

## Love and Marriage, Yesterday and Today

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Abstract: Taking as its starting-point Eva Illouz's sociological study *Why Love Hurts* (2012), this paper develops a philosophical framework for understanding love and marriage, particularly in their contemporary manifestations. To begin with, premodern practices in love and marriage during the ancient Greek and Byzantine eras are outlined and contrasted with modern forms of love, whose overriding features are (according to Illouz) suffering and disappointment. To cast some light upon this great transformation in the fortunes of love the discussion takes an axiological and metaphysical turn by placing the transformation within the context of the kind of relational morality and metaphysics proposed by many idealist philosophers.

Keywords: Eva Illouz, Love, Marriage, Idealism

In *Why Love Hurts*, Eva Illouz undertakes a fascinating exploration of the new and myriad ways in which romantic love today produces suffering, often of an intense and destructive sort (Illouz, 2012). I wish to take this exploration further, in part by looking further backwards towards historical periods not considered in much detail by Illouz, but also and more importantly by examining the data from a distinctly philosophical perspective. Illouz works as a sociologist, and thus she is primarily interested in the ways in which the social and cultural institutions of modernity have made romantic misery possible. Philosophers, unfortunately, tend to neglect the insights of neighbouring, let alone distant, disciplines, a sign no doubt of the increasing specialisation of the academy. But there is clearly much to be gained from sociological analyses, particularly when dealing with multifaceted, perplexing and protean social phenomena such as love and marriage. What I wish to do, then, is to both engage with and challenge Illouz's sociological account. My strategy in doing so will involve an historical journey much like the one Illouz herself takes, so as to bring out in clearer fashion the fundamental philosophical issues at stake, which are (to put the matter very roughly) of a metaphysical and axiological character, to do with the questions of existence and value.

The first part of the paper will take a step back into the premodern world, with particular reference to ancient and medieval societies and their understanding of love and marriage. This will provide an instructive point of contrast with modern practices of love and marriage, whose genesis and nature will be discussed in the second section of the paper. In charting the trajectory of love and marriage from premodern to modern times, the aim is not simply the historical one of describing and comparing discourses and institutions around love and marriage. The principal aim, rather, is to subject these ideas and practices to philosophical scrutiny, to uncover and evaluate their underlying metaphysical and axiological bases – and a beginning in this direction will be made in the third and final part of the paper.

### LOVE AND MARRIAGE "YESTERDAY"

Another fascinating study of love and marriage was carried out by the Oxford social anthropologist, John Campbell. Relying upon first-hand fieldwork undertaken in 1954-55 amongst a provincial, sheep grazing community (the Sarakatsani) in a mountainous area of northwestern Greece, Campbell acquired an intimate knowledge of various facets of the life of this community and subsequently reported his findings in his seminal work, *Honour, Family and Patronage* (Campbell, 1964). Some of the more interesting discoveries related to the community's marriage practices, particularly those that would strike many contemporary Westerners as strange, if not worse. Campbell found, for example, a peculiar absence of romance prior to marriage:

"Despite the contrary testimony of love songs, romantic courtship is impossible. 'The songs tell lies', the Sarakatsani say. Virtually all marriages are arranged. It would be shameful for a man or girl to express any preference, and they have only to answer the specific question, «Will you marry this particular man or girl?» It is almost impossible for a girl to refuse the bridegroom of her family's choice if they insist upon it, although it is believed that a good father or brother ought not to force her into marriage against her will. But it is also said that a daughter should be guided by her parents' or brothers' choice, and in the period of the last twenty years I have discovered evidence of only two cases of «marriage by force» (παντρεία με τὸ ζῶσι). It is more difficult for a father or brother to dictate to a potential bridegroom, but here again, in most cases, unless his feelings are very strongly engaged against a particular girl, the weight of family opinion is likely to persuade him to accept their decision... A marriage is arranged to suit the requirements of the family group, not the individual preference of the youth or maiden." (Campbell, 1964: 124-125)

The essentially familial nature of marriage ruled out, or at least minimised the influence of, individual choice and romantic affection, as Campbell observes:

”The betrothal contract amongst the Sarakatsani...is an agreement between families rather than individuals. The groom contracts to marry a certain man’s daughter whose face he may never have seen rather than a particular person of the opposite sex.” (Campbell, 1964: 127)

”During the months which pass between the betrothal and the day of the marriage... there is no communication between the two groups.” (Campbell, 1964: 132)

Given the absence of romance prior to marriage, one would not expect the level of affection or intimacy amongst the newlyweds to be great. Interestingly, however, newly married couples barely countenance such romance or intimacy as an ideal to aspire towards:

”During the early months of the marriage the young husband gives the minimum of overt public attention to his bride. He may, in stern, almost harsh, tones, make some simple request of her for food and drink or dry clothes, but he does not make conversation.” (Campbell, 1964: 65)

Campbell later explains that, “The husband’s obligations and affections are still entirely contained within his own family of origin,” and so he offers little or no affective interest to his bride (Campbell, 1964: 66). Again, speaking of the first six nights of the marriage, Campbell writes about the husband: “There is no question at this stage of his having any affection for his bride.” (*Ibidem*) No doubt, some degree of affection would usually develop with time, but it is not commonly there from the beginning.

I offer Campbell’s fieldwork as a starting-point towards a *premodern model of love and marriage*, one that is far removed from contemporary sentiments and standards, if not also posing a challenge to these sentiments and standards. This premodern model can be observed in numerous times and places, including ancient Greek society. Indeed, the continuities on this plane between the Sarakatsani and the ancients is remarkable, as has been noted by Peter Walcot, a distinguished Greek classics scholar who devoted much of his career to studying the value systems and social institutions of the ancient Greeks, drawing parallels along the way with premodern patterns of life in modern peasant communities in Greece and Turkey.

One of the themes of Walcot's work is the disconnection between love and marriage in premodern societies. In an insightful paper published in 1987, "Romantic Love and True Love: Greek Attitudes to Marriage," Walcot sought "to establish why romantic love was not acceptable to the Greeks as 'true' love." (Walcot, 1987: 5) By 'romantic love' Walcot means, as we often do today, love at first sight, a profound attachment between two persons before marriage (and sometimes during marriage), and thus something that can propel one to death (or to desire death) if circumstances or the object of love render union or marriage impossible. Antigone and Haemon (in Sophocles' *Antigone*) are regularly regarded as Greek tragedy's most celebrated pair of young people who were denied the opportunity to marry and were therefore driven to self-destruction. Although Walcot prefers to think of the relationship of Antigone and Haemon as one of convenience (an arranged match for dynastic purposes) rather than one based on mutual, romantic love, he offers other instances of doomed loved from other Greek tragedies (such as the story in Ctesias of Cnidos' *Persika* of Zarina, queen of the Sacae, and the Median Stryangaios), while also pointing to stories of post-nuptial (i.e., married) forms of romantic love, where the death of the husband drives the wife to suicide (Walcot, 1987: 19-21).

The important point, however, that Walcot wishes to make is that romantic love was widely repudiated by the Greeks. In evidence of this, Walcot observes that it was generally regarded as disgraceful for husband and wife to kiss or embrace in public. Also, marriages were usually arranged (although occasionally one was permitted to choose one's own partner – Walcot, 1987: 12-13). Walcot also adverts to Greek literature and mythology, where romantic love plays no part in the relationship of Odysseus and Penelope, nor in that of Menelaus and Helen of Troy (in Euripides' retelling of the tale, in his play *Helen*) (Walcot, 1987: 23).

