



**Will you be my Valentine?:
Romance, love, and lust in
popular culture.**



PopCRN

The Popular Culture Network of the University of New England

Symposium: 10th February 2022

Book of Abstracts

900 1030 Introduction & Keynote

900 915 Colin Ahoy
915 930 Alistair Noble
930 1030 Jodi McAlister

Welcome to Country
Welcome Address
Keynote: It's Not You, It's Me: Breaking Up in Popular Culture

1030 1045 Comfort Break / Networking

1045 1200 Panel One: Writing Love

1045 1100 Nattie Golubov
1100 1115 Rosemary Williamson
1115 1130 Benjamin Hanckel & Vassiliki Veros
1130 1200 Questions

Chair: Jo Coghlan

Happy Objects: The Pleasures of Reading the Romance
Loving the 'Dead Heart': The Rhetorical Dimensions of *Australian Women's Weekly* Feature Articles on Uluru 1933-1983
Public Displays of Love: Examining Library Cultures

1200 1245 Lunch Break / Networking

1245 1325 Panel Two: Love in the Magic Kingdom

1245 1300 Huw Nolan & Mike Terry
1300 1315 Simona Strangaru
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A Very Unacademic Celebration of Animated Animal Love
Happily Ever After?: Disney's Reoccurring Thematic Duality of Love and Familial Tragedy in Animated Films

1335 1345 Mini-break

1345 1500 Panel Three: Love and the Dark side

1345 1400 Lesley McLean & Jenny Wise
1400 1415 Naomi van Senff
1415 1430 Jo Coghlan
1430 1500 Questions

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The 'Love and Terror Cult': Examining Popular Culture Representations of Love and the Manson Family Murders
The Mummy: Undead and Loving It!
'Love You to Death': Romance in the Disaster Film Genre

1500 1530 Networking & Publishing Opportunities

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Love Conquers All'?: Race, Bridgerton, and the Romance Writers of America
Popular Culture Representations of Divorced Women: A Binary Discussion of the Romantic and Unromantic
The Grandmother Loves of Agape, Eudaimonia, and Storge, Give Eros a Run for his Money.

1645 1700 Closing Remarks

Jo Coghlan

Keynote

It's Not You, It's Me: Breaking Up in Popular Culture

Dr Jodi McAlister, Deakin University

Breaking up is ubiquitous enough in contemporary culture that it has its own clichés. When we hear phrases like “I’m not looking for a relationship right now”, “I need space”, or “it’s not you, it’s me”, we immediately understand what is happening. The process that Helen Rose Ebaugh calls “becoming an ex”, Diana Vaughan calls “uncoupling”, and Eva Illouz calls “unloving” is something most of us have probably gone through at one time or another, and it is frequently represented in our popular culture.

However, breaking up is a relatively new cultural phenomenon. The idea of role exit – which can encompass things like leaving a job, religion, or community, as well as leaving a relationship – did not become an especially common social process until the twentieth century. As a result, broadly speaking, we are not always entirely sure of how we’re supposed to go about it. As Illouz notes, “we live in and through stories and dramas, and ‘unloving’ is not a plot with a clear structure”.

In this keynote, I will explore depictions of breakups in popular culture to explore the ways in which breakups are depicted. What are the key components of a “good” breakup? What makes a bad one? Are we any closer to developing a narrative ritual for the breakup, or does it remain something with which we are deeply uncomfortable – not just because ending a relationship is an emotional thing to do, but because we’re not quite sure how we’re supposed to do it?

Biography

Dr Jodi McAlister is a Senior Lecturer in Writing, Literature and Culture at Deakin University in Melbourne. Her research interests include romantic love and popular culture, and she is the author of two scholarly books, *The Consummate Virgin: Female Virginity Loss and Love in Anglophone Popular Literatures* (2020) and *New Adult Fiction* (2021). She is also an author of fiction. Her young adult paranormal romance Valentine trilogy (2017-19) is published by Penguin Teen Australia; and her new novels *Libby Lawrence Is Good At Pretending* (Wakefield) and *Here For The Right Reasons* (Simon & Schuster) will be released in 2022.

