Introduction

A Short History of Love

THE MYSTERY OF ROMANCE

I have a confession: I am a true romantic. I fervently believe in happily ever after and true love always. I am also a cynic. I have a sinking feeling that romance blinds us with fairy dust. I am afraid that romance will, metaphorically speaking, wear off at midnight, leaving us dressed in rags and missing one of our shoes. The romantic in me has spent a lifetime looking for "the one" while the cynic has spent nearly as long teaching and writing about romance from a critical perspective. Environmental collapse and a global transfer of wealth to the billionaire class cannot be solved by seeing someone across the room and feeling our hearts beat faster until we finally lean in for the kiss as fireworks go off in the background. I know that. Most people know that and yet, somehow, the promise of romance as a guarantee of future well-being has become increasingly powerful even as the future itself is increasingly insecure.

That is the argument of this book: that the worse things get, the more we turn to romance to feel hopeful about the future. It is not that capitalism causes romance, but rather that romance is both the most pleasurable and the most future-oriented escape from the grimness of globalized capitalism. Americans turn to a number of belief systems for sustenance: religion, nationalism, football. And some of these, like religion, even

promise a better future in the afterlife. Yet romance promises us a better future in *this* life, with the added bonus of an enchantment of the everyday as we hunt for our prince or princess. After all, today could be the day we meet our true love or maybe we are already with our true love and didn't realize it until today. We turn to romance because romance can make our lives better, more bearable, and more sustainable. We turn to romance because unlike having religious faith or even supporting the Jets, only a terrible cynic could begrudge us love.

At the risk of being a terrible cynic, however, I want to point out that romance is a privatized solution to what in fact are structural and global threats. I'm not arguing that married people are less likely to engage in political change, but rather that people who believe that romance will allow them to ride off into the sunset and live happily ever after, many of them single, are looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. True love can no more solve our future than nationalism can. It can only distract us from what we really need: a realistic sense that our future is collective and is seriously endangered at this point in history. Our love affair with romance is like any dysfunctional relationship: the worse things are, the more we believe in the power of romantic love to fix it. When Donald Trump became president of the United States, many Americans insisted that "love trumps hate" and that "love will win." I was too disheartened to respond with that sort of optimism. I looked at this book project, nearly done at the time, and asked myself: Who cares? Why offer a critique of romance as a dangerous ideology when there are far more dangerous ones that now have a place in the White House, ideologies like white nationalism and a worship of wealth and conspicuous consumption? But the worse things got, the more I realized that romance actually is the problem, or if not *the* problem, a problem. Romance lulls us into focusing on our love life rather than politics. Romance teaches us to turn away from the public sphere, to not think about the world, but to focus instead on our relationships and our families. And even when we know the world is bigger than that, even when the world intrudes on us with white nationalists taking over

the streets of Charlottesville and global warming producing monster hurricanes on our coasts, we still hold onto the fantasy that true love will save us. I'm not saying that despair causes romance, but rather that romance is a balm for our battered world.

We know, deep in our hearts, that love is not all we need, but love provides a port in the storm. In the winter of 2016–17, nuclear war rhetoric between the US and North Korea was heating up even as global climate change was creating a series of disasters, from raging fires in California to an Arctic vortex throughout much of the country, and Americans responded by turning to the Hallmark Channel. During the 2017 Christmas season, Hallmark aired thirty-three original movies and more than 80 million people watched them.[1] Despite the various "smart" dramas on cable, Americans took pleasure in Hallmark, the only non-news channel with growing viewership in 2017. The company that invented the canned sentiments of greeting cards has now transformed into a network that produces film after film of love saving the day. As Heather Long pointed out in the *Washington Post,* Americans are turning to Hallmark's "feel good" programming to avoid the ugliness of the real world and the even grimmer future it promises.

> Hallmark's ratings have been going up for several years, but it really started in late 2015, right about the time the … Trump phenomenon took off. During the week of the election last year, the Hallmark Channel was the fourth-most watched channel on TV … It had more prime-time viewers than MSNBC did and was just behind CNN.[2]

Publicly Americans may pretend to want gritty political dramas like *The Handmaid's Tale,* but privately we're watching Hallmark originals like *A Dash of Love,* a film about love in a restaurant, and *Love Locks,* a romance about college sweethearts reuniting after twenty years.

