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How Damsels Love: The Transgressive Pleasure of Romance

Abstract. In this article, I look at contemporary romances as a source of transgressive pleasure that may inspire its audience to reject patriarchy. I focus solely on romances between a man and a woman with emphasis on the psychological dimension of the female character upon her trajectory from an object of desire to the man's ideal partner. I argue that the pleasure of romance is, indeed, a means towards the dismissal of patriarchy. Drawing on feminist theory, I contend that romance constitutes a nucleus of a feminine ideal that women may use as a comparative reference point for their real-life relationships, revealing any problematic and inadequate behavior of real-life partners. Even though romance pertains to the prescripts of patriarchy, I argue that it can be seen as an intertext: a product of the interlanguage used to translate the male discourse to the female bodily experience. In producing and consuming the romance, women can contrast this experience of the feminine ideal with the lack of pleasure patriarchy entails for them. In this respect, the romance possesses a transgressive power that may facilitate women's realization of their dissatisfaction and the refusal of their role as emotional labor.

Keywords: Romance, love, desire, monomyth, pleasure, feminist theory, psychoanalysis, intertext

1. Introduction

In his book, *The Hero with One Thousand Faces* (2004), Joseph Campbell develops the idea of the monomyth. According to this, all stories, the world over, constitute one basic and common narrative that corresponds to the same psychological need. Building on Freudian and Jungean psychoanalysis, Campbell claims that all stories provide humans with the means to appease or satisfy the infantile psychological trauma, the

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separation of the self from the caretaker. Even though his work has been the subject of considerable criticism (Toelken 1996; Dundes 1965; Northup 2006; Ellwood 1999; Crespi 1990), what is important for us to note here is that Campbell's nuclear narrative may not account for all stories, *pace* Campbell, yet is nonetheless one of the most common – if not *the* most common – formulae still dominating the popular paradigm (Vogler 2007; Larsen and Larsen 2002). I argue that contemporary romances as love stories between a man and a woman are based on this premise and follow the heroine's psychological trajectory, as this has been shaped by her position and psyche as the damsel in the hero's narrative.

For Campbell, romances provide satisfaction by enacting the unconscious need to slay the father and marry the mother. In narrative terms, the man has to go on an adventure, defeat the adversary – who regardless of how he is represented, performs the function of the father – and claim the woman, who is a version of the mother. By doing so, he regains access to the source of his original, pre-oedipal satisfaction. Considering Campbell's phallocentric and patriarchal thesis, it comes as no surprise that the woman's role in the hero's adventure is specific and limited: she is there for the hero to claim and possess as a reward. The hero's ability to get the woman and win love has nothing to do with the woman herself but everything to do with the father. Once the hero defeats the adversary and overcomes the challenges relating to his maturity, the woman and her love are by default his. The hero's journey leads to love no matter what. One simply has to reach the end, and love and the woman are waiting for him, locked away in a tower.

For a woman in this narrative, a man's love is all she can hope for. Since she does not have significance and signification of her own, she must become the one whom the man chooses to become a father with. Unlike the son, whose actions make him a father, she cannot become a mother on her own. Instead, a man must make her a mother. In the romantic monomyth, it is usually the woman's beauty and good heart that make her worthy of love. Her fate has nothing to do with her own actions but is dependent on abstract characteristics, wherein choice features little. More importantly, for women, love does not fulfil its promise. Campbell brushes off any differences by saying that in cases in which women are the protagonists they fight for their lover much like men fight for theirs. However, contrary to his assumption, the function of the myth changes completely for the female audience (Hudson 2010; Murdock 1990; Frankel 2010). This is because the psychological substrate for women under patriarchy is different.

2. Feminine Love

Chodorow (1978), who applies Freudian psychoanalysis to feminism and gender studies, contends that in patriarchal families, in which the woman is mostly responsible for the children especially when they are very young, daughters do not manage to successfully differentiate themselves from their mothers during the preoedipal phase.

Instead, they keep identifying with her even after reaching the oedipal period; unlike boys who are better able to differentiate themselves by means of different biological traits: genitals, more precisely. Women come to associate themselves with both the victim and the perpetrator of their infantile trauma and separation anxiety. Since they oscillate between this dipole, they are unable to satisfy their own needs. At the same time, because men have not learned to fulfil their own emotional needs or those of others, they turn to women for that. Women thus find themselves in a conundrum: they are expected to consume emotional energy for their partners and/or children, with no source for its replenishment outside of themselves.

