

# The determination of love

*Warton Lecture on English Poetry*  
*read 25 April 2017*

**ANDREA BRADY**  
*Queen Mary University of London*

*Abstract:* This essay explores love poetry in its most militant and perverse forms. It examines three ‘determinations’ of love: first, how love is defined (determined), given that true love always feels new and singular, but language is a repetition engine which can make these professions of love seem quotational; second, why love is fixated on ends, including catastrophe, the apocalypse and death, and how it might be released (de-termined) from that fixation; and third, how love can teach us to be resolute (determined) to close the gap between the world we experience and the one we desire. Love has been described by poets and philosophers as fullness, and as lack or hunger; as fusion, and as splitting; as original, and as serial or repetitive; as the end of time, or a return to its beginnings in the lost paradises of infantile or primitive experience. Love provokes an anamnesis of an archaic experience of the ideal. It is associated with creativity and fecundity. But it also prompts poets to anticipate the catastrophes of death or the destruction of everything that is. That destruction includes the end of poetry itself. Poets from Shakespeare and Marvell to Shelley or Robert Creeley have affirmed love only through risking its negation (and with the negation of love, the negation also of their own poetic practice). Why is love poetry so drawn to the fantasy of destruction? What is the use of love poetry in times of catastrophe? If artistic remembrance—as Herbert Marcuse puts it—‘spurs the drive for the conquest of suffering and the permanence of joy’, how can remembering love through poetry help us to address a new future, particularly one in which the traditional hierarchies that encumber lyric and love itself can be overturned?

*Keywords:* love poetry, catastrophe, death, lack, Shakespeare, Marvell.

### PERVERSE AND MILITANT LOVE

Last year, when I began to consider the possible subjects for this lecture, we were beginning to recognise the crises of our historical moment: Brexit; Jo Cox; the Pulse nightclub; Obama's drones; Syria; the refugee crisis; Trump's unstoppable obscenity. Men with swastika neck tattoos declared their optimism on the nightly news. The world seemed even more than usual to be ruled by hate.

In such contexts, talking about love poetry feels embarrassing, even a little obscene. But the difficulty of reconciling the opposing urgencies of love and politics has always been a key topos of love poetry itself. It was powerfully articulated by Sorley Maclean, in a series of poems written in the context of the Spanish Civil War, here translated from Scottish Gaelic by Ian Crichton Smith:

Girl of the yellow, heavy-yellow, gold-yellow hair,  
the tune of your lips and Europe's pain together.  
Lustrous, ringletted, joyful, beautiful lass,  
our time's shame would not infect your kiss.

Can the music of your beauty hide from me  
the ominous discord in this harmony?  
The rampant thief and brute at Europe's head,  
the ancient songs, your lips so proud and red.

... Can beauty and the mendacity of verse  
deceive the patient with its transient cures  
or hide the Spanish miner from his doom,  
his soul going down without delirium?

... What is each ringlet of your golden hair  
when weighed against that poverty and fear  
which Europe's people bear and still must bear  
from the first slave-ship to slavery entire?

(Maclean [1943] 1979: 20)

The poem is addressed to a generic 'Eimhir', the wife of Cuchulainn in Irish legend, though the identity of the subject of poem four has been identified as Nessa Ní Shéaghda (later Nessa Doran), whom Maclean met in 1937 (Mackay 2010: 9, 11). The poem describes her beauty as a kind of music; but the poem's beauty is also a form of music, which does not seek to hide the discord of its times. Instead, it amplifies that discord, creating its particular harmonies by drawing together present violence and ancient songs.

Maclean's poem ends with its questions still open. He cannot pretend that there is an easy way of resolving the contradiction between personal desire and international

catastrophe.<sup>1</sup> The poem holds that contradiction in the balance of its rhymes, without forcing its reconciliation, but also without surrendering to despair. And though I feel the intensity of that contradiction every day, I decided that in this lecture I wanted to affirm the value of poetry in times of catastrophe; and to recognise the work that all of us do to sustain each other and the world we make in a generous, critical understanding, which often takes the forms of love.

This is, for me, rather out of keeping. In my own poetic practice, and my critical writing, my usual instinct is to lodge with the negative. I have for several years now been working on a critical study about poetry and bondage, which considers not just formal but also physical constraints. Prison writing, slave songs, verse as chains or shackles, the sadomasochistic pleasures of bondage—thinking about these contexts has allowed me to think about how poets generate the image of freedom by imagining themselves in voluntary states of confinement; and how the occlusion from this image of the millions of people who do actually live, love, write and die in incarceration sets a limit to what we understand as lyric.

As part of that project, I was writing about the American poet Rob Halpern's book *Common Place*, which consists of erotic addresses to a Yemeni prisoner who died in Guantánamo Bay. Halpern's poems attempt to project love into a space of exception, a space where relation was banned. One of the questions his work poses is: 'What does it mean to love inside a system that has made love monstrous, to communalize this eros' (Halpern 2015: 141). I also wanted an answer to this question. While I admire the ethical and formal audacity of his book, I was troubled in ways I could not fully explain by Halpern's proposition that erotic love might be a way of opposing militarised violence.

This opposition of love to war is an ancient fiction, most famously symbolised by the trise of Venus and Mars, caught in flagrante in Vulcan's net. Lisa Robertson imagines the scene in her glorious book *3 Summers*:

I want a pause in vocation. Venus  
chatoyant in the formal dream  
please tranquilise efficient Mars and his  
efficient interests.

The man's neck's flung back  
his man-shawl's agitated  
he has the soul of a mortal horse

<sup>1</sup>David Marriott's extraordinary short book *In Neuter* (2013) is another example of the difficult poetic task of integrating personal love with historical violence and crisis, a task which Marriott undertakes in an attitude of mourning but not reconciliation.

and his saliva's communal  
 flung supine beneath  
 the concept of a goddess  
 who unclasps the depth of his torso  
 with her skilled goddess mouth ... (2016: 43)

This interlude is another way of expressing the desire, which Robertson declares earlier in the book, to 'return to the sex of my thinking'; to bask in the luscious eroticism of maturity, stargazing and lying in stylish baths. Her sensual imagery suggests that love is one means by which queer or feminised subjects can overcome the masculinised violence that is associated with the American imperium elsewhere in her book.<sup>2</sup>

Robertson is imitating Lucretius here, who invokes Venus as muse in the beginning of his poem *De Rerum Natura*. In the translation by Lucy Hutchinson, a 17th-century republican whose own life was framed by war, Venus is implored:

Wherefore sweete language in my thoughts infuse  
 And lett not wars harsh sounds disturbe my muse;  
 Make sea and land a quiet calm possesse  
 For only thou with peace canst mortalls blesse,  
 Since Mars, the mighty God that rules in armes,  
 Lies in thy lap, bound with loves powerfull charmes,  
 And resting there his head in full delight,  
 On thy rich beautie feeds his greedie sight;  
 Hanging with amorous kisses on thy face,  
 Whilst thou (O Goddess) doest this God embrace,  
 While he doth in thy sacred lap remaine,  
 Sweete peace for Rome by gentle prayers obtaine,  
 For neither can we with a quiet mind  
 In time of warre, persue the worke design'd ... (1996: 30, ll. 27–40)

By binding and enchanting the god of war, the goddess of love frees the poet from the harsh sounds of violence, and allows him to write his magnificent thesis on how the world was made. It is important to note that this initiation of the work of imagining the world through love is repudiated in different ways, both by Lucretius—who goes on to say that the gods actually have no effect on human affairs, and to satirise romantic love in book IV—and by Hutchinson, who later rejects the profane and atheistical text she translated so lovingly in a moment of political catastrophe. These repudiations may have different motivations, but they are characteristic of the impulse to negation which often rides hard on the heels of the assertion of love, as I will argue later.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson writes, 'I feel ambivalent about adoring / The sex of Mars / Like America it basks / Exempt from dolorous stuff / The imperium's fucked up / How can we kiss and think?' (2016: 40).

The myth of Venus and Mars presents a tableau in which war is pacified by sensuality. But we know that militarised violence can be eroticised, often in very dangerous ways. Radical political movements have also asserted the inverse: that love can be militant. Martin Luther King's sermons, entitled *Strength to Love*, affirm that love is not 'some sentimental and weak response', but 'that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life' ([1967] 1981: 8).<sup>3</sup> In Gwendolyn Brooks's poem, 'Black Love' is implored to:

provide the adequate electric  
for what is lapsed and lenient in us now.

Rouse us from blur, Call us.

Call adequately the postponed corner brother.  
... Call to the shattered sister and repair her  
in her difficult hour, narrow her fever.

Call to the Elders—  
our customary grace and further sun  
loved in the Long-ago, loathed in the Lately;  
a luxury of languish and of rust.

... be  
the Alwayswonderful of this world.

(1981: 29)

This language of love continues to infuse the Black Lives Matter movement, whose platform includes 'Loving Engagement': 'Guided by love, we continue to stand together for justice, human dignity and our share.'<sup>4</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley argued that 'M4BL's critique of U.S. militarism is driven by Love—not the uncritical love of flag and nation we saw exhibited at both major party conventions, but a love of global humanity' (2016: n.p.). This is a critical, deterritorialised love, a love that flows, rather than a love that solidifies around the stations of privilege.

Such love may bear a resemblance to Christian and socialist forms of belonging together, but it also recalls Franz Fanon's much-quoted testimony in *Black Skin, White Masks*: 'I believe in the possibility of love; that is why I endeavour to trace its imperfections, its perversions' ([1952] 1986: 42). Why perversions? Sigmund Freud described perversion as a detour in desire. He argued that 'the omnipotence of love is perhaps never more strongly proved than in such of its aberrations as these' ([1953]

<sup>3</sup>From his address to the anti-war group Clergy and Laity Concerned, King follows Nygren's classic work *Agape and Eros* (1953) in delineating the distinctions between eros, philia and agape in his sermon 'Loving Your Enemies' (52). He admits that people will find his recommendation to love the enemy 'idealistic and impractical'—an idea which could only work 'in some distant Utopia' (56).