This war between "good" and "bad" TV mirrors the more existential battle between our inner romantic and inner cynic. The fact that nearly all of us are both romantics *and* cynics can help explain some of the more puzzling contradictions of our time. Our romantic landscape is

littered with dating apps and a hook-up culture that encourages young people to not "catch the feels," and yet most Americans want to get married.[3] Although fewer people in the US get married today than ever before, white weddings themselves are ever bigger and more costly.[4] Since 1939, the cost of the average wedding has been rising, from about a fourth of median annual household income to a half.[5] As of 2016, a typical wedding in the US cost a record $32,641. This means that many couples are spending *more* than half their annual income on the big day.[6] People don't read books as much as they used to, yet the romance novel is booming.[7] Romance novels are a billion-dollar industry and account for 13 percent of all adult fiction sold.[8] More to the point, Americans buy even more romances during difficult times. As Motoko Rich explains in the *New York Times,* "Like the Depression-era readers who fueled blockbuster sales of Margaret Mitchell's 'Gone with the Wind,' today's readers are looking for an escape from the grim realities of layoffs, foreclosures and shrinking 401(k) balances."[9] Movies too provide us with escape from our woes. Just as Esther Williams's films sedated depression-era moviegoers, so today's "chick flicks" offer an equally fantastic escape from the Great Recession and its aftermath. Although unemployment and underemployment are on the rise in chick flicks, they continue to mostly offer up stories of what Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker describe as

> imperviousness to the recession, largely continuing to trade in hyper-consumerist spectacle, situating itself exclusively and unselfconsciously in environments of urban affluence and privilege, and glorifying the elimination of feminism from the "life-scripts" of its female protagonists. This all may seem unsurprising; indeed, it complies perfectly with conventional wisdom that in periods of economic duress, Hollywood renews its charge to gratify audiences through escapism.[10]

Romance has not always been our opiate of choice. Once upon a time, not that long ago, there was no such thing as riding off into the sunset to live happily ever after. Prior to the past few hundred years,

humans did fall madly in love, but they did not imagine that love would ever lead to a happy, safe, and secure tomorrow. The idea that true love will keep us safe and happy in the future started with industrialization and modern ideas about sexuality, class, race, and gender. This is not a coincidence. Romance helps people make sense of the modern world and imbues consumption with meaning. Romance not only props up notions of what love is good and what love is bad, but also specifies who deserves good love.

In this way, romance is what Karl Marx called an ideology; as such, it is distinct from the real feelings we have with intimate partners. Romance, like Catholicism or a fervent belief in the power of the free market, is a set of ideas that represents the interests of the ruling class. As an ideology, romance teaches us that certain people (mostly white, mostly straight, mostly well-off, and mostly normatively gendered) deserve happily ever after, as well as full citizenship and extra rights and privileges from the state. As many feminist scholars before me have shown, romance as an ideology tells us stories that keep gender and racial hierarchies in place, with white men as knights in shining armor and white women as damsels in distress; those who would stand in true love's path are often portrayed as middle-aged, power-hungry women, or as queer or not white.

Romance doesn't just sell us ideas about class, race, gender, and sexuality, it also sells us stuff, lots and lots of stuff, from wedding dresses and diamond rings to houses in ideal suburbs and even political candidates. And it imbues that stuff with meaning—marking some items, like diamond rings and wedding dresses, as sacred. Yet even among those Americans who cannot afford the stuff, romance as an ideology still rules. Today nearly everyone wants the promise of a happily ever after. As D'Vera Cohn puts it,

> The romantic ideal of marriage plays out in survey data that show whether they are married or not, Americans are more inclined to choose "love" as a reason for marriage more than any other factor … over "making a lifelong commitment" … and "financial stability."[11]

Romance has its own forms of propaganda. Photo by Willa Cowan-Essig.