As Radway (1991) suggests in explaining Chodorow's theory: "this finally produces in women a continuing wish to regress into infancy to reconstruct the lost intensity of the original mother-daughter bond" (136). This means that women, being unable to fulfil their desire to return to a time in their lives when their needs were met without any effort from their part, have to find the means to recreate this mothering vicariously. Chodorow (1978) argues that this is done when women become mothers. By taking care of a child and identifying with it, they are able to nurture themselves, albeit by proxy. Chodorow does not explicitly consider the possibility that this also happens when women fall in love and that in their romantic relationships they seek to be taken care of and regress to childhood. Flax (1978) attempts this connection when hypothesizing that: "It is also possible that the fantasy women often have about male therapists – the wish to have a baby with them – is on a deeper level a wish to *be* their baby" (175).

Radway (1983, 1991) links this need to women's experience of reading romances. She claims that: "I think this same wish to be protected and cared for by an all-powerful parent is expressed through the romantic fantasy and its requisite infantilization of the heroine" (255). In other words, women turn to romance as a means to self-care, as an experience of the need they have to return to infancy. Radway makes another interesting remark. As we saw before, for Chodorow, women turn to the mothering of others – their children or their love partners – so as to nurture themselves by proxy. Yet as Radway highlights, Chodorow does not conclude whether this vicarious experience is an adequate substitute. Based on her own research into the experience of women reading romance novels, she contends that it is most definitely not. This is why, according to her, this dissatisfaction leads to a repetitive reading of romance novels, despite their following the same formula – or rather because of that.

In this light, the function of romances changes completely. While for men, the romantic monomyth is a fictional example whose prescripts find their bearing in real life – win your position in society by assuming the role of the father (Róheim 1971) – for women it is an unachievable fantasy. This narrative offers the psychological pleasure to its women audience of being taken care of. The romance puts the hero in the role of mother to the heroine, who will make sure she is safe and satisfied, even at the expense of his own wellbeing. In order for the woman to secure this type of love she has to behave as an obedient child. If she relinquishes any will of her own, she will be rewarded with the fulfilment of her needs and the mending of her infantile trauma.

To showcase this, I will use the example of the movie *365 Days* (Barbara Bialowas and Tomasz Mandes 2020). The reason I choose this movie is to show how the romantic monomyth continues to dominate the popular scene. The movie was released in cinemas in February 2020 and in June 2020 was transferred onto Netflix. It immediately reached the platform's top ten users' choice in multiple countries while in the annual rundown it ranked first in Netflix's 100 most popular movies with thrice as many points as that in second place (Vyskočil 2020). The movie has been heavily criticized as low-quality porn with sexist stereotypes glorifying abuse and kidnapping (Spencer 2020). If one looks at the text proper, it is hard to disagree. Here, I would like to examine the movie in terms of psychoanalytical pleasure and argue that this subtext is more instrumental for understanding its cultural function and prominence.

3. Feminine Pleasure

The movie is an adaptation of the book *365 dni* by Polish author Blanka Lipińska. It tells the love story of Laura Biel (Anna Maria Sieklucka) and Massimo Toricelli (Michele Morrone). Laura is a Polish woman who visits Sicily with her friends to celebrate her 29th birthday. There she gets kidnapped by mafia boss Massimo, who has been searching for her for the past five years. As we already know from the beginning of the movie, Massimo witnessed the assassination of his father and almost died himself at the scene. A few seconds prior to this incident, he was looking over a terrace with his binoculars and happened upon the sight of an unknown woman, whom we later discover is Laura. Through his moments of peril before he is eventually saved, Laura's image keeps flashing before his eyes, hence provoking his infatuation with her. He promised himself that if he survived, he would find her and convince her to become his.

