

The Diversity of Love Journal

Love in Popular Culture and Literary Explorations: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Love Studies, 14-16 March 2025

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The conference sought to enhance diversity in love research across various disciplines and cultures, emphasizing international collaboration and the integration of concepts from diverse fields studying love. The participants underscored the significance of comprehending cultural contexts when researchers investigate how individuals live and love in various societies.

The overview of thematic sessions and the scope of diverse presentations are published in [another article](#) in this journal.

Here are the summaries of the key points of presentations and discussions as they are presented in the abstracts submitted by

presenters for the session **Love in Popular Culture and Literary Explorations**, chaired by *Willie van Peer from Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Germany*.

Representation of love in documentary photography

by *Petra Krpan from the University of Zagreb in Croatia*

Research Background. This paper explores various representations of love in photography, examining how visual narratives encapsulate the emotional, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of this emotion. The aim of this paper is to investigate how photography serves as a medium to construct, interpret, and communicate the complex essence of love across diverse contexts, including romantic, familial, and self-love. It seeks to uncover the mechanisms by which photographs evoke emotional resonance, reflect social norms, and challenge traditional notions of intimacy and affection.

The aims of the study and its method. Employing a methodological framework that integrates semiotics, phenomenology, and visual culture analysis, the study draws on the theoretical contributions of Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Barthes' semiotic theory, particularly as outlined in *Camera Lucida*, guides the examination of symbolic elements in photographs and the *punctum*—the emotional impact of an image. Sontag's critical perspectives from *On Photography* provide insight into the social and cultural constructs influencing the photographic depiction of love. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology informs the analysis of embodied perception, emphasizing the viewer's interaction with photographic representations of intimacy and emotion. The research identifies recurring motifs in photography, such as physical proximity, shared gaze, and symbolic

objects, all of which signify love and its various nuances. It also examines how photographic techniques, such as lighting, composition, and color, amplify emotional resonance. The analysis considers the intersection of love with societal constructs such as gender, race, and class, illustrating how cultural norms shape and are reflected in visual representations. Moreover, the paper includes the performative nature of love in media and social platforms, contrasted with raw, unfiltered portrayals in documentary photography.

Summary of the results and conclusions. Finally, this research underscores photography's unique ability to capture fleeting moments of intimacy and emotion, offering profound insights into the human condition and the evolving expressions of love in visual culture. Using these theoretical frameworks, the results of the study provided a more nuanced picture of how love is seen, felt, and constructed visually, adding to larger conversations in visual studies, cultural theory, and emotional semiotics.

Myths of love in a contemporary Nordic teenage series

by Laura Czernysz from the University of Gdańsk, Poland

Research Background. My topic is important as it deepens the analysis of the contemporary depiction of love in media and how this depiction can be rooted in classical myths. One of the pioneering works in the area of myths of love is *Love in the Western World and Myths of Love* by Denis de Rougemont. To this day, these remain the most important and fundamental works on the topic.

The aims of the study and its method. The aim of the study is to prove that the classical myths of love are present and identifiable in contemporary Nordic teenage series.

The method chosen to achieve this is a comparative analysis of three specifically chosen pairs of classical stories (myths) and series.

The “myth of love” in this study is to be understood as a combination of intertextuality, as well as Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structural definition of a myth, John Holloway’s literary definition of a myth, and, most importantly, Denis de Rougemont’s definition of a myth of love.

Summary of the results and conclusions. The results showed that the myths of love are present in the chosen series. Even though some connections between the two stories were not always direct, a specific connection of meanings of their elements was still identifiable. The usage of dictionaries of symbols and secondary sources about the myths proved to be very helpful in deepening the analysis.

In conclusion, the study proves that a comparative analysis of pairs of classical and contemporary stories using the myths of love is an effective method of identifying the patterns of depiction of love in media. The myths of love are certainly present in contemporary Nordic teenage series, which presents an opportunity to study the relevance of classical myths of love on an even broader field.

Mapping Desire in Problematic Phenomena between Romantic Love Discourse and Digital Media

by Katherine Joseph from the University of East London in the UK

Research Background. The ubiquity of digitally-mediated romantic love is well-established (Anderson et al., 2020; Finkel et al., 2012; Flug, 2016). Problematic phenomena like catfishing, ghosting, and body commodification represent one of the more sensational junctures, represented in popular media by television series like “Tinder Swindler” and “Sweet Body: My Catfish Nightmare.” Popularized in 2010 with

the commercial success of “Catfish: The Movie,” catfishing refers to the practice of creating and using a fictitious persona online to intentionally deceive others. Ghosting similarly took root in the mid-2010s and is a term used to describe the dissolution of a relationship by the total removal of communication. The final problematic phenomenon I focus on is body commodification, or the way the self becomes an object under the conditions of online dating platforms. To map the flows of desire, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s (2014) assemblage theory.

The aims of the study and its method. In this study, I explore how the discourse of romantic love informs the assemblage of desire in catfishing, ghosting, and body commodification. Through this mapping, I offer a theory of the movement of romantic love imaginations from the individual to the collective level.