<sup>4</sup><http://blacklivesmatter.com/guiding-principles/>

2001: 161). A perversion is an overcoming by eros of the most deeply inscribed forms of socialisation that determine what we should honour and enjoy and when we should feel disgust or shame. In this sense, perversity is a radical way of recognising what we have been taught to love and hate.<sup>5</sup>

Fanon seeks to release the Black man from the nonbeing in which he is sealed up, unseen, unloved, unrecognised as human. White supremacy has fragmented and objectified him; it has presented his blackness to him as a sign of lack. His book is perverse, in that it works to reclaim the capacity to love and receive love that will restore the Black man to his full humanity and destroy the world as it now exists. This love is only perverse within the context of obscenely racialised institutions and ideologies that persuade the Black man that he is unlovable. To lay claim to love, Fanon must overcome the shame attributed to his historical position, and be free to love himself and others: 'As soon as I *desire* I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else' ([1952] 1986: 218).

Sappho, the Greek and Latin elegists and the troubadours conspired to invent forms of erotic poetry based on the difficulty of loving supremely lovable objects. Dante, Petrarch and their imitators show us how hard it is to love beautiful, pious, chaste women. Fanon and Halpern are part of another tradition of love poetry, which—as the American poet Fred Moten describes it—expresses 'love for the unlovable'. In a recent interview, Moten cites a song by Snoop Dogg as an example of such love:

There's this one moment in the song when he is speaking directly to men on death row and expresses love for them. 'All my dogs up against the life sentence.' For me, it was a totally important and beautiful moment in the song because he is expressing love for folks that are often conceived of as the very embodiment of the unlovable. That capacity to express love for those who are generally perceived of to be unlovable is important. On the most basic level, my work has been primarily structured by love of blackness and love of black people, both of which are often conceived of by what you called the mainstream media as 'unlovable.' (2016: n.p.)

Loving the unlovable is the paradoxical imperative at the heart of Moten's practice. The last poem in his book *B Jenkins*, an elegiac tribute to Moten's mother which invokes numerous friends and cultural heroes in a fused tribute to the endurance of Black culture, ends: 'this is the cluster song of our romance' (2010: 95). The book aggregates the destructive (cluster bombs, cluster fucks) and the creative, emancipatory value of song not around a single, conventionally lovable object, but around 'our

<sup>5</sup>On the relation of perversion to utopia in Marcuse, Janine Casseguet-Smirgel and Janet McDougall, see Whitebook (1995: 47–70).

romance': a collective work of love.

In different ways, Fanon, Moten and Halpern are seeking I think to unbind love from the conventions of the white, bourgeois, heterosexual family, and to encourage its redistribution, especially to people who are excluded from the protections which the state gives to particular forms of life and love. They also militate for the abolition of the ideology and institutions which declare those forms to be perverse. Poetry is one of those institutions. It has contributed immeasurably to our understanding of whom we ought to love, and why, and how, enforcing the romance plot of the heteronormative couple form which Lauren Berlant has described as 'a seductive desire, a fantasy of being emancipated into form's holding environment' (2012: 101). Berlant, like many feminist and queer critics, warns against regarding love as 'invulnerable to the instabilities of narrative or history', and particularly against ignoring the way that heterosexuality is enforced by institutions at the same time as it is represented simply as 'a relation of desire that expresses people's true feelings' (95).

But poetry is not solely a mechanism for enforcing erotic conformity. It extends an endless and often perverse capacity for love to the manifold, lovable and unlovable. All concepts, things, animals, people and relations can be the objects of poetic love, from the Brooklyn Bridge to the film industry in crisis; from a stupendous cat, to God, views of Eton College, a haggis, clouds, nations, babies, and even the product code for a replacement part for an obsolete Hotpoint tumble dryer. We could argue that poetry is an art of imagining the possible universality of love while preserving the particularity of its objects, without losing them in the fog of a concept which exceeds them.

I do not want to go on a Kantian detour here. I am still not even sure that militant poetic love is adequate to the challenge of confronting white supremacy, the judicial system or the war economy. I am reminded of the quote from Cornel West that I read on my friend Justin Katko's t-shirt at a poetry reading organised by Jessica Pujol this February for One Day Without Us, a day on which migrants staged the withdrawal of their labour in protest against xenophobic politics in the US and the UK. The quote was: 'Justice is what love looks like in public.' This beautiful equation might trigger some scepticism. It does not specify whether justice is like love because love is based on recognition before the other as justice is based on recognition before the law, or if it is because love can be ambivalent, bad, coercive or blistered by violence. Sara Ahmed has also shown that love can be deployed in the vocabulary of fascism (love of country, love of the Aryan race and so forth), just as easily as in the discourses of progressivism ([2004] 2014: 122–43).

The attempt to reconcile love and justice has come in for other forms of criticism as well. The philosopher Gillian Rose thought that the opposition between love and justice could not be mended. She argued that the diremption of the universal from the particular cannot be overcome 'with love, forced or fantasized into the state':

If the dirempted terms of the ethical are set in opposition to each other, so that ‘love’—discursive, friendly, saintly, agapic, aporetic, political—is opposed to ‘the law’—the world, the city of man—and made into an unworldly culture—a city of God—this holy city will be infected with the same judgemental banality of opinion about good and evil it would repulse. (1992: 238)

Rose insists that acknowledging the incommensurability of love and justice in the ‘broken heart’ of modernity is the only ethical position we can maintain in this world. She calls this position the anxiety of the middle: staying in the fray, surrendering neither to despair nor to hopes for transcendence.

And yet, poetry *is* an art of commensuration. It asserts itself as a common measure of all imaginable experiences, reconciling love with form, and unfolding the singularity where the universal and the particular meet. I am trying to do this right now. This lecture is really a celebration in miniature of the poems that give me life, the poems that—since I was a small girl, pulling at the frayed edges of the possible—have held me in the world. Tonight, in the pause which *is* vocation, I want to propose to you: to evoke my poetic loves as a way of imagining yours, and finding the measures we have in common.

But I also recognise a danger here. If love can be unrequited, so can poems. Alice Notley (2015: n.p.) describes love ever so tentatively, as an object:

to kick as you walk on the blazing bare ground, where ...  
sentimental, when what I love, I ... don’t have that one  
word. This fire all there is ... to find ... I find it  
You have to find it. It isn’t love, it’s what?

Like a fire, love’s radical uncertainty consumes you as you do the work of ‘finding’ your object. The coordinates of this uncertainty are different for everyone. The alchemical process by which poetry transforms the compacted experience of the individual into something other readers believe in does not always work; some love lyrics seem true and lovable, while others feel like a lump of rock you just want to kick out of the way. What makes the difference? Why do we love one poem and not another?

There are no easy answers to those questions. I am tempted to cite Montaigne’s brilliantly simple response, in his essay ‘On Friendship’: ‘If a man urge me to tell wherefore I loved him, I feel it cannot be expressed, but by answering; Because it was he, because it was my selfe’ ([1603] 1965: 201). My own interest happens to be in those ways of loving in poems which are perverse or militant, and refuse to be reconciled to the way things are—even if that refusal takes the form of a fantasy of catastrophic destruction. The rest of this lecture will consider three aspects of love’s determination: first, how love is defined (determined), given that true love always feels new and singular, but language is a repetition engine which can make these professions of love seem

quotational—I will reflect on several influential definitions, and their consequences for poetics. Second, I will consider why love is fixated on ends, including catastrophe, the apocalypse and death, and how it might be released (de-termined) from that fixation. Third, I will argue that love can teach us to be resolute (determined) to close the gap between the world we experience and the one we desire.

To do this, I will have to admit that talking about love is embarrassing. Emmanuel Levinas, hardly the least sentimental of philosophers, backs away from the word: ‘I don’t very much like the word love, which is worn-out and debased. Let us speak instead of the taking upon oneself of the fate of the other’ (2006: 88). Poets also admit the difficulty of professing love in ways that are meaningful and new: this difficulty is evident in the recurrence of defensiveness, negation, or shame as tropes in erotic poetry. But I also want to think about Levinas’s resolution to ‘take upon oneself of the fate of the other’, in rather different terms, by considering how love can include the possibility of utopia—a possibility that cannot be addressed without further embarrassment. So much of the work of our profession involves transmuting love into rational accounts of cultural value, an approach to close reading driven—in Isobel Armstrong’s memorable phrase—by ‘the terrors of closeness’ (2000: 102). I will have to overcome those terrors, in order to speak to you *from* the place love has made for me, and to speak *of* that place: to propose some theories of how, as Frank O’Hara said, we might ‘live in the terrible western world // here where to love at all’s to be a politician, as to love a poem / is pretention’ (1995: 305).

### DETERMINING THE MEANING OF LOVE

What do we talk about when we talk about love? The poets and philosophers are reluctant to say. Donne’s lovers are ‘by a love, so much refined, / That our selves know not what it is’ (*A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*, 1932: 37). David Hume, in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, begins by averring that ‘’Tis altogether impossible to give any definition of the passions of LOVE and HATRED’, but it is also ‘unnecessary to attempt any description of them’, ‘because these passions of themselves are sufficiently known from our common feeling and experience’ ([1739] 2000: 214). Too well-known to be defined, love—and its concomitant passion of hatred—can only be evaluated through a series of thought experiments which set out a hydraulics of impressions passing from the object to the subject. Though drawn by a very different animus, Shelley’s 1818 ‘*Essay on Love*’ shares Hume’s scepticism about the definition of love: ‘What is Love? Ask him who lives what is life; ask him who adores what is God’ (Holmes 1996: 55). The true nature of love cannot be determined; it must simply be experienced.

Robert Creeley repeatedly returned to the challenge of writing in a new or true way about love. The attempt to speak ‘For Love’, in one of Creeley’s most famous poems ([1966] 1978: 159), ends in deferral and dismay:

Yesterday I wanted to  
 speak of it, that sense above  
 the others to me  
 important because all  
  
 that I know derives  
 from what it teaches me.  
 Today, what is it that  
 is finally so helpless,  
  
 different, despairs of its own  
 statement, wants to  
 turn away, endlessly  
 to turn away.

To write about that which teaches me everything I know is of course impossible; but in turning away from the task of speaking of it, the task which defines my vocation, I seem to turn away from love itself. The poem enacts that ‘despair of its own / statement’, falling, faltering, stopping:

If the moon did not ...  
 no, if you did not  
 I wouldn’t either, but  
 what would I not  
  
 do, what prevention, what  
 thing so quickly stopped.  
 That is love yesterday  
 or tomorrow, not  
  
 now.