He sees her again five years later at the Sicilian airport and has his men abduct her and bring her to his abode – literally, a castle. There, he announces that he plans on keeping her with him for one year with the intention of making her fall in love with him. If, after 365 days, she still had no feelings for him, he would let her go. Laura, in the beginning, is shocked and understandably enraged. After only two months, however, of parties, shopping sprees, and sexual encounters, she admits her love for him and they become engaged. The movie ends on a cliffhanger after an attempted assassination against Laura by Massimo's enemies. A sequel has already been announced (Jean-Philippe 2020; Sagar 2020).

As already argued, the movie's narrative is quite uninspired. The cinematography is equally unimpressive with polished sequences resembling advertisement spots, stilted acting, and banal dialogue. The characters are flat stereotypes: Massimo is a macho alpha-male of the tall, dark, and handsome variety, while Laura is conventionally beautiful and dull. She is shown to be a successful businesswoman with confidence and assertiveness but has no distinctive personality. Both she and Massimo are rather archetypes of the repetitious love story: she is the Beauty and he is the Beast. As the

theme song of the 1991 Disney adaptation succinctly points out, both they and their story are: "Ever just the same; Ever a surprise; Ever as before; Ever just as sure; As the sun will rise" (Ashman and Menken 1991).

Indeed, the narrative leaves no room for doubt as to what it is trying to achieve. Beyond the obvious similarities – Laura is forced to live in a castle with a man who wants her love and Massimo is characterized at least twice as a monster – the effect of the movie fits perfectly into the formula for pleasure discussed above.[1] Massimo is a man introduced to us at the exact moment his father dies in his arms. Just before this event, his father had been telling him that it was time Massimo assumed responsibility for the family business and came into his role as leader of their mafia organization. In this regard, from the moment Massimo meets Laura his transformation from son to father has already been initiated. The bullet that kills his father almost kills him: the son dies and in his stead the father and leader arise.

Yet, in line with Campbell's monomyth, this transformation cannot be complete without Massimo's finding his woman, thus assuring his source of life and identity as a father. If this were a story told from the male perspective, Massimo would have to fight adversaries and overcome challenges in order to secure his position as a hero and the presence of the woman's love in his life. Since this is a romance in the contemporary meaning of the term (Ramsdell 1999), the story is mostly focused on Laura's transformation from a woman to a woman in love. This transformation, unlike the hero's journey (which is cast in action), is primarily psychological in nature (Joannou 2018). Laura has to let go of her inhibitions and misgivings regarding Massimo's true intentions, abandon her motherland, and by implication her daughter-self, and accept Massimo in his monstrosity.

The narrative justifies Radway's (1999) argument that romance stories function to reframe women's views of men's violent behavior in a rationalized and positive light. Massimo is violent on multiple occasions. He murders and tortures people – with both Laura and the viewer bearing witness. He kidnaps Laura and forces her to stay with him. He says he will not touch her against her will but does repeatedly, so turning consent into a precarious event. Yet once Laura accepts him, she understands that she has nothing to be afraid of because he loves her. It was her behavior and unwillingness to accept his love that made him violent against her. In that respect, Laura's defiance against Massimo is but a symptom of her immaturity, her infantile self that is afraid to make the passage to adulthood, in which she will become a woman, a mother, and a queen. Massimo may not be a regal king but in his social landscape he is the most prominent mafia boss. Therefore, once Laura accepts her fate and completes the transformation from not loving to unconditionally loving she gains all the boons: a comely husband and his kingdom.

[1] It is interesting to note that the romantic story of *Beauty and the Beast*, first written by the French author Gabrielle–Suzanne de Villeneuve in 1740, was inspired by the Latin story *Cupid and Psyche* by Apuleius (Paz 1995), which in turn is the primordial example of romance referenced by Campbell (2004, 89).

More importantly, she gains the fantasy pleasure of returning to the infantile state, in which all her needs were taken care of. The movie frequently shows that Massimo treats her as one would expect a child to be treated: he takes her on multiple shopping trips during which she has to try on clothes for him to decide which he will buy for her, he carries her in his arms to bed, he protects her from other people who want to physically or verbally harm her, he saves her from drowning, and quite tellingly his term of endearment is "baby girl." Laura herself attests to this when in a conversation with her best friend she describes Massimo: "Imagine a strong alpha male who always knows what he wants. He is your caretaker and your defender. When you are with him you feel like a little girl" (01:23:56 – 01:24:05). Yet, Massimo is even better than any parent, providing the true completion one is able to achieve after the womb, since he can offer sexual pleasure as well: "He makes all your sexual fantasies come true" (01:24:07).

