment (Milton Keynes: The Open University-Hodder&Stoughton, 1994) 71.

reference to the romance plot, which will be examined in greater detail later within the chapter, Greer also reveals the deceptiveness of this story or plot, as it does not correspond to the reality of men and women's relationships; as she states, it is "more likely she will discover that marriage is not romantic...In the courting phase her relationship was all glamour (spell-binding as the preliminary to imprisonment in the glass mountain)...Marriage is the end of the story" (209). Greer denounces the conventional romantic plot women are invested in, as it does not prepare them for the realities and possible limitations of married life. Consequently, it is apparent that at the hub of the second-wave feminist movement, women were encouraged to reconsider their view of marriage, and to develop critical awareness of patriarchal and conventional models of heterosexual love.

The Heterosexual Romance in Literary Fiction and Popular Romance Novels

Greer, Millett and de Beauvoir, who established the basis for a critique of patriarchy on humanist, economic, liberal and existentialist grounds as a condition of inequality and unequal power, have been seen to consider the problematic nature of heterosexual relationships within male dominant society. As key female figures who contributed significantly to the discussion of romantic love between the sexes, they facilitated later work done by other feminists and critics on this subject. While this section will examine how four 1980s critics tackle the heterosexual romance, it seems important to at least briefly acknowledge here some of the other kinds of valuable work done by feminist literary critics in the late 1970s. For instance, Elaine Showalter conceived the notion of 'gynocriticism' and, in *Literature of their Own* (1977), "combined gynocentric rereadings of canonical female authors with an examination of unknown

writers in an attempt to revolutionize the accepted canon" (Tolan, "Feminisms" 328). Feminists were no longer willing to accept their marginalisation within literature, so that it became important to depart from the limited notion of a male canon. Showalter focused on rewriting the canon while others, like Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), took a close look at works of important nineteenth century women writers. In considering the woman writer's position in a male dominated society, Gilbert and Gubar look at how her voice "would have to take a rather round-about route to express itself through or against the oppressive effects of the dominant patriarchal modes of reading" (Moi 58). In fact, a significant aspect of *The Madwoman in the Attic* is seen to be its examination of the "monster woman...who refuses to be selfless" and "has a story to tell" (Moi 57).

Alongside these different efforts to depart from narrow patriarchal interpretations, there are four critics, in particular, who in the 1980s turned their attention to traditional romance plots and representations of heterosexual romance from the eighteenth century onwards. The focus on woman within the romance plot, which in Nancy K. Miller's work emerges as central to the development of the modern novel, serves as the locus for upholding patriarchal beliefs and conventions. The kinds of patriarchal notions influencing the romance plot led Rachel Blau DuPlessis to bring together twentieth century literary fiction that questions and destabilises these traditional narratives. However, Tania Modleski and Janice A. Radway turn to consideration of popular romance novels, trying to understand the complexities of these often critically neglected texts. In examining genre fantasies, they shed light on women's deep needs and desires, whilst also maintaining a critical stance in relation to the patriarchal messages ingrained in the novels. Interviews conducted by Radway

allowed her to explore readers' relationships to these novels and to interrogate and understand their preferences for certain kinds of romances. Radway's and Modleski's attempts to better understand why readers are so drawn to these novels indicate how their approach differs from previous feminist work in this area. As Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey assert, "In terms of feminist attempts to theorize romance...the work of Modleski and Radway in the 1980s signalled a radical departure from the earlier feminists...who perceived it to be a monolithically pernicious and disabling ideology".[14]

Indeed, this critical work was instrumental in establishing the contexts for the ways in which women writers, in novels published in the 1990s and 2000s, would begin to reimagine heterosexual love. As indicated at the start of the introduction, it is now in recognizing how traditional romance narratives have been established and received that it becomes possible to appreciate the efforts of contemporary women writers to depart from established writerly and cultural conventions in order to rethink heterosexual love.

In *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782* (1980), Nancy K. Miller looks at a number of eighteenth century novels, which allows her to uncover "cultural commonplaces about woman's identity and woman's place" and "to read the ideological subscript of literary femininity in the eighteenth century".[15] In trying to determine woman's particular role within the literature of the period, Miller examines what she calls the heroine's text: "By heroine's text... I mean...the inscription of a female destiny, the fictionalization of what is to be taken to

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[14] Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce, "The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance," *Romance Revisited,* ed. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995) 13.
[15] Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980) x.

be the feminine at a specific cultural moment (at the moment...of the birth, or rise, of the modern novel)" (x). This woman-oriented focus is indicative of the way in which the modern novel came into existence through a growing preoccupation with the individual; indeed, Ian Watt refers to "the transition from the objective, social and public orientation of the classical world to the subjective, individualist and private orientation of the life and literature of the last two hundred years".[16] Thus, the heroine's text, which will be seen to be centred on the lives of individual female characters, reflects the novel form's development.

In considering the depiction of women in the 1700s, it is the male authors' focus on female sexuality which is particularly striking; Miller establishes that "the heroine's text is the text of an ideology that codes femininity in paradigms of sexual vulnerability" (xi). The centrality of woman's sexual vulnerability in the feminocentric novel, which is a term espoused by Miller, predicates why so often the "virtuous and innocent heroine inevitably will be called upon to confront a seducer" (7). Despite a pervasive emphasis on the sexual with regard to woman, Miller indicates in more formal terms that there are "two female-centred plots...the 'euphoric' and the 'dysphoric' text", of which "the novels in the euphoric text end with the heroine's integration into society" and "are structured by a trajectory of ascent", while those in the dysphoric text "end instead with the heroine's death" (xi).[17]

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[16] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957; London: Pimlico; 2000) 176.

[17] Miller's work can be seen as related to phallocentric criticism which "characterized the start of the second wave" and "worked to...demonstrate concealed attitudes to femininity, and...created a new understanding of seemingly coincidental motifs. The practice has become a staple of feminist criticism, radically altering the way in which canonical authors are read. Feminists...have pointed to the frequency with which novels punish women associated with sexuality and lust" (Tolan, "Feminisms" 327). Indeed, Millett's earlier criticism of the male author Henry Miller can also be said to constitute as part of this effort.

The heroine, who is often an orphan, is meant to be quintessentially virtuous and innocent, in a manner similar to Woolf's Angel in the House. Moreover, the heroine's virtuosity must extend to her aspirations for love; for instance in *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, "Mme Tourvel and Julie are both attracted to a concept of love purified and desexualized by the exercise of virtue" (126). Yet, the heroine may stray from this ideal of virtuosity and partake in unchaste behaviour, like the thieving Moll in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1721) who has various lovers and husbands and Fanny in John Cleland's *Memoirs of Fanny Hill* (1748), who works as a prostitute. These two heroines though do return to 'honesty' and 'goodness' by the end; Miller establishes that this is because, "However resourceful and experienced as adventuresses...both claim to need a man in order to attain independence...Fanny and Moll cease to circulate as objects only when they are integrated within the family; neutralized by the bourgeois and Protestant morality" (63). Indeed, the heroines' ability to redeem themselves by ultimately fulfilling the expectations of patriarchal, conservative society determines why these novels belong to the 'euphoric' text category. The manner in which the heroines atone for their 'wrongdoings' suggests that the female in eighteenth century literary fiction must always define herself in relation to man, albeit in the 'right', socially accepted way. It appears that Miller, like Woolf, is conscious of this limiting interpretation of woman; in fact, later in the thesis, Nadine Gordimer will be seen to counter such restrictive notions when highlighting the importance of woman respecting her own needs, even if this may require following a different path from her male partner.

Manon, in *Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1731) by Antoine-François Prévost, does not fare as well as the heroines in the euphoric text category, the novel concluding with her death. *Manon Lescaut* tells "the story of Des Grieux's love for a harlot called Manon" (70), who is primarily interested in the financial benefits of the 'illicit' affair. Miller explains how the disorder brought about by the affair is resolved through Manon's death, as it helps re-establish the accepted status quo:

> Des Grieux...survives the loss of his...mistress; and the novel ends with his reinsertion into the social life from which his liaison with Manon had excluded him...if Manon's existence disrupted the social order...her death...allows for the reestablishment of social continuity. The power of illicit sexuality incarnated by Manon is defused and neutralized by her death. (81-82)

Considering that "the plots of these fictions are also those of the culture",[18] it becomes apparent that women are punished in the novel for not abiding by fundamental social expectations and for a displaying a forbidden and threatening sexuality. Therefore, if the heroine cannot learn to personify goodness and righteousness and does not enter the legal sanction of marriage, death appears as the only viable ending in these eighteenth century novels: "Without marriage as *telos*, there can only be death" (82).[19]

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[18] Joan Hinde Stewart, rev. of *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782,* by Nancy K. Miller, *The French Review* 54.5 (1981): 738, *JSTOR,* 20 June 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/391226>.

[19] In light of this emphasis on marriage, it is interesting to note that some centuries back marriage was not even notionally tied to romantic love; for instance, in Juliet Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution: Essays on Feminism, Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Virago P, 1984), she writes that "in the twelfth and thirteenth century adulterous romantic love is a search for some unattainable ideal and that at the end of the sixteenth century this becomes harnessed as one of the main means to marriage" (108). See Mitchell (103-114) for a further understanding of the development of

In revealing the harsh rules governing the heroine's fate Miller is able to show how "The plots of these feminocentric fictions are...neither female in impulse or origin, nor feminist in spirit" (149). Miller, like many of the feminists looked at previously, remains committed to revealing the problematic nature of male authored literature. However, in subsequent chapters this rigid male approach will be seen to be bypassed, something exemplified by the way marriage is not considered as the basis for a fulfilling relationship in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*. Indeed, even when marriage is embraced, as will be seen, for instance, in Carol Shields's *The Republic of Love*, the author has a more open attitude to this convention, as she is also willing to consider the sense of uncertainty and ambivalence that can define modern married couples' relationships.

Miller indicates that when a heroine is unable to meet the expectations of society, she may, as is seen in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa: or the History of a Young Lady* (1748), welcome death. Indeed, Clarissa is drawn to death after having being raped by Lovelace, as it permits her to escape coming to terms with her own sexuality, which would, in turn, require confronting the culture's conservative and traditional beliefs regarding women. Miller elucidates, "Death provides Clarissa with the security she could never have in life: infallible protection against disruptive sexuality" (94). The novel's fixation with female sexuality, a common feature in the heroine's text, points, according to Miller, to "the unsaid ambivalence on the part of male writers toward the very existence of female desire, and an unsayable anxiety about its power" (134). Indeed, the unease with woman's sexuality appears to be reflected in the portrayal of Lovelace's aggressive and controlling act, by which, as

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romantic love in literature from the twelfth and thirteenth to the sixteenth and early seventeenth century and also for the psychoanalytic angles offered.

Watt affirms, Clarissa becomes "prey" (231). It is this male ambivalence towards woman and the need to reassert power, which are issues Millett also traced to Henry Miller, that can be said to lead Lovelace to attack and force Clarissa into submissiveness; moreover, this unease with female sexuality is something that Clarissa internalizes, thus leading to her death wish. Miller reveals how women must adopt a victim like role against a powerful and sexually domineering male.

In examining *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), another novel by Richardson, Miller illuminates the absurdity of Pamela's marriage to Mr. B, the master who held her captive and attempted rape: "Pamela's destiny is to be installed in marriage, her virtue to be rewarded by a man who threatened it" (49). It is evident that Pamela tolerates his behaviour as she has assimilated her culture's values, which prize the male master above the servant girl: "Instead of being outraged by Mr. B's cruel pursuit, Pamela accepts the legitimacy of his behaviour to the extent that she interprets his anger from and within the fixed hierarchy of power" (45). Mr. B's position of authority convinces Pamela that he is within his rights to treat her as he does. This portrayal of heterosexual 'courtship' in the eighteenth century novel points to how the heroine can only aspire to any social and economic power through her husband, whom she wins over by accepting her own inferior standing and by consistently displaying her virtuosity and innocence. In embodying the values expected of woman in conservative, patriarchal society, Pamela is eventually rewarded with "marriage and social elevation" (37). Miller exposes the complex social and economic factors governing heterosexual relationships in these early novels.

Richardson's work has had a significant role to play in the development of the novel as a whole; Watt refers to the "importance of Richardson's position in the

tradition of the novel", as he based "his novels on a single action, a courtship" (135). It is evident that Richardson impacted the novel's centring on the progression of a single romantic relationship; however, it has also become clear how the narrative action in these texts greatly depends upon the reproduction of patriarchal views and stereotypes of the sexes. Miller is also conscious of how the courtship novel *Pamela*, which 'successfully' resolves the eighteenth century textual "struggle...between virtue and vice" (46), has been influential in perpetuating female stereotypes: "It is Pamela...the heroine who maintains her innocence and is rewarded...by marriage, who becomes the incarnation of the feminine ideal in the eighteenth century (and after)" (151). Moreover, Miller states that "Although Pamela's success has not been rewritten as serious literature, it remains the blueprint for bestsellers: programs for women only" (50). Indeed, the forthcoming sections on Janice Radway and Tania Modleski will demonstrate how contemporary popular romances have adopted some of the basic tenets of novels like *Pamela*. In revealing the influential role of such texts, it emerges that modern-day female readers are consuming aspects of a plot once established by eighteenth century male authors. As Nanette Le Coat asserts, "Female plots...are the result of a male plot".[20] Miller, therefore, traces the origins of a plot that has shaped the way women view themselves, as well as how heterosexual relationships are imagined within contemporary popular culture.

Miller's shedding of light on the patriarchal and conservative notions dictating the heroine's existence and romantic relationships in the eighteenth century novel helps explain why a number of twentieth century writers, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis will now be seen to show, sought to escape these rigid and limiting plots. Indeed, in

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[20] Nanette Le Coat, rev. of *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782,* by Nancy K. Miller, *MLN* 96.4 (1981): 939, *JSTOR,* 20 June 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2905854>.

DuPlessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (1985), she examines the works (dated approximately from the start of the twentieth-century up until the early 1980s)[21] of writers seeking to subvert the romance plot that was also problematised by Miller. DuPlessis offers a particular definition of the romance plot: "What I call a romance or marriage plot is the use of conjugal love as a telos and of the developing heterosexual love relation as a major, if not the only major, element in organizing the narrative action".[22]

As part of her effort to critically depart from the traditional romance plot, DuPlessis clarifies from the start that "heterosexuality is not a natural law, for it must be produced in individuals; nor is it exclusively a personal, private, or sexual choice, but a cultural and narrative ideology" (xi). Thereby, DuPlessis addresses an unquestioned assumption in the heroine's text, since heterosexual coupling and marriage were presented as being so integral to the female character's development that not abiding by this social and narrative rule usually meant succumbing to a premature death. DuPlessis argues that this "marriage/death closure in the romance plot is a 'place' where ideology meets narrative" (19). Indeed, it can be said that already "Any social convention is like a script" (2), while "Any literary convention...as an instrument that claims to depict experience, also interprets it. No convention is neutral, purely mimetic" (2). DuPlessis sheds light on how social and literary conventions work in similar ways, as they create and interpret their own version of 'truth' whilst appearing to present an objective reality.

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[21] DuPlessis primarily examines twentieth century texts but also considers some nineteenth century ones.

[22] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 200.

In unearthing the romance plot's ideological structures, DuPlessis tackles what she perceives to be some of its most disconcerting aspects:

> the romance plot muffles the main female character, represses quest, valorizes heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties, incorporates individuals within couples as sign of their personal and narrative success...values sexual asymmetry...is based on extremes of sexual difference...the romance plot...is a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole. (5)

It is evident that DuPlessis views the romance plot as a reflection of the imbalance and inequality existing between the sexes in patriarchal culture. So it is not only that heterosexuality is privileged in opposition to other forms of relationship within the romance plot, but that it serves as another space affirming already existing gender stereotypes and further diminishing woman's individual potential. When looking back, for instance, to Miller's reference to Richardson's *Pamela*, it is clear that the novel's development allows for the male master's power to be asserted in opposition to the heroine, who is presented as not only accepting her captor's dominance but ultimately acceding to become his wife. Indeed, this is indication of how, as Virginia Woolf declares, "until very lately, women in literature were the creation of men".[23] The existence of such gender discrimination helps illuminate why twentieth-century writers felt it necessary to undertake literary departures from the romance plot; as DuPlessis states, "For reasons that can be linked to their gender position, women writers formulate a critique of heterosexual romance" (xi).

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[23] Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction", *Granite and Rainbow: Essays by Virginia Woolf* (London: The Hogarth P, 1958) 82.

In critiquing the heterosexual romance, there is an attempt to 'write beyond the ending', which presupposes taking "ending as metaphor for conventional narrative, for a regimen of resolutions, and for the social, sexual, and ideological affirmations these make" (21). Moreover, "Writing beyond the ending means the transgressive invention of narrative strategies, strategies that express critical dissent from dominant narrative" (5). The reference to dominant narrative here clearly includes the traditional conclusions to novels expanded on by Miller; indeed, as DuPlessis explains, it becomes necessary to "replace the alternate endings in marriage and death...by offering a different set of choices" (4). Twentieth-century writers reject the limiting options offered within these traditional scripts, thereby alerting women to the possibility of new choices and other ways.[24] While the contemporary fiction examined in the main body of this thesis focuses on heterosexual relationships, it will be seen how the writers also often explore non-traditional aspects within this context; for instance, Louise Erdrich illustrates how the romantic relationships in her novel are characterised by a complexity that does not allow for a conventional 'happily ever after'.

Nonetheless, *Writing Beyond the Ending* looks at how in trying to open up to "a different set of choices", a writer like Virginia Woolf decentres heterosexual love; DuPlessis explains that following Woolf's initial two novels, "heterosexual romance is displaced from a controlling and privileged position in her work. It will never again appear as the unique center of narrative concern; it will never again appear assumed or

[24] Such an attempt can be linked to the development of ècriture feminine in the 1970s within French feminist theory, which came to mean "a uniquely feminine style of writing, characterized by disruptions in the text; gaps, silences, puns, rhythms, and new images" that is unlike masculine language which is "linear, logical, authoritative, and realistic" (Tolan, "Feminisms" 335-336). Although DuPlessis refers to different narrative strategies rather than a feminine style of writing, it seems that both represent a move away from linear patriarchal structures.

unquestioned" (47-48). DuPlessis captures a development in Woolf's writing, whereby the old narrative emphasis on heterosexual love and marriage is resisted. However, DuPlessis demonstrates how Woolf understood this modification only to have become viable due to "the social changes that women as a group have undergone. Because women are now (in general) wage earners and citizens, they need no longer be overdependent upon winning love to achieve self-worth, economic status, and class position" (163). Evidently, as woman's dependence on man for her social and economic survival lessens, it becomes possible for twentieth-century women to embark on the writing of new scripts. In essence, in drawing attention to how the passage of time can alter women's relationship to love, it is possible to appreciate the way ideas and attitudes to romantic love are continuously evolving and shifting, something that will also be evident later on in this thesis.

DuPlessis shows how heterosexual love is further pushed away from the centre by addressing the "loop backward to mother-child attachments" (37) in novels like Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. DuPlessis believes that the privileging of such relationships allows for a move away from Freudian theory, which supports the idea that a girl's healthy development is defined in terms of her ability to successfully manage the turn from mother to father, thereby securing her entrance into the sphere of heterosexual relations. In fact, DuPlessis detects a correlation between Freudian theory and traditional endings of earlier novels:

> Freudian theory, postulating the telos of 'normal femininity' as the proper resolution of the oedipal crisis, bears an uncanny resemblance to the nineteenth-century endings of narrative, in which the female hero

> becomes the heroine and in which the conclusion of a valid love plot is the loss of any momentum of quest...For Freudian theory puts a high premium on female passivity...and on the 'end' of husband, home and male child. (35)

DuPlessis views the psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow as presenting an alternative to Freudian theory; in drawing on Chodorow's work, DuPlessis outlines that "in the development of a girl, the preoedipal attachment to the mother is never entirely given up; it persists in coloring oedipalization" (36-37). Although DuPlessis observes that "the gendering process is the 'arena' where the goal of heterosexuality is 'negotiated'" (37), she conceives how the daughter's development is also significantly marked by her mother and how this stage is "where the mother-daughter dyad and female bonding are affirmed" (37).[25]

Incorporating a more expansive engagement with psychoanalytical theory is perceived by DuPlessis as particularly significant for women. She states:

> The narrative and cultural implications of this neo-Freudian picture of gendering are staggering. With no easy or one-directional passage to 'normal femininity', women as social products are characterized by unresolved and continuous alternations between allegiance to males and females, between heterosexuality and female-identified, lesbian, or bisexual ties...Twentieth –century women writers undertake a reassessment of the process of gendering by inventing narrative

[25] Tolan also refers to how feminists "struggled with the patriarchal narrative..." of the Oedipal Complex that saw the child as having to deny the mother and "accept the authority of the father" ("Feminisms" 334). As Tolan explains, feminists "turned instead to further examine the nature of the pre-Oedipal period. This study was called 'object relations' because it examined the pre-verbal relationship of the child and the unnamed mother, and it discovered the omnipotent mother" (334). This focus on the mother is something DuPlessis captures in her work.

> strategies...that neutralize, minimize, or transcend any oversimplified oedipal drama. (37)

DuPlessis suggests that women writers have been able to intuit what Freudian theory could not and that in doing so, question and decentre the traditional romance plot. Essentially, in exploring ties between women, like the mother-child bond, these writers express their unwillingness to define their female characters solely in relation to a man. Unlike Miller, DuPlessis introduces psychoanalytic thought to approaching narrative development. Later in this thesis Lessing will be seen to draw on Chodorow's work as she considers how the mother continues to have a significant influence on the adult female protagonist.

DuPlessis also shows how some writers portray bisexual and lesbian love plots, thus moving further away from traditional representation. In reference to H.D., DuPlessis attests to the author's way of "exploring a bisexual love plot as another avenue to the critique of heterosexual romance...*HERmione* offers the vivid depiction not only of heterosexual desire...but also of lesbian desire" (71). Once again DuPlessis draws attention to the shift away from heterosexual love as centre, given that other kinds of romantic relationships emerge as equally significant and valid. In emphasising lesbian desire in *Writing Beyond the Ending*, DuPlessis also turns to Adrienne Rich, examining her use of the term 'lesbian continuum'. With this term, Rich means to "embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support".[26] More than just acknowledging the existence of sexual desire, Rich recognizes and honours the

[26] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5. 4 (1980): 648-649, *JSTOR,* 22 June 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>.

possible variances in women's connections. This approach contrasts sharply with that of the male authors examined by Miller in *The Heroine's Text*, where woman was primarily defined by her relationship to a male representative of power, such as her husband. Regarding Rich's introduction of the term 'lesbian continuum', DuPlessis underlines how this points to an important development: "The poles of dominant and alternative are shifted; more than a delegitimation of main culture by an oppositional stance, this is a capture of centrality by a perspective once falsely or ignorantly considered only of secondary importance" (135). Rather than defining Rich as a marginal voice of dissent, DuPlessis sees her as bringing forth a new centrality that is specifically women oriented. Indeed, while the contemporary women writers looked at in this thesis do not foreground lesbian relationships in the selected novels, there will be seen to be an emphasis on the value of female ties, thereby highlighting the significance of nourishing different kinds of connection.

The openness characterising this making of room for other kinds of relationship is also evident in DuPlessis's coining of what she calls the 'multiple individual', something which she feels Dorothy Richardson has developed in her work. In effect, it is Richardson's portrayal of the female perspective as "holistic, synthetic, totalizing, rather than instrumental, calculating, rational" (153) that leads DuPlessis to refer to this multiple individual. She elaborates: "Their capacity for fusing opposite perspectives, for seeing things from so many viewpoints...makes women multiple individuals" (153). Women's proclivity to difference and their ability to remain open to various outlooks defines them as multiple individuals and suggests a departure from the rigid and inflexible marriage/death plot: "making the narrative center be the multiple individual...is an oppositional narrative strategy, denying the

force of marriage as an end as well as death and judgment" (155-156). Evidently, the multiple individual serves as a form of resistance in the novel, since the holistic and multifaceted approach embodied by such a female character figures as incompatible with the finality of the traditional romance plot. Allowing such a multiple individual to take centre stage in a novel necessitates an opening up to the diversity and complexity of life, rather than the kind of narrowing down evident in the traditional romance plot, with its severe marriage/death principle; as DuPlessis writes, "One of the functions of the multiple individual as a strategy would be to absorb and present the plural, contradictory universe in an inclusive, not selective, fashion" (156). In documenting such strategies, DuPlessis is able to shed light on new possibilities for women, rather than remain focused on a critique of male plots, as Miller was seen to do.

In addition to this notion of the multiple individual is the choral, communal or group protagonist, also serving as a means of disrupting the romance plot. According to DuPlessis,

> The communal protagonist is a way of organizing the work so that neither the development of an individual against a backdrop of supporting characters nor the formation of a heterosexual couple is central to the novel...the choral protagonist makes the group, not the individual, the central character...the novel can suggest the structures of social change in the structures of narrative. (163)

Here DuPlessis refers to Woolf's *The Years* and *Between the Acts* as examples of novels that make use of the communal protagonist, which is clearly another inventive method employed as means of combating dependency on oppressive structures and traditions. Indeed, as a novel is based around a group rather than an individual, it is

rendered impossible to focus exclusively on a central protagonist's developing romantic relationship, indicating how resistance to romance can be achieved by structuring the narrative in a manner that does not favour its growth. Although Erdrich's *Love Medicine* that will be looked at in Chapter Two does not make full use of the communal protagonist strategy, as each chapter is structured around a particular individual's story, the novel as a whole does look at a network of characters living in a Native American reservation and strives to emphasise the significance of the communal and collective in their lives and romantic relationships. It is evident that many women writers take a more open, non-traditional approach, even as Erdrich incorporates such alternative aspects into her exploration of heterosexual love.

DuPlessis also determines that "Raising the issue of the future is another tactic for writing beyond the ending" as,

> Having been posed as an experiment in change and choice, a novel typically ends by asserting that choice is over and that the growth of character or the capacity for defining action has ceased. If 'happily ever after' means anything, it means that pleasurable illusion of stasis. (178)

The 'happily ever after' accompanying the customary marriage at the end of a novel conveys a deceptive sense of finality. Essentially, this kind of narrative conclusion implies that the couple has reached a space of equilibrium and stability, whereby they are liberated from any further confrontations with life. DuPlessis contends that in tackling the notion of the future, the illusion of an end is questioned: "if a novel travels through the present into the future, then social or character development can no longer be felt as complete" (178). In bringing in the future, it is no longer possible to support

the ‘pleasurable illusion of stasis’, as time remains open and unfinished. The ‘happily ever after’ is annulled, as the future implies more change and development.

As well as delving into the future, fiction can experiment with a departure from the ‘rules of the world’; according to DuPlessis, there are

> women across the century who, from Charlotte Perkins Gilman to Doris Lessing, challenge the world as we know it by a resolute imagining of other times and other customs. This group of novels may have speculative, fantasy, or ‘science fiction’ elements, such as time travel, telepathic communication, the discovery of a utopian civilization, or the sense of a world parallel to ours...to estrange readers from the rules of the world as known. (179)

DuPlessis considers how science fiction can assist writers in moving away from social rules and conventions, allowing them thereby to experiment with new orders. Indeed, these alternative spaces emerge as where the non-dominant is allowed to prevail: “Speculative fiction by women visualises a world where muted groups, values, and institutions become dominant, and...seems particularly interested in visualizing alternatives to the nuclear family” (186). So, while Miller critically evaluates how woman must fulfil social expectations and take up the role of wife, DuPlessis reveals how women writers can seek out alternative spaces where such requirements do not apply. Atwood also makes use of elements of science fiction in *The Blind Assassin*, though she chooses to simulate and amplify patriarchal structures, which are both critiqued and partially defied. Clearly, science fiction serves women writers in different ways as an effective medium for challenging patriarchy.

Writing Beyond the Ending highlights the many ways in which twentieth-century writers were able to oppose patriarchal conventions and explore other avenues of expression and thought. The critique and departure from the traditional romance plot, which determined that the heroine's fate be resolved in marriage or death, lies at the heart of women writers' efforts to 'write beyond the ending'. So, although more contemporary novels by women writers will be seen in this thesis to return to the concern of heterosexual love, and to shed some new light on it, DuPlessis's work allows for an appreciation of the preceding developments in attitudes and approaches.

In *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (1982), Tania Modleski goes in a different direction to DuPlessis, as she examines Harlequin Romances and Gothic novels.[27] Even though "women's criticism of popular feminine narratives has generally adopted...dismissiveness; hostility...or, most frequently, a flippant kind of mockery",[28] Modleski defends the significance of these novels:

> The present work was conceived and undertaken out of concern that these narratives were not receiving the right kind of attention. I...explore the reasons for the deep-rooted and centuries-old appeal of the narratives. Their enormous and continuing popularity...suggests that they speak to very real problems and tensions in women's lives. (5)

[27] While *Loving with a Vengeance* also includes a chapter on soap operas, this section here will be focusing on her work on Harlequin romances and Gothic novels, as it is the novel form that is of particular interest to this study.

[28] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*, 2nd ed (1982; New York: Routledge, 2008) 4.

Modleski takes a different approach here to previous feminists, not only as she turns to popular romance novels, but as she considers how they are successful with women because of the way they handle certain issues that remain of concern to them.[29]

Modleski first turns to Harlequin Romances, a popular form not held in high esteem in spite of its enormous success. Modleski is conscious of how the Harlequin romances, which have such appeal for women, utilise an old formula. Indeed, Samuel Richardson's novels are seen to be the predecessors of the Harlequins, something that can be recognized when Modleski gives an account of the established Harlequin formula: "a young, inexperienced, poor to moderately well-to-do woman...becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man, older than herself" who is "mocking...even somewhat brutal" until the end when "the hero reveals his love for the heroine" (28). The formula is immediately reminiscent of *Pamela*, pointing to how this eighteenth century romance plot continues to be relevant for modern-day women readers. The particular formula though will not be seen to hold in the novels looked at in the thesis, as Lessing, for example, self-consciously opposes the tendency to only associate young women with romantic love. Yet, while such resistance to limiting notions of love will be seen to be valuable, it is also important to recognize that such traditional ideas still appeal to many women.

In an effort to understand what it is about these novels that draws women, Modleski considers the 'disappearing act' enabled by the Harlequins, which she feels points to "what is laudable and what is deplorable in the appeal of such fiction"; this is because, on the one hand "women should stop vanishing quietly behind the scenes and

[29] The consideration of popular romance novels here seems related to the rise of Cultural Studies in 1960s and specifically feminist Cultural Studies as "from the mid-1970s onwards", "attempts were made to rethink key areas of work-for example... women's magazines, non-canonical women's writing, and romantic fiction". See: Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, "Literature into Culture: Cultural Studies After Leavis," Waugh 250.

start making themselves more visible" (28), while on the other hand, "women's longing to 'disappear'...when mass culture has turned women into delectable sights for consumption-surely cannot be completely condemned" (29). Modleski appreciates that while such escapism may keep women in a passive and inferior position, their need is justifiable when considering the over-sexualisation and objectification of women within patriarchal culture. So, romance reading serves women in certain ways, even as it maintains submissiveness.

Modleski recognizes that, "The complexity of women's responses to romances has not been sufficiently acknowledged" (29). She thus takes a more in-depth approach as she explores the revenge fantasy that defines the Harlequin heroine's own disappearing act: "In most of the novels, the hero finally becomes aware of the heroine's 'infinite preciousness' after she has run away, disappeared...or otherwise shown by threat of her annihilation how important her life really is. This...conceals a deep-seated desire for vengeance" (37). Modleski poses that these romances allow women to express anger at men, even as the heroine appears to be only harming herself. In fact, it is the indirect way in which the heroine's anger is communicated within the Harlequins that accounts for Modleski's call for recognition of an existing complexity. As Modleski explains, woman's self belittlement actually demonstrates anger:

> It is crucial to understand the double-edged nature of women's revenge fantasies. As long as resentment is accompanied by self-denigration, Harlequin Romances can hardly be said to perform a liberating function. However, once it becomes clear how much woman's anger and hostility is reflected in...these seemingly simple 'love stories', all

> notions about women 'cherishing the chains of their bondage' becomes untenable. (39)

Modleski maintains that a heroine's suffering functions as the means for her, and the woman readers, to express suppressed fury against the representatives of patriarchal power. This suggests that the romances, although not progressive, can provide a legitimate outlet for women's anger and frustration. In effect, while DuPlessis strove to show how the heterosexual romance plot was undermined or subverted, Modleski points to the possibility of understanding women's emotions through an in-depth look at a much disregarded genre.

Modleski highlights how these romances serve readers, whilst also exercising critical judgment. This multi-faceted approach allows Modleski to condemn Harlequins for presenting male brutality as a "manifestation not of contempt, but of love" (33), whilst also remaining conscious of how women learn to justify men's behaviour through their reading: "Since readers are prepared to understand the hero's behaviour in terms of the novel's ending, some of the serious doubts women have about men can be confronted and dispelled" (33). So, while legitimizing a troubling element of male dominance, Modleski perceives how this can assist women in translating aggression into something more acceptable. Harlequins function as coping mechanisms within patriarchal society, even as they cannot be said to provide an alternative imagining of heterosexual love or push for any kind of change.

In addition to tackling the matter of male brutality, Modleski looks at how the Harlequins portray the heroine as childlike: "the heroine's extreme youthfulness must...be stressed...A heroine must not even understand sexual desire, for knowledge entails guilt; but since she is a child and knows not what she does, she can do a lot and

be excused" (43). Modleski recognizes that such representations can be damaging to woman readers who "freely view the fantasy as their fantasy" and for whom "The novel becomes an expression of their own hopes and fears" (47), since they cannot assume the idealized feminine qualities of the heroine. This is because such depictions are only feasible through the Harlequins' third person point of view, which permits commentary on aspects such as the heroine's attractiveness and sexual allure that would appear as contradictory to her presumed innocence had it been in the first person (46-47). The technique evidently helps support the ideal female image that was also crucial in the eighteenth century novel; however, the reader's identification with the story creates feelings of guilt as the supposed feminine virtues of the heroine collapse in relation to her. In effect, "the simple substitution of 'I'" (47) reveals "how readers' identification with the heroine turns feminine virtues into their opposites: innocence becomes guile; selflessness becomes insensitivity and self-absorption...In the end, women readers reemerge feeling...more guilty" (47). The switch from third to first person that takes place for the reader exposes the artificiality of such idealised female qualities, as they only hold up in a very controlled setting, and otherwise trigger guilt. Indeed, the reader is not absolved from taking responsibility for her sexuality, which proves disconcerting: "the combination of personal and apersonal narration reinforced feminine guilt feelings by making the reader feel as if female 'victims' are partial agents of their own 'victimization' (i.e. seductions)" (74). Evidently, women's sexuality can only be tolerated within a framework of innocence; although not wishing to adopt critics' usually dismissive tone, Modleski conceives how Harlequin readers can internalise the problematic view of femininity, sexuality and heterosexual love defining romance plots since the eighteenth century. The

contemporary writers looked at in this thesis do later try to reimagine heterosexual love in ways that do not necessarily accord to these traditional romantic plots; even so, Modleski's work allows for a better understanding of women's relationship to such conventional narratives.

However, despite her criticism, it is consistently evident that Modleski does not wish to denounce Harlequins in the way usually done. Apart from seeing how reactions to Harlequins are telling of women's dissatisfactions, she views these novels as more of a symptom of the problems present in patriarchal society than as the cause: "Even though the novels can be said to intensify female tensions and conflicts, on balance the contradictions in women's lives are more responsible for the existence of Harlequins than Harlequins are for the contradictions" (49). It seems that it is the imbalances between the sexes that create the need for such kinds of depictions of heterosexual love; in fact, the novels are seen by Modleski as proof of women's unhappiness with male dominant culture:

> the very fact that the novels must go to such extremes to neutralize women's anger and to make masculine hostility bearable testifies to the depths of women's discontent. Each novel...is as much a protest against as an endorsement of the feminine condition. (49)

Despite the way Harlequins support a conservative view of heterosexual love, Modleski continues to ask her readers to acknowledge the veiled complexity of these romance novels.

Modleski also examines Gothic novels in *Loving with a Vengeance*, which she sees as having some commonality with Harlequins: "Both deal with women's fears of and confusion about masculine behaviour in a world in which men learn to devalue

women" (52). Yet, a significant difference is that in Gothics the heroine tends to fear that her husband or lover is trying to harm her, something that will also become apparent later in the thesis when considering Atwood's *Lady Oracle*, which is a novel that invokes the Gothic romance in a revisionary way. Moreover, according to Modleski, Gothic fictions deal with a different aspect of heterosexual love to Harlequins, as they generally concern themselves with an already established romantic relationship, rather than one that is still in the making: "in Gothics the concern is with understanding the relationship and the feelings involved once the union has been formed" (53). So, these forms of romance relate to separate phases, each of which contains its own set of anxieties and issues.

Modleski, too, explores Gothic novels in relation to paranoia. In looking at William Meissner's *The Paranoid Process*, Modleski describes the paranoid as coming "from a family whose power structure is greatly skewed: one of the parents is perceived as omnipotent...while the other...as submissive to and victimized by the stronger partner...the paranoid patient...enacts within the self the war between victim and victimizer"(58). Modleksi maintains how such a family dynamic creates the basis for paranoia; within this power structure, it is the female who "is more likely than the male to retain (feminine) 'victim' introject and to deny (project) feelings of aggression and anger" (58). Gothics permit the 'paranoid' woman' to express anger without appearing to do so, as she comes across as the victim of an aggressive other: "Gothics...perform the function of giving expression to women's hostility towards men while simultaneously allowing them to repudiate it" (58). In Gothic novels, the heterosexual relationship, particularly that in a more developed stage than courtship, appears to give rise to emotions stemming from childhood, indicating how the

romance can serve as the outward expression of early, influential experiences. As Modleksi explains, "Gothics probe the deepest layers of the feminine unconscious, providing a way for women to work through profound psychic conflicts, especially ambivalence towards the significant people in their lives-mothers, father, lovers" (75). In taking such a psychoanalytically informed view, Modleski is able to uncover how Gothic fictions function as an outlet for woman to come to terms with the anger and aggression that can shadow important relationships.

Modleski considers how the mother, who generally undertakes a submissive role within the patriarchal family structure, appears in the Gothic as a victimised woman from the past, with whom the heroine inevitably identifies. This aspect of the Gothic novel provides scope for women to explore difficult feelings towards their mothers; as Modleski emphasises, "Gothics...help women to deal with their ambivalent attitudes towards their mothers as well as their 'masochistic identification' with them" (61). Consequently, establishing the husband's innocence is profoundly significant to the heroine, as she achieves the desired love from someone who represents the 'father', whilst also managing to gain the necessary distance from the woman who stands for the mother:

> Only after the heroine has obtained 'absolute proof' of the man's innocence can 'oedipal conflicts' be resolved and reconciliation with the father becomes possible; only then can identification with the victimized 'mother' be broken; and only then can the love be accepted. (68)

However, the restoration of the heterosexual couple's bond through the severing of ties to the mother may be regarded as contentious in light of DuPlessis's look at

writers emphasising the daughter's lasting bond to the mother and Chodorow's work in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*.[30] Moreover, what could further reinforce the sense of Gothics' essentially conservative agenda is the manner in which all tensions and problems are resolved by the end, as the male character is finally absolved of guilt. As Modleski contends, "Popular Gothics resolve the conflicts through a fantasy ending" (76), something indicative of how Gothic fictions imbue the heterosexual relationship with an idealised quality also evident in Harlequins. In fact, when considering *Lady Oracle*, Atwood will also be seen to critically locate the way her female protagonist, who is a writer of Gothic romances, draws on the fantasy of these novels for escape.

As with Harlequins, Modleksi is aware of the Gothics' weaknesses, yet here, too, it is apparent that she views these novels as the product of patriarchal society. Thus, the paranoia defining the heroine, which she transmits outwardly through her fear of persecution, is seen in *Loving with a Vengeance* to be the foreseeable result of a Western family construction, which "with its unequal distribution of power, almost inevitably generates...feminine conflicts and anxieties" (73). Modleski perceives how the Gothic romance conveys anxieties that originate from the patriarchal family, but which are ultimately appeased through the novel's fantasy ending. Nevertheless, although the husband's proclaimed innocence allows the heroine to reconcile with the father/husband without having to confront man's position of power, at the same time Gothics can be said to "testify to women's extreme discontent with the social and psychological processes which transform them into victims" (76). It is important that

[30] Although Nancy Chodorow believes that "heterosexual orientation is a major outcome of the oedipal period for most girls..." (112), she also underlines that "Girls do not give up their attachment to their mother, and do not make final and absolute commitments to heterosexual *love,* as emotional commitment (140) in Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978; Berkley: U of California P, 1999).

Modleski points to this underlying discontent, as in doing so she clarifies that women are not actually reconciled with being victims, a fact that cannot be said to come through, for instance, in Miller's *The Heroine's Text.* So, although Modleski recognizes that these texts do not "overtly question the myth of male superiority or the institutions of marriage and the family" (106), she insists that they reflect female issues and problems: "It is useless to deplore the texts for their omissions, distortions, and conservative affirmations. It is crucial to understand them: to let their very omissions and distortions speak, informing us...of the fears that lie behind them" (106). While conservative and conformist on many levels, the texts can provide insight about the more hidden aspects of woman's life and relationships in a patriarchal world.

In *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984), Janice A. Radway also looks at popular romantic fiction, engaging with a group of readers based in Smithton in the US Midwest. This group, and particularly Dorothy Evans (Dot), a local bookstore employee whose review newsletter has influenced other women's reading choices and induced publishers and authors to seek her advice on upcoming books, help Radway better understand this specific brand of fiction and its readership. Like Modleski, Radway works at gauging the deeper issues at hand, balancing criticism with an exploration of women's reasons for indulging in the fantasy of the romance novel.

In interviewing the Smithton women, Radway grasps the importance of plot structure to them, as abidance to a particular narrative formula is understood as the determining factor in a romance novel. Indeed, the Smithton women all have certain basic expectations:

> the women...admitted that they want to identify with the heroine as she attempts to comprehend...the ambiguous attentions of a man...The point of experience is the sense of exquisite tension...created within the reader as she imagines the possible resolutions and consequences for a woman of an encounter with a member of the opposite sex and then observes that...the hero has fallen helplessly in love with her.[31]

While the readers will be shortly seen to differentiate between ideal and failed romances, it is apparent that they agree on the essential and defining features of novels in the genre. Radway brings across how central the basic romance formula is to the Smithton women through a particular example:

> Dot believes that the book's proper plot structure...makes it a romance. It is not the mere use of the romantic subject matter that qualifies Marten's book as a romance...but rather its manner of developing the loving relationship. As Dot remarked... 'Not all love stories are romances.' Some are simply novels about love. (64)

According to Dot, it is only a very particular version of a love story that constitutes the romance, something highlighting the rigidness of such fiction. It is clear that aspects of the eighteenth century romance plot looked at by Miller continue to determine the structure of the popular romance novels favoured by the Smithton group. Thus, Dot and the other readers are not so much seeking to read about love, as they are looking

[31] Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984; Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1991) 64-65.

to immerse themselves in a traditional interpretation of specific events leading to the hero and heroine's conjugal union.

It is perhaps due to having very specific expectations that the Smithton readers can easily differentiate between ideal and failed romance novels. Although failed romances still meet the basic requirements that qualify them as such, it is clear that these women want the novels to comply in ways that are pleasing to them. So, although both types tend to have a happy ending, the readers prefer that a novel focuses "on a single, developing relationship between hero and heroine" (122), and that it does not "also devote considerable attention to interim relationships between hero or heroine and rival individuals" (122). Radway elucidates how the method of directing all attention on the hero and heroine serves the readers as it "facilitates a particularly intense identification between reader and heroine" and allows the reader "to live the heroine's relationship to the hero without distraction" (123). The reader evidently needs to be able to identify with the heroine so that she can experience the imaginary relationship as if it were her own, something that reflects a more intimate and complex reading experience.

Another defining feature of the ideal romance is the depiction of the hero's complete transformation by the end. The hero, whose "reserve, indifference, and even cruelty when...first confronted by the heroine" (129) is initially highlighted, is then transformed into a loving and committed man, as was the case in *Pamela*. Radway takes a probing approach to this narrative development that is so pleasing to the Smithton women, as she perceives how this change is actually superficial; in truth, since the hero's transformation is presented as bringing his innate goodness to the surface, Radway intuits how this does not create the basis for actual change:

> the romance can say nothing about the more difficult problem of how to teach men to be gentle who have developed within a set of family relationships that systematically represses the boy's capacity to nurture...The romance expresses women's dissatisfaction with the current asymmetry in male-female relationships, but, at the same time...represents the desired and necessary transformation as an already accomplished fact. (129)

So, although romances emerge as attesting to women's unhappiness with male behaviour, since the hero's brutality is an element that readers believe must change, the novels deny the possibility of consciously confronting this aspect of patriarchy because they pretend that a transformation has been achieved. As Radway explains, the romance novel does not attempt to explore how men who are invested in patriarchal values and patterns can be introduced to new models of behaviour, nor does it contemplate the possible challenges and difficulties of such a process. So, while it must be acknowledged that the romance expresses women's discontent, a valuable fact also addressed by Modleski, it does not challenge traditional structures in a meaningful way.

As Modleski also determines in *Loving with a Vengeance,* Radway points to how the reader's awareness of the hero's inherent goodness has certain important functions:

> The double perspective on the hero's behaviour thus allows the reader to...identify with the heroine's point of view and therefore with her anger and fear. The act of reading...provides her with an imaginative space to express her reservation and negative feelings about men. On

> the other hand, she can rely on the greater knowledge accorded to her by the narration and enjoy the reassurance it provides that...men do not threaten women. (140)

While Radway recognizes women's unhappiness and frustration with male dominance, she is aware that anger does not initiate change, as the reader remains reassured of the hero's impending transformation. Despite the temporary release of negative emotions, the reader is comforted on an imaginative level that aggressive male behaviour can be altered. Women are not encouraged to explore their anger, which may have proved to be the catalyst for confronting the patriarchal structures defining their personal relationships.

As part of her in-depth approach to the Smithton group's passion for romance novels, Radway takes into account woman's psychic constellation as relational beings, an aspect she considers to be significant to her study. She develops this point by looking at Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, which deals with the way girls come to define themselves:

> From the retention of preoedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others...Masculine personality...comes to be defined more in terms of denial of relation and connection...whereas feminine personality comes to include a fundamental definition of self in relationship. (Chodorow 169)

Indeed, in understanding the female's psychic structure Radway can elaborate on how woman continues to desire maternal nurturance, something that indicates how she, like DuPlessis, is conscious of the significance of the mother:

> Because women move out of their oedipal conflict with a triangular psychic structure intact, not only do they need to connect themselves with a member of the opposite sex, but they also continue to require an intense emotional bond with someone who is reciprocally nurturant and protective in a maternal way. (140)

The Smithton women desire to witness the hero's transformation, as such a development permits them to fulfil their ongoing, profound need for connection and love that they cannot satisfy with "someone who resembles the woman responsible for their memory of it", due to the "homophobic nature of the culture"(140). As such, woman

> must learn to suppress the need entirely, to satisfy it through her relationship with a man...Although the ideal romance initially admits the difficulty of relying on men for gentleness and affective intensity...it also reassures her that such satisfaction is possible because men really do know how to attend to a woman's needs. (140)

Radway's interpretation is significant here, as she reveals that women readers are coming to these novels hoping to satisfy deep emotional needs engendered in them by their mothers. In subsequent chapters the significance of the mother will be further highlighted, most particularly in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and, as has already been mentioned, Lessing's *Love Again*, thus indicating how a discussion of romantic love necessitates considering the maternal figure. Nevertheless, in *Reading the Romance* it is seen how, unlike some of the novels explored by DuPlessis that prioritize the mother-child bond, the popular romance novel asks women to look to men to satisfy

this continuing need for maternal love, which is reminiscent of the Gothics' way of underlining the heroine's final break from the mother.

The socially prescribed idea that a woman must exclusively seek fulfilment through a man, who has generally not been taught to define himself in relation, is seen to in the romance by offering the reader a fictional hero who transforms and proves capable of creating an emotional connection to the heroine. Nonetheless, it must be noted here that while men are clearly socialised to be more emotionally distant, in subsequent chapters some of the contemporary writers will be seen to highlight how certain males can demonstrate openness to love and intimacy, even as others continue to cling to patriarchal models of behaviour. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, a number of writers will show how women forge strong ties to other women alongside their heterosexual relationships, thereby avoiding the kind of total dependence on man that is evident in popular romance novels. Hence, woman's way of defining herself in relation need not be negative; what is problematic is how the popular romance novel portrays the heroine as dependant on a hero whose transformation is merely superficial.

Despite being critical, Radway acknowledges how the "emotional nurturance" (113) that the readers derive feels genuine to them: "Although this kind of experience is vicarious, the pleasure is nonetheless real" (100). The satisfaction gained through reading is not affected, even if the content is based on a certain amount of pretence and suppression. While Radway knows that the Smithton women are not challenging social structures, she takes the unique position, considering how popular romances have been criticised, of acknowledging that romance reading meets some of their needs and makes everyday life more tolerable and pleasurable.

Due to wanting to receive such "vicarious emotional nurturance" (113), it is not surprising that the Smithton women consider a failed romance to be one that "comes much too close to suggesting explicitly that the romantic dream is an illusion and that women ought to lower their expectations and rest content with lesser men" and which also does not establish that a relationship "can provide all the nurturance, care, and love that women need" (178). The reader tends to blame the romance for having failed when it is evident that she is reacting against her own reality, which the novel has not successfully suppressed. So, rather than come to terms with the deeper issues at hand, the Smithton women label certain romances as failures and further reinforce their faith in those 'good' romances.

Although it does not mean that "the Smithton readers' romance constitutes a fundamental, material challenge to patriarchy" (184), Radway argues that the women exhibit agency as they consciously select novels that will enhance some sense of well-being. Furthermore, Radway conceives how the romance novel's idealised ending functions as kind of triumph for the reader, as the hero adapts to the heroine's moral world, and by extension, allows woman's emotional needs to take precedence:

> by witnessing...the ideal romantic conclusion, the reader expresses her opposition to the domination of commodity values in her society because she so heartily applauds the heroine's ability to draw the hero's attention away from the public world of money and status and to convince him of the primacy of her values and concerns. (214)

Essentially, without having to challenge social structures and institutions, the reader is granted the pleasure of experiencing the kind of change that would be welcome in the context of her own life. Indeed, the readers appear to harbour a deep-seated desire to

have their partners reject the patriarchal values of money and power that do not contribute or encourage emotional closeness and intimacy. Thus, like Modleski, Radway continues to move beyond a mere criticism of popular romantic fiction, as she draws attention to the frustrations that women manage through their reading: "the women...are reading not out of contentment but out of dissatisfaction, longing and protest" (215).

Radway explains that "an oppositional moment can be said to characterize even the production of the romantic story if that process is understood as the women themselves conceive it" (214). Radway grants significance to the way these women perceive the reading process, even if this does not lead to the questioning of real life men's investment in the public values of money and power. Yet, the problem lies not only in that the readers do not achieve change in their lives, but that there are troubling elements, such as the hero's initial cruelty and indifference, to be found within these texts. Effectively, this is exemplary of the chasm that exists between how the Smithton women view their romance reading and the actual content of the novels; as Jane E. Caputi says in a review of *Reading the Romance*, "Complexity is one of the watchwords of this study...in looking at that involved and inseparable relationship between reading as act and the text itself, she (Radway) finds that romance reading can be oppositional to social domination while, at the same time, its message reiterates and recommends patriarchy and...its institutions".[32] The conservative popular romance does not push women to become more critical or to open up to new ideas; this may have been achieved by questioning man's tie to power and by highlighting the importance of a relationship based on mutual respect for each other's individuality,

[32] Jane E. Caputi, rev. of *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature,* by Janice A. Radway, *The Library Quarterly* 56.1 (1986):79-80, *JSTOR,* 13 July 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4307942>.

rather than on idealised qualities, which actually are ideas that some writers in the following chapters will be seen to explore. However, it is hard to condemn the Smithton women for wanting, albeit imaginatively, to assert the worthiness of their values and beliefs in a society that does not otherwise do so. Radway is evidently conscious of such complexities, striving to understand the Smithton group's perspective, whilst remaining critical of disempowering traditional plots.

Nevertheless, Radway ultimately chooses to emphasise how popular romantic fiction prevents women from making the kinds of changes that may allow for a new approach to heterosexual love; indeed, she asserts how romance novels, "by deflecting...real protest and by supplying vicariously certain needs that, if presented as demands in the real world, might otherwise lead to the reordering of heterosexual relationships" (217). So, even as the Smithton women's romance reading habits support them in some ways in their everyday life, they remain bound to patriarchal laws, as do their relationships. Questioning the power structures upheld in popular romantic fiction is a step women could take to challenge patriarchal society, and, as Radway states, to encourage the 'reordering' of heterosexual relationships.

In looking at the works of these four 1980s critics, they can be seen to take different approaches to the heterosexual romance. For example, while Miller sheds light on the patriarchal nature of the heterosexual romance plot, DuPlessis attempts to draw attention to the efforts of women writers to move away from these traditional narratives. Modleski and Radway turn to popular romances in order to offer new and more complex views of these texts. Yet, although these critics tackle this subject matter differently, it is evident that the heterosexual romance remains deeply problematic for them, as it also did for feminists like de Beauvoir, Greer and Millett.

The Backlash Against Feminism and Developments in the 1990s and 2000s

Although the heterosexual romance, and its place in literary tradition, has been seen to have been critically received, there were developments in Western society and culture during the 1990s and 2000s that meant that some feminists not only began to view this form of romantic relationship differently but that they also more generally sought to separate themselves from their feminist forerunners. In fact, this section will consider the emergent backlash against feminism in the 1980s, before moving on to examine how the notion of postfeminism is advanced in the 1990s. In doing so, some of the ideas and views of 'new' feminists, who sought to separate themselves from second-wave feminists, will be evaluated, with discussion then going on to assess the popular genre of chick lit. Television shows like *Sex and the City* will also come into consideration here before a final turn to the development of third-wave feminism.

In moving now to the 1980s backlash against feminism, which is dealt with by the journalist Susan Faludi in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991), it emerges how this is intimately tied to the notion of postfeminism as supported by the media; according to Faludi,

> Just when record numbers of younger women were supporting feminist goals in the mid-1980s...the media declared that feminism was the flavour of the 1970s and that 'post-feminism' was the new story-complete with a younger generation who supposedly reviled the women's movement.[33]

Faludi conveys how it became characteristic to speak of the negative effects of feminism upon women: "Professional women are suffering 'burn-out' and succumbing

[33] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991; London: Vintage, 1993) 14.

to an infertility epidemic'. Single women are grieving from a 'man shortage'. The *New York Times* reports: childless women are 'depressed and confused'" (1). Although Faludi demonstrates that women were no longer so emphatic about marriage and even saw being single positively (33), the media insisted on spreading negativity and panic. 1980s Hollywood also contributed to this backlash, by depicting the career woman in a monstrous light in films such as *Fatal Attractions* (146-152), while television programmes like *The Cosby Show* exhibited their support for the traditional nuclear family. According to Faludi, "teaching children to obey dad is the show's primary mission" (188).

Faludi also reports on political figures encouraging the backlash, as exemplified by President Reagan's 1980 anti-feminist presidential campaign and his opposition to abortion (267). The underlying hostility to female advancement can also be discerned in the way Margaret Thatcher, who served as UK Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, faced ridicule because of her sex; Imelda Whelehan states that "the contempt in which she was held by the liberal and left-leaning press meant that she was mercilessly caricatured in terms of her sex".[34] However, in spite of facing such prejudice, Thatcher was not a champion for women's rights; indeed, "Feminists had no reason to be cheered by the election of Mrs Thatcher, given that she never knowingly supported female advancement...her views of women were retroactive in the extreme" (Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* 143). It emerges that within the context of 1980s Western politics, there was little sympathy for women's progress.

It is thus of little surprise that a "return to femininity" was popularised, which meant embracing "the 'feminine' woman", who "is forever static and childlike"

[34] Imelda Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 143.

(Faludi 92). A particularly chilling aspect to this call to a childish, passive state is that women were subsequently channelled into finding fulfilment through consumerism: "The eighties culture stifled women's political speech and then redirected self-expression to the shopping mall. The passive consumer was reissued as an ersatz feminist, exercising her 'right' to buy products" (Faludi 94). So, while women were asked to eschew many of the gains of the feminist movement, consumer culture was able to pretend that this was not so and that they were being liberated through their buying. In fact, this emphasis on consumption is related to the economic changes brought about during the Reagan and Thatcher leadership; Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake refer to the "shift away from the public works philosophy of the Roosevelt years to the free market fundamentalism of the Reagan/Thatcher years".[35] Subsequently, it can be suggested that women were manipulated into becoming key supporters of an aggressively capitalist society.