Walcot does qualify his general thesis, in stating that relationships founded on romantic love were not entirely absent from Greek society; and that it was possible, if not desirable, for strong affection to grow between the partners (Walcot, 1987: 26-27)<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, the overall picture that emerges is one where romantic love is not a significant, let alone indispensable, constituent of marriage. Walcot therefore agrees with Lawrence Stone, who in the course of research on family, sex and marriage in sixteenth-century England emphasised the need to overcome certain preconceptions about premodern love and marriage. Like Stone,

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Walcot contends that we must distance ourselves to some degree from our familiar contemporary attitudes towards love and marriage if we are to properly understand how marriage was viewed and practiced in ancient and medieval communities. Firstly, a clear dichotomy often exists today between (i) marriage for ‘interest’ (i.e., money, status, or power) and (ii) marriage for affect (i.e., love, friendship, or sexual attraction). In ancient and medieval periods, however, no such dichotomy existed; and if it did, (i) would be given priority over (ii). Secondly, sexual intercourse unaccompanied by an emotional relationship tends to be criticised today as immoral, imperfect or flawed in some important respect, and so it is not unusual to see marriage for ‘interest’ dismissed as a form of prostitution. None of this, however, was accepted in the ancient and medieval periods. Thirdly, and as implied by the preceding two points, the value system shaping marriage in modernity (an axiology largely informed by the Enlightenment ideals of autonomy and individuality) diverges profoundly from the values around which the ancient and medieval institution of marriage was built (Walcot, 1987: 14-15)<sup>2</sup>.

A comprehensive foray into the voluminous scholarship on ancient and medieval marriage is not possible here, but some confirmation of Walcot’s account can be provided by way of a brief excursus into the medieval East, or Byzantium. The Byzantine period, stretching from late antiquity (early or late fourth century) to the mid-fifteenth century, witnessed various developments in the institution of marriage, some of which were not continuous with the classical period – for example, the freedom to divorce in ancient Greece and later in the Roman Empire, where unilateral and consensual divorce were legally permitted, was often greatly circumscribed and regulated in the Byzantine era (Clark, 1993: 17-24; Papadatou, 1997). But the freedom to enter into marriage seems to have been as important and central to the validity of marriage as it is in the moral and legal systems of the modern West. What role, then, did autonomy play in Byzantine (Christian) marriage? In looking for an answer, it will be helpful to focus on the question of consent in marriage.

In line with the well-known principle of Roman law that “marriage is not in the intercourse, but in the consent” (*nuptias non concubitus, sed consensus facit*), the Byzantines thought of marriage as an agreement between two freely-choosing parties. As *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* states:

”The consent of the bride and groom, and often of their parents or guardians, was necessary for marriage, although in romances marriages were sometimes performed without parental approval.” (Herrin and Kazhdan, 1991: 1305)

In developing an Orthodox theology of marriage, John Meyendorff calls upon this Byzantine tradition, and specifically its ecclesiastical regulations, so as to highlight the significance of autonomy:

”Freedom of choice and decision is the first condition of true Christian marriage, which Orthodox canonical tradition tries to maintain. There are several canons against forceful abduction of women, which also nullify marriages concluded against their will (St. Basil, canons 22 and 30)... There are also texts which require a sufficiently long period to elapse between betrothal and marriage; legally assimilated with marriage and protected as such, this period obviously served as a test for the decision itself (cf. Sixth Ecumenical Council, or “Quinisext”, canon 98).” (Meyendorff, 1984: 48)

Angeliki Laiou, in her impressive study “Sex, Consent, and Coercion in Byzantium,” appears to confirm such a view when pointing to cases where a marriage was dissolved because the groom had not freely consented to the marriage (Laiou, 1993: 178-179).

But what exactly did ‘consent’ amount to or imply in this context? Laiou is careful to note:

”Consent can be stated and conscious, or it can simply mean the absence of objection. Which of these was recognized [in Byzantium] as valid consent? Insofar as marriage was concerned, absence of opposition was considered tantamount to consent.” (Laiou, 1993: 156)

Even if consent is conceived along these lines, in terms (at bare minimum) of absence of opposition, it is far from clear that it was the personal consent of the bride and groom, as opposed to the consent of the parents or guardians, that was considered necessary for the (valid or legal) formation of a marriage. Laiou herself indicates that Byzantine jurists held that if a man seduces his fiancée before her thirteenth year, then *the decision is up to the parents* as to whether the betrothal should stand or be dissolved (Laiou, 1993: 172). Even more tellingly, Meyendorff states, in the very next paragraph after the one quoted above, that the Byzantine Church “admits the ages of 14 and 12, for men and women respectively, as the lowest age limit for marriage.” (Meyendorff, 1984: 48)<sup>3</sup> If the age of marriage was this low, then marriages would have to be

arranged, and this indeed was the standard, as Gillian Clark points out in *Women in Late Antiquity*:

”Because marriages were so important, they were arranged early, by the girl’s family or guardian. They were not left to the free choice of the marriage-partners, who might well not meet until the marriage was decided.” (Clark, 1993: 13)

Clark goes on to state that:

”The earliest legal age for a formal betrothal was seven, when the parties were assumed to understand what was happening and could give formal consent. The earliest age for a legally valid marriage was 12, and most girls were married by 16.” (Clark, 1993: 13-14)<sup>4</sup>

Seemingly in accord with Meyendorff, Clark writes:

”The essential factor in marriage was the consent of the parties. Usually, this consent followed on careful financial arrangements which were set down in a contract.” (Clark, 1993: 14)

In thinking about the matter of personal or individual consent, it might be well to ask: What degree of autonomy could a 12-year-old girl, or a 14-year-old boy, have in entering upon a marriage? Consider Laiou’s observation that, “according to the law [in Byzantium], a simple engagement could be made when the girl (or the boy) was seven years old, but it could not be confirmed by a church ceremony until the age of thirteen for the girl and fourteen for the boy.” (Laiou, 1993: 169) Alice-Mary Talbot also draws attention to the very early age of betrothal, noting how actual practice did not always conform to legal prescriptions:

”For most girls in Byzantium, childhood came to an abrupt end with the onset of puberty, which was usually soon followed by betrothal and marriage. Early marriage and procreation of children was the norm in Byzantium; the only alternative for teenage girls was entrance into a convent. Byzantine legislation originally permitted betrothal of a girl after the age of seven, a figure later raised to twelve. The laws were frequently ignored, however, and children as young as five years old might become engaged. The minimum age for marriage was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys, but the more normal age at marriage may have been closer to fifteen and twenty respectively. Very rarely we read of women marrying in their twenties.” (Talbot, 1997: 121)<sup>5</sup>

What Meyendorff and Laiou appear to have overlooked is the age of betrothal, in distinction from the age of marriage. For if one is betrothed

at, say, five years of age, then (regardless of the age they marry) there can be no question of (genuine) autonomy and consent – at least with respect to the decision whether to enter into marriage and the decision of whom to marry. This is perhaps why many people today, operating of course from a very different value-base, would tend to regard such marriages as not arranged, but as *forced*<sup>6</sup>.