Yesterday I wanted to speak of it; today the mood is different—petty, irritable, tedious. The speaker has not written the poem he meant to write: ‘Love, what do I think / to say. I cannot say it.’ He cannot articulate his wish, cannot make a verbal image of his object. The inability to speak of love undermines not only the feeling, it seems, but also the poet’s trust in his own practice, and so the poem leaves us with a commemoration not of love or of the beloved Bobbie, but of failure.

Shakespeare’s sonnet 116, one of the most famous definitions of love, also climbs over a series of negations to the rim of failure:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediment; love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his highth be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

([1609] 1997: 1864)

The poem defines love by telling us everything it is not: love is *not* something which bends or alters; it is *not* becoming.<sup>6</sup> Oh no. It is Being, unmoved by the tempest of suffering or lack. It is the star fixed in a superior heaven which looks down on catastrophe; it is constant, and in that magnificent phrase, 'bears it out even to the edge of doom'. As in Creeley's poem, the sonnet uses apophasis to make something out of negation; but Shakespeare draws that rhetoric towards a brilliantly witty and self-cancelling conclusion: the potential for failure in determining love could erase my writing and the whole history of love. Such obliteration is never really a risk, because the reader affirms his vision of love simply by reading his poem: reversing the logic of the couplet, if this poem was ever written, then its claims cannot be in error. Nonetheless, the poem's lingering negativity points to the difficulty of affirming love, a difficulty that takes us to the edge of doom.

These qualities of negation and impossibility are also apparent in Andrew Marvell's poem 'The Definition of Love' (probably written in the 1650s), which attributes qualities to love—it is rare, strange, high. But none of these tell us what love actually is. Instead, Marvell launches into a complicated complaint against fate. He says that the 'iron wedges' of fate prise the lovers apart:

<sup>6</sup>Helen Vendler reads this sonnet, rather unnecessarily, as rebuttals of the youth's assertions that love is transitory, and changes when the lovers change. She argues that the second half of the sonnet is a 'reinscription', which moves from 'a love first described in transcendent vertical terms as a secular Petrarchan fixed star' to 'the immanent horizontal Christian Pauline form of stoic fidelity in endurance.' (1999: 488–9, 491).

## IV

For Fate with jealous eye does see  
 Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;  
 Their union would her ruin be,  
 And her tyrannic power depose.

## V

And therefore her decrees of steel  
 Us as the distant poles have placed,  
 (Though Love's whole world on us doth wheel)  
 Not by themselves to be embraced;

## VI

Unless the giddy heaven fall,  
 And earth some new convulsion tear;  
 And, us to join, the world should all  
 Be cramped into a planisphere.

## VII

As lines so loves oblique may well  
 Themselves in every angle greet;  
 But ours so truly parallel,  
 Though infinite, can never meet.

(2003: 110–11)

The lovers are like parallel lines, or like the poles—never to meet, and yet the axis on which the world turns. Their union would require the radical reorganisation of the universe, the unmaking of geometry, which might also collapse the Earth itself: this is the cost of their love, total catastrophe, the destruction of the conditions of life. The definition of love looks like impossibility.<sup>7</sup> Yet that impossibility is productive:

## II

Magnanimous Despair alone  
 Could show me so divine a thing  
 Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown  
 But vainly flapped its tinsel wing.

(109)

Catastrophic love is, in its way, more powerful than happy love; it raises us up to glimpse astral truths, while hope cannot get off the ground. I will come back to the attractions of catastrophe shortly.

Marvell's poem is indebted to Plato in a number of ways, one of which is its contention that the lovers are being punished by Fate because their union could depose Fate's 'tyrannic power'. This recalls Aristophanes's fable in the *Symposium*,

<sup>7</sup>B. J. Sokol (1988: 169–70) argues that the poem reverses the genealogy of Love from Plato's *Symposium*, making Love here the child of Despair and Impossibility.

which says that humans were originally joined together in units of two, with a complete set of organs on each side. These spherical conjoined lovers ‘were terrible in their strength and vigour; they had great ambitions and made an attack on the gods’, and tried to roll up to heaven, so the gods cut them in two ‘like a flatfish’ (Plato 1999: 23). This is the story that most people remember when they think of the *Symposium*. Socrates’s more philosophical proposition, which he has learned from the absent Diotima, is that love is an action which can only be known by its object—all love is love of something. He defines love as ‘the desire to have the good forever’ (43). But that good does not exist in this world—it can only be imitated by the particular, flawed bodies we see in front of us. So love is a sublimation, which carries us away from the material world which changes and decays to another, better one which ‘always is, and doesn’t come into being or cease; it doesn’t increase or diminish’ (49). According to this deeply influential theory, love mediates between the real and the ideal, exalting those who experience it properly and illuminating the limits of the perceptible world. But sublimation also risks a negation of what is, the material world discarded as the empty shell of a truth content that cannot exist here.

### **Love as creativity**

Socrates also compares love to reproduction, but not the kind we might expect: love, he says, gives birth to beauty. Plato is drawing on a vast and expansive tradition that associates love with creation, both the creation of living beings, and of the natural world itself. This tradition reaches back to the very first known love poem, the Sumerian ‘Love Song of Shu-Sin’, written around 2000 BCE (Black 1998: 88–9), which commemorates the union of the king with Inanna, the goddess of love and procreation, in a ceremony that maintained the fertility of the Earth and its people.

Lucretius, as we have seen, invokes Venus as a metonymy for nature’s fecundity; in Stephen Rodefer’s version she is:

Mother of heroes, mover of hearts of men and of gods,  
Delicious Venus, everyone’s voluptuary,  
Under skies of shooting stars you till our seas  
And fertile earth with signal visitations,  
For every living gene is organised by your sight—  
Beholding you we rise, like the spring to the sun.  
The sky is clear for you, the weather quiet,  
For you the artful earth comes up with sweetest flowers,  
The ocean waves with laughter, the calmer heaven glows  
With larger light for you. At the vernal equinox,  
When the southwind swells its belly,

First the birds feeling the vibration  
 Soar on your coming, then the cows go wild,  
 Bolt their fields and swim the streams for love,  
 They are so driven by your desire!  
 Everywhere through seas, through mountains, and in the air  
 All creatures are moved to love's blandishments  
 And overnight you populate the earth with love. ('After Lucretius', 2008: 28–9).

Lucretius is drawing on the cosmologies of Heraclitus and Empedocles, in which the universe is born from the flux of love and strife (Smith 1985: 3). In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Love and the 'broad-breasted Earth' are born immediately after Chaos (2006: 13–14, ll. 116–22). Spenser's 'Hymn to Love' draws on these ancient theories, depicting a newborn Eros moving through 'The world that was not till he did it make', arranging the elements and quelling their contentions ('Hymn to Love', 1999: 454–5). The Modernist poet Mina Loy draws on similar images for her *Songs to Joannes* (100 years old this April):

When we lifted  
 Our eye-lids on Love  
 A cosmos  
 Of coloured voices  
 And laughing honey  
  
 And spermatozoa  
 At the core of Nothing  
 In the milk of the Moon (1997: 56)

Echoing the affiliation of the mother with 'cosmic reproductivity' in her poem 'Parturition' (1997: 7), Loy imagines a dynamic and combative force of love creating the lovers' world, just as the pre-Socratics believed it built the cosmos, from 'the impact of lighted bodies / Knocking sparks off each other / In chaos' (1997: 59). But at the heart of this cosmic process of reproduction is 'nothing': empty space, failure or lack rather than plenitude and form (Pozorski 2005: 62–4).

The belief that love drives the forces of life to combine into more complex units also lies behind the psychoanalytic account of the opposition between Eros and Thanatos, love and the death drive. One such account, by Jonathan Lear, even claims that 'the world exists because we love it' (1998: 140). That is, the mother's milk keeps the infant alive, but the infant projects his desires onto the mother's breast, imagining that he has created it spontaneously out of his hunger for it; similarly, we imagine that the world that sustains us takes its particular form in response to our need for it. Lear extends Donald Winnicott's description of the 'good enough' mother to the whole

world<sup>8</sup>; the world's loving form reflects the infant's libidinal investment in it. But Lear underemphasises the importance for Winnicott of the survival, by mother or world, of the infant's attempts to destroy them. Jessica Benjamin has argued that this survival is the very foundation of the erotic: the survival of the object of desire shows that the object is distinct from the subject's desires for it, and produces a space of intersubjectivity where subject and object can exist in a relation of mutuality.

Without successful destruction there can be no escape from the realm of idealization and fantasy, and hence no sexuality that is not literal and concrete, in its own way captive to the symbolic equation as much as pornography; no sexuality that includes recognition, and so no confrontation with difference and otherness that is not violent and traumatic. (1995: 209)

By attempting to destroy the other, the subject changes his object. This change is experienced by the subject as the recognition he craves, but also allows the subject to share his destructive desires and watch them be transmuted by the other, rather than having to internalise them and cope with them entirely on his own in a fantasy of omnipotence and singularity. Love may create the world, but the world's ability to survive the lover's attempt to destroy it is what makes love bearable. The relation of creation to destruction as a way of negotiating such fantasies will become clearer when I come to speak about the importance of catastrophe in love poetry later in this lecture.

The contemporary philosopher Alain Badiou also defines love as a process of world-making. Love, he says, is 'always the possibility of being present at the birth of the world' (2012: 26). Badiou describes love as an event, a moment of origin which reveals a universal truth. He emphasises the revolutionary nature of the lover's perspective: lovers view the world not through two singular and separate identities, but 'through the prism of our difference, so this world can be conceived, be born, and not simply represent what fills my own individual gaze' (26), united as in Aristophanes's fable. This new perspective is the foundation of love's 'minimal communism' (90), a fusion of identities brought together through a chance encounter. Badiou's emphasis on chance recalls both Lucretius and Sartre, for whom the random nature of the encounter is a source of grief; the lover, Sartre argues, realises that his love is 'one love among others and is limited by the beloved's facticity as well as by the contingency of encounters. It becomes love in the world, an object which presupposes the world and which in turn can exist for others' ([1943] 1993: 370). The Sartrean lover wants to defeat this contingency, and to extract a form of self-determination from a chance encounter. But for Badiou, the beauty of love is precisely its 'unique trust placed in chance' (17). Through their effortful commitment, the lovers transform chance into a

<sup>8</sup> Winnicott coined this phrase in a 1953 essay ('Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena'), but it runs throughout his work; see also *Playing and Reality* ([1971] 1991).

world, an act of creative investment which Badiou compares to writing poetry. ‘Mallarmé’, he says:

saw a poem as ‘chance defeated word by word’. In love, fidelity signifies this extended victory: the randomness of an encounter defeated day by day through the invention of what will endure, through the birth of a world. (45)

When we write a poem, or declare our love, we utter a word ‘the effects of which, in existence, can be almost infinite. That is also the desire driving a poem. ... To make a declaration of love is to move on from the event-encounter to embark on a construction of truth’, Badiou argues (42). ‘I love you’ is thus not a redundant cliché, but the initiation of a philosophical project which renews the world.