While Faludi paints a grim picture for women in the 1980s, Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon in *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* consider the changed atmosphere of the 1990s:

> If during the 1980s, the prevailing mood surrounding the feminist movement was one of disillusionment and backlash, then the following decade came to represent a more upbeat and 'popular'...version of feminism. It was during this time that postfeminism became more recognisable and concretised as a cultural phenomenon and journalistic

[35] Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, "'It's All About the Benjamins': Economic Determinants of Third Wave Feminism in the United States," *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration,* eds. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, 2nd ed. (2004; Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 115.

> buzzword, as the 1990s saw a veritable explosion of 'new' kinds of feminism.[36]

Although Genz and Brabon believe that postfeminism "harbours the threat of backlash as well as the potential for innovation" (65), the term, particularly in popular culture, has come to indicate "that feminism is no longer required" (Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* 162). Within the context of postfeminism, 'new' feminists like Natasha Walter emerged, who in *The New Feminism* (1998), purported that "feminists exaggerated the extent of women's oppression", something demonstrated by the "examples of women who have achieved fame or success as examples of female empowerment-such as the Spice Girls" (Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* 165). Additionally, Naomi Wolf, another new feminist, or power feminist, distances herself from the second wave in *Fire with Fire* (1993), by claiming to step away from victimhood and embrace power: "According to Wolf, women who flaunt victim status- a realisation crucial for second wave feminist politics...have made themselves impervious to the power actually available to them" (Genz and Brabon 68). Similarly, Katie Rophie in *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism* (1993), rejects what she perceives to be feminists' victim mentality; according to Whelehan, Roiphe believes that "young women on US campuses are encouraged to cry rape and have been given a warped sense of heterosexuality as fundamentally destructive by feminists" (*The Feminist Bestseller* 164). Such postfeminist rhetoric takes a definite stand against second-wave feminism, which is felt to keep women inferior.

However, in *The Feminist Bestseller* Whelehan criticizes these new feminists for not acknowledging the benefits and gains of the second wave, and for supporting a

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[36] Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (2009; Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010) 65.

feminism that is about the "individual consumer making choices to improve their own life" (166). It is clear that in appropriating the achievements of feminism, such as greater financial independence, the younger generation is less willing to consider the need to return to what the new feminists view as "whining victimhood and passivity" (Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* 166). Instead, a component of postfeminism that became particularly popular in the 1990s is Girl Power. As Genz and Brabon explain,

> Propagated in the 1990s by the Spice Girls, Girl Power's defining characteristic is a re-appraisal of femininity...as a means of female empowerment and agency. Girl Power contains an implicit rejection of many tenets held by second wave feminists-who stressed the disempowering and oppressive aspects of femininity in a male-dominated society. (76)

The Spice Girls' position as empowering female figures in the 1990s points to the friction between 'old' and 'new' feminists. Although a band like the Spice Girls saw a return to femininity as a bold, powerful statement of choice, it served to accept some of what second wavers had fought against.

Indeed, new feminists made sure to take a stance distinctive from past feminists on many levels; Whelehan perceives how "The new feminism appears to be about learning to love men and disapproves of any hint of criticism of them, even if the criticisms are more abstract and levelled against the ways structures of patriarchy are maintained" (*The Feminist Bestseller* 166-167). While it certainly seems relevant that heterosexual love be revisited and that discussions are further developed, postfeminists negate the value of many second-wave contributions. Such a position can also be said to disregard the efforts of the likes of Modleski and Radway to come

to terms with the patriarchal structures and beliefs defining popular romances. The novels looked at in the thesis, which were published around the time these new feminist ideas became prevalent, tend to expand perceptions by further exploring heterosexual relationships, whilst remaining critical of patriarchal models of love. Although the selected writers may work on certain ideas regarding heterosexual love that contrast earlier views, there is generally not such a wholesale rejection as that found under the label 'postfeminist'.

A type of literature that can be considered postfeminist is chick lit, which is "a female-oriented fiction that celebrates the pleasures of feminine adornment and heterosexual romance" (Genz and Brabon 76). Indeed, chick lit, which is often associated with Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996),[37] typically

> features a first-person narrative of a twenty-or thirtysomething, white, middle-or upper-middle-class, never-married, childless, Anglo or American, urban, college-educated, heterosexual career woman engaged in a seriocomic romantic quest or dating spree...Workplace obstacles...run concomitantly with dating circuit adventures. This multitasking complements a self-improvement regimen...the denouement frequently involves the protagonist's attainment of a 'serious boyfriend', proposal, or matrimony.[38]

Chick lit clearly has its own specific formula, and makes use of a very particular type of heroine. It is though apparent that the genre has racial and class boundaries, as it concerns itself with the white, middle class woman. While matters of work and beauty

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[37] Although *Bridget Jones's Diary* brought chick lit to the foreground, in *The Feminist Bestseller* Whelehan makes reference to such earlier novels, like Maeve Haran's 1992 *Having it All* (178).
[38] Stephanie Harzewski, *Chick Lit and Postfeminism* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2011) 29.

trouble the idiosyncratic heroine, it emerges that the finding of love has a central role to play in chick lit.

The unattached heroine in chick lit is someone women readers can immediately identify with due to the growing numbers of singles in the late twentieth century, a phenomenon also dealt with by Faludi. Stephanie Harzewski elaborates on this development:

> the social conditions that gave rise to chick lit...the rise of serial cohabitation, the increasing age for first marriage...have led to the emergence of what chick lit authors call 'singleton' lifestyles...Chick lit is both a commentary on and a product of the singles market. (3)

Chick lit's popularity can be linked to certain social conditions within the Western world. Indeed, *Bridget Jones's Diary* represents the modern single woman manoeuvring through life, work and the search for love. As Whelehan explains, "For many readers, Bridget's life was theirs and in the *Diary* they recognized their confusion in their troubled, postmodern, post-feminist existence" (*The Feminist Bestseller* 184). Chick lit appeals to women as it acknowledges this confusion, the feeling of which implies that greater equality and independence did not lend itself to a clear path in regards to dating and love. The younger generation seems to feel that their uncertainty cannot be resolved within the context of feminism, which has come to be characterised by its more critical stance to heterosexual love. Whelehan states in *The Feminist Bestseller* that "It is precisely in the arena of romantic love that sexual politics failed to penetrate in any meaningful or long-lasting way", whilst adding, "feminism can teach Bridget nothing that will get her through the more nuanced, 'ironic', dating practices of the 1990s" (185). Although not chick lit, Shields's *The*

Republic of Love, to be looked at later, also implies that the modern-day search for love is not entirely straightforward, therefore trying to deal with questions around loneliness and to tackle the confusion of dating in the urban setting of Winnipeg in the 1990s. So, while chick lit has its own distinct features, it is apparent that the singleton's search for love was quite an important wider theme in fiction of the 1990s.

Nevertheless, while "Every chick-lit novel centers on a love plot",[39] such fiction does not exactly replicate the traditional romance:

> Chick lit provides a post-feminist narrative of heterosex and romance for those who feel that they're too savvy to be duped by the most conventional romance narrative. It allows for the possibility of promiscuity, illicit sex, ordinariness, loss of dignity, and fallibility, along with other aspirational features...clothing, interiors, or food" (Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* 186).

The present-day romance is adapted to fit the modern woman's independent, less inhibited way of life, within a consumer culture in which she partakes. Furthermore, what is significant to the single woman is the ability to find a man who fulfils both her traditional and progressive expectations, rather than having a grand romance:

> The protagonists seek not the grand love portrayed in the classic romance novel but rather a modern love that is only extraordinary in the difficulty of finding a man who is single, heterosexual, committal,

[39] Juliette Wells, "Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History," *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction,* eds. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (New York: Routledge-Taylor& Francis, 2006) 49.

> manly, sensitive, successful, and attractive...marriage is not the ultimate goal, and very often is not the ultimate result.[40]

Hence, while chick lit ends with some form of commitment, marriage is not essential, which implies some deviation from the traditional romance.

Yet, some kind of 'happy ever after' is still pervasive, something that also comes across clearly in the television show *Sex and the City*[41] (1998-2004), which embraces a happy ending with all its four protagonists either married or in serious relationships, despite its initially more critical stance to love and friendship-oriented focus. As Harzewski states, "This happy coupling...negates the initial episode's pronouncement that 'Cupid has flown the co-op'" (98), thus indicating that a 'happy ever after' is not easily sidestepped. Moreover, a series like *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) depicts its main protagonist, Ally, who is a successful lawyer, as wanting to achieve such a 'happy ever after'. According to Genz and Brabon, Ally "clings to a fairytale notion of love and often retreats into her private fantasy world to reflect on her unmarried and childless state" (73), which points to the series' trouble escaping an idealised image of heterosexual love. While the chick lit heroine may not desire a grand love or be as dependent on marriage as the Harlequin heroine, these more conventional notions can still linger. Evidently, even as contemporary representations of romantic love within popular culture take into account certain social changes, traditional elements and notions continue to be prevalent on various levels. Many of

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[40] Lisa A. Guerrero, "Sistahs Are Doing It for Themselves": Chick Lit in Black and White," Ferriss and Young 88.

[41] Candace Bushnell's novel, *Sex and the City* (1996), on which the series is based, consists of a collection of newspaper columns that were put together and made into a book (Harzewski 92). Harzewski links chick lit to the *Sex and the City* column and TV series; she refers to "The direct influence of the HBO series and Bushnell's column on chick lit is reflected in both the form and subject matter of novels" (96). She cites such parallels as the portrayal of a sex columnist in a particular chick lit novel, something resembling *Sex and the City*.

the writers in the main body of the thesis will be seen to interrogate the traditional romance plot much further, whilst also considering the significance of heterosexual love; even when there is a positive conclusion, this is often presented in a manner that allows for intricacy. Nevertheless, it is evident that the classic romance narrative is questioned or altered to varying degrees and ways in different kinds of narrative, and that a departure from convention is not always achieved.

Harzewski views the 'happy ever after' in *Sex and the City* to indicate a return to love: "the finale portrays...not a farewell to but rather a reinvestment in romantic love" (98). This 'reinvestment' in a popular series like *Sex and the City* is suggestive of the postfeminist tendency in the 1990s and 2000s to celebrate heterosexual love and to appropriate elements that earlier feminists had criticised. For instance, Whelehan, in comparing chick lit to the 1980s bonkbuster, or sex and shopping novel, which centred on glamour, power and sex, determines:

> Chick lit seems to be built on an acknowledgement of the 'failure' of feminism and in each case 'empowered' women must find true self-determination through the right kind of men... Whereas bonkbusters depict women in control of their destiny and determined to forge their own path with or without men, chick lit heroines appear to wish to relinquish control. (*The Feminist Bestseller* 188) [42]

Chick lit legitimizes the heroine's search for a man, allowing her to adopt a less assertive role. While the novels in the thesis take a different approach, providing more complex depictions and continuing to critique patriarchal structures, they also explore

[42] Whelehan clarifies that, despite depictions of powerful women in the bonkbuster, there were "moral panics about what power does to women. Even the most powerful women of the day-such as Margaret Thatcher-didn't seem to think that power was good for women" (*The Feminist Bestseller* 155). This 1980s anxiety regarding women's power corroborates the backlash Faludi discusses.

women's romantic relationships to men. This line fits with the call of a number of contemporary feminist thinkers for a return to the topic of love, which will be further shown later on in the introduction. This is not to suggest that feminists were previously uninterested in romantic love, something refuted by the work of Modleksi and others, but that, albeit in different ways, renegotiations of love appear to have been really brought to the foreground in the late twentieth and early twenty first century.

While invested in romantic love, postfeminist TV programmes and texts are also decidedly marked by their consumption oriented focus, as they present women's lives and romantic choices being determined by capitalism. Faludi has already alluded to the effect of capitalism upon women; Harzewski is now seen to elaborate on the phenomenon of 'late heterosexuality', which "is symptomatic of the growing challenge of separating considerations of heterosexuality in Anglo-American culture from business-based diction and economic considerations" (10). According to Harzewski,

> late heterosexuality ushers in a new stage of straight relations...in which women are less gullible towards romantic myths...But late heterosexuality marries this supposed increased freedom to a new phase of capitalism...wherein men function as accessories or a means to them and courtship is described in the idiom of business. (11)

While women may be less susceptible to romantic myths (although a show like *Ally McBeal* indicates this is not necessarily true), they are vulnerable to capitalist forces, which promise fulfilment through consumption. As a result, consumption and romantic love have come to complement each other; Harzewski explains how although

"chick lit denotes a genre, it is also practically an adjective for a lifestyle in which happiness, romance, and acquisition...chase each other" (10-11). Late heterosexuality is also evident in the *Sex and the City* series, when, for instance, Aidan's engagement ring for Carrie is not well received: "Samantha summarily arbitrates with a 'wrong ring, wrong guy'" (Harzewski 98). Young women may be turning to such programmes in search of a story that appears both relevant and inspiring, but it emerges that the commodification of love also desensitizes them to the insidious effects of capitalism.

Apart from postfeminism, it is important to consider third-wave feminism, which also emerged in the 1990s. According to Whelehan,

> The term Third Wave, first used by Rebecca Walker in 1992...is used to distinguish a new wave of activism quite different from the more negative connotations of post-feminism and which takes on new ground distinct from that inhabited by feminism's Second Wave...Third Wave feminists are young women who are the beneficiaries of a feminist education...one of the frustrations they experience is the need to articulate their own experience of their postmodern world-arguably more baffling and contradictory than that inhabited by early Second Wavers. (169)

Even as it also negotiates the changes and developments in the modern-day woman's life, third-wave feminism is usually separated from postfeminism. Although efforts have been made to conceptualise postfeminism in a more complex manner, and to recognize its similarity to the third wave (Genz and Brabon 161-162), it remains clear that it has been established in opposition to feminism in mainstream culture. Amanda D. Lotz argues that, while "a theorised postfeminism can be of great value to

feminism", she has "grown less convinced that this term can overcome the anti-feminist connotation", so that third wave feminism may be "a more viable term than postfeminism".[43]

Third-wave feminism is not loaded down with the negative overtones of postfeminism as it retains ties to the second wave, whilst also exploring diverse avenues:

> third wave feminism defines itself as a budding political movement with strong affiliations to second wave feminist theory and activism...Third wave feminists embrace contradiction and diversity as inherent components of late twentieth-century and twenty-first century women's (and men's lives), and they envision a new model of feminist thinking and practice (Genz and Brabon 156)

This embracing of diversity and contradiction designates that third-wave feminism makes fewer 'universal' claims about women's experiences and priorities; as Alison Stone asserts, "It cannot be plausibly maintained that women's experiences have any common character, or that women share any common location in social and cultural relations, or sense of psychic identity".[44] In the context of departing from universal perceptions, and being more alert to intersections and differences of race, class etc., women of colour have played an instrumental role. According to Mridula Nath Chakraborty, "women of colour have argued that feminist politics need to be professed from different locations within specific histories of oppression".[45] bell hooks, a

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[43] Amanda D. Lotz, "Theorising the Intermezzo: The Contributions of Postfeminism and Third Wave Feminism," Gillis, Howie and Munford 75.
[44] Alison Stone, "On the Genealogy of Women: A Defence of Anti-Essentialism," Gillis, Howie and Munford 18-19.
[45] Mridula Nath Chakraborty, "Wa(i)ving It All Away: Producing Subject and Knowledge in Feminisms of Colours," Gillis, Howie and Munford 103.

present-day feminist thinker, exhibits common concerns with third-wave agendas, as she asks that white feminists recognize such forms of domination as white supremacy.[46] Indeed, in the next part of the introduction that focuses on a number of contemporary feminists' work on love, hooks will be seen to shed light on black people's experience of love, once more signalling a sensitivity to difference that is intrinsic to third-wave feminism. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey will in turn consider matters like the interracial relationship, thereby cultivating a consciousness of difference that also overlaps with third-wave feminism. However, apart from considering diversity, third-wave feminism incorporates a variety of other topics into its agenda; it "includes the kinds of issues often called 'women's issues', but that encompasses environmentalism, anti-corporate activism, human rights issues, cultural production and the connections between these" (Heywood and Drake 118). So, in engaging with many current issues, whilst also continuing to tackle some second-wave subjects, such as criticism of oppressive power structures,[47] the third-wave feminist movement can be said to take a broad approach.

Some of the writers that will be examined in the thesis share certain of the third-wave feminists' concerns, even though several of them belong to an earlier generation.[48] However, in "It's All About the Benjamins", Heywood and Drake explain that,

> Although third wave feminist thinking can be understood in the context of post-boomer economics and demographics, it must be acknowledged

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[46] bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture* (1994; New York: Routledge, 2006) 232.

[47] Lisa Shapiro Sanders, "'Feminists Love a Utopia': Collaboration, Conflict and the Futures of Feminism," Gillis, Howie and Munford 5.

[48] An exception is Ann Patchett, who was born in 1963; indeed, Genz and Brabon refer to how Heywood and Drake, in *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist Doing Feminism,* define the third-wave generation as having been born between 1963 and 1974 (157). Yet, in 'It's All About the Benjamins' Heywood and Drake take a more open approach.

> that many women and men choose to identify with third wave feminist perspectives whether or not they are part of a post-boomer generation. (118)

Thus, it can be suggested that the writers, whose selected novels were published in the 1990s and 2000s, draw on certain ideas that are current in third-wave feminist discourse, as there are also commonalities with other contemporary feminist works on love. For instance, despite their age gap, both Gordimer and Ann Patchett will be seen to approach difference and diversity through their depictions of interracial relationships, something also providing the space for them to explore issues around the foreigner in a global world.

Naturally, there are also pronounced differences between the third-wave feminists and selected writers; for instance, to some a defining feature of third-wave feminism is its desire "to cross...the perceived boundaries of feminist taboos, such as enjoyment of violence, the pleasures of material success and power, or the seduction of feminine fripperies" (Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* 170). This interest in commodity oriented, 'feminine' pleasures, and the way in which the third wave "situates itself within popular culture" (Genz and Brabon 156), indicates some similarity to postfeminism; as Genz and Brabon maintain, "the third wave and postfeminism both posit a challenge to second wave feminism's anti-popular and anti-feminine agenda" (161). Yet, despite such debate, it will become apparent that certain third-wave feminist preoccupations, such as claiming the pleasures of material success, are not reflected in the selected novels. As with postfeminism and chick lit, still there remain certain facets of the third wave that are germane to the writers' work.

It thus emerges that there were a number of developments in the 1990s and 2000s which spoke to various aspects around women's lives, and their romantic relationships. Indeed, it has been seen that as attitudes shifted within feminism, with 'new' feminists seeking to differentiate themselves from their predecessors, perceptions around heterosexual relationships were influenced too. Chick lit is also an important indicator of women's concerns in the late twentieth century, particularly in regards to their romantic relationships to men. Another significant factor in the 1990s is the emergence of third-wave feminism, which, although still loyal to the convictions of the second wave, was more sensitive to various forms of difference. As will be shown in later chapters, this is a valuable idea that also comes through in some writers' explorations of heterosexual love. Overall, it can be said that these contexts in the 1990s and 2000s serve as an important socio-political backdrop to the consideration of heterosexual love in contemporary women's fiction.

Contemporary Feminist Theory

The contemporary feminist thinkers that will be next examined further highlight how the late twentieth and early twenty first century was characterised by explorations and reimaginings of romantic love. Although these feminist thinkers extend criticisms of patriarchal models of love, they also have their own priorities and perceptions, something reminiscent of the way those labelled third-wave feminists continue to address issues that have concerned earlier feminists whilst also touching on new topics. Hence, the 1990s and 2000s- when many of the texts and essays to be looked at are produced- emerge as particularly significant years with regard to attitudes to love. However, certain 1980s essays, like Lucy Goodison's, are evidence of prior shifts in

approaches to romantic love; indeed, Modleski and Radway have already been seen to treat romance in a somewhat different way as they consider the complex reasons that draw women to popular romantic fiction. Nonetheless, while Modleksi and Radway allow for such in-depth understanding, the works of the feminist thinkers to be examined here indicate some further development and change, as new ways of loving and alternative forms of relationship are put forward. So the 1990s and 2000s especially, are seen to be a time when ideas around romantic love were expanded, something also evident in the selected novels, albeit to varying degrees.

bell hooks is a contemporary African American feminist writer and thinker who significantly develops the feminist discussion and treatment of heterosexual love. hooks is aware of the need to expand perceptions; for instance, while she sees how women may experience love as a form of protection, something de Beauvoir is critical of ("Love will give her back...her childhood" and "prevent her from feeling her abandonment in the wide world" (655)), hooks is not content to leave it at that. Instead, in her book *Communion: The Female Search for Love* (2002), she says that woman must "return to love to reclaim, rediscover, remake, and rejoice. We have to learn to distinguish real love from the fantasy of being rescued".[49] In an effort to reclaim love, hooks tries to rectify the way in which women have learnt to feel ashamed about their desire for love, something Shields also does in the novel *The Republic of Love*. hooks writes:

> Many females are still confused, wondering about the place of love in our lives. Many of us have been afraid to acknowledge that 'love matters,' for fear we will be despised and shamed by women who have

[49] bell hooks, *Communion: The Female Search for Love* (2002; New York: Perennial-Harper, 2003) 234.

> come to power within patriarchy by closing off emotions...Because we did not create a grand body of work that would have taught girls and women new and visionary ways to think about love, we witness the rise of a generation of females...who see any longing for love as a weakness. (xvi)

The confusion and conflict experienced by women who desire love but believe this to be incompatible with success in patriarchal society can be said to also feature in chick lit, which deals with the heroine "being torn in two by the twin pulls of career and home life...professional identities remain masculine and the home remains feminine" (Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* 177). It is evident that women experience uncertainty in negotiating between the more 'masculine' realms of power and success and the 'feminine' ones of love and connection, as the latter has been deemed a weakness. hooks, who understands how love has been undermined by those in 'masculine' positions of power, aspires to move away from shame and create a new visionary model of love. She thus highlights that "Without a sustained, inspired vision of mutual love, our culture revises again and again old stories" (58).

hooks posits that an investment in love, which she defines as a "combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust" (88), can be a powerful source of resistance to patriarchy: "Women who learn to love represent the greatest threat to the patriarchal status quo" (89). Furthermore, this resistance to patriarchy is not only woman's responsibility, as hooks specifies that a man who wishes to invest in a loving relationship must also reject patriarchal values: "genuine love between females and males could emerge only in a context where the sexes come together to challenge and change patriarchal thought" (71-72). Such a vision points to

the fact that hooks's investment in love is also a political one, as a turn to love might be the way for women and men to both join forces against patriarchy. It is evident that hooks is aware of the need to continue to challenge patriarchal models of love, as earlier feminists did, whilst also developing a progressive, inspiring vision of heterosexual love.

The anti-patriarchal vein in hooks's writing is further emphasised by her effort to rethink love in a positive way for women that does not demand self-sacrifice, but which, instead, perceives self-love as vital to the possibility of romantic love: "we find mutual love only when we know how to love. And the best place to start practicing the art of loving is with the self...Learning how to love our female selves is where our search for love must begin" (104). In making self-love the basis for the creation of a romantic relationship, hooks goes on to emphasise that truly satisfying heterosexual relationships are only possible when women choose those men that have not held on to the patriarchal idea of woman as weak and self-sacrificing: "While fewer men may 'want' women who are healthy and self-loving, bonds with these men who do are more affirming, constant, and fulfilling" (136). Many of the novels that will be looked at for the purposes of this study address the issue of self-love in relation to romantic love, something pointing to its significance to the contemporary discussion on heterosexual love.

In addition to viewing self-love as a vital aspect of a positive heterosexual relationship, hooks designates that non-romantic and non-sexual loving connections are as essential as romantic ones. While de Beauvoir expressed concern that romantic love disavows the chance of female friendship in a patriarchal context when stating that "Love destroys the possibility of friendship with other women because the woman

in love is shut off in her lover's universe" (*The Second Sex* 674), hooks emphasises how the existence of a variety of bonds in a person's life is not only possible, but necessary.[50] She refers to the importance of creating "a circle of love" and placing "emphasis on building a beloved community, of which having a partner may be an essential part but not the whole" (225). Many of the women writers to be looked at also affirm that a loving community is a vital component of their conceptualisation of love; Morrison's *Jazz* and Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, which portray characters who respectively belong to the African American and Native American ethnic groups within the US, will be seen to highlight the value of a circle of love for these people within the white dominant North American society.

It is particularly important that in Morrison's novel the value of a beloved community is highlighted as, according to hooks, black people have been historically seen as incapable of love: "In the racist mindset the enslaved African was incapable of deep feeling and fine emotions. Since love was considered to be a finer sentiment, black folks were seen as lacking the capacity to love".[51] hooks challenges such racist convictions by calling for a return to love for African Americans in her book *Salvation: Black People and Love*, in which she addresses "the meaning of love in black experience today, calling for a return to an ethic of love as the platform on which to renew progressive anti-racist struggle" (xxiv). Therefore, for black people this turn to love has progressive political implications, in that it works as the basis for

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[50] This is not to suggest that second-wave feminists did not value female connections, as the notion of sisterhood was vital to the second-wave feminist movement, see: Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (1999; London: Anchor-Transworld Publishers, 2000) 287-290. It seems though that hooks takes a more positive approach, as she appears to consider a circle of love, which includes a partner and friendships, to be more of a viable possibility. In fact, a series like *Sex and the City* also grants great significance to female friendships whilst exploring the female protagonists' heterosexual relationships; see Genz and Brabon 98.

[51] bell hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love* (2000; London: The Woman's P, 2001) xix.

resistance against racism. Consequently, love emerges as also having political value, as it is seen as a possible vehicle for change in society: "Love is profoundly political" writes hooks, "Our deepest revolution will come when we understand this truth...Only love can give us the power to reconcile, to redeem" (*Salvation* 16-17). This giving of positive political meaning to love is something that will also be seen to emerge in *Jazz*, as an investment in both self-love and romantic love will ultimately allow the protagonists to heal from the pain of white imperialist beliefs. hooks appreciates the need to acknowledge the diversity of people's experience of love, something that parallels third-wave feminists' less uniform approach towards other women.

Another contemporary feminist writer who, like hooks, has a great deal to say on the topic of love is Luce Irigaray. One of the aspects Irigaray is concerned with is how romantic love should not annul the individual identity of each partner. In *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History* (1996) she talks about the importance of recognition between two people, which according to her,

> implies respecting you as other, accepting that I draw myself to a halt before you as something insurmountable, a mystery, a freedom that will never be mine, a subjectivity that will never be mine. I recognize you is the one condition for the existence of I, you and we. Nor will it ever be neuter, a collective one....I recognize you signifies that you are different from me, that I cannot identify myself (with) nor master your becoming. I will never be your master.[52]

[52] Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History,* trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996) 104.

Evidently, Irigaray's approach towards love implies a certain respectful distance from the other, by which each person is able to maintain his or her individuality. While feminists like de Beauvoir were critical of how women were taught to self-sacrifice within their romantic relationships in patriarchy, Irigaray chooses here to focus her attention on exploring how love needs to be founded on a respect for each person's distinct identity. Moreover, this respect for the other is, for Irigaray, a way of undermining patriarchal hierarchy: "Recognition is the process by which Hegel's master-slave dialectic can be overcome...In order to avoid master(s)/slave(s) relations, we have to practice a different sort of recognition from the one marked by hierarchy...the power of the one over the other will be no more" (105). Like de Beauvoir, Irigaray rejects hierarchical relationships; however, Irigaray is in line with hooks in seeing love between two people as a promising space, where facets of patriarchy are resisted, something indicating the political potential existing within love.

One novel which will be seen to concern itself greatly with the issue of recognition and regard for the individuality of each person within a relationship is Gordimer's *The Pickup*, as it portrays the female character's struggle to defend her belief that romantic love is compatible with self-love. The analysis of this novel will reveal how it places particular emphasis on what Irigaray refers to as faithfulness to the self: "In every moment, each lays oneself open to the other... Each then turns back in oneself in order to take up again a faithfulness to self...Between this truth of oneself and that heard from the other, a temporality is created which is composed by two".[53] The love Irigaray envisions delineates that there are always two subjects involved who

[53] Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London: Continuum, 2002) 126.

require their own space, which leaves no room for any kind of possessiveness. Therefore, it becomes clear that in order for two people to create a harmonious and healthy relationship they must be respectful of both their own individuality and that of the other. This line of thinking, which the female protagonist in *The Pickup* strives to defend, can be seen to be of particular value to women, as it permits them a faithfulness to self that is obviously not encouraged within patriarchy. Furthermore, considering that feminists like Irigaray and hooks see this faithfulness to self as a possibility within the space of love, it becomes apparent that there lies some promise in the sphere of romantic love.

In addition to recognizing the significance of a faithfulness to self within the love relationship, Irigaray maintains that there is need for a new approach to language, if true communication between two people is to be made possible. She contends that if

> we are to regulate and cultivate energy between human beings, we need language. But not just denotative language, language that names, declares the reality or truth of things and transmits information; we also and especially need language that facilitates and maintains communication...a syntax appropriate to intersubjectivity. (*I Love to You* 100).

This turn to a speech that is interested in communication and not in defining or preaching to the other points to a transformation in the use of language. Irigaray, who as an advocate of ècriture feminine is already conscious of the importance of not suppressing female difference,[54] now underlines that people must nurture a way of

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[54] Irigaray and Hélène Cixous (who also will be looked at in this section) are both supporters of ècriture feminine (Tolan, "Feminisms," 336), which inscribes "female difference in language and text" (Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1986; London: Virago P, 1993) (249). Irigaray and Cixous's

speaking that is both respectful of the self and the presence of the other; it is in doing so that a patriarchal language, which focuses more on *having* than on an intimate sharing between two individuals, can be left behind: "Men communicate in a public realm constructed in accordance with their model of identity, in accordance with their laws. However, their culture emphasizes property and abstract ideal values rather than relations between people" (*I Love to You* 101). Communication between two should no longer be reduced to the male monologue that has dominated speech in the androcentric Western world. It is, therefore, necessary that people become conscious of patriarchal language and realise the way in which such a mode of communication prevents the building of relationships. In essence, learning to communicate in a way that reflects one's openness to the other is vital to the possibility of love. Patchett's novel *Bel Canto* will later be seen to concern itself with the importance of a language that, within the space of love, reflects a person's sensitivity and openness to the other. Furthermore, it is significant that in the novel, one of the male characters, a translator, embraces a thoughtful and respectful way of speaking, indicating his refusal to adopt a patriarchal mode of language. Both Patchett and Irigaray strive to approach love in an alternative way.

Hélène Cixous is another pertinent feminist who works at conceptualising love in an alternative way that is not governed by patriarchal values. In her book *Reading with Clarice Lispector* (1990), Cixous attempts to forge a new approach to love, subverting patriarchal modes of loving, through a reading of the work of the Brazilian woman writer Clarice Lispector. When Lispector asserts "Look at me and love me. No: look at yourself and love yourself ", Cixous proceeds to point out "That is to say,

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work on love (which in both cases emphasises a respect for the other's difference) can be said to have at its basis this appreciation for female difference.

you think you read me, but what you do is look at yourself and love yourself….there is a relay of you".[55] Through Lispector, Cixous explains that what is often confused as love for the other is, actually, love for the image of oneself in the other. This implies, effectively, that the other person's own individuality is annulled; as for Irigaray, it is important for Cixous that there is respect for otherness within the space of love.

In having shown that certain perceptions regarding love are false, Cixous introduces a more respectful way of approaching the other. As part of her attempt to put forward a way of relating to another that has at its foundation the recognition of the other as other, Cixous says "It is on the condition of not understanding anything that I understand what is outside me", while she goes on to quote Lispector: "I do not understand, therefore the other is, therefore there is the other" (56). Cixous appears to be suggesting that an acceptance of one's own inability to understand or control what is outside one is what ultimately allows for a respectful relationship with the other. This new way of regarding life necessitates recognition of the presence of the other as other, which subsequently opens up a space for a relation to the other and the possibility of love. As with Irigaray, love is also seen here to become a positive possibility once it is understood that loving requires acknowledging and accepting the incomprehensibility and otherness of the other.

Cixous clarifies that love should not be possessive: "Love makes one live, but it is accompanied by the cruelty of reality. Love is 'not having.' One can only love on condition of not having what one loves" (112). Cixous's belief that love is not about possession, a topic also touched on, for example, in Lessing's *Love, Again*, goes hand in hand with her request that the otherness of the other be respected; she is intent on

[55] Hélène Cixous, *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, ed. and trans. Verena Andermatt Conley, Theory and History of Literature, Volume 73 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990) 24.

putting forward a vision of love whereby any patriarchal desire to own or possess the other is cast aside. In asking her readers to envision the space of love in a new way, Cixous encourages them to let go of a masculine approach.[56]

As Susan Sellers argues, it appears that Cixous proposes a distinct feminine approach to the other:

> For Cixous, the key difference between a feminine and masculine comportment involves our relationships to others. A feminine approach to the other, in contradistinction to the appropriation or destruction of the other's difference necessitated by masculine attempts to construct a subject position of mastery, entails locating and maintaining a relation in which both self and the other can exist.[57]

Unlike postfeminism, which in some ways returns to a more traditional femininity, Cixous views the feminine approach as allowing the individuality of each person to subsist within the relationship. Indeed, such a stance correlates with third-wave feminism, which strives to take the differences amongst women into account. Patchett also picks up on the importance of such an outlook in *Bel Canto*, as she invests in a portrayal of man embracing what could be seen as a more feminine approach to love and life. It appears that Cixous "sketches an alternative possibility for self/other relations",[58] something allowing her to resist a patriarchal model of love.

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[56] In Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays," *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (1989; Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), Cixous elaborates on the masculine desires and values she opposes: "what he wants...is that he gain more masculinity: plus-value of virility, authority, power, money, or pleasure, all of which reinforce his phallocentric narcissism...A man is always proving something...Masculine profit is almost always mixed up with success that is socially defined" (107).
[57] Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Authorship, Autobiography and Love* (Cambridge: Polity P, 1996) 4.
[58] Susan Sellers, introduction to "The Newly Born Woman," *The Hélène Cixous Reader,* ed. Susan Sellers (1994; New York: Routledge, 2004) 37.

Another contemporary feminist who treats the subject of romantic love is Lucy Goodison, who in her essay "Really Being in Love Means Wanting to Live in a Different World" (1983), criticises the second-wave feminist movement for presenting the experience of falling in love negatively:

> Since 1968 the Left and the women's movement have given 'falling in love' a very bad press. Women have pointed to the way it tends to make us feel helpless, passive, uncomprehending, dependent, immobilised: the very feelings we are struggling to leave behind...All in all we can see that it is clearly 'incorrect,' and one reaction has been to ignore it. [59]

Goodison disagrees with this stance; according to her, despite the 'bad press' "falling in love does not go away. We all do it. It is gripping, exciting. We long for it. It makes other more politically 'correct' areas of our life pale by comparison...Its power is unquestionable" (157). Goodison chooses to focus on the powerful effect that the experience of falling in love has on the individual, which is a matter Shields too highlights in *The Republic of Love*. Indeed, this emphasis on the excitement of falling in love parallels the tendency within third-wave feminism and postfeminism to explore aspects that were regarded, as Whelehan affirms, "feminist taboos" (*The Feminist Bestseller* 170). Clearly, Goodison's essay foresees how certain pleasures and experiences, that may have been the subject of earlier feminist criticism, would be re-examined in the 1990s and 2000s.

Goodison also discusses how the power and vitality of the experience of love might be used in a positive and constructive way. Her suggestion is that

[59] Lucy Goodison, "Really Being in Love Means Wanting to Live in a Different World," Weisser 157.

> Instead of attempting to censor or dismiss these passionate feelings, we could work creatively with them. Perhaps the question is not why we have these 'incorrect' and humiliating experiences and how we can stop having them, but rather why that intensity and vitality of contact is confined to such a localised area; and how can we gain more access to experiencing and directing that vitality in other areas of our lives. (169)

This indicates that the intensity of love could be transferred into other areas of a person's life. While it remains questionable if the scrutiny of one's emotions when in love, which Goodison claims will be helpful in gaining knowledge on how to access the same positive feelings in other areas, is as easy and straightforward as it sounds, it is important that she affirms that romantic passion can co-exist with other non-romantic passions and interests. This is reminiscent of Irigaray's and hooks's contention that self-love is not only compatible with romantic love, but a necessary component of a rewarding, balanced romantic relationship, indicating that a number of thinkers believe in a holistic approach that allows for the nurturing of various aspects of a person's life. In effect, it emerges that both self-love and other non-romantic passions are just as valuable as romantic love, again allowing the belief that a heterosexual relationship necessitates self-sacrifice to be put into question.

Goodison further proposes that "we...consciously broaden the scope of our loving feelings. Part of this may be to realise that we 'fall in love' in situations far from the socially recognised romantic or sexual ones. Because our culture does not validate such feelings, we tend to dismiss them in ourselves" (170). Here Goodison discusses the importance of a general investment in love; in essence, she is asking her readers to be open to both romantic and non-romantic love bonds. This call to

contemplate the diverse experiences of falling in love is reminiscent of third-wave feminism, which embraces difference and avoids making any kind of 'universal' claims. In fact, much subsequent literary analysis in this thesis will show that openness to different kinds of love, whether romantic or non-romantic, is what allows for the presence of more affirmative love in the characters' lives.

In the essay "Beyond Embarrassment: Feminism and Adult Heterosexual Love" (1993), Barbara Ryan also picks up on some of Goodison's themes when she refers to how feminism has not really come to terms with the topic of heterosexual love. She claims that this can be discerned from the lack of dialogue on this subject: "the average citizen gets few chances to hear feminists discuss the possibility of adult heterosexual love (AHL)".[60] Ryan makes clear that not only is there a lack of any kind of substantial discussion on the matter,[61] but that feminists actually fear the idea of love with men. She explains, "One common fear is that feminist women cannot allow themselves to love men, or that, if they find themselves falling into this patriarchal 'trap', they would earn feminists' scorn" (464). Ryan is aware of the fear and shame women may experience because of their personal choices, thus suggesting, like hooks, that feminists speak more clearly about heterosexual love: "As long as feminists don't take a public stand on AHL, even our supporters are likely to feel confused" (465).

For Ryan it is imperative that contemporary feminism takes a stand on love, not only because of the sense of shame that is instilled in women who desire men, but also because "many, many of us go right on looking for AHL" (464). In failing to deal with the topic of heterosexual love, feminism risks "mimicry of a classic masculinist

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[60] Barbara Ryan, "Beyond Embarrassment: Feminism and Heterosexual Love," Weisser 464.
[61] Caroline Ramazanoglu also makes similar claims in: Caroline Ramazanoglu, "Love and the Politics of Heterosexuality," *Heterosexuality: A Feminism & Psychology Reader,* ed. Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (1993; London: Sage Publications, 1994) 59.

position, that of denying emotions and behaviours that greatly concern many women" (464-465). Ryan's viewpoint here suggests that earlier feminist criticisms of heterosexual relationships has led to the adoption of a masculine stance in the denial of the emotional; in other words, in trying to escape the master/slave dichotomy, feminists choose to appropriate the modes of the 'master' as a means of gaining a degree of power within patriarchal society.

However, while Ryan adopts a stance on romantic love that is less critical than some of the feminists looked at previously in the chapter, this does not mean that she denies the value of other feminists' work, something that may be seen to contrast the postfeminist approach. Indeed, Ryan accepts that the warnings issued by feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson[62] in 1974 merit attention, but stresses that these can only be worked through by first admitting to the part of heterosexual love in many people's lives. In essence, it is in opening up to heterosexual love as a possible choice that its problematic aspects can be addressed. Ryan makes this clear when, in response to Atkinson's question "What is love but fear?", she replies:

> it may be several things: companionship... habituated comfort, caring partnership...All good things, yet none necessarily free of the ugly motivations Atkinson lists. We have far more work to do on addressing her concerns, work that might begin with the admission that many of us enjoy and cultivate AHL. (467)

[62] See Ti-Grace Atkinson, "Radical Feminism and Love," Weisser 138-142. For instance, in this 1974 essay, it is clear that Atkinson opposes patriarchal institutions and traditions, as she states that "over thousands of years, men have created and maintained an enclosure of institutionalized oppression to fortify their domination of women by using many institutions and values as vehicles of oppression, e.g., marriage, family, sexual intercourse, love...Women are victims of this oppression" (139).

Ryan is not suggesting that heterosexual love is in any way a utopian space; she readily admits that feminists' doubts hold some truth, but sticks to her belief that effort should be made within feminism to come to terms with heterosexual love, as it can be a valid and positive experience for many women: "I believe that some women have managed to develop satisfying and feminist AHL relationships...I would like to give credence to their beliefs and discuss them more widely in feminist venues" (467).

Another reason for feminism to open up a wider dialogue on heterosexual love is that women have as much to learn about love as men: "women who want to love men have a lot to learn along with them, a process that can be burdened by assumptions that women just 'naturally' understand AHL" (470). This is a point that also comes across in Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*, while in *Communion*, hooks too rejects the assumption that love is intrinsically a woman's field: "Women are not inherently more interested in or more able to love than are men" (75). In breaking through these stereotypical notions that attribute love to the female sex, it emerges that there is a deficit of knowledge regarding love both on women's and men's part, something those like hooks and Ryan obviously believe feminism must deal with.

Indeed, Ryan feels that feminists, with their in-depth knowledge of patriarchal power structures, and their understanding of the complex web of human relations, are ultimately the most suitable for the job of introducing men and women to an imagining of heterosexual love that is in accordance with liberal and respectful values: "For with a wider sense of the infinite variety of love and lovers–and a broader understanding of complicity, collusion, and master-slave–today's feminists are unusually well-equipped to rethink AHL as friendship, coalition, intersubjective praxis, cross-cultural bridging, and translation" (470). Ryan here seems to embrace some of the defining aspects of

third-wave feminism, which incorporates second-wave theories with an openness to diverse experiences, priorities and pleasures. Such a multifarious approach suggests that feminists hold the potential to reimagine the heterosexual relationship: "A feminist AHL, with due attention to power imbalance, gender positioning, and daily struggle, seems an apt model of the dually transformative relationship I think cultural progressives must work on now" (470). It emerges, therefore, that if a transformative relationship is to be developed between the sexes, it is necessary that the patriarchal social structure is taken into account, which feminism is well equipped to do. Furthermore, it seems this suggestion for a feminist adult heterosexual love is particularly valuable and empowering for women, as it allows for a love between men and women that subscribes to the values of feminism, and not to those of patriarchy. It will be argued that many of the novelists analysed in this thesis are also attempting to theorize a feminist model of heterosexual love.

Two further current theorists who open up the discussion on love are Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey in their "The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance", which works as an introduction to the essay collection *Romance Revisited* (1995). In this piece the two writers make clear that romance is very much still alive and kicking, despite feminist criticisms. Pearce and Stacey state that "romance itself seems indestructible" (11) and that while "Feminism is, of course, one of the contemporary political and intellectual movements that might have been expected to bring about the end of romance", this has, in fact, "not happened, despite the opprobrium of earlier feminist writers" (11). Taking into account romance's ability to endure, feminists such as Pearce and Stacey assert that "this is a timely moment to move it back to the centre of the feminist agenda" (12).

What emerges in "The Heart of the Matter" is that the reason for romance's staying power within representations is "that romantic love, for all its persistence, is changing: indeed, that the continued success of romance as a cultural institution might be seen to depend, in large part, on its ability to change" (12). Pearce and Stacey go on to explain that "romance survives because of its narrativity...it is liable to perpetual re-writing; and it is its capacity for 're-scripting' that has enabled it to flourish at the same time that it has been transformed" (12). Indeed, romance's potential for rewriting is something DuPlessis has been seen to demonstrate when, for instance, she draws attention to innovative texts that foreground lesbian and bisexual love plots. Yet, this perception of romance as enduring because of its capacity to foster continuous rewriting and rescripting is a particularly important one for the purposes of this thesis, as the selected contemporary fiction writers will be seen to further explore heterosexual love, despite it having been the subject of much criticism as a traditional, patriarchal model of relationship. In fact, the women writers extend certain criticisms whilst also tending to shed light on alternative, and at times positive, aspects to heterosexual love. Thus, the women writers underline the potential to further develop discussions on heterosexual love.

In an effort to reimagine love, it is evident that the novels looked at in this thesis will need to question, at least to some extent, what Pearce and Stacey call the classic romance narrative, which Miller has also elaborated on. According to Pearce and Stacey,

> [that] story offers the potential of a heterosexual love union whose fulfilment is threatened by a series of barriers or problems. At the most general level, then, romance might be described as a quest for love; a

> quest for another about whom the subject has very definite fantasies, investments and beliefs. This quest involves a staging of desire whose fulfilment may be realised with attainment, or, just as likely, with its loss...like all quests its structure requires the overcoming of obstacles: in the case of romance this means the conquest of barriers in the name of love, and perhaps, by extension, also in the name of truth, knowledge, justice or freedom. (16)

The novels to be analysed here cannot be categorized as generic romances in this vein, even though romantic love is a central aspect of each book. Yet, although the novels selected for the purposes of this thesis do not belong in the category of classic romance, it is clear that romance and romance genres inevitably enter any discussion on love. Indeed, Miller has shown that the heterosexual relationship serves as the basis to the conventional romance plot, so that in portraying the love between the sexes, the writers are evidently engaging with a fundamental aspect of the classic romance. However, the chosen novels can be said to challenge many traditional ideas and offer unorthodox perspectives, thereby departing, in varying degrees, from the classic romance narrative model. For example, *The Blind Assassin* will be found to diverge considerably from this model, while other fiction, such as *The Republic of Love*, will be seen to draw on certain aspects of the romance genre, even though it also reinvents in that it questions certain conservative notions and offers its own individual imagining of love. Indeed, a reimagining of heterosexual love necessitates challenging conventions of romance on some level.

It emerges that many contemporary writers are engaged in changing the established romance narrative. Pearce and Stacey suggest that “Attention to factors

such as class, race and sexuality, for example, reveals not only how the structures of 'classic romance' are being radically transformed in the present, but also how they were present (but unseen) in the past" (14). It is significant that modern-day writers and thinkers are shedding light on matters that have traditionally been suppressed in more conservative portrayals, as this greatly contributes to a reimagining of romantic love. In fact, it becomes clear in "The Heart of the Matter" and this thesis that a reconceptualisation of love is facilitated by the ability of writers to focus on elements that have been previously silenced or largely ignored. For instance, an older woman's sexual desire and need for love is explored in *Love, Again*, while the matter of race will also be found revealing, as chapters two and three examine how writers try to undo how "white agendas have dominated discussions of love and romance" (Pearce and Stacey 22). Ethnic minority Americans and characters from Arab and Latin American countries play a central role in the portrayal of romantic relationships in the novels under consideration. In fact, Chapter Three deals specifically with what Pearce and Stacey term "perhaps the most explosive of all taboos...'the interracial relationship'" (22). In refusing to take a one-directional, narrow approach, and opening up to different forms of relationship, Pearce and Stacey display common concerns with third-wave feminism. Clearly, the late twentieth and early twenty first century is characterised by a desire to shed light on marginal voices and experiences.

Pearce and Stacey also draw attention to the interrogation of gender behaviour brought about by feminism, when they declare that

> many women no longer accept their place within classic narrative trajectories (seeking to challenge men, transgressing the taboos of interracial relationships or exploring the possibilities of 'deviant'

> desires). Whilst many of the traditional gendered components may well continue to have significance (monogamy, betrayal, conflict and abandonment), the extent to which women and men take up their respective places in relation to them has been fundamentally called into question with the impact of feminism. (36)

Pearce and Stacey highlight that women are no longer so willing to accept traditional roles within the space of love, which any reimagining of love needs to take into consideration. A reconceptualisation of romantic love must reflect the changes that have taken place with feminism and society; discussion of love cannot depend anymore on established, limited narratives, like those outlined by Miller, if it is to have positive impact on the young women of today with a feminist consciousness. hooks aims too for a new and visionary mode of teaching girls and women about love, which is appreciative of feminism's achievements but also allows for further transformation and development.

In "Rescripting Romance: An Introduction", which begins the collection *Fatal Attractions: Rescripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film* (1998), Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker are not only interested in contemporary texts that allow for a reimagining or reconceptualisation of romance, but also those that push for a rescripting. According to them, this

> lies not only in the extent to which they alter codes and conventions of traditional romance (e.g. the sexuality of the lovers; the nature of the obstacles they face; the order in which key episodes take place), but whether or not they actively interrogate and destabilise the institutions in which those conventions have become embedded (e.g.

> heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy, the family or the prescription for same-race relationships).[63]

For Pearce and Wisker a rescripting of romance requires the challenging of its conventions and associated institutions, opening the door for a whole new way of perceiving romantic love. However, they make clear that there are texts that appear radical but which are really more traditional; this Pearce and Wisker term as a process of sublimation:

> many...contemporary texts sidestep the feminist politics of their political project entirely through a process of sublimation. Under this heading we must include texts and productions whose apparently radical or liberated reworking of the romance plot and/or protagonists cloaks a highly conservative...move. (9)

Chick lit, which appears as a kind of 'savvy' romance, could be regarded as conservative and conformist in that it does not necessarily question traditional, idealised notions about romantic love and promotes commodity-oriented relationships and lifestyle. However, while it may be accurate that certain supposedly modern or progressive texts have a hidden conservative agenda, it also remains true that women's fiction must re-engage with the conventions of romance (e.g. heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy), if only for the reason that thousands of people still choose to invest in heterosexual relationships. To ignore certain aspects of love, because they are conventional, is then to risk leaving a new generation of women, to quote hooks again, "confused, wondering about the place of love in our lives" (*Communion* xvi). If the body of work that hooks refers to, which teaches women a re-visionary approach to

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[63] Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker, "Rescripting Romance: an Introduction," *Fatal Attractions: Rescripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film,* ed. Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker (London: Pluto P, 1998) 1.

love, is not created, "we witness the rise of a generation of females...who see any longing for love as a weakness" (*Communion* xvi). While it is necessary to continue to critique patriarchal models of heterosexual love, it is also important to consider how progressive, liberated relationships may be cultivated in Western society.

This thesis finds valuable the fact that the selected women writers, like the feminist thinkers examined in this part of the introduction, are searching for fresh and revisionary ways of addressing love, even if their approach is generally more subtle than radical. Furthermore, even though this thesis looks into heterosexual love, which in "Rescripting Romance" is identified as one of the conventions of the romance genre, the novels under analysis often destabilise other conventions, such as, for example, the prescription for same-race relationships. So in this study, certain norms are found to be challenged, without this meaning that the undermining of all kinds of convention is necessary; the moderate as well as the more progressive reimaginings of romantic love are significant. Pearce and Wisker agree that the most extreme models are not necessarily the most valuable:

> In the review of the different types/levels/degrees of romantic subversion...we...avoid the assumption that the most subversive texts/discussions...are necessarily the most interesting or most 'important'. In the final analysis romance is, and will always remain, a discourse predicated upon 'convention'...and the subtle, as well as the major, deviations from its norms...must remain our concern. (3)

Therefore, as will be seen, while rescriptings of romantic love are valuable, in that they challenge convention and allow for radically new possibilities to emerge, more

modest or nuanced or complicated reconceptualisations also have an important role to play.

In having seen here how a number of modern-day feminist thinkers foreground the reworking of romance conventions and contemplate non-patriarchal models of romantic love, it is apparent that it is both important and timely that this thesis, *Women Look into Love: Reimaginings of Heterosexual Love in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, examines how women writers portray heterosexual love in their late twentieth and early twenty first century fiction.

Chapter 1: Reclaiming Love in Contemporary Western Culture

Carol Shields's *The Republic of Love*

Romantic love between men and women is at the thematic centre of *The Republic of Love* (1992), since Carol Shields, who endeavours to examine love in all its forms, addresses the experience of falling in, as well as out, of love. In order to do this, Shields portrays the main characters, Tom Avery, a thirty-nine year old, thrice married, host of a late night radio show, and Fay McLeod, a thirty-five year old folklorist, as being involved with other people before they are finally seen to come together. The structure of the novel, which is predominantly divided into chapters that focus, in turns, on either Tom or Fay, allows Shields to look at the characters' respective search for love in the twentieth century urban setting of Winnipeg. These depictions, which include dealing with aspects of single life, as well as the matter of separation, point to Shields's effort to not only provide "a thoughtful scrutiny of love,"[1] but to also come to terms with women and men's approach to romantic love as a whole within contemporary culture; as she says to Eleanor Wachtel in an interview: "I wanted it to be a book about what love means at the end of our century".[2] Yet, Shields also examines the Western world's tendency to devalue romantic love; in fact, she not only opposes the view that romantic love is frivolous and trivial, but portrays it as one of the most significant human experiences. In an interview Shields clearly states her intention to get people to reengage with romantic love:

> It's difficult to write about, and people have avoided it and have written about loss and longing instead. So I wasn't trying to usurp the love

[1] Dave Williamson, "Seven Steps to Point-of-View Perfection," *Carol Shields: The Arts of a Writing Life,* ed. Neil K. Besner (Winnipeg: Prairie Fire P, 2003) 178.
[2] Eleanor Wachtel, *Random Illuminations: Conversations with Carol Shields* (Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane Editions, 2007) 48.

> story; I felt more that I wanted to rescue it, hold it up against other major themes, like war for example. Do I think love is a lesser subject than war? I do not. I think it is far more important than talking about war, or race relations, or these other things. Love is the basis of our lives. I don't think of it as a minor theme and yet we all know it's been relegated to...romance novels. Serious, reflective people do not fall in love; it's embarrassing even to say so. I don't believe that for a minute, so I want to write about love.[3]

Shields opposes how romantic love has been trivialised and made into a minor theme, and wishes to rescue it by highlighting how love is a fundamental aspect of life. So, although a number of feminists in the introduction have been seen to problematize heterosexual love within patriarchal society, Shields tries in *The Republic of Love* to take a more positive approach and shed light on the valuable role romantic attachments have to play in both women's and men's lives.

Although the novel ultimately emphasises the value of romantic love between men and women, Shields initially deals with the matter of separation. Therefore, it is at the beginning of the novel, in a chapter aptly named 'Breaking', that the anonymous third person narrator informs the reader of Fay's desire to split up with Peter, her partner of three years: "It's...a cold spring morning, and Fay McLeod, a woman of thirty-five, is lying beside a man she no longer loves".[4] Fay's consequent decision to act on this feeling and break up with Peter is indicative of a generally accepted belief that a relationship should only be allowed to last if it is fulfilling and rewarding to both

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[3] Marjorie Anderson, "Interview with Carol Shields," Besner 62-63.
[4] Carol Shields, *The Republic of Love* (1992; London: Harper Perennial-HarperCollins, 2006) 4.

partners; according to Anthony Giddens, this refers to what he has termed the pure relationship, whereby

> a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it.[5]

As well as making reference to this modern attitude to relationships, that helps explain the readiness with which Fay acts upon her emotions, Shields points to the lack of difficulty Peter and Fay face when it comes to the practicalities of the split. The dividing of the things they had purchased together as a couple turns out to be a straightforward task, which highlights the simplicity of ending modern-day relationships, where men and women are often not bound together by the legalities of marriage. As Shields writes,

> With surprisingly little effort or discord, Fay and Peter have settled their affairs. A single trip to Fay's lawyer...and a visit to the bank were all that was required. Afterward, they shook hands like characters in a comedy act and went out for a drink. (57)

In effect, the absence of any problems in the proceedings, as well as Peter and Fay's matter of fact attitude, assists Shields in showing how, in contemporary society, the ending of such a relationship is not only simple to carry out, but is perceived as quite ordinary.

Shields further portrays the break up as unexceptional when Fay is seen to be already thinking about meeting someone new: "As for the future, there will be other

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[5] Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992) 58.

men...Before Peter Knightly, she lived for three years with a man called Nelo...Before Nelo, it was Willy" (8). Fay's certainty that Peter is replaceable creates a sense that romantic relationships are, ultimately, transitory. Yet, in showing how Fay has lived with a series of boyfriends without getting married, Shields seems to be conscious of the social conditions that Harzewski, as seen earlier, believes have led to the chick lit phenomenon: "the social conditions that gave rise to chick lit...the rise of serial cohabitation, the increasing age for first marriage...have led to the emergence of what chick lit authors call 'singleton' lifestyles" (29). It appears that the same conditions that led to the emergence of chick lit concern Shields here as she depicts Fay moving in and out of relationships and practicing this 'serial cohabitation'. While later in the chapter Shields will be seen to take a positive approach to marriage, she does turn away here from the notion that marriage and a 'happily ever after' must be the necessary outcome of all romantic relationships or that, as Miller states in *The Heroine's Text*, "Without marriage as *telos*, there can only be death" (82).

