

Café Philosophy



Love and Marriage

TOM MCGUIRE -Much Ado About MARRIAGE



A cynic once said that tying the knot involves three rings: an engagement ring, a wedding ring and suffering. It is true that many marriages are disastrous, and a higher percentage end in failure now than ever before. However, some people will claim that it is the best thing they ever did. My uncle and aunt found each other at 17 while still in high school, exchanged vows and now enjoy in their 60s, if not 'marital bliss' then something reasonably close.

Even philosophers have wives. Marriage raises important philosophical issues, and not just about whether to leave the toilet seat up or down. Socrates, perhaps the most influential Western philosopher, married Xanthippe. "By all means marry" advised Socrates. "If you get a good wife, you'll become happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher." It seems that the contributions of Xanthippe (apparently a quarrelsome nagger) to Western philosophy have gone mostly unrecognised.

We don't need to go all the way back to ancient Greece to find philosophers with strong views about marriage. Not many people know that the 19th century German author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche, offered enough marital advice to fill numerous weekly columns. Granted, some of his suggestions seem alien to modern sensibilities. "Are you visiting women? Do not forget your whip!" is

wisdom which the Sensitive New Age Guy may find a little difficult to take on board. But if we look past the more obvious signs of misogyny, in many ways Nietzsche was ahead of his time as this edition of *Café Philosophy* reveals.

But let's not forget the most important thing about marriage, which is love. Surely, the two go together 'like a horse and carriage' as the famous song attests? Yet, it is only recently that marriage was widely perceived as a natural consequence of falling in love. In European society, at least, there were more important reasons to get married like expanding one's family influence, or getting out of poverty. Even today, it is quite normal for Indian parents to work out who their offspring will marry well before they are even old enough to fall in love. In Saudi Arabia, where the government has yet to set a minimum age for marriage, children as young as 9 or 12 are frequently betrothed to much older suitors through no real choice of their own.

Then there is the question, hotly debated in Western countries, about whether gender should get in the way of a good marriage. I find this debate fascinating because it is intertwined with so many deeper issues such as freedom, love, tradition and spirituality. One of the articles in this issue is a personal reflection which explores the question of whether, even within a lesbian relationship, there should still be a 'husband' and a 'wife'.

You will sometimes hear that marriage is little more than a glorified piece of paper, which no longer even has much legal significance now that, in New Zealand

at least, de-facto relationships are treated virtually the same. However, there is still a mystique about marriage which gives it an air of importance, over and above bare legal obligations, that is hard to pin down. I think it has something to do with the fact that most Western people still get married in a church. Plenty of cultures have the idea that marriage is the creation (or rediscovery) of a spiritual bond that can never be severed. "Till death do us part" is a pretty heavy promise, if treated sincerely. But for many people, this bond continues even beyond death. I was invited to an old friend's marriage recently where the Christian priest emphasised again and again his belief that, by getting married, the couple were becoming one on a spiritual level. He used the analogy of two flames uniting. For many people marriage symbolises a metaphysical change that, at some level, is irreversible.

There has been a lot of recent focus on the impermanence of marriage. Not only has divorce become more common, but a lot of people see the entire institution of matrimony as redundant and outdated. Why pledge your allegiance to one person for the rest of your life? Why not just proceed through a whole string of relationships, or none at all? This change in attitude will inevitably produce a different sort of society than the one dominated by the 'nuclear family' of the 1950's. Only time will tell if it is for better or for worse.

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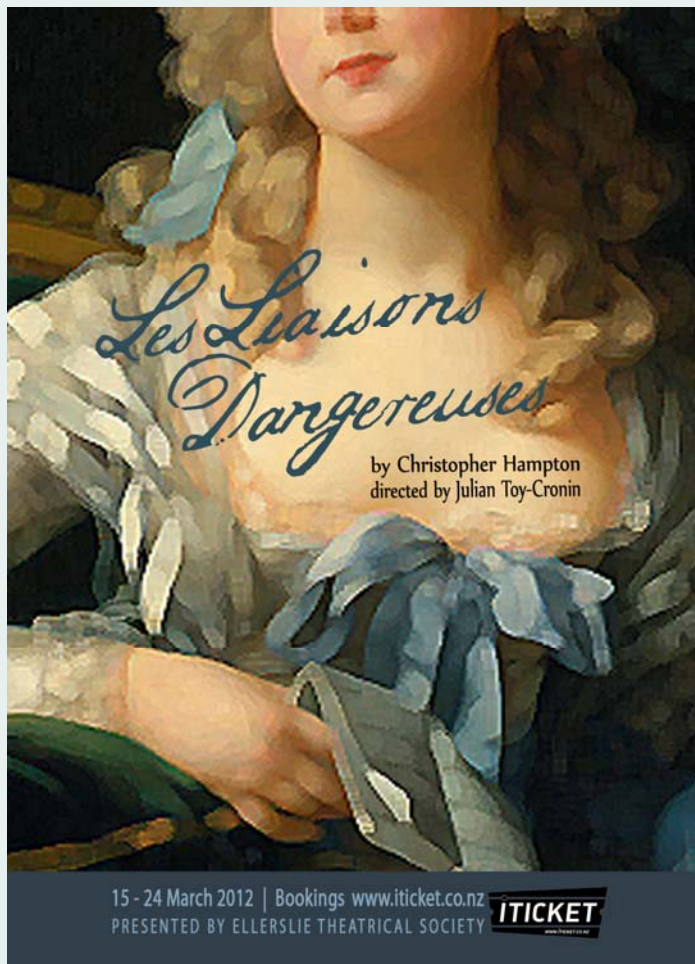


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An Intimate History

In 1782 Pierre Choderlos de Laclos published *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, a novel about sexual depravity among the French aristocracy. Largely ignored in the nineteenth-century, since the 1950s *Les Liaisons* has been performed using countless formats and titles.

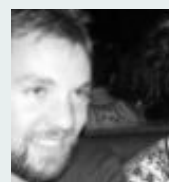
Using a tactic common in the eighteenth-century, *Les Liaisons* consists of a series of letters in which the characters themselves describe their actions. The book chiefly concerns two characters, the Vicomte de Valmont and his former mistress the Marquise de Merteuil, and their use of intricate sexual schemes to amuse themselves and settle scores. The novel chronicles their efforts to seduce and corrupt two other figures, the young Cecile de Volanges and Madame de Tourvel, a pious married woman.

It is unclear what the author's intentions were

with *Les Liaisons*; the central message is ambiguous. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, many viewed the descriptions of the idle aristocracy as Choderlos de Laclos's call to reform the ancient regime. Others postulated that the novel was a call to improve the education of women. Most critics see the book as an acclamation of the libertinism practiced by the novel's protagonists. At least in part due to the turbulent state of French politics in the eighteenth century, the author often changed parties and positions and would, perhaps therefore, change his justification for writing the novel.

Unpopular during the nineteenth century, readers recently rediscovered *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, due in part to the popular stage adaptation by CHRISTOPHER HAMPTON. The ambiguity of the message has proven central to the story's success; it gives the reader incredible freedom to interpret the tale. More than 230 years after its publication readers are still discovering that that Choderlos de Laclos's novel is a compelling, subtle story in which the use of the language makes a tale of sexual intrigue interesting to read, even if the central message of the novel is open to interpretation.

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WITH THE WEDDING CAME THE 'WIFE'



Marriage was never something that I quite imagined for myself, for a variety of reasons-not the least of which is that I happen to be a lesbian. As a professor of philosophy, well versed in feminist theories, a child of the '80s, marriage was definitely something to eschew. It was, it appeared, a symbol of women's oppression, hetero-sexism,

perpetuation of "traditional" values, etc. The institution of marriage did not connect up with my perception of loving unions, commitment, and the like. So I put it out of my mind completely.

I met Abelina when I was in my 30s and we instantly became friends. Somewhere along the line the friendship became a deep love and, with that, the desire to be committed to one another for life. So we moved in together and set up house.