Part of the reason nearly all of us are subject to romance's charms is culture. Hollywood produces film after film telling us that regardless of the obstacles, we too can find happiness and security if we just tie the knot. *Knocked Up* showed us that even a night of regretted sex and the resulting pregnancy can be fixed by falling in love. *My Big Fat Greek Wed-*

ding shows that huge cultural and linguistic divides can be permanently solved by marriage. Even adventure films, like the *Harry Potter* series, end with reproductive, heterosexual, married couples as well as one gay and dead Dumbledore. By the time we see Harry and Ginny and Ron and Hermione send their own offspring to Hogwarts, it is clear to the reader that their love was written in the stars.[12] Hollywood produces a lot of films with a variety of messages, but we all know that a happy ending is one with a wedding and an imagined future where the couple is without conflict and preferably with children. And if a happy ending does not result in the prince and princess riding off into the sunset, it is because such an ending would undermine cultural rules about who deserves love and who does not. In the 2016 Sally Field romantic comedy *Hello, My Name Is Doris,* the humor lies in the romantic fantasies of a quirky sixty-something secretary who mistakenly believes she is in a romantic relationship with a very attractive thirty-something executive. The joke is not about romantic love, per se, but about Field's character, a desexualized older woman who doesn't understand that she is not worthy of this Prince Charming. When the tables are turned, and it is a sixty-something-year-old man with a much younger woman, that's amore. Just look at *Autumn in New York* (Winona Ryder playing twenty-two with a fifty-year-old Robert Redford) or Woody Allen in life or film.

Hollywood is not alone in harnessing the power of romance to seduce us. Advertisers use romantic love as much as they use sex to sell us stuff. There are all the ads for diamond rings and wedding dresses that promise us eternal happiness if we just have the perfect romance with the perfect stuff. But advertisers also use the promise of happily ever after to sell us everything else. Thumb through any fashion or women's magazine and see page after page of beautiful couples staring dreamily into each other's eyes. Buy a minivan or SUV and the promise of a happy family. The right beer can move men from "bromance" to romance. Even cleaning products use the story of romance to convince us to buy the right cleanser. A recent Apple advertisement insists that "medicine, law, engineering—these are noble pursuits and necessary to

sustain life. But poetry, romance, love—these are what we stay alive for." Unspoken are the words: buy an iPad.[13]

This turn to the romantic is not just cultural; it is also political. Politicians on the right and the left argue that "romantic love" and "marriage" are the answer to nearly every problem. Poverty? Marriage will fix it. The US government has been running a marriage campaign in poor neighborhoods for over a decade. The campaign, known as the Healthy Marriage Initiative, tells poor, primarily black and Latino Americans that married people earn more money, and therefore the answer to being poor is to get hitched. Despite all evidence that poverty is caused by a lack of money and the lack of any opportunity to earn money, about $300 million is spent annually to do things like place billboards in poor neighborhoods showing the ideal family—mom, dad, two kids—and the words "Marriage makes you richer."[14]

In the 1980s a vibrant national gay and lesbian political movement took a turn toward magical thinking when it decided to put nearly all its resources into the marriage equality movement.[15] On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court declared that gays and lesbians had a constitutional right to get married. President Obama, along with millions of others, tweeted #lovewins. As Emily Bazelon pointed out a year earlier:

> The win for same-sex marriage overshadowed the loss for voting rights—an abrupt end to a key anti-discrimination provision, which had been hard won by civil rights activists … Instead of focusing on a court that seemed determined to dilute the power of black and Hispanic voters, the public saw a more neutral court respectfully and retroactively recognizing the same-sex marriage of an 84-year-old widow named Edie Windsor.[16]

Despite the promise of the safe and secure future that "winning" marriage implies, for black and Hispanic citizens both queer and straight, basic constitutional rights like voting were gutted. And regardless of race, there is still no federal employment protection for lesbians, gays, or transgendered Americans.[17] Since love "won," LGBTQ citizens are finding themselves in an increasingly precarious legal landscape. State

laws like those in North Carolina and Mississippi allow discrimination against LGBTQ people in everything from whether they can buy a wedding cake to where they can go to the bathroom.[18]