Panel One | Writing Love

Happy Objects: The Pleasures of Reading the Romance

Nattie Golubov, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

This paper argues that popular romance novels actively participate in the circulation of “happy objects” in two senses: they promise happiness as one outcome of the reading experience, on the one

hand, while, on the other, they contribute to the circulation of affect by attaching the promise of happiness to certain objects which, in turn, connect to ideas and values. This affective work is accomplished through the use of literary techniques such as the familiar plot structure, the happy ending, the use of cliché and stereotype which I read as features with affordances conducive to a pleasurable reading experience. Based upon the work of new formalists such as Rita Felski and Caroline Levine and Sara Ahmed's notion of the happy object, I argue that these formal elements incite an embodied type of reading. Contrary to much reader reception theory which dismisses the affective reaction of readers, I argue that (re)reading the romance is a positive, desirable experience because it is embodied, a style of reading that readers expect and unashamedly enjoy.

Biography

Nattie Golubov is Professor of English at the Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Her recent publications include *El amor en tiempos neoliberales: apuntes críticos sobre la novela rosa contemporánea* and the chapter "The Geopolitics of Love: Patriotism, Homeland and the Domestication of Violent Masculinities in US Paramilitary Romance Fiction" published in *The Routledge Companion to Romantic Love* (Ann Brooks, ed. 2021). Nattie can be contacted at ngolubov@unam.mx

Loving the 'dead heart' – the rhetorical dimensions of Australian Women's Weekly feature articles on Uluru 1933-1983

Rose Williamson, University of New England

Australian Women's Weekly (1933-) is Australia's longest running magazine and one of its most widely read. Various studies demonstrate The Weekly's significance as a reflection of, and influence on, Australian women, family and home. Less recognised is The Weekly's capacity to affirm or disrupt popular views of the natural environment, which occurs via what I call vicarious mobility: the magazine employs a set of rhetorical techniques to take readers beyond the home to experience landscapes that otherwise might not be accessible to them. Articles on an iconic feature of the Australian landscape - Uluru - in the first fifty years of The Weekly are illustrative. In examining these articles, this paper identifies certain themes associated with the popular romance genre that tend to recur from the 1950s, and considers their implications from a rhetorical perspective. In doing so, the paper draws on David Abrahamson's concept of magazine exceptionalism and rhetorical theory on identification and community.

Biography

Dr Rose Williamson is a Senior Lecturer in Writing in the Department of Creative Arts and Communication, School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of New England, Australia. She is conducting a longer-term research program on the ways in which popular genres of writing and communication more generally both reflect and influence Australians' relation to their natural environment, past and present. That program so far has involved projects on magazine articles, political memoir, political speeches and press reports of natural disaster. She has published in *Journalism Studies*, *New Writing*, *Media International Australia*, *Journal of Australian Studies* and elsewhere. Rose can be contacted at rwilli27@une.edu.au

Public displays of love: Examining library cultures

Benjamin Hanckel, Western Sydney University and Vassiliki Veros, University of Technology Sydney

In her book 'Guilty Pleasures' Arielle Zibrak writes in the conclusion "To approach our cultural texts with love is, I think, a step toward approaching our world with love" (2021, p. 148). We start with this provocation as a call to use/explore love as a framework, and explore cultures of love. What does it mean to approach public cultural texts/artefacts like libraries and urban spaces with a framework of love? Focused on libraries, and public displays as cultural artefacts practiced and made for publics our analysis attends to and builds on our understanding of the cultural practices that generate displays of love. Our object of inquiry is the public library display - specifically the display at key moments of love (i.e. Valentine's day, LGBT pride), and the practices that make (im)possible certain narratives and re-produced cultural understandings of love and romance. Through the use of duoethnography and the physical enactment of spatial research paired with digital discourses, we will present findings on the displays of public libraries over four years, across multiple sites in two cities – Sydney and London.

Biography

Dr Benjamin Hanckel is a sociologist at the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. His research examines health and wellbeing, social inequalities in health, and social change with a particular research focus on people with diverse sexualities and genders. Benjamin can be contacted at b.hanckel@westernsydney.edu.au

Dr Vassiliki Veros is a popular cultures researcher at the University of Technology Sydney. Her research examines romance fiction, public libraries and the practices of librarianship, metadata, paratext and their interplay with digital cultures. Vassiliki can be contact at vassiliki.h.veros@alumni.uts.edu.au

Panel Two | Love in the Magic Kingdom

A very unacademic celebration of animated animal love
Huw Nolan and Mike Terry, University of New England

Anthropomorphised animals are a mainstay of film culture. Ever since Mickey's first outing on a steamboat, animators have used animal protagonist to inspire imagination, soften harder themes such as violence and avoid the pitfalls of racist caricatures and the uncanny valley. Disney played our innate magnetism to neoteny so successfully that animated animal movies are released yearly. Our humanised animals do things humans do and unsurprisingly, love features in many films. How love is portrayed by animals and what this says of society is worthy of academic study. However, this isn't an academic study, this is a highly unacademic celebration of animal love in all of its animated forms. In this paper we do not challenge the heteronormative, same species coupling, we won't inquire about the aggressive flirting techniques of skunks, nor do we research Western opinions of betrothal in large predatory cats. At no point will we present a psychological theory of attraction to a pantless fox with a bow and arrow, and we don't question the ethics of a zoophilic club performer and their floppy eared spouse. This is a celebration of love in all its animated animal glory.