While our core values definitely align, some others don't quite match up. For one thing, she was raised in a very traditional household, where the mother stays home and the father calls the shots. The roles are very clear for the boys and the girls, as they are cut along the stereotypical lines. Since I grew up with a single mother, everyone pitched in; cooked dinners, did the laundry, cleaned up. Independence was expected as was self-sufficiency. Thus, our perceptions of married life, or, more accurately, living together with loved ones, differed rather markedly. This didn't seem to be a problem for a while.

As our life together unfolded, I suddenly found myself "in-charge" of the household chores. I would come home from work, throw in laundry, clean up the bathroom, vacuum, make beds, take out trash, and start dinner. When necessary, I would stop at the market on the way home. I paid the bills and took care of the finances. I took care of the pets. Abelina came home and asked what was for dinner, wondered where her favorite shirt was, have I called the insurance company.

Honestly, I wasn't even aware of how our roles were shifting that much, because, oddly, it seemed like a natural progression somehow. When our cat became ill and needed medicine multiple times a day, I became primary caretaker. This responsibility made it difficult for us to go away together or out for an entire day. So I started being the one who was to stay home with our sick "child." Again, this seemed like what should be done.

Somehow, along the way, I became Abelina's "wife." Literally. Not only did I fall into the traditional role of wife with respect to taking care of the household, working, and caring for "children," I started being referred to as her wife. I never say "wife." She is my partner-equals (at least, that's what I want to believe.) Yet, she says things like "You're my wife, so you should do that" or "That's your wifely duty" or "Since we are married now, you should do what I want."

I am treated like an in-law in all of the stereotypical, TV-moment ways-definitely scrutinized for cooking abilities, household appearance, and how happy my partner is. It's

odd. As much as I have been accepted into their lives as their daughter's/sister's partner, I am still an in-law who doesn't quite match up.

With all of this in mind, when California allowed for legal civil unions, we did so immediately. This further cemented my "wifeliness." We carried on as wife and partner. When California briefly permitted same-sex marriages, we were to marry.

My wedding was supposed to be the whole traditional affair-gown, friends and family, music-the works. I found myself planning the wedding of my dreams (which I guess I had repressed.) I wanted the whole package-going to the court house alone was not an option. So we planned for a major event-flying in my relatives, catering, honeymoon afterward. I couldn't wait-for the party.

The party was the important part, oddly. We had been together for 10 years already. As I began to reflect on the "marriage" aspect of getting married, I got a bit tense.

The tension stemmed from the realization that I had already become a "wife" and wasn't pleased with that metamorphosis. I didn't love her any less, I just didn't like the whole imbalance of power or whatever it was.

So, I freaked out. When Prop. 8 was on the ballot, we hadn't finished planning the wedding-it was supposed to happen in January. As the election got closer, Abelina wanted to go the courthouse and get married. I balked. I wanted the party. Marriage was still something different to both of us. She wanted the document to verify our relationship as acceptable/traditional; I wanted the ceremonial event, as our union has always been accepted by my family. I was already married. Not just in their eyes, but in my own.

I am a wife. I am the one who picks up after my partner-cooks dinner, buys groceries, cares for children, nurses the sick, massages the tired-and am happy to do so for the most part. I do tell her that some of the demands are a bit lop-sided, and she sees that and alters her behavior. We only work with the scripts that we understand. Once we see that, we can re-write them. However, I didn't see the script so clearly until I wanted a wedding. So, I am a wife with, I suppose, a female husband. But it works.

Elizabeth M Hodge, who wrote this article is a philosopher and writer who lives in Monterey CA, USA, with her partner, Abelina and their feline children.



WAIT JUST A MOMENT, BEFORE YOU BEGIN MARRIED LIFE—Here's ten tips for a great marriage from Friedrich Nietzsche to help you make it succeed

Pic by Derrel Ho-Shing

BRIEF SUMMARY

Friendship is the highest form of love, according to the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, because great friends inspire each other and can even push each other towards the ideal of the *Übermensch* (German word for superman)

While he was doubtful that many people would be strong enough for this kind of higher relationship, Nietzsche saw friendship as essential to a good marriage. Sex, in contrast creates complications because a relationship based on romantic feelings is unlikely to endure a lifetime. Furthermore, the ontological differences between men and women tend to turn love into a war. In order to overcome the power games in the arena of love, Nietzsche thus challenges lovers to be great friends.

Drawing on Nietzsche's plethora of aphorisms on friendship, marriage, sex and power relationships, this article outlines how Nietzsche thought the institution of and approach to marriage could be re-invigorated in ways conducive to more successful

relationships and greater human achievements. While some of Nietzsche's ideas about marriage at first appear to be outrageous, much of what Nietzsche recommends is as relevant and challenging today as it was in his own time. Indeed, Nietzsche himself prophesied that the world would not be ready for his ideas until "sometime in the year 2000" (Fuss & Shapiro, 1971, p. 91)

INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche admires the ancient Greek model of relationships, where friends were great, men were warriors and women were for their recreation (1883-85/1969. p. 91). Yet he views modern marriage as another example of the collapse of standards in our hedonistic world that is heading for nihilism. In order to overcome this predicament, Nietzsche advocates a philosophy of "aristocratic radicalism" (Fuss & Shapiro, 1971, p. 104), where a few courageous and strong human beings take up the challenge of becoming an *Übermensch*.

THE SUPERMAN

An *Übermensch* (loosely translated as

"superman") is one "who transcends" (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 225), strives passionately and creatively to go beyond, lives life to the fullest, constantly combats and overcomes obstacles to be a greater person, and rejects comfort and security. Nietzsche regards heterosexual romantic relationships as generally being an irritating distraction from this goal because of the inherent power struggles.

Two things should be noted before we begin. Firstly, Nietzsche lived from 1844 to 1900: an era in which the roles of men and women in society were very different from today. The dominant role of women was to be wife and mother, and, whilst women's rights were certainly being discussed, with the first women's rights convention held in 1848, women's suffrage and women working in areas such as academia did not become widespread in Europe until well into the twentieth century.

Secondly, on reading Nietzsche, one might be tempted to conclude that, because Nietzsche says some critical things about women, he is a

misogynist. However, current thinking in Nietzsche scholarship often warns against taking Nietzsche's writings *prima facie* (e.g. Abbey, 1996; Helm, 2004; Oppel, 2005; Secomb, 2007) - mainly because he weaves such a hugely complex web of meanings. Furthermore Nietzsche says scathing things not only about women, but also about many different groups of people - including men - and is often contradictory. For example, in *Human, All Too Human* (1878-80/1996), Nietzsche says that "The perfect woman is a higher type of human being than the perfect man" (p. 150), which suggests that he also had great respect for women at times.

CHALLENGE CURRENT ISSUES

Nietzsche's aim is to challenge our assumption about many issues - not only about gender roles, but also about Christianity, conventional morality, politics and the Enlightenment, to name just a few. I would thus agree with Secomb (2007) when she asserts that, "Despite, or perhaps because of, his unconventional approach, Nietzsche is able to challenge and disturb our most settled convictions forcing us to rethink taken-for-granted notions and assumptions" (p. 29). Many of Nietzsche's remarks about women, loving relationships and marriage are, at face value, outrageous by modern standards. However, in the spirit of Nietzsche, my aim in exploring a few of his suggestions relating to loving relationships and marriage is to embrace his challenge, to acknowledge his contradictions, and to look beyond his provocations. In light of this, this paper analyses ten of Nietzsche's ideas about how to make marriages great.

TEN TIPS FOR A GREAT MARRIAGE

1. DON'T MARRY FOR LOVE (MARRY SOMEONE WHOM YOU LIKE TALKING TO)

Before walking down the aisle, Nietzsche advises the betrothed to ask themselves this question: "Do you believe you are going to enjoy talking with this woman up to your old age? Everything else in marriage is

transitory, but most of the time you are together will be devoted to conversation" (1878-80/1996, p. 152). Thus, being interested in one another is infinitely more important to the success of a relationship than being attracted to each other. One hundred years before Harry met Sally, Nietzsche was advocating that, in order to preserve a friendship between a man and a woman, "a slight physical antipathy" is required (1878-80/1996, p. 151).