Alas, even in a fantasy setting the ultimate pleasure is under threat. Adversaries envious of Massimo and Laura's happiness endanger their blissful union. They attempt to murder Laura who is now pregnant with Massimo's child. The movie ends on a cliffhanger after the car driving Laura home enters a tunnel and does not come out again. Massimo upon hearing about the assassination falls onto his knees broken. The trauma of separation, semantically portrayed in the tunnel which resembles a womb and a silent womb at that, remains the last frame of the movie indicating the beginning of a new struggle and a new adventure.

4. Romantic fantasy

Even though the movie belongs to the romance genre and Laura is the point of psychological focalization and identification for the female audience, the first and last scenes show that even in this portrayal it is still the male hero to whom this narrative belongs, at least regarding action. He is the one traumatized in the beginning of the movie both emotionally (his father is killed in front of him) and physically (the bullet wounds him as well). Throughout the movie he is the active actor. He makes all the decisions and performs all the actions. He is the boss of an organization and also the caretaker of Laura. Finally, in the last scene he is the one on whom the camera focuses to show his tragedy and reaction to this traumatic event of losing his woman and source of life. It is his journey to completion that is interrupted.

In that regard, Laura is but an object or a means to an end. Her identity is reduced to her feelings towards Massimo: at the start of their meeting she hates him and eventually she comes to love him. This is her narrative trajectory, in which she takes no action and is constantly passive. Her transformation is an internal, psychological one that can have only one resolution. Her feelings matter as long as they cater to Massimo's adventure in overcoming his infantile separation and allowing him to claim his position as a father. Moreover, her transformation is a rather regressive one. She starts the movie as an assertive businesswoman with her own life and personal goals. The

end of the movie finds her in the role of a bored housewife that gets, supposedly, killed for her husband's mistakes.

True, at the start of the movie we see her in a dead-end relationship with another man who does not care about her needs, but she is obliged instead to provide for his. For example, she has to pack both their suitcases for their trip to Sicily after coming home from a very tiring day, while he sits on the couch watching TV and drinking beer. Her relationship to Massimo is framed in a more positive light because, as previously argued, it provides Freudian infantile pleasure. However, while for Massimo this relationship is a step forward in his role in the symbolic order of society – he gets the woman, he becomes the father, and thus sustains his impact by expanding his genes and family – for Laura, her role gets diminished. She ends up living in Sicily away from her family and friends, jobless and idle. Her only significance is being there for Massimo as the source for his emotional support and progeny. Moreover, she is the one whose life is put in danger and potentially annihilated. Hence, it is her expiration that makes Massimo a tragic hero.[2] It is Massimo who loses something, which makes it all the more prominent that Laura has no power of her own but does so only in relation to Massimo.

As such, this romantic narrative does not break with the patriarchal paradigm. It continues to portray the man as the hero and signifier. Instead, its function is to appease the female audience by reassuring them that in this restrictive pattern there is pleasure to be found for them – the infantile pleasure that we have sought since childhood. Yet, unlike for men, for women, this pleasure comes at a personal cost. They have to sacrifice their personhood and individualism and succumb to the hero's wishes and needs. Only then can they secure their pleasure. However, again unlike for their male counterparts, for women, this narrative is a complete fantasy. While men can find in myths and rituals the means to succeed in their passage to adulthood or enlightenment, for women, there are no such myths and rituals. Even if they follow the paradigm, they will never find pleasure because men cannot provide the pleasure women seek since, as has already been shown, they have not learned to cope with emotional caregiving. For women, romantic narratives work as a sedative or a pacifier for their constant dissatisfaction rather than as a method to achieve satisfaction.

This, once again, proves that contrary to what Campbell tepidly argues, the monomyth does not account for every person irrespectively of their identity and sexuality. What is equally disheartening is the fact that as Campbell very crudely comments, in the monomythic culture, if one does not have a role assigned or recognized by the formula, they remain on the fringes of society, culture, and, consequently, existence. The repetition of romantic narratives cannot be avoided despite their limitations and problematic nature. Since the patriarchal paradigm remains unaltered, the role of the woman in the society continues to be defined accordingly. Therefore, these stories that

[2] A concept which is indicatively associated with both the damsel in distress but also the woman in the refrigerator trope (Simone 1999). See also Irigaray's (1985) theory of the historical role of women as currency of exchange.

provide escapism and solace are the most accessible recourse to representation women have while confined by social dynamics.