That is the power of romance as an ideology: it can make us feel like our lives are enchanted even when the world around us is collapsing. Those of us who turn to romance to feel hope about the future are not "dupes of ideology." What we are is desperate, and desperate times call for desperate measures. Romance allows us to feel hopeful. It provides optimism about our lives and our futures when we need it most. And so many of us embrace the ideology of romance as a survival strategy even when we know that romance will not actually solve the unprecedented problems we humans now face. We might call ourselves homo romanticus. Like homo economicus, homo romanticus makes choices that might be rational at the micro level of individual survival, but the macro and historical effects of these choices can be devastating. Homo economicus can decide to buy a gas-guzzling car because gas is relatively cheap—as is the gas-fueled car compared to an electric one. Homo romanticus can decide to spend her time going to couples therapy rather than "getting out the vote." The ideology of romance, like the consumption of cheap fossil fuels, allows us to keep going *and* will ultimately make things worse.

CAPITALISM, ROMANCE, AND OTHER FAIRY-TALES

In this way romance is intimately connected to consumer capitalism and its emphasis on individual well-being. It is not that romance and capitalism recently got into bed together. The story of capitalism has always been a love story. Yet most histories of capitalism have left romance out of the picture. Max Weber stressed the importance of what he called the Protestant ethic in the development of capitalism. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Weber argued that certain forms of Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, viewed the accumulation of wealth as a sign

of godliness, thereby reshaping the spirit of the culture. Thus, although the structures necessary for capitalism—the currencies, the trade routes, and so on—existed in other places and at other times, it was only in Protestant America, where the accumulation of wealth was seen as godly, that capitalism fully took root. Since wealth signified divine grace, there was an incentive to accumulate more and more wealth by investing in future revenues rather than spending. As capitalism developed, "the strict earning of more and more money … [became] purely … an end in itself."[19]

Weber's sense that capitalism relies on a constant investment in the future missed that this future was already always heterosexual, reproductive, and deeply romantic. In other words, at the very core of the capitalist system lay the promise of a more perfect future not just through the predestination of the Calvinist God or even the accumulation of wealth through labor, but also through the narrative of romance leading to the one true love and the happily ever after. In *No Future,* Lee Edelman describes this constant investment in a reproductive sexuality as "futurity."[20] In *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America,* Margot Canaday argues that an investment in futurity was at the core of American citizenship from the late 1800s onward since "unlike comparable European states, which were well established before sexologists 'discovered' the homosexual in the late twentieth century, the American bureaucracy matured during the same years that scientific and popular awareness of the pervert exploded on the American consciousness."[21] American citizenship has long relied on a heterosexuality that was always already invested in future gains. Like the Protestant ethic, this *romance ethic* promised rewards down the line, even a sense of perfection and completion and yes, heaven, if only we worked hard at it. But like the proverbial bootstraps, the rewards of romance were never available to everyone. Instead, this sexual citizenship demanded heterosexuality, marriage, and even whiteness in order to gain the full rewards of the state. For instance, the federal government rewarded GIs returning from World War II with low-interest loans to buy their suburban homes, but only if they were white, male,

and married.[22] Thus whiteness, heterosexuality, and marital status were always central to full citizenship in the US. Even in the twenty-first century, in part because of the expansion of marriage rights to gay and lesbian couples, marriage remains the primary determination not just of federal rights and privileges, but also of adulthood, good parenting, and even American-ness. The idea that the citizen is always already married persists even though for the first time most adult Americans are *not* married.

Since Weber's classic explanation of capitalism was published over a century ago, many theorists have tried to think through how that spirit or "Geist" moves the American economy and culture. In *Self-Help, Inc.,* Micki McGee makes the argument that in the twentieth century, the Protestant ethic morphed into an ethic of continual self-improvement. McGee theorizes that as citizenship and personhood opened up to more than landed white gentlemen, the earlier promise of being a "self-made man" transformed into the far more democratic if just as unlikely promise of being a "fully realized individual." This "hybridization of personal and commercial values [is] eminently evident in the texts of self-improvement culture. [Thus] a calculating rationality was imported into the private sphere."[23] This left Americans with the sense that each one of us is responsible for our own self's happiness, wealth, and health.