I take an inductive approach to this research, applying Deleuze and Guattari’s (2014) assemblage theory to map the flows of desire. I use their four-way mapping of assemblage, along with the forces of molarity, molecularity, and lines of flight, to explain how romantic love discourse revs up desire in cases of body commodification, catfishing, and ghosting.

Summary of the results and conclusions. I present a mapping of each phenomenon, pointing first to the expressions and enunciations that create the territory of the assemblage. I think this points to the flight of desire. I utilize this mapping to theorize the flow of affective potential, which creates conditions and precarious realities that allow a renegotiation of reality and allow individuals to engage with these phenomena. With the establishment of these conditions, I theorize affective imaginaries that mobilize with intention toward specific trajectories.

From this theoretical point, I offer a theorization of affectively charged

imaginaries that links discursive conditions of romantic love to their affective correlates. I theorize that affective imaginaries are mobilized at the individual level and become organized on a collective level, allowing discourse to become ideology.

Imagination, Pain, and Redemption in the Proustian Conception of Love

by *Enrico Palma from Università di Catania in Italy*

Research Background. My background was taken from the main critical interpretations on the topic as well as from great classics of literature and philosophy, including Stendhal, Heidegger, Deleuze, and Barthes. In particular, I focused on a possible application of Heidegger's existential analytics to Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), highlighting common points and formulating original concepts.

The aims of the study and its method. The aim of the research was to define the Proustian conception of love, using a basically philosophical and hermeneutic methodology. The main hypothesis is that the Parisian writer, analyzing the feeling of love in his work, provided very plausible reasons regarding what, first of all, love requires: the redemption of existence from finitude and pain. According to Heideggerian thought at the height of *Being and Time*, the human being is a finite temporal entity that lacks a foundation. One of the possible ways of attributing a foundation to existence, and therefore a reason for solidity, is precisely the encounter with the other in reciprocated love. Therefore, through this Heideggerian approach, my study of love in Proust has moved along this line, evaluating whether it is actually one of the possibilities of removing the finitude, solitude, and suffering of life, or whether it

instead represents an illusion that causes more pain than it would like to eliminate.

Summary of the results and conclusions. My conclusion is that, although Proust did not solve one of the greatest existential enigmas, he explained its origin, functioning, and purposes. Love is the product of the subject's imagination, which continuously and ceaselessly operates this miraculous transformation, always changing the material to be molded. According to Proust, love is so painful because we force ourselves, engulfed by it, to make our love object resemble this puppet created by our imagination. The object of love is also a philosophical question because it represents the answer to the ultimate question of meaning: the request to give and receive tenderness, the appeal for a decisive meaning to come to life, and ultimately the strongest and most intense prayer that can be formulated for salvation. Even if love is an unfounded plan of salvation, falling in love is necessary because only through suffering can one find the truth of life. Love, says Proust, is this curse that makes one foolish, a sort of bad luck, which cannot be acted upon otherwise than by waiting for the happy hour of liberation from the enchantment. In this way, only by knowing it in all its aspects, both happy and dangerous, can one free oneself from the grip of this fickle feeling.

In conclusion, if the Proustian thesis is a great denial of the salvific reality of love, it nevertheless represents one of the fundamental moments of existence, which are part of its truth. A truth, however, must be fully known in order to be able to dominate it as much as possible and obtain more happiness and less pain.

**A study of popular romantic fiction over time:
why dating apps should focus on character**

rather than appearance

by *Jessica Symons from Visioning Lab in the UK*

Research Background. Ontology Maker is an AI-enabled process for producing multilingual bespoke glossaries and controlled vocabularies for projects and teams in different sectors. The use of specific terms when working together helps improve collaboration and productivity and reduce miscommunication.

The first iteration of this tool focused on the dating sector. Dating apps match people through language, but this focus on specific terms inhibits people's ability to find each other. People who found each other by chance would say, 'We were both on the same app, but we were never matched.'

This led to the research question, 'What are the optimum terms that can be used in a love search tool to facilitate the 'right' people finding each other?' This led to a series of other questions, such as 'How do people know who is 'right'?' 'What does 'right' even mean? Taking the definition of 'right' as the person I am looking for right now (whether that is a one-night stand or a lifetime marriage), how can an AI-enabled tool develop a language of love that can be used to match the right people?

The aims of the study and its method.

For this study, I developed an AI tool, Ontology Maker, to produce a glossary of love for people looking for a traditional match—a suitor for marriage. Working with historical romantic fiction across multiple languages (primarily English, but also Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, French, Russian, German, Spanish, and Italian), I identified a set of interrelated terms categorized according to specific criteria. This

process identified key concepts and themes in more than 150 of the most popular romantic stories from Western and Asian cultures.

Summary of the results and conclusions. Preliminary findings from the study show that while predictable criteria such as appropriate gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation are clearly important in the selection of a suitable partner for marriage, personality traits also figure prominently in what people look for. In this paper, I argue that dating apps should pay considerably less attention to appearance and instead focus on character. After all, a lifelong marriage is a partnership where what you do matters significantly more than how you look.