It appears, however, that Laiou would regard such modern reactions as greatly misconceived:

”Forced marriage...was one area in which the question of free consent was considered important by the Byzantines, and where consent given under duress would invalidate the marriage. The matter did not, as far as I know, give rise to much debate, perhaps because the law was quite unambiguous: no marriage could be valid that was not undertaken with the consent of the future spouses and those who had them under their authority.” (Laiou, 1993: 179)

I think Laiou has missed the complexity of consent in Byzantine marriage. For how could children (especially those betrothed well under twelve years of age) be considered to have given their consent to the relationship? It seems more accurate to say that generally the consent of the parents or guardians was necessary and sufficient, while the consent of the bride and groom may have been sufficient in some cases though it was never necessary. What this suggests is that a quite different understanding of consent was at play here, compared to the way this notion is understood in contemporary Western society. Specifically, it seems that consent was largely a communal and especially a familial affair, not a matter of individual choice. The decision rested in particular in the hands of the father, for as Gillian Clark notes, “the father’s headship of his household, formalized in Roman law as *patria potestas*, was a basic social fact, and it was assumed that he would do what was best for his children.” (Clark, 1993: 15) Indeed, and somewhat extraordinarily when viewed with contemporary eyes, “a woman remained in the *potestas* of her father, not of her husband, when she married, and became legally independent on her father’s death.” (*Ibidem*) In line with this, if the father of the family decided that his daughter should marry a particular person, then that would have been regarded as the will of the whole family, the daughter included. There was no need to obtain the approval of each member of the family. This, of course, did not mean that the daughter who was given in marriage could not resist<sup>7</sup>, but it does indicate that her personal assent to the marriage was not



deemed necessary or important. This follows naturally from the conception of the family inherited from ancient Greco-Roman culture, as Clark again points out:

”Under Roman law, a child was in the *potestas* – that is power to take actions which have an effect in law – of his or her father until the father died; so the child could not independently contract a valid marriage. In the words of Basil of Caesarea, « marriage without the consent of the power-holders is fornication » (*Letter* 199.42, PG 32.729). A girl could refuse to marry the man her father chose only if he was unworthy in status or behaviour.” (Clark, 1993: 14-15)<sup>8</sup>

It is important to also keep in mind the intentions of the respective parents or families in contracting early marriages. Averil Cameron states that “marriages were often arranged at a very young age, well in advance of the statutory minimum marriageable age of thirteen, as families sought to make advantageous alliances; in the Comnenian period [i.e., the twelfth century] early betrothal was used in this way by the upper classes who had most at stake.” (Cameron, 2006: 121) Talbot similarly points out that, “Marriages were arranged by the parents, for whom economic considerations and family connections were paramount.” (Talbot, 1997: 121) If considerations of class, status, honour and finances are motivating the betrothal or marriage, rather than the personal romantic preferences of the bride and groom, then this further calls into question the role of personal autonomy and consent.

What this reveals is that love and marriage are kept apart, at least in the initial stages of the relationship. Love was not placed at the origins of marriage, though it may have been accorded a place after (i.e., within) marriage. Talbot writes:

”As in other societies in which betrothals are arranged by the parents, couples in Byzantium had no expectation of romantic love in marriage but viewed their union as a sacrament ordained by God for the perpetuation of the family and, secondarily, as the merger of the economic assets of two families... For the most part the arranged marriage seems to have worked well, and often true affection and even love developed between husband and wife.” (Talbot, 1997: 127)

But even though romantic feelings could develop in marriage, there was no expectation that they should do so, and one could not imagine a Byzantine husband or wife dismayed or heartbroken by the absence of romance in their marriage. If one desired romance and passion, one had to venture beyond the bounds of conventional marriage and into (e.g.)

adulterous relationships. Such a view was indeed fairly common until recent times. It has often been thought that love (of an impassioned, romantic sort) is *incompatible* with marriage. As Montaigne expresses this view,

”A good marriage (if there be such a thing) rejects the company and conditions of Cupid: it strives to reproduce those of loving-friendship. It is a pleasant fellowship for life, full of constancy, trust and an infinity of solid useful services and mutual duties. No wife who has ever savoured its taste would ever wish to be the beloved mistress of her husband. If she is lodged in his affection as a wife then her lodging is far more honourable and secure.” (de Montaigne, 2003: 961)<sup>9</sup>

Marriage on the premodern model, then, is a union undergirded not so much by romantic love (or its cognates: emotional affection, sexual desire, pleasure, passion, the pursuit of happiness, etc.) as by such ideals as respect and companionship, mutual care and trust, and the desire for progeny and property. If love did enter into the marriage, it was a secondary benefit. Grand gestures and passions were lived outside the bonds of wedlock.

What, then, should we say about the close connection made in modernity between love and marriage, and the ways in which this connection was severed in premodern societies? It is interesting to see how some contemporary writers are coming to a position that is not entirely foreign to the premodern conception of marriage outlined above. Consider, for example, Germaine Greer’s comments:

”In defiance of the obvious, modern morality holds that to marry for any reason other than sexual love is to commit a great crime and to court disaster. From accepting that sexual attraction is the essential condition of the initial coupling and establishment of the pair-bond we have moved on to supposing it to be an essential condition of its continuance. Modern marriage is fragile because the demands made upon it exceed the tensile strength of the initial sexual bond.” (Greer, 2000: 268-269)

The fragility of modern love and the suffering this creates are also the subject of Illouz’s work. In the ensuing section, I want to consider the story Illouz tells of the great transformation that has recently taken place in the area of romantic relationships. As the details of this transition in love and marriage are explored, challenges of a deeply philosophical sort will begin to emerge, driving the discussion beyond the purely historical and sociological plane, and towards difficult questions of a metaphysical and axiological nature.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE "TODAY"

One such difficult question is: What is marriage for? In the ancient and medieval periods, as we saw, marriage was tied to a range of goals that were essentially communal in nature, such as bolstering or reinforcing the family's status and economic interests, and raising children. The latter, procreation, was indeed taken as the primary end of marriage in Byzantium. As Laiou states: "Marriage and the procreation of children were intimately connected in the legislation; indeed, marriage was affirmed to be *for* the procreation of children." (Laiou, 1981: 234) According to Illouz, the purpose of marriage has profoundly shifted in modern times, from having an outward or transcendent focus (aimed at wider goals of a social, moral and religious nature) to one that is predominantly inward, so that marriage now serves as a means to self-validation or self-fulfilment<sup>10</sup>.

Illouz contends that, in modernity, the capacity of love to bestow self-worth has taken on a significance it did not have in the past (Illouz, 2012: ch 4). She quotes in this context a passage from psychoanalyst Ethel Spector Person, who typifies the modern tendency to link love with self-worth: "In mutual love, the lovers *validate* one another's uniqueness and worth... *Our insecurities* are healed, *our importance guaranteed*, only when we become the object of love." (Illouz, 2012: 114; quoting from Person, 1988: 59.) Women today, Illouz notes, often look to their partners to make them feel 'special' and 'unique' (Illouz, 2012: 118). In such an environment, one's value does not exist (or is not established) *prior* to personal interactions with a possible or actual partner, but is founded upon such interactions (Illouz, 2012: 114). One's sense of self-worth is thus intimately tied to being in a (successful) loving relationship. It inevitably follows that rejection as a marriage prospect, or the termination of a relationship, would be internalised as a rejection of the self, or as a personal failing (Illouz, 2012: 34). In late modernity, Illouz writes, "a romantic break-up threatens one's basic sense of worth and the foundations of one's ontological security." (Illouz, 2012: 126)

In more traditional cultures, where one's identity and value are taken to be a function of one's station and duties within various social networks, from the family to the local community all the way up to the church and nation, self-worth is not something that can be easily dislodged by a romantic break-up. Illouz illustrates this through the novels of Jane Austen, whose heroines look to a publicly shared moral

framework rather than to the subjective preferences of their suitors for validation of their inner selves: “Their sense of inner self and value is not bestowed on them by anyone, but rather derives from their capacity to recognize and enact moral imperatives that have a quasi-objective existence.” (Illouz, 2012: 25-26) Disentangled from such ‘quasi-objective’ (or intersubjective) moral standards, modern love is held hostage to the personal choices and desires of others, and so runs the risk of becoming “an ongoing, interminable process of ‘validation’: that is, a reconfirmation of one’s own individuality and value.” (Illouz, 2012: 118-119) In modern romantic relations, then, “recognition is not something that is given once for all,” as it may have been in the past, but rather requires “a complex symbolic work that must be maintained through repeated rituals and which can threaten and engulf the self when not properly executed.” (Illouz, 2012: 123) This, however, can only result in insecurity and uncertainty: one can never be sure where one stands in relation to the love of one’s partner. So, the constant demand for validation may easily destabilise the relationship, while also being experienced as exhausting and unfulfilling. Predictably, the result is disappointment and suffering<sup>11</sup>.