Laura Kipnis, in *Against Love,* weaves Weber's Protestant ethic and Karl Marx's alienation of labor with self-help to argue that our romantic relationships are belabored dead-ends, sites of imprisonment and despair. For Kipnis, capitalism, the Protestant ethic, and the culture of constant self-work transform intimate relationships into yet another form of labor. Kipnis asks:

> When monogamy becomes labor, when desire is organized contractually, with accounts kept and fidelity extracted like labor from employees, with marriage as a domestic factory policed by means of rigid shop-floor discipline designed to keep the wives and husbands and domestic partners of the world choke-chained to the status quo machinery—is this really what we mean by a "good relationship"?[24]

For Kipnis, the only way to escape this "domestic gulag" is to put a clog in its machinery and refuse to be productive in our intimate relationships.[25] Yet Kipnis's *Against Love* still leaves us with some sort of precapitalist form of emotion, some sort of purer and freer form of intimate expression.

In *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism,* Eva Illouz shows how capitalism produces these emotions in the first place. Illouz argues that capitalism is neither cold nor rational, but instead highly emotional. This "emotional capitalism" as Illouz defines it is

> a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other, thus producing … a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behavior and in which emotional life—especially that of the middle classes—follows the logic of economic relations and exchange.[26]

For Illouz, modern love is part of what Max Weber described as our "disenchantment" with our world. "Disenchantment," she writes, "is both a property of belief that becomes organized by knowledge systems and expert cultures … and a difficulty in believing. This is because both the cognitions and emotions organizing belief become rationalized." Illouz argues that this rationalization of feeling leads to a contradictory relationship between our idea of romantic love and our experience of it, and these contradictions mean that modern love is expressed primarily through irony. According to Illouz, "Modern romantic consciousness has the rhetorical structure of irony because it is saturated with knowledge, but it is a disenchanted knowledge that prevents full belief and commitment. Thus if love is a modern religion … it is a religion that cannot produce belief, faith or commitment."[27] Illouz is correct. The feelings of romantic love are often infused with disenchantment, yet paradoxically they are also full of hope and possibility and make life bearable.

In this book, I uncover both how capitalism makes romance possible and how romance makes existence possible. I am building off Illouz and

Kipnis to make a different if related set of claims here: romance has always been central to modernity and capitalism, but in ways more contradictory than notions of alienation and disenchantment allow. I am also arguing that capitalism took a particular turn in the 1980s and that turn demanded an ideology that could both disguise the real material effects of global capital while simultaneously allowing people to feel hopeful about the future. In this book, I am tracing the real emotional effects of romance in real people's lives by showing how romance is a story not just about feelings, but about who belongs and who does not and what love matters and what love dare not speak its name. Romance gets so many of us to buy into this story with our hearts as well as with our hard-earned dollars. I argue that in addition to alienation and disenchantment, romance induces a feeling of hopefulness about the future, but that hopefulness is predicated on the lie that love is all we need.

As economic precariousness and global warming started to press down on us, romance rode in on a white horse to whisk us away. Truth be told, all the other heroes, like communism and revolution, had shown themselves to be drunken louts who never really cared about us in the first place. And just then a dashing leading man and a new form of cowboy capitalism rode into our lives to save the day and the future.

ROMANCING REAGAN

On January 20, 1981, Ronald Reagan became president and set in motion a series of neoliberal economic reforms. These reforms, colloquially referred to as Reaganomics or trickle-down economics, promised that as the rich got richer, their wealth would trickle down to the rest of us. It never did. Reagan's policies would help transform American society from one of the most to one of the least equitable countries. Since our love affair with Reagan began, the US has become a country where 10 percent of the population now controls over 75 percent of the wealth. The US is the most unequal of any industrialized country and slightly worse than India, Chile, and South Africa.[28] The 25 percent of the

wealth left to be divvied up by the remaining 90 percent of us is hardly randomly distributed. Whites continue to earn about 1.7 and 1.5 times what black and Hispanic Americans earn, respectively, and women get paid about 83 percent of what men earn.[29] These policies of transferring monies to the wealthiest and cutting the social safety net for the poorest have since spread around the world, leaving most people much worse off than they were in 1980. Between 2011 and 2014, 95 percent of the world's population got poorer while the richest 1 percent gained over $27 trillion.[30]