At the same time, women get criticized or ridiculed for turning to this readily available form of self-care (Douglas 1980; Snitow 1979; Modleski 1980). For the aesthetic canon, these narratives are of low value, while they are reprimanded for being sexist and for glorifying women's passivity. Rightly so, in terms of the ontological scrutiny of the text, as we saw in the example of *365 days*. Yet, psychologically, these narratives provide a respite from the perpetual female suffering in a society that has not yet developed any other successful antidote. While romance texts traditionally concern an unattainable fantasy that may condition the subservient role of women, they also constitute a nucleus of a female ideal. This ideal can lead to women realizing the confines of patriarchy and potentially to their rejecting and disrupting them.

5. Reparative Reading

Catherine Roach (2016), in examining romance within popular culture, perceives the possibility of a reparative reading. According to her, romance offers a fantasy in which the hero challenges patriarchy in one way or another and proves to the heroine that he can share the emotional burden of a conjugal relationship.[3] Therefore, romance can also be seen as a manifestation of a feminine fantasy inside the sphere of male dominance, which can potentially lead to the understanding of patriarchy as a construct and, as such, liable to come to an end. Roach grounds this argument in the work of American literature critic, Leslie A. Fiedler, and expands upon it. As Roach explains, Fiedler (1948), in looking over American fiction, identifies another myth of pleasure, "what he calls the myth of the dark beloved, in which people of color forgive and love white folk despite the horrors of racism" (Roach 2016, 177).

As Roach comments, Fiedler's essay is essentially about literature as a "reparation fantasy for racism" (ibid). In this type of fiction, a white male shares friendship and brotherly love with a person of color whom in reality they have racially wronged: the pleasure then derives "partly because the friendship offered by the characters of color implies forgiveness and absolution for white people's acts and attitudes of racism" (ibid.) For Roach, romance fiction shares the same function, although it "engages in a reverse type of this reparation fantasy" (ibid): it stems from patriarchy and sexism and is most commonly authored and enjoyed by those who suffer this discrimination – namely women – rather than by those who perpetrate it.

Romance is, indeed, different in that its authors and readers do not hold the power of signification that white males do. In other words, white males have the power to cre-

[3] In the above example we used, Massimo refuses to break-up with Laura despite being promised to another woman, an action which puts in jeopardy his social situation since her family is a powerful ally-turned-foe.

ate a fantasy that shapes culture far more than romance does. Even in female romance fantasies, the woman often retains her deprived position. Therefore, while Roach highlights romantic fantasy's appeal as the end of patriarchy, she is hesitant to make the connection between reading the romance and actively rejecting patriarchy, since the texts themselves retain rather than overturn the system. I argue that the pleasure of romance, in both producing and consuming it, is, indeed, a means towards the dismissal of patriarchy because it facilitates women's establishing their lived experience within the restrictions of the male canon.

Chris Kraus, in *I Love Dick* (1997), contends that for women, love can be an attempt to epistemologically describe female experience: "If I could love you consciously, take an experience that was so completely female and subject it to an abstract analytic system, then perhaps I had a chance of understanding something" (164). In the male economy, women lack the power of signification and, as such, their experience cannot be described by the discursive tools of the hegemonic practice (Cixous 1976, 1981). This is true not only for the actual world but also for the fictional monomyth, in which the role of the woman remains that of the damsel in distress and the romance concerns her psychological trajectory only or primarily in terms of this function. As such, the woman and the female experience remain the inexpressible and her love the ineffable. For all this, Kraus understands love as a, or perhaps the only, means women have of associating with and/or attaching themselves to the hegemonic power of the signifying order – that is, the man: "We fall in love in hope of anchoring ourselves to someone else, to keep from falling" (Kraus 1997, p.181).

