
Modern Love

*Romance, Intimacy,
and the Marriage Crisis*

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Introduction

A Brief History of Love

Moonlight and love songs
Never out of date,
Hearts full of passion,
Jealousy and Hate.
Woman needs Man
And man must have his mate,
That no one can deny.

—“As Time Goes By,” Herman Hupfield (1931)

I can change, I swear, oh,
See what you can do.

—“You’re a Big Girl Now,” Bob Dylan (1974)

The songs quoted above both deal with love and what we have come to call “relationships,” a term that would not have had the same meaning for Herman Hupfield in 1931. We easily recognize “As Time Goes By” as a love song—it is one of the most well-known love songs because of its featured role in the film *Casablanca*. But we might not be so quick to call Bob Dylan’s “You’re a Big Girl Now” a love song even though it tells the story of a failed relationship. The lyrics quoted differ in one obvious way: one set is about things staying the same, while the other talks of change. The songs also differ in ways that these brief quotations don’t clearly illustrate. “As Time Goes By” deals in generalities. It claims to be describing how love is, not just always, but for everyone. “You’re a Big Girl Now” is from the album *Blood on the Tracks*, which according to most commentators was a response to the failure of Dylan’s marriage. Most of the songs on the album are narratives about particular experiences of love. Moreover, the singer seems to be groping

for knowledge about love or about how to make a relationship better, reflecting on his own mistakes as much as complaining about hers. The two songs exemplify the discourses of romance and intimacy and in so doing call into question Hupfield's main idea. Love has changed.

Learning How to Love

How do we learn about courtship, love, and marriage? Many people can recall in detail the way they learned about the mechanics of sex and reproduction, but few of us can be so specific about how we came to expect that falling in love would be the desirable or even necessary prelude to a happy marriage. We may even assume that one doesn't have to learn such expectations, since they are part of "human nature." The lyrics of "As Time Goes By" illustrate with a variety of examples the assertion that romantic love is indeed timeless and natural. This is stated even more explicitly in the song's infrequently performed introduction (or verse), which refers to the rapid pace of progress and intellectual change—illustrated by a reference to Einstein's theory of relativity—and proposes "the simple facts of life" as a respite. Romance, this introduction implies, is natural in a way that even physics is not. Romantic love may be the chief example in our culture of what is natural, uncontested, obvious, as in the cliché "Love makes the world go 'round.'"

Love stories permeate our lives. Novels and films so predictably include a love story as at least a subplot that most people don't think to inquire into the significance of this repetition. If we give it any thought at all, we probably assume that all these representations of love are themselves a response to people's natural concerns and therefore a reflection of reality. In addition, novels and movies are typically understood as mere entertainment, worthy of concern only when a politician such as Dan Quayle notes some deviance from what he takes to be the norm. But it is in these mainly fictional genres that love and marriage have been most frequently depicted. Historically, explicit instruction about love, courtship, and marriage has been much less common. Many people doubtless learned things about love from religious teaching and from the advice and example of elders and peers, yet such advice or influence was for many probably not as frequent or as powerful as the experiences of love that fiction provided.

My assumption is that these fictional narratives do in fact teach read-

ers and viewers even if they are often unaware of the lesson. *Modern Love* explores what it is that stories about love and relationships have been teaching. My argument is that the kinds of stories that our culture has told itself have changed. For most of the twentieth century, such stories were written in the discourse of romance. “As Time Goes By,” with its references to “passion, jealousy, and hate,” but also to a world in which “lovers” will always be welcomed, is typical. Romantic stories deal with love that leads to marriage or love outside marriage, but not love in marriage. The expectation that marriage will be a continuation of the romantic state has been attributed to the influence of these romantic stories.

While most Americans still assume romance to be natural, the idea that romance is specific to the cultures of Europe and the West is not new. The existence of a competing discourse, however, has not generally been recognized. This new discourse, which I call “intimacy,” emerged in the last third of the twentieth century, partly in response to the marriage crisis. The most typical instance of intimacy discourse is the instructional manual, and the very popularity of self-help books about relationships, the most popular of which now typically outsell the leading novels, is evidence of a cultural shift.¹ This discourse claims to be able to explain how marriage and other relationships work. “You’re a Big Girl Now” is representative in that it states a plea to “work on the relationship” and expresses faith in the possibility of change. The discourse of intimacy makes emotional closeness, rather than passion, its Holy Grail. Intimacy, however, does not replace romance but coexists with it. Many stories of the later part of century are told as mixtures of intimacy and romance, which often function in tension with each other.

I call romance and intimacy “discourses” not to restrict my discussion to mere thoughts or words but to emphasize the role that stories and other representations play in shaping experience. Discourses are not doctrines or systems of ideas but rather groups of related narratives in terms of which men and women have projected the “natural” course of their lives. Discourses are not simple sets of prescriptions; rather than dictating particular beliefs or behaviors, they provide sets of terms in which differing thoughts might be formulated. Discourses produce many variations but at the same time exclude others entirely. For example, the discourse of romance includes both the position that love outside marriage is sinful and best avoided and the position that it is ennobling and highly desirable. It excludes the view that love is a form of affection or care that

differs little whether it occurs within a family, between friends, or between lovers.

A *discourse* differs from an *ideology* in a number of ways depending in part on which definition of the latter one has in mind. In the Marxist definition of *ideology*, widely used in other theoretical contexts, the term implies a motivated misunderstanding of the world. Thus, “bourgeois ideology” is a set of assumptions or ideas that not only are the way the bourgeoisie conceive reality but also are a reflection of their interests as a class. Romance has often functioned ideologically in this sense. As any number of feminists have argued, romance has served the interests of men while seeming to represent the natural needs and desires of women.² While *Modern Love* will regularly observe romance in this role, the book will also show why romance is not restricted to it. It is not my intention to debunk romance as merely a pernicious illusion.³ As for *ideology* in the second common usage, a systematic and typically rigidly held body of ideas, romance does not fit the definition. Romance has not usually been advocated as a doctrine, and its conceptions are too dispersed and even contradictory to qualify as a system of this kind.