I’m not convinced by Illouz’s characterisation of modern love as extricated from the broader social and moral fabric of the community, or the suggestion that this fabric has now become undone to such an extent that individual romantic choices are left floating free from publicly shared moral frameworks. Illouz herself indicates that this may be a somewhat simplistic account when comparing traditional commitment-based marriage with modern marriages that tend to be based on ‘emotional authenticity’. In the currently dominant regime of emotional authenticity, primacy in romantic relationships is given to emotions or feelings, not to actions or declarations. As Illouz explains, “Authenticity demands that actors know their feelings; that they act on such feelings, which must then be the actual building blocks of a relationship; that people reveal their feelings to themselves (and preferably to others as well); and that they make decisions about relationships and commit themselves based on these feelings.” (Illouz, 2012: 31) However, this development has not left us stranded in a moral vacuum, but has been informed by a deeper shift in normative perspectives. Illouz holds that commitment-based marriage was shaped by a deontological mindset, where promise-keeping functioned as a mechanism which “stopped the search for a partner and the desire to maximize one’s interests,” and thus

“was at the foundation of commitment.” (Illouz, 2012: 36-37) But as Illouz observes, a definite movement has taken place from *satisficing* (settling for the first ‘good enough’ option) to *maximizing* (always on the look out for the best possible option), where the tendency to ‘maximize one’s interests’ is underwritten by a utilitarian mindset that has eroded the value of commitment (Illouz, 2012: 95). The predilection for “utility-seeking and utility-maximizing behavior in the realm of sentiments” (Illouz, 2012: 35-36) has taken the specific form in our culture of the ideal of ‘self-realisation’, which inhibits our ability to make (and keep) a lifelong commitment: “The ideal of self-realization disrupts and opposes the idea of the self and of the will as something constant and fixed... To self-realize means not committing to any fixed identity and especially not committing to a single project of the self.” (Illouz, 2012: 100)

A similar account is provided by another prominent sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman, who employs the metaphor of ‘liquid’ to describe human relations today, and especially their lack of permanence, stability, certainty and fulfillment – the product, arguably, of prioritising autonomy over commitment (Bauman, 2003). In a liquid society, Bauman points out, any bonds formed are frail and temporary, and this in turn arouses feelings of insecurity and ambivalence (where the ambivalence often takes the form of conflicting desires to tighten the bonds yet keep them loose) (Bauman, 2003: viii)<sup>12</sup>. However, Bauman does not merely single out the increased insistence on autonomy and individuality as the prime cause for the lack of commitment, but points to wider social forces at play – and in particular the impact of capitalist and consumer culture (and the ways in which autonomy is constituted therein) on love:

”If found faulty, or not « fully satisfactory », goods may be exchanged for other, hopefully more satisfying commodities... But even if they deliver on their promise, they are not expected to be in use for long... Any reason why partnerships should be an exception to the rule?” (Bauman, 2003: 13)

Relationships nowadays, Bauman goes on to say, are often treated like investments (or business transactions): you invest time, money and effort, and so expect a payoff (profit); when this is not forthcoming, you let go of your ‘stock’. Also, you continually assess whether it is worth ‘holding on or letting go of your stock’ (Bauman, 2003: 13-14).

Illouz labels this ‘the great transformation of love’ (Illouz, 2012: 40-58)<sup>13</sup> and like Bauman she situates it within the broader reorganisation of society along capitalist, market-driven lines. Illouz speaks, for example,

of “the emergence of a self-regulated market of encounters” and the rise of “marriage markets” which involve a highly complex and competitive process of mate selection with elaborate selection criteria that are weighted according to private tastes and preferences, so that one trait may be ‘traded’ for another (as when ‘chemistry’ and ‘sexiness’ and chosen ahead of economic status). One’s value is no longer measured by objective moral standards or by one’s standing in the community (class, status, reputation, etc.), but by how well one performs in the new marketplace of love – by (e.g.) one’s ability to attract partners and their desire to commit to oneself (Illouz, 2012: 52-53).

Perhaps this transformation might be celebrated in the spirit of Kantian Enlightenment, with its image of humanity coming of age, throwing off its self-imposed tutelage, and taking full responsibility for its own freedom. Kant, as is well known, regarded autonomy as the highest value and the limiting condition of all other values: our incomparable dignity as human beings, he thought, derives from the fact that we possess ultimate responsibility for the choices we make, the goals we aim for, and the manner in which we pursue them. Illouz is not blind to the immense social benefits produced by this way of thinking:

”Freedom has been the quintessential trademark of modernity, the rallying cry of oppressed groups, the glory of democracies, the pride of capitalist economic markets, and the reproof to authoritative regimes. It has been and remains the great accomplishment of modern political institutions.” (Illouz, 2012: 59)

She also goes on to single out increased ‘sexual freedom’ (e.g., changes in attitudes towards premarital sex) as “one of the most significant sociological transformations that occurred in the twentieth century.” (Illouz, 2012: 61)

At the same time, however, Illouz contends that such sexual and emotional freedom has come at a great cost in love and marriage, generating there pervasive forms of suffering. One effect of the abundance of choice is that commitment is often deferred or lacking, as evidenced by high divorce rates and the popularity of non-monogamous affairs. Men today, states Illouz, have become “emotionally elusive and routinely resist women’s attempts to commit to a long-term relationship.” (Illouz, 2012: 66) This widespread ‘commitment phobia’ marks an interesting shift in the nature of masculinity, which had long represented resoluteness and determination in many domains of life, but especially in matrimonial relations<sup>14</sup>. In addition to commitment phobia,

Illouz identifies a number of further dangers introduced by the modern marriage market. She notes, for example, the new emphasis on introspection, where one is encouraged, if not required, to constantly analyse and evaluate what one wants. Love has become “the object of endless investigation, self-knowledge, and self-scrutiny,” (Illouz, 2012: 163) but engaging in lengthy processes of introspection is only likely to paralyze one’s will and to interfere with the capacity to feel strong emotions<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, the object of one’s desire comes under detailed investigation, as one launches into an extensive process of information gathering in order to adjudicate between different options. This not only creates ‘information overload’, but also diminishes the force of intuition and emotion (in decision-making). Illouz therefore holds that “romantic desire is increasingly less determined by the unconscious.” (Illouz, 2012: 232) Indeed, the very appeal of the other person, what attracted one to them in the first place, is likely to decline the more they are subjected to what Illouz calls the “minute, fine-grained, psychologized mode of evaluating others” that has become typical today in decision-making about prospective partners (Illouz, 2012: 94-95, 224-25).

In short, autonomy and choice, although good in themselves, have had a range of detrimental effects on intimate relationships, summed up by Illouz under the category of ‘romantic ambivalence’: mixed, divided or dampened feelings towards one’s partner or prospective partner (Illouz, 2012: 97). When such ambivalence is conjoined with the characteristic late modern attitudes of irony, skepticism and occasionally cynicism about ‘real love’, and when to this heady cocktail one adds our natural or recalcitrant yearning for love, the end result can only be... *disappointment*. Indeed, for Illouz, the overriding feature of love today is disappointment (and the corollary management and acceptance of disappointment). Hence the title of her book: ‘love hurts’, and now more than ever before<sup>16</sup>.

