2
Enchantment and Romance

Introduction

My sister describes the state of something being a psychological or personal “issue” for someone – a trauma, compulsion, phobia, or obsession, for example – as “having brain spaghetti”. For example, apparently she has spaghetti about me pinning her down as a child and tickling her until she screamed for mercy. She knows this because when her spouse tried to do the same, the experience she had as a child came flooding back as a complex tangle of fears, feelings and mental images. Notwithstanding the trauma inflicted on a sibling in my youth, the spaghetti metaphor is a simple but useful tool for explaining how complex our experiences are, and I bring it up here because I believe a lot of people have spaghetti about love.

In this chapter I explore the idea of love, particularly romantic love, and how people might come to have spaghetti about it. I also expand my earlier claim that love is a moral issue by examining the discourses surrounding it. In Western society, we grow up on a diet of popular discourses about relationships and what they mean. Many of these discourses are gendered – where intimate relationships are concerned, for men the discourse is predominantly about sex, for women it is romantic love, although of course the division is not so black and white. Discourses about love and sex also tend to be predominantly heteronormative, which is to say, focused on heterosexual monogamous relationships and traditional masculinity and femininity. Nevertheless, as we shall see, sex and love are two issues over which spaghetti abounds, and the relationship between the two
is probably one of the most complex with which people of all genders and sexualities in our society are faced. To that end, this chapter will examine some of the more enduring discourses characterizing romantic love and what they might mean for us.

Discourses of romantic love

The discourse of enchantment

In popular culture, romantic love is first and foremost a discourse of enchantment. Christina Perri, for example, sings about loving someone for a thousand years, and notions such as this abound in popular music, literature, film, and everyday parlance.

I have died everyday waiting for you
Darling don’t be afraid I have loved you
For a thousand years
I’ll love you for a thousand more

Simplistically, we might think of Perri’s words as a metaphor for the pain and yearning experienced while waiting for the “right person” to come along. When we meet “the one”, we feel as if we have known them forever, and that finally, fate has brought us together. When we meet our destined partner, our soul mate, we become enchanted with each other and with love itself. “A Thousand Years” was made popular as part of the soundtrack for the *Twilight* film series and echoes with excruciating precision the discourse played out between the two main characters, Bella and Edward. I will explore the *Twilight* series in more detail later in this chapter and in chapters 4 and 6. At this point, I want to focus on the song itself and how it beautifully depicts some of the most compelling contemporary discourses about romantic love. In doing so, I have no intention of demonizing love, or setting it up as a “straw man” responsible for all the ills in our society. Rather, I want to explore the richness of the concept and how deeply rooted it is within the psyche of many contemporary relationships.

Indeed, “A Thousand Years” resonates with me personally. Having been married and divorced, then through two unsuccessful relationships over the past 20-odd years, I was determined that I was better off without intimate relationships, happy to live peacefully with my