Poststructuralism has caused us to question the assumption that we speak discourse, insisting that it speaks us. As Michel Foucault puts it, “Discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined.”⁴ By placing the knowing subject in discourse, this body of theory has helped to make us aware that we are not capable of bringing to consciousness all of the background assumptions we must hold in order to function in a society. While not strictly poststructuralist, a remark on marriage by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu illustrates the point: “The constraints surrounding every matrimonial choice are so numerous and appear in such complex combinations that the individuals involved cannot possibly deal with all of them consciously.”⁵

The danger of the poststructuralist position is that it seems to deny people the ability to make *any* rational evaluation of discourse and sometimes seems to ignore the diversity of discourses in which we typically find ourselves. Foucault claims that discourse is a “totality,” but no one lives under a unified, coherent one. Rather, there are competing, contradictory discourses that sometimes allow us to use one to get a purchase on another. The theory of discourse I am assuming rejects the traditional alternative that texts either *influence* people—and thus cause behavior—or *re-*

flect preexisting realities. To say that novels and films teach us about love is not to say that we consciously learn their lessons or that it is impossible to reject or ignore them. Film scholar Virginia Wright Wexman describes Hollywood film as “modeling appropriate courtship behavior.”⁶ This is exactly right, if one understands “behavior” to include not just activity but also ideas and emotions. Such models typically are followed without an awareness of them as models. The fact that romance narratives are usually consumed as entertainment and often explicitly regarded as fantasy does limit the degree to which readers are likely to accept them as true, but this skepticism may not prevent a repeated pattern found in these texts from functioning as a model. Conversely, as sociologist Anthony Giddens has suggested, the fictional status of a narrative may enable it to be used by the reader consciously as a hypothetical model.⁷ In other words, because the narrative does not claim literal truth, it is more available for testing against the reader’s experience. In the theory I am arguing here, discourses define who we are and limit what we can say, while at same time allowing us to become someone different by enabling new things to be said.

Discourse understood in this way must exist at some remove from the social practices or behavior contemporary with it. Bourdieu and the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann treat discourses, or “codes,” as Luhmann calls them, as constitutive of differing social practices. In this conception, changing patterns in fiction are taken as evidence for changing patterns of behavior. I’m not insisting on such significance for the books and films discussed below. Rather, these works are taken to be evidence of the existence and reach of the discourses of romance and intimacy. The discourses provide models for behavior that have been more or less accepted in different eras and that always exist in tension with models deriving from other discourses. What individuals actually do with these various models differs. Thus, neither discourse can be considered identical with the practice of courtship and marriage, which can differ significantly from the model.

That both discourses do function as models—and that they differ from each other—has been powerfully demonstrated by the feminist Sharon Thompson in *Going All the Way*. Thompson interviewed four hundred teenage girls, asking them to talk about their experiences of sex and romantic love. Not all the girls Thompson talked to were caught under the spell of love, and some were quite adept at using it for their own purposes. One group, however, Thompson calls “victims of love.” Some of

these girls held explicitly romantic visions of the lives they hoped to live. One interviewee, Tracy, regards sex as something to be bartered for love:

She considered first sex an extremely serious experience in itself as well as an augury. If she had the ability to transform desire into love through the alchemy of sex, she could look forward to a marvelously romantic future and ultimately to marriage. If she didn't, if she couldn't even exchange virginity for love, what was she going to make a life worth living out of?⁸

This romantic conception of the future coexisted, however, with the influence of the discourse of intimacy. When Tracy finally did decide to have intercourse for the first time, it was in the context of what she described as a “meaningful relationship.” “The meaningful relationship was almost as prevalent in the 1970s and '80s as going steady was in the 1950s.”⁹ According to Thompson, Tracy’s “version of the meaningful relationship was really just a slight modification of the old idea of one true love that lasts forever.”¹⁰ Other girls, however, seem to have taken over more of the discourse of intimacy:

They were . . . highly conversant with the language of therapy, and the therapeutic model was much in evidence when they talked about their expectations for a meaningful relationship. . . . Their accounts gave dominance to problems like feeling marginal or being wounded or disoriented by parental divorce. A combination of meaningful talk and sex could unravel and heal such problems, these narrators believed, and this was the role of the meaningful relationship. Practitioners expected their partners to “work on issues,” “deal with problems,” “talk things out,” discuss pain, alienation, being different or alone or anxious and to be sensitive, responsive lovers. The relationship would last as long as the partners were able to shed a healing or clarifying light on each other’s problems or perhaps even generate new problems to work on. Other relationships might also involve meaningful talk; the meaningful relationship simply produced the most meaning. This was the sense in which it was true love.¹¹

While practitioners of this discourse conceived of love differently than the more traditionally romantic girls did, they continued to put enormous

store in love. They were just as likely to regard “romantic failure as . . . one of the worst ‘horrors of a teenage life.’”¹²

Thompson’s book strongly suggests, although it does not explicitly argue, that the discourse of romance influences teenage girls across boundaries of class, race, and sexual orientation. Romance seems to be most important and most destructive to working-class girls like Tracy. Thompson attributes this to their seeing no choices for themselves besides marriage, but it may also be that romance continues to be at odds with other patterns of working-class life. Historians have long connected the rise of companionate marriage and the later association of romantic love and marriage to the rise of the bourgeoisie. The aristocrats needed marriages of alliance to preserve their power and wealth, and the working class typically married for the economic advantages that extra hands brought to a household. In the period with which I am concerned, however, the true bourgeoisie are no longer the innovators in matters of love and intimacy. It is rather the new middle classes—the petite bourgeoisie and the professional managerial class—who are positioned economically and educationally to develop new patterns of love and intimacy. The expansion of the professional managerial class throughout most of the twentieth century is one of the conditions that enabled the discourse of intimacy to develop. This fact is ratified by the upper-middle-class setting of the relationship stories and marriage fiction that I discuss in Part II.

The true bourgeoisie tend to revert to aristocratic patterns of marriage—as Edith Wharton’s novels illustrate—while in the working class the separate spheres of the Victorian age continue to define heterosexual relationships. Among the working class, the divide that Giddens notes between men’s and women’s responses to romantic love would seem to be especially acute.¹³ For both the bourgeoisie and the working class, economic considerations play a larger role than they do for the middle classes, who are freer to experiment. *Modern Love* does deal with some works that depict a bourgeois milieu—most screwball comedies, for example—but this setting is almost never meant to distinguish the characters’ habits of love or marriage, which are middle class. I assume that the most ready audience for the lessons these texts teach is also middle class.

The films, novels, and advice manuals I’m concerned with depict heterosexual relationships and most directly hail heterosexual men and women; my focus is on what these people are likely to learn from them.

