

“Equally mixed”: artistic representations of old love

By AMIR COHEN-SHALEV¹ & ESTHER-LEE MARCUS²

Abstract

Michael Haneke’s (2012) film *Amour* is used as a point of departure for discussing a spectrum of artistic representations of “old love,” a phenomenon that is still little understood. While most critics have focused on euthanasia when referring to the film’s dramatic climax, its late-life perspective of love has been marginalized. Analyzing *Amour*, as well as other recent cinematic and poetic texts, we challenge the widespread midlife and ageist perception of “April love,” contrasting it with different views from within old love. Our reading of *Amour* illustrates the effects of intense, all-encompassing, and sealed intimacy in advanced old age and sheds light on potential consequences it may have on the decisions and lives of the people involved. We conclude by discussing how certain forms of love, seen from within, unfold in tandem with age or life phases that affect the pace, emotional, and interpersonal nature of the partnership.

Keywords: aging in film, intergenerational relationships, long-term marriage, love in old age, marital relationships.

¹ Amir Cohen-Shalev, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Max Stern Yezreel Valley College, Emek Yezreel, Israel

² Esther-Lee Marcus, Geriatric Division, Herzog Hospital, Jerusalem, Israel and Faculty of Medicine, Hadassah-Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel

Only love and time, when reconciled,
permit us to see other beings
in their enigmatic, complex essence,
unfolding slowly and certainly, like a new settlement.
(Adam Zagajewski, "Epithalamium," *Eternal Enemies*, Poems, 2008:88)

Against all this [massive loss of memory], I stand astonished, celebrating the sensation that she lives the love between us to the fullest... marveling at the power of love to overcome even that monster encircling her round and round, the monster that tears her away from all those closest to her; [from all] except one.
(Amnon Shamosh, 85-year-old writer, "Good Morning Alzheimer," *Yediöt Acharonot*, June 6, 2014 [Hebrew].)

Preface

Long-lasting love has recently moved center stage. A recent *New York Times* article on the subject (Brody 2013) appeared on their list of the 20 most-read stories of the year, ahead of stories on the conflicts in Iraq or the Middle East. After decades of suspicion and doubt concerning the possibility of meaningful long-lasting marriage, its triumph has recently captured more public and academic attention. Underlying the renewed interest in enduring marital partnership is, of course, a demographic phenomenon. As life expectancy is extending, it stands to reason that more people experience longer-lasting love relationships.

Three years after its premiere, Michael Haneke's (2012) film *Amour* is still widely and hotly debated in various academic, as well as public, circles. Judging by the sheer number of responses, reviews, academic articles, position papers, and commentaries it has inspired, it is certainly an important and timely film that epitomizes the steady cultural interest in matters pertaining to age and aging. The fact that it has attracted so much attention and great controversy is surprising; as a film about old age, it focuses on a topic unlikely to attract the attention of the wide movie-going public. Offering a new reading of *Amour* and its surrounding controversy, we use it here as a point of departure for discussing a spectrum of artistic representations of love in old age. The linkage between old age and films provides a fascinating yet still largely uncharted territory in humanistic gerontology (Cohen-Shalev 2009). Popular films continue to provide a distorted picture of age and gender that is dominated by a narrative of decline and disability (Chivers 2011). Similarly in gerontology, research on

late-life relationships is mostly geared toward the practical aspects of caregiving (Ask et al. 2014; Evans & Lee 2014; Godwin et al. 2013). Films like *Amour*, in contrast, can open up new understandings of old-age *coupledom* – that is, the intrapsychic, deeply felt though ineffable aspects of the sentiment generally referred to as *love*. Indeed, we are interested here in artistic representations that narrate anti-ageist counter-stories with the power to “let us see how older people exceed the limitations imposed on them” (Gravagne 2013). This preliminary examination of the artistic depiction of old love will thus also chart a dialectical cultural space between the constraints of decline and the perpetual possibilities of becoming in old age.

Amour is the story of Anne and Georges, an upper middle-class Parisian couple, retired musicians, whose close marital intimacy is disrupted when Anne suffers a stroke that leaves her partially paralyzed, followed by a second stroke, even more severe and debilitating than the first. Released from the hospital after her first stroke, before the second stroke, Anne extracts a promise from Georges that he will never re-hospitalize her. Faithful to his promise (even though he had hired someone to come in to help care for Anne before and also accepted the occasional help of a neighbor), he fires the helper and cares for her on his own, even after the catastrophic second stroke, refusing even their daughter’s somewhat tenuous offers of assistance. Inevitable deterioration ends in what seems, at least initially, a spontaneous act of violence, with Georges smothering Anne with a pillow, suffocating her to death. It is this act that stirred much controversy.