Badiou’s association of love with poetry as forms of making is not uncommon. Like love, poetry is often described as a form of world-making: among many examples is Sir Philip Sidney’s claim in his *Defence of Poesy* that Nature’s ‘world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden’ one (2004: 9). Writing or reading poetry, in turn, is also experienced by some as a kind of love-making. Looking ‘upon fine Phrases’ from Shakespeare and Milton made Keats feel ‘like a Lover’ (Letter to Bailey, 14 August 1819; 1970: 655–6).<sup>9</sup> For Gertrude Stein, ‘that is poetry really loving the name of anything’ ([1935] 1985: 231–2).<sup>10</sup> Her essay ‘Poetry and Grammar’ is a sensual declaration of love for language: poetry is:

concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that. Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns.

Lisa Robertson, again drawing on the scene of Venus and Mars trapped in the net of Vulcan, also writes of reading as a feeling of being ‘caught, as if in a venal snare’: ‘Overwhelmingly in my submission to reading’s supple snare, I feel love’ (2012: 33, 39).

Jeanne Heuving has argued that for a number of poets writing in the Olsonian tradition of open field poetics, their ‘most important and defining poetry is significantly derived through their discovery of how to engage sexual love and its energies’ (2016: 9): love is not merely their theme, but an emancipatory force which drives their experiments with form and language. For one of those poets, Robert Duncan, love is

<sup>9</sup> Marjorie Levinson (1988: 172) describes Keats as taking Milton as his ego-ideal: ‘Keats doesn’t want to *have* Milton, originally. He wants to *be* Milton, but the only way to do that, given Keats’s circumstances, is to make of Milton the introjected erotic object: the possessed otherness that is inalienable because always already alien.’

<sup>10</sup> On the centrality of love for Stein’s notion of composition in the 1920s and 1930s, see Abraham (1996: 87) and Chessman (1989: esp. 79–111).

similar to poetry, in that each provokes a deepening of experience which outsiders might regard as perverse:

Just as Love going deeper into the matter of love, being in love with being in love, altho this is what makes men lovers, is viewed as a disorder of feeling by men who are not lovers, so Poetry going deeper into the nature of poetry is not only in literature departments but in certain schools of poetry and among certain critics and leaders of the art, attackt as a disorder of art. (Duncan, 'Notes to Ground Work', quoted in Fredman, 2009: 28)

The notion of love and poetic experimentation as related 'disorders' has a particular context for Duncan, whose 1944 essay on 'The Homosexual in Society' associated sexual love and experimental poetics with the demand for human freedom articulated by the civil rights and gay rights movements. Reflecting on that essay's militancy fifteen years later, Duncan wrote that:

I was, I think, at the threshold of a critical concept: sexual love wherever it was taught and practiced was a single adventure, that troubadours sang in romance, that poets have kept as a traditional adherence, and that novelists have given scope. Love is dishonored where sexual love between those of the same sex is despised; and where love is dishonored there is no public trust. (1944: n.p.)

Duncan described the voice of his earlier essay as a guilty one, whose view of society as sinister and repressive was inflected by 'the dawning realization that we are all exiles from paradise'. For him, love is a form of creativity which nonetheless reminds us of all that we have lost: poetry, similarly, becomes the song of lamentation for an irrecoverable past rooted in a fabled and idealised time before the repressions of adult love.

### **Love as repetition**

I have been alluding to just some of the many writers who think of poetry as an art of sensuality in language. The most famous example of this sensuality of poetic language is Roland Barthes's ecstatic elicitation of the pleasure of the text, which he says offers 'the pledge of continuous jubilation, the moment when by its very excess verbal pleasure chokes and reels into bliss' (1975: 8). The plenitude of the text, in Barthes's deeply psychoanalytic account, is like the mother's overflowing milk; reading is therefore a kind of return to the lost paradise of infantile fulfilment. This image brings us to the second mode of determining love, which also extends from both Plato and Freud: as repetition. This tradition represents love as anamnesis, or the unforgetting of an archaic experience, whether of the ideal, or of infancy. As Shelley's 'Essay on Love' puts it, love is a form of 'thirsting after our likeness': 'It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother'

(Holmes 1996: 55–6). Freud takes up this image in his essay on ‘Infant Sexuality’, where he says that just as the satisfaction the baby feels ‘must have been previously experienced in order to have left behind a need for its repetition’, so the pleasures of adult love recollect an infantile pleasure: ‘There are ... good reasons why a child sucking at his mother’s breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it’ (‘Three Essays on Sexuality’, [1953] 2001: 184, 222).

Nonetheless, the serial nature of love is often represented by poets as a problem. Kierkegaard satirised the erotic poets for claiming that ‘there is but one and only one beloved in the whole world, and this one and only one time of erotic love is love, is everything; the second time is nothing’, and for suggesting that ‘to love a second time is not also to love but, to poetry, is an abomination’ ([1847] 1995: 49). Shakespeare does not represent second love as abomination, but he does admit, in sonnet 110, that:

Alas, ‘tis true, I have gone here and there  
 And made myself a motley to the view,  
 Gor’d mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,  
 Made old offences of affections new;  
 Most true it is that I have look’d on truth  
 Askance and strangely: but by all above,  
 These blenches gave my heart another youth,  
 And worse essays prov’d thee my best of love.  
 Now all is done, have what shall have no end,  
 Mine appetite I never more will grind  
 On newer proof, to try an older friend,  
 A god in love, to whom I am confin’d.  
 Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,  
 Even to thy pure and most most loving breast. ([1609] 1997: 1863)

This sonnet turns from repetition to singularity: from the ‘motley’ of a mixed, foolish promiscuity to perpetual confinement with ‘a god in love’. Its new promise of constancy is articulated most precisely in the poem’s ninth line: ‘Now all is done, have what shall have no end’. This line is exquisitely balanced: now against the past (all I have done) and the future (what shall be endless); all against none (no end); what is against what will be; what is done, against what is endless; what you have, and what you shall not have (an end). This balance signifies a monumental transition. The speaker is determined that change (his changing affections) is finished. Indeed, ‘all is done’: change has changed to changelessness; the sublunary world of mutability is the scene for something eternal. It is this ending which makes way for that which has no end. But the endlessness of commitment is literally predicated on everything being ‘done’, accomplished, finished—an endlessness dependent on an end. The fragility of

this resolution is also signified earlier by the paradoxical wish to be confined to a god—to be bound by something boundless—and by the repetition of ‘most’ in the final line. This is a poor way of intensifying the poem’s conclusion and filling out the metre, and we might feel simply that Shakespeare should have done better; but it produces a paradox which unravels the assurance of the poem as a whole. The sonnet ends with repetition, when it had promised the end of repetition.

Perhaps Kierkegaard is right. There are very few good poems about late, mature, or long love: William Cowper’s ‘To Mary’ (1905: 427–8) and W. S. Graham’s ‘To My Wife at Midnight’ (2004: 262–5), might qualify; but even those poems get their energy from the anticipation of death. Perhaps this is why love poems tend to dwell on what Badiou called the event of love rather than on the way love persists. Enduring love is the incremental result of small, undramatic acts of generosity and understanding, repeated over time. Catastrophes, on the other hand, are singular and individualising. Shakespeare’s sonnets, like love poetry more generally, are full of catastrophes. Sonnet 55 sings your praises ‘Even in the eyes of all posterity / That wear this world out to the ending doom’ ([1609] 1997: 1853); in sonnet 107, true love will never be ‘forfeit to a confin’d doom’ ([1609] 1997: 1862); the Rockies may tumble, Gibraltar may crumble, they’re only made of clay. There is undoubtedly a latent aggression in these predictions, which would destroy the world in order to prove the speaker’s fidelity. There is also perhaps a fear: if love made the world, the loss of love might unmake it. Love arrived after Chaos, and gave Chaos a structure; and when I love her not, Chaos is come again.

Judging from the poems, it is much easier to celebrate the event of first love than enduring love. Three years into his sonnet sequence, Shakespeare wondered:

Why is my verse so barren of new pride?  
 So far from variation or quick change?  
 Why with the time do I not glance aside  
 To new-found methods and to compounds strange?  
 Why write I still all one, ever the same,  
 And keep invention in a noted weed,  
 That every word doth almost [tell] my name,  
 Showing their birth, and where they did proceed?  
 O, know, sweet love, I always write of you,  
 And you and love are still my argument;  
 So all my best is dressing old words new,  
 Spending again what is already spent:  
     For as the sun is daily new and old,  
     So is my love still telling what is told.

(Sonnet 76, [1609] 1997: 1857)

How, Shakespeare asks, can I write more than one poem about my singular beloved, without copying myself and the whole history of erotic verse? Why can I not innovate,

but just keep dressing up my old fictions and repeating myself? One answer might be that the sonnet is, like love, inherently repetitive. Great sonnets can reveal the passionate emergence of a singularity from the predictable recurrence of soundings and tropes, but this is particularly difficult to achieve in a sonnet sequence, each individual poem of which strives to be both new and authentic, and a coherent part of an extended narrative.

If love is repetitive and common, so is the language in which it is expressed. ‘I love you’ is ‘the very sentence of indigence’ (Nancy 2003: 264), a clichéd formulation which John Keats mocked as a banality or a lie:

And what is love? It is a doll dressed up  
For idleness to cosset, nurse, and dandle.  
A thing of soft misnomers, so divine  
That silly youth doth think to make itself  
Divine by loving, and so goes on  
Yawning and doting a whole summer long ... (1970: 394)

Even after he fell in love with Fanny Brawne, Keats wrote to his brother and sister-in-law, ‘Nothing strikes me so forcibly with a sense of the ridiculous as love. A Man in love I do think cuts the sorryest figure in the world’ (Letter 156, to George and Georgiana Keats, 27 September 1819; 1935: 401). And yet, as often happens, true love made him into a believer: ‘I never knew before, what such a love as you have made me feel, was; I did not believe it; my Fancy was afraid of it, lest it should burn me up’ (Letter 136, to Fanny, 8 July 1819; 1935: 356). Finding the language to describe this unique experience of love presented a particular challenge. ‘For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form: I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair’ (Letter 134, To Fanny Brawne, 1 July 1819; 1935: 353). He wished to distinguish his love from the endless clichés he had parodied, but this would require a new language, made of words never before used—a language which could serve no purpose as communication.