Gay men and lesbians do, I think, also learn from stories devoted to heterosexual relations, but what they learn is also transformed in complicated ways. Romance is not, as is often alleged, an exclusively heterosexual discourse in our society, but its narrative patterns that take marriage as a defining category cannot have the same meaning for those whom that category excludes. It is also true, of course, that gay and lesbian experience and representations of it have had an impact on heterosexuality. Moreover, gay artists have given us some of the most popular representations of heterosexual love, such as the songs of Cole Porter and the films of George Cukor—though just how these men’s private sexual orientation made an impact on their work remains to be determined. The increasing visibility of and tolerance for homosexual practices has doubtless had an impact on the meaning of various kinds of heterosexual relations. According to Giddens, because gays could not marry they “have therefore been forced to pioneer the more open and negotiated relationships which subsequently have permeated the heterosexual population.”¹⁴ Explicitly gay or lesbian fiction and films have remained limited enough in their reach, however, that they cannot be regarded as a significant source for heterosexuals’ conceptions of love and relationships.

In another road not taken, this book could have surveyed the literature and film of various ethnic minorities for their representations of love, courtship, and marriage. Immigrants often bring with them practices that differ markedly from those dominant in the United States, including, for example, arranged marriage. Other ethnic groups’ patterns of courtship and marriage differ from those of the white, Anglo middle class. Sometimes, as in *Crossing Delancey* (Joan Micklin Silver, 1988) or *Mississippi Masala* (Mira Nair, 1991), this conflict becomes the subject of an independent film or a novel, but it is seldom the focus of mainstream treatments of love and marriage.

African Americans’ experiences of slavery and racial oppression have had an impact on how love and marriage have been depicted in the novels and films they have produced. As literary scholar Ann duCille notes, “Marriage is necessarily a historically complex and contradictory concept in African American history and literature. . . . [F]or nineteenth-century African Americans, recently released from slavery and its dramatic disruption of marital and family life, marriage rites were a long-denied basic human right—signs of liberation and entitlement to both democracy and desire.”¹⁵ As a result, African American fiction, while continuing to make use of marriage plots, is much less prone to specifically ro-

mantic treatments of love and marriage. As duCille concludes, “The particular history of African Americans has complicated the marriage stories black authors have told and continue to tell. Alice Walker’s first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), for example, highlights the disparity between the implicit promises of the marriage ideal . . . and the explicit impossibilities of the actual social and material conditions of . . . most black Americans.”¹⁶ Films focusing on African American culture tend to reflect the working-class gap between men’s and women’s attitudes toward love and marriage, and, as a result, they tend to fall outside the patterns of the screwball comedy or the relationship story.¹⁷ Films that deal with interracial marriage typically fail to do anything else very interesting with love because they focus on the conflicts that the relationship generates in or between the couple’s families.¹⁸

If racism and racial conflict are not my subjects, and conflicts of sexual orientation and class are more background than foreground for this study, gender conflict is of central concern in *Modern Love*. The book is partly motivated by the belief that gender inequality is one of the chief barriers to successful heterosexual relationships. Each chapter explores the nature of that inequality and its effects on love, courtship, and marriage. The book does not assume, however, that it is the main function of the representations of these in film or fiction to perpetuate that inequality. While that is doubtless part of the cultural work of many of the texts I discuss here, many of them also contribute to or at least reflect changes in the culture that have made gender relations more equal and gender roles more flexible. Part of the story this book tells is of the decline of patriarchal power and of the success of women’s struggles.

Academic fields such as women’s studies, African American studies, and gay and lesbian studies have made us aware that the white, the male, and the heterosexual cannot be treated as normative. While these studies have assumed and critiqued the illegitimate domination of whites, men, and heterosexuals, they have also tended to take the character of the dominant for granted and to focus their interpretive energy on the works of the marginal and oppressed. Lately, however, cultural studies has begun to return to the dominant, now relativized by the existence of historical and cultural difference. I have chosen texts—a few canonical, most not—that best illustrate romance and intimacy and that by their popularity demonstrate the cultural reach of these discourses. It is not my goal to canonize these texts but to treat them as artifacts of the culture that produces and consumes them.

If I have chosen mainly popular books and films, I have not devoted chapters to other media that reach larger audiences because I believe they have been less important to the development and spread of romance and intimacy. Television, with the exception of the soap opera, has from its inception been much less focused on romantic love than film. In recent years, since it became possible to deal with sex openly on television, romance has been more in evidence, but it still does not play the dominant role here that it does in other popular media. The more routine way in which television is used by consumers may make it less a source of deeply internalized narratives than novels or movies. The talk show boom of the 1980s and 1990s has doubtless contributed to the spread of the discourse of intimacy, but the talk show is not a site in which the complexities of this discourse can easily be observed or analyzed. Similarly, while it is true that popular songs have long been predominantly concerned with love, their form makes them less useful texts for the interpretive work I am engaged in here. The limited number of words a song contains restricts what it can communicate, and throughout most of twentieth century, popular songs were not typically narrative. Popular songs have reinforced the cultural power of romance and intimacy, but the way in which popular music is used may make it less significant in spreading these discourses. Popular songs are most often experienced as ephemeral and transient, the background rather than the focus of the listener's attention.

Fiction and film are experienced quite differently from television and popular music. Novels especially demand a commitment of considerable time and attention. Moreover, they encourage emotional involvement. Readers often report that they find themselves transported out of their mundane reality and into the fictional world that the novel evokes. Movies also command identification from the viewer, and the star system, Hollywood's practice of building films around two or more carefully nurtured and promoted personalities, has helped to transfer such identification from fictional character to actor, thus maintaining it from film to film. The physical beauty and glamour of the stars reinforce the allure of the romance that their films typically portray. And, like novels, theatrical films are experienced apart from mundane reality, in this case literally apart in a special darkened space where both sight and sound are larger than life.

Love's Prehistory

Most of us probably don't normally think of love as having a history, much less a prehistory. We assume, with "As Time Goes By," that love, desire, sex, and marriage are eternal and that they don't vary significantly from culture to culture. There are senses, I believe, in which it is proper to speak of love as an experience that most humans share. Like other mammals, humans typically begin life in an emotional attachment with one or both parents. The capacity for such attachment presumably is at the root of all of the psychological bonds that humans form later in life, including those with siblings, relatives, friends, lovers, spouses, and even pets. But while such bonds can have very different degrees and qualities, the capacity to bond does not by itself account for the experience of love usually associated with romance. Yet anthropologists have discovered that experiences like those we name "romantic love" or "romantic passion" are recorded across a wide range of cultures.¹⁹ The anthropologist Helen Fisher describes the elements of this experience, including patterns of courtship behavior and feelings she labels "infatuation," which seem to represent another capacity available to most human beings.²⁰

Let us grant that there exists a more or less universally human capability, "infatuation," and distinguish it from "romantic love," a way of writing, thinking about, and experiencing love that is distinctive to the cultures of Western Europe.²¹ "Romantic love" in this sense is best understood as a culturally specific discourse. The point is not that humans elsewhere lack the capacity to experience what we typically call romance or that they never do so. Rather, it is that the place that passionate love is given in Western culture and the specific form it has taken there are not universal.