### A PHILOSOPHICAL DIAGNOSIS OF THE FAILURES OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Illouz is well aware that relationships of love have always had a propensity to bring about hurt and devastation, on both a personal and social level, though her innovation is to claim that “there is something qualitatively new in the modern experience of suffering generated by love.” (Illouz, 2012: 16) But even if the kinds of romantic misery that dominate

the interpersonal landscape today might be new, and perhaps also more intense and more widely distributed than the suffering produced by pre-modern love, this doesn't address the broader philosophical question as to whether our predicament vis-à-vis love and suffering is better or worse overall at present than it was in premodern times. Sociologists, understandably, are reluctant to venture into such normative terrain, but philosophers cannot avoid doing so. Despite the difficulty, even seeming impossibility, of answering such a fundamental question, implicated as it is in complex description, analysis and evaluation of divergent value-systems across the centuries, some modest progress can be made if we are prepared to allow for both axiological and metaphysical considerations.

There is a tendency in defenders of traditional, long-lasting and powerful institutions that are now coming under great threat and may well be on the way towards extinction or radical reformation – whether it be marriage, the church, the university, or something more delimited like hardcopy-printed books and handwritten letters – to become *nostalgic*, longing for what seems to be disappearing and fearing what appears to be taking its place. I don't think it would be entirely unfair to say that Illouz gives at least the appearance of succumbing to such nostalgia on some occasions, even if this is not her intention. In the Epilogue to her book, she states: “Under no circumstance does this book make the claim that modern love is always unhappy or that Victorian love is a better or preferable option to our own.” (Illouz, 2012: 238-239) However, Illouz rarely discusses happy or successful forms of modern love, and premodern love tends to be presented as preferable, in certain respects, to modern love. One of these respects is the quite significant one of *commitment*.

As we have seen, both Illouz and Bauman detail the ways in which commitment is devalued and undermined in contemporary romantic relationships, contrasting this with the stability and resilience of commitment-based marriage in pre- and early modernity. At least one problem with this account is that it overlooks the various pitfalls of commitment, which are largely responsible for the very changes identified by Illouz and Bauman in how we negotiate love and marriage nowadays. Consider, for example, Hanif Kureishi's 1998 novel, *Intimacy*, where the middle-aged narrator, Jay, feels trapped in a loveless relationship with his partner, Susan, after living together for six years. He has



made up his mind to leave her and their two sons, and this prompts him to reflect upon his parents' commitment-based marriage:

"What did Father's life show me? That life is a struggle, and that struggle gets you nowhere and is neither recognized nor rewarded. There is little pleasure in marriage; it involves considerable endurance, like doing a job one hates. You can't leave and you can't enjoy it. Both he and Mother were frustrated, neither being able to find a way to get what they wanted, whatever that was. Nevertheless they were loyal and faithful to one another. Disloyal and unfaithful to themselves. Or do I misunderstand?" (Kureishi, 1998: 57-58).

As this indicates, the price of (undying, unquestioning) commitment may well be excessively high in certain circumstances, disfiguring and even destroying the lives of the partners. This is not to treat relationships in utilitarian or self-centred terms, but only to acknowledge that commitments too have their limits.

Consider also Germaine Greer's assessment of traditional, commitment-based marriage. After detailing four cases reported in the *Independent* on 19 November 1993 about women struggling to remain in destructive marriages over many years for the sake of their children, Greer writes:

"More and more women now refuse to put up with being lied to, beaten and betrayed by the fathers of their children. The truth behind the so-called decline in family values is that the illusion of stable family life was built on the silence of suffering women, who lived on whatever their husbands thought fit to give them, did menial work for a pittance to buy the necessities that their husbands would not pay for, put up with their husbands' drinking and their bit on the side, blamed themselves for their husbands' violence towards them, and endured abuse silently because of the children. The honour of the family was served if the appearance of unity was maintained; all marriages were happy marriages." (Greer, 2000: 270-271).

If Greer's account is factually accurate, and it is difficult to dispute it (at least in broad outlines), then it seems disingenuous of Illouz to concentrate on the sufferings produced by the instabilities and uncertainties of modern love-relationships against the backdrop of seemingly content life-long marriages of the past – and, worse still, to present this social shift as a move away from authentic (other-centred, deontological) morality to a self-interested and instrumental (utilitarian) view of human relations. This procedure obscures what feminist critics of commitment-based marriage have long highlighted: the suffering of women in silence. (There is also, I might add from a male point of view, an equally pernicious but often unacknowledged form of suffering experienced by the

husbands in these marriages, as the suffering and violence they inflict on their partners inevitably impacts upon their own character and well-being.) Have we, then, simply substituted one unhealthy or destructive way of relating to one another in love and marriage with another, equally unsatisfactory, way of relating?

It is also important to connect the institution of marriage and popular discourses like romantic fiction to the broader socio-political system in which they have been formed. Illouz does this well with modern love and marriage, offering a comprehensive and illuminating account of the ways in which the (Enlightenment) values of autonomy, equality and rationality have deeply marked and transformed our understanding and practice of love. But nothing comparable is done with respect to the premodern period. Yet, I suspect that if the connections were traced between premodern love and the wider political structures and moral ideals of the relevant societies, the resultant image would be a much bleaker one than Illouz would have us believe.

Consider only the premodern model of love and marriage briefly outlined earlier, but now within the context of a highly authoritarian Byzantine political system where personal freedoms were tightly circumscribed. Byzantine society, as is well documented, did not allow for (let alone nurture) difference and dissent (especially in the political and religious spheres), displayed little interest in democratic as opposed to autocratic forms of governance, rarely encouraged critical and creative thought, and did not place much value upon individual autonomy and gender equality<sup>17</sup>. To be fair, the Byzantines were no different from most ancient and medieval communities in these respects. And it is possible that modern and medieval value systems may at some level be incommensurable, rendering comparison and hence evaluation fruitless. As one scholar of late antiquity put it, “No ancient person, male or female, would have had an inkling of what we moderns value in an idea of individualism or personal autonomy. Even to reject the group was a gesture within the group consciousness.” (Cooper, 1996: 144) It is not necessary, however, to go to the extremes of incommensurability, and there is no need to downplay the various ways in which Byzantine or other medieval societies ushered in relatively ‘progressive’ moral attitudes or values – as happened, for example, when the medieval east and west widened the parameters of individual freedom so as to make it possible and respectable for men and women to choose not to marry and to pursue a life of celibacy (as monks or nuns), a choice that was not readily

available in the ancient Greco-Roman, pre-Christian world. Indeed, the rise of asceticism amongst women in the fourth century is often attributed to the capacity of the ascetic life to offer women things which they could not obtain through marriage, including personal autonomy, social prestige and authority.

Despite such ‘progress’, the reality remains that love and marriage in much of the ancient and medieval world were embedded in wider social structures that few of us today would find acceptable, on at least moral and political grounds. We have therefore reached an impasse. On the one hand, premodern love is free of many of the dangers and disappointments of modern love, but this in part is because it was conditioned by social forces and value systems now commonly dismissed as psychologically repressive, politically oppressive, and morally repugnant. On the other hand, modern love is tied to a way of living and thinking, and a way of organizing society and its institutions, where values such as personal autonomy, individual choice, critical inquiry and gender equality are both paramount and non-negotiable (or at least not easily trumped or overridden). These values are integral to modern liberal democracies, where few would comfortably forego basic freedoms such as the freedom to enter into and dissolve an intimate relationship (or marriage) according to one’s own preferences and criteria. But, as Illouz demonstrates, these freedoms come at a great cost, raising significantly the risk of suffering in love<sup>18</sup>.