The intersection of love and intellectualism in the literary genre of Dark Academia

by *Cyntia Kálmánová* from *J. Selye University in Slovakia*

Research Background. The Dark Academia genre is heavily influenced by a love of all things academic, the philosophy of the ancient classics, secret societies, and the Gothic style of art. The themes are deeply rooted in intellectualism and existentialism, and love seems to be linked to an intense desire to learn and follow strict academic rules. The study sets out to explore the multifaceted nature of love in the context of Dark Academia, delving into its turbulent and more intense character within the genre's fascination with chaos and distress to see how it is capable of driving individuals to emotional extremes.

The aims of the study and its method. In Dark Academia, the theme of love is frequently depicted with tragic and complex undertones, serving to emphasize the notion of fleeing human nature. Simultaneously, it frequently portrays love as an obsessive emotion, marked by yearning, emotional unavailability, and a sense of alienation. This phenomenon manifests in diverse forms in the genre of Dark Academia, such as

forbidden or unrequited love, platonic, intellectual love, or ravaging loyalty. The present study aims to explore the role of love as depicted in a particular work of Dark Academia, considering it as an intricate concept that blurs the boundaries between intellectual and romantic attraction. The destructive nature of this concept is what compels characters into morally questionable behaviors, leading to obsessive patterns that compromise their intellect.

The study will provide a comprehensive analysis of the urtext of the Dark Academia genre, namely *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt, with a particular focus on the role of love in shaping the novel's sense of fatalism. This exploration will be undertaken through the perspective of a closely knit group of academics and their shared affinity, examining how these characters are constantly seeking something essentially philosophical, whether in their intellectual or emotional pursuits.

Summary of the results and conclusions. The results of the study will introduce a more platonic form of love that flourishes from the bond over shared intellectual pursuits: a passion for art, knowledge, and the beauty of learning. By examining the novel *The Secret History*, the study reveals that the characters' relationship is not only characterized by romantic attraction but also by a mutual intellectual aspiration grounded in philosophical beliefs to achieve something collectively that surpasses conventional boundaries yet becomes potentially toxic.

In summary, the concept of love in Dark Academia is characterized by its complexity, intensity, and tragic nature. The research shows that love plays a big part in Dark Academia. It adds to the intellectual and existential undercurrents of the genre, which is in line with its focus on the darker sides of human experience. Love is both a destructive and a motivating force, and it adds to the themes of bonding, obsession, and a sense of superiority.

The intentionality of the action of love in 'Bridget Jones's Diary' and 'Pride and Prejudice'

by Bartłomiej Kowalczyk from The University of Liverpool in the UK

Research Background. The study focuses on the analysis of the intentionality of the action of love in two different literary contexts: the contemporary novel "Bridget Jones's Diary" and the classic "Pride and Prejudice". This analysis uses a corpus approach, examining the frequency and meaning of verbs collocating with the verb "to love" in both texts. This allows for the examination of how the action of love is conceptualized and realized in these two different narratives.

The aims of the study and its method. The main aim of the study is to compare the intentional aspects of love in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Pride and Prejudice* by analyzing the verbs most frequently occurring in the vicinity of the word "to love." The study consists of identifying and analyzing the most frequently collocating verbs with "to love" in both corpora. The method is based on quantitative (frequency of occurrence) and qualitative (meaning of collocations) analysis of verbs. This allows for the identification of dominant meanings and intentional aspects of the action of love in both texts studied.

Summary of the results and conclusions. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the most frequently collocated verbs with "to love" are, among others, "see", "take", "speak", "want", "give", and "find". The strongest collocations in terms of meaning are "ask", "want", "meet", and "like". The dominant meaning related to the action of love is "see", which suggests perceiving the other person in a certain way. The meanings of "give" (selflessness) and "take" (intentionality) are also significant. In the context of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the action of love is related to perception, giving, taking, and communication. In relation to *Pride and*

Prejudice, the most frequently collocating verbs are “suppose”, “like”, “wish”, and “ask”. The verb “suppose” is the strongest collocation in terms of the similarity of meaning. The dominant actions that are present in *Pride and Prejudice* are verbs related to emotions “wish”, “hope”, “hate”, and “admire”.

The study shows the diversity of intentional aspects of love, where perception and communication are strongly emphasized in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, with elements of selflessness and the desire for possession. In the context of *Pride and Prejudice*, the intentionality of love seems to be depicted in terms of the need for acceptance, the desire for closeness, the fear of loss, and the need for self-expression. In summary, the study sheds light on the intentionality of love’s action in different literary contexts, emphasizing its multidimensionality and dependence on a specific narrative.

You can see the abstracts from the sessions **Evolutionary and Cultural Perspectives on Love** and **Experiences and Expressions of Love** in other articles.

See other articles on related topics in the rubrics of **language of Love**, **literary studies of love**, **love in different cultures**, **love theories**, **modern love studies**.