The idea that love has a history is not new even if it is fairly recent. Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World* might be taken to mark the emergence of a specifically historical treatment of love,²² though Sigmund Freud and sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing had early in the century already at least implicitly relativized love by naturalizing sex. Since Rougemont, we have seen studies such as *Love as Passion*, by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, and *The Transformation of Intimacy*, by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, argue for fundamental historical shifts in the experience of love. The literary scholar Joseph Boone and the film scholar Virginia Wright Wexman have treated the history of love as expressed in the particular cultural forms they study.²³ In

spite of these books, most people in the United States now so routinely associate love and marriage that it is easy to forget that they have not always been so connected.

Marriage in most cultures has been understood mainly as a social institution and a property relation rather than a personal commitment and an emotional relation. The traditional meaning of *love* is not romance but social solidarity; it corresponds to the capacity for bonding rather than the capacity for infatuation. For most of Western history, as Luhmann argues, “What was considered important is not living out one’s own passions, but rather a voluntarily (and not compulsorily or slavishly) developed solidarity within a given order. And the master was thought of as someone who loved his property, i.e., his house and home, wife and children.”²⁴

Representations of love from such cultures are often read today as dealing with romance, but to do so is to misunderstand what these texts meant to their original audiences. The literature of ancient Greece, for example, is full of sexual intrigue and passion, yet it does not typically follow the pattern of romantic narratives, the overcoming of the obstacles that stand in the way of true love. In Euripedes’ *Medea*, for example, the protagonist kills her children because her husband has left her for another woman. The act demonstrates her passion, yet it is not primarily the loss of Jason’s love that she avenges but the loss of power and privilege that the marriage provided. By killing his children, Medea deprives Jason of the one thing he valued from the marriage. The most famous triangle in ancient Greek literature, that of Oedipus and his parents, is again not romantic. The issues here are fate and incest, and Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* tells us nothing of the characters’ desire, passion, courtship, or marriage. Even the so-called “Greek romances” are not about love triangles typical of the Middle Ages and later. Rather, they seem to be about the exchange of women between fathers and husbands. Greek New Comedy is also about such exchange, as revealed by its typical focus on the objections of the woman’s father. Yet Greek comedy probably provides the ur-story of the romance discourse, since it is about courtship and ends in marriage. It remains unromantic, however, because its chief concern is the renewal of society and not the passion of the lovers.

Not only literature but also the actual practice of love and marriage has differed significantly over the course of history. In ancient Rome, “Love in marriage was a stroke of good fortune; it was not the basis of the institution.”²⁵ In the early Middle Ages, though the Church insisted

on monogamy and indissoluble marriage, these did not become common practice until the tenth century. And marriage was still not founded on love, which was regarded as a destructive passion. The term *love* was not used in connection with official marriages. The proper attitudes between a married couple were said to be tenderness, friendship, and respect, but misogynist attitudes doubtless made such feelings difficult and perhaps rare.

The direct precursors of the literature of romance in Europe were probably written in Arabic and Persian. *Layla and Majnun*, a Persian poem of the twelfth century by Nizami, describes the obsessive love of the poet Majnun for his cousin Layla. The very extremity of Majnun's love leads Layla's father to prohibit their marriage even though Layla also loves Majnun. Like medieval European romances, this narrative tells of an impossible love. But unlike them, it clearly depicts passion as a misfortune. Majnun's love is so extreme that it drives him mad, making him unfit to be a husband.²⁶ Passion here is treated in a way that is consistent with its treatment in the ancient world. If there is a change, it is in the focus on the experience of passion; the judgment of it remains the same. Moreover, in *Layla and Majnun* the obstacle to the lovers' union is the father's prohibition, as it typically was in ancient comedy. Marriage here continues to be depicted as exchange between men in which the woman's wishes are ultimately irrelevant.

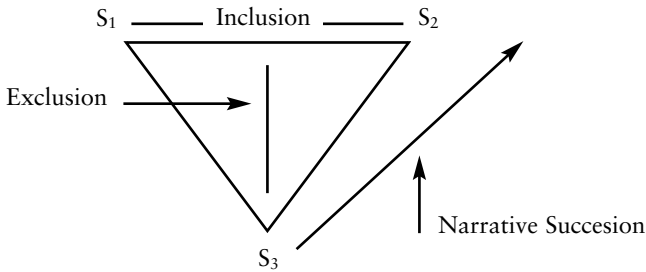
Courtly Love and Medieval Romance

Romance emerged as a counterdiscourse representing at least a theoretical alternative to the repressive character of officially sanctioned marriages among the aristocracy. The rise of the literature of romance, which includes both lyric poetry and narrative romances, corresponds to shifts in manners and morals in the courts of feudal Europe. One of these changes was that women, who had been assumed to be corrupt and corrupting, came to be idealized, and love was idealized in the process.²⁷ Historians today suggest that this idealization probably caused little immediate change in marriage or in women's lot, though its impact was felt in the long run. The idealization of love was one of the conditions for the emergence of the discourse of romance, but this elevated sense of love was not then connected to marriage. "Whether love and marriage were compatible was the great question that agitated the courts of Champagne and

Ile-de-France.”²⁸ The creed of courtly love argued that they were not; as Andreas Capellanus’s twelfth-century treatise, *The Art of Courtly Love*, insists, “Everybody knows that love can have no place between husband and wife.”²⁹ As this text describes it, love at its most pure will exist between a knight and a lady of higher rank. While this love is passionate, it is to be unconsummated. But as Boone notes, “The extent to which *amour courtois* [courtly love] existed as a real phenomenon beyond literary convention remains open to speculation.”³⁰ French historian Georges Duby describes it as a “great game” in which “the Lord’s wife was coveted, and the desire she inspired, sublimated into a sophisticated form of love, was used as a means of disciplining young knights.”³¹ Duby believes that this game only infrequently resulted in actual adultery, but the lyric poems and romances of the period often describe explicitly or implicitly consummated adultery between such partners.³²

The first two books of *The Art of Courtly Love* may have been a hoax; the text does a complete reversal in Book 3 and ends by criticizing the extramarital love it originally had endorsed, but this failure to endorse the love it first claimed to instruct is typical of the discourse that will develop after it. Romance has seldom been expressed as a doctrine or explicitly used as the basis for moral instruction.³³ But romance did produce a raft of new literary forms. It is no coincidence that the name *romance* means, in addition to a kind of love, a kind of story. These two definitions stem from the fact that romantic love was originally disseminated most widely in the extended narratives we call medieval romances.