"He who marries for love must live in grief" says the Spanish proverb.

THE SIZZLE AND FIZZLE OF ROMANTIC LOVE

For Nietzsche, a marriage based only on romantic love is on shaky ground because it is fleeting: "Sensuality often makes love grow too quickly, so that the root remains weak and is easy to pull out" (1886/1990, p. 98). It is much better if there is no sexual attraction to confuse the friendship. "How many married men there are who have experienced the morning when it has dawned on them that their young wife is tedious and believes the opposite" (Nietzsche, 1881/1997, p. 150). To avoid this complication, he recommends preparing lovers for the inevitable evaporation of attraction in order to curb the disappointment when it happens: "Sometimes it requires only a stronger pair of spectacles to cure the lover, and he who had the imagination to picture a face, a figure twenty years older would perhaps pass through life very undisturbed" Nietzsche (1878-80/1996, p. 154).

Romantic love relationships are bound to sizzle and fizzle,

Zarathustra, the protagonist of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85/1969), argues that romantic love relationships are just brief follies and that it is stupid to turn a folly into a long-term commitment (p. 96). Earlier, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche stresses the insanity of love-matches: "Marriages contracted from love (so-called love-matches) have error for their father and need for their mother" (p. 151). For marriage to be based on romantic love, as modern marriages often are, undermines the whole institution by basing it on an idiosyncrasy - and "You never, ever base on institution on an idiosyncrasy" (Nietzsche, 1888/2005b, p. 215).

BROKEN PROMISES

In *Twilight of the Idols* (1888/2005b), Nietzsche notes that marriage has become completely irrelevant and irrational (p. 215). Nietzsche had already highlighted in *Daybreak* (1881/1997) that marriage is "very often and almost as a general rule refuted" and thus has "introduced a very great deal of hypocrisy and lying into the world" (p. 21). Would it not be better to remain friends and lovers, without creating complications with vows that will inevitably be broken? If lovers continue to walk down the aisle while in love, Nietzsche suggests making it illegal:

We ought not be permitted to come to a decision affecting our whole life while we are in the condition of being in love, nor to determine once and for all the character of the company we keep on the basis of a violent whim: the oaths of lovers ought to be publicly declared invalid and marriage denied them: - the reason being that one ought to take marriage enormously more seriously! (1881/1997, p. 98).

Instead of doing away with marriage altogether, Nietzsche seeks in *Twilight of the Idols* to reinvigorate it by inventing "new ideals" (1888/2005b, p. 98).

He draws us back to first principles to look at why marriage existed in the first place: it was about what was good for

the family and society. Ancient Greek marriages had solid foundations because they were rational business arrangements, roles were very clearly defined, couples could not get divorced, and love was not a factor in the decision. Marriage “knew how to be heard above the accidents of feeling, passion, and the distractions of the moment” (Nietzsche 1888/2005b, p. 215).

While in most western cultures today this idea seems old-fashioned, there are many cultures in which arranged marriages still exist. For the rest of us, Nietzsche advises that it would be much more sensible to marry not only because the individuals happen to be in lust, but by taking other factors into account, such as being able to talk to the spouse, and to maintain the family’s “power, influence and wealth” for future generations (1888/2005b, p. 215). To do this, strong and healthy offspring are required.

2. MAKE SUPER-BABIES

If Nietzsche were a god looking down on humanity, he says he would be hugely disappointed with what he saw going on with modern marriage. With people marrying for love, mate-selection is based on chance, and making babies is, thus, a random exercise. Mankind is capable of “amazing” things, and yet “individuals are squandered” because they get so swept away with the frivolity of romantic loving that they give “no thought to the fact, indeed that through procreation he could prepare the way for an even more victorious life” (Nietzsche, 1881/1997, p. 97). This is also a theme in *The Will to Power* (1883-88/1968), where Nietzsche explains that creating new generations of even more amazing individuals is a great achievement and even the ultimate expression of an individual’s power (p. 360). So, it is actually in the individual’s greatest self-interest to marry not for love, but in order to create strong, healthy, well-educated children.

Nietzsche advocates that we improve

the human species and build great civilisations through careful mate selection. Zarathustra says: “You should propagate yourself not only forward, but upward!” (1883-85/1969, p. 95). Through discerning gene matching, the parents should be able to create children greater than themselves.

While marriage is, of course, not a necessary condition for procreation, Nietzsche thinks the family unit would certainly assist in building those new generations: “May the garden of marriage help you to do it!” (1883-85/1969, p. 95). Yet, perhaps loving and super-baby making are not as mutually exclusive as Nietzsche might think. For, when in love, and not simply lusty animal attraction, partners tend to think very highly of each other, and thus it is logical that the lovers would also think that their partners would be able to produce good offspring.

3. NEVER PROMISE EVERLASTING LOVE

If romantic love is ephemeral, promising to love your partner forever is absurd and a lie, according to Nietzsche. Love that lasts a lifetime is the exception, not the rule. Love, like any other feeling, is not within the individual’s power. Nietzsche’s argument is as follows: love is a feeling; feelings are involuntary; and a promise cannot be made based on something that one has no control over.

What one can promise, however, are actions. In a loving relationship, one can promise actions that “are usually the consequences of love” (Nietzsche, 1878-80/1996, p. 42). It would be much more appropriate to recognise this contingency and be honest about it. To avoid deception in wedding vows, Nietzsche recommends saying something along these lines:

“FOR AS LONG AS I LOVE YOU I SHALL RENDER TO YOU THE ACTIONS OF LOVE; IF I CEASE TO LOVE YOU, YOU WILL CONTINUE TO RECEIVE THE SAME ACTIONS FROM ME, THOUGH FROM OTHER MOTIVES” (1878-80/1996, p. 42).

This will not be deceptive, because one is promising to act as if still in love, rather than mistakenly promising the feeling of love.

Nietzsche is convinced that this would be perfectly acceptable and that the beloved will still say “I do” to marriage when being confronted with a partner who is uncertain about how long the loving feeling will last. He assumes the still popular view that feelings are involuntary and that love is thus not a choice. Regardless of whether or not one agrees with Nietzsche that feelings are involuntary, one has to acknowledge that Nietzsche is right in recognising the absurdity of promising on their wedding day, there is a much better chance of the marriage enduring. Since romantic love relationships are often not strong enough to ensure a lifetime, other motivations are needed. Yet let us now consider the possibility of adapting marriage to better suit romantic love relationships.

4. SHORT TERM MARRIAGES

To avoid the problem of the temporary nature of romantic love relationships, why do people not agree to short-term marriages upfront? Nietzsche even considered the option of a two-year marriage for himself at one stage. To understand Nietzsche’s reasoning in this regard, we must first better understand Nietzsche’s view of friendship. In *The Gay Science* (1882/2001), Nietzsche refers to a noble kind of friendship called a “STAR FRIENDSHIP”:

We are two ships, each of which has its own goal and course; we may cross and have a feast together, as we did - and then the good ships lay so quietly in one harbour and one sun that it may have seemed as if they had

already completed their course and had the same goal. But then the almighty force of our projects drove us apart once again, into different seas and sunny zones ... (p. 159).

Despite many of Nietzsche's own star friendships turning sour, he glorifies them and seems to truly appreciate the short time they lasted. Applying this same concept to romantic love relationships, the risk for lovers is not only that they loving feeling may wane, but that people change too. Like ships that come together and separate in the star friendship, so too do lovers have their own personal goals and seek to pursue their own paths that may not be synergistic. Thus the custom of marriage where two people are bound together for life is naturally untenable.