Although Fay has been through a number of break ups before, she finds herself confronted with a fear of lonesomeness following the end of her relationship to Peter: "a change that frightens her with the spectre of loneliness" (10). This sense of aloneness makes Fay momentarily feel that she should have just stayed with Peter: "his absence is so...sudden. Her evenings feel airless and unbalanced...now she wonders if she made a mistake, if she and Peter shouldn't have persevered, making the best of things, as most people seem to do" (73). Fay evidently struggles to get used to living on her own again, after having become accustomed to Peter's presence. It is, though, not only Fay that suffers from loneliness, as Tom is also seen to be undergoing a similar spell of isolation. While Tom and Fay's stories are each told in separate

chapters, Shields creates a parallel between their experiences: "He is acutely, palpably afraid of Friday nights, what to do with them, those gaping, sneering, and stubbornly recurring widths of time... Tonight he sits alone in his apartment...and thinks dark, unkind thoughts about his life" (17). In indicating how Tom's and Fay's bouts of loneliness are linked to the absence of a partner, Shields is able to emphasise that romantic love is a determining factor in their lives.

Indeed, Shields appears to be aware of a general sense of isolation within Western society; she portrays how Tom's job as the host of a late night radio show puts him in contact with a large number of people who, like Fay and him, feel alienated and alone: "He's a night person...He feels in touch with...a certain segment of the population, the night segment...The trapped, the unlucky, the unclaimed, the lonely" (25). Shields refers to the pervasiveness of loneliness within the Western world at the end of the twentieth century in her interview with Marjorie Anderson: "I do know that loneliness is the disease of our times" (58). She implies that, within Western societies, there is an absence of satisfying loving connections, leading to this widespread feeling of aloneness and isolation.

The issue of loneliness is further brought to the foreground in the novel through Fay's engagement with the mythical figure of the mermaid.[6] The research she conducts on mermaids as part of her work at the folklore centre points to her affinity with a creature that is unable to communicate with others, as the mermaid is defined by her inability to speak: "Even their songs are wordless. Their underwater journeys and adventures, their consuming drive to tempt and console-all remain wrapped in

[6] That the mermaid theme is significant to the novel is evident from the fact that in "the contract for what was later *The Republic of Love,* the provisional title was "Bodies of Water," which has significantly more stress on the mermaid theme in her work than the final title"; see Catherine Hobbs, "Voice and Revision: The Carol Shields Archival Fonds," ed. Marta Dvořák and Manina Jones, *Carol Shields and the Extra-Ordinary* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007) 39-40.

silence" (79). The wordlessness of the mermaid points to an essentially isolated creature; the attempts to lure sailors to her can never really lead to love, as the mermaid remains trapped in her own silent world. According to Clara Thomas, there is an analogy between mermaids and the female protagonist, as "Like herself, who has never...come close to total commitment, the mermaids are totally unknowable",[7] suggesting that Fay has so far been unable to achieve true closeness in a way akin to the mermaids. Moreover, the reference to mermaids in Shields's novel is reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1836), which tells the story of the little mermaid who, out of love for the prince, gave up her voice in exchange for human legs. However, as she is finally not the one to marry the prince and is seen to have "failed in her quest" and to be "completely alone",[8] it may be said that this is a fate Fay fears for herself. Indeed, it can be suggested that these mythical creatures are the objectification of Fay's fear and that her work allows her to try and handle any underlying concern about ending up confined in loneliness and solitude, like the little mermaid; as Faye Hammill states, "Fay's interpretations of the mermaids reveal her own fears about future loneliness".[9]

While Fay tries to negotiate her own situation through her research on mermaids, Tom is focused on alleviating other people's sense of isolation through his job at the radio station. Tom, who "feels good when he's communicating" (25), works from

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[7] Clara Thomas, "Carol Shields's *The Republic of Love* and *The Stone Diaries:* 'Swerves of Destiny' and 'Rings of Light,'" '*Union in Partition': Essays in Honour of Jeanne Delbaere,* ed. Gilbert Debusscher and Marc Maufort (Liège, Belgium: L3- Liège Language and Literature, 1997) 155.

[8] Pil Dahlerup, Ulla Thomsen, Sabrina L. Soracco, Niels Ingwersen, Faith Ingwersen, and Gregory Nybo, "Splash! Six Views of "The Little Mermaid," *Scandinavian Studies* 63.2 (1991): 150, *JSTOR,* 17 Jan. 2013 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40919257>.

[9] Faye Hammill, "*The Republic of Love* and Popular Romance," *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, and Possibilities of Fiction,* ed. Edward Eden and Dee Goertz (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003) 77-78.

> midnight to 4:00 a.m. Uncle Tom Avery brightens the night. Middle class insomniacs in this city hang in with Uncle Tom...He knows what they're after. They want their edges knocked off, they want to get some sleep so they can get up in the morning and get on with their dangerous daylight hours. (22)

Tom, who figures as a male communicator in the novel, undertakes the task of caring for people and drawing them out of their seclusion. In handing this role over to a man, though women have conventionally been regarded as nurturers, Shields defies the patriarchal stereotype of the male sex as unresponsive and uncaring. Indeed, this is something that Patchett will also be seen to do in *Bel Canto*, indicating that an alternative vision of man has a significant part to play in these women writers' efforts to reimagine heterosexual love.

Tom's line of work, which requires him to reach out to a large, if atomised, audience daily, is also suggestive of a man who is looking for some kind of connection to others. It is, though, his search for love that really defines him; as the all knowing third person narrator informs the reader, Tom "ached for something...What he wanted was something to love...some person he could love" (105). Shields's emphasis on Tom's desire for love is revisionary if one considers how it is woman that has traditionally been defined in relation to love.[10] In her interview with Anderson, Shields contradicts the idea that men are indifferent to romantic love, whilst also refusing to distinguish between women's and men's emotional needs: "I have a romantic belief that men experience life very much as we do emotionally...men are as damaged as women are by power, by powerlessness, by loss, by loneliness, by their need for the

[10] For instance, William J. Robinson claims in an essay in 1917 that "love is a woman's whole life", in William J. Robinson, "Woman: Her Sex and Love Life," Weisser 58.

other" (62). Although referred to as a romantic belief, it is important that Shields openly talks about men's need for love, as this allows her to oppose the patriarchal Western standpoint that allots emotions only to women. Alison Jaggar refers to the Western world's position on emotions in her essay "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology", where she explains that within

> the Western philosophical tradition, emotions have usually been considered potentially or actually subversive of knowledge...Not only has reason been contrasted with the emotion, but it has also been associated with the mental, the cultural, the universal, the public and the male, whereas emotion has been associated with the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular, the private and, of course, the female.[11]

Shields's resistance to the idea that men are far removed from the realm of emotions suggests that a significant part of her rethinking of love includes opposing the kind of patriarchal views mentioned by Jaagar. In doing so, Shields not only liberates men from the pressure of expressing no emotions, but allows women to relate to the male sex on another level, as their common need and desire for love is brought to the surface.

Shields's emphasis on Tom's desire for love and connection is also indicative of the way in which *The Republic of Love* takes a different approach to the conventional popular romance. As Modleski has already been seen to suggest in *Loving with a Vengeance*, men in this genre are presented as unfeeling and distant, which corresponds to the Western philosophical view of men as separate from the

[11] Alison Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," *Feminisms,* ed. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, Oxford Readers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 188.

sphere of feelings: "the hero of Harlequins...is more or less brutal...typically in the first meeting between hero and heroine, the man's indifference, contempt...is emphasised" (31-32). Yet, apart from the highlighting of Tom's emotional needs and sensitivity, what makes *The Republic of Love* different from the popular romance is the fact that readers are as exposed to Tom's thoughts and feelings as they are to Fay's, which is due to the way Shields has divided the chapters between them. Hammill explains, "A more striking deviation from the pattern of romantic fiction is the equal attention which she gives to her male protagonist. Popular romances...almost always focus on female experience" (68). Even though Hammill does not acknowledge how this focus on Tom also allows Shields to resist the patriarchal tendency to avoid looking into male emotions, the comparison made between the novel and romantic fiction helps highlight the way Shields opposes some of the conventions of this particular genre. Yet, it seems important to recognize how, more than just seeking to make a distinction between *The Republic of Love* and the genre of romantic fiction, Shields wishes to demonstrate that a novel like hers, which focuses on love, need not necessarily uphold the patriarchal stereotypes about the male sex that are endlessly recycled both in popular romances and in Western culture more broadly.

While it is the male need for love and connection that has been suppressed within patriarchy, in *The Republic of Love*, Shields draws attention to the fact that women may in modern Western culture also take a negative approach to romantic love, despite having traditionally been associated with the sphere of emotions. As Sheila, one of Tom's ex-wives, says, "'Love,' she sniffed rudely. 'Who needs it'" (49). Although such an attitude can be linked to the rather more cynical tone adopted by feminists like Millett and Greer in regards to heterosexual love within patriarchal

society, Shields suggests in the novel that women are confused within contemporary Western culture about what stance to take towards love. This becomes clear from the erratic behaviour of Elizabeth Joll, a woman that Tom meets at the Newly Single Club and who is a single mother of around thirty.[12] Elizabeth's attitude to love is initially marked by a kind of cynicism and indifference that is reminiscent of Sheila, since she tries to come across as primarily interested in sex. Her way of responding to Tom's attempt to get out of her invitation for coffee at the end of a date clearly reflects this: "'That's ok,' she said with one final peal of her hungry laughter. 'I've got my period anyway'" (65). This apparent lack of concern, whereby Elizabeth acts as if her time with Tom would only be worthwhile if they were able to have sex, is inconsistent with the actual pain and desperation that she experiences when he fails to contact her again:

> 'Do you have any idea how hard it is for someone on her own to meet someone? I'm doing something wrong, I know that much, and I just want to know what...Are you scared to get involved with a woman who happens to have a kid?...' Her voice was cracked and closed. (139-140)

The desperation Elizabeth evidently feels suggests that the blasé attitude she displayed on her date with Tom was not entirely honest, particularly towards her own self. Elizabeth's desire to appear primarily interested in starting a casual physical relationship with Tom is indicative of the feminist tendency to concentrate on sex, rather than love. hooks elaborates on this phenomenon: "Sex gets more attention than love from feminist women and everyone else because when we speak of love we have to speak of loss, of lack, of our failures of will and courage" (*Communion* 71).[13] hooks

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[12] Here Shields can be said to make reference once more to the 'singleton culture' that was looked at earlier in the chapter.

[13] Also see Nickianne Moody's discussion on women's growing preoccupation with sex in: Nickianne Moody, "Feminism and Popular Culture", *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory,* ed.

is aware that love has become a more complex issue than sex; she clarifies that feminists have failed to initiate a fresh and genuine discussion about love: "Our talk about love has heretofore primarily been a talk about desire. For the most part, the feminist movement did not... offer us new ways to think about love" (*Communion* xv). hooks's perception of feminists' failure to come to terms with romantic love, and their emphasis on sex and desire,[14] helps shed light on Elizabeth's reluctance to reach out to Tom on an emotional level.

Additionally, Shields shows how this focus on sex nowadays not only makes it hard for women like Elizabeth to admit to their desire for love, but also makes some incapable of achieving real closeness with a man. For instance, even though Charlotte, a woman Tom sleeps with on one occasion, is seen to be both sexually suave and confident, she is clearly unable to connect with him on an emotional level:

> 'We'd better talk about the matter of precautions first,' she said. She showed him her condoms and he showed her his. 'I hope you don't mind if we use mine,' she said...'You don't mind if I ask if you're a complete hetero,' she said. She was beginning to sound not tough, but toughened, which was something different...'Do you by any chance,' she asked, 'have a herpes history?'...'This may sound kind of

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Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 185- 186, Cambridge Collections Online, 19 Sept. 2011<DOI: 10.1017/CCOL0521807069.009>.

[14] In considering the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s, the emphasis on sex and desire is not a new feminist phenomenon. Although feminists then came to feel, as Whelehan explains in *The Feminist Bestseller,* that "the Sexual Revolution...beckoned in a new libertarianism which didn't necessarily change women's sexual identity or their power relationships with men" (109), Genz and Brabon locate in *Postfeminism* a later branch of feminism called 'do-me feminism' that focuses on sex: "do-me feminism'... in the early 1990s ...focuses on sexuality as a means to attain freedom and power...Exemplified in popular culture by...the successful Singletons of the HBO series *Sex and the City*" (92). Shields appears to be aware of this privileging of sexual power in the 1990s in the novel.

> weird...but could you start by rubbing the instep of my feet. Both feet'. (145)

While it is important to see a woman consciously protecting herself and unashamedly claiming her right to pleasure, this scene points to how Charlotte's behaviour disallows the cultivation of intimacy and a sense of connection between her and Tom. Moreover, Charlotte's tone and the kinds of questions she bombards Tom with, although wise in the age of AIDS, serve to highlight the absence of a personal dialogue between them. Charlotte's apparent inability to act in an emotionally open way with Tom is suggestive of women's lack of knowledge when it comes to loving the other, something hooks tackles in *Communion*: "Women are often more interested in being loved than in the act of loving. All too often the female search for love is epitomized by this desire, not by a desire to know how to love" (88). While Western society educates individuals on how to practice safe sex with strangers, no serious attention is given to the matter of love and closeness; even women, who have traditionally been associated with emotions, are seen to have trouble acting in a loving manner.

Shields moves, however, from focusing on these failed attempts at love to the coming together of Tom and Fay. Their first encounter is an intense experience for them both; this moment, which is initially brought forth to the reader from Tom's point of view, is described in cinematic fashion, since everything else around the male protagonist seems to fall silent as Fay comes into his field of vision. To Tom, she appears to enter the house in slow motion, while he is also filled with a sense of magic and wonder at the sight of her:

> Someone opened the wide screen door, and Tom saw a woman running up the sidewalk toward the house. Oh my God, he thought, and seemed to see her pinned to the air like a hologram. He had an impression of thinness, of dark hair swinging from side to side as she ran, of a wide skirt in several shades of blue...she held on to the strings of a dozen rainbow-colored balloons. (174-175)

Fay is also transfixed by Tom from the very start:

> 'How do you do,' she'd said when they were introduced at the birthday party, and her first thought was that she would like to reach up and press the back of her hand against his cheek...She rested one arm along a cool shelf...steadying herself. (177)

Although presented from a point soon afterwards, when Fay is seen to look back to this first moment, it is still evident that she had an immediate and intense reaction to Tom. Shields appears here to draw on the "myth of romantic love...in Western tradition" that "True romantic love is an irrational state into which one falls like a ton of bricks".[15] It seems though that in drawing on this myth and portraying Tom and Fay falling in love suddenly and intensely, Shields is effectively able to communicate to her readers that this is the start of a positive and meaningful relationship.

Yet, while Fay and Tom's reaction to each other does confirm that this is the beginning of a new relationship, it is of no surprise to the reader that these two have come together. Even though the chapter is called 'Fortuitous Events', Tom and Fay's encounter does not appear accidental, as Shields has been preparing the ground for this from the start of the novel, pairing them in her narrative structure and portraying Tom

[15] Crystal Kile, "Endless Love Will Keep Us Together: The Myth of Romantic Love and Contemporary Popular Movie Love Themes," Weisser 415.

and Fay both going through a series of romantic disappointments that filled them with a similar sense of desolation and loneliness. As Hammill illuminates, "The novel consists of the interwoven stories of two lonely people...They do not meet until half way through the book, but the alternation between their two perspectives sets up an immediate reader expectation that they will end up together" (62).

This set up, whereby the two main characters are clearly meant to end up together, but whose meeting is delayed, is a device commonly employed in Hollywood films, as Alex Ramon explains:

> in its teasing postponement of Fay and Tom's first encounter...at about mid-way through the book, the text that the novel most resembles is in fact a Hollywood film: Nora Ephron's *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993)...which delays the first meeting of its protagonists until its very final moments.[16]

In fact, *The Republic of Love* not only draws on Hollywood representations like *Sleepless in Seattle*, but, in this particular case, makes use of popular romantic fiction conventions. According to Taïna Tuhkunen, Shields is "mirroring some of the typical features of romantic fiction...a love-at-first sight scene".[17] In *Reading the Romance* Radway also suggests that within the ideal romances she examines there is "the gradual removal of emotional barriers between two people who recognize their connection early in the story" (123). Although in these romances, at first "the hero's behaviour is...ambiguous" (140), it is evident that Radway, like Tuhkunen, sees romantic fiction as leading readers to believe that the hero and heroine have some

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[16] Alex Ramon, *Liminal Spaces: The Double Art of Carol Shields* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) 103.

[17] Taïna Tuhkunen, "Carol Shields's *The Republic of Love*, or How to Ravish A Genre," Dvořák and Jones 109.

connection early on and that they will end up together. Hence, while Shields does not present such an ambiguous male figure, she does utilise some aspects that are intrinsic to romantic fiction and film, as it permits her to emphasise that *The Republic of Love* centres around love. However, Shields's decision to make love the main topic of a novel that, despite its use of certain characteristics of popular forms, is "certainly not directed at the Mills & Boon / Harlequin readership" (Hammill 72), suggests that she wants people to think about romantic love between men and women as a serious subject, to encourage self-reflexivity.

Shields clearly wishes to affirm love's significance, meaning that in *The Republic of Love* she consciously tackles this matter; as Peter Kemp maintains, the novel is "a love-surveying love story".[18] Indeed, through Fay, Shields deliberately addresses issues around love, echoing the interview with Anderson looked at the start of the chapter:

> Fay's noticed something she's never noticed before. That love is not, anywhere, taken seriously...It's the one thing in the world everyone wants-she's convinced of that-but for some reason people are obliged to pretend that love is trifling and foolish.
>
> Work is important....Wars and good sex and race relations and the environment are important, and so are health and illness...We turn our heads and pretend it's not there, the thunderous passions that enter a life and alter its course. Love belongs in an amateur operetta, on the

[18] Peter Kemp, "Conjugal Arrangements," *Times Literary Supplement* 20 Mar. 1992: 21, *Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive*, 22 Jan. 2013 <http://find.galegroup.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=duruni&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200466071&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>.

> inside of a jokey greeting card, or in the annals of an old-fashioned poetry society...It's womanish, it's embarrassing, something to jeer at...no adult with any sense talks about love's richness and transcendence, that it actually happens, that it's happening right now, in the last years of our long, hard, lean, bitter, and promiscuous century... the miracle of it. (248)

Fay's observation that love is seen to belong in a jokey greeting card or the annals of a poetry society allows Shields to comment on modern day prejudices, whereby romantic love is regarded either as silly or outdated. Moreover, Fay's choice of the words hard, bitter and promiscuous in her description of the twentieth century are suggestive of an essentially harsh and cynical capitalistic world that focuses on sex, rather than love, something that Shields also brings across through her portrayal of Tom's experiences with Elizabeth and Charlotte. Indeed, Shields effectively transmits her sense of the Western world's failure to address men and women's need for love and connection.[19]

This is a progressive viewpoint, particularly when considering how romantic love has been subjected to much feminist criticism within patriarchal society. In fact, this affirmation of love's significance needs to be considered in relation to the "explosion of 'new' kinds of feminism" (Genz and Brabon 65) in the 1990s that were examined in the introduction and seen to embrace heterosexuality, as well as the phenomenon of chick lit, which "celebrates the pleasures of... heterosexual romance"

[19] The view that love is undermined in Western culture seems to be shared by hooks, who in *Communion* has been seen to state: "Many of us have been afraid to acknowledge that 'love matters,' for fear we will be despised and shamed by women who have come to power within patriarchy by closing off emotions" (xvi). This implies that love is considered something to be ashamed of and not conducive to the gaining of power. Jaggar's earlier statement that "emotion has been associated with the irrational" (188) in the Western world further corroborates Shields's point.

(Genz and Brabon 76). Rather than acknowledging the context of this approach to heterosexual love within feminism and fiction in the 1990s, Hammill simply believes that the novel's privileging of love is indicative of its identification with romantic fiction: "*The Republic of Love* replicates the ideology of the popular romance...through its emphasis on the centrality of love in human lives" (79). Yet, it is necessary to recognize wider connections, as it seems inaccurate to judge *The Republic of Love* in such a way, especially since Shields has clarified in her interview with Anderson that she does not feel that love should only be allowed to function as a central theme in devalued popular romance novels. In fact, Shields, like hooks, asks for a different approach to love, whereby it is taken seriously and recognised as something of a miracle.

Shields's emphasis on the importance of love in the novel also includes acknowledging the joy and intense emotions that come with the experience of falling in love. This is something she achieves by playfully portraying Fay as "Limp with love" (246) and Tom as euphoric: "He's over the rainbow. On top of the world. He's rockin' along. Burning, burning in a sea of love. Burning up with love" (244). In spite of the rather teasing tone adopted in the depiction of Fay and Tom, using these clichéd expressions of love, Shields still manages to effectively transmit the elation the couple experiences, whilst also accentuating the joy and headiness of falling in love.[20] Rather than undermining these feelings, Shields is intent on claiming love as a real and valid occurrence in people's lives. Goodison, as seen earlier, also takes a positive view of the experience of falling in love in the essay "Really Being in Love Means Wanting to

[20] See Tuhkunen regarding Shields's use of irony and parody (99); also see Hammill's essay for an understanding of comedy, humor and parody in *The Republic of Love*, and in particular, see Hammill (69) concerning Shields's use of these elements as way of reconfiguring certain basic aspects of romantic fiction.

Live in a Different World," thereby helping resist the tendency within Western culture to dismiss this state: "We all do it. It is gripping, exciting. We long for it. It makes other more politically 'correct' areas of our life pale by comparison...Its power is unquestionable" (157).

While Shields playfully uses clichéd expressions to express the joy of being in love for Fay and Tom, she is simultaneously aware that 'light' versions of romantic love are endlessly recycled in songs and films in the Western world. The music and film industry's monopoly over romantic love is indeed a source of frustration for Fay:

> Fay feels trapped in the shallow rhetoric of Hollywood or of pop music. Everything she pronounces or thinks seems to come winking off a set of diluted song lyrics. *I wanna hold you round the clock...I love you...baby...* A numbing self-consciousness has made her doubt every word that leaps off her tongue. Not to mention every word that enters her ear. (319)

It is made evident how the trite language of Hollywood films and pop songs prevents people from thinking about romantic love with any kind of originality and honesty. In consciously dealing with the treatment of love in modern Western culture, which points to the self-reflexive nature of the novel, Shields draws awareness to the prevalence of hackneyed phrases. Indeed, "one of Shields's central concerns in *The Republic of Love*" is, as Hammill explains, "the need to reclaim the language of love from the realm of cliché" (65).

However, while Hammill is certainly right in pointing to this as one of the key aims in the novel, it is also clear that Shields is aware of the difficulties of moving past the clichéd language of love and taking a more meaningful and sincere approach. In

fact, not only does Shields playfully use some clichéd expressions herself, but also demonstrates that Fay is unable to find an adequate term to describe what she has with Tom:

> 'I'm not having an affair,' Fay told Beverly...Love affairs were what movie stars have...Love affairs were trashy and temporary... 'I'm having...I don't know what I'm having. A romance, I suppose. What a word! Do you know what my sister-in-law, Sonya, calls romance? She calls it 'the love that dares not speak its name.' Romance fiction, those doctor-and-nurse things. It's lost its meaning, romance-if it ever had any. (249-250)

Fay expresses frustration at the way romance is perceived since, as she explains, "'that's what I'm having. A romance. A fine romance. Why are you laughing, Bev?'" (250). It seems that people's linking of romance with movie stars' love affairs and romantic fiction prevents Fay from being able to name what has developed between her and Tom. The novel self-consciously invokes the romance genre, as Shields examines the negative associations made with this kind of writing and the way this shadows any discussion about romantic love. In addition, the depiction of Fay speaking directly about some of the common prejudices regarding the terms 'romance' and 'love affair' permits Shields to demonstrate how the Western world's dismissive stance on romance and love is reflected in language. Shields is clearly aware of the challenges involved in talking on a more serious level about romantic love.

In addition to wanting to initiate a new appreciation of romantic love, Shields wishes to present a more complex picture of love, as she show how both of her protagonists are in some way connected to a few of each other's ex-partners. Fay

realises that she knows all three of Tom's ex-wives, while she also ascertains that her last boyfriend, Peter, was divorced from a woman called Fritzi, who had later married another man named Sammy, to whom Sheila, one of Tom's ex-wives, had previously been married. These intertwined discoveries, however, fill Fay with shame: "This Tom-Sheila-Sammy-Fritzi-Peter-Fay merry-go-round dismays her...these unspooled connections...She contrasts the tidy faithfulness of her parents' lives with her own disordered history, which is coated with an impure sheen, which is obscene and, yes, incestuous. A malevolent circle" (269). The exaggerated links between a number of the characters permit Shields to demonstrate how, within modern Western societies, where the younger generations tend to experiment with a greater number of partners, the nature of people's associations with one another has subtly become more intimate and complex. While such changes may only be apparent in a relatively small city like Winnipeg, what Shields tries to highlight here is how people's infinitely more complicated personal histories create these kinds of unwitting connections between relative strangers. Fay finds these ties offensive and shameful, particularly when she weighs herself against her parents; yet, it is precisely this comparison to a couple that married sometime in the 1950s that allows Shields to highlight the changing nature of men and women's romantic relationships, something she also effectively brought across when depicting the straightforwardness of Peter and Fay's earlier split. This does not mean that Shields denies the possibility of a meaningful and lasting relationship in today's world, as Tom and Fay's love indicates, but that she is intent on presenting an up-to-date picture of romantic love relationships in contemporary society.

The connections Tom and Fay discover they have to each other's ex partners are indicative of *The Republic of Love's* difference from conventional romances. Hammill, who examines the similarities as well as the dissimilarities between romantic fiction and Shields's novel, explains: "Fay and Tom are enmeshed in a complex network of human connections...this is a modification of the conventions of traditional romance" (74). Although the novel has, in certain ways, been seen to conform to some features of the popular romance, as with Tom and Fay's love at first sight scene, Shields does not create a world in which only the hero and heroine exist. On the contrary, Tom and Fay's love for each other forces them to acknowledge that they are part of a large network of people. Indeed, Fay knowingly rejects the isolating tendency within romantic fiction,[21] which is also indicative of the way Shields's novel remains conscious of the conventions of the romance genre: "The problem with stories of romance is that lovers are always shown in isolation...Fay...wonders why it is that lovers in books are cast adrift...removed from human interference...none of this is true. The world does not retreat" (333). Ramon, like Hammill, picks up on the way Fay and Tom's connectedness to others differs from romantic fiction: "*The Republic of Love*...asserts the impossibility of any relationship existing 'in isolation'...the text challenges the insularity of romantic fiction" (119). However, reimagining an aspect of traditional romance that contradicts the reality of people's experiences implies that, more than just altering some of the conventions of this genre as Hammill and Ramon suggest, Shields shows that "romantic love...is liable to perpetual re-writing" (Stacey and Pearce 12). Shields speculates on the potential to reimagine romantic love in alternative ways, rather than repeating old, tired paradigms.

[21] Radway also maintains in *Reading the Romance* that "the most striking characteristic of the ideal romance" is "its resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero" (122).

Another point Shields strives to underline is that the need and desire for love is not exclusive to the main characters. In the novel, "Love is...a republic, not a kingdom" (224), thus suggesting love is not the right of a privileged few, but of everyone. Indeed, it is an experience common to most of the characters in the novel; for instance, Tom's mother is seen to have found love with the man she married at the age of fifty-two, while Fay's family members are also in loving relationships:

> 'I love you' is what her parents must say...a thousand times...And what her...brother, Clyde, must whisper to his dear...Sonya...And Onion and Strom?...Surely mysteries must have been exchanged between the two of them. Almost everyone gets a chance to say it-I love you. And to hear it said to them. (224)

In looking closely at the phrase 'I love you', Shields highlights her belief that romantic love is not the exclusive privilege of the central couple. It must be said, though, that Shields does rather blithely assume that everyone gets the same chances for love as her relatively privileged white, middle class characters, without considering the kind of prejudices and hardships that might make this an impossibility for certain individuals. However, while Shields could have dealt with this in a more careful and sensitive manner, she does, at least, demonstrate that age does not alter the desire for love, as the love between Fay's parents, and the older couple Onion and Strom, implies. Indeed, this topic will be further explored when looking at Lessing's novel *Love, Again*, which deals with a sixty-five year old woman's ardent longing for love.

While love is prevalent in the novel, regardless of age, Shields does not imply that these romantic relationships are problem free. In fact, Tom and Fay are seen to

separate for a while following Fay's father's decision to leave his wife after forty years of marriage:

> Everywhere she looks she is pierced with the fragility of human arrangements...No, no, she suddenly sees; she cannot open her body to such harm...Out of love, or its punishing absence, her drugged mother is slumped before a television set...Her father, who has survived on love's diminishing curve all these years...has exiled himself to a dark brown solitary cave...'Tom,' she finds herself stammering into the receiver. 'Listen...I'm so sorry, but this just isn't going to work out'. (331-332)

The unexpected cancellation of their wedding indicates how Shields manages to further postpone the moment when Fay and Tom truly settle down together, in the way the start of their relationship was delayed with the inclusion of Fay's trip to Europe and, as already mentioned, with the initial deferral of their first meeting. However, it must be recognised that this tactic of delay largely depends on the bringing in of obstacles, which are an essential element in the traditional romance plot. Stacey and Pearce explain that, in regards to the classic romance narrative, "the story offers the potential of a heterosexual love union whose fulfilment is threatened by a series of barriers or problems...like all quests its structure requires the overcoming of obstacles" (15-16). Therefore, the incorporation of these obstacles to Tom and Fay's happiness as a couple points to how *The Republic of Love* is, in certain ways, structurally dependent on prior romance forms.

However, although the obstacles faced by the central couple indicate how the novel draws on aspects that are intrinsic to the traditional romance plot, it is also necessary to consider how Fay's sudden decision to call off the wedding allows

Shields to highlight that individuals tend to make assumptions about romantic love based on what they have learned from their families. Indeed, it is evident that her parents' previously happy marriage had led Fay to believe in love as a positive good, a conviction then shattered by their sudden separation. Fay supposes that, in breaking it off with Tom, she escapes the misery her mother now endures: "A sense of salvation was what she felt. Profound relief. A narrow escape" (333). Fay's sister, Bibbi, is aware that she is reacting to their parents' separation: "'Are you sure this is what you want? You've been right in the middle of all this...awful sadness. But it doesn't have to be that way with you and Tom...everyone makes their own arrangements" (334). Fay reinterprets her relationship to Tom on basis of her parents' separation, indicating again how the state of her existence is not disconnected from the people around her.

Shields further supports the notion that an individual's attitude to romantic love is influenced by others when she shows how Fay is able to move towards restoring her faith in love only once Onion, who is an important, older female mentor in her life, has asked her to rethink her decision to split from Tom: "'I don't know what's got into you, why you've gone and done what you've done, but you've made a terrible mistake, and you've got to stop it right now'" (354). Upon getting this advice from Onion, who is truly able to understand the meaning of loss, due to her husband's death that same night, Fay reconciles with Tom. Onion's way of communicating her perception of love as precious and fleeting assists Fay in getting over the shock of her parents' separation. Although Fay's parents finally do work things out, this has nothing to do with her decision to go back to Tom, predating the other reunion. Therefore, the emphasis on Onion's capacity to help Fay face up to her fears allows Shields to make reference to women's need for guidance from female elders,

particularly when it comes to romantic love within the patriarchal social context. This is something that hooks stresses in *Communion*: "females are born into a patriarchal world...The time has come for female elders to rescue girls and young women, to offer them a vision of love that will sustain them on their journey" (xviii). Indeed, such a vision can be said to function as a potential source of empowerment for women in the patriarchal world, not only as they gain access to a more fulfilling conception of romantic love, but as they finally learn to value each other's beliefs and viewpoints.

Fay's reconciliation with Tom is suggestive of her differentiation from the figure of the mermaid, with whom she had identified during this confusing and lonely period. Fay's fear of commitment was shown to echo the ambiguity defining the figure of the mermaid, who is torn between her human side, as represented by her upper body, and her amphibian side, as seen by the fish tail. The mermaid, whose anatomy prevents her from ever becoming physically involved with any of the sailors she encounters, embodies a woman who is incapable of true closeness, something Fay had come close to turning into:

> In the days before she married Tom Avery there came to her a vision...of how it might feel actually to be a mermaid, adrift in a cold sea foam and endlessly circling the confused wreckage of...drowned, scattered human bodies...It seems to Fay...that the traditional mermaid was her spiritual sister-plaintive, coy, and greedy...Above this salty scene rose a wan yellow moon whose paleness announced a troubling imbalance: the conjoined life and its unscrolled intimacies were weighed against singular satisfaction, and found wanting-too full of

> domestic spoilage...too burdened with risk and danger. To love or not to love. (364)

Fay's vision of herself floating aimlessly around lifeless human bodies indicates how her fear of a close connection has almost led to the end or 'death' of her relationship to Tom. Yet, even though Fay feels frightened by what she refers to as 'domestic spoilage', it is her relationships to her loved ones that finally draw her away from uncertainty and doubt: "She hadn't counted on the particularity of desire-on Tom's midnight voice...or on how the blessings and admonitions of the bereft- Onion in particular-would drive her beyond her stumbling abstractions" (364). In putting an end to her theorizing of her fear of attachment and in relinquishing her association with the elusive figure of the mermaid, Fay is seen to embrace closeness and connection.

Tom and Fay's renewed commitment to one another and their decision to finally go through with their marital plans, although indicative of the privileging of love and connection in *The Republic of Love*, also point to Shields's support for marriage. This is something for which Shields has been criticised; according to Hammill, Shields "reasserts the importance of marriage and monogamy" (79), whilst "*The Republic of Love* replicates the ideology of the popular romance...through its ultimate privileging of marriage over other forms of relationship" (79). Although it is certainly true that Shields can be said here to uphold "the conventions of the courtship novel" which "demand a happy union between the heroine and romantic hero",[22] she does so because she believes that marriage serves the human need for closeness and connection. This is something she speaks about in the interview with Anderson:

[22] Joan Forbes, "Anti-Romantic Discourse as Resistance: Women's Fiction 1775-1820," Pearce and Stacey 303.

> there is a part of human need that involves a search for the other, that ultimate intimacy, and I suppose in our society and culture we arrive at that traditionally though marriage. For all the things wrong with marriage, it seems to give us that one chance to know an other. (57)

While Shields could be critiqued further for suggesting that the marital union functions as the privileged basis for true intimacy between men and women, it is clear that she wants to point out that marriage does allow for the building of a sense of affinity and connection. So, although Shields has been seen earlier in the chapter to suggest that marriage or a 'happily ever after' is not the necessary outcome of all relationships, it is apparent that she is far from opposed to this form of commitment and that she is prepared to draw on its positives.

In doing so, Shields questions an idea that was prevalent in earlier decades; she comments, "in the seventies…I saw so many women leaving their marriages in search of 'freedom.' I'm not sure anyone then, or now, can define freedom, but the definition can be broadened to include ties of loyalty and love".[23] Shields evidently wants readers to consider the positive potential of marriage, and not see freedom as divorced from love and long-term commitment. So, although feminists like Greer opposed, in *The Female Eunuch*, the "domestic romantic myth" (211) and tried to show women who have traditionally been dependent on their husbands that marriage does "not provide emotional security" (272), Shields takes a somewhat different approach in *The Republic of Love*. Indeed, this positive attitude to marriage is also evident in *Ally McBeal's* presentation of a modern young woman viewing marriage, and career, to be important aspects of her fulfillment; according to Genz and Brabon, Ally wishes to

[23] Donna Krolik Hollenberg and Carol Shields, "An Interview with Carol Shields," *Contemporary Literature* 39. 3 (1998): 343-344, *JSTOR,* 22 Jan. 2013 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208862>.

"'have it all'-marriage, children and partnership in the law firm" (74). As Rachel Moseley and Jacinda Read affirm, Ally "really does want to change the world, but then adds, "I just want to get married first".[24] These more affirmative views of marriage, which can be linked to the late twentieth century tendency to "fashion new styles of feminism" (Genz and Brabon 64), contrast the ideas expressed in the seventies by feminists like Greer. Yet, while Shields highlights marriage's positive potential, she does not idealize marriage; on the contrary, she clearly acknowledges the problems of marriage, as her depiction of Tom's three divorces and Fay's parents' marital problems indicate. So, even though Shields supports marriage, she does not approach it in a simplistic and romanticized manner.[25]

Furthermore, it must also be acknowledged that Shields attempts to take a less traditional approach to marriage, even as she embraces it as a positive life choice for her characters. Shields refuses, for instance, to adhere to a conventional depiction of the wedding ceremony, both in the case of Onion and Strom, and Tom and Fay. In regards to Onion and Strom, Shields humorously portrays them being married in the hospital by a female member of the clergy named Dot, while the two of them are dressed in unconventional wedding attire: Strom "wears a pair of blue pyjamas" and Onion, "who appears to have dressed hurriedly", has just worn "an old denim skirt and a white blouse" (110). As part of her refusal to take the rituals of the wedding ceremony too seriously, the marriage vows are presented in a rather comical manner, pointing to the way Shields makes "ample use of irony and parody" (Tuhkunen 99).

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[24] Rachel Moseley and Jacinda Read, "'Having it *Ally':* Popular Television (Post-) Feminism," *Feminist Media Studies* 2.2 (2002): 240.

[25] Shields's view of marriage is further clarified when she defends it as a worthy subject matter in fiction, explaining that an in-depth look at such longstanding relationships "...can be as complex…potentially dynamic, and as open to catharsis as the most shattering divorce". Carol Shields, "Narrative Hunger and the Overflowing Cupboard," Eden and Goertz 33.

Such an approach permits her to shed light on the irony of the vows being made by this particular couple, as Onion and Strom promise to stand by each other throughout the good and bad in their lives, while the groom is in an extremely critical state of health: "'In sickness and in health,' Onion repeats dryly, affecting a wince...Strom, who is supported by three large pillows, beeps back his assent...his one good eye madly dancing" (111). The somewhat untraditional approach to a wedding can also be discerned in Shields's portrayal of Tom and Fay wilfully bypassing the plan to have a large, elaborate marriage ceremony. Thus, as well as marrying in a courtroom without any friends or family, the newlyweds choose to spend their honeymoon simply in Tom's apartment.

According to Hammill, these two rather alternative weddings suggest that Shields brings certain unorthodox aspects in to her portrayal of love, without needing to completely reject several of the conventions of romance:

> These scenes repeat the basic plot events of the traditional romance but defy reader expectations about the presentation of those events...Shields's purpose...is to offer alternative versions of the love story, releasing it from conventional, idealized fictional patterns, and incorporating into it elements of unpredictability, complexity, provisionality, and comedy. (69)

Although it is evident that these unconventional elements do not subvert the fundamental story line of romantic fiction, it must be said that such seemingly small interventions do allow Shields to draw attention to the possibility of subtly transforming certain conventions and traditions of marriage. Therefore, in moving beyond simply looking at how the novel compares to the genre of popular romance, it

can be suggested that Shields does open the path for a new approach to marriage. The depiction of Onion and Strom's ceremony highlights the potential for change, as, in undercutting the widely accepted belief that a wedding marks the beginning of a couple's shared life together, Shields implies that marriage must not necessarily abide by any such rigid, traditional ideas. In addition, the portrayal of a woman performing the nuptials is particularly important, as Shields removes patriarchal authority from the marital union, which was clearly a deciding factor in feminist criticisms of marriage. Shields's effort to minimise patriarchal influence in this way is suggestive of how *The Republic of Love* allows for a rethinking of marriage, something Tuhkunen also acknowledges: "the institution is revisited in such a way as to liberate it from some of the severest social conformities and restrictions that have defined wedlock through history" (108). While there is clearly a lot of work to be done before the institution of marriage can be said to be free of patriarchal prejudice, these small, yet valuable, changes can be seen as promising.

Although Shields suggests that marriage can be reimagined in a potentially positive way, this does not mean that she takes a simplistic approach to men and women's committed relationships. Shields's treatment of Fay's parents' marital problems suggests that romantic relationships between men and women are never really ideal; indeed, even when Fay's parents are reunited, they are changed by the memory of the near-end to their marriage. Fay notices this about them:

> She observes her parents, who appear to have aligned themselves around something edgy and uncomfortable-she's not sure what that something is but believes it is more than a fear of being alone. Her father refers (very occasionally) to his 'spell of madness', and her

> mother, speaking ironically of the same period, uses the word 'vacation.' (365)

Fay too is unable to completely forget about the temporary break up with Tom: "Love renewed is not precisely love redeemed, and Fays seems less able than Tom to chase that thought away" (364). In presenting the cracks in her characters' relationships, Shields directs her readers away from the romanticised, seemingly perfect images of love that are put forward in Hollywood films and romance novels. Although Shields draws on these at times to emphasise the love centred theme of the novel, she is eager to get her readers to start thinking about romantic love in a manner that appears more complex and 'true to life'.

Having gone into some of the issues that continue to trouble several of the characters in regards to their relationships, it can be said that there is an underlying sense of fragility and uncertainty by the end of the novel, which prevents the reader from feeling that everything has been wrapped up too neatly. As Ramon explains, there is this "ostensible 'happy ending' into which is incorporated a significant amount of tentativeness and ambivalence" (109). However, the ambivalence and uncertainty does not only derive from the more realistic portrayal of love, but is associated with the characters' coming to terms with the matters of death and loss. The passing away of Strom, for instance, has now left Onion "rather frail-looking" (365), while Fay's father, following the incident when a plane wheel fell through his roof, has been made alert to the precariousness of life: "it brought her father to his sense...a violent electric shock, a jolt to his mortality" (364). Even Fay has become conscious of her parents changing with the passing of time: "they are getting older, more forgetful, more easily rattled" (365). These portrayals imply that, although Shields appreciates a committed

and long-lasting love, the inevitability of an end to all relationships, as well as life itself, is something of which she is also aware. Contrary to traditional romantic tales that emphasise a 'happily ever after', Shields implies that love between women and men is by no account timeless and invulnerable. Shields clearly addresses the illusion of forever when it comes to love in an interview: "Love...It's vulnerable, it's fragile...We think, when we have it, that we'll have it forever, but I don't agree" (Wachtel 87).

However, it is in recognizing romantic love's lack of forever, that Shields can stress how a connection should be appreciated for as long as it exists; as she elucidates, "Love is a gift, isn't it? We can't expect to have it all our lives. When it comes, we want to hang onto it" (Wachtel 87). This is illustrated in the way Onion tries hold on to her husband as he dies: "'I was holding on to his arm when he died, rubbing it and rubbing it, trying to keep the pulse alive" (354). Despite the lack of a forever, there remains a real and abiding human need to hold fast to such close, loving relationships.

It is noteworthy that Shields strives throughout *The Republic of Love* to reclaim romantic love's importance, rather than allowing its continued dismissal as inconsequential and trivial. In doing so, Shields also acknowledges the joy and intensity that comes with falling in love; however, the focus on Fay and Tom's happiness as a result of their meeting does not mean that she creates an idealised situation in which the two main characters exist only for one another, as their relationship is greatly influenced by the people around them. Indeed, this is one of the ways in which Shields manages to highlight the differences between *The Republic of Love* and romantic fiction, despite occasionally drawing on the genre in her novel.

Additionally, Shields endeavours in *The Republic of Love* to portray romantic love in a specifically late twentieth century context; as part of her aim to do so, the author can be seen to come to terms with a number of different, sometimes damaging, attitudes to love in modern day society, particularly through her portrayal of Tom and Fay's previous romantic involvements. Although Shields's attempts to stress the love-centred theme of the novel push her at times to include certain exaggerated romantic scenes that are reminiscent of popular romance novels and Hollywood films, she strives to depict love in a way that reflects men and women's experiences nowadays and is realistic and relevant to her readers. Shields's effort to work her way through the difficulties of contemporary relationships also leads to Fay's preoccupation with the mythical figure of the mermaid, who symbolises the isolation and loneliness that characterises many men and women in the modern world. However, it is Tom and Fay's move towards each other that not only allows them to escape the mermaid's solitary fate, but which assists Shields in affirming that, for both men and women, it "is one of our greatest longings in life-to be that close to another" (Anderson 57).

Chapter 2: Ethnic American Women Turn to Love

Introduction

This chapter will examine how Toni Morrison, with *Jazz* (1992), and Louise Erdrich, with *Love Medicine* (1993)[1], respectively explore romantic love in an African American and a Native American context. This allows the two writers to create a connection between the characters' romantic relationships and their experiences within their individual communities in the white and male dominant US society.

While both novels depict a group of people that have been marginalised in white controlled North America, Morrison's *Jazz* specifically deals with an African American couple, Joe and Violet Trace, who have settled in Harlem in the 1920s, following a life in the South, with its devastating history of slavery. In moving between the protagonists' past experiences in the South and more recent events in the Northern city, Morrison sheds light on how old traumas influence and shape her characters' romantic relationships, indicating her historically and socially complex vision of love. However, in an effort to better understand the development of Morrison's vision of love, her 1970 novel, *The Bluest Eye*, will be considered shortly before a main focus on *Jazz*.

Erdrich, on her part, depicts a marginalised Chippewa community residing on a North Dakota reservation, which too faces the difficulties of life in a society governed by whites. Yet, in *Love Medicine* Erdrich is also interested in exploring romantic love within a specifically Native American context, so that she shows how the ideas, beliefs and values that are specific to the Chippewa men and women in the novel are reflected

[1] Louise Erdrich first published *Love Medicine* in 1984, but later revised and expanded it, and republished it in 1993. It this 1993 version that is used here.

in their relationships. Significantly, Erdrich suggests that the community has an important role to play in her vision of romantic love.

Although Morrison and Erdrich are writing about two separate ethnic American groups, they are both interested in prompting their readers to consider romantic love in relation to their characters' community and collective history. This suggests that the romantic relationship between man and woman is not only personally significant, but of value on social, political and cultural levels. Consequently, romantic love between the sexes, within these ethnic American communities, can be said to help counter the damaging effects of life in the patriarchal, white dominant US society.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Before delving into an analysis of *Jazz*, Morrison's debut novel *The Bluest Eye* will be looked at briefly here in an effort to track the development of her conception of heterosexual love. Indeed, Morrison indicates in an interview that love is an important theme in all her work: "all the time that I write, I'm writing about love or its absence...About love and how to survive...whole in a world where we are all of us, in some measure, victims of something".[2] While in her later novel *Jazz* Morrison conveys her sense of love's potential to help men and women 'survive whole', in *The Bluest Eye*, she focuses on "what the painful consequences are of distortion, of love that isn't fructified" (Bakerman 60). Thus, in *The Bluest Eye* Morrison depicts the destructive effects that the veneration of white standards of beauty have upon African Americans and particularly Pecola Breedlove, an eleven year old girl living in Ohio in the 1940s, who desires blue eyes that hold the elusive promise of beauty and love. In

[2] Jane Bakerman, "The Seams Can't Show: An Interview with Toni Morrison," *Black American Literature Forum* 12.2 (1978): 60, *JSTOR,* 25 Nov. 2008 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3041597>.

the white dominant culture, Pecola and the rest of her family experience poverty and lack, and absorb the negative messages that are associated with the colour of their skin. Morrison deals with the complex effects of racism upon her characters' lives, their sense of self and ability to love and be in relationship with others.

In an effort to shed light on the insidious forms of racism in white supremacist[3] society, Morrison critiques romantic love and its representation within cultural apparatuses such as the film industry, since it serves to devalue African Americans and propagates damaging emotions. This is evident in the case of Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, who is enthralled by the movies:

> Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another-physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion...She regarded love as possessive mating, and romance as goal of the spirit. It would be for her a well-spring from which she would draw the most destructive emotions, deceiving the lover and seeking to imprison the beloved, curtailing freedom in every way. She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty.[4]

Morrison rejects how African Americans are indoctrinated into valuing an injurious vision of love that is associated with a white imposed beauty ideal which they cannot live up to. So, while feminists have been seen to criticise the patriarchal conventions of romance, which Morrison addresses when she examines its restrictive, possessive qualities, the novel also reveals how this version of romance is racially exclusive and

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[3] 'White supremacy' is a term widely used in hooks's work; see: bell hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love* 56.

[4] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970; London: Vintage, 1999) 95.

prejudiced. Pauline becomes conscious of her exclusion within dominant representations when she loses a front tooth while at the movies: "There I was...trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I...settled down to being ugly" (96). Since Pauline cannot conform to the culture's ideals, which promise happiness and love to those who meet a white model of beauty, and has no access to any positive images of African Americans, she falls into a void; as Thomas H. Fick maintains, "Pauline Breedlove is the cinema's primary victim".[5] Like the Dick and Jane primer, that points to "the alien white world...which impinges upon the lives of the black children and their families while at the same time excluding them",[6] the cinema shapes standards that are inherently white supremacist and prohibiting for African Americans.

Morrison further moves away from the strictures of romance in her depiction of the three prostitutes that live above the Breedloves' storefront home. These women, who view their profession without embarrassment and who "hated men, all men, without shame, apology, or discrimination" (42-43), are in contrast to the heroines that appear in the classic romance narratives explored by Miller and which Morrison now alludes to:

> They did not belong to those generations of prostitutes created in novels...that sensitive breed of young girl, gone wrong at the hands of fate, forced to cultivate an outward bitterness...but knowing full well

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[5] Thomas H. Fick, "Toni Morrison's 'Allegory of the Cave': Movies, Consumption, and Platonic Realism in 'The Bluest Eye,'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 22.1 (1989): 15, *JSTOR,* 4 Oct. 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1315270>.

[6] Phyllis R. Klotman, "Dick-and-Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in the Bluest Eye," *Black American Literature Forum* 13.4 (1979): 123, *JSTOR,* 9 Oct. 2012<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3041475>.

> she was cut out for better things, and could make the right man happy. (42)

Morrison shows her opposition here to romance conventions that present the female as vulnerable and in need of the 'right' man to protect and redeem her; in fact, as these women prove to be amongst the few adults that are somewhat friendly to Pecola, Morrison suggests that human connection and authenticity emerge in a realm that rejects tradition.

In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison is also seen to grant readers insight into the past and family background of Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father, which helps illuminate the circumstances that lead him to rape his daughter. As Jane S. Bakerman explains, "Cholly, parentless, set adrift by the death of his guardian, taunted and humiliated by white men during his first sexual encounter, does not know about nurturing love, and feeling love, is incapable of expressing it healthfully".[7] This inability to love 'healthfully', which can be said to also afflict Pauline who "neglected her house, her children, her man" (99), leads to the deterioration of their relationship, but also to Pecola's rape.

Claudia MacTeer, the nine year old friend of Pecola, who narrates parts of the novel, conceives that Cholly loved his daughter, but was only capable of a limited, destructive love:

> Cholly loved her...He...was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her. But his touch was fatal...Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly,

[7] Jane S. Bakerman, "Failures of Love: Female Initiation in the Novels of Toni Morrison," *American Literature* 52.4 (1981): 544, JSTOR, 5 Oct. 2012 <http://jstor.org/stable/2925459>.

> stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye. (163)

Morrison wishes to transmit how the quality of love always depends on the person doing the loving; Cholly, whose 'freedom' remains circumscribed by the legacy of slavery, is wounded to a degree where he is incapable of turning his inward eye/I outwards to truly perceive the other, so that this 'gift of love', or the absence of it, can only be a reflection of the trauma and confusion held within. The tragedy that Morrison further underlines here is the perpetuation of this 'unsafe' love; the lack Cholly experienced throughout his life leads him to relate to his family in a destructive manner, something that not only damages his daughter emotionally and physically, but forecloses the possibility of her growing to be a woman who can conceive of a healthy adult relationship and sexuality.

The novel ends bleakly; Pecola, who becomes pregnant, loses the baby, and lapses into madness, believing her wish for blue eyes has finally been granted, while Cholly dies. Morrison highlights how racism and trauma can lead to the deterioration of various forms of relationship, but does not imagine the road toward healing here yet. So, as well as shedding light on the destructiveness of romance, in her first fiction Morrison focuses on the dangerous form love can take when individuals are exposed to longstanding abuse and humiliation.

Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

In her novel *Jazz*, published over twenty years later, Morrison examines love between men and women in a very specific context, portraying African American life in Harlem in the 1920s. In fact, Morrison weaves an intriguing tale of a complex love triangle which centres on this period in history, whilst opening doors for a discussion on love that is very much contemporary. She does this by delving into the long-standing issues around racism and sexism within the patriarchal, white supremacist society of the US and proving them to be integral to an understanding of love in *Jazz*. In particular, Morrison offers a socially and historically informed interpretation of heterosexual love by showing how the subjugation of African Americans and the glorification of the white male actually destroy family units, which has a negative impact upon the romantic relationship between men and women within this ethnic minority. In creating a link between the historical oppression of African Americans and their intimate relationships, which is something that is also evident in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison demonstrates how a focus on romantic love can help illuminate complex social issues. Nonetheless, Morrison ultimately in *Jazz* stresses the empowering potential of intimacy and love, as she reveals how these serve as unifying forces for African American men and women, which is a development from the bleak picture of *The Bluest Eye*.

The centrality of romantic love to *Jazz* is clear when the mysterious narrator indicates from the first page that we are dealing with "one of those deepdown, spooky loves".[8] The complexity of the plot is also made apparent quickly as the reader is informed that this is the story of an older married man named Joe, who shot his young

[8] Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (1992; London: Vintage, 2005) 3.

lover, Dorcas, and whose wife, Violet, attempted to deface the dead girl at her funeral. Having introduced the reader to this highly intricate and unusual lovers' triangle, the narrator proceeds to tell the story which centres around this married couple who have migrated to Harlem from the South.

Morrison begins to draw attention to the significance of the protagonists' difficult history as African Americans in the white dominant US through this migration, which is not a simple process for Joe and Violet; indeed, the complex development of events in the novel needs to be seen in relation to the displacing experience of migration, which brought about what Morrison calls the "emotional unmanageableness of radical change from the menace of post-Reconstruction South to the promise of post WWI North" (x). This 'radical change' takes place in Harlem, which offers Joe and Violet, and other African Americans, a sense of liberty seemingly not found elsewhere. Effectively, in order to grasp the links Morrison makes between her characters' romantic involvements and the social issues that define them, it is necessary to understand the changes Joe and Violet have faced and the setting in which they now live, as well as the mood that defines the city of Harlem at this point in time. In recognizing the connection between the jazz music that permeates the city and a feeling of freedom emergent there, light is shed on black people's sense of being able to express themselves in new ways during the period. Linden Peach locates the two defining features of jazz music, which holds such lure in *Jazz*:

> First, there is anger at the violence that blacks in the North experienced at the hands of whites...Second, the music conveys emotional/spiritual longing and hunger, themselves products of a history in which black

> people had been forced to deny their emotional, spiritual and physical needs.[9]

It is the city, with its unique possibilities of expression for African Americans, with which Violet and Joe fall in love. Yet, it is here that love starts to take a different shape and meaning:

> And in the beginning when they first arrive, and twenty years later when they and the City have grown up, they love that part of themselves so much they forget what loving other people was like-if they ever knew, that is...what they start to love is the way a person is in the City. (33)

The development of a selfish and narcissistic self-love in the city is described; while the characters' problematic relation to love foretells the detrimental effects of the white and male dominant structure of US society, it is clear at this point in *Jazz* that the ability to love another is made difficult within this metropolis, with all its modern, urban possibilities. Morrison presents, according to Maria Balshaw, "the deceptions and seductions of the city...the depredations of a delightful, beautiful, but ultimately predatory urban modernity".[10]

Thus, it is in this seductive city, where the Traces' problems that are linked to their past in the South surface, that Joe turns to eighteen-year old Dorcas and leaves his wife feeling despondent and angry. Yet, the reader is told that Violet had been emotionally low even before the onset of Joe's affair: "Long before Joe stood in the drugstore watching a girl buying candy, Violet had stumbled into a crack or two" (23).

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[9] Linden Peach, *Toni Morrison* (London: Macmillan, 2000) 137-138.
[10] Maria Balshaw, *Looking for Harlem: Urban Aesthetics in African American Literature* (London: Pluto, 2000) 136.