I suggest that a fuller appreciation of this predicament requires a transposition of the discussion to the metaphysical plane. It is helpful to begin with what might be called a ‘relational metaphysics’, as this will bring to the forefront some of the fundamental ways in which both modern and premodern love issue in suffering, albeit for divergent reasons. The basic principle of relational metaphysics is that *to be is to be in relation*. The world, on this view, does not consist of persistent entities or things, but is a complex web of interconnections or relations, so that the deepest level of reality consists in a holistic connectivity. In the idealist tradition of philosophy, where ultimate reality is conceived as mental or spiritual in nature (or at least not physical), the category of ‘relation’ is often accorded a central place in the attempt to grapple with the nature of everyday experience. As William Mander notes, the nineteenth-century British idealist T.H. Green “finds relations at the heart of everything,” while his one-time pupil F.H. Bradley thought that “all our basic categories are in one way or another relational.” (Mander,

2011: 129) Rejecting the atomism or individualism of their empiricist predecessors, Green and Bradley developed a *monistic* (or holistic) view of reality: everything is related (e.g., temporally or spatially) to everything else<sup>19</sup>. This all-embracing relational matrix Green called the ‘Eternal Consciousness’ and Bradley the ‘Absolute’. Although the two concepts should by no means be considered equivalent, both represent ultimate reality as a unity-in-diversity, a single and seamless totality that is essentially mind-like or spiritual, described by Green as a ‘world-consciousness’ and ‘divine’ and compared by Bradley to a preconceptual state of ‘immediate experience’ (or ‘feeling’) containing differences but no distinctions.

Such a relational ontology naturally leads to a relational conception of the self. Both Green and Bradley were adamant that the hedonistic utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill (which dominated moral philosophy in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century) foundered on a flawed understanding of the self. Utilitarianism and the empiricist tradition to which it was allied treated the individual as accidentally, not organically, related to the whole, with the latter regarded as an artificial construct out of the former. This strong individualism, upholding the metaphysical autonomy of the self, has a long history in philosophy, with roots in the Aristotelian conception of ‘substance’ (*ousia*). Aristotle’s account of substance is notoriously complex, but one important way in which he develops the notion is in terms of a concrete individual thing which could exist in itself or on its own (a ‘thing-in-itself’, so to speak). On this view, a substance has an independent existence, as opposed to the parasitic mode of existence had by qualities and relations (examples offered of substance in this sense by Aristotle include an individual man and a horse). Applied to the self, the substance view results in a conception of the self as both durable and independent: a timeless unchanging entity that is also independent and ontologically distinct from other substances, whether they be plants or planets.

But there is another strand running through Aristotle’s corpus that insists on the social nature of human life: “man is a political animal”. This ‘social holism’ is prominent in Hegel, who considered the nature of the self as inextricably bound up with its social context. Following Hegel, Green and Bradley emphasized the intrinsic communal dimension of the self. According to Green, individuality is contingent upon sociality: “Without society, no persons,” he wrote. In other words, our individuality is something we have because of (not in spite of) the wider social

whole to which we are organically related (Green, 1969: 199)<sup>20</sup>. Bradley similarly thought of our identity as constituted by social life and relations. Explicating Bradley's view, William Mander has written:

"...our identity is massively shaped by our relations to others, our family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. «I am who I am because of everyone», a recent advertising slogan for a mobile phone company (Orange), could well have been Bradley's own here, for he holds that social relations make for personhood. We define who we are, we become who we are, through our interrelations with others." (Mander, 2011: 189)

Thus, the attempt to abstract the individual from the community, and to regard it as a distinct unit separate from the whole, is to offer an incomplete and distorted picture of the self (Bradley, 1962: 173-174).

If we now view the fortunes of modern love from the perspective of the above relational ontology, the diagnosis is clear: the distinctive tendency of modern love to produce suffering and disappointment, rather than flourishing and well-being, is a result of its failure to acknowledge and abide by the limits and conditions set by nature, including human nature. If to be is to be in relation, and so the self is real insofar as it is relational or social, then the characteristic modern project (in love and other domains) of grounding meaning and value in an autonomous, sovereign self is only likely to court disaster and tragedy. Given the social nature of the self, fulfilment and happiness can only come by relating in a certain way to others. Bradley expressed this in terms of his famous 'my station and its duties' doctrine, according to which duties are determined by one's place and functions in a particular social organism, such as the family, the state and society at large (though this was not, as will be seen, his final word on the matter)<sup>21</sup>. On this view, the overall goal of human life – what Bradley called 'self-realisation' – is achieved only within society, by rising above selfish interests and loyally discharging the various responsibilities which communal life involves. As Bradley put it, "You cannot be a whole, unless you join a whole." (Bradley, 1962: 79; Mander, 2011: 187-190)

Bradley derived his notion of 'self-realisation' from Green, who similarly upheld a form of moral perfectionism, regarding the supreme good for human beings as consisting in the complete development of our potentiality. This Green called 'self-satisfaction', intending by this not merely the satisfaction of wants and desires, but (like Bradley) the realisation of one's rational and moral capacities, which for Green (as for

Bradley) can only be attained within a social setting: “man cannot contemplate himself as in a better state, or on the way to the best, without contemplating others, not merely as a means to that better state, but as sharing it with him.” (Green, 1969: 210) In line with the primacy accorded to metaphysics by the British idealists, the origins of Green’s moral views are to be located in his holistic account of reality as a system of necessary relations and his concomitant understanding of the self as necessarily social: each of us exists from the beginning “in manifold relations to nature and other persons,” and “these relations form the reality of the self.” (Green quoted in Mander, 2011: 207)

What happens, then, when we seek to shape our lives and institutions in ways that flout the relationality that is built into reality? The ancient Greeks had a clear sense of the dangers, vividly depicting the Furies (or Erinyes) in their myths and tragedies as protecting the moral order of the world. This especially involved safeguarding the ideal of ‘measure’, the universal limits inherent in nature, from breaches by gods and humans alike. When limits were transgressed, the dreaded Erinyes were sure to track the transgressors down and inflict them with all manner of misfortune. What we have here is in effect a theodicy for suffering, attributing the downfall of the great to their impiety or pride (*hubris*), a vain attempt to overreach the limits of reality. The suggestion, speculative by its very nature, is that modern forms of love involve a similar overreach (from the perspective, of course, of the relational metaphysics sketched earlier) and thus suffer the inevitable consequences, even if they not be as severe as the punishments of Prometheus.

In premodernity, by contrast, love and marriage tend to be closely connected to the relational conception of morality and metaphysics developed in the idealist philosophies of Hegel and his successors. But the more circumspect of these idealists claimed to be expounding ideals only, or the way the world is in some ultimate or absolute sense, not the way things stand in the everyday world of ‘appearances’. The moral ideal of ‘self-realisation’, for example, is assumed by Bradley to be an ideal only, never actually realisable. The ideal self, for Bradley, is one that has a basic coherence and unity, or ‘integrity’, where the inner life of the person (beliefs, desires, values, etc.) works together as an organic whole, rather than as a collection of disparate or conflicting elements. The ideal self desires not merely to be a whole, but an *infinite whole*, where the process of realising oneself as an infinite whole is not to be understood

quantitatively as simply one that progresses without end, but in the Hegelian sense as never running up against limiting relations (from the outside) and thus being completely self-contained. However, as David Crossley notes, the ideal self as an infinite whole is postulated by Bradley only as a limiting case: “it may guide our moral thinking and our practical reasoning, but it does not represent a condition anyone can achieve.” (Crossley, 2014)<sup>22</sup> Equally importantly, Bradley was well aware that complete integration in a wider social whole is not merely unattainable but inadvisable in certain circumstances. Although ‘my station and its duties’ is sometimes presented as the essence of Bradley’s moral and political philosophy, and as committing him to the conservative thesis that one must accept and keep to one’s position in society, the fact is that Bradley recognised that not every society, or station and role in it, may further the realisation of the self. He admits, for example, that the social whole itself “may be in a confused or rotten condition” (Bradley, 1962: 203)<sup>23</sup>, in which case the individual will need to rise above the values of her society in an attempt to reform and critique them. Despite, then, his social conception of morality, Bradley countenances values that exceed the social, and regards it as imperative that room be made for a critical morality that takes a point of view outside an historically contingent set of stations and duties.