The structure of these medieval romances is distinct from the structure typical of the narratives that precede them. Their specific narratological structure was discovered by literary scholar Donald Maddox in the *Lais* of Marie de France. Maddox argues that short narratives in the Middle Ages had been dyadic, involving an exchange between two subjects. Marie’s *Lais*, on the contrary, feature a triadic structure, including a pair of subjects and an excluded third subject. Maddox illustrates the structure as a triangle with each member of the pair at an angle on top and the third term at the bottom (see figure 1). Narrative succession occurs because the excluded subject always seeks to be included in the pair. When he or she is included, this will necessarily displace someone else.³⁴ In most romances, the narrative structure is actually represented by a triangular set of relationships among lovers, but the narrative structure is not identical with the love triangle, since other relationships—for example, fa-



Intersubjective relations and narrative succession in the discourse of romance. Adapted from Donald Maddox, “Triadic Structure in the *Lais* of Marie de France,” *Assays* 3 (1985): 22.

ther/daughter or king/court—may be represented. Maddox describes this narrative structure as *intersubjective* because all three subjects of the narrative are represented as both desiring and desirable. The intersubjective character of romance helps to explain its extraordinary power to generate emotional investment. The reader of a romance is positioned to identify with the excluded subject and experiences his or her desire, motivating and structuring the reader’s attention.

The triadic structure of romance enshrines the obstacle as the indispensable element of such a narrative. Love stories are seldom simple celebrations of ecstasy. While they may have ecstatic moments, these at best punctuate a series of events that keep the lovers apart. Historically, the discourse of romance transformed passion from a pain that it was best to avoid into an experience to be sought. The view of passion as a misfortune continues to be present in some of the early European romances, such as *Tristan*, but in them, this view is undermined by the events of the stories they tell. *Tristan* is ultimately a tragedy, but it is a marvelous adventure first. It celebrates the lovers’ passion before it shows the consequences of that passion, the lovers’ deaths. Moreover, it is a tale of mutual love, in which the woman’s desire is every bit as important as the man’s desire. As in most other European romances, the obstacles standing between Tristan and Isolde result from the fact that she is married to someone else. *Tristan*, unlike *Layla and Majnun*, is not a story of love that can never be consummated; it is a tale of an adulterous affair. What is impossible for Tristan and Isolde is not love but marriage.

Early Modern Love

Rougemont famously claims that “happy love has no history.”³⁵ While this is an accurate account of the medieval discourse of romance, it is a vast overstatement when it is applied to the entire history of Western culture. Rougemont ignores several important genres that contradict his point. The earliest of these is Shakespearean romantic comedy, which, it has been suggested, expresses a new, middle-class myth that links romantic love and marriage.³⁶ Unlike ancient comedy, Shakespeare’s is concerned with marriage as a matter of individual happiness as much as a rite of social renewal. Perhaps even more germane to the history of love, his comedies not only embody a new pattern that unites romance and marriage but also reflect the old practice of marriage as alliance.

The two couples in *Much Ado about Nothing*, for example, seem to embody two conflicting conceptions of marriage that correspond to their different creative origins. Shakespeare is believed to have borrowed the basic outline of *Much Ado* from an earlier play that itself made use of a story found in various sixteenth-century sources, including *The Faerie Queene* and an Italian novel by Matteo Bandello. These sources contain the story of Hero and Claudio, the first marriage to be planned in the play, which is quite explicitly arranged. Don Pedro courts Hero and wins her for Claudio. It is significant that Hero is Claudio’s choice, but we the audience see nothing that would help us to understand this choice. The lack of knowledge that each has of the other is the condition of Don John’s temporarily successful slander of Hero. This story gives a picture of the traditional marriage of alliance, albeit with a comic aura that largely disguises its political foundation.

The story of the play’s other couple, Beatrice and Benedict, is Shakespeare’s own invention, and it reflects the emerging ideal of marriage based on the needs and desires of increasingly individualized persons. It is true that Beatrice and Benedict are tricked into believing that each loves the other, yet this “arrangement” only works because the two already know each other deeply. That knowledge is expressed in the couple’s verbal sparring, and this competition grants a degree of equality between these two lovers that is not depicted between Hero and Claudio. Beatrice and Benedict’s sparring serves as both obstacle and enticement to their love, a combination perfectly consistent with the discourse of romance. We will see this device again in Hollywood’s screwball comedies. The difference between this early modern version of that discourse and

the one we observed in the Middle Ages is that Beatrice and Benedict do get married, and we are meant to believe in their living happily ever after.

Much Ado about Nothing is probably more a utopian vision of marriage and courtship than a reflection of widespread change in practice, and it certainly does not give us grounds for assuming that a courtship like Beatrice and Benedict's was typical. Still, historians are divided about courtship practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Lawrence Stone argues that "for all classes who possessed property, that is the top two-thirds economically, marriage before the seventeenth century was arranged by the parents, and the motives were the economic and political benefit of the kin group, not the emotional satisfaction of the individuals."³⁷ But Richard Adair asserts that "even among the aristocracy . . . a certain degree of choice was always extended to children, particularly sons, and it was rare for them to be forced into marriage with an unwanted partner."³⁸

Historians are also divided about the character of early modern marriages. Stone believes that before about 1660, they typically lacked even affection, but it has been claimed that "diaries, letters, ballads, and church court cases" prove otherwise.³⁹ Romantic love was a frequent literary concern but was uncommon in life except for one social group, "the one in which it had always existed since the twelfth century, that is the households of the prince and the great nobles."⁴⁰ And in these households romantic love existed outside marriage and was often adulterous; only by chance might it lead to marriage. Other historians believe that romantic love was much more commonly associated with marriage in Shakespeare's time, and they cite literature as evidence.⁴¹

There is more agreement that in the seventeenth century, a new form of marriage emerged in England that Stone names "the companionate marriage."⁴² Unlike the sort of marriage proposed under this name in the twentieth century, this form was not based on romance. In companionate marriage, "the choice of spouse was increasingly left in the hands of children themselves and was based mainly on temperamental compatibility with the aim of lasting companionship."⁴³ Marriage now assumed friendship or affection rather than passion as its basis, and it entailed more legal equality between the partners. As feminist literary historian Nancy Armstrong describes it, this modification of patriarchy took the form of an exchange in which the woman ceded her political power to the man in return for control of the domestic sphere and emotions.⁴⁴ This bargain

continued in force well into the twentieth century, and the Victorian doctrine of “separate spheres” can be understood as an outgrowth.