As in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison starts in *Jazz* to create a link between the difficulties in her characters' romantic relationships and the oppression of African Americans; she does this by clarifying that the reasons for Violet's depression stem from her childhood, which was marked by the far reaching effects of slavery. Morrison conveys this by defying any linear, chronological order in the novel; the narrative switches between various periods in time, and in doing so, it emerges that Violet was raised by her grandmother True Belle, due to the damaged state of her own mother, Rose Dear, who had faced the hardship of having lost her own mother to the demands of a white lady and slave owner.[11] Moreover, True Belle's long absence also proved to be the precursor to the later departure of Rose Dear's husband. All this appears to have led to Rose Dear's depressive state and to her eventual suicide. Ultimately, "Rose Dear jumped in the well and missed all the fun" (99).

The connections between African Americans' historical subjugation in the US and the characters' lives and personal relationships are effectively highlighted through this portrayal of Rose Dear and Violet's joint suffering, as Rose Dear's decline, which led to her decision to fling herself to death in the dark depths of a well, had an impact on her daughter. This bond between mother and daughter is emphasised by Chodorow, who states that as "mother and daughter maintain elements of their primary relationship...they will feel alike in fundamental ways" (*The Reproduction of Mothering* 110). The mother's significance for the daughter, something that also emerges in Radway's work, helps explain the gloomy emptiness that follows Violet and has such an effect on her relationship to Joe. However, this feeling is also related

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[11] Andrea O'Reilly, "In Search of My Mother's Garden, I Found My Own: Mother- Love, Healing, and Identity in Toni Morrison's *Jazz," African American Review* 30 (1996): 371, *JSTOR,* 3 Nov. 2008<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3042530>.

to the values which were, directly and indirectly, transmitted to her via her grandmother. True Belle left her own children in order to care for Vera Louise and her golden-haired son, the product of an illicit affair with an enslaved black man. This boy, who appeared to be white although of mixed race, was the object of True Belle's adoration, so that she later regaled her grandchildren "with descriptions of life with the wonderful Golden Gray" (142). Like the white beauty ideals that are pervasive in mid-twentieth century film and taint Pauline's ideas of love in *The Bluest Eye,* True Belle's adoration of this boy ultimately transmits destructive messages about love, pointing to Morrison's desire to expose how the personal realm of emotions is affected by racism. Andrea O'Reilly explains,

> From her grandmother's tales of the pampered and worshipped Golden Boy, Violet learns that with whiteness and maleness one is assured love and happiness. She also learns from these stories that True Belle's daughters-one of whom was Rose Dear-were left behind...the mother love that rightfully belonged to the daughters was lavished on a white boy with 'the yellow curls.' (368)

It becomes evident that Violet and Rose Dear, as well as True Belle, were victims of a racist and sexist ideology that pervaded their lives. The maintenance of close, loving bonds between them was made difficult due to the long absence of True Belle, whilst at the same time all three women were essentially forced to comply with a world that demanded that whites be given priority. Living in a slave society, True Belle had to go with Vera Louise and did, to some extent, internalize the dominant model of thinking. Consequently, her worship of Golden Gray gave her own daughter and granddaughter the message that love belongs to the realm of the white male. It is clear that slavery

disrupted family units, as it denied Rose Dear and Violet of the presence of True Belle, and also created the conditions for a black woman to nurture feelings of adoration for the child that kept her away from her own home.

The wide-ranging effects of white supremacy and patriarchy upon love are also evident from the way Violet, paradoxically enough, embraces the golden boy in turn too, despite the fact that Golden Gray and his mother were responsible for True Belle's absence. She becomes aware that this has happened whilst trying to understand the reasons for Joe's involvement with Dorcas, a girl with "high-yellow skin instead of black" (97). It is then that she acknowledges the possibility that her husband, like her, has been seduced by other representations of love:

> Who was he thinking of when he ran in the dark to meet me in the cane field? Somebody golden, like my own golden boy, who I never saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers?...I knew him and loved him better than anybody except True Belle who is the one who made me crazy about him in the first place...Standing in the cane, he was trying to catch a girl he was yet to see, but his heart knew all about, and me, holding on to him but wishing he was the golden boy I never saw either. (97)

As O'Reilly identifies, the white 'golden' boy was the "beloved child" and was therefore given priority over the daughter and granddaughter (371). Thus, as a legacy of slavery, Violet grew up believing that this boy was the ideal object of love. However, while O'Reilly emphasises the absence of mother love due to the adoration of this "beloved child", she does not really engage with the fact that Violet was schooled from a young age in false representations of romantic love. The

destructiveness of this is made apparent when Violet enters her relationship with Joe with the image of the golden boy already firmly lodged into her perception of love and man. Although it is clear that women may, in certain cases within patriarchy, idealise men, as de Beauvoir affirms when stating in *The Second Sex* that females desire "a man who represents male superiority" (654), it is evident in *Jazz* that Violet's views and emotions have not only been influenced by patriarchal beliefs, but also by a racist mindset. Morrison, who frequently "highlights the dangers of assimilating dominant (white, male, bourgeois) American cultural values",[12] points to how love is not free from both the racist and sexist ideology that was and is pervasive in North America and unpacks how love can be a site where such social injustices take over. It becomes particularly clear in a novel like *Jazz*, that foregrounds Joe and Violet's relationship, that the personal realm of love has a political element, as it proves to be the very space in which dominant social hierarchies can manifest themselves and hold power over women and men.

hooks also tackles the conjoined issues of racism and sexism that are valuable in Morrison's vision of love, and attempts to establish that patriarchy cannot be dealt with solely as the only form of domination without examining white supremacy. As with third-wave feminists, who underline the need to consider the differences amongst women, hooks counters the neglect by white feminists to confront white supremacy; she ascertains that these feminists deal with terms like capitalist patriarchy without tackling the issue of racism:

> white feminists were using the phrase 'capitalist patriarchy' without questioning its appropriateness. Evidently it was easier for folks to see

[12] Emma Parker, "'Apple Pie' Ideology and the Politics of Appetite in the Novels of Toni Morrison," *Contemporary Literature* 39 (1998): 618, *JSTOR,* 30 Nov.2011<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208728>.

> the truth in referring to the economic system as capitalist and the institutionalized system of male gender domination as patriarchal than for them to consider the way white supremacy as a foundational ideology continually informs and shapes the direction of these two systems of domination. (*Outlaw Culture* 232)

hooks's effort to draw attention to the way in which patriarchy, as well as capitalism, is informed by white supremacy also leads her to examine how all of these three systems actually affect the way black people experience love. In *Salvation: Black People and Love*, hooks explains,

> we live in a society that remains white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal. As long as these systems dominate all our lives, black people...will always need to vigilantly create the alternative ground where our love can grow and flourish. Much of what we experience in the mainstream culture will militate against this love. (185)

hooks understands that white supremacist, capitalist and patriarchal culture does not support the building of loving bonds between black men and women. This corresponds to Morrison's own attempt to emphasize the way in which romantic love is distorted within white supremacist, patriarchal North American society; whereas Morrison is aware of the need to continue the feminist critique of patriarchy, her focus on race allows for a more multi-faceted consideration of heterosexual relationships. Morrison's concerns seem to accord with the prioritisation of the matter of race in recent feminist discussions of romantic love, for example those of hooks and Pearce. Although not all earlier white feminists neglected how racism interconnects with

sexism, it seems that in the 1990s and 2000s there is more of an emphasis on how different forms of experience and identity may influence love relationships.[13]

The social context, which privileges whiteness, in addition to maleness, within Western society also has injurious effects on man, which is a topic also touched on in *The Bluest Eye* with Cholly. In *Jazz* this can be discerned through the depiction of Joe's relationship to his mother, which is also affected by the racism and sexism inherent in US society and which in turn is seen to take a toll on him and his love relationships.

Unlike Rose Dear, Joe's mother is not dead, but permanently absent from his life. While aware of his orphan status in the family that raised him, it is only as a young man that he comes to know that the 'crazy', elusive woman with the "coal-black skin" (171) who lives in the local woods is actually his mother. Yet, despite this revelation, Joe is never able to make contact with her; he attempts several times to track her down, but his 'wild' mother remains as mysterious and out of reach to him as ever. According to O'Reilly, this absence defines his life as he "does not seem to ever have had an original self because at birth he was abandoned by his mother" (375). His relationships to both Violet and Dorcas are shown to be coloured by this void. Indeed in drawing attention to how Joe is affected by the absence of his mother, Morrison has a different point of focus here than Radway, who considers the way women turn to romance novels to satisfy their need for maternal love and nurturance. While Morrison does not contradict Radway's observations, she deals with how men's emotional growth and relational abilities are also constituted by the mother. As Chodorow explains in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, all children learn about relationships

[13] Shulamith Firestone, for instance, does examine the connection between racism and sexism in *The Dialectic of Sex,* yet she does not incorporate this into the chapters on romance and love, where she focuses instead on inequality of power between the sexes.

through attachment and separation from the mother: "the child's primary love for its mother...must usually give way to a different kind of love, which recognizes her as a separate person with separate interests...this is the most important aspect of relational development" (72). Thus, it is clear that Joe, whose mother abandoned him, was denied these important lessons.

That his mother's absence has an effect on Joe's love relationships is made evident by a particular search for her that proves fruitless. Although Joe finds the cave in which he believes his mother is living, he does not get to see her. While "Joe longs to discover where he came from so that he may, at last, know who he is" (O'Reilly 374), he is denied this. The reader is informed that from "then on his work was maniacal...when the cotton was in...Joe got married" (179-180). Joe himself is conscious of a link between his failure to reach out to his mother and his sudden decision to marry Violet, pointing to the way Morrison perceives love to be affected by such traumas: "'All right, Violet, I'll marry you,' just because I couldn't see whether a wildwoman put out her hand or not" (181).

This fusion of the quest for missing woman/mother and the adult identification of a woman/lover is not only applicable to Violet though. Joe is also unable to distance his relation to the eighteen-year old Dorcas from traumatic memories of his youth. Even in their most private and intimate moments, his mother lurks in his thoughts:

> He rented a room from a neighbor...Six hours a week he has purchased...time enough...to tell his new love things he never told his wife.
>
> Important things like how the hibiscus smells on the bank of a stream at dusk; how he can barely see his knees poking through the holes in his

> trousers in that light, so what makes him think he can see her hand even if she did decide to shove it through the bushes and confirm...that she was indeed his mother. (36)

This act of remembering his mother while in the presence of Dorcas suggests how his history defines his present; as Linda Anderson explains, "the process of remembering...highlights the past as not past, not finished, but as continuously reaching into the present and beyond".[14] Joe's unfinished past leads to an ongoing search for his absent mother that comes to a climax in the city scene where he hunts Dorcas down with a gun. The narrator allows Joe to voice his desire to find Dorcas; yet, as the reader focuses on Joe and his quest, the flow of the present moment is repeatedly interrupted by the insertion of scenes from Joe's last attempt to locate his mother. This alternating between Joe's frantic, desperate voice and the quiet space of the cave in the Southern woods causes the backdrop of Harlem to mesh with woodland terrain; Dorcas finally fuses and becomes one with his mother, Wild: "When I find her...she won't be holed up with one of them...Not Dorcas. She'll be alone. Hardheaded. Wild, even" (182). Although O'Reilly is not preoccupied by the ways in which romantic relationships between men and women are shaped by a number of complex factors, as is the case here, she does recognize that "Wild and Dorcas eventually merge...Wild is the woman shot, and it is her death that Joe mourns" (376).

Evidently, Joe is unable to keep his sense of alienation from his mother out of the space of romantic love shared with both Dorcas and Violet; this reveals the ways in which intimate connections are not immune to the traumas inflicted in other areas of his life, allowing Morrison to show, once again, how complex social realities shape

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[14] Linda Anderson, "The Re-Imagining of History in Contemporary Women's Fiction," *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction*, ed. Linda Anderson, Stratford-upon-Avon studies (London: Edward Arnold, 1990) 138.

these African American characters' romantic relationships. Although Lessing will also be found in *Love, Again* to point to the way mothers can influence people's perception of the opposite sex in a romantic context as adults, what is both significant and unique in *Jazz* is that Joe's mother is not just an absent mother, but Wild, who must be viewed in the context of a US culture that has been shaped and marked by slavery. Morrison's attentiveness to the historical discrimination against African Americans is made apparent in the portrayal of Golden Gray's reaction to Wild during an earlier encounter:

> He looks at her and...moves quickly to get back into the carriage. He wants nothing to do with what he has seen-in fact he is certain that what he is running from is not a real woman but a 'vision'. When he picks up the reins he cannot help noticing that his horse is also black, naked and shiny wet, and his feelings about the horse are of security and affection. It occurs to him that there is something odd about that: the pride he takes in his horse; the nausea the woman provoked. (144)

Golden Gray's reaction to Wild indicates how, according to Patricia Hill Collins, certain "races of people have been defined as being more bodylike, more animallike...Biological notions of race and gender prevalent in the early nineteenth century which fostered the animalistic icon of Black female sexuality were joined by the appearance of a racist biology incorporating the concept of degeneracy".[15] In comprehending the way in which black women have been aligned with animality, it becomes impossible to see Wild simply, as Joe thinks in moments of despair, as too

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[15] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,* Perspectives on Gender, Volume 2 (1990; New York: Chapman and Hall-Routledge, 1991) 171.

"brain-blasted to do what the meanest sow managed: nurse what she birthed...powerless, invisible, wastefully daft" (179). Instead it is made clear that Wild is as much a victim as the motherless Joe.

Indeed, it becomes evident in *Jazz* that the effect of racist and sexist prejudice upon one person does not confine itself only to that same person, since, as seen with Joe, this way of thinking invades the lives of others too. In revealing the ways in which Joe and his love relations are affected by Wild, Morrison suggests that romantic love is a space in which the problematic of white, patriarchal dominance can be explored. This can be done because love between men and women in *Jazz* is, directly or indirectly, shaped in a myriad of complex ways by the governing models of thinking in the Western world. Here the public, political world pervades the personal interior space of love, making the personal political and the political personal.

In demonstrating how Joe suffers due to the far reaching consequences of a joint elevation of whiteness and maleness, as is also implied with Cholly, Morrison allows for a different awareness of man. O'Reilly maintains that "Morrison's *Jazz* tells quite a different story of the wounding and healing of men...What Joe suffers from is...grief as an unmothered child" (375). While Morrison extends earlier feminists' criticisms of patriarchy, she also considers it necessary to take a more in-depth look at male behaviour, something which is also reminiscent of Shields's effort in *The Republic of Love* to explore Tom's emotional world. In effect, as hooks states in *Communion*, the "path to male self-love is as arduous as the path to female self-love. We all usually have to begin this journey by going back to childhood to do the work of reparenting" (191). So, although the novel is set in the 1920s, it deals with the modern day issue of man's emotionality and hurt, something addressed more directly by late

twentieth century gender discourse. It is in looking into man's emotional world, as her female contemporaries also do, that Morrison can show how both Joe and Violet's pain was caused by a past defined by the difficult reality for African Americans, which bespeaks the possibility of greater understanding between the sexes.

Morrison draws further attention to the detrimental effects of this patriarchal, ex-slave society when she reveals the way in which Dorcas has absorbed problematic conceptions of romantic love between men and women. Dorcas's susceptibility can only be understood, though, when seen in the context of her own traumatic past. Both her parents were killed in the East St. Louis race riots of 1917, so that Dorcas was raised by her aunt, Alice Manfred. Already a secondary casualty of racist violence, Dorcas grows up in a strict environment in which she is instructed by an aunt who, as a black woman living in white dominated, androcentric North America, has learnt fear intimately. Dorcas is, hence, taught by her aunt to be apprehensive of white men early on in her life: "she hid the girl's hair in braids tucked under, lest whitemen see it raining round her shoulders and push dollar-wrapped fingers toward her...Taught her...how to do anything, move anywhere to avoid a whiteboy over the age of eleven" (54-55). It is evident that Alice, who had suffered through years of oppression, tried to control and shape the young Dorcas's sexuality so as to make her inconspicuous to the roaming white, male eye. Yet, Morrison demonstrates how such control prevents Dorcas from thinking of her body, sex or love in a self-determined and positive way, and leads her to turn to other notions available to her within the community. The absence of the kind of inspired vision hooks refers to leads love to take on a mysterious yet idealized meaning, as Dorcas soaks up the stories she hears around her. When a woman, who takes care of her after school, speaks of a fourteen-year old girl

that ran away from home after a boy and ended up alone, Dorcas is captivated. She "was enchanted by the frail, melty tendency of the flesh and the Paradise that could...make a girl travel four hundred miles to a camptown...Paradise. All for Paradise" (63). It is apparent that the controlling environment at home leaves Dorcas grasping at other interpretations of love and life. In getting romantically involved with Joe, who is a married man in his fifties, she displays her confusion and uncertainty in relation to man and love. Her secret affair with Joe, which is initiated in Alice's home without her knowledge, and her idealized conception of love, indicate how Dorcas perceives romance as a form of resistance against her strict upbringing: "Resisting her aunt's protection and restraining hands, Dorcas thought of that life-below-the-sash as all the life there was" (60).

In addition to showing how the lack of a positive and empowering view of love has a detrimental effect on the way Dorcas conceives romantic relationships between the sexes, Morrison underlines how this young woman comes to idealize a patriarchal notion of maleness. This becomes clear through her subsequent relationship with Acton, who is an archetypal macho male: "Hawk-eyed, tireless and a little cruel. He has never given her a present or even thought about it...Other women want him-badly-and he has been selective" (188). What emerges in Dorcas's relationship to this domineering young man is the way in which she embraces her own role as the passive female. Dorcas accepts and even welcomes Acton's behaviour, believing that he treats her as a man should:

> Acton, now, he tells me when he doesn't like the way I fix my hair. Then I do it how he likes it. I never wear glasses when he is with me...And I play with my food now. Joe liked for me to eat it all

> up...Acton gives me a quiet look when I ask for seconds....I wanted to have a personality and with Acton I'm getting one. I have a look now. (190)

Dorcas desires to be controlled by her partner; she prefers Acton despite the sense of self-determination she experienced in her past relationship with Joe. While Dorcas concedes that with "Joe I worked the stick of the world, the power in my hand" (191), she is, according to Elizabeth M. Cannon, uncomfortable with this kind of role:

> Dorcas...seems at first glance a more independent subject than Violet. She doesn't seem subjected to Joe, as he is the one rushing to satisfy her demands...But Dorcas is uncomfortable with this type of power and thus captures the most sought-after male in her community, Acton, a male who 'owns' his women and constructs them.[16]

The awkwardness Dorcas feels in having autonomy and her ability to only enjoy a sense of influence and authority as derived from her submissive position next to a dominant male indicates the way that patriarchal ideology is deeply embedded in the minds of women. Considering how, as hooks points out in *Communion*, patriarchy destroys love, Dorcas denies herself the possibility of entering a positive space of love by embracing a male who seemingly represents power and authority. Morrison, like earlier feminists, evidently retains a critical stance to the patriarchal conventions of romance that portray men in this problematic light.

Nonetheless, while Morrison, on the one hand, shows Dorcas to be uncomfortable with a sense of power in her relationships to men, she reveals, on the other hand, Violet to be in need of a feeling of control in her relationship to Joe.

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[16] Elizabeth M Cannon, "Following the Traces of Female Desire in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *African American Review* 31. 2 (1997): 240, *JSTOR*, 3 Nov. 2008<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3042462>.

Although under patriarchy it has been seen how men desire to possess women, in *Jazz,* Morrison makes a point of highlighting Violet's wish for a sense of power over Joe, which can be seen as possessiveness. This is made evident in Violet's recollections of the early stages of her relationship with him, where she sees Joe as having belonged to her: "I was bound to meet my Joe Trace don't care what, and do what you will or may he was my Joe Trace. Mine. I picked him out from all the others" (96). Violet's selection of Joe, which leads her to look at him, as her own possession, is problematic for the relationship, since "domination and love do not go together, that if one is present, the other is not" (*Communion* 72). In witnessing how "women eschew the politics of love for the politics of power" (*Communion* 72), it is apparent that the female sex can replicate the values of dominance and authority prevalent in the patriarchal, Western world.

However, Violet's possessiveness also needs to be viewed as a symptom of what Morrison earlier called the "emotional unmanageableness of radical change from the menace of post-Reconstruction South to the promise of post WWI North" (x). In addition to the threat posed by Joe's affair, the experience of migration and the consequent period of transformation all contribute to this need in Violet to look back to the start of her relationship to Joe with possessive emotions. Her claim over Joe betrays her insecurity and need for a sense of control in light of all this change she has experienced. Moreover, her desire to 'own' Joe can be seen as part of a reaction to the way black people were themselves systematically treated as possessions by whites, something that also may help explain why "the love of a free man is never safe" (*The Bluest Eye* 163).

Joe experiences possessive emotions only towards Dorcas, in whom he feels he has made his own personal emotional investment: "he decided on Dorcas. Regarding his marriage to Violet-he had not chosen that...Violet did it for him" (30). Thus, when Dorcas gets involved with Acton, Joe hunts her down, thinking, "She'll be all alone. She'll turn to me...Just me. Nobody but me" (183-84). According to Philip Page, "Joe egotistically asserts that, as opposed to his experience with Violet, he 'chose' Dorcas and that she is therefore his".[17] Page goes on to explain, however, that this possessiveness needs to be looked at in relation to the fact that Joe "has to work through his grief for his missing mother, has to renegotiate his own past...Joe...is a displaced victim of the white majority, already an other" (162).

Page and Morrison both unmistakably pick up on the way the US's history of racism has created a scar in the psyche of many black people and how this, as a consequence, is manifested within the love relation. Morrison's historically and socially informed imagining of love allows her to stress that romantic encounters between men and women become the space where these scars are brought to the light, illuminating once again how love is the arena where the political and personal converge. Furthermore, in underlining how black women and men, who have both been victims of racial discrimination, can adopt a patriarchal way of loving that seeks to possess, Morrison supports hooks's belief that "racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination which uphold and sustain one another".[18]

While this possessive claim over the chosen loved other is clearly not a positive aspect of any romantic relationship, something Irigaray emphasises when

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[17] Philip Page, *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995) 162.
[18] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991) 59.

stating that it is important to "leave the other to be, not to possess him in any way",[19] this kind of behaviour must also be viewed in the context of black people's lack of choice within a white supremacist society with a slave past. Morrison stresses the particular importance of choice in love for black people and associates it with the Northern, early twentieth century setting of *Jazz*:

> when you listen to their music-the beginnings of jazz...They are talking about love, about loss...somebody's always leaving-but they're not whining. It's as though the whole tragedy of choosing somebody, risking love, risking emotion, risking sensuality, and then losing it all didn't matter, since it was their choice. Exercising choice in who you love was a major, major thing. And the music reinforced the idea of love as a space where one could negotiate freedom.[20]

Morrison points to the way in which love provides a space of freedom, where rather than be dictated to, one can make choices in life. Violet and Joe's respective choice of partners around the period when jazz music was making black people conscious of the potential for freedom within the space of love, conveys how romantic love might function as a political act of resistance to repression. While Morrison clearly does not condone possessiveness over a chosen loved one, just as second-wave feminists did not, she nonetheless acknowledges love's capacity to provide both men and women with a sense of agency and control that was otherwise nonexistent in their lives.

Morrison also conceptualises female friendship, like that which develops between Violet and Alice, as a form of liberation from repressive society. Violet, who

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[19] Luce Irigaray, *To be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (1994; London: The Athlone P, 2000) 46.

[20] Elissa Schappell and Claudia Brodsky Lacour, "Toni Morrison: The Art of Fiction CXXXIV," *Paris Review* 35 (1993): 113.

goes to Alice's apartment following Dorcas's death, finds herself in an unlikely dialogue with the aunt of her husband's dead lover. Violet's motivation for visiting Alice seems at first consistent with her own obsession with Dorcas, yet she soon finds herself articulating her sense of perplexity concerning the direction of her life with Joe: "'We women, me and you. Tell me something real. Don't just say I'm grown up and ought to know. I don't. I'm fifty and I don't know nothing...Do I stay with him? I want to, I think. I want...well, I didn't always...now I want'" (110). This plea for help regarding her relationship to Joe leads to an emotional breakthrough, as when Violet exclaims "'Oh shoot! Where the grown people? Is it us?'" Alice responds "'Oh, Mama.'" (111). Violet reacts similarly to Alice: "Violet had the same thought: Mama. Mama?" (111). Both women appear to retain a longing for their mothers; in Violet's case it is particularly evident that the pain of losing her mother persists, making it difficult for her to perceive herself as an adult. Hence, Morrison suggests, like Radway, that beneath the longing for resolution with Joe resides this continuing yearning for maternal love. Alice, as a seamstress, asks Violet for her coat so that she can fix the ripped lining, thus also fulfilling Violet's need for maternal nurturance. Violet "watched the seamstress go to work", whose "stitches were invisible to the eye" (111), signifying the emotionally sustaining nature of Alice's handiwork. O'Reilly suggests that "Violet in *Jazz* is 'daughter' to Alice, who takes Violet on a healing journey back to her original self and the mother she lost...she mends the ...tear in Violet's selfhood and stitches together the frayed pieces of her splintered subjectivity" (372). Violet's ability to open up about her emotions in regards to Joe allows her to also satisfy her desire for motherly love and attention.

Alice's unexpected friendship and nurturing behaviour serve as the catalyst for Violet to come to terms with her sorrow and to move beyond it. In being reminded of her mother, who, as seen earlier, was emotionally destroyed by the devaluation of black women in the South, Violet learns now that this wound can be healed; thus, she is able to share a moment of laughter with Alice, whereby Violet also recalls True Belle's return to her family and how she had realised then that laughter can serve as a healing balm:

> laughter was rocking them both. Violet was reminded of True Belle, who entered...and laughed...what they felt was better. Not beaten, not lost...even Rose Dear shook her head and smiled, and suddenly the world was right side up. Violet learned then...that laughter is serious. More complicated, more serious than tears" (113).

Christa Albrecht-Crane maintains that this ability to laugh is important:

> Alice and Violet create a new sense of bonding, of belonging...they manage to tear themselves away from what defines them socially-their race, their gender, their class...In these moments of serious laughter the women are strong, not beaten, not lost, because they affirm that they cannot be completely defined by the social forces surrounding them.[21]

As a result, it emerges that Alice and Violet's laughter allows for a move away from the negative social forces that have defined and diminished them. Morrison strives to illustrate in *Jazz* that female friendship can act as the catalyst for a departure from the detrimental social values that disavow the possibility of self-love and a positive romantic love relation between men and women. Indeed, hooks has been seen in the

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[21] Christa Albrecht-Crane, "Becoming Minoritarian: Post-Identity in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *The Journal of Midwest Modern Language Association* 36.1 (2003): 65, *JSTOR,* 25 Nov. 2008 <http://www.jstor.org.stable/1315398>.

introduction to emphasise how self-love functions as the basis to love with an other, whilst also referring to the importance of creating a 'circle of love'. In effect, Violet's shift in this more positive direction highlights the development in Morrison's work, as here, unlike *The Bluest Eye*, she is able to imagine the road toward healing.

In acknowledging, together with a contemporary feminist theorist like hooks, the value of addressing female friendship and self-love within a discussion on romantic love, it is once again apparent that Morrison takes a modern and up-to-date approach to love between the sexes in *Jazz*, even within the novel's 1920s setting. However, despite Morrison's progressive vision of love in which female friendship plays a significant role, she is regarded by Maria Lauret in *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures* as presenting a conservative view of sexual politics due to the absence of a homosexual relation between Alice and Violet: "how conservative *Jazz's* sexual politics are-you only have to imagine what Alice Walker would have done with the developing friendship of Violet and Alice Manfred".[22] This statement, though, overlooks that it is Violet's friendship with Alice which assists Violet in coming to terms with her past and achieving self-knowledge and acceptance, which are key issues for women within patriarchy. It must be acknowledged that Morrison portrays a reformist and hopeful friendship, which attempts to unravel the effects of racism and sexism upon Violet's psyche and which will be seen to assist her in moving toward a healing intimacy with Joe.

In *Jazz*, the promise of female friendship is actualized when, following Violet and Alice's conversations, Violet expresses new awareness and insight. This is seen when Felice, Dorcas's friend, pays Violet and Joe a visit. In dialogue with Felice,

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[22] Maria Lauret, "African American Fiction," *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures*, Helena Grice, Candida Hepworth, Maria Lauret and Martin Padget (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001)123.

Violet reveals how the move to the city left her with a confused sense of identity: "'Before I came North I made sense and so did the world. We didn't have nothing but we didn't miss it'" (207). While the city provided a novel feeling of liberty, it was, considering "Morrison's abiding concern with the presentness of the past",[23] not a place where prior negative experiences were automatically left behind. Instead, it emerges that Violet had come to the North without having resolved these old traumas. Morrison testifies to the importance of facing one's past:

> although history should not become a straightjacket, which overwhelms and binds, neither should it be forgotten. One must critique it, test it, confront it and understand it in order to achieve...true, adult agency. If you penetrate the seduction of the city, then it becomes possible to confront your own history. (Schappell and Lacour 114)

In essence, the chaos that ensues in Violet and Joe's life forces Violet to break through the lure of this city, which has enticed so many to it:

> That kind of fascination, permanent and out of control, seizes children, young girls, men of every description, mothers, brides, and barfly women, and if they have their way and get to the City, they feel more like themselves, more like the people they always believed they were. (35)

It is only in looking beyond the city's seduction that Violet is able to consciously tackle the racist and sexist prejudices that have informed her life. Consequently, the city's promise of freedom only applies through an understanding of the limits to its

[23] Jill Matus, *Toni Morrison*, Contemporary World Writers (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998) 129.

power; in effect, the city cannot erase the pain of the past, but once this is understood by Violet, it does give her a sense of perspective in confronting her life in the South.

Violet now fully comprehends how being raised in the South, with its slave-tainted past, has shaped her adult life. She says: "'I just ran up and down the streets wishing I was somebody else...White. Light. Young again'" (208). Violet now realizes that she must leave such thinking behind:

> 'Now I want to be the woman my mother didn't stay around long enough to see...The one she would have liked and the one I used to like before...My grandmother fed me stories about a blond little child. He was a boy, but I thought of him as a girl sometimes, as a brother, sometimes as a boyfriend. He lived inside my mind. Quiet as a mole. But I didn't know it till I got here.' (208)

Violet admits that she had been unaware of the dangerous blonde boy who had resided within her till this point. Ultimately, Joe's affair, Dorcas's death and her consequent friendship with Alice take Violet through a process that leads her to exorcise this 'blonde little' boy, who had so profoundly affected her self-esteem and her perception of man and love. Although Violet is affected by the white beauty ideals that seek to determine the love worthiness of people, she is able, unlike Pecola, to move away from this cultural tyranny. According to Malin Walther Pereira, while "We can say of *The Bluest Eye* that signs of white beauty throughout the culture were internalized by the black community", in "*Jazz*, Morrison signifies on the signs from *The Bluest Eye*, but her characters and the novel escape being determined by them".[24]

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[24] Malin Walther Pereira, "Periodizing Toni Morrison's Work from *The Bluest Eye* to *Jazz:* The Importance of *Tar Baby*," *MELUS* 22.3 (1997): 77, *JSTOR,* 25 Nov. 2008<http://www.jstor.org/stable/46765 >.

The white supremacist beliefs that had affected Violet's self-perception and ideas around love, and from which she now disengages, allow Morrison to highlight the significance of reimagining romantic love in a way that is respectful of African Americans' racial identity.

It is important that Violet shares these insights with Felice, because, as Cannon asserts, "Something opens up. Violet shows Felice a female subject and looks at her as a female subject" (244-45). In communicating with a black woman who has rejected being further defined by the dominant culture, an awakening is triggered in the younger woman's own critical consciousness. Felice starts to consider the way in which her perception of herself and love has also been violated by forceful racist ideology:

> I understood what she meant. About having another you inside that isn't anything like you. Dorcas and I used to make up love scenes and describe them to each other...Something about it bothered me...Not the loving stuff, but the picture I had of myself when I did it. Nothing like me. I saw myself as somebody I'd seen in a picture show or magazine...If I pictured myself the way I am it seemed wrong. (208-9)

Felice realizes that it is difficult for black women to think of love without stumbling upon a pervasive white imagery, which has made a positive sense of self challenging for them. However, it is this recognition that creates a space of opposition within Western society; Violet's decision to share her realizations with Felice illustrates how communication can be a useful tool of resistance for women. Thus, Violet helps Felice move towards self-acceptance and a healthier vision of romantic love, something that is not achieved in *The Bluest Eye*, in spite of the fact that Claudia and

Frieda MacTeer attempt to assist the pregnant, traumatised Pecola by planting the marigold seeds they believe might save her. Through this development in *Jazz*, Morrison supports hooks's belief that women must create a 'new and visionary' body of work on love for the younger generation, indicating the tendency in the late twentieth and early twenty first century to emphasise how women could assist each other in realizing the possibility of a more empowering love.

Furthermore, just as Violet opens the door to a new critical perceptiveness for Felice, so Felice makes Joe and Violet aware of the circumstances surrounding Dorcas's death. Felice recalls how, after the shooting, Dorcas told her that "she'd go to the hospital in the morning. 'Don't let them call nobody,' she said" (209). In informing Joe and Violet of Dorcas's unwillingness to be taken to the hospital, Felice indicates the way in which Dorcas allowed herself to become a victim. Felice also recounts how it was Dorcas's dying wish that she convey a final message to Joe; her resentment over Dorcas's focus on Joe rather than on her own survival spills over. She tells Joe "'You were the last thing on her mind...She let herself die right out from under me'" (213). Dorcas's morbid loyalty to romantic notions, positions her in death, as in life, as a passive female. According to Derek Alwes, "Morrison's point is clearly that the rejection of the task of self-construction is a form of suicide".[25] Dorcas's unwillingness to fight for her own life suggests an inability to build an autonomous female self. It seems though that, within patriarchal models of romantic love, woman is encouraged to abandon her sense of identity, something which leads Irigaray in *I Love to You* to issue a warning to females: "she must avoid the risks of hierarchy and submission...of losing her identity" (76). Dorcas's acceptance of death without putting

[25] Derek Alwes, "The Burden of Liberty: Choice in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*," *African American Review* 30.3 (1996): 357, *JSTOR,* 3 Nov. 2008< http://www.jstor.org/stable/3042529>.

up a fight indicates that she succumbs to these kinds of risks; however, it is clear that men, as well as women, are implicated in the maintenance of patriarchal paradigms, considering that Joe shoots Dorcas. Hence, Morrison remains critical, like earlier feminists, of patriarchal constructions of identity as well as romantic love.

After revealing Dorcas's passive stance in the aftermath of the shooting, Felice converses with Joe and, in doing so, allows him to probe deeper into his relation to Dorcas. When Felice questions whether he's still 'stuck' on Dorcas, he replies "'Stuck? Well, if you mean did I like what I felt about her. I guess I'm stuck to that'" (212). Significantly enough, with the help of this young woman, Joe starts to explore his own inner world and, as a result, displays an insightful emotional maturity, something that is not achieved by Cholly. Joe's ability to examine his feelings about Dorcas contradicts the patriarchal Western world's perception that "a really 'masculine' man" needs to be "in control of his emotions, rational and 'objective' above all else".[26] The emphasis on Joe's emotional sensitivity challenges, therefore, the notion that men are generally uncaring and unfeeling, as Shields has also been seen to do by calling attention to Tom's emotional needs and desires.

Furthermore, following his talk with Felice, whereby he looks into his emotions regarding Dorcas, Joe is able to re-connect with Violet. Yeonman Kim maintains that, "Felice obviously serves as the mediator figure, an agent who restores Joe and Violet's love and merriment".[27] Thus, it is apparent that Morrison does not view love as an isolated, utopian space that cannot benefit from the help of others, just as she evidently does not see love as immune to the effects of the outside world. This

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[26] Shere Hite, *The Hite Report: Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress* (1987; London: Viking, 1988)141.

[27] Yeonman Kim, "Involuntary Vulnerability and the Felix Culpa in Toni Morrison's *Jazz,*" *The Southern Literary Journal* 33.2 (2001):132, *Project Muse*, 1 Dec. 2008 <https://duo.dur.ac.uk/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_32_1>.

is another point Shields conveys when she shows how Tom and Fay's relationship is affected by the people that surround them, while Erdrich will be seen in the second part of this chapter to demonstrate how her characters are shaped by the Native American community to which they belong. In regards to *Jazz*, though, it is apparent that the culture Joe and Violet live in influences their personal relationships, a point that is central to Morrison's vision of romantic love. Effectively, for Joe and Violet, communication and the presence of a loving community are vital, in that this helps challenge the authority of patriarchal and racist Western society. It is only once Joe and Violet have both reached a deeper level of awareness, with the help of mediators such as Felice and Alice, that they are able to move together in the present moment: "Mr. Trace moved his head to the rhythm and his wife snapped her fingers in time. She did a little step in front of him and he smiled. By and by they were dancing" (214).

Although *Jazz* certainly cannot be said to fit into the category of romantic fiction, the restoration of Joe and Violet's happiness as a couple may seem indicative of Morrison's faithfulness to the traditional romance narrative, whereby "Pleasure in the 'progress of romance' lies in the solution to the narrative problems, and the affirmation of the desire to see 'love conquering all'" (Stacey and Pearce 16). Yet, while the novel appears by the end to follow this romance convention, it must be pointed out that the reaffirmation of Joe and Violet's love for each other actually serves Morrison in demonstrating how this mature couple is finally able to share and soothe the wounds of the past:

> they played poker just the two of them until it was time to go to bed under the quilt...He wants to slip under it and hold on to her. Take her

> hand and put it on his chest, his stomach...Lying next to her, his head turned toward the window, he sees through the glass darkness taking the shape of a shoulder with a thin line of blood. Slowly, slowly it forms itself into a bird with a blade of red on the wing. Meanwhile Violet rests her hand on his chest as though it were the sunlit rim of a well. (224-25)

In portraying the way in which Joe and Violet are able to face their respective pasts together, something invoked through subtle imagery of birds, a well and blood in this extract, suggesting Wild, Rose Dear and Dorcas, it is clear that their renewed commitment to one another is more complex than simply following the traditional romance narrative.

Although O'Reilly does not explore romantic love in any depth in her essay, she is evidently aware of the significance of this development between the main couple in *Jazz*, as she expresses her belief that this particular scene suggests that "Joe and Violet have learned to live with the past...The last image we have of Joe and Violet is the two of them together, both thinking of their mothers (376). While O'Reilly has a different point of emphasis than Radway, who focuses on women's need for maternal love, they both perceive how the mother has an important role to play within a romantic relationship. For instance, the shoulder appearing to represent Dorcas that Joe imagines forming into a bird in the window evokes the "blue-black birds" in the woods that were a sign that his mother "was close" (176), which not only suggests the interconnectedness of the different aspects of his past, but points to his mother's continued presence on an emotional level for him.

Moreover, this recollection of the protagonists' respective mothers, and Dorcas, specifies how Morrison conceptualises love as the space where the grief over

such traumas is shared, and as a result, eased. Man and woman (rather than just woman), are seen to be in need of the other's presence; in effect, this goes against the traditional association of women with love and emotions within patriarchy, a viewpoint that *The Republic of Love* also contests. Love, which is important to both the sexes, can consequently be said to counter the damaging effects of society upon marginalised men and women's psyches. Indeed, in making such a point, Morrison views romantic love, once more, in relation to the realities of life for African Americans within the white and male dominant US society, although, this time, she does so in order to highlight the healing and unifying potential of these kinds of intimate connections. This development in the later novel is clear indication of how Morrison puts forward a different line of thought than in *The Bluest Eye*, where love is seen to be more of a destructive force. So, while Morrison continues to be critical of oppressive models of romantic love, which she sees as informed by both patriarchy and white supremacy, she finally imagines Joe and Violet's relationship as a healing space. Thus, in *Jazz* heterosexual love holds some positive potential, which is a notion that a number of contemporary feminists have been seen to explore in the introduction; for example, in *Salvation* hooks also refers to the redeeming power of love for African Americans.

Additionally, it is important that this healing love which Morrison finally envisions in *Jazz* is an unpredictable love. This is transmitted to the reader via the narrator, who has mistakenly tried to foretell the outcome of the relationship between Joe and Violet. Towards the end of the novel, when the couple is re-united, the narrator concedes her/his mistake:

> So I missed it altogether. I was sure one would kill the other... That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack... I was so sure, and they danced and walked all over me. Busy, they were, busy being original, complicated, changeable-human...while I was the predictable one (220).

The narrator had conviction in the correctness of her/his own deterministic interpretation of Joe and Violet's relationship, which parallels the way in which the androcentric and white supremacist Western world influences and manipulates perceptions of love. Morrison unmasks the inherent falseness and meaninglessness behind any kind of all-knowing authority through the narrator's fallibility and concession of the unpredictability of the relationship. Joe and Violet escape being defined by the narrator, but it is an escape that alerts the reader to the danger of not doing so. As suggested by Katherine J. Mayberry, narrators must "admit the impossibility of their claims to know other characters; they must reveal that behind all narrative there is a narrating figure who is human and fallible and enormously pretentious".[28] In exposing the narrator as unreliable in *Jazz*, Morrison cautions her readers to remain vigilant towards any kind of imposing figures or powers, as well as authoritative, hegemonic and presuming views. It is only with such awareness that men and women will be able to turn inwards to one another and work on building a self-determined and positive love relationship that is not defined by any apparently all-knowing, authoritative figure(s) or social forces.

Jazz demonstrates that while there is still need to continue feminist criticism of patriarchal models of heterosexual love, it is also important to reflect and focus on

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[28] Katherine J. Mayberry, "The Problem of Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*, ed. David L. Middleton, Critical Studies in Black Life and Culture (New York: Garland, 1997) 305.

issues around race in regards to love, which is something hooks has recently argued for too. Moreover, in *Jazz*, unlike in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison highlights the healing potential in men and women's romantic relationships, as love is finally what allows Violet and Joe to 'survive whole'.

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*

Erdrich's *Love Medicine* tells the story of a number of Native American families living on a North Dakota reservation, which allows for an understanding of the love relationship between men and women that is particular to this setting and which thereby firmly places a reimagining of romantic love in the context of this Chippewa community. As will be explored, Erdrich takes up her themes through multiple central figures and narrative angles. Effectively, *Love Medicine*, which is structured around one or more of the characters' stories in each chapter, makes repeated reference to the way many of the romantic relationships in the novel help create a sense of community and belonging, pointing to the significance of the collective in Erdrich's vision of love. Moreover, *Love Medicine* highlights the realities of life on a reservation in the US, allowing Erdrich to clarify how the white and male dominant North American society influences romantic relationships between men and women, as Morrison also illustrates in *Jazz*. Yet, in spite of such forces, Erdrich seeks to put forward her own alternative, empowering and non-patriarchal imagining of romantic love, which remains true to the Native American culture she introduces in the novel.

What Erdrich initially emphasises, in the contemporary part of the narrative in the first chapter of *Love Medicine*, are the difficult circumstances for Native

Americans living on reservations, something which becomes apparent when Albertine Johnson drives home some time after her aunt June's death. She reflects,

> My mother lives just on the very edge of the reservation...I grew up with her in an aqua-and-silver trailer, set next to the old house on the land my great-grandparents were allocated when the government decided to turn Indians into farmers...looking around, I saw as usual how much of the reservation was sold to whites and lost forever.[29]

In transmitting this sense of the dwindling land of the Native American population in the late twentieth century US to the reader, Erdrich allows for a pragmatic awareness of the wider political situation for the families in *Love Medicine* whose sense of home is being eroded.

The marginalization of Native Americans by the white dominant US government has an effect on perceptions of men and women's romantic relationships, as seen by the enmity Albertine's mother Zelda expresses towards Lynette, who is married to her nephew. She calls her "that white girl" (15), while she also conveys her regret over her own past marriage to a white man: "'Learnt my lesson'...'Never marry a Swedish is my rule'" (15). Zelda goes on to stress that Albertine is Native American, despite her part Swedish parentage: "'My girl's an Indian,' Zelda emphasized. 'I raised her an Indian and that's what she is'" (24). It becomes evident that Zelda's love relationship with a white man unsettles her, as it creates questions regarding Albertine's identity. Just as Golden Gray in *Jazz* must eventually face up to the fact that his father is black, Albertine too must deal with the feeling of difference that comes with having a white father. When Aurelia chastises her sister for speaking badly

[29] Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (1993; London: Harper Perennial-Harper, 2004) 12.

of Lynette in front of Albertine, since her father is white, we are given an interior perspective that expands on this: "I understood what Aurelia meant though-I was light, clearly a breed" (24).

Questions of ethnic identity also plague Marie Lazarre at the age of fourteen. Erdrich moves between past and present in each chapter, and it is via this narrative technique that the reader is introduced to the young Marie in 1934, who wishes to distance herself from her Indian origin. In the wider context of social marginalisation, Marie wants to construct herself into something greater than an insignificant Indian girl living on a reservation, which is why she decides to become a nun:

> I was going up there on the hill with the black robe women. They were not any lighter than me...Because I don't have that much Indian blood. And they never thought they'd have a girl from this reservation as a saint they'd have to kneel to. But they'd have me. And I'd be carved in pure gold. With ruby lips. And my toenails would be little pink ocean shells. (43)

Karla Sanders, who sees that this picture "combines the gold of a Catholic statue with the ocean shells of native religions",[30] goes on to argue that this indicates the effect colonialism has had on Native American consciousness: "The fusion of religious emblems presents the ambivalence inherent in a people who have been forced to accept the validity of the colonizer's beliefs, and on a more personal level, shows Marie's desire to embrace a beautiful, powerful identity" (134).

Marie's identification with a religious symbol of Western society apparently disavows the possibility of her regarding her own Native American origin in a positive

[30] Karla Sanders, "A Healthy Balance: Religion, Identity, and Community in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine,*" *MELUS* 23.2 (1998): 134, *JSTOR,* 17 Feb. 2009<http://www.jstor.org/stable/468016>.

way. Instead, Marie feels that she must aspire to something higher; she must ascend the hill in order to pursue what she believes is a more worthy way of living. Her passport to this seemingly superior way of life is her apparent whiteness, as it also was in Golden Gray's case in *Jazz*. According to Sister Leopolda, remaining down in the reservation would mean relegating herself to the mere status of an Indian's wife: "'You're not smart...You have two choices. One, you can marry a no-good Indian, bear his brats, die like a dog. Or two, you can give yourself to God'" (48). Leopolda degrades Marie as an Indian girl, while she also transmits her negative view of love with a man of Native American descent, in opposition to a superior and redemptive life dedicated to God.

Marie, though, eventually rejects Leopolda's conception of the meaning of life and love. While she gains saintly reverence for her wounds from the other nuns following a violent struggle with Leopolda, Marie finds herself filled with sudden pity for Leopolda. Even her new saintly powers over Leopolda dismay her: "there was no heart in it. No joy when she bent to touch the floor...My skin was dust. Dust my lips...Rise up! I thought." (60). Sanders believes that, "Marie's realization that life in the convent with Sister Leopolda would be full of dust, a living death without love, propels her to reject that way of life and to leave" (136).

Marie turns away from the prospect of a life without love within the convent and, in doing so, rejects living in strict adherence with the religious values of the white dominant society. Moreover, in ultimately leaving the convent Marie also allows Nector Kashpaw, an Indian man, into her life. Nector, who takes over in recounting the story of his meeting with Marie once she has left the convent, first accuses her of

having stolen the pillowcase in her hand. This leads to an angry tussle; yet, as he pins her down, Nector finds himself becoming sexually aware of Marie:

> It hits me then I am lying full length across a woman, not a girl. Her breasts graze my chest, soft and pointed...I am caught. I give way. I cannot help myself, because, to my everlasting wonder, Marie is all tight plush acceptance, graceful movements, little jabs that lead me underneath her skirt where she is slick, warm, silk. (65)

Significantly, Marie takes the initiative in this incident with Nector: "Marie...catches and holds Nector with her own sexual power",[31] which reinforces her decision not to embrace a life of religious service, as promoted by Leopolda. While at the beginning of her meeting with Nector she says to him "'you damn Indian'... 'You stink to hell!'" (63), she then finds herself responding to Nector; a connection has clearly been made, so that Nector reaches out to her: "I hold her wounded hand in my hand...Her hand grows thick and fevered, heavy in my own, and I don't want her, but I want her, and I cannot let go" (67). It is in this moment implying sexual arousal that Marie also allows her hand to relax in his, indicating the beginning of an openness to love and to man, as well as a sense of belonging within the Native American community.

Sander sees Marie's encounter with Nector immediately following her departure from the convent to indicate "an acceptance of the literal values of her Native American heritage" (137). For Marie this means choosing a life on the reservation with an Indian man over a life in the church. Marie's relationship to Nector then becomes the basis for the creation of a large family, as apart from the many

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[31] Robert F. Gish, "Life into Death, Death into Life: Hunting as Metaphor and Motive in *Love Medicine," The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*, ed. Allan Chavkin (Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 1999) 77.

babies they have, Marie also takes in, amongst others, June, who is her deceased sister's daughter, and later on her son Lipsha: "the babies...were all over in the house once they started...I lost track of which were ours and which Marie had taken in" (126). It seems that through her relationship to Nector, Marie seeks to create a large family that functions as a community, allowing Erdrich to begin to suggest how romantic love relationships are connected to this sense of the communal.

While Marie and Nector create this large family, their relationship is not idyllic, since Nector is a drinker. Marie tries to control this, as she wants him to help her redeem her tainted family name:

> I had married a man with brains. But the brains wouldn't matter unless I kept him from the bottle...I had decided I was going to make him into something big on this reservation...when he got there they would not whisper 'dirty Lazare' when I walked down from the church. They would wish they were the woman I was. Marie Kashpaw (89).

Her dependence on Nector in order to gain a sense of worth, as well as external recognition within the community, show that while she has turned away from Leopolda's values regarding life and love, which diminished her as a Chippewa woman, she is now unable to escape the patriarchal mindset that sees woman's value only through her relationship to man. In essence, Marie's dependence on Nector suggests that she perceives him to be superior to her, which is exactly the kind of stance de Beauvoir criticised in *The Second Sex* when she stated that "For woman...to love is to relinquish everything for the benefit of a master"(653).

However, Sanders does not read Marie's identification with Nector from a straightforward feminist perspective, as she believes that it is related to Native

American women's changed position within their culture: "female power is no longer viable in the Native American culture, Marie's new identity comes not through herself, but through Nector" (Sanders 137). Paula Gunn Allen also helps shed light on such women's lack of power when she refers to the patriarchal influence of the colonizing European settlers upon Native Americans. According to Allen, "Traditional tribal lifestyles are more often gynocratic than not, and they are never patriarchal".[32] She believes though that "Now dependant on white institutions for survival, tribal systems can ill afford gynocracy when patriarchy-that is, survival-requires male dominance" (42). Consequently, Marie's dependence on Nector is indicative of her incorporation of patriarchal values that are not traditionally Native American but that have been adopted as a result of the US society's influence.

In addition to exploring the impact of the leading US society upon minority women, Erdrich engages with how a female character like Lulu Nanapush must move between the Native American culture, as personified by her mother, Fleur Pillager, and her uncle Nanapush, and the official Western culture, as represented by the government school to which she is sent. Lulu is made to negotiate these two cultures, which clearly has an effect on her. This can be discerned from the way the foreignness of the school makes Lulu ache for her mother and the culture which she represents as a medicine woman, despite the fact that Fleur has long been absent from her life: "I lived by bells, orders, flat voices, rough English. I missed the old language in my mother's mouth. Sometimes, I heard her. N'dawnis, n'dawnis. My daughter, she consoled me" (69). While it is her uncle Nanapush and not Fleur that rescues her from the lifeless school, Lulu, nevertheless, still identifies with her mother, and

[32] Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986; Boston: Beacon P, 1992) 2.

consequently the culture she represents, as she grows into a young woman: “I needed my mother the more I became like her- a Pillager kind of woman with a sudden body, fierce outright wishes, a surprising heart. I needed her when Rushes Bear’s son, Nector Kashpaw, started looking at me with an insisting glance” (71). Lulu’s need for her mother, which is a recurring theme in this thesis, is evident here; indeed, in a somewhat similar fashion to Radway, who emphasises that women seek maternal nurturance when they turn to romance novels, Erdrich affirms this link between the mother and romantic love when she shows how Lulu’s longing for Fleur accompanies her awakening to sexuality and love. Moreover, it appears that Lulu seeks her Native American mother to guide and direct her in relation to men and love.

Although her mother is not there in order to steer her transition from girlhood to womanhood, Lulu demonstrates sexual assertiveness by initiating a relationship with Moses Pillager. She gets involved with Moses despite the fact that he is distantly related to her; indeed, she appears to choose him as he is close to her Indian heritage and has a likeness to her uncle Nanapush, indicating how Erdrich perceives that romantic love can allow for the maintaining of a sense of connection to Native American culture. Both Moses and Nanapush are immersed in Chippewa ways, as they speak in their tribal language and are knowledgeable about traditional medicine. Lulu recalls, “One summer...when I was a little girl, he came to Nanapush and the two sat beneath the arbor, talking only in the old language, arguing the medicine ways” (73). In addition to Moses’s closeness to his Chippewa heritage, he is also a man who is removed from the influences of capitalist, patriarchal Western society, as he lives an isolated life on an island where he moved to after many of the tribe were lost to a Western introduced illness. In her desire to approach this solitary man who lives

disconnected from any kind of social norms, Lulu finds guidance on how to proceed via Nanapush: “my windigo stare caught him... I did what came to mind. I heard Nanapush. The greatest wisdom doesn’t know itself. The richest plan is not to have one” (80). Erdrich, therefore, is conceptualizing a love that involves acting on values that derive from Lulu’s Chippewa family. Furthermore, in loving Moses, Lulu is opened to the tribal language: “I woke to find him speaking the old language, using words that few remember, forgotten, lost to people who live in town” (81). It is in this space of love, in which Lulu and Moses communicate using a language other than the colonizer’s, that they both find themselves opening up to each other: “And deep in the night...we wept, drank each other’s tears” (81).

However, the close relationship between the two does not curb Lulu’s individuality and sense of freedom. When she finds that she is pregnant with Moses’s child, she feels that she cannot stay on the island for long, despite knowing that he will not follow her back into society. In effect, Lulu shows that she does not necessarily need the father to be present in order to forge a family. Instead, she acts independently of man and pursues her own needs, even if they are not compatible with the desires and proximity of her partner. In doing so, Lulu basically rejects the patriarchal mindset that expects woman to assume a traditional familial role and sacrifice herself to her man and children, an idea many of the feminists looked at in the introduction also opposed. Irigaray elaborates on this patriarchal viewpoint, alien to Lulu: “She has no right to ...love for herself...She has to be sacrificed and to sacrifice herself...And she must disappear as desire...unless it is...the desire to be wife and mother” (*I Love to You* 22).

Contrary to patriarchal law that negates women's desire, Lulu is seen to clearly express her wants and needs. In fact, Lulu, who appears to be narrating her story from some point in the future, openly claims this moment in time on the island as the awakening of her sexuality and in doing so, comes across as both powerful and assertive:

> To this day I still hurt. I must have rolled in the beds of wild rose, for the tiny thorns...pierced my skin. Their poison is desire and it dissolved in my blood. The cats made me one of them-sleek and without mercy, avid, falling hungry upon the defenceless body...I want to enter [men]...the way their hot shadows fold into their bodies in full sunlight. (82)

Lulu's unrestrained sexuality and the candid, vivid portrayal of her desires attest to her sexual agency, which is particularly significant, considering that, as Carole Vance says, "Feminism must insist that women are sexual subjects, sexual actors, sexual agents".[33] Although Shields has been seen in the previous chapter to address women's damaging tendency to appear as primarily interested in sex and not love,[34] a matter hooks also elaborates on, it still seems important for females to be allowed to express their desires, in light of patriarchy's suppression of their voice and their wants and needs.

Nector is one of the men with whom Lulu later becomes romantically involved, and also has a child with, even as he is still married to Marie. Yet, the muddled state of Nector's own romantic relationships is related to an uncertainty about

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[33] Carole Vance, "Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality," *Feminisms*, ed. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, Oxford Readers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 334.