Bradley therefore circumvents the charge of conservatism, but the same cannot be said for the premodern understanding of love and marriage. As is common in tradition-bound cultures, premodern communities were prone to conflate the ideal with the actual, thus reinforcing the status quo and the established hierarchies of society. Recall that love and marriage in premodernity were enframed by a value system that did not recognise what we would now regard as the central principles and values of liberal democracy: personal autonomy, individual choice, independent thought and dissent, equality and inclusivism, and so on. Lacking these values, and lacking especially the notions of civil liberties and human rights bequeathed to us from the Enlightenment, there was little chance or incentive for social reform. In conjunction with this, there was little opportunity to recognise failure – for example, an unhappy marriage (i.e., a marriage that did in fact diminish the welfare of one or both partners, regardless of how they or their community viewed the matter) might have been rationalised as a relationship of self-sacrifice in the service of the family and God. Commitment in marriage was therefore highly prized, irrespective quite often of its harmful consequences. In the

medieval period, this was buttressed by theological considerations, so that marriage was construed in sacramental terms where “the union between husband and wife is an end in itself; it is an eternal union between two unique and eternal personalities which cannot be broken.” (Meyendorff, 1984: 14)<sup>24</sup> Utopian visions, whether they be religious or secular, lead only to dashed hopes, if not dystopian nightmares. This is why, amongst those shaped by modern liberal values, there is little desire for a return to the medieval world, despite occasional nostalgic yearnings for its experience of the marriage bond as resilient and sacred.

Love and marriage, both modern and premodern, cannot escape the liability of all else in life to pain and suffering. As the first Noble Truth of Buddhism teaches, everything is *dukkha* – everything in life is unsatisfactory and unpleasant. This does not mean, as Buddhists are careful to point out, that life is simply miserable, but only that life is always a mixture of pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow, and that even pleasant, happy experiences will inevitably end. In its second Noble Truth, Buddhism identifies the cause of this pervasive suffering as lying in desire or craving (*tanha*), particularly in wrongful and selfish desires that lead to pathological attachments. In some ways this parallels the story I have sought to tell about the fortunes of love and marriage. In modernity love and marriage are conditioned in large part by the desire for choice and change, while in premodernity the conditioning role is played by the opposing desire for permanence (tradition) and perfection (sanctity). In each case, though for divergent reasons, the craving and clinging leads to dysfunctional attachments, and the end result is the same: suffering. Even if the suffering occasioned by love and marriage has qualitatively changed through the centuries, its potential and propensity to lay waste to individuals and societies is nothing new.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Walcot notes, for instance, that in Menander’s play *Epilepentes*, affection between two young persons develops after an arranged marriage to an extent which permits the marriage to survive a severe setback.

<sup>2</sup> Walcot is here drawing upon Stone, 1977: 86-87, 180-181.

<sup>3</sup> It seems that the same applied in the medieval West (see Leyser, 1996: 108). Note also P.J.P. Goldberg’s comments:

”The later medieval English aristocracy seems to have followed an aristocratic model, marrying daughters off as young as eleven, though more commonly in the later teens... Data for other parts of Europe before the later Middle Ages are patchy, anecdotal, and



socially biased. These tend to show girls married at various ages between about twelve and the late teens. Ages for men are harder to capture.” (Goldberg, 2014: 28)

In ancient Greece, writes Lisa Appignanesi, “a man married in his thirties, his bride was usually in her teens, and would have been chosen by his father,” while in the Roman Empire marriages “were arranged by parents, were monogamous, and were entered into during the late teens.” (Appignanesi, 2011: 114-115)

<sup>4</sup> This seems to have been underwritten by the Byzantine view that “women are always assumed to have reached puberty by their twelfth birthday” (*Codex Justinianus* 5.60.3) (apud Clark, 1993: 80).

<sup>5</sup> It might be instructive in this context to consider specific historical cases. Talbot mentions the following: “Around the year 1300, Simonis, the daughter of Emperor Andronikos II, *married at age five* to the middle-aged ruler of Serbia, was also injured by premature sexual intercourse so that she was rendered incapable of child-bearing.” (Talbot, 1997: 122, emphasis added) Laiou also makes reference to this case: “A well-known historical example is the case of Simonis, daughter of Andronikos II, who was married, at the age of five, to the Serbian kral Stefan Uroš II Milutin, then about forty years old. He apparently consummated the union while Simonis was still under age, and she became sterile as a result.” (Laiou, 1993: 168; see also Laiou, 1981: 260) Laiou notes a similar problem in thirteenth-century Epirus, “which may have been particularly acute in the region: the engagement or marriage of extremely young girls to much older men. In one case, a girl was reportedly married twice before reaching the legal age of twelve years.” Laiou, 1981: 235) According to Laiou, “Girls were married at an early age in upper class families too. For example, Irene Choumnaina was married at age twelve.” (Laiou, 1981: 236)

There were, to be sure, compelling reasons for teenage marriage in the medieval period. Talbot (1997: 121) mentions the following factors: (i) the importance placed on the virginity of the bride; (ii) the desire to make the most of one’s childbearing years (particularly in light of the high rate of infant mortality, which meant that women had to bear many children to ensure the survival of a few); and (iii) the life expectancy of women, which averaged at about 35, and so most would want to marry early and give birth while young. Laiou (Laiou, 1981: 236) notes that the peasantry of the fourteenth century had a life expectancy of about 25 years and a survival rate of 50% in the first 5 years of life; and that a woman would have to bear 6 daughters to ensure that one of them would survive to the age of 30.

<sup>6</sup> This further indicates that the choice not to marry and instead lead a life of celibacy (as a monk or nun) was a somewhat circumscribed choice in that it may have been made only later in life after being betrothed and one’s fiancé had died (as famously happened in the case of Macrina, the sister of Gregory of Nyssa); also, it is a choice that would usually have been made in the face of great social and familial pressure to marry and procreate.

<sup>7</sup> As Talbot states, “Normally girls accepted the bridegroom selected by their families, although there was occasional resistance, both by girls who preferred to take monastic vows and live as consecrated virgins, and by girls who violently objected to the groom selected for them. A twelve-year-old girl from Epiros, for

example, betrothed from the age of five, threatened suicide if she was forced to go through with the marriage; her family managed to have the betrothal annulled in the courts.” (Talbot, 1997: 122) But note that in this case the girl is given some degree of autonomy only after, not before, her betrothal (she had no say in the betrothal itself).

<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in ancient Greece the family took precedence before the individual, and so when a man married he did not so much as marry his wife as marry *into her family*. Cf. Campbell’s observation of the Sarakatsani: “people do not ask whom a man has married, but whose daughter has he taken.” (Campbell, 1964: 124)

In the Byzantine era, it seems that the only women who had complete autonomy with respect to choice of partner (and so did not require the consent of parents or other family members) were the empresses. Lynda Garland states:

”Certainly at the Imperial level women frequently had total social and political independence, whatever conventions of behaviour the sources chose to attribute to them. Empresses, married, unmarried or widowed, associated unhindered with courtiers and were free to make their own choice of lovers or husbands.” (Garland, 1988: 391)

But this was unusual, the exception that proves the rule. Perhaps widows with no family members alive also enjoyed a similar degree of autonomy.