In *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche suggests that it would be much better (for men, presumably) to do away with the custom of one wife for life and instead "one might very well consider whether nature and reason do not dictate that a man ought to have two marriages" (p. 156). The first marriage is the most important and necessary for a man's education; it should be when the man is twenty-two years old to a woman who is "intellectually and morally superior and who can lead him through the perils of the twenties" (Nietzsche 1878-80/1996, p. 156). A second marriage, while useful, is not necessary; it should be during a man's thirties and to a younger disciple "whose education he would himself take in hand". Later in life, man should preferably be without a wife because marriage "is often harmful and promotes the spiritual retrogression of the man" (Nietzsche 1878-80/1996, p. 156). In a later work, Nietzsche cites a raft of great philosophers who have not been married as evidence for this incompatibility between marriage and personal fulfilment: "Heraclitus, Plato,

Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer", with only Socrates as the ironic exception (1887/1989, P. 107).

While Nietzsche does not go into detail on how serial monogamy could be of benefit to women, he recognises that it would require generosity on their part - hence the title he gives the aphorism discussed in the previous paragraph: "Opportunity for female generosity" (1878-80/1996, p. 156). Nevertheless, the star friendship is not just a male domain. However, once children are introduced, this argument is in conflict with Nietzsche view that a strong family unit is better for a child's upbringing and education. With regard to such contradictions, it could nevertheless be argued that Nietzsche is simply presenting various options to couples and by no means insisting that every suggestion needs to be accepted as indispensably part of a comprehensive and systematic solution.

5. MAKE IT WORK

For couples wanting to marry. Nietzsche proposes a trial first. Zarathustra says: "Allow us a term and a little marriage, to see if we are fit for the great marriage! It is a big thing always to be with another!" (1883-85/1969, p. 228). Nietzsche argues that people rush amorously into marriage and, when it goes wrong, it causes the couple as well as everyone around them a great deal of aggravation. Just be honest, urges Zarathustra, and say: "We love each other, let us see to it that we stay in love! Or shall our promise be a mistake?" (Nietzsche, 1883-85/1969, p. 228). Had the lovers taken Nietzsche's advice and promised the semblance of love, not the continuation of the feeling of love, it would have been easier to keep the promise and to stay together, as expectations had already been set. Further trying to convince us that love actually is irrelevant in a marriage, Nietzsche writes:

Sample of reflection before marriage.
- Supposing she loves me, how burdensome she would become to me in the long run! And supposing she does not love me, how really burdensome she would become to me in the long run! - It is only a question of two different kinds of burdensomeness - therefore let us get married! (1881/1997, p. 172).

Presumably, setting expectations low will avoid disappointment in the long run. Married couples will inevitably encounter problems, however, and Nietzsche has a couple of other alternatives for how to make marriage work.

6. GIVE HER A BABY

Zarathustra says that "Everything about woman is a riddle, and everything about woman has one solution: it is called pregnancy" (Nietzsche, 1883-85/1969, p. 91). Pregnancy is the solution because it is the only reason that a woman needs a man: "Man is for woman a means, the purpose is always the child" (Nietzsche, 1883-



85/1969, p. 91). Taking these comments at face value, Diethe (1989) reads Nietzsche as saying that women are “completely defined by the reproductive urge” and their “sole instinct is to crave for children” (p. 867); permanently craving for sex, women are predators or “vamp-like *femmes fatales*” who seduce men simply for impregnation (pp. 865, 867).

This interpretation fits nicely with Nietzsche’s idea that people should choose mates based on the criterion of attempting to produce strong offspring. It is thus only natural for women to sue their skills of seduction to this end. Nevertheless other scholars, such as Ackermann (1990, p. 123), encourage us not to jump to conclusions, because it is unclear whose pregnancy is being discussed; elsewhere, Nietzsche also uses pregnancy as a metaphor for creativity.

Yet the two interpretations - woman as sex animal and woman as stimulating creativity - are not mutually exclusive. The underlying assumption in this suggestion is that women are capable of being independent and do not need a man for anything except sperm. Woman, in her quest to create a super-baby, uses man to impregnate her. Yet it could also mean that men and women use each other as fertiliser for creativity, and as such use marriage as a launching pad to greater things and to achieve greater goals.

7. GET A LITTLE ACTION ON THE SIDE

Can a woman be a good wife. “friend, assistant, mother, family head and housekeeper.” Business woman and concubine to boot (Nietzsche, 1878-80/1996, p. 157)? Nietzsche realises that all these roles and expectations put a huge strain on a woman and concedes that “it would be too much to demand of her” (1878-80/1996, p. 157). In this regard, Abbey (1997) notes that, “a century before its becoming common currency in the western world, Nietzsche saw the problem of the superwoman!” (p. 85).

Nietzsche assumes that men naturally need sex more than women do, and his

solution is not to help a wife out with the housework, but to relieve women of the burden of satisfying their husband’s sexual desires by finding a “natural assistant, namely concubinage” (1878-80/1996, p. 157). Anticipating some resistance, Nietzsche urges women to think of the “higher conception” of marriage as a “soul-friendship” in which sensuality is “a rare occasional means to a greater end” - that is, creating children (1878-80/1996, p. 157). This is a neat solution for Nietzsche because, as he suggests elsewhere, fidelity comes naturally to a woman but not to a man (1882/2001, p. 228).

One compelling explanation for the concubine suggestion is that, in Nietzsche’s time, contraception was not widespread, so sex often resulted in reproduction (Diethe, 1989, p. 866). Nietzsche is simply proposing clarification of the role of women as mother as distinct from that of woman as sex partner. While there is no supporting evidence for this essentialist idea that women are naturally faithful, one might still appreciate that Nietzsche has good intentions in seeking creative ways to reduce a wife’s stress levels. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that introducing a concubine into a marriage may only increase a wife’s stress.

8. LET HIM SUFFER

Whereas women naturally like peace and comfort, men want quite the opposite; men welcome challenges and obstacles, according to Nietzsche (1878-80/1996). Women hate to see men suffer and try to help them to have easier lives by removing obstacles; yet doing so is very frustrating for men. Zarathustra explains the phoenix-like rebirth that comes from the most harrowing experiences; “You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame: how could you become new, if you had not first become ashes?” (Nietzsche, 1883-85, p. 90). Like giving birth, great creations and achievements are painful: “all becoming and growth, everything that guarantees the future involves pain” (Nietzsche, 1888/2005b, p. 228).

This idea relates to what Nietzsche had first-hand experience of, having been very ill for most of his life. In a letter to a friend he wrote: “My illness has been my greatest boon; it unblocked me, it gave me the courage to be myself” (Fuss & Shapiro, 1971, p. 114). Constantly overcoming the obstacles and challenges in life, he thought, provided strength of character and could bring the greatest rewards and creativity. One of Nietzsche’s most enduring maxims, “What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger”



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(1888/2005b, p. 157), was something he seemed to truly believe. The greater the challenge, the greater the achievement when it is overcome. Like a predecessor, Max Stirner, who advocated preserving life only in order to squander it, Nietzsche admires people who care more about challenging than safeguarding themselves: “I love those who do not wish to preserve themselves. I love with my whole love those who go down and perish: for they are going beyond” (1883-85/1969, p. 217).

While Nietzsche makes some sweeping generalisations about the ontological differences between men and women, there is certainly merit in acknowledging that people have different preferences. Just because two people are in love does not mean that they have to pretend to be the same - which is perhaps why they need a whip.

9. Take a Whip to Her!

“Are you visiting women? Do not forget your whip!” is a piece of advice given to Zarathustra and

which has created a huge amount of speculation as to its meaning (Nietzsche, 1883-85/1969, p. 93). Taken literally, one might believe it suggests disdain for women and advocates physical violence against them. Yet the context of the quotation causes us not to jump to conclusions. The advice is given to Zarathustra by an old woman as a special gift of thanks and she warns him to keep it a secret - perhaps because in the wrong hands it would be misunderstood.

Solomon and Higgins (2000) argue that, because Zarathustra has been talking about differences in the way men and women experience and practises love, "the old woman presents the sexes as engaged in a power struggle that the male is by no means assured of winning" (pp. 7-8). Indeed, Nietzsche says elsewhere that love is war and "the deadly hatred between the sexes!" (1888/2005a, p. 236).