[34] As outlined earlier in the thesis, see Genz and Brabon on debates around 'pro-sex' versions of feminism (91-97).

life as a Native American, something indicative of the socio-political background to Erdrich's imagining of love. Having already lived outside the reservation during his time in a government boarding school, Nector attempts, as a young man, to integrate into mainstream US society. Yet, his efforts prove futile, as he is given jobs that betray white society's prejudices regarding Native Americans. Having posed for a portrait that depicts him jumping, naked, to his death, he reflects: "I could not believe it...when she showed me the picture...The only good Indian is a dead Indian? When I saw that the greater world was only interested in my doom, I went home" (124). Nector here discovers that white society is simply interested in hanging on to its own definition of Indians: "Nector recognizes the epic and tragic role white America has reserved for the Indian".[35]

Nector returns to the reservation after these discouraging and alienating experiences. Yet, these moves between the reservation and the dominant white society, which are reminiscent of Albertine and Lulu's own attempts to negotiate the two cultures, are paralleled by the way in which he oscillates in his private life between Lulu and Marie. In fact, even in his relationship to Lulu, Nector is unable to maintain a balanced position; although Nector feels blissfully happy and liberated with Lulu for the first few years, this eventually becomes marred by his need to control her: "I was jealous of Lulu...I was jealous because I could not control her or count on her whereabouts...And yet I couldn't ask her to be true, since I wasn't" (135). Nector exposes his indecisiveness and his patriarchal need for control, which suggest that he does not understand that, as Cixous explains in *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, "Love

[35] Louis Owens, "Erdrich and Dorris's Mixed-bloods and Multiple Narratives," *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook,* ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong, Casebooks in Contemporary Fiction (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 62.

is ‘not having.’ One can only love on condition of not having what one loves” (112). While the patriarchal influence of the whites upon Native Americans is clear, Erdrich indicates, like many of the other writers in this thesis, that she remains critical of any controlling and domineering behaviour within the space of love.

Furthermore, in addition to his identification with a male dominant, possessive mindset, Nector is seen to be influenced by political interests. This is evident when he betrays Lulu by signing a paper that orders her off the land she has been living on. While Nector initially opposes this decision, he finally gives in to central political pressure:

> Lulu...didn’t own the land, because the Lamartines had squatted there. The land had always belonged to the tribe, I was sorry to find, for now the tribal council had decided that Lulu’s land was the one perfect place to locate a factory. Oh, I argued. I did as much as I could. But government money was dangling before their noses... My hand descended like a dream. I wrote my name on the dotted line. (138)

This shows, according to Louis Owens, how “Nector...goes consistently with the current, never fighting very strongly if at all” (62). Owens elaborates, “When he signs the letter evicting Lulu from her home, he assumes no responsibility for the act” (63). This act of signing the letter, which in itself appears as a very ‘Western’ act echoing written US government treaties, reveals that Nector’s attitudes towards love, as well as politics, are similar; in both cases, he displays an inability to make a decision and stand up for his beliefs and desires. Yet, while Nector cannot be excused for his part in Lulu’s eviction, the pressure placed upon him to sign this paper is also further

indication of the government's destructive effect upon the romantic relationship between this Chippewa man and woman.

Unlike Nector, Lulu does stand firm for her beliefs. In the chapter 'The Good Tears', where Lulu is the first person narrator, Erdrich gives her the chance to voice her anger over the discovery that Nector is an accomplice in the plan to evict her. This affects her love for him: "the politician showed his true stripe, a lily-white, and the love knot we had welded between us unbent" (281). This underlines that the loved one's personal convictions and value system, as well as loyalty to the community, are important in the space of love in *Love Medicine*; while Lulu loves Nector, she cannot be with a man who yields to the government's unjust actions. Lulu expresses her sense of historical betrayal; she rejects their claim over the land and, in doing so, also rejects Nector:

> If we're going to measure land, let's measure right. Every foot and inch you're standing on...belongs to the Indians. That's the real truth of the matter. Of course, since when were higher-ups interested in the truth?...Kashpaw knocked that night...I stopped my ears and sicced the dogs on him. I was done with his lying hands. (282)

As well as standing up for her right to this land, Lulu does not allow herself to be belittled by the people who express disdain because of her unorthodox family, which consists of several children with different men. For instance, at a meeting of the tribal council, when she is verbally attacked by a vicious, and inherently patriarchal, crowd: "'All those Lamartine sons by different fathers.' That voice was loud enough to be heard" (284), Lulu defends herself: "I looked straight out at the people...There was many a man who found something to study on the floor. 'I'll name

all of them,' I offered in a very soft voice. 'The fathers'" (284). Indeed, it is not only Lulu but her sons that appear resistant, as they do not display signs of being influenced by this patriarchal consciousness. Lulu says about her boys, "They kept me company through loneliness. And they would look aside and never notice what my wildness made me do" (278). This suggests that while patriarchal models of behaviour are still dominant, there are members of the male sex who realise that "in order to know love" they "must challenge patriarchy" (hooks, *Communion* 175).

In fact, in detaching themselves from a patriarchal value system that disavows the possibility of love, Lulu's boys are seen to be fiercely loyal to their mother and to each other, something one of Lulu's lovers, Beverly Lamartine, notices:

> Lulu managed to make the younger boys obey perfectly...while the older ones adored her to the point that they did not tolerate anything less from anyone else...Bev thought of some Tarzan book he had read...there was a queen protected by bloodthirsty warriors who smoothly dispatched all her enemies. Lulu's boys had grown into a kind of pack...Clearly, they were of one soul...they were bound in total loyalty, not by oath but by the simple, unquestioning belongingness of part of one organism. (118)

This family, which functions like a tribe in microcosm, is clearly not defined in patriarchal terms, while its members enjoy a sense of belonging and closeness. Lulu's unorthodox love relationships evidently allow her to have the children with whom she experiences this sense of unity and community. Indeed, Lorena L. Stookey discusses this focus on community in Erdrich's work: "For Louise Erdrich... characters'

individual lives are always portrayed in the context of community...multiple narratives are structured around the idea that home is the site of identity and connection".[36]

Considering that Lulu's home is the place of connection for her and her boys, it is clear why Nector's role in the bureaucratic process of removing them from the land they live on, in addition to the accidental burning of her house, makes her withdraw from their relationship. Erdrich, therefore, stresses how respect for the loved one's home and community has a pivotal role in the space of love, particularly so for Native Americans, who have been historically marginalized and displaced in the US. The significance of home is also addressed in *Jazz*, where Morrison deals with Joe and Violet's migration to Harlem in search of a place where they can belong after the experience of Southern slavery and segregation. As a result, taking into account the emphasis laid on a place of belonging by people of ethnic background in both *Jazz* and *Love Medicine*, it becomes evident why Erdrich stresses that understanding and respect for the loved one's home is a crucial element in the heterosexual romantic relationship.

While Lulu ends her intimacy with Nector following the eviction, Marie sticks by her husband's side even when she discovers a note he has left her announcing his decision to leave her for Lulu. When Marie, however, first discovers Nector's intent, she is shocked and hurt. This pain can be better understood when looked at in relation to the fact that Marie, according to Greg Sarris, "believes others' ideas about her and sees no value in who or what she has been, where she comes from, her heritage".[37] Yet, despite her low self-esteem, Marie discovers that she has an inner strength and "overcomes the fear of losing her husband" (Sarris 194-95), as she understands "I was

[36] Lorena L. Stookey, *Louise Erdrich: A Critical Companion*, Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1999) 25.
[37] Greg Sarris, "Reading Louise Erdrich: *Love Medicine* as Home Medicine," Wong 194.

not going under, even if he left me. I could leave off my fear of ever being a Lazarre. I could leave off my fear, even of losing Nector, since he was gone and I was able to scrub down the floor" (165). Marie taps in to what Erdrich sees as women's transformational energy. Erdrich explains, "We are taught to present a demure face to the world and yet there is a kind of wild energy behind it in many women that is transformational energy".[38] Marie displays a Lulu-like independence, as she grasps her inner power, reclaims her home space and transforms into a woman that has conquered her insecurities.

It is with this new armour of inner strength, self-knowledge and self-love that Marie is able to open up to love again and to accept Nector back into her life. Unlike in her first encounter with Nector many years back, Marie is now the one who reaches out emotionally to him: "I put my hand through what scared him. I held it out there for him. And when he took it with the strength of his arms, I pulled him in" (166). This clearly designates that self-respect and love functions as the basis to affirmative love with an other, as hooks has been seen to point out: "Learning how to love our female selves is where our search for love must begin" (*Communion* 104). Indeed, the importance of self-love is too underlined in *Jazz*, while it will also be found to be of significance in Gordimer's *The Pickup*, which indicates that woman's positive perception of self has a valuable role to play in this reimagining of romantic love.

Yet, while Marie and Nector are able to overcome the difficulties in their relationship, it emerges that their own son, Gordie, experienced serious problems in his marriage to June. The reader, who already knows of June's death, is taken back to points in time in the couple's relationship through Gordie's narrative recollections.

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[38] Joseph Bruchac, "Whatever Is Really Yours: An Interview with Louise Erdrich," *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*, ed. Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin, Literary Conversation Series (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994) 100-1.

The reader, though, is not allowed to hear Gordie tell his tale from the first person, since both chapters that focus on him are narrated via the third person. Specifically, in the chapter titled 'Crown of Thorns', the story is "related from an omniscient point of view, with access to the minds of multiple characters, with a knowledge of communal history beyond the grasp of any individual, and with an authoritative judgment that seems beyond reproach".[39] This narrative technique, which is sometimes reminiscent of the one used in *Jazz*, serves to make Gordie appear almost as distant to the reader as the deceased June, something that helps transmit the sense of alienation that he feels due to his wife's death.

In addition to portraying a relationship in which one of the two partners is already known to be deceased, Erdrich adds to the unusualness of this situation by presenting a romance between a man and a woman, who as cousins, are related to each other. As in the case of Lulu and Moses, who are also distantly related, Gordie and June's relationship is atypical, to say the least; however, Erdrich clarifies the reasons behind this attachment when it emerges that Gordie and June were extremely close, due to having grown up in the same assorted household of people, making reference once again to the significance of a sense of wider affiliation within the space of love in *Love Medicine*: "He had been together with her all his life...When they ran away from everybody and got married...it was just a formality for the records. They already knew each other better than most people who were married a lifetime" (217). This intensely close relationship to June, though, makes it difficult for Gordie to adjust to her death:

> A month after June died Gordie took the first drink...From the beginning it was his hands that made him drink. They remembered

[39] James Nagel, *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of Genre* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2001) 23.

> things his mind could not-curve of hip and taut breast. They remembered farther back, to the times he spent with June when the two were young. They had always been together, like brother and sister...They fought but always made up easy and quick, until they were married. (212)

Although it is clear that Gordie was extremely attached to June and, therefore, devastated by her death, it also evident that the love relationship was not an ideal one. Gordie admits that they got along well only until they were married; from that point onwards their relationship was unstable and subject to temporary break ups, during which June had an affair with Gerry Nanapush that resulted in the birth of Lipsha. Moreover, it also emerges that in having entered into the patriarchal institution of marriage, Gordie became violent with June: "what his hands remembered now were the times they struck June" (213). Even though Erdrich does not portray all marital unions in this same damaging light, the depiction of the problems in Gordie and June's relationship can be seen to point to how patriarchal values have shaped the institution of marriage, whereby men behave in a tyrannical and authoritarian manner and women are "still expected to be... submissive to their husbands".[40] So, while a writer like Shields, who perceives marriage positively, does not envision married couples abiding by such patriarchal expectations, it is clear that there is still work to be done in overcoming the longstanding and conservative 'man dominant' paradigms of marriage in Western society, which is a topic many of the feminists looked at in the introduction have been seen to address.

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[40] Francesca M. Cancian, *Love in America: Gender and Self-Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 34.

This less than ideal relationship, which can be paralleled with Joe and Violet's turbulent marriage in *Jazz*, implies that June and Gordie were searching for a way to maintain a sense of familial closeness and belonging rather than choosing each other as a spouse. Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist believes that most "of Erdrich's novels chronicle the fumbling attempts of characters trying to find a kind of healing intimacy that will steady them against the contingencies of human existence".[41] It is not surprising that Gordie and June kept reinvesting in a love relationship that was obviously disastrous, since they were searching for a 'healing intimacy' or, as suggested by the title, a kind of love medicine, considering the particularly difficult experience of 'home' for many Native Americans. Lundquist discusses this and its effect on Native American people's identifying psyche: "the fragmentation that has resulted from the incessant disruption of Native life...the loss of self-determination, lands, and life-ways has been and continues to be detrimental to the ongoing psychic life of five hundred nations of North American peoples" (202). The people on this Chippewa reservation, as seen in the novel, have obviously not escaped the fragmentation caused by the dominant white US government and culture, which helps explains Gordie and June's choice of a romantic partner who is a familiar and constant presence. The emphasis Erdrich places on Gordie and June's closeness and long-time familiarity with one another suggests that the love between them serves as a means of finding security and stability in an ever-changing, hierarchical and capitalistic Western society. The particularly significant role love has to play for people experiencing such fragmentation and marginalisation is not only a subject matter that would be out of context in traditional romance narratives, but one that has also not been considered

[41] Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist, *Native American Literatures: An Introduction,* Continuum Studies in Literary Genre (New York: Continuum, 2004) 242.

within the feminist discussions of romantic love examined in the introduction. As a result, it seems important that Erdrich foregrounds this concern here.

Despite their familiarity and closeness, June and Gordie's relationship does not work out. After June's death, Gordie goes on a drinking spree, through which he attempts to appease his grief and his feelings of guilt over his violent behaviour with her. During one of his drunken states, Erdrich portrays Gordie's encounter with June's ghost: "Her face. June's face was there. Wild and pale with a bloody mouth" (218). Following this terrifying sighting, Gordie has a road accident with a deer, which he believes is June: "it came to his attention that he'd just killed June" (222). Despite the unusualness of this reaction, James Ruppert explains that this may be seen in different ways according to a Western or Native American view:

> when Gordie sees June's ghost, a reader whose orientations are Western will not see the encounter as real but will instead see it as a delusion brought on by alcohol and grief...However, in the traditional Chippewa worldview, the spirit world is the source of special insight and power. Human and non-human beings can be transformed to assume a variety of appearances.[42]

Furthermore, considering that according "to traditional Chippewa custom, a dead wife's returning to visit the husband who abused her would not be surprising" (Ruppert 75), it is apparent that Erdrich draws on a Native American belief to show that violent, patriarchal behaviour in *Love Medicine* can, in fact, be haunting for man. Erdrich posits the importance of a non-patriarchal and non-violent love relationship between the sexes, both for man and woman.

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[42] James Ruppert, "Celebrating Culture: *Love Medicine*," Wong 74-75.

In contrast to Gordie and June, Gerry Nanapush and Dot Adare have a relationship untainted by any kind of violence against each other. Yet, while violence is not an issue between them, Gerry is incarcerated over a fight with a white man, as a result of only having Native American witnesses on his side. The love between Gerry and Dot works, however, as a space of resistance to the US's legal system, since it manages to flourish despite the many restrictions. Not only is Gerry and Dot's love not extinguished by his enforced absence, but, rather, it is cemented by the conception of a child under the most extraordinary circumstances: "The child...had been conceived in a visiting room at the state prison. Dot had straddled Gerry's lap in a corner the closed-circuit TV did not quite scan. Through a hole ripped in her pantyhose and a hole ripped in Gerry's coveralls they somehow managed to join, and miraculously, to conceive" (199). The restrictions which the legal system tries to impose upon them clearly do not stop Gerry and Dot; their child is, thus, a lively testament to their resistance to Gerry's imprisonment and the state's power over them.

As well as resisting the imposed restrictions, Dot does not allow herself to be deterred by Gerry's absence; she simply waits it through: "she loved Gerry with a deep and true love-that was clear. She knit his absences into thick little suits for the child" (203). Erdrich shows how the creation of a family gives Dot strength, whilst she is also seen to be empowered by a deep connection to Gerry, which allows them both to sense when they are in need of each other. This is made apparent in Dot's conversation with Albertine: "'I got pains...Like it's going to come sometime soon. Well, all I can say is he better haul ass to get here, that Gerry'" (204). Albertine then witnesses the sudden and mysterious appearance of Gerry, who has broken out of jail to be with Dot: "following her gaze to the door, which a man's body filled suddenly. Gerry, of course

it was Gerry" (205). So, while second-wave feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson believed that within an oppressive, patriarchal society "'Love' can be felt by one party; it is unilateral by nature" ("Radical Feminism and Love" 140), it is apparent that Dot and Gerry's relationship is a mutually loving, attuned and caring one. Clearly, Erdrich conceptualizes the existence of a powerful love connection, where priority is given to the loved other's needs over the laws and regulations of society.

The strong love connection between these two characters also allows for the creation of spaces where they can enjoy a sense of belonging, even though Gerry's right to dwell in his own home has been taken away. As a prisoner, Gerry does not have a real 'home' in the traditional sense: "'I won't ever really have what you'd call a home'" (362). Yet, when he escapes prison, he consistently goes to wherever Dot is, indicating that she is the person to whom he can turn. This suggests that while Gerry doesn't have a home, he has a partner with whom he belongs, which is illustrative of how in Erdrich's vision of love, romantic relationships hold the potential to help work against the racial discrimination experienced by Native Americans. The promise of love is seen to be actualised in the novel through Dot's act of taking Gerry in, even when the odds are stacked against them:

> he appeared, suddenly, at Dot's door...Hiding a six-foot-plus, two-hundred-and-fifty-pound Indian in the middle of a town that doesn't like Indians in the first place isn't easy...She spent most of her time walking to and from the grocery store...astonishing the neighbours with the size of what they thought was her appetite. (200)

This rather comic, but also endearing presentation of Dot's loyalty and devotion to Gerry, as well as Gerry's own determination to be around Dot, is indicative of the

couple's continued investment in their relationship despite the many obstacles, testifying to the significance of love in their lives.

Marie is also seen to invest in the survival of her own bumpy love relationship with Nector when, later in life, she asks Lipsha to help her obtain a love medicine. Thus, as Lipsha becomes involved in their relationship, Erdrich implies that love is not something that only affects or concerns the couple. Lipsha is not indifferent to Marie's plight; rather, Marie's jealousy when it comes to Lulu makes him more sensitive and aware of the complexities of love. He learns that pain can be intertwined with love:

> And that's when I saw how much grief and love she felt for him...I thought love got easier over the years so it didn't hurt so bad when it hurt, or feel so good when it felt good. I thought it smoothed out and old people hardly noticed it...Now I saw it rear up like a whip and lash...So I didn't know what to do. I was in a laundry then. They were like parents to me. (233-34)

Lipsha becomes more conscious of the intensities of love, while he also begins to feel a sense of responsibility towards Nector and Marie. Consequently, in highlighting Lipsha's involvement, Erdrich places love in a larger communal context. Maintaining strong love bonds between couples can also be seen as a way of maintaining strong familial and community bonds. As Connie A. Jacobs identifies,

> Love as the most powerful of all medicines is the major theme of Erdrich's novels, and the families where love is strong are those families in which people survive and feel a part of the whole, of the community, because they have a place where they belong and are

> wanted...many of the family units are constructed not so much by biological ties but rather by ties of the heart.[43]

In putting forward the significance of love for the family and the community, Erdrich is accentuating the need for meaningful and sustaining romantic relationships between men and women.

While Lipsha recognizes the importance of maintaining a strong bond between Marie and Nector, he is unable to prevent the use of a modern love medicine from going wrong. Lipsha takes a pair of frozen supermarket turkey hearts to Marie rather than freshly hunted goose ones, which turn out to be Nector's downfall, as he chokes on a piece and dies. Despite the disastrous turn of events, relations do not appear to be over between Marie and Nector, as Marie tells Lipsha that she's seen her husband as a ghost. Lispha believes her; in fact, he too senses Nector's presence. This reappearance, which is clearly different to the tormented vision of June that Gordie encounters, teaches Lipsha something about Nector's love for Marie. He shares this with Marie: "'Love medicine ain't what brings him back to you, Grandma. No, it's something else. He loved you over time and distance, but went off so quick he never got the chance to tell you how he loves you, how he doesn't blame you...It's true feeling'" (255). So, although the disastrous effect of the 'love medicine' upon Nector may initially appear to reflect negatively upon romantic relationships, Erdrich implies how this death allows Lipsha to develop a deeper and more mature perception of love, as he is intuitive enough now to come to a better understanding of what his late grandfather's emotional world was like.

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[43] Connie A Jacobs, *The Novels of Louise Erdrich: Stories of Her People,* American Indian Studies (New York: Peter Lang, 2001) 146.

Additionally, Lipsha's effort to apprehend Nector's emotions indicates how there is a continual flow of love in *Love Medicine*; Nector and Marie's relationship, despite its difficulties, provided a home for Lipsha, so that he, in turn, is now able to give some of this feeling back to them. So, while, as indicated earlier in the thesis, men have been placed at a distance from the sphere of emotions within Western society, Erdrich considers here, as paralleled in *The Republic of Love* and *Jazz*, men's capacity to be emotionally open. Indeed, Lipsha's loving behaviour also acts as the basis for Marie to renew her affection for him: "a look came on her face...It was tenderness. 'Lipsha...you was always my favourite'" (257). Lipsha's sensitivity to his grandparents' love serves, in turn, to reinforce his own connection with Marie, strengthening, as a result, the love amongst the members of this family.

Lipsha and Marie, who are both reinforced by each other's love after Nector's death, are, nonetheless, not the only ones in *Love Medicine* to witness Nector's ghost. In looking back to the time after Nector's funeral, Lulu remembers how she was also visited by Nector, which served as a kind of revelation: "I felt the long weight of Nector...I smelled the lilac bath soap on his hands...New worlds, I thought, beyond this. Things of which I'd never heard" (296). While such a development, like Gordie's encounter with June's ghost, cannot be easily absorbed in Western thought, it is significant to the tribe: "in Chippewa religious thought, the concept of a return to life is central" (Ruppert 75). As a Chippewa woman, it is evident that Lulu is receptive to a more open and fluid notion of life and love. In conceptualizing love within a Native American tradition, Erdrich challenges her readers to begin reflecting on the connection between men and women in a way that does not necessarily fit into Western notions. It is through this reimagining of love that Erdrich cultivates

awareness of and resistance to the Western world's dominance over people's perceptions.

Erdrich goes on to portray how Lulu's after-death encounter with Nector is followed the next morning by the start of an unexpected friendship between her and Marie: "She knocked that morning. I let her in. Things are new even at the age when we are supposed to have seen everything. We sat down for coffee...I thought her voice was like music...ripe and quiet" (296). In this moment, Marie and Lulu do not remain stuck in jealousy or possessiveness and, instead, permit their love for Nector to work as a basis for unity and connection, rather than separation: "We did not talk about Nector. He was already there...It was enough just to sit there without words. We mourned him the same way together...For the first time I saw exactly how another woman felt, and it gave me deep comfort, surprising" (297). Consequently, these women's shared love for Nector serves as the foundation for the creation of other kinds of bonds, which is suggestive of Erdrich's belief that romantic love solidifies ties within the community. Furthermore, Marie and Lulu's newfound awareness of the importance of female friendship is reminiscent of Violet's discovery of the self-empowering possibilities of her communion with Alice in *Jazz.* In effect, Morrison and Erdrich recognize the value of both romantic love and female friendship, something that hooks too asserts in *Communion* when she explains that women must realise that it is not only "important... to find the right partner, someone to love", but also necessary to "place emphasis on building a beloved community" (*Communion* 225). Moreover, Erdrich suggests that Lulu and Marie's connection allows them subsequently to act communally on political matters within the reservation. This indicates that women obtain strength from each other, and that they are also able to

draw on love, even love for the same man, as a positive force that allows for political agency.

As Marie and Lulu's friendship develops at a later stage in their lives, so Gerry and his son Lipsha are seen to build a relationship once Lipsha has reached early adulthood. When the two men unexpectedly meet towards the end of the novel, Gerry first acknowledges his relation to Lipsha, and in doing so, a bond between them is created:

> 'You're a Nanapush man,' he said. 'We all have this odd thing with our hearts'...He put a hand out and touched my shoulder...I felt my own heart give this little burping skip...Every new thing that happens to a person is a first. To be a son of a father was like that. In that night I felt expansion, as if the world was branching out in shoots...I felt smallness, how the earth divided into bits and kept dividing. I felt the stars. I felt them roosting on my shoulders with his hand. (366)

Erdrich reveals how the complex web of love relations in the novel, such as June and Gerry's long-ago love affair, actually creates the possibility for the kind of connection that is seen to now take place between Gerry and Lipsha. Evidently, Erdrich places romantic love, once again, in a larger context, as she shows how it allows for the creation of a variety of complicated, yet significant, bonds within the community. The forging of this father and son link, can, indeed, also strengthen a sense of belonging to the community; Lipsha's visualization of the earth as branching into bits as he talks to his father, suggests a holistic sense of connectedness and a reinforcement of his feeling of belonging in their own part of the world, in which the whole Chippewa community is rooted. This sensation of connectedness and belonging is particularly significant

considering Albertine's earlier awareness of the marginalization of Native Americans during her drive to the reservation at the start of the novel.

The focus on community here can be seen as reminiscent of the communal protagonist strategy that DuPlessis touches on in *Writing Beyond the Ending* which decentralizes heterosexual love; indeed, Erdrich rejects the traditional romance approach that places the heterosexual couple at the centre, highlighting the significance of her characters' complex web of romantic relationships and striving to incorporate this notion of community into her vision of love. For instance, while Erdrich shows Gerry and Dot's strong love to remain intact in the novel, she also considers the value of Gerry's connection to his son from another woman. Erdrich thus rejects a conservative approach to romantic love, but also attempts to expand her readers' understanding of love so that it includes the communal and collective. Like third-wave feminists, who seek to present a more varied understanding of women's experiences, Erdrich works to put forward this unconventional view of heterosexual love.

Erdrich's vision of love is innovative on another level too; for instance, unlike the conventional romance narrative, whose structure faithfully "requires the overcoming of obstacles…the conquest of barriers in the name of love" (Stacey and Pearce 16), romantic relationships are, in *Love Medicine*, characterized by far more complexity, as the various issues between the couples are not resolved in a clear-cut way. Both Marie and Lulu must come to terms with Nector's death and inconstancy and Gordie is haunted by June's ghost, while Gerry and Dot cannot move on with their lives together, as he is a wanted prisoner at the mercy of federal justice. As has already been suggested and will be looked at in further detail shortly, this does not mean that

love's importance is undermined, but that Erdrich does not approach romantic relationships in a simplistic manner. Moreover, the complexity of Erdrich's imagining of love is not only shaped by the inclusion of these problems, but also by the portrayal of multiple romantic relationships, as seen with the number of different lovers many of the characters take throughout the novel. In presenting such an intricate set of relations amongst the sexes in *Love Medicine*, Erdrich is able, once more, to challenge traditional romantic fiction that tends to focus on the love affair between a particular man and woman, as shown by the likes of Miller and Radway in the introduction.

This emphasis on plurality not only applies to the matter of multiple romantic relationships but to the novel in general, considering the number of different narratives and characters that are present in *Love Medicine*. The multitude of intertwined figures and stories, which create the basis for the portrayal of the complex ties between the protagonists, also assists Erdrich in pointing to the unpredictable nature of life and love, as she is able to explore a number of surprising events and their unforeseen effects upon several different people. This can be discerned from the way, for example, the curious appearance of Nector's spirit actually strengthens Marie and Lipsha's bond, while in a chapter on Lulu this kind of 'visit' from her old lover allows her to gain a new appreciation of life and also precipitates the forging of an unexpected connection to Marie. The unusual developments of such events are indicative of Erdrich's refusal to portray things in an expected and straightforward way, which might recall *Jazz*, where the narrator must eventually come to accept the unpredictability and intricacy of Joe and Violet's relationship. Essentially, both writers try to come to terms with the complicated and non-predetermined nature of life and love.

Erdrich suggests several positive implications; Nector's post-death reappearance, which is revelatory for Lulu, testifies to this, as do Gerry's surprising re-emergences in Dot's life. Perhaps, as the characters do not to move through their lives and their relationships in a deterministic, straightforward manner, their way of living and loving can be understood in relation to the Native American perception of time and space. Allen explains,

> the tendency of the American Indian (is) to view space as spherical and time as cyclical, whereas non-Indians tend to view space as linear and time as sequential. The circular concept requires all 'points' that make up a sphere of being to have a significant identity and function, while the linear model assumes that some 'points' are more significant than others. (59)

Erdrich, who moves back and forward in time, as well as across space, throughout the narrative of *Love Medicine*, thus thwarting "Western expectations of ...a consistently chronological linear narrative",[44] strives to portray the cyclical nature of life and love. In her vision of love, there is a looping movement of renewal;[45] death, as seen with the presence of Nector's ghost, does not presuppose an end, while it also initiates the deepening of Lispha and Marie's bond and the beginning of an unexpected friendship between Lulu and Marie. In fact, this new friendship based on their common love for Nector, highlights how various elements emerge as important in this rethinking of love. So while this can be perceived as a means of decentralizing heterosexual love, it seems Erdrich is interested in going against Western notions of hierarchical

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[44] Hertha D. Sweet Wong, "Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*: Narrative Communities and the Short Story Cycle," Wong 88.

[45] See: Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1992; London: Rider-Random House, 1998), 127-163, regarding her discussion of the life/death/life nature of love.

significance as she shows how all these various aspects matter, thus foregrounding a reimagining of love that departs from convention. For instance, the portrayal of Lipsha's involvement in Marie and Nector's relationship brings attention to the fact that a love union does not necessarily only concern and affect the two people who are together. This is reminiscent of the depiction of Felice's mediatory role in Joe and Violet's relationship in *Jazz*.

Erdrich also moves from presenting the unconventionality of love to capturing its healing and empowering potential, despite the fact that romantic relationships are not always resolved positively or without problems. The persistent investment in the space of love by Gerry and Dot testifies to loyalty, a perception found through closeness and strong faith in the agency of love. In fact, while Gerry's journey towards Dot after another escape from prison does not guarantee his freedom, it is, nevertheless, a journey towards love, which serves as a sort of healing space in the midst of all his troubles. This offers a parallel to Violet and Joe finally discovering love as a restorative space following the pain of the past in *Jazz*. Here, even as they remain critically aware of patriarchal models of love and continue to problematize conventional approaches, Erdrich's and Morrison's perception of love's healing properties indicates a different emphasis from, as seen in the introduction, many earlier feminist works.

Furthermore, the empowering and healing potential of love accounts for Erdrich's choice of title, which puts forward the idea of love as medicine. The word medicine in the title takes as fact the presence of pain and the consequent need for a remedy; however, in using the word love in conjunction with medicine, Erdrich is not simply referring to a traditional concoction to lure a lover back, but is foregrounding a

love between men and women which, while not always ideal, has the capacity to work as a positive force in a harsh, capitalist and white dominant Western world. This idea of love as medicine suggests that it is the intimate connections between men and women that, despite their complexity, ultimately unite, strengthen and heal the inhabitants of the Chippewa community in *Love Medicine*.

Conclusion

Despite the distinct issues at stake for African and Native Americans in the two novels, Morrison and Erdrich both examine romantic love within the context of an ethnic American community that has been marginalised within the white supremacist, patriarchal US society and past. In looking at romantic relationships in relation to the characters' ethnic groups, it emerges that, for both writers, a reimagining of love involves coming to terms with some of the issues that specifically concern these communities of people.

Yet, while these two authors are equally conscious of the oppression their respective communities have been subjected to in North American society, in *Jazz*, Morrison specifically deals with the far reaching effects of African Americans' history of slavery and misuse that disrupts family units and creates the conditions for the mother absence marking her novel, and which ultimately has a damaging effect upon the characters' love relationships. In *Love Medicine*, however, Erdrich does not give as much emphasis to mother absence and the consequent fragmentation of families, even though characters such as Lulu and Lipsha are depicted as being motherless. Although Erdrich calls attention to the difficulties Native Americans face in the US, and shows how her characters' love affairs are affected by this context, as seen with the way

Gerry's conviction prevents him from settling down with Dot and land issues come between Lulu and Nector, she does not address, in the same depth as Morrison, how the characters' traumatic childhood experiences determine subsequent romantic relationships. Erdrich rather deals with the racial discrimination against Native Americans by highlighting some of the more practical, material difficulties of life for her Chippewa community.

Despite their different approaches, Erdrich and Morrison are both clearly conscious of the racism inherent in US society, something informing their explorations of romantic love. Yet, they also highlight the detrimental effect of patriarchy upon the space of love, an issue that has long troubled feminists. Morrison highlights the link between patriarchal, sexist beliefs and racist ones, as she shows, for instance, how True Belle's adoration of the seemingly white Golden Gray colours Violet's perception of love and man. In examining Gordie's and Nector's male dominant behaviour towards their partners in *Love Medicine* in light of Allen's claim that the existence of patriarchy in Native American culture is one of the outcomes of white colonialism, this link between racist and patriarchal values can be traced once more, even if it is not emphasised as explicitly as in *Jazz*. Therefore, as it emerges in these fictions, men and women's love relationships help shed light on the complex link between racial discrimination against minority Americans and the prevalence of patriarchal actions and beliefs within these communities.

Moreover, Morrison considers the significance of female self-love and how it can change women's approach to romantic love, as does Erdrich. For instance, Lulu, who appears to be the most innately self-loving, as well as self-respecting, female character out of the two novels, has the courage to distance herself from Nector when

he betrays her trust by supporting the plan to evict her from her home. Marie, however, like Violet in *Jazz*, must learn the art of self-loving (unlike the earlier Pecola who does not achieve this); for both women this leads to a renewal of their romantic relationship, as they reinvest in their partners with a stronger sense of self. This thesis suggests Morrison and Erdrich are in unison regarding the necessity of female self-love for forging love of others, so emphasising a vision of heterosexual love that is more positive for women.

In addition to accentuating the necessity of female self-love within the heterosexual relationship, Erdrich and Morrison explore man's capacity for emotional openness. Later in *Jazz*, for example, Joe reflects on his feelings for Dorcas in depth, which is indicative of his own growing emotional maturity. In *Love Medicine* Lipsha also displays profound emotional sensitivity and awareness regarding Marie and Nector's relationship, something that helps reinforce the bonds between the members of his family, since he and Marie come closer in the process of trying to resolve her marital problems. However, Morrison and Erdrich do not idealise men, and are conscious of the dangers of patriarchal models of love, as is clear in the portrayal of Dorcas's embracing of Acton, or in Nector's possessiveness towards Lulu. It seems that they remain attuned to feminist critiques of patriarchy, whilst also exploring men's potential to break free from such limiting behaviour.

Moreover, love and intimacy are suggested to have restorative potential in the novels. In *Jazz*, the healing possibilities of romantic love are established, as Violet and Joe are finally seen to come together to share and alleviate the pain of the past, something that marks a difference from *The Bluest Eye*. However, in *Love Medicine*, the therapeutic potential of romantic love is not put forward as conclusively as in *Jazz*,

considering that Nector and June are dead, and Gerry remains on the run; nevertheless, it is apparent that Dot does represent a healing space of love for Gerry in the midst of all his troubles. Furthermore, in seeing how Lipsha's concern and sensitivity to Marie and Nector's love functions as the basis for strengthening Lipsha and Marie's bond, and how Marie's and Lulu's common love for Nector ultimately connects them, there is evidently a reinforcement of a sense of closeness within the family and the tribe, something healing and empowering for them all. In underlining the significance of a strong love like Gerry and Dot's *and* also portraying romantic relationships in connection to other kinds of ties, Erdrich values romantic love, as well as places it in a communal context. So, although Morrison and Erdrich have some different emphases and approaches, they mutually recognize the important role romantic love has to play for women and men in their respective ethnic American communities.

Chapter 3: Approaching Difference: Interracial Love Relationships

Introduction

In this chapter, *The Pickup* (2001), by the white South African writer Nadine Gordimer, and *Bel Canto* (2001), by the US author Ann Patchett, will be found to contribute to a reimagining of romantic love by exploring interracial relationships between the sexes and showing how these serve as the means for approaching difference. As the novels, which are both predominantly set in unspecified developing countries, deal with romantic relationships that cross not only racial and cultural barriers but, in certain cases, also social and economic ones, Gordimer and Patchett illustrate how the encountering of difference opens up an alternative understanding of love.

The Pickup, which is initially set in South Africa and then an unnamed Arab country, depicts the relationship between Julie, a wealthy white woman and Ibrahim, an illegal Arab immigrant; this affair forces the female protagonist to face the difficult life circumstances of her disadvantaged lover. The relationship also becomes the reason for their move to his country, so that in her foreign lover's village, Julie embraces a way of living that is different to that in any Western oriented society. Moreover, in this setting, Julie is also seen to come to appreciate the value of self-love, in addition to a healthy and respectful love for an other, which is indicative of Gordimer's desire to move away from patriarchal interpretations of romantic love that are limiting for women.

In *Bel Canto*, a hostage situation in Latin America operates to bring a diverse group of people together, thus permitting Patchett to portray a number of mixed race relationships. As in *The Pickup*, these love relationships are linked to the characters'

approach to difference; in effect, the men and women in the novel are able, partly through their passion for music, to connect in spite of any socio-economic, cultural, and in particular, linguistic differences, and create the kind of unconventional love unions that help oppose the values and beliefs of the wider patriarchal and power-oriented world. Therefore, for both Gordimer and Patchett, such interracial relationships, which become the means for negotiating difference, act as the foundation for their own distinctive explorations of romantic love.

Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*

In *The Pickup,* the relationship between Julie, a well-to-do, white South African woman, and Ibrahim, an illegal, Arab immigrant, allows Gordimer to show how openness to difference is crucial to her vision of romantic love. In fact, it is particularly valuable that Gordimer tackles an interracial relationship, considering how Pearce and Stacey identify that

> white agendas have dominated discussions of love and romance...there has been a stunning silence about such issues within standard feminist debates about romance. Much of the earlier feminist critiques of romantic love...ignored the factors of race, ethnicity and cultural difference. ("The Heart of the Matter" 22)

In exploring issues that have tended to be overlooked in 'standard feminist debates' about romantic love, Gordimer is able to tackle the disparity in privilege that can exist between people, pointing to complex political, social and economic undertones in her imagining of love. Moreover, Gordimer portrays how in a foreign country Julie begins to understand the importance of balancing self-love with a respectful, non-possessive

love for an other. Yet, while Gordimer presents some progressive and unconventional approaches to heterosexual love, she does remain critically aware of patriarchal influences upon men and women's romantic relationships.

The economic and social divide between Julie and Ibrahim is apparent from the beginning of the novel. When Julie goes to the garage, she enters his workplace as the white owner of a car that is having trouble, while Ibrahim lies underneath the cars, fixing them for the people who can afford them. Julie, who Gordimer informs us is "naturally pale",[1] encounters a "man lying on his back half-under the belly of a car...He was young, his greasy work-clothes, long hands oil-slicked...he wasn't one of them...glossy dark-haired with black eyes blueish-shadowed" (7). His appearance and the work he does make Julie conscious of the difference in their social positions; from her first meeting with Ibrahim, she is careful not to further emphasise the apparent gap in privilege between them: "she did not like to walk ahead of the garage man as if he were some sort of servant" (7).

Julie's reluctance to bring further attention to the gap in status between her and this darker man is related to the experience of apartheid in South Africa. Having grown up in a country where the differences in skin colour were stratified by hierarchical race laws, Julie is sensitive to an evidently still thorny issue in the post-apartheid era. Indeed, Julie is someone who has rejected her family's affluent, suburban 'white' lifestyle in favour of living "in a series of backyard cottages" (8) and mingling with a racially mixed group of friends. However, in spite of this chosen way of life, Julie is oblivious to the plight of a foreigner like Ibrahim who comes from, what is to the West, a peripheral part of the world: "He named a country she had

[1] Nadine Gordimer, *The Pickup (*2001; London: Bloomsbury, 2002) 6.

barely heard of...One of those countries where you can't tell religion apart from politics...Things were bad there. Not really knowing what she was talking about" (12). Julie is forced to recognize that she does not have any knowledge of this marginalized country; however, in a global world, where "capital, goods, labor, persons...flow",[2] she is confronted with such a foreigner in her homeland, and in wanting to connect with him, must educate herself about his difficult life circumstances. Hence, the beginning of a romantic relationship between the two becomes, for Julie, the site for the undoing of a certain degree of ignorance regarding the hardship of others outside the context in which she has been raised. In effect, as Julie becomes emotionally invested in Ibrahim, Gordimer implies that she must learn to cultivate a consciousness of difference, something third-wave feminists propose as they tackle the diversity of women's experiences.[3]

As they begin their relationship, Julie experiences shame when Ibrahim witnesses her family's affluent lifestyle, which she had distanced herself from when she moved away from home. Julie is mortified by the suave, wealthy guests at her father's house who indulge in endless business talk:

> The shame of being ashamed of them; the shame of him seeing what she is...this origin of hers now expansively revealed before him, laid out

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[2] Vilashini Cooppan, "World Literature and Global Theory: Comparative Literature for the New Millennium," S*ymplokē* 9.1/2(2001): 15, *JSTOR,* 2 Jan. 2013< http://www.jstor.org/stable/40550499>.

[3] Regarding Gordimer's relationship to third-wave feminism, while she does not make direct reference, she admits to being more sympathetic to feminism now than she was in the 1970s, due to past divisions between white and black women: "My views have changed, and they've changed because the situation has changed... I can't see any vestiges now of that trivial feminism that I was talking about so disparagingly in the early times...A tremendous division arose in the mid-70s...between the concerns of white women and the concerns of black women". Karen Lazar and Nadine Gordimer, "'A Feeling of Realistic Optimism': An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," *Salmagundi* 113 (1997): 156, *JSTOR,* 2 Jan. 2013 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40548938>.

> like the margaritas and the wine...She blunders to one of the bathrooms; but cannot succeed in retching to humiliate herself. (45)

This sense of shame that engulfs Julie as Ibrahim bears witness to the opulence of her family environment can be said to arise out of her knowledge of the life advantages she and her father's guests have in contrast to him; indeed, in speaking about *The Pickup* in an interview, Gordimer refers to the "young white woman who has every advantage, and the feeling of shame that such advantage brings".[4]

Nonetheless, in spite of Julie's and Ibrahim's profoundly different life experiences that cause feelings of shame to surface in her, Julie perceives the emergent relationship to be fulfilling and free of any traces of possessiveness:

> they made love beautifully; she so roused and fulfilled that tears came with all that flooded her…In an anthology of poetry were the lines that expressed what she was aware of in herself…*Praise be the love wherein there is no possessor and no possessed, but both surrender*. (27-28)

Julie's sense of their love being without any possessiveness is significant considering, according to Irigaray in *I Love To You*, that women historically have been under the control of men: "For centuries…woman…has functioned as a use-value for man and society without being a partner in exchanges" (76). Gordimer has chosen to portray a love relationship in *The Pickup* which, at least at this stage, departs from such patriarchal power play. She places emphasis on Julie's sense of experiencing a love that is free of any traces of proprietorship and which introduces her to an intimacy and closeness that was missing in her social circle: "She feels she never knew them…in the real sense of knowing that she has now with him, the man foreign to her who came

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[4] Sue Kossew, "Living in Hope: An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 23.2 (2001): 61.

to her one day from under the belly of a car" (91). Despite their differences, this relationship permits Julie to enjoy a novel experience of closeness.

However, Julie finds this newfound closeness under threat when Ibrahim receives notification that he must depart from the country, due to his illegal status in South Africa. This awakens Julie to what Sue Kossew calls the struggles of "displacement, economic exile and migration"[5] that define Ibrahim's life which, as the daughter of a rich, white man, she has never had to face. Julie, who is convinced that something can be done about the order, reacts in a way that serves to highlight the disparity between her and Ibrahim's life perceptions:

> She took him by the hand for them to sit and read it over again, together. But he...did not follow the lines with her. He knows the form, the content, the phraseology; it is the form of the world's communication with him. She looks for loopholes, for double meanings that might be deciphered to advantage, that he knows are all stopped up, are all unambiguous. Out. Get out. (53)

Gordimer structures this paragraph in such a way that, via shifting focalisation, the reader has access to the antithesis in Julie and Ibrahim's reactions to the letter. By placing the two different translations of the same letter in one paragraph, Gordimer underlines that meaning in the present is created according to the individual's perspective, which is shaped by past experiences.

Evidently, Julie's decision to begin a romantic relationship with an illegal Arab immigrant forces her to become acutely aware of the difference between the lived realities of those who belong to privileged social groups and those who do not. Even

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[5] Sue Kossew, "Beyond the National: Exile and Belonging in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup,*" *Scrutiny 2* 8.1 (2003): 21.

though Julie is clearly conscious of such social distinctions as a result of having been raised in a country in which whites ruled over blacks during apartheid, her relationship to Ibrahim compels her to experience for the first time what it means to be an outsider in society and to be bereft of the luxury of options. Here she is made to feel what life is like for a marginalized person in a society in which power is held by wealthy whites. Kathryn Perry explains how a white person's own sense of identity changes as a result of being in such an interracial relationship: "Although most white people remain complicit in their ignorance of white racial identity, in interracial relationships white people do have to encounter the racialization of a private relationship and their own identities as white".[6] In fact, Gordimer's fiction is known for being "committed to getting away from... a literature that views the world with a (in her case, white) racial perspective".[7] So, as Julie is introduced to a new reality, it is evident that her whiteness, her inherited fortune and her upper class family origins have not prepared her for the harsh truth of Ibrahim's existence as a displaced man from an impoverished, Arab country. Gordimer indicates in *The Pickup* that investing in a love relationship across differences can make one vulnerable to, but also more aware of, such socio-political forces. It is in portraying such an interracial relationship that Gordimer poses romantic love as helping create a new kind of attentiveness to social realities. Her approach here is once more reminiscent of third-wave feminists, who examine 'women's issues', but also tackle current matters like human rights (Heywood and Drake 118).

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[6] Kathryn Perry, "The Heart of Whiteness: White Subjectivity and Interracial Relationships," Pearce and Stacey 172.

[7] Dorothy Driver, "Nadine Gordimer: The Politicisation of Women," *English in Africa* 10.2 (1983): 29, 4 Jan. 2013 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40238523>.

Gordimer portrays how this new, romantic relationship makes Julie confront the negative way in which foreignness and darkness is seen in a country like South Africa. Although Julie has kept her distance from any overtly racist people as a result of occupying a more liberal and multiracial social circle, she is now introduced to the resistance and sensitivity that still exists regarding mixed race relationships. Society's opposition to interracial relationships, which is an issue that is also addressed in Gordimer's novel *My Son's Story*,[8] becomes apparent in *The Pickup* when the narrative suddenly centres on the thoughts of Ibrahim's employer. This allows the reader to appreciate the prejudices Julie and Ibrahim must contend with: "That young lady...she had class...As a white father of daughters himself, it was a shame to see what she was doing with this fellow from God knows where, nothing against him, but still" (31). This man, who is clearly a product of the racially charged, post-apartheid society he lives in, is unwilling to consider the possibility of a positive romance between a white woman and an Arab immigrant. In "Rescripting Romance" Pearce and Wisker address this resistance to racially mixed relationships: "In contemporary Western culture the two principle orthodoxies governing relationships are that they should be heterosexual and same-race, which is why romances that cross these

[8] Nadine Gordimer, *My Son's Story* (1990; London: Bloomsbury, 2003). While 'standard feminist debates' about romantic love have primarily been silent about topics like race, Gordimer has also previously explored interracial relationships. According to Louise Yelin, in both *My Son's Story* and *A Sport of Nature* (1987) Gordimer examines the potential of such transgressive relationships, as she shows how "love between a white woman and a black man offers an affirmation, however equivocal, transitory, and vulnerable to the violence of the apartheid state, of utopian possibility" (141). Louise Yelin, *From the Margins of Empire: Christine Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998). For Gordimer interracial love evidently helps counter racial repression and prejudice, something that helps explain her continuing interest in this form of relationship. However, in *The Pickup* Gordimer extends beyond the racial issues within South Africa, as the novel will shortly be seen to move out to Ibrahim's unnamed Arab country. According to Ileana Dimitriu this indicates a "radical shift of emphasis" in Gordimer's work, as "She seems to have renounced her exclusive focus on South Africa" and taken "an interest in ... other margins of the world" (Ileana Dimitriu, "Postcolonialising Gordimer: The Ethics of 'Beyond' and Significant Peripheries in the Recent Fiction," *English in Africa* 33.2 (2006): 159-160, *JSTOR,* 31 Dec. 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40232385>).

boundaries have been so symbolically powerful" (15). Julie, however, defies such intolerance; she reacts with anger at the condescending manner of Ibrahim's employer: "The nerves in her hands began to twitch; a confusion that he should think he had the right to infer he knew who occupied her bed, anger at the assumption that she shared human standards in common with the lout, like-to-like, white-to-white" (32).

Despite the negative stance of people like Ibrahim's employer, Julie decides to follow Ibrahim to his obscure homeland after all efforts to keep him in the country have proved futile. Ibrahim fears that Julie is unaware of what she is getting herself into; when he sees, however, that she is determined, he resolves that they must be married before their departure. Julie's decision to go with him is one that brings her joy: "She was suddenly exhilarated and laughed…I'm here, I'm here! What she meant: can you believe it? I'm here with you" (110). While Julie may be seen as dependent on Ibrahim, Gordimer clearly wishes readers to consider how an investment in the space of love can bring happiness and pleasure. Cixous too contends that an act of love towards the other can grant one's own self joy: "When one gives, what does one give oneself?… She…with open hands, gives herself-pleasure, happiness" ("Sorties" 107). In fact, Gordimer's stance in this instance can be said to correspond with some of the more positive approaches to heterosexual love emergent in the late twentieth century.

As well as gaining happiness from her investment in Ibrahim, Julie matures as a person in her act of love toward him. Her move to her lover's country allows her to approach and discover things about herself away from her family and friends. It is a fresh start for her in this foreign country:

> it came to her that she was somehow as strange to herself as she was to them…And it meant that when she went forward to his family…she

> could do so offering herself in an emotional knowledge: if she was strangely new to them, she was also strangely new to herself (117).

Arriving in a place where she is conscious of the political, racial, and religious disparities between her and Ibrahim's family, Julie uses this sensation of de-familiarisation in order to discover unknown aspects of her personality. Svetlana Boym explains in the essay "On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes" that the shattering of the "illusion of complete belonging" and a "foreign backdrop" can "heighten the pleasure and intensity of surprise".[9] Thus, by experiencing her own foreignness, or coming to terms with this prior 'illusion of complete belonging', Julie is able to 'offer herself' to Ibrahim's family in a unique way as she shares their sense of meeting someone new, making this a particularly powerful moment for her. Moreover, it seems that Julie's acceptance of her own foreignness opens her to the foreignness she encounters; indeed, Julia Kristeva suggests that "the foreigner lives within us...By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself".[10] Gordimer underlines here that an openness to difference requires becoming familiar with the foreigner in oneself, and hence in others.

However, while Julie's initial experiences in Ibrahim's country put her on a path of self-exploration, Ibrahim rejects the sight of the familiar landscape to which he has been forced to return. His reaction to a dead sheep lying in the street gives the reader a sense of the shame that he is privately filled with: "He is ashamed and at the same time angrily resentful that she is seeing it...it will be an image of his country, his people, *what he comes from*, what he really is" (133). His shame is reflected in the

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[9] Svetlana Boym, "On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes," *Intimacy,* ed. Lauren Berlant (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2000) 230.
[10] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 1.

procedures he starts afresh in order to gain entry to some other Western country. By allowing the reader access to his thoughts, Gordimer reveals that this intense desire to be accepted and embraced by the West also has to do with a fear of being abandoned by Julie:

> love-he found himself yielding to feel, for her. That would be his weakness-the day when she packed the elegant suitcase and went away, this adventure worn thin, as it will. Him the loser, yet again. He's not for her. Papers refused. He did not tell her that from the first day what he was doing when he left early on a morning...was seeking out every contact...to apply for visas for emigration to those endowed countries. (137)

Ibrahim's feeling of being made vulnerable by his love for Julie must be considered in relation to his awareness of how his wife's inherited wealth and influential connections make it easy for her to leave his homeland whenever she wants to. This explains why Ibrahim presumes that his only defence against the possibility of his wife taking advantage of her privileged position and abandoning him in his poverty-stricken country is his ability to keep his feelings for her under control.

The insecurity Ibrahim experiences as regards Julie's attachment to him, and his need to ease this anxiety by working at being accepted by the West, suggests that he perceives romantic love as a luxury of those belonging to the privileged, First World: "the protection he must take to guard against that thing, luxury. People who could afford it called love" (137). The fear of not being able to afford this luxury reveals how romantic love has become linked to prosperity; indeed, such a view can be better understood if the development of the notion of romantic love as consumption-

oriented within the Western, capitalist world is taken into account. Indeed, earlier in the thesis Harzewski has been seen to refer to the phenomenon of 'late heterosexuality', whereby "economic considerations" become central to the romantic relationship between the sexes (10). Eva Illouz expresses similar views:

> At the turn of the century, cultural entrepreneurs and established industries began promoting commodity-centred definitions of romance to further their own economic interests... Since then, consumption and romantic emotions have progressively merged...Commodities have now penetrated the romantic bond so deeply that they have become the invisible and unacknowledged spirit reigning over romantic encounters.[11]

It is apparent that Ibrahim, who does not have the economic ability to partake in a romance of consumption, struggles in his relationship to Julie, as he cannot situate himself in the dominant, Western model of love or imagine a possible alternative to this.

The connection between entitlement to love and economic success fuels Ibrahim's wish to belong in the West. As a result of this desire, Ibrahim is unable to accept Julie's growing openness to his culture, thus dismissing her wish to take part in the Ramadan fast and trying to deter her from learning his language, which she now wants to be able to speak with him: "We must talk English...if I am going to get a decent job anywhere" (152). However, Julie is not thwarted by Ibrahim and begins to learn the language with the help of Ibrahim's sister Maryam and some of the other women in the village in return for English lessons. When Julie begins to teach, she

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[11] Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkley: U of California P, 1997) 11.

derives an unfamiliar sense of purpose: "Strange; she had never worked like this before, without reservations of self, always had been merely trying out this and that…not expecting satisfaction" (195). By opening herself to the local people and doing such work, Julie achieves a feeling of self-respect that is cultivated alongside her love for her partner. Gordimer shows how Julie's relationship to Ibrahim creates new possibilities for her, as it is in his country that she finds herself discovering traits and abilities she did not know she had and that give her a satisfying sense of worth.

In addition to offering self-respect, the English lessons act as a starting point for Julie to interact on a closer level with some of the local women. As Julie also attempts to learn their language, this exchange of knowledge leads them to start becoming more familiar with one another:

> picking up Julie's language, Julie picking up theirs…The shade is thin and the shifting of light across the faces, Julie and theirs, is a play upon what each does not know, in unfamiliarity, and is beginning to have revealed, in glances of intuition about the other. (150-151)

These new female bonds demonstrate how Julie has begun to create a broader circle of love, which may start from Ibrahim, but continues to grow from there. Julie's love for her partner acts as the basis for the bringing of more love into her life, as her relationship to him introduces her to Maryam and leads the two women to invest in a close friendship: "The two with their arms again about each other sat on the sofa quietly as if Ibrahim's wife were a sister" (164). Although these new bonds might be slightly idealized, considering how quickly and easily the two women bond in spite of having to face the complex task of bridging the enormous cultural and social divide between them, this serves Gordimer in pointing out that genuine connections are

possible regardless of people's disparate backgrounds. It is clear that Gordimer wants readers to consider how an interracial relationship like Julie and Ibrahim's can function as a possible foundation for moving past differences and building connections between individuals from such separate cultures.

Moreover, Julie's investment in such female friendships demonstrates an awareness of the impossibility of her and Ibrahim being everything to one another. The importance of female friendship can helpfully be considered in relation to the notion of sisterhood, which Germaine Greer's *The Whole Woman* details was promoted by feminists in the 1970s.[12] Sisterhood became significant as "sisterly relations have been a means for providing comfort...empowerment in the practical realm of social relations...sisterhood has been used effectively to...enjoin women to activism".[13] Gordimer's portrayal of Julie not only valuing her relationship to Ibrahim but also creating close ties that place her as part of a loving female community is indicative of the influential notion of sisterhood. Yet, while Gordimer signals that female friendships are a positive addition in Julie's life rather than a way of separating part of herself from Ibrahim, Greer suggests in *The Whole Woman* that "the dignified alternative is for women to segregate themselves as men do" considering that "masculine men flee domesticity and pursue a galaxy of concerns that hold no appeal for women" (423). Although Greer's approach is more cynical than Gordimer's, as the novel depicts Julie finding genuine pleasure in such connections and not merely pursuing it as a reactive alternative, it is evident that women novelists and feminist thinkers alike perceive the value of a female community. The value of female ties that

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[12] Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (1999; London: Anchor-Transworld Publishers, 2000) 288.
[13] Susan Ostrov Weisser and Jennifer Fleischner, "Introduction," *Feminist Nightmares: Women at Odds: Feminism and the Problem of Sisterhood,* ed. Susan Ostrov Weisser and Jennifer Fleischner (New York: New York UP, 1994) 2-3.

surfaces in *The Pickup* also does so in *Jazz*, *Love Medicine* and *The Republic of Love*, while hooks too turns to this topic, thus accentuating the centrality of a female community to a discussion of heterosexual love.