Understanding love primarily as an attachment or, in the first instance, a desire to attach oneself, is an act that is inexorably political. To explain what is meant by that, I turn to Berlant's take on love, desire, and intimacy as a continuous process conditioned by one's situatedness and relation to the institutions of power. Critiquing psychoanalysis, Berlant (2012) argues that love is always the fantasy of desire for stability and anchored attachment as this is made accessible through language. They, thus, see love as at once an unattainable end state and the hegemonic appropriation and normalization of desire. This is even more political because for Berlant, fantasy conditions and shapes the subject and the self as part of society: "Persons find their form, their "selves," from within fantasy, which includes the projection of impossible desires onto love objects for a bearable and prior stability and the mediation of norms that make them socially intelligible" (52–53). In this sense, love is inherently codified: a product of institutionalized codification that offers the power of signification to certain expressions of desire.

Berlant specifically reads intimacy as, "an aesthetic of attachment" (1998, 285), and love as a spatial web that creates fantastical worlds and spaces based on convention: "intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation" (282). Love, therefore, is but another formation of desire under the hegemonic hierarchy, a stabilizing discourse facilitated by patriarchy "and the institutions of *loco parentis*, namely, schools and religions" (287). Notwithstanding Berlant's treatise on love as a fantasy, they do not disregard the desire for it: "That these forms

are conventions whose imaginary propriety serves a variety of religious and capitalist institutions does not mean that the desire for romantic love is an ignorant or false desire" (86). Yet, instead of using love as a promise of false/fictional stability for which we have to reformulate our identity by disrupting or sacrificing any parts or expressions thereof that do not fit the paradigm, Berlant calls for love as a means to embrace ambivalence, which is inherent in desire, the self, and the subject.

Berlant, following affect theorists like Deleuze and Guattari, sees in this ambivalence an opportunity to find pleasure without needing to subject ourselves, or our desire, to normative ideologies and stabilizing regimes. More importantly, following one's desire in its affective form is a means to disassociate it from the hegemonic economy and inaugurate new relations of intimacy, attachment, and fantasy. To connect this to the function of romance, I argue that even though romances fit into the stabilizing discourse of patriarchy, they do possess the power to express the fantasy of the feminine experience, which can potentially lead to the actualization of the female ideal: having partners that share the emotional burden of a conjugal relationship.

6. The Transgressive Pleasure of Romance

Mary Anna Doane (1987), in analysing the love story in cinematic history, contends that: "Female desire is a necessary premise of the love story's structure. And even if it is a passive desire, signified most frequently by waiting, it nevertheless presupposes a desiring subjectivity" (112). Romance constitutes an imaginary desire and this fictionality in which romance as a genre is condemned is another way to contain the female desire as purely fictional (Cook 2005) and thus unattainable. As Doane explains, this is the reason why many love stories end with the death of the woman, like *365 days* discussed above: "[it] is a sign of the love story's vulnerability, the fragility of its project (1987, 118). However, this fragility contaminates patriarchy itself, uncovering its most "vulnerable sites" (ibid):

> In a patriarchal society, the myth of romantic love is always there to act as an outlet for any excess energy the woman may possess, to, somewhat paradoxically, domesticate her. But, it is precisely because there is so much at stake here that the genre has the potential to interrogate the woman's position—to explode in the face of patriarchal strictures. For the myth of romantic love is at odds with the domestic routinized work expected of women and this is a structuring contradiction which generates others (ibid.)[4]

[4] This becomes even more overt when Doane makes the case, by using Madame Bovary's example, that women learn to desire vicariously by consuming the romance, a notion which brings to mind René Girard's concept of mimetic desire and his connection in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1965) of how Emma from Madame Bovary comes to her desire for a lover through the romantic books she has been reading since her adolescence.

To show how this fragility can potentially lead to transgressiveness and the rejection of patriarchy, I turn to the concept of intertext. I specifically argue that it is done by understanding romance as an intertext pertaining to interlanguage, which uses the male discourse to express the female fantasy and pleasure. Doane argues that women are caught up in the representation of the love story as their ideal desire. Banting (1992), instead, in developing Cixous' thought, contends that female writing is not based on representation but on translation. Banting explains this with the concept of interlanguage: "The term 'interlanguage' refers to the linguistic interference from the source language (SL) which results from a second-language learner's attempted production of the target language (TL)" (236). This encompasses translating the female lived experience into a language that is not there yet, by means of the patriarchal discourse.