Shortly before *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was written, a photograph was taken of Nietzsche with two of his close friends at the time; Lou Salome and Paul Ree. The photograph shows Salome driving a pony-trap and brandishing a whip, with Nietzsche and Ree between the shafts. While the photograph, orchestrated by Nietzsche may have simply been a bit of fun, it shows that "the men are the potential victims" (Thomas, 1980, p. 117).

One of the more interesting interpretations builds on the idea that, when in love, there is a strong desire to dissolve the feeling of otherness and 'make the same' (Nietzsche, 1881/1997, pp. 210-211). Nietzsche thinks this to be madness, arguing that distance is essential to keep power over oneself: "The thinker must always from time to time drive away those people he loves", because love tends to blind one to the truth, giving lovers power to deceive and to seduce; conversely, driving lovers away tends to reveal their malice and helps one to distance oneself from them

(1881/1997, pp. 197-198).

Perhaps the will is to help Zarathustra with either creating or preserving a "motivating distance" (Ackermann, 1990, p. 124). Distance from women is very important for Nietzsche so as not to spoil the mystery and beauty of the feminine: "The magic and the most powerful effect of women is, to speak the language of the philosophers, action at a distance" (1882/2001, p. 71). Derrida (1979), drawing on the power struggle between men and women, suggests that a man must keep his distance to avoid falling under the spell of a woman's "beguiling song of enchantment" and as such to remain free to "seduce without being seduced" (p. 49).

It is most unlikely that Nietzsche means physical violence when Zarathustra was advised to take a whip to women. It is much more likely that the comment is metaphorical and that the whip is to be used by either or both lovers to preserve distance from one another, in order to avoid forgetting their individuality. In the context of loving relationships, we will now explore the possibility that the whip is for the great Zarathustra to give to a woman to help him be even greater. The best type of relationship is one where the partners are brave enough to "whip each other into shape" so to speak.

10. MARRY YOUR BEST FRIEND

For Nietzsche, friendship is the "ultimate ideal" of love and "a kind of ideal of Being-with-Others" (Solomon, 2003, pp. 95, 157). He admires the ancient Greek ideal of friendships between men and agreed with Aristotle that great friends could inspire each other. This kind of friendship is neither about mutual benefit nor based on pleasure and enjoyment. While a great friendship may include all these elements, the key difference is that really great friends help one another to become better people through "a shared higher thirst for an ideal above them" (Nietzsche, 1882/2001, p. 41); in other words, each friend acts like a "catalytic muse" for the other

(Lungstrum, 1994, p. 137).

MAN SHOULD BE OVERCOME

Nietzsche says that "man is something that should be overcome", and yet this is something that is extremely difficult to do on one's own (1883-85/1969, p. 41). The individual, if left alone for too long without friends, can too easily fall into a rut. For, as Nietzsche warns in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886/1990), "He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you" (p. 102). Thus, the friend is valued not so much for his or her gaze, as Jean-Paul Sartre later envisaged, but rather for his or her ability to pull the individual up from the depths of the abyss and be a launching pad to a greater existence.

Yet being a great friend is not an easy task. The best teachers are the hardest critics and should be wary of being too sympathetic towards the friend. Zarathustra says: "Let your pity for your friend conceal itself under a hard shell" (Nietzsche, 1883-85/1969, p. 83). Secomb (2007) highlights that "Friends do not unquestioningly uphold, reinforce and echo our attitudes but provide new perspectives and interrogate our presuppositions" (pp. 30-31). Indeed, sometimes great friends must be so ruthless that they are also the enemy: "If you want a friend, you must also be willing to wage war for him: and to wage war, you must be capable of being an enemy" (Nietzsche, 1883-85/1969, p. 82).

Nietzsche is challenging all of us to be better friends. He urges lovers not to get caught in power games but instead to help each other find the way to becoming an

Übermensch. While Nietzsche tends to be a little vague on what the Übermensch entails, he thought the best kind of love “arouses longing for the Superman” (1883-85/1969, p. 96). This kind of love propels us to want to be the best kind of person we can be. It is precisely this kind of great friendship that will make a great marriage. In fact, “The best friend will probably acquire the best wife, because a good marriage is founded on the talent of friendship” (Nietzsche, 1878-80/1996, p. 150).

CONCLUSION

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre (2007) argues that “it is in his relentlessly serious pursuit of the problem, not in his frivolous solutions that Nietzsche’s greatness lies” (p. 114). Yet this paper has shown that Nietzsche put forward at least ten practical, if at times mutually exclusive, suggestions for how to make marriages more successful, many of which are still relevant today. While initially some of these suggestions may appear frivolous, I have shown through a number of alternative interpretations that Nietzsche’s solutions are extremely insightful. For example, Nietzsche provides sage and universal advice when he says that marriage should be based on something more rational than romantic loving alone, that lovers should be honest with each other from the very beginning, and that lovers should learn to stand on their own two feet and never forget their own goals in life; so, too, when he highlights the great achievement in creating a wonderful child. The emergence of fertility clinics where parents can create “bespoke babies” by choosing physical traits and screening for defects and diseases suggests that there is indeed a demand for creating stronger and more attractive children cosmetically (Sherwell, 2009). Nietzsche is simply arguing a natural form of this through partner selection rather than in test tubes. Moreover, the issue of stay-at-home versus working mothers and the conflicting roles of mother, wife and career woman is still topical today. Alluding to the fact that all a woman needs a man for is for sperm, one might wonder if Nietzsche foresaw a diminishing need for men as breadwinners and the breakdown of the nuclear family - both of which would hinder a child’s upbringing. Indeed, recent United States

census data show that four out of ten births were to unmarried women. This was more than in any other year in the nation’s history, and three-quarters of those mothers were 20 or older (Ventura, 2009). The wide availability of contraception puts seriously into question whether all these pregnancies were accidental. If marriage were to become obsolete, Nietzsche would have been hugely disappointed and worried about the impact of that on children’s development.

Nietzsche did not have it all worked out. Indeed, he seemed to find women confusing at times, as shown, for example, as we have already seen, in his saying that they are “a riddle”. Yet he saw it as natural that people fall in love and like to get married. When marriages fall apart, they can be painful, because promises get broken and people get damaged and weakened. Loving relationships he thought, can be wonderful when they are between two strong individuals. Yet such a thing is rare, and great marriages are even rarer. Yet that does not mean that great loving relationships are impossible. He gives us ideas how to do it well and make it work wonderfully. It will not be easy. It will create conflict. At times, the lovers will have to be enemies. Yet Nietzsche would approve because he welcomed challenges and obstacles in life.

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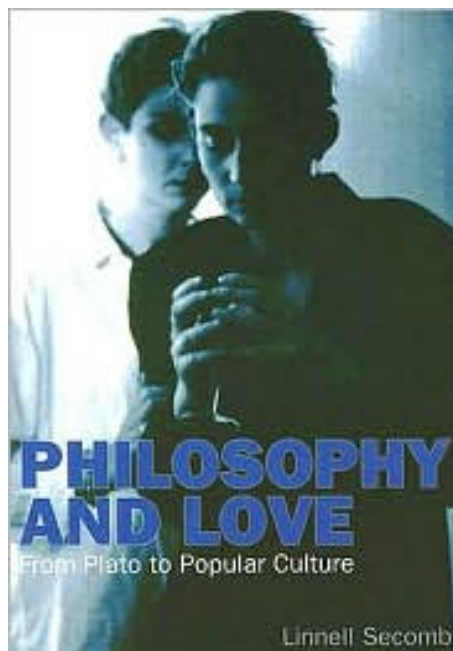
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AMERICAN FILMS

13 Conversations about One Thing



Ask yourself if you're really happy and you might be surprised at what you find. Ask several people at various points in their lives and you will get the premise behind 13 Conversations, a film that depicts the lives of five different individuals and their quest to find and comprehend the meaning of happiness.