During the time the British were practicing “companionate” marriage, there developed among the French aristocracy an elaborate social code for adulterous love that Luhmann labels *amour passion*. Manuals printed during this period taught readers how to seduce and be seduced: Seduction becomes a game with two players, at which point it can only be a game that both parties see through—that is, a game in which they take part only because they wish to take part. Players agree to subject themselves to the code and its rules and allow themselves to be seduced or at least play for a while with fire. The game’s fascination lies in this quality of its conceivably getting out of control—from the points of view of both players.⁴⁵

Where medieval discourse had idealized love, the Classical Age “paradoxicalized” it. “The special sphere accorded to love relations makes it clear that here *the code is ‘only a code’ and that love is an emotion preformed, and indeed prescribed, in literature*, and no longer directed by social institutions such as family or religion.”⁴⁶ In this system, love is not merely opposed to marriage; society has created a separate social arrangement in which love can flourish. We don’t remember the literature of *amour passion* very often these days, but the literature of reaction against it from the late eighteenth century is quite familiar. Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni* and Laclos’s novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* are representations of *amour passion* from the point of view of romantic love, its successor in cultural dominance. The seducer now is either an evil exploiter of innocence and/or a romantic who is unaware of him- or herself.

The Triumph of Romance

The emergence of the discourse of romance as the dominant way of conceiving love and marriage depends upon the historical evolution of the individual. As capitalism dissolved more and more of the social bonds that had structured traditional societies, persons became increasingly individualized. Individuals are persons who are understood to be differentiated from all others and not to be defined by membership in a class or caste. To be an individual is to have a distinctive inner life or psychology. To be sure, the traditional view of personhood assumed a substantial soul, but the soul’s distinctiveness was known only to God. In the feudal era, no-

bles were more individualized than members of other classes were. The rise of capitalism not only extended individualization, first to the bourgeoisie and then to other classes, but made persons of these classes more individualized than medieval lords and ladies. Romantic love accompanied the dawning of individualization among the bourgeoisie, and it became a dominant discourse only when individualization was widespread.

It was only in the nineteenth century that romantic expectations began to be commonly attached to marriage. As Stone puts it,

It was not . . . until the romantic movement and the rise of the novel, especially the pulp novel, in the nineteenth century, that society at large accepted a new idea—that it was normal and indeed praiseworthy for young men and women to fall passionately in love, and that there must be something wrong with those who have failed to have such an overwhelming experience some time in late adolescence or early manhood [*sic*].⁴⁷

Yet this shift in cultural values does not mean either that marriages suddenly became more passionate or loving or that romance now ruled the emotional world without opposition. While the separate spheres that men and women were encouraged to inhabit probably helped to foster a romantic conception of marriage by making the other gender more mysterious, this separation also must have inhibited marital love. Victorian sexual repression meant that men continued to look for sexual satisfaction outside marriage. We have evidence from such sources as letters and diaries that romantic love was indeed increasingly the dominant conception of the grounds for marriage during the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ In these letters and diaries people use the romantic language of novels to describe their own experience of love. At the same time, marriage manuals consistently warn their readers against the illusions of romantic love. Both religious and “scientific” advice books of the period depict the ideal marriage as something like a successful business arrangement. Love is often identified with devotion and friendship rather than romance or pleasure. Conceptions of love and marriage in the nineteenth century were divided among those deriving from romance, from companionate marriage, from more traditional economic and social considerations, and from other sources.

As long as the opposition between love and marriage remained dominant in society, fiction continued to follow the pattern Rougemont

describes. When, as Luhmann puts it, “passionate love [was proclaimed] to be the very principle upon which the *choice* of a spouse should be based,” the typical narrative of romance also changed: “the old thesis of the incompatibility of love and marriage had to be covered up; the end of the novel was not the end of life.”⁴⁹ While the medieval and early modern models assumed a fundamental incompatibility between romance and marriage, the romantic ideology of the nineteenth century assumed their inseparability. It is this later version of romance that was dominant in America in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The most popular narratives of this era, both in print and on screen, unite romantic love and marriage more explicitly than was typical even in the early nineteenth century. This version of the discourse of romance holds that there is a right man or woman for each person. It projects a life story that involves meeting that individual and living with him or her in marriage.

There is general agreement among historians of love and marriage that novels were the primary means by which a romantic conception of marriage came to be widely held.⁵⁰ Since the fictional status of novels and movies is often taken to compromise any claim to truth that they may seem to make, we may wonder why fiction could have served this function. We call the cognitive attitude that a typical consumer of fiction takes toward a story “suspension of disbelief.” The reader or viewer knows that what he or she is experiencing is “only a story,” but the full experience of the narrative depends on a temporary forgetting of this knowledge. If the story is successful, most readers or viewers will not merely comprehend the words or images but also live with and through the characters for the duration of the narrative. In surrendering to the story, the reader or viewer typically accepts the point or points of identification that the text offers. So readers, male or female, of *Jane Eyre* usually identify much more with Jane, the narrator and protagonist, than with any of the other characters. Literary and film theorists describe this effect as the “positioning” of the reader or spectator. Such positioning involves more than emotional identification with a character; it can entail the acceptance of a whole range of assumptions associated with the character. The reader of *Jane Eyre* is positioned not merely to want for Jane what Jane herself most wants—to marry Rochester—but also to accept, at least while in the world of the novel, that the desire to marry for love is natural. Such positioning is all the more effective and consequential when, as is the case here, it reinforces the positioning of discourse in general social circulation.