When women produce and consume romance, they use the masculine discourse and monomyth, which is the only canonical tool they possess, as the source material to translate the lived female bodily experience to the text. Since the patriarchal discourse is institutional, the female bodily experience is informed "by it by default." Of great importance is the woman becoming self-aware of this translational need, deriving from it "the wedge to break the hold" (Gallop 1987, 328). The feminine text is then an interlanguage, an in-between towards a target language that is "as-yet-unknown" and "spoken by no one" (Banting 1992, 236). If this process sometimes fails, it is "a failure not so much of translation as of representation of the source text by the target text" (ibid.) Translation can rarely achieve absolute equivalence of expression since the source language and the target language are two different systems. Translation remains, nonetheless, one the most applicable and useful tools of intercultural and interlingual communication that we have.

This is exemplarily shown in the fact that male heroes in romances are essentially feminized (Barthes 1978; Modleski 1980). Doane (1987) argues that this happens automatically by the male's presence in a woman's genre. Yet, often the narrative make this point overt (Radway 1991). For example, Massimo has waited five years for Laura, a trait and practice culturally associated with women (Doane 1987; Barthers 1978). For Doane (1987), this is proof of the woman's narcissism because what she ultimately desires is herself:

> What is fascinating about this process is the supposition that underlies it that men in the love story are what women would want them to be, and what they want them to be is like themselves. The thematics of narcissism, the type of relation—or more accurately, nonrelation—to the other which Freud labelled specifically feminine, returns to haunt the love story (116).

While there is truth to this criticism, I find it exaggeratingly unfair, perpetuating the discourse Doane herself denounces. Instead, I see this feminization as an indication that, as was explained in the previous sections, what women desire is for men to exhibit the means to take care of them. Since in patriarchal society it is women who take on this role of emotional caregiving, the men in the romance need to become feminized to satisfy the emotional needs of the heroine and, by proxy, the female audience. In our

example, Massimo treats Laura as a mother would a child. This is an excessive ideal, yet in the same way that desire is inherently excessive, as Doane (1987) points out.

Romance then entails the power to express female pleasure and feminine fantasy in a way that allows its readers to be able to imagine the yet inexpressible. Despite being informed by male authority and the male discourse, romance is a valid way for women to translate their lived feminine experience by transgressing the masculine language. Most importantly, they can use this interlanguage to shape their fantasies and, as such, become aware of all the ways reality fails them and also of the inadequacies of the male canon and its discourse. Understandably, romance alone cannot achieve a complete power transformation and one needs to remain critical of how this interlanguage is used. At the same time, however, romance is an organic, synthesizing genre, through which female experience can become standardized and canonized.

7. Conclusion

In this article, I look at romances as narratives of the female psyche's transformation when women fall in love as damsels in distress in the monomyth of the hero's journey. I specifically argue that Campbell's concept of the monomyth still dominates the popular canon and romances, despite their being targeted towards women. This monomyth continues to preserve patriarchal dynamics, making the woman function inside this hegemonic context. Reading the romance is a way for women to experience, by proxy, the satisfaction of love and completion in psychoanalytical terms, which they can never fulfil in actual life as long as the paradigm remains that of the male order. Hence, romance has not only been criticized for providing a means of escape but also for facilitating women's rationalization and acceptance of their disenfranchised position.

Here, I argue that romances can, indeed, be seen as a means to overcome patriarchy. Romances not only act as reparative reading, as contended by Roach, they also constitute translations of the lived female experience into the male canon. Romances have been accused of representing an unattainable fantasy, a criticism which results in ridiculing and constraining the female ideal. This ideal, however, despite being dictated by the hegemonic paradigm, is a means for women to come to their desire and pleasure and understand it as something valid. I explain the workings of this by expanding on the term interlanguage and intertext. I understand romances as an intertext between the male discourse and feminine pleasure. Women producing and consuming romance use male language to express their experience and fantasies. Romances then provide a way for women to imagine, conceptualize, and, eventually, actualize their fantasy concerning the end of patriarchy toward conjugal relationships in which the emotional labor is equally shared by both partners.

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