<sup>9</sup> On Montaigne’s ideal of ‘loving-friendship’, see his famous essay, “De l’amitié” (de Montaigne, 2003: 205-219). Appignanesi points out that the ancient Greeks upheld a similar view of love and marriage:

”Though there may have been instances when citizen marriages were sparked by passion – and indeed Greek literature here and there expresses a wish for love in marriage – scholars largely agree that “the purpose of marriage was to engender and rear legitimate children... rather than to gratify the emotional needs of either husband or wife.” [here referring to Brown, 1993] ”Athens was a society which denied the validity of love as the basis for a happily married life.” [here referring to Walcot, 1987] (Appignanesi, 2011: 114)

Appignanesi further notes:

”St Jerome quotes a lost text by the philosopher Seneca, tutor to Nero, as saying: « Nothing is more impure than to love one’s wife as if she were a mistress... men should appear before their wife not as lovers, but as husbands. »” (Appignanesi, 2011: 115; quotation from Ariès and Béjin, 1985: 124)

A similar outlook is evident in Jane Austen’s novels, where “the choice between one partner and another is not a matter of romance, but of argument and discussion, of shared values and hopes of the world.” (Appignanesi, 2011: 86)

<sup>10</sup> Although not mentioned by Illouz, an early and perceptive account of this transition in marriage is provided in Ibsen’s play, *A Doll’s House*, which premiered to a scandalised public in Copenhagen in December 1879. One of the lead characters, Nora, considers her marriage to be a very unhappy one, in large part because she holds the expectation that marriage should be a path to personal fulfilment, something that will or should enable one to grow, mature and develop one’s sense of self. So, when she confesses her unhappiness to her husband, Torvald, she does so by talking about how their home has been “nothing but a play-room” to her, with her playing the role of “doll-wife”, her children in turn being her own dolls,

and the fun and games they would all play with each other being her only source of joy. “That’s what our marriage has been, Torvald,” whereupon she resolves to get to know herself and the large world outside, and to leave poor Torvald behind.

<sup>11</sup> Illouz, I might note, does not explore the modern connection between love and self-worth in psychological categories (e.g., as exhibiting a rise in narcissism or a lack of self-esteem) but in sociological terms: she traces this development to changes in *social recognition*: recognition is no longer founded on class, family ties, moral standing, etc. but on one’s performance in romantic love.

<sup>12</sup> Bauman later writes that what the English Puritan leader Richard Baxter (1615-1691) said of worldly goods – that they “should only lie on the shoulders like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment,” and that one should beware more than anything else their turning, unintentionally and surreptitiously, into “a steel casing” – would now be applied, in our liquid modern world, to relationships (Bauman, 2003: 23).

<sup>13</sup> Illouz borrows the expression ‘the great transformation’ from Karl Polanyi’s 1944 book with that title, which focused on economic (and not romantic) relations.

<sup>14</sup> On commitment phobia, see Illouz, 2012: ch. 3. See in particular the arresting account of this phobia on Illouz, 2012: 65-66.

<sup>15</sup> Illouz also points to evidence in cognitive psychology that humans have built-in cognitive biases that create obstacles in self-knowledge (Illouz, 2012: 92).

<sup>16</sup> Or, as Bauman insightfully states, “In a relationship, you may feel as insecure as without it, or worse. Only the names you give your anxiety change.” (Bauman, 2003: 15) In other words, the current conditions of love are such that when it is ‘found’, it does not remove many of the ailments that the lovers were seeking to overcome (insecurity, ambivalence, uncertainty, etc.), but only reinforces or exacerbates them.

<sup>17</sup> For an insight into the repression of religious dissent in Byzantium, see Alexander, 1977: 238-264. Alexander notes that, “in the eyes of the court the right to persecute heretics was an indispensable component of imperial power” (p.258), and that “Byzantine literature of the eighth and ninth centuries presents religious persecution as a frequent occurrence, almost a normal fact of life” (Alexander, 1977: 262).

<sup>18</sup> One cost not discussed by Illouz are ‘crimes of passion’, often the subject of art and film, as well as news bulletins. Tolstoy, in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), provides a masterful literary depiction of a crime of passion within marriage, employing this as an indirect critique against the importation of romantic affection into the institution of marriage. Tolstoy makes this explicit in his Postface to the work, included as Appendix 1 in Tolstoy, 2008. Consider also the following harrowing case mentioned by Gregg Lambert in the context of a psychoanalytic critique of the notion of love we have inherited from the Christian tradition. A man had bought an expensive ring to propose to his partner, but soon discovered that she was cheating on him. In response, he sent the ring to her in a box of his own faeces. She returned the ‘compliment’ by cleaning the ring and using it to buy a new car. She then sent him a note, saying: “Thank you very much for the new car. It is what I have always wanted.” As Lambert comments, “Her response was extremely significant, since for her the greatest pain she could possibly imagine was to demonstrate that, for her, his

love was easily exchangeable (or was equivalent to her pleasure from commodities) and that she could associate his absence with the possibility of pleasure derived from other objects, particularly sexual ones.” After receiving the note, the man went to her house, knocked her unconscious, handcuffed her to the steering wheel of the very car she had bought (thanks to him), turned the engine on and closed the garage door. Several days later the police found her asphyxiated body. See Lambert, 2004: 29-30. Crimes of passion like this show how easily love can turn into hatred, and that the greater ‘the torrents of love’, the greater the potential for cruelty and hatred, enmity and exclusion, or simply sadness and depression.

<sup>19</sup> There are, however, significant differences between Green and Bradley with respect to relations. Most of all, Green regards relationality as the very mark of reality, whereas Bradley holds that relations are unreal or mere ‘appearance’. Bradley thinks this because he takes relations to lack unifying power (in the sense that they lack the capacity to ground the unity of an individual thing), while for Green relations are “the glue that holds the world together,” as Mander puts it. And so, even though both represent the world as an all-inclusive unity, Green “persists in thinking reality a unity because of its relational character,” while for Bradley “reality is a unity precisely *despite* its relations.” (Mander, 2011: 130).

<sup>20</sup> For Green, however, this did not entail the submersion or absorption of individuality (or the finite self) into the whole, or Eternal Consciousness (see Green, 1969: 199), in contrast with more radical monist philosophies (like the Advaita Vedanta tradition in Hinduism), where the self is sometimes compared to a drop of water merging into the undifferentiated expanse of the sea.

<sup>21</sup> Bradley discusses this doctrine, which was influenced by Hegel’s notion of *Sittlichkeit* (‘social morality’), in essay five of *Ethical Studies*.

<sup>22</sup> On Bradley’s notion of the self as an infinite whole, see his *Ethical Studies*, 74-80.

<sup>23</sup> Bradley discusses several further problems with the ‘my stations and its duties’ doctrine (1962: 203-206).

<sup>24</sup> As mentioned earlier, Roman law allowed the right to end a marriage at any time by mutual agreement or by repudiation of the spouse, whereas the Byzantine church and state curtailed the freedom to divorce by stipulating specific grounds on which divorce was permissible. The medieval church in the West seems to have had an even more stringent view of divorce, strongly upholding the indissolubility of marriage: “The [western] church did sanction separation in case of a wife’s adultery or a husband’s excessive cruelty, but this was very difficult to obtain.” (Goldberg, 2014: 25)

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