After the story is finished, “disbelief” is resumed. The reader, having finished the novel, doesn’t believe that Jane Eyre is a real person. The reader’s emotional experience produced by the novel is real, however. If, in seeking similar experiences, a reader repeatedly experiences the same kind of narrative pattern, might that not also come to seem real or true even if the characters and events are never held to be factual? And if the narrative pattern confirms or illustrates more broadly held beliefs or expectations, then it would in a sense be “true” in advance of the reading. We can assume that, so long as fictional romance was at odds with social practice, it would typically have been regarded as fantasy and would not usually have led people to expect to experience the pattern in their own lives. But as the traditional practice broke down and individuals increasingly chose their own partners, the fictional discourse no longer seemed so fantastic. Moreover, the breakdown of the traditional practice increased interest in fictional romance, and technological innovation in the nineteenth century meant that that interest could be indulged as never before. We can’t say that fiction by itself changed the practice of courtship and marriage, but we can say that it was part of the context that helped form new practices.

In the nineteenth century, romance became grafted onto marriage, but it has never become entirely at ease with the union. This combination produced a tension within the discourse because its essential characteristics derive from adulterous love. As the chapters in the first section of this book will show, narratives written in the discourse of romance contain in some form, however repressed or vestigial, what Luhmann called “the old thesis” of love’s incompatibility with marriage. Because the fundamental structure of romance narratives is triadic, the form does not lend itself to accounts of the couple. The stories that romance narratives tell now more often than not endorse marriage, but the endorsement typically relies on the excitement and adventure of illicit love. Often the entire story is taken up with overcoming obstacles, so that only in the end, offscreen, as it were, do the lovers fulfill their desire for each other.

Thus, the last and perhaps most important characteristic of the discourse of romance: whatever its attitude toward marriage, it does not depict it. Romance may describe chaste courtly love, it may revel in adulterous passion, or it may give an account of an extended courtship ending in a marriage made in heaven, but it cannot tell the story of a marriage. It is in part because of this inability that the discourse of intimacy arose.

The Marriage Crisis

The growth of capitalism not only made people into individuals; it also caused older social relations to dissolve. Where marriage had previously been a central structure in which property could be preserved or augmented, under capitalism it tended to lose this role. As institutions such as the corporation replaced the family as the major repositories of wealth, marriage was increasingly freed from the necessity of being a financial alliance. Historian John Gillis has argued that even the rituals associated with marriage became increasingly private, as weddings, kissing, and other behaviors retreated from public spaces.⁵¹ Marriage became more private as its social function became less significant.

The social expectation of marriage had always been binding on women in a way that it had not been on men. Marriage was expected because women had few if any socially acceptable alternatives. But as women began to envision life projects beyond those of wife and mother, marriage became not only an option rather than a rule but also an option that might get in the way of a career or of a quest for personal fulfillment. While the vast majority of women still married, they were increasingly unwilling to accept unhappiness as the price for keeping a marriage together. Until the twentieth century, divorce, which Milton had argued in the seventeenth century was a necessary condition for loving marriages, remained socially taboo even when and where it became legal.

Paradoxically, it was only when marriage became a choice that expectations of it radically increased. Marriage became both a bigger—or at least different—site for emotional investment and a more fragile bond. As long as marriage functioned as the cornerstone of the social edifice, divorce had to be prohibited or strongly discouraged. Traditionally, this state of affairs was accepted because marriages were not assumed to provide the benefits of romantic love or indeed to exist for the purpose of making individuals happy. But with marriage now being less a social necessity and with more individualized persons demanding happiness, divorce became more acceptable and more common. The new vision of romantic marriage engendered expectations that many marriages did not fulfill, in part because romance offered no vision of how marriage might fulfill them.

According to May, the result was a massive shift in patterns of marriage and divorce. “During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American marriages began to collapse at an unprecedented rate. Between

1867 and 1929, the population of the United States increased 300 percent, the number of marriages 400 percent, and the divorce rate 2,000 percent. By the end of the 1920s, more than one marriage in six ended in divorce every year.”⁵² If divorce had been increasing since the nineteenth century, it continued to do so in the twentieth. Between 1910 and 1940, the divorce rate nearly doubled, in spite of a slight decline in the 1930s.⁵³ Debate over the causes of the crisis raged in newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals. Many explanations were offered, ranging from women’s emancipation and liberal divorce laws to the general conditions of urban life. May’s explanation is that rising expectations of personal satisfaction and happiness put an increased burden on marriage that it was unable to bear. May seems unaware, however, that a version of this explanation was also articulated at the time. Several studies related the failure of marriages to expectations engendered by romance.⁵⁴ If, as Luhmann notes, this explanation remains speculative, May’s analysis of divorce cases goes some way toward supporting it.⁵⁵ May adds to the traditional sources of romance the example set by movie stars, such as Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, who became identified “with an entirely new type of home.”⁵⁶ While the home had traditionally been identified as an institution that demanded sacrifice and communal values, the new home was “self-contained” and “geared to personal happiness.”⁵⁷

That the rise in the divorce rate should be considered a crisis shows that older views of marriage, both religious and secular, persisted. Even though sociologists recognized that marriage no longer played the same role that it used to, they continued to see it as a fundamental social building block. While there were critics of marriage who thought that the institution should be abolished, most of the discussion of the crisis involved proposals for trying to save it. As we will see in chapter 2, feminists like Elinor Glyn and Marie Carmichael Stopes continued to treat marriage as the only legitimate form of relationship. More than this, they treated marriage as having the potential to yield a transcendent happiness available from no other source. Thus marriage, increasingly freed from its social obligations, also came increasingly under the pressure of ever-greater personal expectations. The discourse of romance narrated these expectations, but it was not by itself responsible for their rise. Rather, increasing social fragmentation meant that marriage had to fill in the emotional gap left by the demise of other relations. As individuals found themselves ever more alienated from each other and from their work, they made marriage the refuge of human connection.

Intimacy

Sociologist Francesca Cancian remarks of early nineteenth-century America that “marital intimacy, in the modern sense of emotional expression and verbal disclosure of personal experience, was probably rare. Instead, husband and wife were likely to share a more formal and wordless kind of love, based on duty, working together, mutual help, and sex.”⁵⁸ My investigation into the discourses of love supports Cancian’s contention, for emotional expression and verbal disclosure of personal experience were not typically understood to define a good marriage in the nineteenth century. In her study of nineteenth-century American love letters, the American studies scholar Karen Lystra finds that “self-disclosure” was understood to be an important aspect of courtship but finds much less of it in letters written by couples after they married.⁵⁹ While romantic love urged emotional expression outside marriage in courtship or adultery, it didn’t provide a model for the continuing expression of emotion. As historian Peter Stearns has shown, Victorian culture did value intense emotional experience and its expression in poetry and other arts, but within a marriage, the need for “serenity” demanded “emotional repression.”⁶⁰ Cancian names qualities that we have come to expect in marriage only since the twentieth century.