Biography

Huw Nolan is an animal welfare scientist at the University of New England, NSW. Huw's research investigates the impact human imagination, beliefs and intuitions have on the welfare of animals. Huw can be contacted at hnolan3@une.edu.au

Mike Terry is a visual anthropologist and photographer. Mike currently works as a visual producer in the School of Environmental and Rural Science at the University of New England and developed and teaches the course Space & Place in the Visual and Media Anthropology MA program at HMKW in Berlin, Germany.

'Happily ever after?: Disney's reoccurring thematic duality of love and familial tragedy in animated films'

Simona Strungaru, University of New England

The multinational entertainment conglomerate, Disney, has been a household name for decades, appealing to audiences across all generations and ages. It most popularly known for its animated fairy tale films of love, romance, and magic which continue to inspire fantastical ideals of "happily ever after". An understudied feature of Disney's love stories, however, is the company's incessant reoccurring thematic incorporation of death, grief, and separation. As will be demonstrated within this paper, a common – albeit inconspicuous – reoccurring thematic pairing present within its films is that of love and romance with familial tragedy, specifically, the death, or absence of, protagonist's parents and/or immediate family characters. Out of 21 animation studio films that specifically centre around a narrative of love and romance, 16 include background themes and narratives of either familial character death, separation of the protagonist from family members, or complete absence of the protagonist's parents in the films. This includes both 'Disney Princess' films such as 'Frozen', 'Tangled', 'Snow White' and 'Cinderella', as well as non-Disney Princess films alike, including 'Tarzan', 'The Lion King', and 'Bambi'. This paper will explore Disney's unusual thematic pairing, focusing specifically on Disney's original animation studio films (up to the most recent 2021 release, 'Encanto'), aiming to inquire why motifs and scenes of familial tragedy continue to be prevalent within its films.

Biography

Simona Strungaru is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the University of New England, Australia. She is currently undertaking research into the prevalence of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by UN peacekeepers. Simona is greatly interested in human rights, specifically, children's rights. Living in Saudi Arabia for many years and witnessing the impacts of the spread of ISIL in the region, Simona was motivated to undertake her Masters' research on the issue of child marriage amongst the Syrian refugee population in Jordan. She has also worked numerous years in locally-engaged diplomatic roles. In her spare time, Simona's interests also include travel, film, and a love of animals. Simona can be contacted at sstrunga@myune.edu.au

Panel Three | Love and the Dark Side

‘The love and terror cult’: Examining popular culture representations of love and the Manson Family murders

Dr Lesley McLean and Dr Jenny Wise, University of New England

The 1960s often evokes images and emotions associated with love and freedom. Yet, Charles Manson and his ‘family’ also offer a potent symbol in popular culture for the dark side of the 1960s countercultural movement in the United States. Two years after his release from federal penitentiary in 1967, the year popularly known as the ‘summer of love’ (describing primarily the San Francisco hippie scene of which Manson himself was a fixture), Manson orchestrated the murders of at least eight people in horrifying and sensational circumstances. Popular media headlines at the time described Manson as the ‘demon of Death Valley’ (Time Magazine) or the ‘most dangerous man alive’ (Rolling Stone) and of the group more generally, as ‘the love and terror cult’ (Life). This latter pairing of Manson and the family with mentions of ‘love’ – albeit alongside notions of ‘terror’ – can strike readers as deeply incongruous and therefore warrants investigation. Adopting a discourse analysis approach, this paper focuses on the Rolling Stone Magazine’s widely read popular culture representation of Manson “converting fellow inmates to his gospel of love” (Felton and Dalton 1970) and how narratives of love have been subverted through its connection with Charles Manson and his ‘family’.