We first get a glimpse of Walker's life, a physics professor whose life has been disrupted by an assault. But his wife, Patricia, seems more concerned than he is. At the dinner table, the two can barely exchange a word. The whole randomness of the event has brought to his attention his general unhappiness and boredom with his routine life. So, to compensate, he starts an affair with one of the university secretaries. Eventually, however, he comes to realize that even the affair itself becomes routine. Patricia, on the other hand, is well aware of the affair and contemplates divorce.

In another storyline, Troy is a hotshot attorney, out celebrating over a recent court victory. While ordering drinks at a local bar, he is told by another barfly that happiness is not what it's cracked up to be. Troy mocks him, buys him a drink, and returns to his party happier than ever. Yet, on his way home, his life is jolted after a hit and run accident. Instead of calling the police, he panics and flees the scene. His impending deterioration then plays out like a character in a novel by Dostoevsky.

Lastly, Gene is an office manager for an insurance company puzzled by one of his employee's strange behavior. It would seem that Wade Bowman is always happy, no matter what the circumstance. This unusual amount of happiness even in bad times, makes Gene crazy. He cannot understand how someone could be so happy and cheerful all the time. Thus, he pulls out all the stops to make Wade unhappy, including firing him. When his attempts fail, he is stricken with guilt and must find a way to make amends.

This is an intelligent film along the lines of Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, showing the effects of happiness or the pursuit of happiness on various people with

varying storylines, some of which are related and others which are not. As random as real life, so too is the storytelling of 13 Conversations. But interestingly enough, Jill Sprecher puts the pieces together in a way that is unconventional, yet flows with a greater purpose. There is a sort of thoughtful randomness to the clips which makes for a delight to watch. We don't see things in a chronological order per se, but rather an order in which makes the scenes more cohesive and built around a particular idiom or saying. Such sayings are interjected throughout: "Once I knew a happy man. His happiness was a curse;" "Fortune smiles on some and laughs at others," etc.

Is life really random or is there something greater that connects us all together? This film playfully ponders the meaning of true happiness, the notion of karma and luck, and the possibility of hope. It also hints at how one single event can change another's life forever. The assault changes Walker's routine, Wade loses his job but miraculously stumbles into another, Troy is living high off the hog until his car accident, and Beatrice has her confidence shattered after her accident.

The film has several magnificent performances from Turturro, DuVall, and McConaughey - but, above all, this is

Alan Arkin's picture. Arkin plays the prototypical businessman: stern, self assured, and unhappy. His presence resonates with the everyman and seems so effortless. In fact, it is his resentment of a happy co-worker that brings out his true nature: a man who is willing to do anything to get rid of or ruin this person's life. Much like Dr. Seuss' Grinch, Gene's best attempts at ruining Wade's happiness are ineffective. And, after realizing his attempts are futile, guilt overwhelms him, his heart grows [two sizes] and he finds that he must secretly try and help the man he once tried to harm.

Like another one of Arkin's best pictures, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, this film has the same ebb and flow. But unlike *Glengarry*, 13 Conversations is not a competitive or cutthroat look at life, but rather a statement about fate, the choices we make, and how things are all connected. The fact that it takes place in New York City is even more compelling because you may think that in a great metropolis, the chances of interconnectedness would be slim. Instead, despite various trials and tribulations, we are shown that fate may be kind or cruel. One subtle event can be life changing. And no matter what the time or place, there is always a glimmer of hope, sometimes when you least expect it.

By Mark Sells

<http://www.kamera.co.uk/article.php/503>

**THIS FILM PONDERES
THE MEANING OF
HAPPINESS, THE
NOTION OF KARMA
AND LUCK, AND THE
POSSIBILITY OF HOPE.
IT ALSO HINTS AT HOW
ONE SINGLE EVENT
CAN CHANGE A
PERSONS LIFE**



FRENCH FILMS

ROMAIN DURIS

HEARTBREAKER

Romain Duris is a celebrated actor in his native France and a recognized face in world cinema. He's young, charismatic, and versatile — attributes that make him

an ideal candidate for crossover success — so why is he largely unknown to American moviegoers?

Unfortunately, Duris is working against a Hollywood system that insists on recycling its male stars. Although two of his past films — *L'Auberge Espagnole* (The Spanish Apartment) and *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* — were critically praised and had success in their limited American releases, he hasn't really had an opportunity to break out or even be noticed here beyond perhaps *Le Divorce*. However, Duris' latest effort as Alex Lippi in director Pascal Chaumeil's *Heartbreaker* will hopefully bring him some deserved recognition stateside.

Alex is a professional Romeo and master of disguise, operating a niche business with his sister (Julie Ferrier) and her husband Marc (Francois Damiens). The business, designed to break up relationships, dupes unwitting lovers with elaborate schemes and outrageous hijinx, but it's on the verge of bankruptcy because Alex spends their profits on Italian suits and illicit ventures. To get the company out of the red and save his own ass, Alex takes a lucrative job that contradicts his only ethical principle: with true love, he shan't intervene. With their careers in the balance and 10 days to stop sophisticated heiress Juliette (Vanessa Paradis) from marrying her seemingly perfect fiancé,

the team descends upon Monte Carlo. But Juliet turns out to be a tough mark and when Alex becomes her bodyguard (spoiler alert!), he begins to fall for her.

If my abbreviated plot summary sounds fairly banal, it should. The plot is farcically trivial. This is a film that has no qualms with the tropes of romantic comedy. In fact, it plays almost exclusively within the genre's conventions. However, its characters are tactfully drawn and the situational-comedy is often hilarious. While Duris is the obvious standout, displaying his range in mock action sequences and *Dirty Dancing*-inspired numbers, Damiens manages to steal some scenes with lively Jerry Lewis-style slapstick. As Alex's older sister, Ferrier is supposed to be the level-headed one, but she portrays the character with enough verve to make her comedic presence known. Their interplay comes off natural and rarely forced, as if they've worked the shtick before. With the team frequently costumed and sending up stereotypes, they become role players in a ribald carnivalesque drama.

Heartbreaker is very aware of its lightheartedness and disposability, never attempting to be more than a crowd-pleasing affair. Watching the film for its narrative is pointless; you already know the ending (assuming you've seen a Drew Barrymore or Hugh Grant film). There are so many cinema reference points and pop culture nuggets that the movie develops a tone of freewheeling homage to the genre's cloying romanticism, harkening back to spy thrillers and even pulling off a bit about George Michael and Wham! without derailing.

Given Hollywood's recent history, there's a good chance that *Heartbreaker* will be remade and thoroughly botched for audiences that can't read subtitles. My guess is that Cameron Diaz and Bradley Cooper will be featured, because apparently the average viewer lusts after them. If it is rehashed, though, there's no reason why Romain Duris shouldn't be involved. He's an ideal international Casanova.

Review by: RYAN MOONEY at Tiny Mix Tapes;
<http://www.tinymixtapes.com/film/heartbreaker>

CONDITIONS OF LOVE—*The philosophy of Intimacy*— by John Armstrong

This book is an attempt to understand the nature of love by way of reflecting upon significant works of literature. In chapter one a book by Johann Goethe, *The Sorrows of the Young Werther*, is mentioned as defining love as a: 'special kind of feeling.'

In chapter two various definitions of love are presented, these range from "love is the growth of the wings of the soul," to the cynical: "love is an illusion;" from the optimistic: "love is the solution to the deepest problems of existence," and to the less poetic; "love is friendship plus sex."

In chapter three the question of "what is love for?" is debated and the fact that, "the experience of love is part of our genetic endowment. In other words our minds are set for love."

In chapter twenty one Erich Fromm is quoted as saying, "that love is the only thing which can fully connect us to another person—and since being disconnected from other people is, he thinks, the central problem of our times, love is the solution to the key problem of existence."

This is an enlightening book and is recommended to anyone in a relationship or who may be planning to get married. As John Armstrong wisely remarks, "love is an achievement, it is something we create, day-by-day, not something we just find if we're lucky." Rob Mason



Photo of Miki by Gary Baley

Elle Hunt explains what it means to: 'LOSE THE (*Marriage*) PLOT'

Much of what we learn about love, we learn from literature. Elle Hunt looks at what the plot of Jeffrey Eugenides' latest novel has to say about marriage.