Denise Riley describes the drive for originality, in writing about love, as futile; she echoes Kierkegaard in her poem ‘Two Ambitions to Remember’: ‘Some words you may use only once. / Repeat them to some newer heart / and all your accuracy is gone’ (1985: 56). ‘I love you’ is always a repetition or a quotation. Riley extends this argument in her book *Words of Selves*:

This hopeless drive for originality resembles the problem of writing an original love letter (or, rather, a convincing love letter, since any emotional originality here is impossible: the truer the love, the more unapologetically ordinary its language)—a letter that could convince its author of its constancy and of hers, when inevitably she finds herself echoing the same expressions used to others before. It is a linguistic humiliation when the apparent rarity and singularity of feeling announces itself as, after all,

condemned to verbal repetition, yet it seems cheapskate to reiterate the phrases written in all sincerity over the decades. (2000: 61)

'I love you' is simultaneously the most powerful and direct expression of love, and its most inadequate shadow; it is necessary, singular, and powerful, but also repetitive—not only of all the times you've said it yourself, to different people, in different situations, but also of the whole history of human love. As the young Shelley wrote:

One word is too often profaned  
For me to profane it,  
One feeling too falsely disdain'd  
For thee to disdain it. (Holmes 1996: 246)

'I can give not what men call love'; he asks instead for the beloved to accept worship and devotion, or seek out a new language which remains undefiled by repetition.

### **Love as lack**

The theories I have been discussing suggest that the repetitive nature of love recalls a memory of the ideal uncorrupted by materiality, and an infantile experience of satiety, profusion and world-making omnipotence. But that satisfaction is also accompanied by the painful memory of lack or hunger. Laplanche also argued that the plenitude of the mother's breast can never be rediscovered in any form of adult sexual love; the original object of love is irrecoverable.<sup>11</sup> Although he depicted the baby, flushed with feeding, as an image of post-coital bliss, Freud observed that there is 'something in the nature of the sexual drive [which] itself is unfavourable to the realisation of complete satisfaction' ('On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love,' [1957] 2001: 188–9). In ancient myth this dissatisfaction is dramatised as starvation. Aristophanes says that when the separated lovers find each other they fuse together so desperately that they neglect all their other needs and starve to death (Palto 1999: 24). In his *Amoretti*, Edmund Spenser describes himself as succumbing to rapturous admiration for his beloved while 'I starue my body and mine eyes doe blynd' ('Amoretti' 87, 1999: 431). Love, in these myths, is not a source of plenitude and creativity, but a threat to the subsistence of the organism whenever it becomes too obsessively fixated on the object; sexual desire is not a fountain of nourishment, but of hunger and lack.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Belsey (1994: 52) cites Laplanche's argument that 'there is no primordial, original, founding sexual object at all, but only an object subsequently sexually cathected, and invested with sexual meanings initially learned from others' through care received in infancy.' For Laplanche, the lost object of desire portrayed in Aristophanes's fable is actually the object of self-preservation, and cannot ever be rediscovered, because the object which has been lost is not the same as that which is sought (Laplanche, 1976: 20).

We have already encountered this notion of love as lack in Loy's image of the 'nothing' which is at the heart of cosmic reproductivity, and the missing detainee who is the object of Halpern's poetic eros. Lack is also the form of love we are perhaps most familiar with from love poetry, with its endlessly unrequited, moaning lovers, pining for their absent, cruel or unyielding objects. Some poets go so far as to allege that there can be no desire without lack: 'Whoever desires what is not gone? No one. The Greeks were clear on this. They invented eros to express it' (1998: 11), Anne Carson argues. This invention can also be traced to Plato's *Symposium*. Socrates tells a story in which Poenia (or poverty) waits outside Aphrodite's birthday party; when Poros (or plenty) emerges and collapses in a drunken stupor, she seduces him, and becomes pregnant with Eros. Eros is thus the child of lack and resourcefulness, and the resources he has are always 'draining away' (39–40).

In his 1961 seminar on the transference which begins with an extended reading of the *Symposium*, Jacques Lacan fixates on Poenia's destitution: 'poor Aporia [*Penia*], by definition and structure, has nothing to give above and beyond her constitutive lack or aporia' ([1961] 2015: 121). Lacan finds in Plato the expression that love is 'giving what you don't have' (ibid.), which he refines in his 1965 seminar to specify that 'loving is to give what one does not have ... to someone who does not want it' (1965: 165). I do not want to get mired in a lot of Lacanian technicalities here, particularly regarding his controversial association of lack with femininity. Instead, we can subvert his dictum, and notice that giving a lack is also a way of giving a space in which possibility infuses the impoverishment of the present. This may sound like futility, but it could be construed as a form of utopian thought: the gift of what we do not have, what we can scarcely imagine, the child of our resourcefulness and our failure, to a world too drunk on its riches to know it needs it.

Søren Kierkegaard follows a different route but also arrives at a definition of (Christian) love as lack: as infinite debt to the beloved. Kierkegaard argues that

Love has been called a want, but, note well, such a want that the lover continually wants what he actually possesses ... for his own sake the lover wishes to remain in debt; he does not wish exemption from any sacrifice, far from it. Ready, indescribably ready, as love's prompting is, he wants to do everything and fears only one thing, that he could do everything in such a way that he would get out of debt. ([1847] 1995: 178)

It is a joy to be in debt, and a disaster to repay. Kierkegaard describes this condition of indebtedness as 'the crowning garland on the festivity' (187). For me, this infinite and festive debt describes the 'fail again, fail better' experience of writing verse much more accurately than any Platonic theory of sublimation. The impossibility of speaking truly and completely about love leads not to the end of writing, but to its infinitude. I cannot pay you, my beloved, back with a poem which fully represents

your singularity; no poem is ever enough for you, and this gives me joy, because I am determined to remain in a debt, to you and to poetry, which I cannot exhaust, however long I live.

The exquisite torture of love as lack is writ large in the Petrarchan tradition. One of Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey's translations of Petrarch represents the lover as completely out of step with the quiet world: the night is serene, the sea calm—but the lover suffers.

Alas! so all things now do hold their peace!  
 Heaven and earth disturbed in no thing;  
 The beasts, the air, the birds their song do cease,  
 The nightèd car the stars about doth bring.

'So am not I, whom love, alas! doth wring,' and though my 'sweet thoughts' of the beloved sometimes bring pleasure, they are immediately also a source of pain: 'When that I think what grief it is again, / To live and lack the thing should rid my pain' (1965: 20). That curative thing which is lacking is the beloved, but the poem also gives pleasure—it is the form in which 'I weep and sing', modulating between the joy and fellowship of a conventional sonnet form, and the isolated woe which is its conventional content. The poem is both the evidence of lack, and its compensation. It reveals a lover set apart by what he lacks, who is also inscribed into a companionate history of human love by his ability to model that desire within the sonnet's repetitive form.

The writer whom I associate most intensely with this idea of love as lack and the poem as compensation, of the seduction of a drunken resourcefulness by the figure of poverty who waits outside the party, is John Wieners. Many of his poems commemorate the loss or absence of his lovers, but also grant a magical restitution: Wieners repeatedly asserts that poetry itself has the power to 'cure the / hurts of wanting the impossible / through this suspended vacuum' ('Supplication', 1998: 125). His poems show how desire can move across this vacuum, towards the missing beloved or the reader. Poems can cure the hurt of wanting the impossible because nothing is impossible to poems; they are magical instruments that ensure that 'no man dies loveless', that 'I shall never be lonely again, because of the love that dwells within poetry's mouth' ('The Lanterns Along the Wall', 1988: 106). In his 'Poem for Painters', Wieners describes love as Surrey did, as lack:

I look for love.  
 My lips stand out  
 dry and cracked with want  
 of it.  
 Oh it is well.  
 My poem shall show the need for it.

(1998: 29)

The poem offers an illusion of control over the force of love, making absent love appear in the space where it is desired. He goes on to echo Marvell's geometrical conceit:

No circles  
 but that two parallels do cross  
 And carry our souls and bodies  
 together as the planets,  
 Showing light on the surface  
 of our skin, knowing  
 that so much of it flows through  
 the veins underneath. (1998: 29)

Souls and bodies travel across the vacuum of space not on circular orbits but parallel lines which somehow manage to cross. This is an imaginative consolation, but one which—as in Marvell's poem—requires the defeat of gravity and geometry and the reorganisation of the universe.

Wieners's love poems reveal the lack and need of the abandoned lover, a subject position familiar from the Petrarchan tradition; but they also show how love creates a world. One of the most moving portraits of catastrophic love is his poem 'Cocaine':

For I have seen love  
 and his face is choice Heart of Hearts,  
 a flesh of pure fire, fusing from the center  
 where all Motion is one.

And I have known  
 despair that the Face has ceased to stare  
 at me with the Rose of the world  
 but lies furled

in an artificial paradise it is Hell to get into.  
 If I knew you were there  
 I would fall upon my knees and plead to God  
 to deliver you in my arms once again.

But it is senseless to try.  
 One can only take means to reduce misery,  
 confuse the sensations so that this Face,  
 what aches in the heart and makes each new

start less close to the source of desire,  
 fade from the flesh that fires the night,  
 with dreams and infinite longing. (1998: 76)

This extraordinary poem imagines love as both hell and paradise, the suffering of lack and the experience of profusion. Love is the pure, creative fire at the centre of the cosmos, an ethereal centre where (if we were to read this as a reference to Aristotelian physics) all motion is ‘one’—unchanging, constant. The Face of love gives and withholds its divine, life-giving gaze, withdrawing from the world it creates and returning to the ‘artificial paradise’ which we might also associate—through Baudelaire, and Wieners’s own history—with narcotic derangement. The poem shifts momentarily to a more local ‘you’, whose location is undiscoverable, before confessing the futility of any prayer for restitution. But the poem is itself such a prayer, and thus engages in a version of apophasis: it denies the worth of pleading as it pleads. It wishes to dull the senses and make the image of desire fade, and at the same time sharpens the senses and conjures an unforgettable image of desire. It stokes a cosmic fire while fantasising about the relief of routinisation; and—like Shakespeare’s sonnet 110—it exercises the discipline of ending with a profession of endless longing.