Biography

Dr Lesley McLean is a Lecturer in Philosophy and Religion within the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of New England. She has published in the area of animal ethics (her philosophical interest) and is currently researching the intersection of ‘cults’, popular culture and dark tourism (her religious studies interests). Lesley can be contacted at lmclean4@une.edu.au

Dr Jenny Wise is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology within the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of New England. Her research focuses upon the social impacts of forensic science on the criminal justice system, the role of the CSI Effect changing criminal justice practices, dark tourism, and crime as a form of leisure. However, a love of pop culture sometimes diverts her research into new and interesting spaces. Jenny can be contacted at jwise7@une.edu.au

The Mummy - Undead and loving it!
Naomi von Senff, University of New England

Two images are conjured up by the words ‘immortal love story’, and it strays into the realms of the undead. Anne Rice’s novel “The Mummy, or Ramses the Damned” features a cross century love story between Julie Stratford and the 3000 year old reanimated corpse of Ramses who is unable to die, and the problems caused by his raising his old flame Cleopatra from the dead. This parallels the dual love story in the movie “The Mummy”, where Imhotep is accidentally raised from the dead, interrupting the burgeoning romance between Evelyn Carnahan and Rick O’Connell, and attempting to bring his lost love Anck Su Namun back to life. While there are other mummy stories such as Bram Stokers “The

Jewel of the Seven Stars” and the 1980 Movie “The Awakening”, these deal more with possession by Queen Kara after her tomb is disturbed rather than an ongoing romance that span the milleniums. I will discuss orientalism and the depictions of ‘English idealism” contrasted with “Exotic romance” between the Mummy(s) and those that were lost. There are depictions of madness, biblical scenes and a desire to sacrifice “anything for love”, culminating in failure to continue the ideal of love lost, and showing the triumph of new love stories.

Biography

Naomi von Senff is an operatic soprano performing with Symphonic choir, River City Voices. She is a musicologist, author, designer, researcher, and Assistant Coroner. She holds a B.Criminology/ B.Laws; B.A. Hon (Musicology); B.MUS. Hon (Opera); Diplom Gesang/Diplom Italien; B.A. Humanities and is undertaking a Master of Philosophy. Her research interests include: Michael Crichton, Stephen King, Joe Hill and the modern American Gothic, music and politics; Witchcraft trials and their literary representation, vampire fiction, Sweeney Todd, leitmotif, Der Freischütz and Demonology, musical transcription and performance, costume design, fashion, perfumery, Egyptology and warfare. Naomi can be contacted at naomivonsenff@gmail.com

‘Love you to death’: Romance in the disaster film genre
Associate Professor Jo Coghlan, University of New England

The Tomorrow Man (2019) and *Don’t Look Up* (2021) provide unconventional endings to the traditional Hollywood disaster film: everyone dies. This paper examines these two American films to contextualise changes to the disaster genre from other periods in American filmatic history. In examining the disaster film genre, taking critic Vladamir Propp’s proto-structuralism position that popular narratives – such as those evident in conventional disaster films – are rigidly rule-governed (1928), this paper examines a number of unconventional narrative devices evident in these two films, which posit a shift in the end-of-days disaster genre including changing representations of the romantic hero.

Biography

Dr Jo Coghlan is an Associate Professor in Politics and Sociology and is Chair of the UNE Human Ethics Committee. She teaches in the areas of Australian politics, Australian Studies and popular and material culture. Her research interests are in the fashioned political body, political fashion and liminal political culture, and in death studies. Jo has recent publications in *Persona and Places: Negotiating Myths, Stereotypes and National Identities*, *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, *The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies* and *Media/Culture Journal*. Jo can be contacted at jo.coghlan@une.edu.au

Panel Four | Representations of Love

‘Love Conquers All’?: Race, *Bridgerton*, and the Romance Writers of America

Lisa J. Hackett, University of New England

Netflix’s historical romance *Bridgerton* (2020 -) was notable for its colour-diverse cast. The show, however, has drawn a lot of criticism for the way it handled race within the context of the British aristocracy of Regency London. In episode 4, “An Affair of Honour” the position of persons of colour is explicitly discussed between Lady Danbury and Simon, the Duke of Hastings, both themselves characters of colour. Lady Danbury holds that the transformation of status came about because of love, specifically that of the King for his Queen, a woman of colour: “love conquers all”. Simon demurs, they are elevated due to the King’s whim, and this can easily be reversed: “love changes nothing”.

While much has been made of the intersection between #BlackLivesMatter and the depictions of persons of colour in shows such as *Bridgerton*, in this paper I argue that depictions of Characters of Colour occupy a tenuous position within the genre of Historical Romance Novels. *Bridgerton* aired during a time when one of the biggest organisations devoted to the production of romance, the Romance Writers of America (RWA), was grappling with the issue of diversity. This paper compares the reception of *Bridgerton* with the events within the RWA. Through examining the events of the RWA from the Courtney Milan affair (2019), when the organisation imploded due to diversity issues, through to the controversy of the 2021 Vivian awards, this paper demonstrates that the current elevated position of characters of colour is held tenuously and more needs to be done to strengthen their existence within the world of Historical Romance.