The release of Jeffrey Eugenides' third novel, *The Marriage Plot*, last year prompted me to reflect on the first time I read *Middlesex*. I was 16 or 17, and my copy was on loan from my then-best friend's mother, a sworn devotee of the Oprah Book Club. Laura had read it and loved it and passed it onto me.

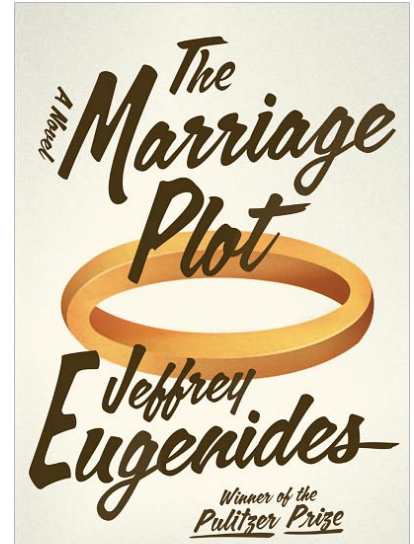
Along with Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, which I read every six months or so when I was in my early teens, *Middlesex* taught me that great literature could be both ambitious and accessible. While *Pi* made the pairing of a boy and a tiger in a lifeboat seem like the realistic outcome of maritime incompetence and a zoo in transit, *Middlesex* chronicles the momentous impact of a mutated gene on three generations of a Greek family.

Told from the perspective of the intersex protagonist Cal (or Calliope), *Middlesex* covers more ground—three continents, one for each generation, and social, cultural and historical events spanning decades—than one would think possible in a 544-page paperback, but not once does it seem to overreach its vision. As New York Times reviewer William Deresiewicz wrote: "For all the novelty of its hermaphroditic protagonist,

[*Middlesex*] is straight-up realism, start to finish".

In truth, Deresiewicz intended that comment as criticism, not praise (he conceded that his dislike of *Middlesex* associates him with "a minority of perhaps no more than one"), but that "realism" in the face of its scope—its matter-of-fact, personable depiction of 5-Alpha-reductase deficiency, a condition that most of us will go through life with no knowledge of—was what endeared me to *Middlesex* in the first place. I'd liked Eugenides' debut, *The Virgin Suicides*, but it was so intangible and dreamlike, I couldn't find something of substance to connect with. Take away what Deresiewicz acidly describes as its "trendy theme", *Middlesex* is at heart a bildungsroman, and its unapologetic but sensitive approach to Cal's experience of adolescence, no matter how different it was to mine, meant aspects resonated with me.

Crushes, for instance: fleeting, fickle infatuations that left one light-headed. Fraught relationships with parents, peers, siblings, teachers. Intense (too intense, as mine with Laura proved to be) friendships. In this way, *Middlesex*—a book that is at least in part about a child's transition to adulthood—came to be a defining discovery of my own adolescence. As with my other high school favourites (Lancome lip glosses, hazelnut



lattes, too many Canadian alt-rock bands to count), it's too irrevocably linked to that time for me to wholeheartedly enjoy it today, so I wondered whether *The Marriage Plot*, released last year, would come to represent my years at university in the same way.

Judging the book by its cover, it bodes well. After all, there are parallels. I'm approaching the end of my Bachelor of Arts degree at Victoria University; *The Marriage Plot* follows the lives of three recent graduates of Brown in 1982. Like its central character, Madeleine Hanna, my major is in English literature, focusing on the Victorian era, during which the literary device that *The Marriage Plot* is named for was prominent. Moreover, marriage is just beginning to have meaningful impact on my life.

Until recently, the last wedding I was invited to was over a

decade ago, and I served as a flower girl. Now, even with marriage purportedly an outdated and irrelevant institution for my Generation Y, friends of friends are announcing their engagements. Acquaintances made during my first year of university are inviting me to their hen's nights. A conspicuous few Facebook statuses have progressed from 'in a relationship with' to 'married to'. It boggles the mind—the oldest of the known newlyweds can't be over 24—but there it is.

This has made me realise that, even though I'm only a month shy of my 21st birthday, any boy I date from now on could become, in theory, the man I spend the rest of my life with. High school romances, as *Middlesex* so accurately portrayed with Cal's infatuation with his female friend (fittingly only referred to as 'The Obscure Object'), seemed too removed from reality to have any long-term impact on one's life. At university, however, the lecture theatres are lined with potential life partners: as my friendship circle has demonstrated, romances can easily progress to cohabitation to engagement to death-do-us-part.

But what is an amusing thought idling at the back of my brain is Madeleine's entire *raison d'être* in *The Marriage Plot*, and this is why I can't get behind Eugenides' third novel the way I did his second. Though reviews have been largely positive, with Deresiewicz praising *The Marriage Plot*'s "texture and pain of lived experience" and *The Observer*, its "tight plotting and internalised psychology". I, on the other hand, found it cloying and reductive, largely due to

Eugenides' portrayal of Madeleine—who, in theory, I should have felt far closer to than I did the intersex Cal.

While I'm not so pig-headed or misguided a feminist as to demand 'strong female characters' of all the literature I consume ("No-one has ever asked an actor, 'You're playing a strong-minded man...'," pointed out Meryl Streep in an interview on *The Iron Lady*), it's important that they have some personality of their own. Eugenides devotes more than half the book's 400-odd pages to Madeleine, but it's not entirely apparent why. Over the course of the novel, she undergoes no journey, change or epiphany; for all her beauty and bookishness, her character is almost entirely passive.

If *The Marriage Plot* can be taken as Eugenides' bid to put a modern spin on the storyline that sustained so much of Austen, Eliot and the Brontës' oeuvres, his efforts fall especially flat. Madeleine pales in comparison to heroines such as Jane Eyre and Elizabeth Bennet, who (though not without their flaws and insecurities) had more power, agency and personality even within the confines of the 19th century than she even comes close to attaining in this novel, set in the 20th.

Even her approach to her love life—with which *The Marriage Plot* is primarily concerned, almost to the exclusion of any other facets of her character—is reactive. Though there is much handwringing over the various pros and cons of her competing suitors, she seems to have no real control over the decision between the charismatic Leonard and the

steadfast Mitchell. Madeleine falls into marriage—a passive response it's hard to place in the context of the Victorian works that Eugenides so often (and so self-consciously: its opening line is "To start with, look at all the books") references. Even the novel's final resolution she "gratefully" accepts.

"One thing is certain about these characters: the men do things like take jobs or explore the world, while the woman sits around, waits, and thinks about the men," wrote Ilana Teitelbaum of *The Marriage Plot* in *The Huffington Post*. "If there were any doubts of this, Eugenides even at one point compares her to Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey*—although Penelope, at least, had a plan."

The Marriage Plot is not without its strengths; in particular, Eugenides' portrayal of the academic community at Brown, and the tensions present within it, is both wryly humorous and apt. But his treatment of Madeleine and marriage alienated me. If Eugenides did indeed, as *The Observer* hypothesises, intend for his third novel to "breathe new life into the redundant marriage plot; to create a properly absorbing love triangle, not only as a pastiche or irony", then I believe he failed. The author's attention to authenticity is apparent in both *Middlesex* and *The Marriage Plot*, but the latter paints an entirely bleaker reality.

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Book Review by Gabrielle - Anna Karenina by Count Leo Tolstoy—Soon to be released as a movie starring Keira Christina Knightley as Anna Karenina and Aaron Perry Johnson as Count Vronsky

'ALL HAPPY FAMILIES ARE ALIKE; EACH UNHAPPY FAMILY IS UNHAPPY IN ITS OWN WAY.'

I don't know any serious reader who isn't familiar with the opening lines of *Anna Karenina*, considered by many to be the "world's greatest novel." Whether it is or not, I do think it's the definitive exploration of love and marriage and human frailty, set against the panoramic background of Russian high society.