Is it true that ‘only recollection’s love is happy’, as Kierkegaard’s aesthete argues in *Either/Or*, or must these recollections of lost love always take the form of grief ([1843] 1987: 41), as they do throughout Wieners’s writing? Memory, Herbert Marcuse argued, can be a source of joy, and a means of resisting the tyranny of fate and time, particularly the time of alienated labour. Marcuse was criticising the way that civilisation represses pleasure, and prohibits us from accessing the fulfilment we once enjoyed either as infants or as a species. He proposed that one way of overcoming this repression is through memory, which allows us to retrieve those archaic experience of gratification, from a time before the pleasure principle was supplanted by the ‘order of renunciation’. Our utopian hopes are not fictional; we are not just imagining another world, we can remember it. However, this makes happiness:

essentially a thing of the *past*. The terrible sentence which states that only the lost paradises are the true ones judges and at the same time rescues the *temps perdu*. The lost paradises are the only true ones not because, in retrospect, the past joy seems more beautiful than it really was, but because remembrance alone provides the joy without the anxiety over its passing and thus gives it an otherwise impossible duration. Time loses its power when remembrance redeems the past ([1955] 1972: 163–4).

This argument resonates with Wieners’s poems, in which the ‘artificial paradise’ of lost love can only be entered through suffering and returned to in dreams. But that remembered paradise endures forever, unlike the fleeting present in which desire is realised and then lost. Past love can seem like the only happy love because its fate, to use Marvell’s term, is already determined; poems seal that moment of consummation in their amber.

### Hunger and fusion

In ‘Cocaine’, Wieners imagines love as a centre where flesh of pure fire is ‘fused’ and all motion becomes ‘one’. Like Marvell, he uses cosmic imagery to represent a wish for bodily and psychic conjunction—the desire, as Freud put it, ‘to make the I and the love object one, to abolish all spatial barriers between them’ ([1926] 2001: 122). Freud saw that ‘at the height of being in love, the boundary between I and object threatens to melt away’ ([1929] 2001: 66). This loss of boundary between self and other is embraced in many accounts of love, from Aristophanes’s fable of the conjoined lovers in the *Symposium*, to John Donne’s poem ‘The Ecstasy’, to Freud’s ‘oceanic feeling’, or Badiou’s ‘Two Scene’. Max Weber argues that:

the erotic relation seems to offer the unsurpassable peak of the fulfilment of the request for love in the direct fusion of the souls of one to the other. This boundless giving of oneself is as radical as possible in its opposition to all functionality, rationality, and generality ([1948] 1991: 347).

Fusion is not just a way of describing a desire for sexual intercourse or the recollected unity of the mother–infant dyad, but a form of radical generosity which opposes Enlightenment rationality and returns humans to their charismatic animal natures. However, if the fantasy of fusion is a way of returning to the materiality of the body, the body is also the limit of that fantasy, whether it be chaste bodies which resist penetration, absent bodies which can only be remembered and not touched, or mortal bodies which must succumb to death.

The fantasy of fusion also forms part of Hegel’s elusive fragment ‘On Love’, in which love arrives late to a world filled with dead things. In Hegel’s argument, the subject first loves the objects which surround him. These objects are dead and regard him with indifference, or not at all; the lover, unrequited in his desire for these things, lives on in a necrophiliac despair, unable to bear thinking ‘of himself as this nullity’ (1970: 304), unable really to live. He can only return to life, recognise himself as living, through love’s pedagogy, which teaches him to treat a living being as something other than an instrument or an object. Hegel says that lovers relinquish the love of things to come together as mortal beings and form ‘a living whole’. The lovers free themselves from the fetters of materiality and fuse psychically and sexually in an attempt to overcome the separation of their finite, bounded bodies, and to negate their mortality. Love strives to annul the possibility of death ‘as a mere abstract possibility, to unite even the mortal element and to make it immortal’ (1970: 305–6). The lovers learned about their finitude from living in a world of dead things, and they rebel against that finitude through reproduction—the making of a living being in which they are fused, in the form of a child. Leaving aside the bias towards reproductive heterosexuality in Hegel’s account, we can read in this strange little

text a clear indication of the necessity of an encounter with death to the determination of the subject which is so important to Hegel's philosophy. I will return to this theme in a moment.

It may seem paradoxical that love is imagined as constituted by lack, and at the same time inspires endless fantasies of fusion, which almost convey an excess of presence: two beings so closely locked together that there is no internal or external space where they are not mixed. But these two tropes are linked, I think, by hunger. Love poems are full of the regressive impulse to try to reclaim the lost paradise of (literal) fulfilment. Come live with me and be my love; withdraw with me into a fantastic paradise of plenitude. But the ancient pleasures we remember are elusive and cannot be recaptured. Love always entails a yearning and feeling of incompleteness or hunger, even starvation. No one can survive in a private world of uninterrupted erotic fusion with the beloved. Withdrawing into such a world not only deprives the self of nourishment; it also jeopardises our participation in the making of the world. Jonathan Lear's remark, cited earlier, suggests that 'the world exists because we love it'. If we withdraw our world-constituting love and give it to a single person, then the world might cease to exist. Such love is potentially catastrophic.

### **DE-TERMINING LOVE: LOVE POETRY AND THE CATASTROPHE OF DEATH**

The specific world-ending catastrophe that haunts many love poems is death.<sup>12</sup> Shakespeare says about the idea 'That Time will come and take my love away': 'This thought is as a death' (sonnet 64, [1609] 1997: 1855). Death is the black hole of thought; it powerfully draws all thoughts toward it, and puts out their lights. Death is the absolute singularity, the cancellation of the debt. It is the opposite of festivity and of the banality of repetition. It is the ultimate rebuke to the infantile fantasy of omnipotence. But these are not its functions in love poetry. Oh no. For poets, death is the recurrent emblem *of* omnipotence, the occasion of their triumph over time and decay. The catastrophe of death is what the poem alone can outlast. Think of the troubadours pining for death as a release from the anguish of love; of the way Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* and Dante's *Vita Nuova* meditate on death as a means of transcending the limits of the body; of the repeated invocation of death in Shakespeare's sonnets as the threat against which the poems are raised; or W. S. Graham's late poem,

<sup>12</sup>The most interesting exploration of this topic is still by Denis Rougemont ([1939] 1983).

'To My Wife at Midnight' (2004: 262–5), in which the poet's thoughts as he sleeps beside his wife Nessie Dunsmuir turn to death and desire.

Graham's powerful poem compiles many of the themes of this lecture: the two are alone and separate, but also fused—'where we each reach / Sleeping alone together, / Nobody can touch' (263). Her sleeping, present absence creates the space which enables him to compose this poem to her: neither out of hearing, nor truly in it, she is both his interlocutor, and turned away from him; she does not speak to him directly, though her heart answers 'my dear my dear // My dear for all it's worth' (264). The poem regresses, in a way which was quite common in Graham's work, first to childhood ('coming out to play'; 'to play the games of Greenock / Beside the sugar-house quays', 264, 265), then historically—to the field at Culloden (265), where the Hanoverians finally defeated the Jacobite uprising. This site brings a surprising note of war into a poem of night, restfulness, the cat going through its flap, and the Coleridgean meditation echoed in its title. We learn that the speaker has acquired a wound, and that he is begging Nessie 'to help me now to go', to 'buckle me for the war' and 'kiss me and fasten my drowsy armour tight' (265). Nessie is like Venus, consorting with Mars; and the poem could be read as a witty Donnean innuendo about the desire to 'go' or come:

Is the cat's window open?  
Shall I turn into your back?  
And what is to happen?

However, Graham strikes a more melancholic note; instead of disarming him, Nessie prepares him for the fight as he 'goes under'—into the unconsciousness of sleep or death. With his going he imagines sleep as a little death, his soul watching from the stoure at Culloden as Nessie, untroubled by time, sleeps here too, still living but in a 'lonely place' in his absence. Her love empowers him to stand and fight, but not to survive. The poem is a lonely address to the warm body beside him, imagining the scene changed into death. It is Nessie's beating heart which keeps his soul from skipping and missing a beat, the rhythms of her body which keep the poem's tercets anchored in the darkness. The image of death spoils the pleasure of lying warmly with the beloved; the poem shows how that paradise is always already lost, and even the paradise of childhood is cultivated on the ruins of historical premises. Put a different way, it shows how the bliss of loving intimacy can be claimed amid those ruins. Like many love poems, Graham's constructs in its forever present declaration of love, a way of forestalling the catastrophe of death to come which it cannot stop repeating.

Marcuse argued that memory can even overcome the most repressive force of all: death itself. He suggested that 'in a repressive civilisation, death itself becomes an instrument of repression.' Nonetheless, the biological necessity of death:

does not refute the possibility of final liberation. ... Men can die without anxiety if they know that what they love is protected from misery and oblivion. After a fulfilled life, they may take it upon themselves to die—at a moment of their own choosing. ([1955] 1972: 165)

This hope—that we can imagine a world in which we could die whenever we choose, without anxiety, knowing that what we have worked to make will last—is outrageously utopian. But it is also a central theme of many of the poems I am discussing: that they can overcome death through love. Love induces fears of mortality, which the poem's immortality can assuage; the poem is the articulation of a demand which speaks forward to future readers, and backwards, to the lost paradises of infantile experience.

Keats was of course both half in love with easeful Death, and plagued by fears of ceasing to be. He wrote to Fanny Brawne that he broods over 'two luxuries' as he walks:

your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute. I hate the world: it batters too much the wings of my self-will, and would I could take a sweet poison from your lips to send me out of it. From no others would I take it (Letter 139, to Fanny, 25 July 1819; 1935: 362).<sup>13</sup>

Love makes him wish for death, but also for endless life: 'I shall never be able to bid you an entire farewell. If I am destined to be happy with you here—how short is the longest Life. I wish to believe in immortality—I wish to live with you for ever.' (Letter 223, July 1820; 1935: 500). And when his death was actually approaching, as his health failed and he planned his journey to Italy, he asked his friend Charles Brown to look after Fanny. 'The thought of leaving Miss Brawne is beyond every thing horrible—the sense of darkness coming over me—I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing' (Letter 238, To Charles Brown, 30 September 1820; 1935: 520). It is this figure which makes him fear the death he longed for, and which he sees, and cannot bring himself to regard, in the pain of their misunderstandings and separation.