Biography

Lisa J. Hackett is a Lecturer at the University of New England. She is also a founding member of PopCRN, the Popular Culture Research Network at UNE. Her research interests examine the role of clothing in various contexts, popular culture and the understanding of history. Her current research examines the roles of female Second World War pilot’s uniforms in propaganda. Her latest publications include “‘Biography of the self’: Why Australian women wear 1950s style clothing” (2021) in *Fashion, Style and Popular Culture* and “The History Bubble: Negotiating Authenticity in Historical Romance Novels” in *M/C Journal*. Her upcoming article “Sewing History: Consuming Culture” (2022) will be published in *Clothing Cultures*. Lisa can be contacted at lhacket4@une.edu.au

Popular Culture Representations of Divorced Women: A binary discussion of the romantic and unromantic

Sue Smith, University of New England

Popular culture has the potential to shape the social, cultural, and political attitudes about social groups and individuals in our society. Popular culture mediums such as film, television, literature, social media, and the like, act as visual and narrative devices that rely on binaries – usually stereotypes such as good/bad, men/women, citizen/non-citizen and so on, to shape attitudes, particularly about who is valued, worthy and even entitled. The binary of good/bad acts as a discourse through which

audiences develop an understanding of what actions and behaviours are considered socially and culturally acceptable, and what actions and behaviours are not. Consequently, popular culture influences how a society construes its social structures around who it 'others' as the person or a group of people judged to be different from and generally inferior to the hegemonic group of that society (Jensen, 2011, pp. 64-65). This paper examines how popular culture frames older divorced women using binaries, in ways which posit such value judgements. It argues that some of popular culture's stereotypical depictions of middle-to-older aged, divorced women frame them in a binary of 'good' divorced women who are financially independent and have managed to re-attract romance into their lives or 'bad' divorced women who are financially insecure and unromantically single. The latter, it is argued, lessens the visibility of vulnerable older women within spaces of socio-political discourse, agenda setting and social policy decision-making.

Biography

Sue Smith is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of New England, NSW, Australia. Her research interests include: the role of homemaking in Australia with regards to the economic, social, cultural and political perceptions and evaluations of the work; the social justice and equity issue regarding the unpaid status of homemaking work; whether the financial impoverishment of full-time homemakers following divorce constitutes Domestic and Family violence, financial abuse or economic abuse; historical and contemporary divorce laws in Australia with regards to alimony and spousal maintenance; social policies regarding social housing and approaches to the welfare of older women in Australia; the problem of the growing number of older women who are experiencing or vulnerable to poverty and homelessness in Australia today and; the long-term economic security of women in Australia. Sue can be contacted at sue.e.smith.67@gmail.com

The Grandmother Loves of Agape, Eudaimonia, and Storge, give Eros a run for his money
Mary Cane, University of Aberdeen

In recent popular culture, the unlovable mother-in-law, along with stereotypical nineteen seventies jokes, have been replaced by images of a grandmother excessively consumed with love for her grandchildren. Children's picture books, clothing, and social media, all portray images that inflate the emotional connection between grandmothers and their grandchildren. In this paper, through ethnographic interviews, this cultural phenomenon is investigated from the contemporary grandmother's perspective to see how it plays out in lived experience. With reference to Greek definitions of love, I consider the self-centred loves of hedonism and eros, as well as three types of selfless, unconditional love - agape, eudaimonia, and storge. Two central questions then emerge, (1) which of these different kinds of love underpins the extravagant images of grandmother love we are seeing in popular culture, and (2) which best describes the more complex types of love, manifested by the grandmother contributors? Current research (Fivush and Duke:2008) has shown that a foundation of family knowledge builds a sense of identity and mental resilience in young people, meaning that all grandmotherly love will have wide reaching implications.

Biography

I am a PhD researcher at the Elphinstone Institute of Ethnology and Folklore (University of Aberdeen) in Scotland. My academic interest is centred around the unique position grandmothers occupy within family, and the phenomenon of long distance, grandmother love. As a creative practitioner and writer, I write and illustrate articles about cultural history in the Northeast of Scotland and make children's

picture books, to inform my children and grandchildren about their family story. Like my contributor group of grandmothers, I regularly travel between Australia, New Zealand, and America to visit close family. Mary can be contacted at m.cane.18@aberdeen.ac.uk