Although Julie works on creating dialogues with the women in the village, she also learns that she must be able to find peace with herself. It is only when she has left her busy social life in South Africa behind that Julie begins to realize that she has the need for a space for inward reflection, where she can cultivate her relationship to her own self. This process of building a private emotional space is made possible through quiet contemplation in the desert that surrounds the village, where "she finds a spiritual element within herself that is...fulfilling" ("Beyond the National", Kossew 22). The desert, which she sometimes visits with Ibrahim's niece, is a site where she can, in the present moment, enjoy a feeling of being separate from all else: "It is in the very early morning that she goes out into the desert alone…even with the child she is alone in the sense of not accompanied by what was always with her, part of herself, back wherever the past was" (198). The emphasis on the significance of this desert location to the central female character signifies how "Gordimer's fiction displays an...understanding of the importance of space".[14] However, Julie's valuable solitary time in the desert does not take away from moments with Ibrahim, but rather concurs with her love for him: "He lay flushed with sleep…Here I am. Here to come back to from a desert just on the doorstep" (168). Gordimer implies here that Julie grasps the significance of being able to balance her own valuable private space and time with her love for Ibrahim.

[14] Dominic Head, *Nadine Gordimer,* Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 26.

Julie's daily excursions to the solitary desert point to the way in which she has embraced the landscape that surrounds the village. Nevertheless, Julie's openness to the place does not prevent her presence, as a foreigner, from creating a certain amount of tension in Ibrahim's family home. Julie's newness to their Muslim customs pushes Ibrahim's mother to transmit her wish that the religious rule that prohibits sex in the daylight hours of Ramadan is not overlooked, something of which Ibrahim is also aware: "Between them was the knowledge of the taboo, to be observed absolutely" (154).

Despite Ibrahim's mother's cautionary warning, Julie and Ibrahim do not abstain from sexual contact. Ibrahim's mother become aware of this, and is thus filled with pain:

> the shame and sin of what he had done: her son; she could not look at this beloved face, as if she would see it horribly changed, only for her...into corruption and ugliness. And that face, since she had bequeathed her own features to him, would also be her own. (157)

By focusing on the private thoughts of Ibrahim's mother, Gordimer is able to convey the sense of betrayal she experiences, which suggests that Julie and Ibrahim cannot reinvent or disregard the rules and conventions of the society they inhabit. This incident indicates Gordimer's understanding of the kind of challenges a culturally diverse, interracial couple may face. This, however, does not mean that Gordimer, who lived through and opposed the South African apartheid, during which "Sexual relations between black and white became a criminal offence",[15] is echoing Ibrahim's white boss by undermining the mixed race relationship. Rather she supports the

[15] Nadine Gordimer, *Writing and Being* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1995) 126.

possibility of such a connection, yet underlines that the couple must approach the complexities of each particular culture respectfully.

In addition to focusing on the need for the couple to approach the society in which they dwell with sensitivity, Gordimer maintains that different perceptions of love also should be dealt with carefully. Gordimer shows how Julie is, at first, not very tolerant of the way in which people in Ibrahim's village regard love and marriage; Julie becomes critical when she hears that an arranged marriage is being organized for Maryam. She supports the possibility of Maryam going to university instead: "Why can't she have the chance?...She has a brain. You somehow got to university" (136). When Ibrahim brushes her appeal aside, Julie is disapproving: "So that's it" (136). Julie's feelings plainly reflect a more Westernized, feminist consciousness. However, Julie's critical stance appears problematic in that it invokes ideas of Western advancement, which is the kind of attitude Edward W. Said elaborates on in *Orientalism*: "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures...the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient...reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness ".[16] So, although Julie may wish to oppose what she perceives to be an injustice at Maryam's expense, it is also apparent that her Western upbringing and value system make her feel entitled to judge the customs of this foreign village. While Julie later stops making such judgements about Maryam's upcoming marriage, it is apparent that in the encounter with difference she has retained some Western assumptions.

However, in spite of the underlying sense of superiority found in Julie's initial stance towards Maryam, she is respectful and considerate of Ibrahim. When Ibrahim

[16] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1987; New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995) 7.

rejects his uncle's proposition to become manager of his business and the coveted heir, Julie questions him about his decision, but maintains that she did not feel she had the right to assume, as his family did, that he would reply positively to his uncle's offer:

> I don't know what I thought. Yes or no. Because there's so much I don't know-about you. I've found that out. Since we've been home here...You could have reasons for saying 'yes' I couldn't know about because they're...unconnected with me, with you and me, d'you see? (187)

After her arrival in Ibrahim's homeland, Julie is made to recognize that having a partner who comes from such a culture requires that she remain aware of the pronounced difference in their perceptions of life. She does not presume that their relationship annuls these differences and gives her the right to make any kind of assumptions about him. Yet, in addition to taking into account their culturally disparate upbringings, Julie is conscious of the fact that the people in a relationship are always two separate individuals, with their own separate needs and wants.

In *I Love to You,* Irigaray substantiates the significance of remaining alert to the individuality of the other:

> Recognizing you means or implies respecting you as other, accepting that I draw myself to a halt before you as...a mystery, a freedom that will never be mine, a subjectivity that will never be mine...You will never be entirely visible to me, but, thanks to that, I respect you as different to me. What I do not see of you draws me towards you provided you hold your own, and provided your energy allows me to hold my own. (104)

Irigaray's stress on the importance of respecting otherness presupposes that love must be devoid of any kind of possessiveness, the value of which Julie has already been identified as recognizing at the start of her relationship to Ibrahim. While feminists were seen in the introduction to be concerned at the way women are taught to negate their identity in favour of their male partner, Gordimer portrays a female protagonist who has learned to value individuality through her own process of self-development and who continually attempts to uphold a respectful distance within her relationship. Therefore, Gordimer shows how woman's wellbeing and a strong sense of self contribute to the possibility of a balanced heterosexual relationship, also an issue touched on by Morrison in *Jazz* when she portrays the positive change in Violet and Joe's relationship following Violet's budding self-acceptance.

As Ibrahim's village is the site where Julie invests in building a new and more fulfilling life for herself, she is eager to settle there. Unlike her husband, who wishes to get into another Western country, she is drawn to the idea of owning land in an oasis in the desert that they visit. Julie is enticed by the expanse of green composed of rice fields in the middle of the desert and starts to think about the ways in which the money she is due to inherit could be put to good use. As a result of a growing awareness of self, Julie now dares to rethink the dream of making a life elsewhere, to which Ibrahim has dedicated himself from the first day of his return: "There is another way, not surrogate succession to the Uncle Yaqub's vehicle workshop, not the dirty work waiting in some other, the next country-here, a possibility...Here. You could have it both. The mute desert and the life-chorus of green" (213).

Ibrahim, however, not only rejects Julie's wish to build a life in his country of birth, but refuses to accept the village as his home for the present: "Julie, we do not

live here" (216). Ibrahim, who has "the desire ... to climb out of the feudal rut in which he feels morbidly stuck" and "to join the modern world",[17] cannot understand his wife's newfound love for his country: "Once it was an agency for actors in Cape Town, now rice in an oasis, another adventure to hear from her, from her rich girl's ignorance, innocence" (216). While Ibrahim reacts with frustration, it is understandable that the possibility of such a drastic change of plan is troubling for him, since he does not have the security of Julie's inheritance or background to fall back on. Julie is in an unquestionably privileged position; indeed, according to Kossew in "Beyond the National", "one is always aware that Julie still has the power to choose to leave whenever she wants to, while Ibrahim does not" (22-23). Yet, Julie herself remains conflicted by the advantages to which she still has access even as she has long since extracted herself from her family and their elite social circle: "Stop sneering at the rich, you're thinking of making use of the fact of being one, yourself, aren't you!" (213). While Julie is conscious of her advantageous position, this does not change the fact that the gap between her and Ibrahim's social and financial situations leads them to nurture separate visions for the future.

Although the plan to buy a rice field is rejected by Ibrahim, Julie comes to feel that there are alternative ways of living and that following Ibrahim to America is not the best decision for her. Following a period of contemplation, she announces: "I am not going-coming to America" (248). It is important to consider the significance of this decision in terms of Gordimer's vision of the heterosexual relationship, as it allows for an understanding of love that does not entail self-sacrifice. Even though this sudden reversal may appear like a rejection of Ibrahim, Julie attempts to convey her

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[17] Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, "Commitment Ceremonies," rev. of *The Pickup,* by Nadine Gordimer, *The Women's Review of Books* 19. 1 (2001): 10, *JSTOR*, 31 Dec. 2012<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4023853>.

love for her husband whilst articulating her decision to stay: "She has taken his head between her hard palms and forced his face before her, she feels his texture…the image stored. You know that. Saying both at once: the unsaid (that stored image is love)…. I'm staying here" (252-253). Julie loves Ibrahim, but is unwilling to abandon a life that sustains her. She tries to deal with his outrage by making him realize how she feels about her new existence: "I really thought you saw how I was beginning…to live here…How I was different-not the same as I was back there when you met me. I thought we were close enough for you to understand" (262).

Gordimer's emphasis on the importance of Julie defending her individual needs can be viewed in relation to what Ileana Dimitriu defines as her post-Apartheid, "new tone"; Dimitriu, who identifies Gordimer's interest in *The Pickup* in other 'margins of the world', also believes that in the writer's first post-Apartheid novel, *None To Accompany Me* (1994), "socio-political dimensions" are significant, but they are dealt with "without...foregrounding them at the expense of analysing issues of individual choice and responsibility.[18] Moreover, Dimitriu makes reference to the change that is implied in the novelist's approach to Vera Stark, the female protagonist: "What is new about this type of Gordimer woman is her courage to confront her inner needs, her existential self, with an emphasis on individual choice and a responsibility towards her singular life" (345). While racial, cultural and socio-political differences are vital to *The Pickup*, Gordimer does not neglect the importance of Julie's process of self-growth, something indicative of her post-Apartheid emphasis on woman's individual needs. The interracial relationship in *The Pickup* permits Gordimer to further explore her preoccupation with woman's responsibility towards her own self, something that

[18] Ileana Dimitriu, "A New Sense of Social Space: Gordimer's Civil Imaginary," *Spaces and Crossings: Essays on Literature and Culture in Africa and Beyond,* ed. Rita Wilson and Carlotta von Maltzan, Literary and Cultural Theory; Vol. 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001) 344.

hooks has also addressed when referring to the significance of self-love in her discussion of romantic love.

However, while Gordimer shows the value of Julie respecting her individual needs, it is also clear that there are inevitable challenges and difficulties involved in negotiating the separate wants of this diverse couple. For instance, the heated dialogue in which Julie expresses her disappointment over Ibrahim's short-sightedness reveals that they both had certain preconceived notions regarding each other that corresponded more to their own ideas and wishes. Within this interracial relationship, Julie expected her husband to display the same kind of openness and awareness that she has cultivated in his homeland, while Ibrahim evidently believed that her racial, cultural and social background, as well as his desire to move to the West, automatically made it her desire too. In exposing the falsity of these assumptions Gordimer specifies that the romantic relationship between the sexes cannot be viewed in an idealistic and simplistic manner. It becomes clear that the love relationship, particularly between people from disparate cultures, can easily fall prey to such misconceptions and that both partners need to establish a truly communicative basis that remains vigilant against them.

Even though Julie is hurt that her partner is not in tune with the workings of her emotional world, it is Ibrahim who cannot cope with the fact that his wife has different desires and needs from him, making it thereby impossible for him to accept her decision. It appears that Ibrahim has been socialized in a patriarchal world that fully supports the "cultural glorification of men (but not of women) who are

independent, defiant individuals".[19] As the narrative swings between Julie's attempts to resist this injustice and explain her position, and Ibrahim's overwhelming rage and sense of betrayal, it is plain that he has not grasped that her attachment to him does not mean that she has to sacrifice herself and that her love will endure even if he goes to the US on his own: "You were lying to me all this time. Here in this bed with me kissing and lying. Fucking and lying" (261). This kind of troubling male approach, which requires woman to sacrifice her wants, is something that, as seen in the introduction, second-wave feminists objected to in regards to heterosexual relationships, indicating how Gordimer remains conscious of the problems of patriarchy.

While Ibrahim cannot comprehend Julie's refusal to do something that she feels is self-compromising, he also does not realize that she is rejecting his wish to make her comply in what is, apart from a search for a job that will provide him with some financial security, a patriarchal quest for power and social success. Although this raises the issue of Julie's privileged position once more, it must also be acknowledged that Ibrahim has a craving for status, which is apparent from the beginning of the novel when he expresses admiration for the class of wealthy businessmen present at Julie's father's home: "Interesting people there. They make a success" (51). Cixous elaborates on man's need to prove himself according to such competitive values: "what he wants…is that he gain more masculinity: plus-value of virility, authority, power, money, or pleasure…A man is always proving something…Masculine profit is almost always mixed up with a success that is socially defined" ("Sorties" 107). Ibrahim's dedication to the idea of making a success of himself in the West contributes

[19] Marilyn Friedman, "Autonomy and Social Relationships: Rethinking the Feminist Critique," *Feminists Rethink the Self,* ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (Boulder, Colorado: Westview P-Perseus Books Group, 1997) 52.

to his inability to consider Julie's feelings and his authoritative behaviour with her. Although Julie attempts to maintain a non possessive love, which at the start of their relationship she felt they had, Ibrahim now becomes controlling in reaction to his sense of rejection.

Ibrahim also feels shamed by his love for Julie: "she will be in this house...without anyone to talk to...yes, he can admit it to himself only, without his love for her. That weakness that is not for him" (266). This continuing understanding of love as a weakness indicates that Ibrahim has an entirely different way of thinking from Julie; in the last chapter, Gordimer switches rapidly from Ibrahim's private thoughts in one paragraph to Julie's in the next, showing how Julie does not share a sense of shame at her love for him. Instead, she ponders the difficulties she foresees in Ibrahim's future: "the pain of seeing him return to the same new-old humiliations that await him, doing the dirty work they don't want to do for themselves...That's it. That's reality" (266). These thoughts highlight, on the one hand, Julie's advantageous position and the impossibility of her ever having to do such work, while, on the other hand, her genuine love and concern for the unjust treatment she knows her husband will face as a poor immigrant. However, despite her reluctance to see him suffer, Julie does not try to dissuade Ibrahim from moving to the US. Julie's appreciation of him as a separate person who must be able to go his way and make his own decisions is well expressed in the lines of a poem she recalls, which also mirrors Irigaray's insistence that the other's difference be respected: "'I was occupied in picturing him to myself; I had undertaken the task of imagining him.' But he is himself. Nobody's task" (245).

Julie's refusal to discourage Ibrahim from trying to transform his life in a way with which she disagrees signifies that woman, rather than man, exemplifies emotional

maturity and inner strength in *The Pickup*. Gordimer suggests that, even as man continues to be loyal to patriarchal models of love, woman has the ability to grasp that self-appreciation and a respectful love for one's partner are equally important. Julie is seen to be loving towards Ibrahim, but also capable of standing firm and managing her own life. In *Love Medicine* Erdrich also portrays the character of Lulu as being both self-respecting and open to love. Such a way of loving and living can help women oppose patriarchy, as they dedicate themselves to their own feminine power that permits them to be both strong and emotionally open.[20]

This perception of woman's receptivity to love as something positive does not mean, however, that Gordimer is trying to suggest that an investment in love is the answer to everything. Indeed, the novel does not put forward an idealized understanding of love, outlined by Pearce and Stacey as characteristic of more traditional romantic fiction whereby love is seen as capable of "conquering all' (16). Gordimer, instead, seeks to make clear that while Ibrahim's return would undoubtedly be a positive development in Julie's life, it is not the only potential path for happiness for an autonomous woman like her. Ultimately, Julie's decision to stay behind in the village points to her awareness of her personal contentment being dependent upon making room for her own needs and wants, as well as maintaining her connection to Ibrahim.

Gordimer indicates that Ibrahim may return, as seen by the encouraging words of one of the family women: "He'll come back" (268). While Gordimer in no way addresses how likely such a change of conviction is, she ends the novel with this prospect hanging in the air. It is clear that Julie will remain in the village, as a result of

[20] See Cixous's essay "Sorties" (109) for its reference to the link between femininity and love.

her love for both the place and for Ibrahim, meaning that the onus is placed on man to revisit and question the sparkling promise of the First World. However, while it is implied that Ibrahim must rethink his dedication to a vision of existence aligned with capitalist values, it seems that Gordimer does not truly address the complexity of Ibrahim's possible return. Even if Ibrahim were to return and to accept the local managerial position offered to him, Gordimer would still have to resolve the fact that Julie would always have a kind of freedom, due to her white, wealthy background, unavailable to Ibrahim, as well as to other family members like Maryam. Therefore, while Gordimer obviously supports the choice of an interracial relationship and suggests that such a mixed race couple need to approach the particularities of each culture respectfully, she has not been able to propose how Julie and Ibrahim could in practice overcome the social unevenness that exists between them.

While Gordimer fails to completely come to terms with the complexity of these issues, it is important that she focuses on the interracial relationship in her novel, as it opposes romance orthodoxies and allows for the consideration of difference within the space of love. Yet, as well as raising the importance of openness to difference, Gordimer explores the pleasure and happiness that can be derived through romantic love and the possibility of personal growth within the interracial relationship. Moreover, Gordimer insists on the equal significance of self-appreciation and a respectful love for the other, which is a particularly valuable point for woman that also has emerged in hooks's and Irigaray's recent work. Although Julie and not Ibrahim upholds this idea, it seems important that Gordimer, like Irigaray, insists on this point. It is evident that Gordimer remains concerned with patriarchal values and how they impinge upon the heterosexual relationship. Heterosexual love is not ideal or

unequivocally positive in *The Pickup* and does not provide simple solutions to complex social issues; nonetheless, it appears that Gordimer wishes to highlight some of its potential and possibilities, whilst also educating readers about the directions it must take if it is to become a more promising space.

Ann Patchett's *Bel Canto*

In *Bel Canto*, Patchett, drawing on the Lima Crisis that took place in Peru in 1996, establishes a hostage holdup in an unnamed Latin American country that allows her to explore and make central a fresh vision of romantic love. By somewhat unusually transforming the holdup into a liberating life experience for the hostages and revolutionaries alike, Patchett shows how the women and men from various parts of the world invest in love connections despite their socio-economic, cultural and, especially, linguistic differences. In Patchett's novel, openness to difference is a significant part of her vision of romantic love, as it also is for Gordimer. Furthermore, it must be noted that this international mix of people, who embrace romantic love, as well as communal love, are partly seen to do so through their shared passion for music and, more particularly, opera. Such depictions indicate that Patchett privileges aspects of life that bring pleasure and enjoyment and allow for a sense of closeness and connection, instead of favouring the money, power and success oriented values of a patriarchal, capitalist world. In addition to using her treatment of love to reject such negative social values and standards, Patchett shows too how certain male characters in the novel are particularly sensitive to difference, something that is seen in *Bel Canto* to be conducive to romantic love. As will be seen, Patchett also tries to question the institution of marriage and the notion of a happy ending or 'forever' put forward in

traditional romance plots, even though this is rendered problematic by the conclusion of her own novel. Nevertheless, the romantic relationships that develop between men and women during the hostage holdup, although presented in a somewhat idealistic and even melodramatic way at times, point to Patchett's innovative reimagining of love and life.

From the beginning of the novel, it is evident that romantic love is at the top of Patchett's agenda, as she draws attention immediately to the fact that the guests, who have been invited to the birthday party of the powerful Japanese business tycoon, Katsumi Hosokawa, are mesmerised by the kiss they believe the American opera singer, Roxane Coss, shares with her accompanist whilst the room is in darkness. The omniscient third person narrator, who retrospectively recounts the story of this hostage situation, informs the reader of the illusive kiss:

> When the lights went off the accompanist kissed her. Maybe he had been turning towards her just before it was completely dark...There must have been some movement...because every person in the living room would later remember a kiss. They did not see a kiss...Not only was everyone there certain of a kiss, they claimed they could identify the type of kiss: it was strong and passionate, and it took her by surprise...they wanted her too, all of the men and women in the room...They were so taken by the beauty of her voice that they wanted to cover her mouth with their mouth, drink in.[21]

The guests' speculation over the alleged kiss, as well as their own passionate feelings for Roxane, places the topic of romantic love, in a grand and dramatic way, at the

[21] Ann Patchett, *Bel Canto* (2001; London: Perennial-Harper, 2002) 1.

centre of the novel right from the start. This sense of intensity and drama appears fitting to the operatic performance that has just been given; indeed, opera serves Patchett well in portraying this seemingly romantic scene, as, according to her, it is an art form that favours the passionate and the 'grand' over the commonplace: "It is an enormous, passionate, melodramatic affair that puts the little business of our lives into perspective...Opera, more than any other art form, has the sheer muscle and magnitude to pull us into another world".[22] We might find a suggestive link between Patchett's conception of opera and the experience of romantic love, considering that Stevi Jackson defines falling in love as "mysterious, inexplicable, irrational, uncontrollable, compelling and ecstatic...It appears to be experienced as a dramatic, deeply felt inner transformation, as something that lifts us above the mundane everyday world".[23]

This link between opera and romantic love helps explain why Patchett introduces her readers to the romantic theme of the novel in conjunction with Roxane's performance; the grandness and melodrama of opera emerges as a suitable medium for bringing across the intensity of romantic love, just as Shields draws on Hollywood films and romantic fiction at times in order to emphasise the love oriented theme of her book. However, while the use of opera, with its emphasis on passion and melodrama, assists Patchett in transmitting the guests' infatuation for Roxane and the spectacle of the mysterious kiss to her readers, these elements in the text appear to reinforce traditional notions of romance that rely on drama and suspense.[24] This

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[22] Ann Patchett, "How to Fall in Love with Opera," *Bel Canto,* Ann Patchett (2001; London: Harper Perennial-Harper, 2008) 9.
[23] Stevi Jackson, "Women and Heterosexual Love," Pearce and Stacey 53.
[24] In *Reading the Romance,* Radway makes reference to the importance of "the sense of exquisite tension, anticipation, and excitement created within the reader" (65), thus highlighting how such elements are fundamental to popular romances. While readers later come to understand that Roxane is not romantically involved with the accompanist, this episode of *Bel Canto* is presented in a way that

conventional approach marking *Bel Canto* at its outset is further highlighted by Patchett's decision to make soap opera, which is a TV genre well known for its mainstream romance dramas,[25] crucial to the development of events in the novel; she does this by establishing that the guests are only taken hostage because President Masuda, the man whom the rebels originally planned to kidnap, is absent from the party as a result of his unwillingness to miss his favourite soap. While Patchett does reimagine love in an alternative way as the novel progresses, she initially invokes more customary notions of love and romance through genres such as soap opera and the opera. Although opera will be seen to serve as a point of connection for the international mix of people during the holdup, it is an aspect of *Bel Canto* that at times contradicts Patchett's mostly unorthodox vision of heterosexual love.

Having established the main theme of the novel by initially relying on grand, yet received, notions of romance and love, Patchett then begins to focus on particular individuals and their perceptions of love. Patchett first does this when she illustrates the way in which Simon Thibault, who is the French ambassador and one of the hostages, privileges his love relationship. Simon is more preoccupied by love for his wife, Edith, than by the impending threat to his life: "Whilst everyone else lay rigid and trembling, the Thibaults leaned in, her head on his shoulder, his cheek pressed to the crown of her head. He was thinking less of the terrorists and more of the remarkable fact that his wife's hair smelled of lilacs" (35-36). The way in which Simon Thibault's love for his wife allows him to mentally remove himself from the hostage situation indicates that the connection between men and women can be

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appears to correspond to the passionate and effusive scene of the final declaration of love within the romances Radway describes (see Radway 134).

[25] Regarding soap opera, see Kathryn Weibel*, Mirror Mirror: Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture (*New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1977) 55-63.

empowering, which is a view that is similar to feminist Goodison's perception of romantic love as a method of survival: "Rather than denigrating falling in love, we could see it as a healthy response to a crazy world and perhaps one of the stratagems our organism uses to survive" ("Really Being in Love Means Wanting to Live in a Different World" 168). While Goodison refers specifically to the experience of falling in love, Patricia Waugh more broadly highlights the significance of interrelatedness to humanity: "The definition of self through relations with others, identity as mutually defined...are not, in fact, pathological positions, but essential for the survival of the human race".[26] Such observations are also instructive in terms of Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and Morrison's *Jazz,* which have been seen to support the view that love between individuals who constitute an ethnic minority in a white dominant culture like North America's can be affirmative and reinforcing.

As well as showing how romantic love works as a strengthening force within the Vice-President's home, Patchett illustrates that during the hostage situation, Roxane's music assists this mix of hostages and rebel soldiers in discovering a way of life that departs from that of a stereotypically male dominant society. After the generals have accepted the delivery of Roxane's music sheets, the power dynamics in the house are drastically altered. "Before the box, the terrorists controlled the Vice President's home" (161) yet, afterwards "Roxane Coss was in charge" (162). Patchett suggests that Roxane assumes a position of leadership in the house, something curious due to her position as one of the hostages. However, it seems that in *Bel Canto* the terrorists' "motives are shown to be far removed from the impulse of psychological

[26] Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989) 44.

and philosophical nihilism. They are idealists".[27] For instance, Patchett explains that one of the Generals who had previously "taught grade school" was only trying to save his brother who "was buried alive in a high-altitude prison" for "distributing flyers for a political protest" (136). Patchett's way of humanizing the terrorists and showing them to be victims of an unjust political and social system in this Latin American country supports the ease with which they surrender authority to a female hostage like Roxane and prove open to her music.

Indeed, Patchett stresses that Roxane's music serves to connect this group of people from all over the world and helps minimize any attempts by the Generals to be controlling. As Elizabeth Powers maintains, "Life becomes centered on her daily musical practice, and...inner reality is transformed".[28] Indeed, the music Roxane sings gives all their days a new quality, indicating how opera has an unconventional function at this point in the novel:

> Roxane Coss sang...and for those hours no one gave a single thought to their death. They thought about her signing and about the song...Soon enough the days were divided into three states: the anticipation of her singing, the pleasure of her singing, and the reflection on her singing. If the power had shifted away from them, the Generals didn't seem to mind. (164)

As the narrative is presented in such a way that the reader is continually made aware of the characters' inner thoughts, Patchett is able to underline how opera music helps the hostages and the Generals look past their differences and adopt a way of life that

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[27] Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel, "Terrorism and the Novel, 1970-2001," *Poetics Today* 29.3 (2008): 405-406, *JSTOR,* 9 Jan. 2013 < http://www.jstor.org/stable/40280833>.
[28] Elizabeth Powers, rev. of *Bel Canto,* by Ann Patchett, *World Literature Today* 76. 2 (2002): 152, *JSTOR,* 9 Jan. 2013 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40157337>.

places value on sensation and pleasure.[29] The meaning of the novel's title (beautiful singing) seems an apt one in this respect, as it highlights the way in which Patchett sees art, and by extension life, in relation to pleasurable appreciation. This attitude is clearly in stark contrast with the competitive and commodity oriented values dominant in the wider world, which had previously determined the lives of many of the successful and wealthy hostages. Mr. Hosokawa, for example, feels his old way of life and past priorities slipping away: "But in this vast ocean of time Mr. Hosokawa could not seem to startle up any concern for Nansei...The company that had been his life, his son, slipped away from him...thoughtlessly" (108). Such changes in perceptions can be seen, in part, to explain why the people in the house begin to privilege their love relationships; essentially, this new way of life has granted them the opportunity to centre on the more personal aspects of their existences. The group's collective transformation is reminiscent of how Julie, in *The Pickup,* also starts to invest in a more self-reflexive mode of living in Ibrahim's homeland.

Furthermore, it is important that Patchett challenges Western patriarchal ideas, as she puts forward the promise of a man whose sensitivity and awareness instigates and cultivates the possibility of positive heterosexual love. This differs from the typical hero in the popular romance novel who, as has been shown by Modleski in *Loving with a Vengeance*, is "contemptuous, often hostile...even somewhat brutal" (28) until the end when he declares his love for the heroine. Indeed, Patchett opposes the view that men have been exposed to within patriarchy, encouraging them to "believe it is 'natural' for them to behave as though emotions do not matter, as though all emotional work, including loving, is primarily a female task" (hooks, *Communion*

[29] See how Cixous in *Reading with Clarice Lispector* privileges pleasure in her rethinking of the Biblical story of Eve, when she considers the satisfaction Eve experienced in discovering the tastiness of the apple (11).

170). In *Bel Canto* it is Gen Watanabe, Mr. Hosokawa's personal translator, who takes up 'emotional work', as he proves instrumental in the establishment of Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa's romantic connection. Gen, who is a polyglot, helps initiate their relationship despite the fact that they do not share a common language; in fact, he is the only person who can communicate with everyone in the Vice President's home, despite the multiplicity of nationalities. Gen's openness and sensitivity to the particularities of each language and culture allows him to mediate between the two; after approaching Roxane on behalf of his boss, Gen manages to help her bridge the gap between American and Japanese ways. When Roxane says to Gen "'Say his name again for me'", he pushes her gently along enunciating "'Ho-so-kawa'" (92), which she then repeats. Gen also ensures that initial contact is established between the two; Patchett informs the reader that Gen is the one who first takes Roxane to Mr. Hosokawa: "He stood up and Roxane Coss put her hand on his arm to walk across the room" (93). Mr. Hosokawa recognizes Gen's considerate gesture: "Mr. Hosokawa...realized that Gen was bringing Roxane Coss to him" (93).

In *Bel Canto*, it is man and not woman, as is the case with Felice in *Jazz*, who takes on the position of mediator. In showing man as capable of such a role, which requires a heightened sensitivity to the needs of each individual, Patchett defies male dominant ways of thought and opens up the possibility for a more fulfilling, balanced heterosexual relationship. Furthermore, Gen espouses the kind of openness to difference that has been seen in the introduction to be advocated by some third-wave feminists, who stress the importance of "learning one another's cultural codes and respecting our differences...Respecting diversity does not mean uniformity or

sameness".[30] While this portrayal of Gen, who displays constant sensitivity and respect for difference, could be said to be slightly idealised, it is, nevertheless, optimistic and encouraging that Patchett is sketching this as a possibility, as it makes women question the naturalness and innateness of dominant patriarchal behaviour.

Furthermore, Mr. Hosokawa's relationship to the American Roxane, who, while also coming from a developed part of the world, is culturally and linguistically apart from him, indicates his openness to difference. Indeed, it is through this interracial relationship, which allows him to approach difference, that Mr. Hosokawa is able to discover new meaning in his life. Patchett's choice of an omniscient third person narrator, who has knowledge of both Mr. Hosokawa's past and present, assists her readers in appreciating the profound effect Mr. Hosokawa's romantic relationship with Roxane has upon him:

> He disciplined himself to only want the things that were possible to have: an enormous industry, a productive family, an understanding of music. And now, a few months after his fifty-third birthday, in a country he had never really seen, he felt desire in the deepest part of himself...He had been asked to come to her room at two A.M. and there was nothing more in the world to want, ever. (254)

It is through inhabiting the private thoughts and feelings of this Japanese businessman that Patchett suggests how his relationship with a woman from another part of the world makes him question the values of the capitalist and essentially traditional society in which he has lived. Mr. Hosokawa's attachment to Roxane helps him discover a profound sense of happiness outside the proscribed demands of society. In

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[30] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center,* 2nd ed. (London: Pluto P, 2000) 58.

fact, it is this embracing of difference that assists Mr. Hosokawa in letting go of his dependence on power and money-oriented values; unlike Ibrahim in *The Pickup*, Mr. Hosokawa now privileges connection and closeness.

Similarly to Mr. Hosokawa, Roxane finds herself going through some changes in the Vice President's home, as she alters her outlook regarding love. While she initially wonders "how it was possible to love someone you couldn't even speak to" (238), her love for Mr. Hosokawa eventually makes her reconsider this view:

> There was nothing they could say to one another but Roxane was far beyond thinking that speaking the same language was the only way to communicate with people. Besides, what was there to say, really? He knew her...she cried for the relief that came...from loving someone and from being loved...There were so many ways to talk. (306-7)

While it may appear that Patchett reproduces the clichéd notion of love as the universal language, she puts forward an imagining of a romantic relationship that escapes being determined by language and that is not daunted by difference. Patchett's attempt to think about love as not completely dependent on verbal communication is worthy, considering that the language of lovers is, according to Catherine Belsey, always already pre-determined: "Lovers speak, and yet in doing so they are spoken by a language that precedes them, that is not at their disposal, under their control; this language is at the same time dispersed among banalities, poetry, the sacred, tragedy."[31] Patchett tries to evade a dependency on conventional language, which echoes Shields's efforts to move away from the clichéd language of love generally disseminated in popular representations. In fact, as Mr. Hosokawa and Roxane bond,

[31] Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture (*Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 84.

with only their passion for music as a common link, Patchett indicates that love opens up new paths for communication. In an interview about *Bel Canto* with Gwen Ifill for *Online NewsHour*, Patchett states, "I think that it's also about going beyond language. And they come to realize finally they can communicate through their love of music…through romantic love. They find ways to rise above language".[32] While it is, in a sense, a paradox that Patchett attempts to make her characters independent of the language that she inevitably employs as a writer who is concerned with romantic love, it is, nevertheless, important that she challenges her readers to consider how language determines perceptions of love and how communication is possible in a multitude of ways for the interracial couple.

While Patchett tries to present a 'languageless' love, she also reveals that Gen's knowledge of a variety of languages denotes an openness to difference that is, as has already been seen, conducive to the creation of a romantic connection. Gen's multilingual ability, which permits him to converse with people from different parts of the world, is what initially attracts Carmen, a female rebel soldier, to him: "She had been hoping to speak to the translator since she realized what it was he did" (146). Gen's aptitude for language is connected to a heightened sense of intuition; despite their disparate cultural backgrounds, Gen has a sense of what touches Carmen. From their first conversation he is able to comment "'You like the music'", to which Carmen's reply is instant: "'Very beautiful,' she whispered" (149). Gen's approach points to the fact that he is not daunted by foreignness; indeed, his multilingualism implies that he has continuously exposed himself, as a foreigner, to the rules and particularities of each separate language and culture. Kristeva's work on the foreigner

[32] Ann Patchett, interview with Gwen Ifill, "Conversation: Ann Patchett," *Online NewsHour* 2 July 2002, 14 Oct. 2009 <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/conversation/july-dec02/patchett_7-02.html>.

in *Strangers to Ourselves*, which has already been looked at in relation to *The Pickup*, also helps sheds light here on the way Gen has, in becoming comfortable with the idea of himself as a foreigner, been able to accept the foreignness of others. Kristeva explains, "the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity...By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself" (1).[33] While such acceptance of foreignness and difference is significant for the interracial, international couple, it is also important in that it implies a reimagining of the approach to love, considering that in the romantic relationship, each person's partner is always an other and, hence, always outside one's own self: "Approaching the other requires perceiving him as other".[34] Patchett is, as a result, visualising the possibility of a respectful, sensitive approach to heterosexual love, which has bearing on all kinds of romantic relationships.

However, the fact that Patchett foregrounds an interracial relationship, which allows her to depict the coming together of people from such diverse economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, is a valuable move, as she, like Gordimer in *The Pickup*, defies the same race orthodoxy regarding romantic love (Pearce and Wisker 15). What makes this choice subversive is that Patchett, in a similar fashion to Gordimer's portrayal of Julie and Ibrahim's union, presents a love relationship between Gen, who is from a powerful, wealthy society, and Carmen, who is from a poor, marginalized region of the world; according to Pearce and Wisker it is such a combination that marks a coupling as transgressive: "it is important to emphasize...that a 'deviant' coupling is not, in itself, subversive: a full disarticulation depends upon at

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[33] Also see Kristeva's further discussion on foreignness and language in: Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt: The Power and Limits of Psychoanalysis, Volume 2,* trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) 241, 253.

[34] Luce Irigaray, *To be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (1994; London: The Athlone P, 2000) 45.

least one of the parties retaining the mark/sign of cultural orthodoxy at the same time as their action shatters the foundations on which it stands" (15). Taking this matter of hierarchy into consideration, Patchett and Gordimer can be seen to make a unique contribution to a reimagining of love, as, in confronting difference in such a way, they challenge the orthodoxy of same-race love (Pearce and Wisker 15).

Nonetheless, although they both work at subverting same-race expectations regarding love, the two writers deal with the issue of race in their own manner, as Gordimer, on the one hand, is more politically conscious and focused on certain socio-economic realities, while Patchett, on the other hand, is primarily interested in cultural and linguistic difference; as Margaret Stead affirms, *Bel Canto* examines "how we interact outside the borders of language and culture".[35] Revealingly, while Patchett does portray a relationship that crosses socio-economic and class barriers, she does not explore the consequences of such disparity in the same depth as Gordimer. Indeed, Valerie Sayers also suggests that as a novelist, Patchett "is not interested in racial tension so much as in the possibility of love-and respect-crossing racial lines".[36] This indicates that Patchett is focused on the potential of love to traverse racial barriers rather than on an in-depth exploration of the kinds of problems that can arise within a context of racism and inequality.

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[35] Margaret Stead, "A Diva Among the Hostages," rev. of *Bel Canto, The Times Literary Supplement* 27 July, 2001: 21, *Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive,* 10 Jan. 2013 <http://find.galegroup.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=duruni&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200505101&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>.

[36] Valerie Sayers, "False Start," rev. of *Run,* by Ann Patchett, *Commonweal* 135. 2 (2008): 27, *Literature Online*, 9 Jan. 2013 <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=0000001465986701&Fmt=3&clientId=43168&RQT=309&VName=PQD>.

In addition to defying the racial orthodoxy of romantic relationships, Patchett suggests the possibility of overcoming power struggles in the space of love. This is apparent from the way in which Gen, in spite of all of the advantages he has as an educated Japanese man, does not behave in a dominating or condescending manner towards Carmen. Instead, it is clear that Gen is willing to share his knowledge with her; as she is illiterate, he helps her learn how to read and write in Spanish and English. Gen does not look down on Carmen, but admires her abilities and intelligence, while it also becomes apparent he goes through the learning process with her, rather than dictating in the distant manner of the knowledge bearer: "To tell something to Carmen was to have it sewn forever into the silky folds of her brain...They went forward, pressing on through the night as if they were being hunted down by wolves" (209). Similarly, Carmen does not attempt to use her power as a rebel soldier to control Gen in any way. In fact, a connection is forged between them when she allows the "lines between the captives and captors" to "blur".[37] This is managed one night when she first asks him to teach her; her manner denotes her perception of him as an individual and not a political pawn: "All she had to do was ask...Carmen held her breath and stretched out on the floor next to Gen...She lay on her side and put her mouth near his sleeping ear" (157). This evident lack of power seeking on either Carmen or Gen's part is especially striking considering that, according to hooks, we "are living in an age when women and men are more likely to long for power than they are to long for love...Our longing for love...is to be counted among the weak, the soft" (*Communion* 72-73). Taking this into account, it significant

[37] Nancy Posey, rev. of *Bel Canto,* by Ann Patchett, *The English Journal* 92.6 (2003): 93, *JSTOR,* 9 Jan. 2013 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3650553>.

that both Carmen and Gen, unlike Ibrahim in *The Pickup,* privilege love and connection over control.

In *Bel Canto* Patchett also suggests that openness to romantic love cultivates openness to the creation of other non-sexual and non-romantic attachments. Mr. Hosokawa, for instance, not only connects with Roxane, but also with many of the other people in the house, including the rebels:

> Everything that Mr. Hosokawa had ever known or suspected about the way life worked had been proven to him to be incorrect these past months. Where before there had been endless hours of work...there were now chess games with a terrorist for whom he felt an unaccountable fondness. Where there had been a respectable family that functioned in the highest order, there were now people he loved and could not speak to. (228)

It appears that Mr. Hosokawa's ability to bond with Roxane, who comes from another part of the world, helps him become accepting of difference on a larger scale. Gen, similarly, becomes more open; he is seen to express feelings of affection for Mr. Hosokawa following the start of his romance with Carmen: "He was here...waiting on the girl he taught and loved, waiting to help Mr. Hosokawa, whom he loved as well. There was Gen, who had gone from nothing to loving two people" (249). Patchett here rejects the patriarchal clichés that have prevented men from being open and expressive about their emotions; Jaggar writes in "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology" that "men who express their emotions freely are suspected of being homosexual or in some other way deviant from the masculine ideal" (190). Hence, in revising any narrow-minded, patriarchal conceptions of man, Patchett is able to

present Gen's love for Carmen in connection to his love for Mr. Hosokawa, something allowing her to emphasise how an investment in romantic love is linked to the investment in other kinds of relationship, such as friendship. Indeed, hooks, who has been seen in the introduction to underline the importance of creating "a circle of love" (*Communion* 225), suggests that a romantic relationship and other kinds of connection like friendship should be linked together, as they need to co-exist harmoniously in a person's life.

Patchett points to the development of a kind of communal love in the occupied Vice President's home, as it is not only Gen and Mr. Hosokawa who open up to the people around them, but the soldiers, generals and other hostages who do as well. In fact, Ruben Iglesias, the Vice President, and Ishmael, one of the soldiers, build an unusually strong bond to one another:

> Carmen...did not remember her direct orders to form no emotional bonds to the hostages... Ishmael forgot because he wanted to be the other son of Ruben Iglesias...The Generals helped them forget by turning a blind eye to all the affection and slackness that surrounded them, and they could do that because there was so much they were forgetting themselves. (304)

Eventually, the affection the inhabitants of the house feel for each other makes them unwilling to leave: "the hostages...were in love with the place. They wouldn't leave if you tore the wall down. If you poked them in the back with your gun and told them to get going they would still run to you" (283). Like Julie living abroad in *The Pickup,* the hostages and soldiers alike do not wish to leave a place where they have experienced such a sense of closeness and communal love, and also where, unlike the

'outside world', "utopian harmony prevails".[38] While this vision can be said to be idealistic and even sometimes unrealistic, and also indicative of a more uncomplicated imagining of communal feeling than found in Erdrich, Patchett manages to convey that people, regardless of nationality, share this need for a life imbued with more love. Indeed, Patchett seems to draw on aspects of utopian fiction, as a departure from common reality allows her to bring this message across more clearly than she could have if she had remained faithful to a sense of everyday life in society.

Besides shaping the possibility of communal love in *Bel Canto*, Patchett attempts to clarify that the experience of falling in love does not have to be a romantic one, something Goodison has been seen to touch on when she explains that there is need to "broaden the scope of our loving feelings. Part of this may be to realise that we 'fall in love' in situations far from the socially recognised romantic or sexual ones" (170). Patchett outlines a connection between falling in love in the romantic and non-romantic sense through Roxane: "As soon as Roxane fell in love, she fell in love again. The two experiences were completely different and yet coming as they did, one right on top of the other, she could not help but link them together in her mind" (306). Roxane is simultaneously in love with Mr. Hosokawa and the voice of Cesar, one of the young soldiers:

> It wasn't that she was in love with Cesar, but she was in love with his singing. It was like this: every night Mr. Hosokawa came back to her bedroom and every morning Cesar waited to practice. If there was something else to want she forgot what it might be. (307)

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[38] Christina Konig, "A Novel That Holds a High Note," rev. of *Bel Canto,* by Ann Patchett, *Times* 4 July 2001: 12, *The Times Digital Archive,* 10 Jan. 2013 <http://find.galegroup.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=duruni&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=IF501054995&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0 >.

In stressing that Roxane's feelings for this Latin American boy's singing are passionate in a way that equates to her sense of being in love with Mr. Hosokawa, Patchett demonstrates that, in her reimagining of heterosexual love, woman perceives romantic love as a state of being that is conducive to other kinds of passion and pleasure. Hence, Patchett challenges the kind of earlier conservative thinking that William J. Robinson expressed in the 1917 essay "Woman: Her Sex and Love Life": "love is a woman's whole life...woman is made for love" (58). Moreover, in depicting Roxane as being invested in kinds of passion other than romantic love, Patchett goes against some of the conventions of popular romance novels, which tend to focus, as Radway explains, "on a single, developing relationship between hero and heroine" (122). Yet, while Patchett does not follow the popular romance approach, she cannot be said to decentralise the heterosexual love relation as explored by DuPlessis. This is since the heterosexual relationships in *Bel Canto* remain to the fore, even as Patchett opens up the experience of falling in love to a non-romantic sense.

Patchett also undermines expectations around love as the romantic relationships she depicts do not subscribe to the norms of society. Gen is aware of the idiosyncratic nature of his relationship to Carmen, a poor girl from another part of the world, who is currently classed as a terrorist:

> What a sense of humour one would need to believe that the woman you love is not in Tokyo or Paris or New York or Athens. The woman you love is a girl who dresses as a boy and she lives in a village in a jungle...The woman you love puts her gun beside a blue gravy boat at night so that you can teach her to read. She came into your life through

> an air-conditioner vent and how she will leave is the question that keeps you awake. (202-203)

The formation of ties between people who have been brought up in very dissimilar social contexts can be seen as part of Patchett's effort to put forward an alternative imagining of love. Considering how Pearce and Stacey have criticised the way in which "Much of the earlier feminist critiques of romantic love...ignored the factors of race, ethnicity and cultural difference" (22), it seems important that *Bel Canto* focuses on these disparate pairings which cannot be easily subsumed by more mainstream, conservative conceptions of love.

Furthermore, in *Bel Canto* Patchett resists the idea that romantic love between men and women is inextricably linked to the path of marriage, which is a romance convention scrutinised by Miller; indeed, in referring to traditional plots, Miller states, "Without marriage as *telos*, there can only be death" (*The Heroine's Text* 82). While Shields defends marriage in spite of such criticisms and tries to redefine it, Patchett here challenges the perception of it as a necessary part of love. In the novel, Mr. Hosokawa and Roxane cannot make plans for the future as he is already married, yet this is not seen to affect the intensity of their feelings for each other. Although women have, according to Irigaray, traditionally been defined in relation to marriage, "The woman is wife and mother" (*I Love to You* 21), Roxane is not seen to cling to the idea of a 'happily ever after' with Mr. Hosokawa. She does not imagine the relationship in such terms and is unwilling to impose a future upon them: "[even] if the third scenario were true, that they would be released quickly and unharmed...certainly then she would not see Katsumi Hosokawa again" (239). In a similar fashion to Roxane, Carmen endorses a non-traditional approach to romantic love, as she defends Roxane

and Mr. Hosokawa's love affair and does not attempt to uphold the legitimacy of the institution of monogamy and marriage. When Gen mentions Mrs. Hosokawa, Carmen says, "'Mrs. Hosokawa lives in Japan...while I'm sorry for Mrs. Hosokawa, I don't think that means that Mr. Hosokawa should be alone'" (203). In showing her characters questioning monogamy and marriage, Patchett pushes her readers to rethink what Pearce and Wisker consider to be conventions of traditional romance; Patchett clearly acknowledges the need to "interrogate and destabilise the institutions in which those conventions have become embedded (e.g., heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy, the family or the prescription for same-race relationships)" (Pearce and Wisker 1). While Pearce and Wisker perceive heterosexuality to be one of the orthodox conventions of romance (something DuPlessis also puts forward in *Writing Beyond the Ending*), Patchett is able to question the connection between romantic love and the institution of marriage precisely through Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa's relationship, suggesting that heterosexual love does hold the potential for rethinking traditional conceptualisations of romance.

Yet, although Patchett questions monogamy and marriage, the traditional idea of a 'happily ever after' does, in some ways, haunt the text. This is evident in Gen's internal attempt to envision a future with Carmen. However, Gen only has such thoughts after the ending of the hostage situation; the third person narrative voice in *Bel Canto* permits the reader access to Gen's musings following the end of his relationship to Carmen, whereby his regret for not having pushed for the possibility of a shared life with her is revealed:

> For the rest of Gen's life he will remember this night in two completely different ways. First, he will imagine what he did not do. In this

> version, he takes Carmen's hand and leads her out the gate...They go to an airport and find a flight back to Japan and they live there, together, happily and forever. (261)

Gen is evidently unable to completely let go of traditional notions of romance, which see love in terms of a future, a long term partnership, and, in other words, marriage. Gen, in fact, refers to Carmen as his wife even at the time of the climactic shooting, "She was his wife in every way that mattered" (313), pointing to his desire for such a union. Crystal Kile specifically addresses the social phenomenon of linking romantic love to marriage and the notion of a shared forever in her essay "Endless Love Will Keep Us Together": "The search for 'true love'...promises lifelong companionship...we continue to cling to this mythologically central notion that love should be forever" (415). Although this is a pervasive Western view, it is somewhat surprising that Gen starts to see his relationship to Carmen in such a light, as their connection to each other was never, according to society's standards, a conventional one. Nevertheless, the narrative itself resists this more traditional imagining of love by moving away from Gen's fantasy of what he wishes had happened, to his memory of what did actually take place that night:

> Then he will imagine exactly what did happen...Carmen kisses him and he kisses her and from then on he will never be able to separate the smell of her from the smell of the night...At the very moment he could have been taking her away, he is pulling her closer. (261-262)

In *Bel Canto*, this moment of contact and closeness is the real memory, as Patchett highlights the illusiveness of the fantasy of a 'happily ever after'; the sense of

connection Gen and Carmen share in this experience is, after all, more tangible and precious than anything else.

The questioning of the notion that a romantic relationship must conclude in marriage is further dramatized in the portrayal of the deaths of Carmen and Mr. Hosokawa, as this puts a final end to the unions that came into being in the house. Their deaths, which transpire in the military raid that Patchett based on the actual conclusion to the Lima Crisis, discontinues the situation in which this economically, socially and linguistically diverse group of people have come to love and care for one another, both in a romantic and non-romantic way. By unfolding, in an almost cinematic fashion, the events of the violent raid and offering an elaborate description of the scene of the shooting, the author lays emphasis on voice and sound, so signalling how the opera genre might foreshadow this textual development. The tragic, romantic stories that define much of the opera music sung in the house appear to come to life in this instance:

> they heard Roxane Coss. Not a song but a scream and then a long, wolflike howl. Together they turned towards the door, Mr. Hosokawa and Carmen...they heard the shot that brought down Cesar. They stepped into the living room just as a man with a gun turned to face them, just as Roxane took the body of her student in her arms...Roxane saw them as the man with the gun saw them, Carmen saw Cesar, and Mr. Hosokawa saw Carmen and he scooped her from the space in front of him...One shot fixed them together in a pairing no one had considered before: Carmen and Mr. Hosokawa. (313)

Here, the communal love that has developed amongst the inhabitants of the house clearly spurs Mr. Hosokawa to try and save Carmen. However, neither they nor Cesar survive, indicating how Patchett invokes the often tragic, melodramatic narratives of opera. This emphasis on building the details that make up the scene of Carmen's and Mr. Hosokawa's deaths suggests that Patchett wishes to highlight the destruction brought about by the reappearance of people from the outside world. However, the fact that Patchett presents this in a way that is reminiscent of an operatic performance indicates her sense of opera, "an art devoted to love and death (and especially to the cryptic alliance between them)",[39] being an apt medium for the depiction of the dramatic and tragic developments. Patchett, though, also draws on aspects of the Courtly Love tradition, which, in the widespread Tristan myth, posits a love that is not allowed to endure within the real world. Pearce explains that due to "insuperable social and ideological constraint...Tristan and Iseult's love is defined by its very impossibility in the 'real'/social world, and...the story itself...ensures that it remains that way".[40] A parallel between the doomed mythical pair and the two main couples in *Bel Canto*, as well as the reference to certain operatic elements, indicates that Patchett here draws on sources that see love in terms of tragedy.

It seems that the essentially conservative nature of operatic plot patterns and the Courtly Love tradition, where transgressive love is seen to lead to tragic death, contradicts the mostly positive and progressive vision of love presented throughout *Bel Canto*. Moreover, the novel's sudden emphasis on death and destruction appears inconsistent with the love and pleasure oriented atmosphere previously prevailing in the Vice President's home. Patchett's turn to traditional and tragic love plots points to

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[39] Peter Conrad, *A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera* (1987; London: Hogarth P, 1989) 11.
[40] Lynne Pearce, *Romance Writing* (Cambridge: Polity P, 2007) 15.

some inconsistency in the novel. In fact, such inconsistency can also be detected in some of the customary and mainstream depictions of romance seen earlier in *Bel Canto*, suggesting that Patchett occasionally has difficulty upholding an unorthodox vision of the heterosexual relationship. Therefore, even though the author predominantly offers unconventional imaginings of heterosexual love, she sometimes draws upon elements and generic solutions that are at odds with the whole.

The tragic end to the holdup is followed by an abrupt change of setting and mood, as Patchett takes her readers to a town in Italy, on the day of Roxane and Gen's wedding. Such a coupling, which points to how Patchett moves away from the ill-fated raid and tries to recreate a more joyful and optimistic atmosphere, however, is unexpected, as there has been no prior indication that Roxane and Gen have any romantic inclinations towards one another. Yet, the genuineness of their feelings is stressed here when Gen states to Simon Thibault, who is in attendance with his wife, "'I love Roxane'" (317), while Roxane, too, affirms her affection for him: "'I'm happy,' Roxane said, and then looked at Gen and said it again" (316). Despite the apparent authenticity of their attachment to each other, it is surprising that Patchett chooses to end the novel with this marriage after she has consistently indicated that the legitimacy of romantic love is not dependant on the possibility of a shared future.[41] There is a sense that Patchett is struggling to conclude a novel that has such a strong emphasis on romantic love without providing her readers with a traditionally happy ending. Her inability to close *Bel Canto* without this 'happily ever after', though, functions as a sort of haunting for the reader and of the text itself, as the necessity of

[41] It has also been suggested that inconsistency defines the recent television series *Sex and the City,* which, as seen in the introduction, finally shows its protagonists turning to marriage or having serious and committed relationships, despite its initially more critical stance to love. (See Harzewski 98). It is evident that conventions such as marriage are not easily bypassed, even if they have formerly been put into question.

marriage and a shared forever returns to dominate notions of heterosexual love, despite the portrayal of non-conventional relationships in the Vice-President's home. Taking this into account, the question is raised whether resistance to the norms of society is only viable when people are cut off from the rest of the world, as was the case during the hostage situation.

While Patchett's decision to portray Gen and Roxane's later marriage implies a return to convention, something reinforced by the fact that they both come from developed countries and belong to a relatively privileged class of people, she does suggest that the coming together of these survivors of the military raid is their way of holding on, in some sense, to the way of life that had evolved in the house. Although Gen and Roxane cannot lead the same kind of unconventional, liberated life they did whilst held captive, Gen wants Roxane's singing to remain a part of his everyday existence, as it gives him a sense of hope, which was evidently battered by the experience of violence and loss:

> 'When I hear Roxane sing I am still able to think well of the world...This is a world in which...she can still sing that music with so much compassion. That's proof of something isn't it? I don't think I would last a day without that now.' (318)

Furthermore, it emerges that the love between Roxane and Gen is an extension of their respective loves for Mr. Hosokawa and Carmen, as well as for the people they had bonded with in the house: "Gen and Roxane had married for love, the love of each other and the love of all the people they remembered" (318). Roxane and Gen's new relationship and the occasion of their wedding too acts as the impetus for them to meet the Thibaults again, which allows them to rekindle connection to those with whom

they had shared this sense of communal love. Therefore, while Patchett can be criticised for choosing marriage as the only way of perpetuating the unconventional ties that had developed amongst the characters during their captivity, she strives to find a means of retaining some sense of this love once they are 'outside' in the 'real' world. It is evident that while there are certain conventional strands running through the novel, as is seen with the sudden concluding marriage, the text's initial focus on the spectacle of romance, and the turn to the conservative, tragic plot patterns of opera and the Courtly Love tradition, Patchett also puts forward a revisionary reading of the romantic relationship between the sexes.

Moreover, it is valuable that Patchett goes against convention when she underlines that man can be a staunch supporter for a way of life that prioritizes love; in *Bel Canto* it is Gen who is the most protective of the positive experience in the Vice President's home, as he is seen to interrogate the way in which the press later ignores the existence of Carmen and another woman rebel: "'I've called the papers and asked them to publish a correction, but no one is interested. It's almost as if they never existed'" (317). Even though Patchett has perhaps been unable to imagine how a socially and economically disparate couple like Carmen and Gen could ever be allowed to remain together outside the exceptional space of hostage, she does depict how Gen resents the world's view of this young woman, who as a terrorist from a marginalised group, is not considered worth mentioning. Although the press pays no heed to his request, Gen tries to tell the story: "Gen...talked as if he were telling the story to the bar" (317). While he is not able to rectify the world's indifference, he displays his own refusal to stay quiet; in fact, his determination to hold on to such

things as Roxane's singing denotes his defiance towards a society of material hierarchies that brushes over the existence of people like Carmen.