Anna Karenina is a rather long novel and its title character doesn't even make her appearance until Chapter Eighteen. The book begins, though, with a scene from a marriage – the marriage of Anna's brother, Prince Stepan Oblansky (also known as Stiva) to Dolly (Darya) Shcherbatskya – and the problems caused by Stiva's infidelity with his children's French governess.

Despite the confusion he's caused, Stepan Arkadyich isn't wholly without a sense of humor regarding his infidelity (and many other things as well, as we'll learn later in the book):

Stepan Arkadyich was a truthful man concerning his own self. He could not deceive himself into believing that he repented of his behavior. He could not now be repentant that he, a thirty-four-year-old, handsome, amorous man, did not feel amorous with his wife, the mother of five living and two dead children, who was only a year younger than he. He repented only that he had not managed to conceal things better from her. But he felt all the gravity of his situation, and pitied his wife, his children and himself. Perhaps he would have

managed to hide his sins better from his wife had he anticipated that the news would have such an effect on her. He had never thought the question over clearly, but vaguely imagined that his wife had long suspected him of being unfaithful to her and was looking the other way. It even seemed to him that she, a worn-out, aged, no longer beautiful woman, not remarkable for anything, simple, merely a kind mother of a family, ought in all fairness to be indulgent. It turned out to be quite the opposite.

Stiva does take comfort in the fact that his sister, Anna Karenina, wife of a well-known government minister in St. Petersburg, will be arriving the next day. Anna, Stiva believes, can calm Dolly and cause her to see that forgiveness would be the best route for her to take.

It is through Prince Oblansky (Stiva), that we're introduced to another pivotal character in *Anna Karenina*, Konstantin Levin, a man very much taken with Dolly's teenaged sister, Kitty Shcherbatskya. Kitty, however, has already given her heart to another, the dashing Imperial aide-de-camp, Count Vronsky.

Konstantin Levin's story in *Anna Karenina* will echo and reflect and intertwine with Anna's own, though the two will meet only once. Levin's story will be just as important as Anna's, and though it may not appear to be so at first glance, Levin and Anna are really very much alike. Both have compassionate, though somewhat self-centered natures, and both throw themselves wholeheartedly into everything they do. Unlike Anna, however, who loves city life and high society, Levin is very much attached to the countryside and his own farms and has an almost spiritual reverence for the land.

Tolstoy, himself, was very much attached to the land, an attachment he believed necessary to the preservation of health and well-being. Cities, on the contrary, to Tolstoy, represented hotbeds of moral depravity.

We first meet Anna Karenina as she's stepping off a train. In this book, trains are an important symbol, usually foreshadowing death and despair (Tolstoy greatly disapproved of Western industrialization in Russia and decided to make the train one of many symbols of his dislike). Just as it's no coincidence that we first meet Anna as she's stepping off a train, in my opinion, it's also no coincidence that Anna and Vronsky, who are destined to become lovers, first encounter each other at a train station.

Just as Tolstoy believed in a reverence for the land, he also believed in a reverence for family life and this included one's extended family as well as one's immediate family. Adultery was common in 19th century Russian high society, and some society matrons even made their appearance at the opera or at afternoon teas with both husband and lover in tow. Very few thought any the less of them as long as they "kept up appearances" in their marriage and family life as well. Princess Betsy, a friend of Anna's and the epitome of "high society hypocrisy" even gives a croquet party at which two society matrons arrive with their husbands...and their lovers. Anna, however, doesn't give a whit about her husband; she only attends because she doesn't want to miss a chance to see her lover.

Anna's inability to maintain her marriage and simply "dally" with her lover as many other women did is the source of her anguish as well as a manifestation of the richness and depth of her character.



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Anna Karenina was a passionate woman, but she could give that passion to only one man. Anna's passion for her lover dooms both her family life with her husband and son, and her lover's family life with his mother and siblings.

Throughout the novel, both Anna and Karenin, her husband, adopt a "first they will and then they won't" attitude toward divorce. In 19th century Russia, the only grounds for divorce were extreme cruelty or adultery. Anna rebels against divorce primarily because she would lose custody of her beloved son, Seryozha; Karenin rebels, in part, because of the disruption it would cause to his career and to his public image. He even goes so far as to tell Anna that he's willing to accept her affair if only she conducts it with a little more propriety. I know many readers who disliked Alexei Karenin immensely. I'm not one of those readers. I found Alexei Karenin to be both as complex and complicated as Anna, and though he can be cruel at times, I was often impressed with his generosity of spirit and his understanding and acceptance of his wife's far more passionate (and adulterous) nature. So many times I found myself more in sympathy with Karenin than the far-less-rational Anna.

In contrast to Karenin, Vronsky is a shallow and superficial man, not in the slightest bit complex; a man who would probably be hard-pressed to succeed at loving any woman, even one whose passions were far less potent and demanding than are Anna's. And Anna's passions are demanding. She allows her lover no time to "be himself," and tries to place all the responsibility for her happiness on his shoulders by telling him: Everything is finished. I have nothing but you now. Remember that.

Tolstoy wrote Anna Karenina to tell a story of marriage and infidelity, of marriage and faithfulness, of jealousy and kindness, but he also wanted to showcase life in 19th century Russia and detail the many changes that were taking place. He does the latter, not through Anna, but largely through the deeply conflicted and deeply troubled character of Konstantin Levin.

As a landowner, Levin worries about his relationship with the peasants and muzhiks working on his lands. He even enjoys whole days mowing with the muzhiks in the meadow, and these "days in

the countryside" represent some of the book's most lyrical passages:

They finished another swath and another. They went through long swaths, short swaths, with bad grass, with good grass. Levin lost all awareness of time and had no idea whether it was late or early. A change now began to take place in his work which gave him enormous pleasure. In the midst of his work moments came to him when he forgot what he was doing and began to feel light, and in those moments his swath came out as even and good as Titus's. But as soon as he remembered what he was doing and started trying to do better, he at once felt how hard his work was and the swath came out badly.

More than any other thing, however, Levin worries about death. It's clear that Levin is a highly spiritual being, and until quite late in the novel, a being without a God to trust.

As Anna grows apart from both husband and lover, Levin and Kitty grow closer and closer together. And although still much alike, Anna's passions are destructive and damaging, while Levin's are spiritual and nurturing. As Anna's life spirals downward, Levin's reaches a beautiful state of grace.

Anna Karenina is a novel told in eight parts. The story's climax is reached in Part Seven. Part Eight, which is shorter than the preceding seven parts, contains a beautiful denouement of falling action in which Tolstoy shows us how Levin's quest for the spiritual led him to life rather than to death.

Some readers have called Tolstoy "too moralistic" for the views of marriage and fidelity he presents in Anna Karenina. While there can be no doubt that Tolstoy was a bit of a prude, I don't think this book is really about what is morally right and what is wrong. I think it's more about the power of undirected passion to overwhelm, to destroy, to kill. For after all, Levin is not Anna's opposite; of all the characters in the book, he is the one most like her, the one character, perhaps, capable of understanding her dilemma to the fullest. And yet, Levin, passionate as he is, is not consumed by his desires, not destroyed by them. He flourishes; he prospers; he finds happiness and peace.

Although this is my all time favourite book (I'm a great fan of Realism), the main reason I reread it when I did was because of my great admiration for the translations of the husband and wife team of Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. I certainly was not disappointed. In this book, I think the human condition is portrayed in all its intricacy and richness. I was immediately swept into the story and into the lives of the characters. I savoured the book and the translation and was sorry to read the final page. And even though I didn't like all of the characters, I still found echoes of them in myself and in every other person I meet. Therein, I think, lies this book's timelessness and its genius. Anna Karenina is, at its most basic, a celebration, for good or ill, of what it means to be human.

Review by Gabrielle at the Literary Corner Café

<http://literarycornercafe.blogspot.co.nz/2010/12/book-review-classics-anna-karenina-by.html>



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