Instead of paying attention to Reagan and his ideological soul mate, Margaret Thatcher, and their fantasy that a "rising tide floats all boats," most of us were too focused on a different sort of fantasy. Seven months after Reagan took office, Charles, Prince of Wales, and Lady Diana Spencer got married in the most fairy-tale of weddings; 750 million people watched it around the world.[31] If only that many had paid attention to Reagan and Thatcher's dreams of giving money to the wealthiest and ending government programs and legal protections for the poorest and most marginalized. Most people, myself included, ignored the deregulation of banking. Many of us, however, knew all the details of the twenty-five-foot train of Princess Di's ivory taffeta wedding dress and her poufy princess sleeves and how dashing Prince Charles looked in his full naval attire complete with white gloves and gold braid. In fact, the two looked so like Prince Charming and Cinderella that even today the keeper of Diana's wedding dress, Nick Grossmark, says the reason it is a priceless gem is because "it is a fairytale fantasy, a typical princess's wedding gown. It's like something out of Walt Disney."[32]

Disney, in fact, was a key player in this global turn to romance over reality. The corporation managed to turn itself around at the end of the 1980s by reinvigorating romance as its genre of choice. After not so great sales of its far less romantic films, like *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* and *Oliver and Company,* Disney went back to its romantic roots. In 1989, Disney hit the jackpot with *The Little Mermaid* and *Pretty Woman*. According to press reports, earnings from the movies pushed profits up 34.5 per-

cent; videocassette sales increased profits by 56.8.[33] In *Pretty Woman,* a prostitute becomes worthy of the love of a wealthy "john" as their romance transforms them into a prince and princess. In *The Little Mermaid* a fish/princess hybrid is made human through the love of a prince. Both these stories demanded a suspension of reality ("johns" don't fall in love with prostitutes and marry them; mermaids don't exist and if they did, why would they want to be human?).

Disney and trickle-down economics both promised us that things would get better. We now know the economic policies didn't work, and with the advent of Occupy Wall Street and other social movements calling for the redistribution of wealth, the fantasy of trickle-down economics is no longer very popular. There has been, however, no large-scale movement to stop fantasizing about a future saved through romance. To the contrary, in much of the world today people willingly swallow the central tenet of the romantic ethic: work hard at relationships, discipline yourself sexually, invest in the future through marriage, and you will be rewarded. You can be gay or black or even old and have failed at the enterprise of love over and over again, but just keep trying. Heaven in the form of a fairy-tale ending is just around the corner if you follow the rules, show yourself to be a good romantic citizen, and buy the right stuff. No wonder many of us feel disenchantment; but, also, no wonder many of us feel a sense of purpose that is the foundation of the ideology of romance. This is where the marriage of romance and capitalism draws its strength: by promising us a better world at some future point *if* we are willing to sacrifice now. We are being sold hope in increasingly hopeless times, and many of us are buying it like never before, not just in the US but globally, because romance, like capital and the problems it creates, travels.

In the past few decades, romance as an ideology *and* as a material force has been gaining ground worldwide. As Utopian visions of collective well-being or magic markets faded into the dustbin of history and arguments over "capitalism versus communism" began to seem as quaint as landlines and TV networks, romance gained new life as a solution for

the future. Nation-states turned away from economic camps and began to align themselves along notions of good and bad romance. We might call this a new romantic cold war. Unlike the Cold War of old, which neatly divided states into East and West, this new romantic cold war is a global one. It does not exist in one place or another, but circulates. No longer confined to Russia or the US, East or West, fights over what it means to be a good sexual citizen and what constitutes good love happen in surprisingly similar ways here, there, and everywhere.