Despite certain traditional aspects, Patchett elsewhere puts forward an unconventional imagining of heterosexual love in *Bel Canto*. For instance, Patchett explores the importance of openness to difference within mixed race relationships, while she also depicts the positive male figure of Gen, who does not abide by patriarchal values. For the most part Patchett focuses her attention on developing the potential of a non-authoritative relationship like, for instance, Gen and Carmen's. Moreover, within her imagining of love, Patchett examines other unorthodox facets, such as the possibility of falling in love in a non-romantic sense. So, although there are clearly certain conservative elements to *Bel Canto*, it is important that Patchett shows how this international mix of men and women in the novel learn to prioritize a life lived according to a love ethic. Overall Patchett can be said to provide a unique imagining of romantic love in *Bel Canto*.

Conclusion

As delineated in this chapter, the interracial love relationship occupies the centre of Gordimer's and Patchett's reconceptualisations of romantic love. Both writers show how an engagement with difference can serve as a significant foundation for approaching heterosexual love in new ways. Yet, while both writers are concerned with interracial love relationships, they each have their own distinct points of focus. Gordimer, for instance, is preoccupied with the differences between Julie and Ibrahim's economic and social positions and how these affect their relationship. In fact, external economic and social factors have such an influence on their relationship

that Ibrahim is propelled to take a different direction to Julie. In *Bel Canto,* the international cast of characters also come from disparate social and economic backgrounds; however, unlike in *The Pickup,* the romantic, as well as platonic, relationships created within the Vice-President's home cause these lines of distinction between the protagonists to blur. However, linguistic differences are highlighted, allowing Patchett to bring the matter of language into her exploration of heterosexual love. Different languages are, though, not a reason for alienation in the novel, as Patchett emphasises the possibility of a relationship that is not dependent on verbal communication. Therefore, it can be suggested that difference is more readily assimilated in *Bel Canto*.

Although Gordimer takes a more probing and contextualised approach to interracial relationships, both writers are clearly aware of the significance of openness to difference in the space of romantic love with someone from another part of the world. In *The Pickup*, for instance, Julie approaches a stranger and integrates him into her life, while she then goes on to open herself to his family and existence in an unfamiliar Arab country. While the men and women in *Bel Canto* who are held hostage do not actually choose to start a new life in a foreign land as Julie does, they too must open themselves to the international mix of people they encounter. Moreover, it is evident that Gen goes through a parallel process to Julie when it comes to approaching difference, as Carmen not only comes from another country, but is someone whose life experiences, as a poor rebel soldier, are radically dissimilar to his own. In both novels approaching difference also requires the ability to be comfortable with one's own foreignness, something Gen appears to have achieved through his engagement with new languages and cultures, and which Julie learns as she

experiences a de-familiarised sense of self in Ibrahim's country. Therefore, it is apparent that interracial love is not only linked to a positive exposure to otherness in various forms, but to this different awareness of self.

Furthermore, *The Pickup* highlights that there is need for balance between a respectful love for the other and self-love, which is something particularly important for woman, who in patriarchal society has traditionally been expected to sacrifice herself for man. While Gordimer does maintain that Julie's relationship to Ibrahim brings her genuine happiness and pleasure, she also recognises the need to respect her, as well as his, individual needs and wants. Such balance is central to Gordimer's vision of positive heterosexual love, even though she also shows how Ibrahim struggles within patriarchal society to accept that a woman has separate needs of her own. In *Bel Canto*, however, such patriarchal beliefs and behaviours are not promulgated by Mr. Hosokawa or Gen; for instance, Patchett shows how Gen's sensitive manner allows him to build a respectful, positive relationship to a woman from a different part of the world. Thus, while in Gordimer's imagining of heterosexual love men are still somewhat trapped in patriarchal patterns and potential for change is located in woman, Patchett's male characters, who allow for a radical overturning of certain preconceived notions regarding men's emotional life, are seen as able to cultivate a respectful love.

Furthermore, in addition to illustrating how rewarding romantic relationships can be cultivated when men adopt non-patriarchal behaviour, Patchett portrays how the inhabitants of the hostage house create strong connections to one another, indicating that communal love flourishes alongside romantic love. The development of a sense of loving comradeship, in addition to the love between the main couples, is

assisted by a shared passion for opera music; this points to how Patchett has created a space which, if one excludes the emphasis on death and destruction in the military raid, is love and pleasure oriented. Such interest in communal love also comes out in *The Pickup*, as Gordimer shows how Julie's relationship to Ibrahim, which is what brings her to his country, creates the possibility for her to form connections to some local women. While both writers draw attention to the significance of these wider connections, Gordimer actually focuses on the portrayal of a female community, which suggests that friendship amongst women has an important role to play in her vision of romantic love. Thus the two authors can be said to consider romantic love as being conducive to the creation of communal ties.

In *Bel Canto*, the marriage of the survivors Gen and Roxane at the end allows them, in some sense, to hold on to the way of life and connections created in captivity. Yet, such a portrayal does appear to contradict Patchett's earlier efforts to resist the necessity of a shared future or 'happily ever after' and returns to more traditional conceptions of romantic love, something Gordimer disrupts by concluding her novel with Ibrahim's departure. This impression of a conventional and idealised strand running through *Bel Canto* is reinforced by its occasional more melodramatic depictions of romance, resonanating with operatic styles and plots. However, the turn to marriage, although contradictory and conservative, does not utterly negate the significance of Roxane and Gen's attempt to hold on to the affirmative love experienced in captivity, which suggests that there is transgressive potential to be found even in this concluding part of the novel.

While Gordimer avoids a typical 'happily ever after' by showing how Julie is left behind when Ibrahim goes away, *The Pickup's* conclusion is also indicative of the

characters' inability to work through the social and economic differences that divide them. So, although Julie's unwillingness to follow Ibrahim is testament to her independence and the finding of balance between self-love and love for her partner, which are highlighted as important aspects for woman, at the end of the novel Gordimer does not resolve the disparity of privilege that exists between this interracial couple. In contrast, Patchett can be seen to try to find a solution to the abrupt end to many of the positive connections forged in the hostage house through a recuperative marriage that recreates some sense of the earlier loves. However, it can be suggested that Patchett is only able to imagine the permanent coupling of two people like Roxane and Gen, who in spite of their different ethnic backgrounds, come from equally developed countries, rather than a lasting union between Gen and the impoverished, uneducated terrorist Carmen. Therefore, both Gordimer and Patchett, in distinct ways, leave exposed the difficulties of power imbalance and negotiating discrepancy in status.

Despite these complexities, it remains the case that interracial love relationships, which allow for and centralise the approaching of difference, function as the basis for both writers to bring forth of a number of unorthodox elements in their reimaginings of romantic love. While Gordimer provides a more ambiguous ending and does not take a clearly positive approach, and Patchett at times draws on conventional aspects, it seems that both writers have been able to locate some potential within their exploration of interracial love between men and women.

Chapter 4: Rejecting Patriarchy: Narratives of Alternative Love

Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*

This chapter will first look at how Atwood's early novel *Lady Oracle* (1976) establishes a critical stance towards romance. The main reading will then turn to *The Blind Assassin* (2000) in which Atwood will be found to problematize patriarchal models of romantic love, whilst also offering a development by exploring the significance of some more alternative, unconventional forms of heterosexual relationship.

Lady Oracle is a novel set between the 1950s and 1970s whose female protagonist, Joan Foster, is a writer of Gothic romances and an acclaimed book of poetry, also called *Lady Oracle.* Joan is revealed as someone who merges reality and fantasy when it comes to love; indeed, Atwood explains in an interview that Joan "is attempting to act out a romantic myth we're all handed out as women in a non-romantic world".[1] In creating a heroine who is a romance author, Atwood self consciously draws attention to this genre as Joan writes but also tries to act out the culture's romantic myths, something apparent in the scene where she meets her husband, Arthur Foster. Joan, who is immersed in thoughts about one of her Gothic romances, feels his hand on her arm at the exact moment she imagines someone reaching out to her heroine. Joan is evidently still wrapped up in the fantasy of romance, as she perceives Arthur as a kind of male hero: "He was wearing a black crew-neck sweater, which I found quite dashing. A melancholy fighter for almost-lost

[1] Karla Hammond, "Defying Distinctions," *Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review P, 2006) 64.

causes, idealistic and doomed, sort of like Lord Byron...I fell in love".[2] The narrative reveals Joan imposes these romantic ideas upon a "skinny, confused-looking young man" (164), thus starting a relationship that is based on a false image of Arthur. Clearly, their subsequent union cannot match Joan's romantic ideals; for instance, while she continues to translate Arthur's behaviour against the backdrop of romance, her justifications are immediately deconstructed by the interjecting voice of her future self:

> His aloofness was even intriguing, like a figurative cloak. Heroes were supposed to be aloof. His indifference was feigned, I told myself. Any moment his hidden depths would heave to the surface; he would be passionate and confess his long-standing devotion. I would then confess mine, and we would be happy. (Later I decided that his indifference was not feigned at all. I also decided that passionate revelation scenes were better avoided...). (197)

Like Radway and Modleski, who suggest that romance reading helps women excuse male behaviour, Atwood shows how Joan explains Arthur's emotional distance by drawing on romance narratives. Joan's future self, however, reveals these suppositions to be false; in effect, this dialogue between different points in time, which functions as a self-announcing narrative technique, heightens the reader's focus on the seductions *and* problems of romance tropes and plots.

Yet, Atwood indicates it is not only Arthur that does not live up to Joan's romantic ideals, as, in Gina Wisker's words, the "men in Joan's life, her dreams and

[2] Margaret Atwood, *Lady Oracle* (1976; London: Virago, 1997) 165.

romances, are all ambiguous and untrustworthy".[3] Indeed, the male figures in Joan's life, like the heroes she portrays in her novels, are predominantly perceived as threatening and frightening:

> Every man I'd ever been involved with...had had two selves: my father, healer and killer...the Royal Porcupine and his double Chuck Brewer; even Paul...I'd always believed had a sinister other life...Arthur was someone I didn't know at all...what if he woke up, eyes glittering, and reached for me? (292)

According to Wisker, *Lady Oracle* is preoccupied with "the usual Gothic elements: pursuit, terror, power" (51), whilst, as identified by Shuli Barzilai, Joan's fear of Arthur is also reminiscent of the Bluebeard tale, where "men murder their wives and...get away with it".[4] In depicting Joan's fears that her husband may be a Bluebeard-like figure, Atwood confronts some of the questions raised in an interview with Joyce Carol Oates: "what was it about these books that appealed-do so many women think of themselves as menaced...and of their husbands as potential murderers?... Are these our secret plots?".[5] Thus, Atwood addresses how Gothic romance plots reveal the underlying anxiety that can shadow women's romantic relations within patriarchal society, a point also established by Modleksi. In *Lady Oracle*, Joan's romantic relationships express this uncertainty about male power.

Moreover, another matter that becomes clear in *Lady Oracle* is that Joan's fantasies are a means of escaping reality. For instance, Joan starts an affair with

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[3] Gina Wisker, *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 49.
[4] Shuli Barzilai, "The Bluebeard Syndrome in Atwood's *Lady Oracle*: Fear and Femininity," *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 19.2 (2005): 249, *JSTOR,* 25 Oct. 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41388752>.
[5] Joyce Carol Oates, "Dancing on the Edge of the Precipice," Ingersoll 44.

Chuck, a man who she meets under the guise of the Royal Porcupine, because she is intrigued by his unusual appearance: "I found him attractive. Him or the cape, I wasn't sure which" (239). When Chuck later asks her to leave Arthur, she is reluctant, as he primarily serves as a form of escapism: "It wasn't that I didn't love him. I did, in a peculiar way, but I knew I couldn't live with him...it would mean there was no fantasy, and therefore no escape" (270). As Joan's attraction to Chuck is tied up with this notion of escape, she is horrified when he renounces his Royal Porcupine persona: "He was merely Chuck Brewer; had he always been, underneath his beard?... 'My God,' I said, almost screamed...I was staring at his chin; I'd never seen it before...It was horrible...Without his beard, he had the chin of a junior accountant" (270-71). Here Atwood gives Joan's response an air of ridiculousness, thus using humour to mock her protagonist's captivation with romance conventions. Nonetheless, at this the affair comes to an abrupt end, allowing Atwood to imply that Joan is more intrigued by the escapist potential of fantasy than the idea of leaving Arthur and pursuing an actual relationship with Chuck. However, Atwood signals that while Chuck initially wants more of a commitment from Joan, this desire does not run very deep; in fact, when Joan contacts him because she believes he is harassing her for having left him, he clarifies that he has already moved on: "You know me, here today, gone tomorrow. Easy come, easy go...Why prolong the agony?...Besides, I've got company" (276). Atwood indicates that while there may have been genuine affection between Joan and Chuck, neither of them were greatly emotionally invested in the relationship. *Lady Oracle* thus critically assesses romantic love for its dependence on fantasy and escape.

Furthermore, *Lady Oracle* deals with how Joan is unable, even after the staging of death that allowed her to leave her old life with Arthur behind, to stop

acting out the romantic fantasies that have dominated her life and writing. This is particularly clear when Joan hits a reporter with a bottle as he interrupts her imagining the male protagonist of her novel *Stalked by Love* reaching out to harm the female character trapped in the middle of a maze. Following this incident, Joan becomes drawn to the reporter because of his injuries and the way he has been exposed to this rather dramatic side to her: "I have to admit that there is something about a man in a bandage...I've never hit anyone else with a bottle, so they never got to see that part of me" (345). Even though Joan has decided to stop writing Gothic romances by the end of the novel, Barzilai refers to how Joan's nursing of the reporter is reminiscent of the hospital romance genre and suggests that this "may be deemed an unsatisfactory progress or...nonprogress on Joan's part".[6] Susan Jaret McKinstry also affirms that "Joan cannot give up her addiction to romance because of its value as escape".[7]

In *Lady Oracle* it is apparent that Joan remains entangled in the maze of romance. Moreover, Joan cannot be said to work through her uncertainty about male power, something that has been located to lie at the root of the fearful fantasies she has about men, whether fictional or real life. Clearly, in her 1976 novel Atwood leaves unresolved the issue of women's anxieties about men within patriarchal structures, while she also retains a critical stance towards the romance plots and conventions which prove so alluring to her female protagonist.

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[6] Shuli Barzilai, "'Say That I Had a Lovely Face': The Grimm's 'Rapunzel,' Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott,' and Atwood's Lady Oracle," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19.2 (2000): 249, *JSTOR,* 25 Oct. 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/464428>.

[7] Susan Jaret McKinstry, "Living Literally by the Pen: The Self-Conceived and Self-Deceiving Heroine-Author in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*," *Margaret Atwood: Essays on Her Works,* ed. Branko Gorjup, Writers Series 25 (Toronto: Guernica, 2008) 68-69.

Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*

In the later *The Blind Assassin* Atwood portrays the story of Iris Chase, an ageing woman living in Canada at the end of the twentieth century. As a large part of *The Blind Assassin* takes the shape of Iris's memoir, the novel is greatly concerned with her recollection of the past. Yet, there is also a frame narrative, which deals with Iris's present from 1998-1999. Moreover, *The Blind Assassin* contains a novel within a novel which is also named *The Blind Assassin*, and deals with a love story that is recounted by Iris, a fact which remains unknown to the reader till the end of the book, as the assumed author of this 'inside' novel is Iris's sister, Laura Chase. To complicate matters further, this 'inside' novel also holds a science fiction fantasy, which is narrated by the male protagonist, who while unnamed till the end, is finally known to be Alex Thomas, Iris's clandestine lover.

The memoir and inside novels will primarily serve as the foundation for a critique of a patriarchal approach to romantic love, as well as an introduction to Atwood's more alternative outlook on love as developed in her recent fiction. In fact, it is in moving between the inside novel that is presented in short instalments throughout the text and explores some of heterosexual love's potential, and the memoir, which primarily deals with patriarchal modes of loving, that Atwood pushes her readers to consider different ideas and approaches in regards to romantic love. While Atwood in no way idealises love in the inside novel, she does create some form of alternative to the repressive relationships in the memoir. Moreover, Atwood allows this unorthodox heterosexual relationship to remain of consequence until the end of the novel, a departure from *Lady Oracle* where Joan continues to be invested in romance fantasy and not in any significantly positive love.

What emerges quite early on in the novel is Atwood's belief that the romantic relationship between two individuals does not make them immune to the difficulties inherent to life in a patriarchal and capitalist world. This is seen through the portrayal of Iris and Laura's parents' budding romance, which Iris discusses in her memoir, based on the information given to her by Reenie, the housekeeper, who figures as a sort of mother figure to the sisters following Mrs. Chase's death. While it remains questionable whether Reenie's recollection of events from 1914 and Iris's own memory of these stories in 1998 in her early eighties are entirely 'accurate', the reader is led to believe that soon after Mr. and Mrs. Chase fell in love and got married, their time together was interrupted by the outbreak of World War One: "after the wedding, there was war. Love, then marriage, then catastrophe".[8] The catastrophic reality of World War One is seen to disrupt the Chases' time together as a newly married couple, revealing the falseness of marriage's promise of permanence and stability. Atwood strives to show how, in the lead up to Iris's parents' wedding, the elaborate rituals and customs that precede the marriage ceremony create an illusion of safety and stability: "Then came the ring, and the announcement in the papers; and then...there were formal teas. Beautifully set out they were...then there was the trousseau...the nightgowns, the peignoirs, the kind of lace on them, the pillowcases" (87). These customs, which appear to offer the couple protection and elevation from the rest of the world, emerge as a flimsy sort of defence in light of the war that separates Mr. and Mrs. Chase in *The Blind Assassin*.

It is after the war, when they are reunited, that it becomes apparent how their time apart has changed them:

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[8] Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (2000; London: Virago, 2002) 87.

> This wasn't what he'd remembered, this efficient, careworn woman...They were now strangers...How harsh the light was. How much older they'd become. There was no trace of the man who'd once knelt deferentially on the ice to lace up her skates, or of the young woman who'd sweetly accepted this homage. (95)

The harsh reality of war annuls this earlier act of courtship, as the 'deferential' man and 'sweet' woman are replaced by individuals who have been exposed to severe exterior forces. In revealing how a disastrous larger event like war has a direct effect on Mr. and Mrs. Chase's relationship, Atwood elucidates that it is not only the personal that is political, but that the political is also personal. This suggests that the topic of romantic love cannot be explored without consideration of the political and social context, something Morrison also takes into account in *Jazz* when she highlights the way Joe and Violet's difficulties as a couple are linked to the reality of African-Americans within US society.

Atwood continues to be critical of the institution of marriage when she reveals that Iris's grandparents' relationship was more of a convenient economic arrangement than a union based on love. Another deciding factor for the marriage is how it enables ascending the social ladder in late nineteenth century Canadian society, since Iris's grandmother Adelia is able to offer her husband the status of her once well-established family background in return for the recent money he's made: "she'd married money-crude money, button money. She was expected to refine this money, like oil." (74) This materialistic and power oriented view of love continues to dominate in the twentieth century when Iris's father forces his daughter to submit to his desire for her to be married to the much older and affluent Richard Griffen, in hope that this might

save his failing business, which was affected badly by the Depression. This move on Iris's father's part points, once again, to Atwood's attentiveness to the matter of class in connection to love, as it becomes clear that the need to belong to a certain social group, which translates into the acquisition of money and power, is the deciding factor in the selection of a husband for Iris in the same way it was for her grandparents. Even Iris herself is clear about the monetary value of her marriage to Richard: "What he was saying was that unless I married Richard, we wouldn't have any money" (276). As J. Brooks Bouson perceives, Iris's father's attempt to regain his former influence and status by marrying his daughter off to a member of high class Canadian society is suggestive of "the victimization of women in a patriarchal system".[9] Within such a system, the eighteen year old Iris is unable to display any kind of opposition to her father's decision: "I said nothing" (277). In fact, Iris's obedience must be considered in relation to the fact that she is, according to Fiona Tolan "a product of both a masculine culture and of a strictly enforced patriarchal family".[10] Moreover, Iris's passive acceptance of a marriage to a man she does not love points to the way women can be pushed into complying with the patriarchal belief that wealth and power constitute a sound basis for the building of a relationship. It is only later, as an older woman, that Iris is able to grasp the danger of allowing such a patriarchal perception of love to be imposed upon her. Looking back to that moment in 1935, she says "There was no floor to my room: I was suspended in the air, about to plummet. My fall would be endless-endlessly down" (279), an image suggesting her desolation and loss.

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[9] J. Brooks Bouson, "Introduction: Negotiating with Margaret Atwood," *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake,* ed. J. Brooks Bouson (London: Continuum, 2010) 16.
[10] Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2007) 262.

The fall Iris alludes to starts to come to light when, after their marriage in 1935, Richard displays his desire for sexual dominance over his young bride:

> I did not yet know that my lack of enjoyment-my distaste, my suffering even-would be considered normal and even desirable by my husband. He was one of those men who felt that if a woman did not experience sexual pleasure this was all to the good, because then she would not be liable to wander off seeking it elsewhere. (294-295)

Iris who, according to Madeline Davies, has "no autonomy over her own body" and "is the disempowered victim of wider forces",[11] is not the only female who Richard harms, as he forces himself upon his wife's sister Laura. When Iris discovers this later on in her marriage,[12] she speaks out openly about her husband's sexually abusive behaviour to his sister Winifred: "He has a yen for young girls...Even at eighteen I was pushing the upper limit. Having Laura in the house was just too much temptation for him, I see that now. He couldn't keep his hands off her" (618). Richard's sexual interest in Laura is clear indication of his desire to exercise power over a younger, and therefore more vulnerable, other. Considering how the Gothic is concerned with "pursuit, terror, power, and the potential of real rape" (Wisker 51-52) alongside Richard's sadistic behaviour, Wisker proposes that "The Iris and Richard tale is a gothic marriage tale of conformity and hidden abuse" (Wisker 134). Evidently, Atwood remains preoccupied with bringing Gothic aspects into her work, as it allows her to represent the oppressiveness of patriarchal forms of relationship in an amplified mode.

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[11] Madeline Davies, "Margaret Atwood's Female Bodies," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Carol Ann Howells (2006; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 61.

[12] There are, however, other more critical views taken; for instance, Carol Ann Howells feels that in regards to Laura, Iris "was...blind to her distress". Carol Ann Howells, *Margaret Atwood,* 2nd edition (1996; Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005) 160.

Atwood's wish to shed light on the ugly reality of Richard and Iris's relationship leads her, in the science fiction fantasy that is contained within the inside novel, to compare the sacrificial virgins' procession towards their death in the fictional city of Sakiel-Norn with the wedding of a high society bride:

> tongueless, and swollen with words she could never again pronounce, each girl would be led in procession to the sound of solemn music, wrapped in veils and garlanded with flowers, up the winding steps...Nowadays, you might say she looked like a pampered society bride. (37)

In *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* Tolan suggests that Alex is actually referring to Iris when he mentions the society bride: "This bride, of course, is Iris-sacrificed to Richard in silence" (263). In comparing a bride, akin to Iris, with the brutally treated sacrificial virgins, Atwood foregrounds the cost women pay for complying with the Western world's power oriented and deeply patriarchal take on love. The allusion within the fantasy story echoes the use of Gothic elements to once more show how the inherently patriarchal perception of romantic love within Western culture truly entails the silencing of women's individual voice.

Iris attempts to escape the unhappiness of her marriage by starting an affair with Alex, a rebellious, young man she meets at her father's company picnic. However, Iris's way of reacting against the misery of her marriage is not something that first-time readers of Atwood's text are able to appreciate, as they are led to believe that Laura is the writer of the novel within the novel also named *The Blind Assassin* and, therefore, in all probability, the one to have been involved with Alex. Although the man and woman within the inside novel are never actually named and, as a result,

remain simply known as ‘he’ and ‘she’, Iris clarifies, by the end of her memoir, that she was the one having an affair with Alex and the author of *The Blind Assassin*. Thus, Iris is, like Joan in *Lady Oracle*, a writer publishing under a different name; although Iris’s novel is based on her own life, and she is not a Gothic romance author, Atwood continues to depict her female characters creating narratives about romantic love. While there will be seen to be certain differences between Atwood’s treatment of love in her two novels, it is clear that she remains interested in women’s relationship to writing and love.

The romantic relationship that eventually is known to have been between Iris and Alex functions as a form of contrast to Iris’s marriage with the repressive, sexually abusive Richard. Alex, for instance, recognises the need to communicate and negotiate on matters with Iris, without becoming dictatorial. A playful attempt to figure out what type of story Alex should narrate to Iris subtly reveals how their relationship is a space of negotiation and communication. Alex asks Iris “What will it be then?...Dinner jackets and romance, or shipwrecks on a barren coast? You can have your pick: jungles, tropical islands, mountains. Or another dimension of space” (11). In taking Iris’s wishes into account, it is evident that Alex, unlike Richard and even her father, acknowledges her as an individual, with her own distinct needs and wants. While Iris’s father expected her complete compliance to his wish to marry her off to a much older man, Alex encourages Iris to cease acting in a passive and submissive manner. Although Iris is initially uncertain, Alex’s question stirs something in her, so that she then tentatively voices her wish: “Could I have another dimension of space, and also the tombs and the dead women, please?” (11). While Iris figures as one of the tongueless sacrificial virgins in her marriage, with Alex she moves towards claiming

her own voice, negotiating the kind of story her lover should tell her. Although this development in *The Blind Assassin* has some similarity to *Lady Oracle*, in that both Iris and Joan start affairs due to unfulfilling marriages, what Atwood emphasises here is that the heterosexual relationship can be a space where the other is respectfully acknowledged. Moreover, Iris's finding of voice implies that a love relationship holds the potential to be a positively challenging and empowering space for woman.

Furthermore, Iris's investment in the love affair with Alex spurs her to take some affirmative action in her own life. While she remains in an unhappy marriage, her relationship to Alex acts as the impetus for her to write the novel also named *The Blind Assassin*: "I wanted a memorial. That was how it began. For Alex, but also for myself" (626). Although the readers of Atwood's novel are not aware that Iris is the author until very late, it eventually becomes clear that Iris was courageous enough to write about an affair that she concealed from most people in her life. Despite the fact that she, in a sense, has hidden behind Laura and the mysterious he and she that she uses throughout, it is valuable that this love relationship has spurred her into setting experiences down in writing and allowed her to experiment with her own voice. While Iris also writes a memoir at a later stage in her life, it is particularly important that in the inside version of *The Blind Assassin*, she focuses specifically on those intimate moments she has shared with her lover. Her ability to write about such a private, transgressive matter, even when using an alias, appears to be a major feat for a woman who has generally behaved in a meek and passive manner, suggesting, once again, that love can function as an empowering force in life. Iris's novel, wherein she shares personal and intimate experiences, differs from the Gothic romances Joan

writes which recycle the culture's romantic myths and conventions.[13] Indeed, in considering Iris's personal evolution, it is clear that she has gone from being a girl who remained silent when marriage was forced upon her, to a woman capable of writing about her secret love affair, even though she does not publicly claim responsibility for the novel until much later in her life.

When Iris does finally claim *The Blind Assassin*, she articulates her own particular view of the writing process: "As for the book, Laura didn't write a word of it...I wrote it myself, during my long evenings alone...I didn't think of what I was doing as writing-just writing down" (626). Iris's perception of the process as something more intimate, an unpacking of memories on the page, rather than writing for any official purpose, implies that a woman's finding of voice may actually be assisted by the ability to function on a more emotional level. This kind of writing, which seems to depart from the more formal and detached communication that prevails within the capitalist, man-dominated world, is truly valuable as, according to Cixous, in her essay "Sorties", women's investment in a specifically feminine form of writing (ècriture feminine), holds the potential to initiate change within patriarchal society:

> A feminine text cannot not be more than subversive...She must write herself because, when the time comes for her liberation, it is the

[13] Christina Ljungberg states: "by...reproducing Gothic conventions that involve stereotyping of both men and women, Joan has not yet found her own voice and only reinforces existing destructive attitudes and constrictions"; Christina Ljungberg, *To Join, to Fit, and to Make: The Creative Craft of Margaret Atwood's Fiction*, European University Studies: Series 14, Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature; Vol. 361 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999) 133.

> invention of a new, insurgent writing that will allow her to put the breaks and indispensable changes into effect in her history. (116)[14]

In similar fashion to Cixous, Atwood implies that women's ability to write about personal and intimate experiences acts as a form of opposition in a patriarchal culture that tends to disregard the emotional and expects women to behave in a passive and meek manner. Moreover, Iris's finding of voice through the narration of her experience with Alex signals that Atwood perceives love as being a space in which women can potentially redefine and reinterpret themselves, which points to the cultivation of a different approach since the 1970s.

In addition to addressing the issue of woman's voice, Atwood deals with the matter of possessiveness in the space of love, like many of the other novelists looked at in the context of this thesis. Atwood works to critique possessiveness and the attempt to assimilate the loved other through the introduction of a second brief science fiction story narrated by Alex within the inside novel. This short story, which is supposed to take place in the Rocky Mountains, centres around three male characters named simply X, Y and Z and a female one called B. This foursome, who stumble across a space vehicle containing some kind of alien male creature that has seemingly been frozen to death, resolve to guard this strange being until they decide what to do with it. However, during B's turn as guard, a horrific scene is depicted, whereby the awakened alien, engulfs B, enabling Atwood to dramatize the destructiveness of a possessive love:

> Without a sound he approaches the sleeping girl. The dark-green hair on his head stirs...then lengthens, tentacle...by tentacle. One tentacle twines

[14] The potential Cixous locates in a feminine text also helps explain why she draws on Lispector's work in *Reading with Clarice Lispector,* where she defines an alternative, non-patriarchal approach to the other.

> itself around the girl's throat... his cold tentacles hold her in an implacable grip; he is gazing at her with unprecedented longing and desire, with sheer naked need...She struggles briefly, then surrenders to his embrace. Not that she has much choice. The green mouth opens, revealing fangs. They approach her neck. He loves her so much he'll assimilate her-make her part of himself, forever. He and she will become one. (339)

Atwood uses this science fiction fantasy in order to portray the ugliness and danger of a love that aims to possess or assimilate the other in a way that may not have been possible in a realist mode of fiction. In *Feminist Fiction,* Anne Cranny-Francis examines how fantasy literature grants the writer freedom and flexibility to explore issues that realist literature cannot: "Fantasy...is not bound by the conventions of realism into something like a faithful reproduction of the contemporary 'real'. As a result it can explore areas of life that realist literature tends to deny or repress".[15] Indeed, the mysterious and sinister elements in Joan's Gothic romances also permit Atwood to tackle some of the shadowy aspects of women's relationships to men.

Although this short science fiction fantasy serves well in dramatizing the terror and destructiveness of a male possessive love, Atwood also attempts, within the parts of the inside novel that depict the two lovers' time together, to point to the way in which women are too capable of adopting a patriarchal possessiveness within their romantic relationships. While Cixous clarifies in *Reading with Clarice Lispector* that "Love is 'not having'" (112), it emerges that the woman later known to be Iris has the desire to control her lover: "She imagines him wounded; it would be one way of

[15] Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1990) 75.

making him stay put. She'd like him locked up, tied down, kept for her alone" (442). These deeply private thoughts imply that women, as men, have a distorted relation to love within patriarchal culture, whereby there is this wish to possess and control. hooks, who has been seen to emphasise how patriarchal power play is incompatible with love, also maintains that women are actually as uneducated about love as men are: "We fail at love as much as men do because we simply do not know what we are doing" (*Communion* 88). hooks's belief that women are as lacking as men in handling love is proven to be justified in *The Blind Assassin*, as is indicated by Iris's failure, at least in fantasy, to grasp the significance of respecting the loved other's individuality. Evidently, both women and men are in urgent need of self-reflexivity about loving.

In contrast to Iris, as well as Richard, Alex primarily rejects a possessive love. Even though he expresses some jealousy on the occasion when he asks Iris to leave her husband for him, he generally demonstrates his distaste for a love that is possessive. Alex makes clear, in a rather abrupt manner during some disagreement, that he does not feel like he owns Iris in any way: "I'm not your keeper. You don't have to sit up and beg and whine and wag your tail for me" (425). Alex implies that Iris need not behave in the way she does with Richard; in fact, his refusal to act in such a controlling manner in his relationship is noteworthy, as it indicates that men are capable of resisting patriarchal modes of behaviour. While a male character like Richard is seen to be the ultimate patriarch, it emerges in *The Blind Assassin* that not all men necessarily adhere to such standards of behaviour. Thus, Atwood declines a simplistic approach to the male sex, as she is aware that men can take up different positions within patriarchy, which is something Patchett also indicates with Gen. Such

depictions imply that men, in certain cases, hold the potential to contribute to a reimagining of heterosexual love.

However, while Alex is generally not possessive in his relationship with Iris, Atwood clarifies that he is not a 'perfect prince', as he does sometimes assume a masculinist stance; for example, at one point, Alex is seen to be privately thinking of his lover in terms that are indicative of a sexist viewpoint:

> Where is she?....He stares at the streetcar stop, willing her to materialize. Stepping down with a flash of leg, a high-heeled boot, best plush. Cunt on stilts. Why does he think like that, when if any other man said that about her he'd hit the bastard? (335)

This way of thinking is reminiscent of the Polish Count or Paul, Joan's first lover, who views women in patriarchal, conservative terms, as "he believed in wives and mistresses" (159). Alex is not traditional like Paul, and shows awareness of his failings, yet is still not entirely able to shake off the pervasive values of patriarchal culture. While Atwood illustrates that men do hold the potential to defy patriarchal modes of behaviour, as seen with Alex's unwillingness to claim control over Iris, she is also careful not to idealize any male character and, like earlier feminists, not to overlook the indisputable influence that masculine beliefs and values have in an androcentric world. So, although Alex does not display any of the sinister and threatening qualities of Richard, or those seen in many of the male characters in *Lady Oracle*, he is not without faults or weaknesses.

Atwood moreover makes sure not to idealize Iris and Alex's relationship. She attempts to portray this love affair in a realistic light by showing how Alex and Iris come from two very different social, economic and political backgrounds, offering a

development from her earlier fiction.[16] In *The Blind Assassin*, whereas Iris belongs to the upper crust of Canadian society, Alex is an orphan who was adopted by a Presbyterian minister and his wife, and now affiliated with the Communist movement and therefore with working class sympathies. Consequently, in addition to the class differences that divide the couple, Alex's political ideology, which motivates him to take part in subversive activities, is completely opposite to what Iris has been exposed to as the daughter and the wife of capitalists. However, the difficulties involved in such a disparate pairing, which will be looked at shortly, are intensified by the fact that these two come together at a point in time when the working class issues that Alex actively supports are particularly pressing; the affair takes place in the 1930s, during a period of social unrest and deprivation known as the Depression. Alex, who is involved in labour insurgencies, is forced to hideaway in various secret locations, which has an effect upon his relationship with Iris, as the timing and places of their meetings are limited. Although Iris is herself constrained by her need to keep this affair secret from Richard, Alex's need to maintain a low profile is a deciding factor in the locations chosen for their unions and thus the reason why Iris is exposed to a completely new and foreign environment. Indeed, at one of their meetings at a particular cafe selected by Alex, the social class disparity that exists between them is glaringly obvious, so that Iris finds herself standing out. The presence of working class people, and perhaps even the widespread poverty and deprivation of the time, seems to push Alex to comment, in an agitated manner, on the conspicuousness of her outfit: "Judas Priest...you might as well have worn mink" (129). Alex is aware of how Iris's clothing causes the cafe's regulars to react with hostility, as they clearly perceive her

[16] This is a topic not really addressed in *Lady Oracle,* except within Joan's Gothic romances that continue to draw on conventional notions of a young, helpless female finding a powerful, affluent male (a topic Miller, for instance, also touches on in *The Heroine's Text*).

as alien to their environment: “the other men look at her with suspicion and contempt as she hurries towards him” (130). However, Iris also feels out of place; she admits to Alex: “I’ve never been down here before-to a place like this” (130). Iris tries to pretend that she has not noticed the destitution surrounding them, attempting to conceal her own sense of unfamiliarity and discomfort: “There’s a smell in the room, of ... old meat and one shower a week, of scrimping and cheating and resentment. She knows it’s important to act as if she doesn’t notice the smell” (129).

While Iris attempts to mask her true feelings and not draw attention to her privileged and affluent background as the daughter and wife of businessmen, it is apparent that she and Alex have completely opposite life experiences. This is reminiscent of *The Pickup*, which, in examining love between a man and woman from different racial backgrounds, also addresses the socio-economic disparities that exist between them. Nonetheless, in *The Blind Assassin*, the tenseness that characterizes Iris and Alex’s meeting allows Atwood to show how class differences can have, within capitalist society, an important role to play in men and women’s romantic relationships, since these affect how an individual perceives, and is received within, various social environments. Atwood and Gordimer’s drawing of attention to matters of difference within the space of love can be seen to parallel third-wave feminists’ way of emphasising differences amongst women, something that points to a general opening up to diversity and alertness to multiple forms of hierarchy.

However, although Atwood emphasises the difficulties encountered by the couple due to their class differences, it also emerges that such a relationship can function as a form of resistance. Indeed, Iris is involved with someone who, as Magali Cornier Michael identifies, “represents a threat to the dominance of the white male

moneyed class".[17] In effect, her affair gives Iris the chance to rebel, in her own way, against the values and beliefs of her husband and father, even as she remains a member of their rank. Moreover, Iris's affair with Alex allows her to appreciate and enjoy aspects of life which the upper classes have dismissed, as "love has little place in Iris's social class, and sexual desire is swept under the carpet" (Cornier Michael 94). Although Iris has complicated and contradictory emotions regarding her social position, it is apparent that her relationship with Alex permits her to explore the significance of love, something the upper class she belongs to denies. In *The Blind Assassin* Atwood considers how love can work as an expression of defiance against oppressive structures, even if the romantic relationship does not have the power to resolve and mend deep-seated social schisms.

As well as drawing attention to the significance of class, the matter of sexual desire is confronted in this reimagining of love in *The Blind Assassin*. While in her marriage Iris is sexually mistreated, with Alex she has positive sexual experiences. Iris alludes to her affair in the pages of her memoir when she muses over the word 'honeymoon', and in doing so, makes apparent that this relationship allowed her to experience sexual pleasure in a newfound way:

> Why is a honeymoon called that? Lune de miel, moon of honey-as if the moon itself is not a cold and airless and barren sphere of pockmarked rock, but soft, golden, luscious-a luminous candied plum...melting in the mouth and sticky as desire, so achingly sweet...A warm floodlight floating, not in the sky, but inside your own body. I know about all that. I remember it very well. But not from my honeymoon. (366)

[17] Magali Cornier Michael, "Narrative Multiplicity and the Multi-layered Self in *The Blind Assassin,*" Bouson 94.

In opposition to the actual moon, which is 'cold and airless' and appears more fitting to Iris's marriage, the 'golden, luscious' moon of honey captures the sweetness of her and Alex's affair. As Iris distinctly recollects the sexual desire and pleasure she once felt, Atwood implies that the sexual aspect of love does in fact have value for women. Indeed, sexuality is claimed to be an important part of romantic love, as long as it is not used by men as another way of affirming power and control over women; thus, in an interview Atwood differentiates between sex as something that can be an "act of love, act of lust, [or] act of hate".[18]

In claiming woman's right to a positive form of sexual experience Atwood distances herself from what Audre Lorde perceives as the patriarchal tendency to colour perceptions of the erotic. Lorde elaborates on this in her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power":

> The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power.[19]

In openly referring to her own sexual experiences, Iris allows the erotic and the sexual to be understood in personal and intimate terms, rather than in accordance with the kind of denigrating views that Lorde believes are disseminated within patriarchal culture. Furthermore, it is particularly important that Iris's recollections of intimacy with Alex permit the erotic to emerge as a source of empowering pleasure for woman. While Shields highlights that too much emphasis is now laid on sex rather than love,

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[18] Mandy Morris, "Opening a Door onto a Completely Unknown Space," Ingersoll 145.
[19] Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, A Gender and Culture Reader (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 278.

Gordimer, like Atwood, tries to show that the sexual and the erotic can be enabling for woman when she portrays how Julie feels liberated by a sexual experience with Ibrahim that is devoid of any possessiveness. It emerges in this thesis that, without devaluing or sidestepping love, there is need to reconfigure sexual desire and intimacy from women's viewpoints.[20]

While Iris alludes to her affair with Alex in the pages of her memoir, it is primarily in the inside novel that Alex and Iris's love is fully explored. The much shorter instalments of the inside novel, which deal specifically with the romantic relationship that is the covert part of Iris's life, contrast with the main narrative that consists of Iris's memoir and which is primarily concerned with her surface and known existence. This can be said to contrast with the self reflexive merging of fiction and life in *Lady Oracle*. Even though Iris and Alex's relationship is not without its problems, it is much more of an open, unconventional space than what emerges in the memoir. Cornier Michael proposes that "The novella...functions...as an assertion of a more open, free identity" (95); however, this is something she attributes to the way Iris is able to explore the "realm of female sexual passion" in spite of the "culture's regulation of women's sexuality and identity" (95). Although this is an important point, it must also be acknowledged that Iris's relationship to Alex allows her to experience a more fulfilling model of romantic relationship than that with the dictatorial Richard. Moreover, while the thematic content of the inside novel differs

[20] In Miller's *The Heroine's Text,* female sexuality was seen to cause men unease, so that women had to abide by a model of virtuosity and innocence. Yet, while women's relationship to sex had changed with the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, "Feminists generally saw this vision of a Sexual Revolution as a chimera where women were being sold the idea of sex as liberation but often it cast them in just as strong a thrall to men, with new pressures to perform sexually at every occasion" (Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* 109). Therefore, it seems particularly valuable that Iris here claims her right to a positive sexual experience that does not have to do with affirming man's power or dominance, something that appears more attuned to Audre's positive vision of the erotic.

from that of the main narrative, the text's structure furthers this opposition, as the brief instalments of the inside novel, which are always preceded by the heading *The Blind Assassin*, consistently interrupt the flow of the memoir. The reader, Atwood ensures, is never able to focus exclusively on the memoir, so that it is prevented from claiming authority over the inside novel; rather, the alternative reality of the two lovers that regularly punctuates the narrative, colours the reader's perception and forces him or her to come to terms with a different kind of existence, which contrasts with the conventional life Iris shares with Richard. The regular instalments of this unorthodox romantic relationship prevent complacency, encouraging the reader to question traditional, patriarchal notions of love.

However, just as the inside novel affects perceptions of the main narrative, so the science fiction fantasy, which is inserted within the pages of the inside novel, also assists Atwood in her effort to critique the patriarchal reality that comes forth in the memoir. The description of the fantastical city of Sakiel-Norn, whose formidable laws demand that a certain amount of virgins are sacrificed annually, can be seen as an exaggerated version of the patriarchal system that has so defined and shaped Iris's, as well as Laura's, life. According to Ellen McWilliams,

> the science fiction narrative offers an 'intertextual commentary' on the primary narrative, and so the rape, sacrifice, and trauma described in the science fiction story of *The Blind Assassin* contains echoes of Laura's and Iris's suffering at the hands of Richard Griffen. In fact, the former might be read as a more extreme, explicit dramatization of the latter;

> Laura and Iris are sacrificial victims on the same spectrum as the brutalized figures who inhabit the science fiction fantasy.[21]

This connection between the characters of the science fiction and those belonging to the main narrative is something that Atwood self-reflexively plays with in *The Blind Assassin*, in a deliberate attempt to draw attention to the patriarchal and repressive nature of Western society. It is, therefore, apparent that the inside novel seeks, in more ways than one, to confront the male dominance that comes out in the memoir.

Atwood further resists patriarchy when she portrays how the male protagonist in the science fiction tale, who cannot converse with the girl with no tongue, resorts to a more intimate mode of communication that is not in any way controlling or threatening. Thus, the inability to depend on language pushes the blind assassin to turn to touch as a way of communicating with the girl. Atwood writes,

> The blind assassin begins very slowly to touch her, with one hand only, the right-the dexterous hand, the knife hand. He passes it over her face, down her throat; then he adds the left hand, the sinister hand, using both together, tenderly, as if picking a lock of the utmost fragility, a lock made of silk. It's like being caressed by water. She trembles, but not as before with fear. After a time she lets the red brocade fall away from around her, and takes his hand and guides it. (311)

The blind assassin's unconventional use of touch as a mode of communication is particularly important, as it implies that he has adopted a tender and gentle approach. This indicates his sensitivity to the girl's particular needs, something reminiscent of Gen in *Bel Canto*, who, as a translator, displays his sensitivity to each individual

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[21] Ellen McWilliams, *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 117.

caught up in the hostage situation. In the blind assassin's case, however, the perceptiveness he exhibits suggests that he has let go of his initial intention to hurt and destroy, whereby he also departs from the ways of a patriarchal society that lays value on control, authority and power.[22] Essentially, the blind assassin's display of tenderness to the girl he was meant to kill puts him in a position where he has to turn his back on a 'profession' that personifies oppressive masculine values:

> he's betrayed his calling by saving alive someone he's been paid to murder. They're professionals, the assassins...they don't stand for violations of their own code of conduct. They'd kill him without mercy, and her too after a while...He'll have to take her out of Sakiel-Norn. (328)

Therefore, the blind assassin's gesture cannot be seen simply as the act of a hero in a popular romance novel, who although once "relentlessly domineering", suddenly transforms into someone that "offers...love"[23] to the heroine; he not only changes his stance to the girl, but, in the process, takes the radical step of distancing himself from the masculine culture that the clan of assassins represents. In effect, his inability to maintain his position in the world of assassins, in addition to his newfound love for the girl, suggests that a loyalty to patriarchy is not compatible with romantic love, which is a point hooks has been seen to emphasise too.

In setting himself apart from the community of assassins, who are representative of patriarchal culture, the blind assassin is seen to experience a profound sense of joy: "He's exhausted, but also elated, filled with a strange aching

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[22] Cixous elaborates on these kinds of masculine principles within Western society in her essay "Sorties" (107).

[23] Ann Rosalind Jones, "Mills & Boon Meets Feminism," *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction,* ed. Jean Radford, History Workshop Series (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986)198-199.

happiness. He has saved her. He has extended mercy, for the first time in his life. Who knows what may come of such a departure from his chosen path?" (329). This uncharacteristic act that fills him with feeling precedes the formation of the bond to the girl, marking the beginning of a new life. While the ease with which the blind assassin transforms his existence for the sake of this girl could be perceived as a rather romanticized and unrealistic development, the fact that this story is science fiction grants Atwood the freedom needed to explore this as a legitimate possibility. Although Atwood does not guarantee that things will go favourably for this couple, the science fiction fantasy at least allows her to underline the radical potential of romantic love, which differs from the earlier *Lady Oracle* where she uses the excerpts from Joan's Gothic romances to both present and undermine traditional plots.

Moreover, Atwood investigates the fact that love does not necessarily guarantee Alex and Iris a common future together. This is an idea she advances through one of the couple's conversations, whereby Alex implies that the two of them do not have enduring prospects:

> 'You shouldn't worship me', he says. 'I don't have the only cock in the world. Some day you'll find that out'.
>
> 'It's not a question of that', she says...Already he's pushing her away, into the future.
>
> 'Well, whatever it is, you'll have more of it, once I'm out of your hair'.
>
> 'Meaning what exactly? You're not in my hair'.
>
> 'That there's life after life', he says. 'Life after our life'. (33)

While Alex here refuses to idealize long term togetherness and initially appears more nonchalant about a possible end to their relationships, this may be said to stem from his awareness of Iris as already married. Yet, despite being Richard's wife, Iris does not wish to accept that their love might not last, which it does not, as Alex is killed in Holland towards the end of World War Two. Iris's response needs to be considered in relation to the way in which the Western world has promoted the idea of a shared forever when it comes to the romantic relationship between the sexes. Kile, as has been seen in the previous chapter, tackles this phenomenon in her essay "Endless Love Will Keep Us Together". She writes, "the 'true love' relationship promises lifelong companionship, passion and support...To think otherwise would be to step outside the mythologized love ideal in which separation from a lover or loss of a lover is the ultimate tragedy" (415).

In holding onto this idea of a shared future, Iris also tries to impose a happy ending for the couple within the science fiction fantasy. However, this is not seen to be the only possible outcome, as two, distinctly different endings are imagined by Iris and Alex for the protagonists of this story. Alex, on the one hand, believes that the blind assassin and girl should be killed by the dangerous creatures that prowl the mountains. He says, "Our two romantic leads are wolf meat before you can say Jack Robinson" (423). Iris, on the other hand, attempts to negotiate a happy conclusion for these two characters, so that in her version, all dangers in the outside world are neutralized, allowing the blind assassin and the girl to live 'happily ever after':

> these people will take the two fugitives in, and once they've heard their sad story they'll be really nice to them. Then the blind assassin and the

> girl with no tongue can live in one of the caves, and sooner or later they'll have children...and they'll be very happy. (422)

While it is important that Iris voices her own opinions and attempts to break the silence that characterized her previously by negotiating an ending that she finds pleasing, she is shown to adhere to the classic romantic narrative approach, whereby love is capable of "conquering all" (Stacey and Pearce 16). Although Atwood dedicates more space in *Lady Oracle* to critiquing romantic myths, in *The Blind Assassin* she problematizes this one-sided version of romance by showing that there are actually two alternative endings to the science fiction fantasy. Indeed, Theodore F. Scheckels who explores fairy tale motifs in regards to princes in the essay "No Princes Here: Male Characters in Margaret Atwood's Fiction," states that while the couple in the science fiction story "have escaped", there is "this deliberate refusal on Atwood's part to commit to a happy ending".[24] Like in DuPlessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending*, Atwood opposes traditional romance conclusions, even as she chooses to explore heterosexual love. In *The Pickup* Gordimer also resonates with Atwood's stance by annulling the conventional happy ending; thus traditional ideas are dismantled and a more open view of heterosexual love is permitted to emerge.

Iris's desire for an ideal ending within the science fiction is related to her need for a happy resolution in her own life. It is apparent that she perceives the science fiction tale as a reflection of her and Alex's relationship; Howells writes, "there is a continual blurring of borders...between the Sakiel-Norn fantasy and the lives of the two lovers in Toronto" (165), while the fantasy story is one of the ways "through

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[24] Theodore F. Scheckels, "No Princes Here: Male Characters in Margaret Atwood's Fiction," *Once Upon a Time: Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings,* ed. Sarah A. Appleton (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) 124.

which this novel's main characters negotiate their love affair".[25] In fact, the comparison made between Iris and Alex, and the protagonists of the science fiction story, is played out in a conversation she has with Alex, where she is personally offended by his belief that the girl had nothing to lose by investing emotionally in the blind assassin. Iris reacts, "Not like me...I guess you mean" (313). Iris who is, like Joan, seeking escape through a fictional fantasy, confusedly perceives developments in the story in relation to her own life.

However, this strong desire for a happy conclusion on an imaginary level is linked to Iris's inability to find satisfaction within her own life. The courage and initiative that is lacking personally in Iris becomes visible when Alex asks her to leave her husband: "But I wouldn't have any money, she says in a wondering voice. Where would I live?...What would I live on?" (442). Iris's insecurity regarding her financial survival suggests that she depends on the privileges accorded to her as a result of being the wife of a wealthy man, even though she has no trace of affection for Richard. While she is in love with Alex, he does not belong to the same class as her and is, therefore, unable to provide her with the same economic security as Richard. So although Iris dreams of a future with Alex, and attempts to live out this fantasy on an imaginative level through the science fiction plot, she is, in reality, unwilling to renounce the advantages she has as Richard's wife, just as her father was disinclined to accept the loss of his wealth and power.[26] Atwood thus makes clear that while the potential for unconventional romantic relationships between men and women exists,

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[25] Alan Robinson, "'Alias Laura': Representations of the Past in Margaret Atwood's 'The Blind Assassin,'" *The Modern Language Review* 101.2 (2006): 348, *JSTOR,* 8 Nov. 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20466787>.

[26] As Barzilai suggests about Iris, in "Growing up in a material world...she became a material girl." Shuli Barzilai, "'If You Look Long Enough': Photography, Memory, and Mourning in *The Blind Assassin,"* Bouson 108.

class, and therefore money and power, can play a defining role in love. This is very different from *Lady Oracle*, where Joan loses interest and immediately ends her affair with Chuck once he abandons his Royal Porcupine persona. So, while Iris's love for Alex remains intact, her fear of venturing out on her own prolongs her dependence on Richard, allowing Atwood to highlight the way in which women can inadvertently validate patriarchal men's power.

While Atwood dedicates a great deal of narrative space to depicting the complexities of men and women's relationships, something that Lessing will be seen to do in her own way, she also touches on the subject of the female bond. In particular, Atwood considers women's ability to share their life experiences with other women, which can be discerned as Iris finally comes to recognize, prior to her death in 1999, her desire to communicate intimate life details to her granddaughter, Sabrina. As Atwood suggests that for "every book, there is an intended reader, a true reader",[27] so here Iris becomes conscious of Sabrina as the reader of her memoir:

> When I began this account...I had no idea why I was writing it, or who I expected might read it once I'd done. But it's clear to me now. I was writing it for you, dearest Sabrina, because you're the one-the only one-who needs it now. (627)

As a result of an underlying need to share her experiences with Sabrina, Iris has written down her story, which includes a confession of her love affair with Alex. In addition to this admission in the pages of her memoir, Iris owns up to having written *The Blind Assassin*, something that should compel Sabrina to reassess the novel, once regarded as Laura's, with the newfound knowledge that it speaks of her grandmother

[27] Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 131.

and true grandfather's clandestine relationship. While Tolan does not address the fact that Sabrina is allowed to know the truth about this love affair, she does highlight the value of Iris finding her voice through her memoir: "Unlike the mutilated handmaid in 'The Blind Assassin' science fiction story...Iris reclaims her voice and her right to self-representation".[28] This finding of voice, which is in itself significant for women within patriarchy, enables Iris to reach out to her granddaughter.[29]

In owning the unorthodox love between the unnamed man and woman of the inside novel, Iris opens the path for Sabrina to see that her connection to Alex was significantly different to her marriage to the domineering and authoritative Richard, highlighting therefore that not all relationships need be marked by patriarchal power play. Moreover, Iris lets her granddaughter know that she actually owes her existence to this past love affair with Alex, which she hopes will imbue Sabrina with a sense of freedom, as she comes to realize that she is in no way related to the oppressive Griffen clan that Iris had herself broken away from after Laura's death in 1945 and following the discovery of Richard's sexual abuse of her sister:

> you're no longer who you think you are...That can be a shock, but it can also be a relief. For instance, you're no relation at all to Winifred, and none to Richard...your hands are clean on that score. Your real grandfather was Alex Thomas, and as to who his own father was, well, the sky's the limit. Rich man, poor man, beggarman, saint...take your

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[28] Fiona Tolan, "'Was I My Sister's Keeper?': *The Blind Assassin* and Problematic Feminisms," Bouson 86.

[29] In a more critical take, Sharon R. Wilson believes that Iris is "blind...heartless, and asleep throughout the book" as she only belatedly "understands what has happened to her sister" in Sarah R. Wilson, "Margaret Atwood and the Fairy Tale: Postmodern Revisioning in Recent Texts," *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale,* ed. Stephen Benson (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2008) 110-111. Considering Iris's past 'blindness' and silence (in regards to Richard's abuse of Laura), and thus her possible part in Laura's death, it is particularly significant that she makes the effort to reach out to Sabrina, as she hence performs a redemptive act for another female relative who "needs it now".

> pick. Your legacy from him is the realm of infinite speculation. You're free to reinvent yourself at will. (627)

Iris grants significance to family roots here, as it is in annulling her granddaughter's connection to the Griffen family, which acted as a tyrannical force in her own life for so long, that Sabrina need no longer identify with this authoritarian patrilineal line that lays value on power and dominance. As Cornier Michael suggests, Iris "imagines her autobiography as potentially allowing the creation of two new, more fully multi-dimensional identities-her own and that of Sabrina" (91). In testifying to the aspects of her life that were repressed while living under the shadow of the Griffens, Iris rejects being only defined by her narrow and constrained surface existence, thus encouraging Sabrina to do the same. Sabrina can also now no longer be truly regarded as belonging to the upper crust of Canadian society; here Iris is not only unperturbed by her and Sabrina's demotion, but is seen, through the indifference she displays regarding the Thomas family's social class, to be opposed to the hierarchical social system she was herself once sacrificed for and for which, out of financial fear and dependence, she gave up the chance of loving Alex. Iris now seeks to liberate her granddaughter from the kinds of values and beliefs that earlier brought about the negation of love for her. By bestowing Sabrina with the freedom that comes from knowing the truth, Iris seeks that her granddaughter will embrace her autonomy and learn to define her life according to her own standards.