Those fears fed off and into his fantasies of withdrawing from the world into a private space of erotic monopolisation of the other, and his hopes for poetic immortality. He begged Fanny Brawne:

<sup>13</sup> Levinson offers an interesting reading of Keats's relationship to Brawne, whom she says 'was pretty unanimously judged to be cool, vain, and self-involved': she argues that Keats typically loved narcissistic women because he himself was 'seeking after object-love' (quoting Freud, 'On Narcissism'); and that in the presence of such women he felt at ease because 'I forget myself entirely' (letter to George Keats, 14–31 October 1818; Levinson 1988: 180–1, n. 15).

Do not think of any thing but me. Do not live as if I was not existing—Do not forget me ... for you to love me as I do you, you must think of no one but me. (Letter 216, to Fanny, May 1820; 1935: 490).

It is a sentiment he echoes in his poem 'To Fanny', where he makes his life contingent on total possession of her:

O! let me have thee whole, —all—all—be mine!  
 That shape, that fairness, that sweet minor zest  
 Of love, your kiss, —those hands, those eyes divine,  
 That warm, white, lucent, million-pleasured breast, —  
 Yourself —your soul —in pity give me all,  
 Withhold no atom's atom or I die ... (1970: 689)

At such moments, Keats acts the part of the obsessional lover that Sartre identifies. He wants to be the one 'whose function is to make trees and water exist, to make cities and fields and other men exist, in order to give them later to the Other who arranges them into a world.' By giving her the world, he becomes 'the unsurpassable', the 'absolute end', not a means but the anchor and foundation of all values ([1943] 1993: 369). In such a case, world-making is not a generous and creative endeavour, but a way of shrinking the actual in order to constrain the beloved and ensure her dependency. Sequestered by illness, Keats accuses Fanny of flirtation, of not taking their love as seriously as he does:

My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you—I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again—my Life seems to stop there—I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving. (Letter 220, to Fanny, 5 July? 1820; 1935: 496)

He is already withdrawn, dying, destroying his world and himself in order to live wholly in a love which makes him feel as if he were 'dissolving'—as he wished, in his 'Ode to a Nightingale', to 'Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget / What thou among the leaves hast never known': age, sickness and death. He wants the beloved to withdraw with him, into the world he has made to exist, a world beyond common values: the world his poetry constitutes. But as we have already seen, such a withdrawal is catastrophic, and threatens to obliterate the shared world and starve those who practise it.

Keats's attempts to control his beloved remind us that there is an excess which can never be accounted for by the demand for love. This excess is the beloved object, that figure who engenders the poem, and who constantly escapes its constraints. The beloved is always more than the poem can be, a real person whose speech, dreams, manners and body exceed the poem's frame. What the poem preserves for eternity is, as John Donne put it, a 'relic', not the fullness of the irrecoverable object for which the

poem is perpetually hungry. The fugitive nature of that object installs a lack at the centre of the love poem which threatens the poem's claim to be the foundation of value. But the excess is also the irrecoverable plenitude of feeling and language which any single poem cannot contain, the fantastic ideal which casts a shadow over the existing text and which we could identify with the nightingale's high requiem. Hegel argued that 'a pure heart is not ashamed of love; but it is ashamed if its love is incomplete' (1970: 306), if some part of the subject remains separate or exclusive, not given over to love. This, Judith Butler says, is Hegel at his most Kleinian, a recognition 'of the hostility in love that keeps love from ever being absolute' (2012: 15): 'on the one hand, the individuality of the other precludes the union, and yet to rage against that individuality is to strike at the other whom one loves' (13). The poet is particularly at risk of the shame of incompleteness, the inability to contain the excess of language and desire even in the purest of hearts or most capacious of poems.

Perhaps this is what gives the lie to the poem's claims to omnipotence and world-making: love cannot impose its structure on that excess which is the beloved, the poem's own beginning. And so chaos is come again. I have argued, following Jessica Benjamin, that the object's survival is the basis of erotic mutuality. The attempt to destroy the beloved object or world that object constitutes and inhabits is proof that the object really does exist, independent of the subject's fantasies. The icy beloved of the Petrarchan tradition is a caricature, an outline which masks an actual, various person whom the poem cannot contain. The unrequited lover's bitterness tells us that this object actually exists, and that she resists both his fantastic idealisation and his violence. The fantasy of destroying the other, or indeed the world, is part of the dream of omnipotent possession. But rather than proving the unity of the couple, it leaves the lover alone. At least then the lover knows he is not repeating: the poem comes to stand in for the singularity of feeling and utterance which love, common, repetitive love, prohibits. But the problem for poets, of course, is that they are never alone. Their endurance depends on another kind of loving repetition: by readers.

### THE DETERMINATION OF LOVE

So at the terminus of this lecture, we have arrived at a point of intense ambivalence. Love can be a figure for the making of the world—and for its destruction. It can remind us of the blissful fullness of infancy and fusion with the mother—and the pain of emptiness or lack. It is singular and new; it is repetitive and ordinary. It is a gift of something we do not have but can only imagine, a communion of eros which is embedded in the language that never lets us forget that we are not the first to feel the intensities of passion for a singular individual. But it also causes us to imagine

withdrawing from or destroying the world; it skirts the edge of doom, and draws us inexorably towards the catastrophe of our mortality. It is perhaps inevitable, in this historic moment, and in the intellectual traditions that dominate our culture, that it is the latter vision which determines our perspective on love—though I hope everyone reading this essay has had a chance to feel otherwise.

Our tendency when thinking about love, in other words, is to give in to what the late Mark Fisher described as ‘capitalist realism’: the belief that only catastrophe is inevitable. Now that ‘capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizon of the thinkable’, Fisher argues, ‘poverty, famine and war can be presented as an inevitable part of reality, while the hope that these forms of suffering could be eliminated [is] easily pained as naïve utopianism (2009: 8, 16). I want in this final moment to turn away from capitalism’s realistic scoffing at the possibility of the end of suffering, and argue that by making us contemplate death and the annihilation of the existing world, love poems help us to survive the catastrophes which are already here. This is the opening of Sophie Robinson’s poem ‘where the heart is streaming’:

there are places in which the mind thrives like plankton, where jobs  
are easy to come by & every apartment overlooks the park, where  
the funeral has barely started & the heart is a mist that rises & clears  
like a browser & streaming faster — a gapless surface of fake solids

& there are places in which love reproduces itself like a lizard’s tail, heeds  
to no alarm or database. places where the sun raises like a fat cunt  
glowing in the sky. places where the rats don’t race but rat out  
their days in a waterlogged stupor. places you can dive into from a height.

there are places where a heart is megashared & its kitchens always full  
of foods. where babies name themselves. a place you cannot unknow ...

(2014: n.p.)

The world Robinson imagines is not wholly free of violence or fear. These are places where ‘nobody dies’, and ‘in which the lives of happy & boring people unfold / day after day, where nobody writes anything down & nobody suffers’. The production of this world is not divorced from the production of our own: ‘like a hybrid tea rose sewn / together in a factory in bangladesh & sold for eight hundred times its worth’. It is a utopia, but a perverse one, a world made not just for impossibly sublime objects, but for the unlovable, and everyone in between. It crosses the parallel lines of the real and the ideal, its desire moving across that gap which separates the world we live in from the one we can imagine, and which we can only speak about stupidly, repetitively, and therefore truly. But in order to really imagine such a world, we also have to find a way to overcome the obsession both with the event and with catastrophe which characterises so much love poetry and revolutionary thinking. A poetics of enduring

love might help us to understand how worlds are built and not just destroyed; but such a poetics entails the surrender of the fantasy of omnipotence and singularity which redeems poets from their dependence on the objects that they cannot contain, and therefore seek to destroy.

What might such a poetics look like? As I have said, there are precious few examples of it: of mature love which is also infantile in its hopefulness. Robinson's poem echoes the refrain from Frank O'Hara's 'Ode to Joy', which has been looping in my head repeatedly over the past year. 'We shall have everything we want and there will be no more dying' (1995: 281). This is the most beautiful expression of an infantile wish for omnipotence and bliss that I can imagine. It reminds me of Spenser's characterisation in his 'Hymn to Love' of Eros as both a baby, and 'the eldest of the heavenly Peers'. Love is an ancient child who delights in play and presence, communicates through touch, hungers for fullness and experiences absence as pain. Infinitely old, and infinitely young, the figure of Eros—and O'Hara's refrain—urge us to believe that these desires are not immature, but love's final and interminable condition.

Keston Sutherland has described writing poetry in a similar spirit, as a response to the wish 'to break out from infinite emptiness, to escape from the absolute, fearful, disgusting and extinct identity of a dot lost in alien infinity' (2016: 109–10). He writes:

There is no escape at last from that form of the subject for so long as we are in reality crushed, wasted and emptied out by capital, and not worked out by our own really free exertions of thinking, feeling and love, just as in reality there is no escape from death. But the work of struggling to explode that form and to produce an infinite and ineradicable act of defiance against it is somehow obscurely essential to poetic expression. ... Poetry makes resound right now and in this world the promise of whatever we would risk this crushed life for. (110)

I started this lecture by admitting my scepticism about communised eros—a melancholic scepticism which picks through such statements with its long nails. But thinking about love poetry over the past year has helped me to understand Keston's wish, which is also O'Hara's. Love is the determination to make a world, which requires us also to risk destroying one. It is the belief that we *can* make love real on the edge of doom, can create a loving world that will sustain us. Behind us is the irrecoverable paradise of total fulfilment. Ahead of us is catastrophe. We are bound together in the present by all the things we lack, and by repetition: each time we profess our loves, we stand in the light of our particularity and all those whose gestures and care have kept us alive, and which we repeat and extend, bearing it out to the edge of doom. Love is the name for this desire to make a world, a world we must defend with all our wit, strength and festivity against the powers of death. As O'Hara puts it in his 'Ode: Salute to the French Negro Poets', 'the only truth is face to face, the poem

whose words become your mouth / and dying in black and white we fight for what we love, not are' (1995: 305).

Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art.



Standing—with militant love—against the killing by police of Alton Sterling (photo by Jonathan Bachman of Ieshia Evans in Baton Rouge).

*Acknowledgements:* I would like to thank Amy De'Ath, Sam Ladkin and John Wilkinson for their comments on an earlier draft of this lecture, and Isobel Armstrong for her generous response to my work. I am also grateful to Marlene Dumas for permission to use her fierce painting 'Hierarchy' in the publicity for this event.

## REFERENCES

- Abraham, Julie (1996), *Are Girls Necessary? Lesbian Writing and Modern Histories* (New York & London, Routledge).
- Ahmed, Sara ([2004] 2014), 'In the Name of Love', in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press), 122–43.
- Armstrong, Isobel (2000), *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford, Blackwell).

- Badiou, Alain (2012), *In Praise of Love*, with Nicolas Truong, trans. Peter Bush (London, Serpent's Tail).
- Barthes, Roland (1975), *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux); first published 1973.
- Belsey, Catherine (1994), *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford, Blackwell).
- Benjamin, Jessica (1995), *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven, CT & London, Yale University Press).
- Berlant, Lauren (2012), *Desire/Love* (Brooklyn, Punctum).
- Black, Jeremy (1998), *Reading Sumerian Poetry* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press).
- Brooks, Gwendolyn (1981), 'Black Love', *Ebony* (August): 29.
- Butler, Judith (2012), *To Sense What is Living in the Other: Hegel's Early Love*, 100 Notes—100 Thoughts no. 66 (Kassel, Documenta 13).
- Carson, Anne (1998), *Eros the Bittersweet* (Champaign, IL, Dalkey Archive Press).
- Chessman, Harriet Scott (1989), *The Public is Invited to Dance: Representation, the Body, and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press).
- Cowper, William (1905), *The Complete Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. H. S. Milford (London, Henry Frowde).
- Creeley, Robert ([1966], 1978), *Poems 1950–1965* (London, Marion Boyars), 159–60.
- Donne, John (1932), *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (London, Nonesuch).
- Duncan, Robert (1944), 'The Homosexual in Society', *Politics* 1.7 (August); revised and expanded version, *Jimmy & Lucy's House of "K"* 3 (January 1985).
- Fanon, Franz ([1952] 1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London, Pluto Press).
- Fisher, Mark (2009), *Capitalist Realism, Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, MA, Zer0 Books).
- Fredman, Stephen (2009), *Contextual Practice: Assemblage and the Erotic in Postwar Poetry and Art* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press).
- Freud, Sigmund ([1926] 2001), 'Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. XX (1925–1926): An Autobiographical Study, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, The Question of Lay Analysis and Other Works (London, Vintage).
- Freud, Sigmund ([1929] 2001), 'Civilisation and its Discontents', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. XXI: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents, and Other Works (1927–1931) (London, Vintage).
- Freud, Sigmund ([1953] 2001), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. VII: A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality, and Other Works, 1901–1905, ed. James Strachey (London, Vintage).
- Freud, Sigmund ([1957] 2001), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. XI: Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works, 1910 (London, Vintage).
- Graham, W. S. (2004), *New Collected Poems*, ed. Matthew Francis (London, Faber).
- Halpern, Rob (2015), *Common Place* (New York, Ugly Duckling Presse).
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1970), 'On Love', in *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Gloucester, MA, Peter Smith), 302–8.
- Hesiod (2006 edn), *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. Glenn W. Most (London & Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press).
- Heuving, Jeanne (2016), *The Transmutation of Love and Avant-Garde Poetics* (Tuscaloosa, AL, University of Alabama Press).
- Holmes, Richard (ed.) (1996), *Shelley on Love: Selected Writings* (London, Flamingo for Harper Collins).
- Howard, Henry Earl of Surrey & Thomas Wyatt (1965), *The Works*, ed. George Nott, 2 vols, vol. 1 (New York, AMS Press).
- Hume, David ([1739] 2000), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton & Mary J. Norton (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

- Hutchinson, Lucy (1996 edn), *Lucy Hutchinson's Translation of Lucretius, De Rerum Natura*, ed. Hugh de Quehen (London, Duckworth).
- Keats, John (1935), *The Letters*, ed. Maurice Buxton Forman, rev. ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Keats, John (1970), *The Complete Poems*, ed. Miriam Allott (London, Longman).
- Kelley, Robin D. G. (2016), 'What Does Black Lives Matter Want?', *Boston Review*, 17 August, <http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/robin-d-g-kelley-movement-black-lives-vision>
- Kierkegaard, Søren ([1843] 1987), *Either/Or*, Part I, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press).
- Kierkegaard, Søren ([1847] 1995), *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard's Writings Vol. XVI, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press).
- King, Martin Luther Jr. ([1967] 1981), *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press).
- Lacan, Jacques ([1961] 2015), *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge, Polity).
- Lacan, Jacques (1965), 'Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis', Seminar XII, in *Jacques Lacan in Ireland*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/12-Crucial-problems-for-psychoanalysis.pdf>
- Laplanche, Jean (1976), *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Lear, Jonathan (1998), *Love and Its Place in Nature, A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New Haven, CT & London, Yale University Press).
- Levinas, Emmanuel (2006), *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith & Barbara Harshav (London & New York, Continuum).
- Levinson, Marjorie (1988), *Keats's Life of Allegory; The Origins of A Style* (Oxford, Blackwell).
- Loy, Mina (1997), *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (Manchester, Carcanet).
- Mackay, Peter (2010), *Sorley Maclean* (Aberdeen, AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies).
- Maclean, Sorley ([1943] 1979), *Poems to Eimhir*, trans. Iain Crichton Smith (Newcastle, Northern House).
- Marcuse, Herbert ([1955] 1972), *Eros and Civilisation* (London, Abacus).
- Marriott, David (2013), *In Neuter* (Cambridge, Equipage).
- Marvell, Andrew (2003 edn), *The Poems*, ed. Nigel Smith (London, Longman).
- Montaigne, Michel de ([1603] 1965), 'Of Friendship', in *Essays*, trans. John Florio, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Dutton & New York, Dent).
- Moten, Fred (2010), *B Jenkins* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press).
- Moten, Fred (2016), 'Interview', *Lunch Ticket*, <http://lunchticket.org/fred-moten-poet/>
- Nancy, Jean-Luc (2003), 'Shattered Love', in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press).
- Notley, Alice. (2015), 'This Fire', *Poetry* (July/August), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/58234/this-fire>
- Nygren, Anders ([1930/36] 1953) *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (SPCK, Westminster).
- O'Hara, Frank (1995), *The Collected Poems*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, University of California Press).
- Plato (1999 edn), *The Symposium*, trans. Christopher Gill (London, Penguin).
- Pozorski, Aimee L. (2005), 'Eugenicist Mistress & Ethnic Mother: Mina Loy and Futurism, 1913–1917', *Melus*, 30.3 (Fall): 41–69 <https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/30.3.41>
- Riley, Denise (1985), *Dry Air* (London, Virago).
- Riley, Denise (2000), *Words of Selves, Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press).

- Robertson, Lisa (2012), *Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, the Codex, Melancholy, Lucretius, Folds, Cities and Related Aporias* (Toronto, Bookthug).
- Robertson, Lisa (2016), *3 Summers* (Toronto, Coach House).
- Robinson, Sophie (2014), 'where the heart is streaming', *Morning Star*, (8 July), <https://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/a-899d-Two-poems-by-Sophie-Robinson#.WQNWctLyvIU>
- Rodefer, Stephen (2008), *Call It Thought* (Manchester, Carcanet).
- Rose, Gillian (1992), *The Broken Middle* (Oxford, Blackwell).
- Rougemont, Denis (1983), *Love in the Western World* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press); first published 1939.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul ([1943] 1993), *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London, Routledge).
- Shakespeare, William ([1609] 1997), *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, J. J. M. Tobin et al., 2nd ed. (Boston, MA & New York, Houghton Mifflin).
- Sidney, Philip (2004 edn), *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London, Penguin).
- Smith, A. J. (1985), *The Metaphysics of Love, Studies in Renaissance Love Poetry from Dante to Milton* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Sokol, B. J. (1988), 'The Symposium, Two Kinds of "Definition", and Marvell's "The Definition of Love"', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 35, 169–70.
- Spenser, Edmund (1999 edn), *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (London, Penguin).
- Stein, Gertrude ([1935] 1985), 'Poetry and Grammar', in *Lectures In America* (Boston, MA Beacon Press).
- Sutherland, Keston (2016), 'Infinite Exhaustion', in *Brittle Land*, ed. Alexandra Navratil (Rome, Roma Publications & Berlin, Dan Gunn), 83–110.
- Vendler, Helen (1999), *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press).
- Weber, Max ([1948] 1991), *From Max Weber, Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (London, Routledge).
- Whitebook, Joel (1995), *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press).
- Wiens, John (1988), *Cultural Affairs in Boston, Poetry and Prose 1956–1985*, ed. Raymond Foye (Santa Rosa, CA, Black Sparrow).
- Wiens, John (1998), *Selected Poems 1958–1984*, ed. Raymond Foye (Santa Rosa, CA, Black Sparrow).
- Winnicott, Donald W. (1953), 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: A Study of the First Not-me Possession', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34(2): 89–97.
- Winnicott, Donald W. (1971, 1991), *Playing and Reality* (London & New York, Routledge).

*Note on the author:* Andrea Brady's books of poetry include *The Strong Room* (Crater Press, 2016), *Dompteuse* (2014), *Cut from the Rushes* (Reality Street, 2013), *Mutability: Scripts for Infancy* (Seagull Books, 2012), and *Wildfire: A Verse Essay on Obscurity and Illumination* (Krupskaya, 2010). She is Professor of Poetry at Queen Mary University of London, where she runs the Centre for Poetry and the Archive of the Now. She is also co-publisher of Barque Press.

a.brady@qmul.ac.uk

To cite the article: Andrea Brady (2017), 'The determination of love', *Journal of the British Academy*, 5: 271–308.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.85871/jba/005.271>

This article is licensed under a  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.

*Journal of the British Academy* (ISSN 2052–7217) is published by  
The British Academy—the national academy for the humanities and social sciences.  
10–11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH  
[www.britishacademy.ac.uk](http://www.britishacademy.ac.uk)