ROMANCE TRAVELS

On Valentine's Day 2010, I stood in the small Tuscan village of Volterra, Italy, and listened as Russian, British, American, and German tourists prattled on about teen vampires and true love. It was then that I understood that romance travels. I have been trying to travel with romance—going to the royal wedding of Kate and William in London and wedding expos across North America, touring with teen vampire fans, and interviewing "naughty" middle-aged women obsessed with a love story that involves spanking, lots and lots of spanking. I have also been following romance's shadow, the dark space left behind where love and happy endings are not allowed. In these dark spaces, circulating between Russia, Uganda, the United States, and France, a story of bad romance threatens not just good love, but nation-states.

That is why the story of how romance travels is a story about ideology, capital, *and* emotion in the twenty-first century. It is a story about romance as an ideological formation that has married a particular form of economic policy known as neoliberalism and how this couple works together to produce real emotional commitments. These emotional commitments range from a nearly religious zeal for marriage to an equally religious zeal for destroying homosexuality. In the United States, a place where citizenship has long been defined as the ability to access marriage and individuals are willing to take on huge amounts of debt to create "perfect" weddings, there is also a huge amount of anxi-

ety about single-mother families and gay marriage. In Russia, homosexuality is imagined as a contagious disease that threatens the body politic, and yet there are also a lot of gay and lesbian citizens. That is because citizenship and sexuality are now fractured, existing as a palimpsest, with previous notions written over contemporary ones and families as they actually are coming into contact with a variety of representations of ideal families from a variety of locations.

In the twenty-first century we all exist in fractured time. I live in multiple spaces, languages, cities, and countries. I travel back and forth and in between. Sometimes I listen to Russian news stories in Burlington, Vermont, while I Skype with my daughter in St. Petersburg or my partner in Boston. I am what the advertisers like to call a "global citizen," but in the twenty-first century, we are all global subjects. Even for those who do not exist in the privileged world that I do, nation-states mean less and less as both capital and the problems it produces transcend national borders. We are all in what political theorists call "post-Westphalian" time, a historical moment when nation-states are less important than global corporations. As Nancy Fraser points out, imagining nation-states as sovereign no longer makes sense when it comes to thinking about how the world works. Global climate change, the accumulation of capital among the few, and the simultaneous economic crisis for the many mean that not just ideologies cross borders, but also the real material results of these ideologies, such as rising oceans and air too polluted to breathe. Instead of thinking about romance and neoliberal capitalism as being nationally located, I am trying to trace what Fraser calls "all affected" persons, since "globalization is driving a widening wedge between affectedness and political membership."[34]

Nation, culture, and economy are all working together to convince us that love matters more than gender and racial equity, economic justice, or even environmental salvation. And yet romance is more than an ideology. It is also a survival strategy. Like meditation or a good glass of red wine, romance convinces us that we can survive another day. It is romance's ability to produce this sense of optimism, no matter how

grim the world becomes, that is its real magical power. This book is an attempt to unravel how romance travels alongside global capital but also how romance travels in the hearts and minds of many ordinary Americans.

I have tried to follow my head and my heart to examine how love gets incorporated into culture and economy. My head led me to ask questions: What are the scripts of love that our culture teaches us to follow? And what are the products that consumer capitalism sells us in our quest for happily ever after? How is love "produced"? How is it "incorporated" by a variety of industries and ideologies that teach us what to do when we fall in love? All of these industries and ideologies do not have our best interests at heart, but profit. Yet romance is also a set of emotional commitments. That is why so many of us consume romance even when we know that it cannot save us. Romance keeps us going, keeps us from feeling hopeless and provides us with everyday magic that is too easily dismissed as "childish" or "for women." In this sense, romance is both an ideology *and* a strategy, a trap *and* an escape mechanism.

But my heart led me somewhere else. I can see that romance has real emotional effects. Romance does the affective labor that neoliberal global capitalism cannot. It gives so many of us hope in hopeless times. And yet, romance produces a sort of cruel optimism, an optimism that Lauren Berlant describes as

> ignit[ing] a sense of possibility [yet] actually mak[ing] it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly cruel … such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming.[35]

We certainly live in a time of profound threats. Romance has been mobilized to allow us this cruel optimism when what we really need is "kind realism." Kind realism demands that we no longer privatize our futures by searching for our own personal happily ever after, but collectivize our resources to survive environmental destruction, religious

fundamentalism, and the seemingly inevitable concentration of resources in the hands of the few. We don't need fairy-tales; we need global movements where we see "humanity" as far more important than our beloved. If such a future seems overly optimistic, consider the cruelty of the alternative.