This development in *The Blind Assassin* does not delineate a conventional 'happily ever after' for Iris and Alex; however, long after the affair has come to an end, it still emerges as having the potential to liberate Sabrina, something indicating how this love continues to have some relevance and purpose in the novel. While in

Lady Oracle Joan's relationships lose significance (for instance, she is no longer interested in Chuck, or by the end even Arthur as she focuses on her next romantic escape with the nameless reporter), the importance and value of Alex and Iris's relationship is not undermined in this way. As such, in the epilogue of the inside novel, it is clear that although Alex has passed away and their affair has not had a traditional 'happy' conclusion, Iris remains very connected to him: "She has a single photograph of him...She preserves it carefully, because it's almost all she has left of him...It was a hot day. Holding her hand over the picture, she can still feel the heat coming up from it" (631). Atwood does not take a straightforwardly positive approach to heterosexual love, and appears conscious of the limitations and issues that have troubled so many feminists. Nevertheless, comparing *Lady Oracle* to *The Blind Assassin*, in the former Atwood shows how Joan continues to privilege fantasy and escape rather any meaningful love, while her later work demonstrates some subtle development, as Alex and Iris's love maintains value and credibility, and the possibly positive effect upon Sabrina is highlighted.

Atwood's portrayal of heterosexual love in *The Blind Assassin* is not clear-cut or simple; whilst she is critical of romance conventions and patriarchal power structures, as she is in *Lady Oracle*, there is also indication of development in her vision of love. For instance, Atwood explores here the issue of class in regards to love, while she demonstrates, through the blind assassin character, how man can choose to move away from patriarchy towards love, without presenting the two protagonists necessarily succumbing to a 'happily ever after'. Furthermore, although Atwood does not idealize Alex, she offers him as a different model of masculinity and male loving. Despite the absence of a traditionally favourable conclusion, Atwood does not annul

the significance of Alex and Iris's relationship and also shows how this love affair finally emerges as freeing for Sabrina. Essentially, Atwood continues to problematize many facets of heterosexual love, while she also opens up to a more expansive contemplation of this form of relationship.

Chapter 5: Age and Love Again: Confronting Prejudice and Unearthing Complexities

Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*

In this chapter Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) will be examined as a prelude to a main focus on the author's later novel *Love, Again* (1995). In both novels Lessing will be seen to be critically aware of issues that affect heterosexual relationships within patriarchal society, considering, for instance, men's prejudiced views of women. However, Lessing's vision of love can be said to expand in *Love, Again* as she raises issues around age, esteem and desire, as well as investigating the complex ways in which childhood relations shape adult loves.

In *The Golden Notebook* Lessing plays with form, as it contains a frame novel called *Free Women* that is set in 1957, in addition to sections from the different notebooks kept by Anna Wulf, who is also a key figure within the inside novel. The black, red, yellow and blue notebooks (which precede the final golden notebook) are concerned with various aspects of Anna's life between 1950-57; the black notebook deals with her writing life, the red with politics, the yellow contains "her notes for fiction (in many cases mirroring, analyzing...her own personal search for a satisfying love relationship)",[1] while the blue has to do with daily events. As *Free Women* appears as the "summary and condensation of all that mass of material",[2] Lessing is able to pose "the dissatisfaction of a writer when something is finished...how can this small neat thing be true when what I experienced was so rough and apparently formless and unshaped?" (13). The 'mass of material' reflects the complexity of life which is not easily defined in the neat borders of a novel.

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[1] Anne M. Mulkeen, "Twentieth-Century Realism: The 'Grid' Structure of 'The Golden Notebook'," *Studies in the Novel* 4.2 (1972): 265, *JSTOR,* 20 Nov. 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29531519>.
[2] Doris Lessing, Preface, *The Golden Notebook*, by Lessing (1962; London: Harper Perennial, 2007) 13.

What comes across clearly within this 'mass of material' are the problematic relationships between women and men; although Lessing states that she was "completely unconscious of writing a feminist book",[3] she explores the issues that women must face in a patriarchal society in the 1950s. Despite being 'free' and independent, her female protagonists appear trapped in a series of dysfunctional affairs with married men. As Lynn Sukenick observes, "*The Golden Notebook*...brilliantly dissects the nature of freedom which is, paradoxically, incomplete without love, yet almost invariably undermined by it".[4] So, while, for instance, the character of Ella (who appears in the yellow notebook and functions as a mirror for Anna) is a financially independent, single mother, she becomes the mistress of the married Paul (an affair reflecting Anna's with Michael) and cultivates a need for him: "by now she knows and is frightened of, her utter dependence on Paul. Every fibre of herself is woven with him, and she cannot imagine living without him".[5] As Maroula Joannou comments, "Lessing's 'free woman' may enjoy her sexual freedom but she is not liberated from the conventions of romantic love which assume a reparative psychic communion with another as a result of which the flawed individual is made whole".[6] Thus, woman's 'freedom' is circumscribed by such dependence, particularly that on a married man. As single and married women alike are mistreated or patronised by men here, it is evident that "one is vulnerable, in Lessing's view...to love, the resulting betrayals by men, and the trappings...of domesticity" (Sukenick 523).

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[3] Sarah O'Reilly, interview, "Q&A: Doris Lessing Talks to Sarah O'Reilly about *The Golden Notebook," The Golden Notebook,* 2.
[4] Lynn Sukenick, "Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's Fiction," *Contemporary Literature* 14.4 (1973): 524, *JSTOR,* 21 Nov. 2012< http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207470>.
[5] Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962; London: Harper Perennial, 2007) 193.
[6] Maroula Joannou, *Contemporary Women's Writing: From the Golden Notebook* to *The Color Purple* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 27-28.

Lessing's early novel also shows how men have defined ideas about women; as Ella's friend Julia states within the pages of the yellow notebook: "I swear to God, that every one of them, even the best of them, have the old idea of good women and bad women" (404). Such an objection appears justified in light of Paul's attitude, as he describes his wife as "a very simple woman...a good mother" (205) in contradiction to Ella, who he presumes is sexually promiscuous. Indeed, he once leaves her money after spending a night, whilst commenting: "'And so you'll be free tonight...for your other boy-friends, you've been neglecting them'" (189). Lessing highlights how men can pigeonhole women, something de Beauvoir also addresses in *The Second Sex*: "woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary" (175). Such prejudices are also touched on in Miller's *The Heroine's Text,* where it is clear that the heroine can either be 'good' and comply with the marriage ending, or meet her death. This bifurcation between 'good' or 'bad', and wife or mistress, which characterises men's view of women, is something Lessing engages with and foregrounds in *The Golden Notebook*.

In effect, men here have a negative and aggressive stance towards women. For instance, Julia is blamed for a man's impotence: "You're a castrating woman" (398), while Anna's lover, Saul, openly shares his condescending views of women: "I enjoy a society where women are second-class citizens, I enjoy being boss" (526). Such observations help explain why Julia states to Ella: "What's the use of us being free if they aren't?" (404). Although it is apparent to Joannou that in depending "emotionally on men for their happiness, they collude with them in denying their shortcomings" (29), Lessing exposes the kinds of disparaging beliefs about women that are being nurtured in a male dominant society. Moreover, *The Golden Notebook* poses heterosexual relationships as a space where men's prejudices against women are

crystallised. Lessing's earlier novel, which was published at a time when many second-wave feminists were condemning patriarchal forms of relationship, reflects many of these concerns.

However, it is during her involvement with Saul, who problematically belittles women, that Anna is finally led to the writing of the golden notebook, which has been described as "the record of a sort of modern dream vision" (Mulkeen 266). In this section of the novel everything breaks down and there is a synthesis of what had previously been compartmentalised into separate notebooks: "there was a fusion, and instead of seeing separate scenes, people, faces...they were all together" (551). Through this breakdown, Anna moves towards a newfound acceptance and awareness of life, as she distinguishes the "small painful sort of courage which is at the root of every life, because injustice and cruelty is at the root of life" (551). As well as achieving such insight, Anna overcomes her writer's block, since it is revealed that she is the author of *Free Women.*

While it is Saul who grants her the first lines to *Free Women*, the relationship, which was a "sadistic-masochistic cycle" (527) of lying and cheating on his part and suffering on hers, does not withstand this destructiveness and is brought to an end, both within the golden notebook and her novel. Lessing does not here provide an answer for the problems raised in regards to heterosexual love, so that dissolution and pain remain at the core of this form of relationship. At best, Lessing suggests that woman can embrace a compromise, something evident in her depiction of Anna's friend Molly choosing within *Free Women* to finally take the 'safe' approach and marry a wealthy man, a decision that she admits to being "perfectly resigned to" (576). Thus, while Anna accesses some sense of courage and re-embraces her creativity,

heterosexual love is not reclaimed in the novel, as Lessing is not able to conceive how the obstacles that mark women and men's romantic relationships could be overcome.

Doris Lessing's *Love, Again*

In the later *Love, Again*, Lessing's unusual main character is the sixty-five year old Sarah Durham. Being a producer and playwright, as well as the co-founder of a theatre company, Sarah finds herself profoundly affected by her current project, which is a play about the nineteenth century life of a mixed race woman named Julie Vairon. Julie, who was later to become recognized for her music, paintings and journal writings, is known to have immigrated to France from colonial Martinique after falling in love with a young Frenchman. Julie's life story has such an effect on Sarah that she finds herself reliving the experience of love after a twenty year period of sexual and emotional isolation. Sarah's reinvestment in love, which will be looked at in detail in the rest of this chapter, allows Lessing to draw attention to the fact that older women do still fall in love and that it is not a prerogative of the young. In addition to this, Lessing will be seen in her 1995 fiction to elaborate the complexity of romantic love, as, in drawing on psychoanalysis, she traces the connection between adult romantic love and defining familial relationships in childhood. Besides this link between the past and present, the novel explores how men and women have a problematical perception of each other, as well as of romantic love. Although, on one level, Lessing will be seen to be critical in exposing this, she does, on another level, adopt a conservative line of thought regarding romantic love, particularly in relation to women.

The figure of Julie has a great influence upon the modern female protagonist, as well as the other characters. Although only a very small section at the beginning of the novel is dedicated exclusively to Julie, it is these few pages, which are transmitted to the reader by an anonymous third person narrator, that function as the backdrop to the events within the main narrative. Indeed, love plays a central role in Julie's life, which foretells the direction that the rest of the novel will take, as *Love, Again* is primarily focused on Sarah's experience of falling in love after an extended period alone. Lessing emphasises Julie's relationships with Paul and Rémy, which were clearly passionate affairs: "Rémy, soon fell in love with her...When she began to love him it was against her good sense, and then she abandoned caution, just as she had in Martinique with Paul, and loved him absolutely".[7] These intense love affairs both came to an end because the two men's families, who belonged to the upper classes of French society, disapproved of Julie as a poor girl of mixed-race from the colonies. Yet, in spite of these two failed relationships, love remains a supreme ideal to Julie, so that when she finds herself in a position where she is to marry a man she does not truly feel for, she chooses to commit suicide rather than compromise her beliefs about passionate love. According to the narrator, "she threw herself into the pool, because that sensible marriage 'lacked conviction'" (27).[8] This dramatic response fits a traditional model of idealisation and self-sacrifice.

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[7] Doris Lessing, *Love, Again* (1995; London: Harper Perennial-Harper Collins, 2007) 20.

[8] This notion of love as a high idea worth sacrificing oneself for is present in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1836). In the story, the little mermaid, who has renounced her voice and fishtail for the prince, refuses to take up the chance to become a mermaid again once the prince has married someone else, as this would mean having to kill him. However, in not doing so she must die (she eventually turns into some form of spirit). In fact, Lessing's language is similar to Andersen's, as he writes: "She cast one more lingering, half-fainting glance at the prince, and then threw herself from the ship into the sea". Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Mermaid,* 1836, 2007, 3 Dec. 2012 <http://hca.gilead.org.il/li_merma.html>. It appears that Lessing's nineteenth century character is inspired by this story from the same period.

Lessing apparently subscribes to a conservative way of thinking about romantic love when she recreates a typical romantic heroine in Julie. This is something that Lessing does consciously; in one of the rare moments when the anonymous third person narrator speaks directly to the reader, reference is made to the fact that Julie's story translates easily into a rather conventional romantic tale, recalling the plots treated by Miller in *The Heroine's Text*: "This romantic story, the reader has probably long ago decided, is hardly unusual. Beautiful young women without family support, and disadvantaged-in this case doubly, being both illegitimate and coloured-have this kind of history." (22) In addition to parallels with Hans Christian Andersen's fated little mermaid, Lessing invokes Julie as a kind of Cinderella figure within the novel; she too, like the fairy tale character, is supposed to have been beautiful and essentially decent, but without family and destined to fall in love with men above her station.

In summoning up this archetypal romantic heroine, Lessing creates a female character that dangerously overvalues love by understanding it as life defining. Although it is evident that Julie was a highly creative woman, who was independent enough to survive by her own means in nineteenth century France, her attitude towards romantic love was such that it appears to have commanded her entire existence, something reminiscent of Ella's dependence on Paul in *The Golden Notebook*. Regarding Julie's relationships to Paul and Rémy, "she gave them all the weight and meaning they have in her life" (22), which helps explains why she felt unable to go on when married to a man she did not love. While it is valuable that Julie is portrayed as having been an intelligent woman who unashamedly claimed the significance of love, and who refused to compromise her desires, that she prioritized love at the expense of her own self is disturbing and undermines more positive aspects. Julie's fervent need

for a love that had 'conviction' gained ascendancy over her own preservation instinct, indicating that in overvaluing love she had undervalued herself. Indeed, Julie's actions substantiate patriarchal assertions that "Nothing, nothing can fill the void made by the lack of love...For essentially woman is made for love".[9]

Furthermore, it is also unsettling that in Julie's relationships to both Paul and Rémy, she had chosen men who, having come from a white, upper class background, gave way before family pressure to separate from her. Hence, in choosing men who were equally incapable of standing up to their families and thus brought a kind of tragic 'drama' into her life, Julie displayed a dangerous willingness to suffer. These repeated emotional investments that were destined to cause her pain, as well as the decision to end her life because of her inability to live without the kind of intense bond experienced with Paul and Rémy, suggest that Julie was drawn to suffering, which she clearly believed to be intrinsic to love.

Julie's tale, which serves as the springboard from which the action in the novel is launched, corresponds to the story of Tristan and Iseult's tragic and unfulfilled love examined in the context of Patchett's *Bel Canto*. In *Love in the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont looks at the link between pain and love in a chapter on the Tristan myth: "Passion means suffering...To love love more than the object of love, to love passion for its own sake, has been to love to suffer...Passionate love, the longing for what sears us and annihilates us in its triumph".[10] Julie too connects love with suffering, as can be discerned not only from the pattern in her choice of romantic partners, but also from her sense of it as a calamity: "She might have adored her lover Paul, and more than adored Rémy, but she often described these passions as if a busy

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[9] William J. Robinson, "Woman: Her Sex and Love Life," Weisser, *Women and Romance* 58.
[10] Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World,* trans. Belgion Montgomery (1940; New York: Harper Colophon-Harper, 1974) 50.

physician were making notes about calamitous illnesses" (22). Furthermore, Julie's decision to end her life because of love, or rather its lack, points to how Lessing recreates a traditional association between love and death, elaborated on by de Rougemont:

> Love and death- a fatal love-in these phrases is summed up...whatever is universally moving in European literature, alike as regards the oldest legends and the sweetest songs. Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal. (15)

In upholding such an established conception of romance it is apparent that the brief story within the later novel is quite conservative in character.

Lessing shows awareness of this problematic when she has her third person narrator comment reflexively: "to the feminists...[Julie] is a contentious sister. For some she is the archetypal female victim, while others identify with her independence" (25). While conceding that Julie may not be viewed by all in positive terms, Lessing reinforces that she does not view her as a victim; this is made clear through repeated references to Julie's intelligence and talent, as well as through Sarah's rejection of that interpretation: "'Julie never saw herself as a victim. She saw herself as having choice'" (32). Although it is noteworthy that Lessing does not wish Julie's romantic decisions and her death to completely negate the capable and creative woman she clearly once was, her refusal to condemn or otherwise explain Julie's suicide is surprising, especially given the emphasis of many of the female writers and theorists looked at previously on the need for women to finally recognize the significance of self-love in the context of a romantic relationship.

Sarah's friend Stephen, who is involved as well in the Julie Vairon play, also has a problematic attitude to love, since he is infatuated with this nineteenth century woman. He unashamedly reveals this to Sarah: "'I am besotted with her. I have been since I first heard her music...She's the woman for me'" (37). Stephen's emotional zeal for a deceased woman, which can only be classed as a futile obsession, appears to be based on a romanticised image he has built of her. In fact, despite the claims of love, Stephen is unable to accept her as the woman she once was, something evident from the way he becomes disturbed by the real and factual aspects of Julie that come out in her journals. Subjected to Sarah's questioning, he admits: "'when I read her journals I feel-shut out. She slams a door in my face" (37). Behind this dislike, lies his unease with the fact that Julie was once an intelligent, articulate woman; Stephen resents anything that interferes with the idealised image of her as a gentle, non-threatening woman who in another life would have been entirely devoted to him. Sarah senses that this aversion to the journals is indicative of the unrealistic nature of his obsession, as she tries to make him critically examine his love for Julie. She asks him directly "'What are you in love with?'" (37), to which he replies: "'I don't think that I'd like that cold intelligence of hers directed at me'" (37). Stephen's objection to what he perceives to be a 'cold intelligence' allows Lessing to suggest that a woman's "intelligence is a threatening element in her relations with men" (Sukenick 525). Sarah does not directly confront his prejudice against women, but continues to pursue her point by gently trying to both make him see Julie as a real person and recognize that love is not the idealised and simplified state he imagines: "'But when one is in love one's intelligence does go on, doesn't it?'" (37). Stephen, though, refuses to relinquish his position, insisting on staying true to his romanticized beliefs: "'No, if

she'd been happy she'd never have written all that. All that was just...self-defence'" (37).

Apart from Stephen's apparent distaste for intelligence in the woman he claims to love, he also reacts aggressively to Sarah's reference to a man Julie may have been attracted to: "'It seems to me you want to make her a kind of tart, falling in love with one man after another'" (40) The offensive nature and double standard of his remark is not missed by Sarah: "She couldn't believe her ears. 'How many women have you been in love with?'" (40). Sarah responds with surprise at Stephen's comment, as it betrays the conservative and traditional beliefs he has concerning women. Indeed, it is indicative of an ambivalent construction of femininity, whereby woman is, as also seen in *The Golden Notebook*, "at once Eve and the Virgin Mary" (de Beauvoir 175).

As well as maintaining such preconceptions, Stephen nurtures possessive feelings towards Julie, about which he is quite frank: "he informed her, he had carried away *his* Julie into some fastness where she, Sarah, could not come" (47). Stephen recognizes that his stance is ludicrous; when Sarah reacts to this statement by saying "'You're crazy, Stephen'", he acknowledges the absurdity: "'Yes, I'll freely admit it, Sarah'" (47). However, it is precisely the absurdity of Stephen's sense of a dead woman as belonging to him that permits Lessing to draw her reader's attention to the issue of possessiveness in romantic love, a longstanding feminist concern. The disturbing and clearly unhealthy cast of Stephen's desire to own Julie seems to symbolize the essentially sinister nature of the need to possess the loved other. Stephen's remarks, which are emblematic of a conservative, male dominant way of thinking, help illustrate hooks's point regarding the negation of love within a

patriarchal setting, as it becomes apparent that Stephen is not capable of embracing a reciprocal love.

Moreover, the conservative facets of Julie's depiction, explored earlier, cannot be overlooked, as she influences how the twentieth century protagonists view romantic love. Stephen, for example, also sees love as related to suffering, something that emerges in his journal entries about Julie: "'This longing is like a poison...I understand what it means to be ill with love'" (308-9). Although the significance of Sarah's feelings, in her sixties, for Bill, the twenty-six year old actor playing the role of one of Julie's lovers, will be explored in detail shortly, it must be pointed out here that Sarah also starts to understand love as an illness when she falls in love with this young, attractive man who is the object of many women's attentions. Sarah recalls Julie's reference to love as a calamity:

> For people are often in love, and they are usually not in love equally, or even at the same time...if the condition she was in were not tagged with the innocuous 'in love', then her symptoms would be those of a real illness. (136)

Sarah focuses on the suffering that is the result of one-sided or unequal love, an emphasis which has parallels to *The Golden Notebook,* where Anna/Ella endures difficulties with uncommitted, unfaithful lovers. In effect, although Julie's story only appears as a brief instalment at the start of *Love, Again*, it sets the tone of the novel, as the more conservative and traditional approach to romantic love discerned in her tale is seen to affect the way the other characters think about love.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the characters' tendency to equate love with an affliction is often rooted in wider issues. In Stephen's case, the pain he experiences in

falling in love with a dead woman appears the outcome of a general unhappiness in life, something that eventually leads to his suicide. In Julie's case the sense of love as an illness seems to be a response to the grief that came from having invested emotionally in patriarchal models and in men who were incapable of truly committing. Sarah meanwhile becomes emotionally tied to a man who taunts her with his flirtatious behaviour with other women: "Bill ran his hand from Molly's shoulder to her buttocks... Sarah saw how he sent her...a swift diagnostic glance to see if she had been watching, had seen, had been affected" (88). Like many of the women in *The Golden Notebook* who tolerate men's philandering, Sarah remains infatuated with Bill in spite of his behaviour. Sarah also accepts the idea that suffering comes with love, rather than tackling the source of the problem, which is the actual man in whom she has invested love. Although Lessing does seem inclined to portray romantic love in a tragic and negative way, what perhaps emerges here is that it is not love itself that needs to be condemned, but women's blindness to a patriarchal system that asks them to put men above their own welfare and happiness.

However, while it is clear that Sarah has invested in a man who has a problematic attitude to women, it must be also recognised how her feelings for Bill function as a reawakening to love at the age of sixty-five after prolonged abstinence from any romantic involvement: "I haven't been in love for twenty years. Recently I've been thinking about that" (38). In fact, while it is Bill who first reintroduces Sarah to such emotions, she also later falls in love with Henry, the thirty-five year old director, suggesting a broader change. Nonetheless, when Sarah first starts to develop feelings for Bill, she is reluctant to accept the situation: "She did not waste time saying

it was absurd, for that went without saying. That weekend she was forced to acknowledge that she had fallen a little in love with the young man" (89).

In portraying her falling in love at this later stage in life, Lessing makes readers understand that Sarah is still a woman with emotional longings and erotic desires, this topic proving a departure from *The Golden Notebook*. Lessing emphasises that, despite being older, Sarah is overcome by her need for Bill: "She was thinking that if this young man did not come to her that night she would very likely die, and this did not seem an exaggeration in her feverish state" (135). This senior woman's sexual longing is significant according to Roberta Rubenstein, who, in relation to Lessing's *Love, Again*, as well as one of Marilyn French's novels, states that "both authors dare to imagine their female protagonists as independent, older, *desiring* women".[11] Lessing's focus on a mature woman's sexuality differs from Atwood's portrayal of an aged female protagonist in *The Blind Assassin*, as there it is the young Iris's sexuality that is emphasised, while the older Iris is desexualised and concentrates on documenting the past.

In daring to show a sixty-five year old articulating her desires, Lessing resists the tendency within patriarchal culture to conceal and negate older women's sexuality. This is a topic that is suppressed in conventional romance plots, which foreground the "young, inexperienced" (Modleski 28) woman's path towards marriage. While feminist critics have focused their attention on critiquing this more traditional kind of plot, in *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir addresses how older women do still have erotic desires and may fall "secretly in love with one young man after another" (591), also acknowledging the difficulty of being "suddenly deprived of...femininity" with age

[11] Roberta Rubenstein, "Feminism, Eros, and the Coming of Age," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 22.2 (2001): 4, *Project Muse,* 27 Aug. 2010<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/fro/summary/v022.22.2rubenstein.html>.

(587).[12] Significantly, Lessing decides to explore and draw attention this idea in the recent fiction *Love, Again*.[13] Indeed, she admits in a 1998 interview: "Yes, I did fall in love at sixty-five", also stating:

> Everybody falls in love. I talk to older people, and when they're being truthful, they'll confess that they fall in love at the most inappropriate ages, and often with people much younger than themselves. This is what is interesting. It's got nothing to do with reproduction or anything...It's passion.[14]

Here and in her novel Lessing debunks the idea that love is a privilege of the young as she highlights older people's capacity for passion, which is a truth she clearly feels is suppressed.[15]

In tackling an older woman's desire for love, Lessing confronts how the Western mindset views romantic love as the prerogative of the young and beautiful.

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[12] Although de Beauvoir has earlier addressed the issue of age, Rubenstein explains in "Feminism, Eros, and the Coming of Age," that "Now that the cohort of women whose pioneering work defined the second wave of the women's movement has reached the life-stage of the women they once regarded as invisible or irrelevant, they have begun to address the challenges of aging from the perspective of their own experience as older women" (2), indicating how age was not a key issue for second-wave feminists at the time and that it has more recently been brought to the foreground.

[13] Lessing does deal with the topic of age in her novels *The Summer Before Dark* (1973) and *The Diary of a Good Neighbor* in *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1984). However, the respective heroines are forty-five and forty-nine years of age; Sarah at sixty-five is older than this (thus making her return to love a particular transgression against social norms and expectations). See: Barbara Frey Waxman, "From 'Bildungsroman' to 'Reifungsroman': Aging in Doris Lessing's Fiction," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 68.3 (1985): 318-334, *JSTOR,* 30 Nov. 2012 <http://jstor.org/stable/41178344>.

[14] Cathleen Rountree, "A Thing of Temperament: An Interview with Doris Lessing, May 16, 1998," *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche* 2.1 (2008): 67, *JSTOR,* 20 Nov. 2012 <http://jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jung.2008.2.1.62>.

[15] Fay Weldon, in *Rhode Island Blues* (2000), also portrays an older woman (eighty-three years old) falling in love; as Roberta Rubenstein states, "In contrast to virtually all of her earlier female characters, in Felicity Moore of *Rhode Island Blues* Weldon has created an exuberant...*significantly older* woman who dares to follow the dictates of her heart, social norms about age be damned". Roberta Rubenstein, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Fay Weldon's Elder Fairy Tale," *Adventures of the Spirit: The Older Woman in the Works of Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, and Other Contemporary Women Writers,* ed. Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis (Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2007) 196.

Indeed, Sarah is troubled by the fact that she no longer belongs to what she considers to be a sexually privileged class of people:

> And I, Sarah Durham, sitting here tonight surrounded mostly by the young...am in exactly the same situation as the innumerable people of the world who are ugly, deformed, or crippled...Millions spend their lives behind ugly masks, longing for the simplicities of love known to attractive people. There is now no difference between me and those people barred from love, but this is the first time it has been brought home to me that all my youth I was in a privileged class sexually but never thought about it or what it must mean not to be. (136)

Sarah has a sense of being placed in a marginalised position, akin to those perceived as unattractive or suffering from some deformity; in fact, A.S. Byatt points out how Lessing tackles ageing women's sense of becoming insignificant and "invisible to everyone except those who fear becoming old women themselves".[16] Due to this feeling of inadequacy, Sarah regrets having been made familiar with Julie's existence, her subsequent reinvestment in romantic love making her conscious of the difficulties of ageing: "(...if I had not entered Julie's territory), I could have lived comfortably with something like a light dimming...and arrived at being really old" (137).

In effect, Sarah faces how, in a superficial world, love is accorded to those who fit certain aesthetic criteria and how this is a particularly harsh reality for women. As Efrat Tseëlon claims: "appearance is emphasised and valued more highly in females than in males. The interpersonal consequences of physical attractiveness are

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[16] A. S. Byatt, "Passionate Tale of the Unexpected," *Times* 4 Apr. 1996: 39, *The Times Digital Archive*, 22 Jan. 2013. <http://find.galegroup.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=duruni&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=IF502627188&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>.

unequivocally stronger for women. Women are more critically judged for attractiveness, and more severely rejected when they lack it".[17] This value system induces Sarah to examine and judge her own body:

> A woman of a certain age stands in front of her looking-glass naked...She has not done this for...twenty years? Thirty?...her body had been a pretty good one, and it held its shape (more or less) till she moved, when a subtle disintegration set in, and areas shapely enough were surfaced with the fine velvety wrinkles of an elderly peach. (234)

In being in love, Sarah is led to critically evaluate her 'subtly disintegrating' sixty-five year old body, which like an 'elderly peach' no longer retains its tautness. This points to how society has embedded the belief in women that beauty and youth are intrinsically connected to each other and to romantic love.

Having been shaped herself by such cultural beliefs, Sarah is duly apprehensive about the possibility of intimacy with a man:

> He wanted to be in bed with her...but-she faced this steadily, though it hurt quite horribly-with him there would be, too, curiosity. What is it like having sex with a woman twice my age?...For the first time in her life she would ask to have the light off, while knowing there would be that moment...when he would switch on the light. (237)

The anxiety Sarah has about exposing her ageing body is not unfounded, as Bill and Henry both finally prove unwilling to engage in a physical relationship with her, despite being attracted to her. With Henry, this is especially obvious, as he avoids the opportunity for intimacy by intoxicating himself. Sarah endures a kind of dismissal not

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[17] Efrat Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life* (1995; London: Sage, 1997) 79.

faced by Anna in *The Golden Notebook*; indeed, Sarah knows her age is the reason for this, as she bitterly transmits her sense of rejection to Stephen: "'You see, if I had been Susan's age...then I don't think morality would have done so well. There would have been nights of bliss and then wallowing in apologies to his wife'" (261). Sarah is made to experience that, as Julia O'Faolain states, "Age matters in our day as much as family and property did in Julie's."[18] Yet, woman's exclusion from the sphere of love and desire after a certain age[19] is not something that men also endure, as Stephen, who is around fifty years old, has no problem in having an affair with one of the young actresses. Rubenstein refers to this prejudice in "Feminism, Eros, and the Coming of Age": "Lessing acerbically illuminates the reality of a double standard that obtains far beyond youth: While it is easy and socially acceptable for older men to form relationships with young women, the reverse remains both unconventional and suspect" (9).

As well as being denied the possibility of a physical relationship with a younger man due to her body's non-compliance with dominant standards of beauty, Sarah is faced with the sense that parts of her have become superfluous, since she is no longer a young woman, capable of nursing a child: "Her breasts...what had happened to them?...Surely the right time for these paps was when she was a mother" (234). Sarah feels that her body does not have the 'use' that it once did when she was a

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[18] Julia O'Faolain, "Objects of Eros," *Times Literary Supplement* 5 Apr. 1996: 27, *Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive,* 22 Jan. 2013 <http://find.galegroup.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=duruni&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200482194&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>.

[19] Sally Chivers also examines, in regards to Suzette Mayr's *The Widows* (1998), how society sees older women as incongruous with the sexual: "in *The Widows* the characters depicted as sexual-old women-do not match public perceptions of who is supposed to seek and revel in the pleasures of the flesh". Sally Chivers, "On the Road Again: Aritha Van Herk's *No Fixed Address* and Suzette Mayr's *The Widows,*" Perrakis, *Adventures of the Spirit* 209.

young mother, implying that the ability to reproduce and to care for a child is an intrinsic part of her self-image and identity as a woman. Therefore, it is not only the loss of her youthful beauty that disturbs Sarah, as she finds her body slowly becoming, by patriarchal standards, barren and redundant.

In addition to tackling an older woman's desire and self-image, Lessing devotes attention to uncovering some of the connections between a person's childhood experiences and his or her consequent adult love relationships. For example, Bill's attraction to the mature protagonist appears linked to feelings for his mother, something of which Sarah is aware: "you are as careless as an inexperienced boy with explosives, allowing all the sexuality you do not admit feeling for your mother to slop about over older women" (156). In fact, Bill himself openly makes the connection between Sarah and his mother: "Bill leaped up to accompany her to the hotel door, there enfolding her in an embrace and murmuring that he thought of her as a second mother" (190). Such a portrayal suggests that men's romantic choices can be shaped by feelings for their mothers; indeed, in making such reference, Lessing turns to traditional psychoanalysis, which, according to Sigmund Freud, states that "In the case of the male, his mother becomes his first love-object as a result of her feeding him and looking after him, and she remains so until she is replaced by someone who resembles her or is derived from her".[20]

Freud sheds light on the connection between a man's primary bond to his mother and his attraction to other women. However, this move away from the mother, considered by Freud to be a natural and healthy development for the male, is not something that Bill manages to achieve, as he does not initiate a relationship with any

[20] Sigmund Freud, "Female Sexuality," *Psychoanalysis and Woman: A Reader*, ed. Shelley Saguaro (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 23.

of the women that he flirts with and is attracted to. Bill's inability in *Love, Again* to become physically and emotionally involved with another woman points to an unresolved Oedipus complex.[21] In fact, Bill is not only emotionally unable to detach from his infantile love object, his mother, but is also quite immature and childlike. After receiving a card from him, Sarah comes to understand that Bill still perceives himself as a boy: "It was the most charming and guileless card...It could not have been in worse taste- for anyone but a small child. The person who sent this card...was a child...The card made the statement, I am a little boy" (105). This juvenile card, which demonstrates that Bill has not matured, signals that Lessing does not want readers to simply think of him as an arrogant male character, but to consider how Bill's continued emotional investment in his mother is responsible for his ambivalent attitude to Sarah. While the taking of such a position may be perceived as a way of excusing Bill's behaviour, it is clear that Lessing wants to foreground his difficult relationship to women, thus highlighting the inherently complex nature of sexual desire and love.

Just as Lessing uncovers the connection between Bill's attachment to his mother and his current-day relationships with women, she underlines the link between the past and the present for Sarah, depicting the sixty-five year old discovering how being in love awakens old memories in her. Indeed, Sarah is made to re-examine a childhood love from an adult's perspective following Bill's unwillingness to start a sexual relationship with her, despite his flirtatious behaviour. She is taken back in time

[21] According to Ayala Malach Pines, a contemporary female psychologist working within Freudian discourse, this constitutes a man's inability to let go of his mother: "When boys and girls do not pass through the Oedipal stage successfully, they remain fixated at this stage and cannot detach themselves from their infantile love object. When they grow up, such men remain in love with their mothers and are incapable of loving fully other women". Ayala Malach Pines, *Falling in Love: Why We Choose the Lovers We Do* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 152.

to the age of six, when she was hurt by a boy's declaration of love for another girl after having kissed, and confessed his affections for, her:

> This incident frozen all those years ago, a baby mammoth in ice, was filling her with the emotions of then...Long ago...a desolation of grief had swallowed her. A child's love. So she had filed it away: a childish love, not to be taken seriously. (107)

This memory of a deeply hurtful event that had remained 'frozen' or suppressed within her psyche, now disrupting the narrative flow of the present in *Love, Again*, allows Sarah to trace a pattern of rejection and hurt, once again indicating how the past is undeniably bound to the present.

In re-accessing aspects of her past, Sarah recalls the rejection she experienced as a child within her family unit, since she was neglected by her mother, who preferred her younger brother, Hal:

> He had been her mother's favourite, she had always known and accepted that. Or at least she could not remember ever having not accepted it. He was the much wanted and loved boy, and she had taken second place from the moment he was born. (84)

The glorification of the male, whereby Sarah's mother showed preferential treatment towards her son, is not an isolated case within her family, but an established way of thinking in an inherently patriarchal Western culture. Such beliefs can be traced in traditional psychoanalytic theory, which views little girls as being biologically inferior. The feminist psychoanalyst Chodorow critiques Freud's perception of a girl's genitalia being subordinate to that of a boy in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978): "Freud does not tell us only that a little girl thinks or imagines that she is castrated or

mutilated, or that she thinks she is inferior or an incomplete boy. Rather, she is so" (144-45). Chodorow's condemnation of Freud's perception of female inferiority indicates how she aligns herself with those feminists who rejected and tried to shed light on the essentially patriarchal nature of traditional psychoanalysis. Key feminists of the second-wave movement, like Millett (*Sexual Politics* 179-203) and Firestone (*The Dialectic of Sex* 46-58), asserted that Freud's theories on, for example, penis envy and the Oedipus Complex, are a reflection of the patriarchal power structure of society. While one may question why Lessing critiques some intrinsic notions within traditional Freudian psychoanalysis, even as she abides by and invokes some of its ideas, it is evident here that she wishes to draw attention to the longstanding androcentric values dominating the family and Western society.

In an effort to resist belief in the superiority of the male, Lessing emphasises the disastrous effects of such an androcentric mindset. She does this by showing how being adored as the only son leads Hal to grow up to be immature and selfish: "This big babyish man, with his little tummy, his little double chin, his self-absorbed mouth" (321). Hal is completely incapable of emotionally supporting his problematic daughter, Joyce, while he is also unable to truly commit to his wife, to whom he is unfaithful. In light of the man Hal has turned out to be, it not surprising that Sarah does not feel attached to him: "She had never liked Hal, let alone loved him" (84). Yet, while Sarah appears to have come to terms with her aversion to Hal, it emerges later in the novel that her feelings for her brother are more complicated than she realised. Sarah is made aware of how she had once loved Hal while reflecting back on a hug she had shared with Henry, suddenly finding her brother entering her thoughts with an unforeseen emotional intensity: "She found herself sitting...feeling the sweet touch of

his hair on her mouth, while she muttered, 'God, how I did love you, my little brother, how I did love you.' Astonishment pulled her eyes open" (275-276). Although in *The Golden Notebook* Lessing also appears conscious of complex family attachments when she shows Maryrose, a character in *Free Women*, to be in love with her brother, or one of Anna's lovers briefly referring to his wife as mother, in *Love, Again* she highlights and enquires into the connections between present-day romantic investments and childhood relations in much greater detail. Indeed, as Lessing explores Sarah's emotions for Hal as a child, she comes to recognize the great anger she harbours towards him. At one point she tells Stephen of a dream in which "There's a small girl stabbing a doll with scissors. The doll is bleeding" (215). When Stephen questions her about the identity of the doll, she replies "Well...it could be my brother" (215). This ambivalence towards her brother indicates that the glorification of the male not only renders Hal incapable of building positive relationships to others, but is responsible for the kind of troubled emotions he induces in Sarah.

Lessing continues to explore Sarah's relationship to her family and her past when she shows how the experience of falling in love with Bill and then Henry has less to do with them and more to do with an inner longing that goes back to her childhood. Sarah starts to "connect present...emotions with past, even infant needs",[22] which she becomes conscious of when she finds herself easily transferring her affections from Bill to Henry:

> Meeting Henry again was like that deep involuntary sigh of a child finding itself lifted into longed-for arms. Henry greeted Sarah with his cry of *Sarah!* and a smile both passionate and ironical, and she fell in

[22] Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, "Introduction," Perrakis, *Adventures of the Spirit* 3.

> love there and then. An interesting moment, when you observe one man sliding out of your heart while another slides in. But did it matter? The sufferings she was going through obviously had nothing to do with Bill, or Henry. People carry around with them this weight of longing...and then, for no obvious reason, just like that, there he was (who?), and onto him is projected this longing, with love. (205-206)

Sarah's sense of herself as a child who has just encountered a longed after loved one, indicates that her emotional need for love, which was not satisfied in the early years of her life due to her mother's preference for Hal, is now being projected upon Henry. In still longing for the love and attention that she should have received from her mother as a child, and in trying to fulfil this through her romantic attachments to men, it is evident that Sarah's mother continues to play a significant role in her daughter's life.

As has been seen in previous chapters, Chodorow argues too that the daughter's emotional need for her mother shapes her later romantic relationships to men:

> most girls seek to create in love relationships an internal emotional dialogue with the mother: to recreate directly the early infantile or oedipal connection...Women seek directly to reconstitute, resurrect, reshape, reimagine an emotional relation with their mothers...even as they form relationships with men.[23]

In *Reading the Romance* Radway also considers how women seek to discursively recover something of the mother through romance reading, as such novels portray the hero granting the heroine the "affective intensity" (140) that is associated with

[23] Nancy J. Chodorow, *Femininities*, *Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond,* The Blazer Lectures for 1990 (1990; Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1994) 82.

maternal nurturance and for which the female reader still longs. Indeed, the mother emerges as a recurring motif in this thesis, as Morrison also explores how her protagonists' mothers have a significant impact upon their romantic relationships.

Although in *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir refers to woman's desire to regain her mother and father through her romantic relationship, she focuses on critiquing woman for wanting her partner to provide her with the same sense of safety and security she had as a child:

> Woman does not long to reincarnate one individual in another, but to reconstruct a situation: that which she experienced as a little girl, under adult protection. She was deeply integrated with home and family, she knew the peace of quasi-passivity. Love will give her back her mother as well as her father, it will give her back her childhood... many women suffer in becoming adults; and so a great number remain obstinately 'babyish'". (655)

De Beauvoir overlooks how the daughter's specific attempt to rediscover her mother through her romantic relationship is a process that could be something distinct from the immaturity and passivity she attributes to the woman in love in *The Second Sex*. Even though Lessing compares Sarah's happiness at meeting Henry with that of a child, she does not view this critically as a sign of her desire to be protected by him, but uses the scene to shed light on how the process of falling in love can be determined by such longings from early life. While a modern-day, feminist conscious woman may perceive such a notion as infringing on her autonomy and sense of self-rule, it is apparent that Lessing explores how people's adult romantic feelings are

shaped by this primary love relation to the mother, especially following devaluation within a patriarchal order.

This is not an area given much attention to in *The Golden Notebook*; while Lessing depicts Anna in psychotherapy with Mrs. Marks/Mother Sugar, which implies that the analyst works as a kind of mother figure, she does not explicitly address woman's longing for maternal love and how it affects adult, romantic investments, something pointing to the development of her conception of love. In DuPlessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending* though it has been seen how some women writers have decentred heterosexual love by addressing the "loop backward to mother-child attachments" (37). Indeed, DuPlessis uses Lessing's *The Four-Gated City* as an example of this, whereby she refers to how Martha finds motherhood to be something she finally cannot sidestep: "Martha remembers her daughter Caroline and the stupidity of thinking she was liberating the girl from social replication just by deserting her...So she loops back into motherhood in a very troubled household, repeating what she once evaded" (193). It is evident that Lessing, among other writers, has used this approach to shift emphasis from heterosexual love, and it can be said that her focus on the mother in *Love, Again* also constitutes part of this effort. However, the connection between what Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis calls "late loves and early memories"[24] simultaneously allows Lessing to take an in-depth approach to heterosexual love and deal with its complex groundings. In fact, in *Love, Again* particularly, Lessing not only 'loops back' to the mother-child attachment, but repeatedly connects adult loves to childhood relations (which do not only include the mother).

[24] Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, "The Whirlpool and the Fountain: Inner Growth and *Love, Again,*" *Spiritual Exploration in the Works of Doris Lessing,* ed. Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Number 81 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1999) 101.

Although Lessing encourages exploration of such complex connections, she cannot be said to take a celebratory approach to love in *Love, Again.* Indeed, Sarah ends up finally returning to her old solitary life and adopting a cynical attitude to romantic love: "Really, how silly – on hearing of someone foolishly in love" (330). She is now seen to find pleasure in other aspects of life, which while indicative of a happier and more balanced existence, points to how Sarah now feels that joy is to be secured in isolation, rather than in relation to others: "She was finding herself in moments of quiet enjoyment, drawing vitality...from small physical pleasures, like the...warmth of sunlight on bare skin" (330).

Nevertheless, while Lessing apparently takes a more negative or mixed approach to love than the other women writers looked at in this thesis, she does not simply sidestep or condemn it, as great emphasis continues to be laid on illustrating the complexity of adult romantic love through connections between the past and the present. Sarah, in fact, gains clarity about her own past after witnessing a little girl being neglected by her mother in a park. Acting in line with patriarchal values, the mother shows preference for her baby son, despite the great anguish and sadness this brings her young daughter. Observing this little girl's suffering is an emotionally intense experience for Sarah, as it pushes certain long buried feelings to the light of consciousness. This induces Sarah to silently reach out to the female child:

> You are living in an eternity of loneliness and grief...you believe that this is what life is and must be: you will always be disliked, and you will have to watch her love that little creature you love so much because you think that if you love what she loves, she will love you. (335)

After witnessing this little girl being mistreated by her mother, which recalls her own early sense of neglect and loneliness, Sarah is then finally able to make a clear link between her desire for Henry and Bill and her feelings for her brother as a child:

> She did not think about Bill...that anguishing passion now seemed an irrelevance...She thought of Henry, all right, but only in that realm behind or beyond ordinary life...where-if they chanced to meet-they would at once go on with an interrupted conversation...That place was where once had lived her little brother Hal, when loving him had seemed the only pledge there was or could be for the hope of love. (339)

Although Sarah had already started to trace the connection between her feelings for Bill and Henry and her relationship to her brother even before this scene in the park, and had also sensed her child's longing for love, she now comes to recognize clearly how she had once felt obliged to love Hal, in the hope that this would somehow help her gain her mother's love; as Perrakis maintains, Sarah sought to achieve "some sense of sharing her inner world with her mother-both love the same object" ("The Whirlpool and the Fountain" 92). Sarah comes to comprehend that, in seeking to get the love she craved from men who were incapable of reciprocating, she was recreating her unhappy childhood, which was marked by her efforts to gain her mother's love through the adoration of her baby brother. The narrative shows Sarah consciously processing all the pieces of her past that have now come together; as Virginia Tiger

explains, "this sleeper awake(s), knowing her unquenchable craving for love had...an early-and benighted- source".[25]

The significance of Sarah coming to understand how the past affected her adult relationships is something that Rubenstein, drawing on psychoanalytic discourse, also discusses:

> To acknowledge her younger brother's pre-eminence in her mother's affections and to recall so distinctly her own sense of inadequacy is to confront the profound effect that such emotional deprivations and losses may impose on later relationships. The narcissistic wound, experienced so early and so damagingly, may never entirely heal but may continue to bleed into and sabotage subsequent attachments, unless it is confronted and integrated into conscious awareness. ("Feminism, Eros, and the Coming of Age" 11)

So, in tracing the complex connections between past and present and the effect these have on an adult's romantic relationships, Lessing can be said to address heterosexual love in an in-depth, questioning manner. Although this emphasis on the mother may function as a way of decentralizing heterosexual love, as DuPlessis similarly suggests, it is significant that Lessing's portrayal allows readers to better comprehend some of the issues affecting men and women's relationships, seeing that she looks at how patriarchal society pushes girls from a young age to assume a subservient role in relation to men, even within the immediate family.[26] This psychoanalytically informed

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[25] Virginia Tiger, "'Sleepers Wake': The Surfacing of Buried Grief in Doris Lessing's *Love, Again,* Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow,* and Margaret Drabble's *The Seven Sisters,*" Perrakis, *Adventures of the Spirit* 32.

[26] This recalls how Violet and Rose Dear were damaged by True Belle's adoration of Golden Gray in *Jazz,* pointing to Morrison's awareness of the devastating effects of a patriarchal, but also racist, mindset upon a family.

view of the links between past and present might be perceived as delineating a deterministic way of approaching this early damage, whereby woman remains so defined by her past that she is still unable to invest in a fulfilling love relationship. Yet, this position does permit Lessing to expose the patriarchal patterns within the family affecting adult romantic investments and to encourage a deeper understanding of love.

In fact, it is in having gone through this process of falling in love again and becoming conscious of the way in which she was devalued as a female in her primary relations, in addition to how this affected her adult interactions with men, that Sarah is led to feel that she has achieved "much new understanding" (338). Like the earlier Lessing protagonist Anna, who manages to find some meaning in facing the chaos of life, Sarah's awareness can be said to work as a necessary part of her emotional survival, which, when considering both Julie's and Stephen's suicides, is an invaluable feat. Moreover, Lessing, who has suggested in regards to *The Golden Notebook* that "it's more truthful because it's more complex",[27] can be said to take a similar approach here as she indicates how it is Sarah's intertwined relationships that hold the 'truth' that contributes to her progression.

In *Love, Again* Lessing emphasises the complexity of heterosexual love, as she makes a point of delineating the strong link between childhood experiences and adult loves. Like Chodorow and Radway, Lessing highlights the important role the mother has to play within woman's romantic investments; as such kinds of connections between past and present were not expanded on in *The Golden Notebook*, some development can be perceived in her approach to heterosexual love here. Lessing also

[27] Florence Howe, "A Conversation with Doris Lessing (1966)," *Contemporary Literature* 14.4 (1973): 429, *JSTOR,* 21 Nov. 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207464>.

challenges perceptions of love in *Love, Again* when she pushes beyond the limited notion that romantic love and desire are only the prerogatives of the young. Ageing women, Lessing affirms, do have sexual and emotional needs and desires, a valuable view that is suppressed in a superficial, beauty and youth-obsessed Western culture. Again it is apparent that Lessing's vision of romantic love has expanded since her 1962 novel; yet, while Lessing foregrounds the issue of age and encourages in-depth understanding of the romantic relationship between the sexes, she is not any more positive about heterosexual love than in *The Golden Notebook*, and still attuned to feminist critiques of patriarchal forms of relationship. For instance, Lessing's condemnation of men's patriarchal behaviour in *The Golden Notebook* remains in evidence in *Love, Again*, as she tackles Stephen's refusal to recognize Julie as being her own individual self. Nevertheless, problematic perceptions of romantic love are not exclusive to men, as Sarah and Julie are inclined to view love in relation to suffering, not at first questioning their attraction to the kind of emotionally immature or conformist men who follow patriarchal patterns of behaviour. At times Lessing herself tends to romanticise, most particularly in the case of Julie, the suffering and unhappiness that comes with love. This is not to say, though, that *Love, Again* does not offer critical awareness; indeed, what appears to be most unique about the novel is Lessing's effort to get readers to question assumptions about love and to look beneath the surface of the present when considering adults' love attachments.

Conclusion

Through this timely examination of a range of contemporary women writers' explorations of heterosexual love it emerges that they remain critical of patriarchal models of love, while also enabling the discussion of love to be developed further in other directions. The selected women writers offer reimaginings of heterosexual love, often in subtle ways, while continuing to recognize the validity of many issues that have long concerned feminists in a male dominant world; this is congruent with the third-wave feminist approach, whereby second-wave feminist contributions are acknowledged in the context of new explorations and ideas. This is exemplified, for instance, by Morrison, who rejects a patriarchal, and racist, model of love, but also highlights the affirmative power of Joe and Violet's love for each other, something not attempted in the earlier, more bleak *The Bluest Eye.* In the case of *Love Medicine*, while Erdrich condemns Gordie's violent behaviour towards June, she depicts a positive and empowering love between Gerry and Dot and recognizes the wider significance of love within the Chippewa community. Thus, there is awareness of the need to remain vigilant and critical of patriarchal attitudes, whilst also presenting some of love's positive potential. In a sense, this is the approach that hooks also takes in her early twenty first century theoretical work, since she continues to oppose patriarchal power structures, whilst too seeking to create a more inspiring and fulfilling vision of love for the next generation of women.

In addition, a shift can be identified as some issues that have previously troubled feminists within patriarchy are no longer of such concern to certain writers. For example, Shields and Patchett foreground how their male protagonists have the potential to behave in an emotionally open and loving manner, rather than depict men

who remain invested in traditional models of behaviour. Although Joe also develops emotional maturity by the end of *Jazz*, he goes through a process before being able to confront his own male dominant complicity. So, as Gen in *Bel Canto* and Tom in *The Republic of Love* are not in any way invested in patriarchal patterns of behaviour, Patchett and Shields present a picture of man that is conducive to a balancing and fulfilling love. In portraying man in this way, it seems that some writers are intent on promoting awareness of the positive potential of the heterosexual love relationship.

Others are though more cautious about, or qualifying in, an affirmation of romantic love. Atwood, for example, explores the possibility of unconventional love in *The Blind Assassin* and shows how Iris and Alex's relationship maintains some sense of meaning and significance by the end despite the absence of a 'happily ever after', something that is not seen in the earlier *Lady Oracle*. Yet, Atwood's depiction of Richard and Iris's marriage suggests that she remains highly critical of patriarchal relationships, whilst she also confronts problems that arise from class difference for Alex and Iris. So, although Alex and Iris's love, as well as that of the blind assassin and the girl, is presented as a form of resistance to repressive society, there is no clear-cut positive conclusion in the way provided by Morrison. Similarly, even though Gordimer explores the joy and happiness that love can bring and emphasises the importance of balancing self-love with a respectful love for the other, an idea echoing Irigaray's *I Love to You*, there is an ambiguous ending to *The Pickup*.

While Atwood and Gordimer do not provide loving reunions or neat resolutions, they do consider some of love's potential in their novels. Lessing, however, takes a more negative critical approach to romantic relations in both *The Golden Notebook* and *Love, Again*, as she locates how patriarchal prejudices and

structures shape the space of love. Yet, in spite of this, Lessing's vision of love has been seen to have developed in *Love, Again*, as she draws attention to an older woman's longing for love and the inherently complex connections between the formative bonds in childhood and later adult relationships. Lessing's in-depth, searching fictional enquiry into romantic love in some ways recalls the work of Radway, who examines how women seek through romance reading to satisfy profound emotional needs engendered in them by their mothers, and also that of Chodorow, who considers how woman's emotional need for the mother influences her romantic relationships to men. Although Lessing does not perceive heterosexual love in a positive light in the way of Shields, whose narrative operates to reclaim the value of romantic love, her broadened vision foregrounds an interest in love and illuminates various meaningful aspects.

Indeed, this study has identified that women writers continue to write about heterosexual love also because of the need to extend the scope of discussion. Just as Lessing explores issues around age, so Erdrich, whose multi-voiced narrative presents romantic love in the context of community, examines love according to unconventional, collective perspectives not touched on within the structures of the traditional romance. This opening up to more diverse views, which is also characteristic of third-wave feminism, holds true in the case of Morrison, who brings the wider social context into perceptions of love when she considers how her characters' romantic relationships are affected by racial oppression as well as how Joe and Violet's love serves as a source of healing for this damage. Gordimer and Patchett, who both look at interracial relationships, tackle various forms of difference (racial, socio-economic, cultural and linguistic), which points to a departure from the white

agendas that have directed feminists' discussions of romantic love and a distancing from the conventions of romance, such as the same-race expectations to which Pearce and Wisker refer. In *The Pickup* Gordimer not only defies such generic conventions but develops her vision of interracial love by posing the protagonists' relationship against the backdrop of a marginal, Arab country and engaging with notions of negotiating difference. As the writers incorporate these different situations and perspectives into their portrayal of romantic love, it is evident that there is much scope for challenging simplistic and/or conservative views of heterosexual love.

With regards to revisitation of the romance genre, the fiction addresses and offers different attitudes to marriage, an institution which has been shown by Miller to be key to traditional plots. Indeed, marriage is presented critically by Atwood but embraced by Shields, even though *The Republic of Love* identifies that a shared future is not necessarily the outcome of a romantic relationship. However, Shields's affirmative view of marriage is not out of context, as a popular 1990s television show like *Ally McBeal* also depicts a modern-day career woman yearning to be married. Patchett too returns to marriage by the end of *Bel Canto*, despite having previously indicated that a loving relationship is not dependent on such long term promises and formalities. Hence, it emerges that a reimagining of heterosexual love does not only involve opposing traditions and bringing in new ideas, but for some can also include the reclamation of certain conventions.

It can be concluded that these women writers' recent reimaginings of heterosexual love are not uniform, one directional or simple, as a number of different views and approaches are put forward. It is though evident that criticisms of limiting and repressive models of love remain a relevant concern, even as novelists develop

their own individual positions towards the romantic relationship between the sexes. There are positive attitudes to love to be found in the selected fiction, as is the case in contemporary feminist thought, particularly since the 1990s. However, this does not mean that contemporary women writers take an unanimously positive approach to heterosexual love; for example, Lessing draws attention to matters like age and love in her 1995 novel, but overall adopts a rather pessimistic stance. Additionally, it is apparent that Morrison provides a much stronger positive revision of romantic love in her later fiction than Atwood does in hers. What does emerge clearly from these varied examples is that contemporary women writers have thrown important light on the topic of heterosexual love and have allowed its discussion to expand and broaden in valuable ways. Even as it is vital to continue to critique oppressive and patriarchal views, heterosexual love offers great potential for further exploration and affirmative development within women's fiction.

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