The discourse of intimacy is both an expression of these new expectations of marriage and a response to the crisis that they in part provoked. The new desire for intimacy, a special closeness founded on verbal openness, has its roots in alienation caused by social fragmentation under capitalism. But this desire was in the beginning formulated in terms of the discourse of romance. It was psychotherapy, especially psychoanalysis, that enabled a new discourse to emerge. Since therapy is by definition a response to an illness, a crisis, the application of it to marriage could come only after a crisis or problem in marriage was widely perceived. At one level, the discourse of intimacy arose because many people—including social scientists, public moralists, politicians, and psychoanalysts, but also private individuals—were troubled by the failure of marriages to last and to satisfy. But the discourse of intimacy is also a more direct response to the reduced social role of marriage. Since marriage was increasingly seen as a private matter, it could no longer be justified as the exclusive legitimate context for sexual relations. People began experimenting more openly and in larger numbers with various alternatives to marriage, including heterosexual and homosexual practices. From the late nineteenth

through the mid-twentieth centuries, courtship and marriage continued to be the very powerful norm, but by the 1960s, a new term, *relationship*, had emerged to cover the new variety of commonly practiced erotically invested bonds between individuals. Marriage was now only one alternative, albeit still the dominant one, in which intimacy might occur.

In that last sentence, *intimacy* is used ambiguously. It could mean in the context either “sexual relations” or “emotional closeness.” While both of these meanings persist today, the connotations of the word *intimacy* have subtly changed during the twentieth century. From the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century, it was, as it still is, a euphemism for sexual relations. But its primary meanings were, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “the state of being personally intimate; intimate friendship or acquaintance; familiar intercourse; close familiarity; an instance of this.” Thus, in Jane Austen’s novels, intimacy was what a family shared and what it might extend to specially favored others. Intimacy was not what Elisabeth Bennet, say, expected to achieve in her marriage to Darcy; it was rather a simple condition of the married state. By the late twentieth century, however, intimacy had become a quality by which a marriage could be measured. Thus, a typical formulation from an advice book states that “of all the components of marriage, intimacy is probably the quality most longed for, and often the most elusive.”⁶¹ Intimacy was once what distinguished marriage and family from most other social relations; it is now a quality that marriages may or may not have and that couples are told they must work to attain.

If love is a duty, as it was conceived in the traditional view of marriage, then in principle anyone is capable of performing it. If love is something that befalls one, as the discourse of romance would have it, then whether a couple loves is beyond their control. It is the premise of the discourse of intimacy that love is something that happens between lovers. While it is partly a function of who they are as individuals, it is also a function of how they behave in the relationship. In the early part of the twentieth century, popular advisers such as Dorothy Dix began to pave the way for the new discourse. These advisers reflected an increasingly widespread belief that some individuals are suited psychologically for each other, while others are unsuited and should not marry. Moreover, advice columnists probably helped to condition the population to accept the idea that a marriage could be “worked on,” even though their recommendations tended to be fairly limited in scope. We get the first hints of a deeper analysis of marriage and its problems in the 1920s, but these advice

books remain mainly within the discourse of romance; their novelty lies in applying that discourse explicitly to marital relationships. It is only after World War II, and mainly after the 1960s, that intimacy as a distinct discourse develops, producing new descriptions of and prescriptions for the “relationship.” It also has produced a distinctive narrative form. Besides exposition and instruction, intimacy manuals typically rely on the case history as a major element. The case history has been picked up by novelists, filmmakers, and even songwriters and has been transformed into new genres telling new kinds of stories that are increasingly influential.

Readers will, I am sure, be aware that the discourse of intimacy has not “solved” the crisis of marriage. Divorce rates have leveled off, but they have not receded. What’s more, there is now evidence that fewer people are getting married. Some feminists and others on the left have long considered marriage an inherently oppressive institution. More recently, advocates of same-sex marriage are challenging some of the basic terms in which marriage has been understood. Our society is increasingly accepting of a diversity of intimate relationships, yet the widespread influence of the discourse of intimacy suggests that most Americans still value marriage very highly. It is certainly true that none of the alternatives to marriage seem satisfactory replacements for it. Intimacy discourse thus finds itself caught between its bias toward marriage and its assumption that marriage is just one kind of relationship. In the examples discussed below, we will see both sides of this tension explored. The new film genre, “the relationship story,” takes the nonmarital relationship as its focus. Fiction by the writers John Updike and Alison Lurie, on the contrary, looks at marriage with a brutal honesty that was not possible when marriage seemed to hold society together. In both genres, marriage is presented as difficult and likely to fail, yet happy marriage remains at least the implicit goal of the characters depicted.

Even in its most distinct expressions, the discourse of intimacy has not banished romance, which remains an element of the other discourse. Romance is in intimacy a stage in the relationship, or a reproducible experience that a couple can make or purchase.⁶² Moreover, the discourse of romance continues to exist on its own. There is much evidence in contemporary novels and movies to show that romance is more influential than ever. The success of romantic films such as *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990), a modern Cinderella story, and the massive industry that the formula romance has become demonstrate this beyond reasonable doubt.

While the two discourses are in part contradictory, the differences between them often go unrecognized because they coexist with each other and most of us are influenced by both of them. Both discourses promise a great deal in the name of love. Romance offers adventure, intense emotion, and the possibility of finding the perfect mate. Intimacy promises deep communication, friendship, and sharing that will last beyond the passion of new love. As we will see, both discourses cover over internal contradictions that they cannot resolve, making their visions of love seem more complete and adequate than they are. By recognizing the gaps in these conceptions, it is more likely that one can approach relationships with appropriate expectations.

The connection between romance and marriage forged in the nineteenth century was an expression of individualism, of the growing freedom of the individual from traditional social structures. The development of the discourse of intimacy represents both the intensification of that process and a reaction against it. Where romance championed the autonomous individual, intimacy insists on a balance between autonomy and attachment. Thus, intimacy at the start of the millennium has become perhaps the most significant refuge from the social fragmentation of late capitalism. Unfortunately, it is a purely private refuge, and thus no solution to the degradation of society.