It was never written in the stars that capitalism be so cruel nor that romance be married to it. Like most marriages, this one is the result of random chance and utilitarianism. Romance helps us bear the effects of global capital, but capitalism could survive without romance and romance could survive without capitalism. In order to disrupt the marriage of romance and capitalism, I have organized this book like a typical love story. Chapter 1, "Learning to Love," considers how romance is a hegemonic ideological formation that instructs us in a variety of things: from how to love, how to be more productive workers, and how to maintain racial and gender hierarchies, as well as to accept the global accumulation of capital among very few people. From Disney to *Twilight* to *Fifty Shades of Grey,* love stories are primers in the ideology of romance, and the ideology of romance is deeply wedded to capital. The second chapter, "Finding Love," considers contemporary practices of dating, partnering, and the rituals of becoming a couple. I consider how finding our "perfect" mate is now part science, part consumer product, and how Americans buy into it no matter how often they fail at the happy ending. Chapter 3, "Marry Me?," looks at how couples move into the increasingly sacred and *spectacular* space of "engaged to be married." By considering the somewhat new phenomenon of YouTube proposals, I look at how the wedding proposal has moved from a private conversation between a man and a woman to highly watched videos of dancing flash mobs and singing grooms. Chapter 4, "White Weddings," considers how the ideology of romance solidifies into romantic subjects and sexual citizens through marriage and its most fetishistic ritual, the white wedding. By examining the global circulation of perfect weddings, I try to map out the close connection between economic redistribution under neoliberalism and the sexual apartheid created under romance. Chapter 5,

"The Honeymoon," considers romantic travel and consumption as a colonizing process that allows the ideology of romance to reproduce racial, gender, and class hierarchies. I go to Disney World in Florida to find out why the most magical place on earth is also the number one destination in the continental US for honeymooners. The book's conclusion, "Happily Never After," considers how people actually experience the culmination of romance. I travel to the world's most fantastical suburb, Celebration, Florida, a town designed by the Disney corporation to embody the space of ideal families, and consider how Celebration's entanglement in the "real"—the housing crisis, increasing homelessness, and globalization—disrupted it as an imaginary space and led to Disney selling off this dreamscape and its nightmarish problems. As can be seen from the book's organization, the research is based on analysis of various cultural texts, fieldwork at various sites of romance, and interviews with people engaged in various forms of romantic behavior. I conducted fieldwork for three days before and during the royal wedding of Kate Middleton and Prince William, as well as at sites of *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* tourism (Volterra, Italy; Forks, OR, and Seattle, WA). I interviewed nearly a hundred people planning weddings and vendors at three wedding expos (two in the US and one in Canada), conducted a week's worth of fieldwork at Disney World and Celebration, Florida, and conducted twenty semistructured interviews lasting between one and three hours on modern dating. I also went to a mass lesbian wedding, interviewing sixteen brides and four wedding guests. Spending all this time in the world of Love, Inc., convinced me more than ever that love is not all we need, but it sure feels good.

The contradiction between wanting the magic of romance even as we know there is no such thing as magic is the tension at the heart of so much of contemporary life. Most people I interviewed for this book are both hard-nosed cynics and true romantics. Most of us are Jekyll and Hyde when it comes to love. Our cynical selves scoff at the crass commercialism of big weddings and online dating sites that for a fee will find us our "perfect match." And yet that doesn't stop many of us from

crying at weddings or even shows about weddings or writing that profile on Match.com. I am trying to speak with my fellow romantics here to tell a different sort of love story, one where our "happily ever after" is about some sense of collective well-being. If this were a typical fairy-tale I would be the wicked witch showing up uninvited to ruin the wedding of the prince and princess. But please consider that the time for fairy-tales has passed. We can either start telling ourselves new stories with new, more collective endings, or, like the wicked witch, meet our unfortunate ends.

I realize that *Love, Inc.* is hardly a typical love story. I still hope that it will leave you with a true romantic's belief that the future can be better than the present.