The scope and intensity of this controversy is impressive and extensive, encompassing opinions from “if it’s murder it can’t be love” (e.g. Gullette 2013, 2014) to “if it’s love it must be murder” (Grundmann 2012) and representing a wide variety of disciplines from philosophy to medicine and nursing, film studies and palliative medicine, theology and psychoanalysis. Almost every aspect of this act has been analyzed, dissected, and evaluated (Bosch 2013; Drake & Drake 2014; Gronstad 2013; O’Neill 2012; Ringstrom 2014; Rose & Rose 2012; Scalabrino 2013; Quinodoz 2014; Wijdicks 2013). Given the cumulative volume and epistemological breadth of the responses, it would seem there is little more to add. Yet, the opposite is true; as *Amour* is a film of the highest artistic merit (the only aspect of

the work about which there is consensus), it sustains, even demands, continued discussion, debate, and elucidation. Indeed, it is the immanent inexhaustibility of *Amour* that provides us with one justification for yet another search for meaning in, and through, this difficult and challenging cinematic text. Another reason for plowing this already over-trodden field is connected to the late-life perspective it offers, a late-life perspective that has been wholly marginalized by the dominant discourse that has focused on the issue of euthanasia that constitutes the film's dramatic climax.

Thus, our reading of *Amour* departs from the central debate the film has provoked and focuses elsewhere. We believe that *Amour* is not primarily concerned with depicting the trials and tribulations of caregiving to the frail elderly, but rather with representing the end result of a delicate, lengthy, and subterranean process of the formation of a joint, cohesive, indivisible dual self, as may evolve after decades of marital intimacy. We propose reading *Amour* as a tale of love unconventionally defined; we argue that *Amour* is a pioneering, experimental cinematic examination of the rarely explored territory of long-lasting love, love that carries two people across several decades well into the couple's old age. There is as yet no exact word in the English language, nor to the best of our knowledge in other languages, for this type of love. It appears that the love of old age has yet to be encoded in cultural parlance. Thus, our reading of *Amour* takes advantage of the metaphorical language of film and poetry in order to provide a preliminary delineation of this concept of old love, shared and experienced in some, though certainly not all, long-lasting relationships, late into the couple's lives. While some may criticize the term *old love* as implying something negative, this is not our intention. The stigma is in the eyes of the beholder. Seeing old love as derogatory is akin to seeing old age as negative. Old love may be seen from the outside as connoting something worn out and without potential for change. Positively or negatively considered, a generalizing concept of old/late love (in the singular) is inevitably ageist. There are as many kinds of late love as there are "late styles" (Hutcheon & Hutcheon 2012).

While the close marital relationship of Anne and Georges, the octogenarian couple of *Amour*, played by the 85-year-old Emmanuelle Riva and the 82-year-old Jean-Louis Trintignant, is ubiquitously noted and

praised by virtually all writers and critics of the film, the nature of their love is either taken for granted or addressed in only a cursory manner. We argue that this film is only superficially about euthanasia; it is much more an exploration of a particular form of love that has hitherto been under-researched and little understood. It is because of the film's representation of this old-age love that it should occupy humanistic gerontology discourse.

April Love: A Many-Splendored, but Fleeting, Thing

Some time ago, one of us witnessed an incident where an elderly couple came into our neighborhood bookstore. While the man stood by the counter having a casual conversation with the owner, his wife was surveying a nearby shelf, with her back to him, but within hearing distance. When the proprietor made a comment regarding the couple's apparent good health, husband and wife spontaneously made a "knock on wood" gesture, which, by no prior design had the exact same rhythm and tempo, sounding like two well-practiced musicians playing a theme in perfect unison with no eye contact at all. The owner's response was "this is what happens when two people have been married for ages." The implications of the owner's response were that two individuals in long-lasting couples become more and more alike and, second, that this "alike-ness" is singularly a result of a full, long-lasting love relationship.

The bookstore owner's comment cannot be considered uncommon; that responses, behaviors, attitudes, and even outside appearances seem to grow more and more alike in direct correlation to shared time together is a phenomenon that has often been noted in popular circles. However, the implications of this phenomenon have rarely been explored from the perspective of love that covers an entire life span. Indeed, we are faced with a phenomenon, peculiar to long-lasting relationships, that represents a subtle but momentous process of identity de-differentiation. The reason this identity transformation has been accorded little attention in past decades is due to lack of interest in this matter relating to older people (Askham 1995); it is also related to Western culture's characteristic emphasis on the concept of individuation as a major regulating factor in lifelong ego or self-development.

“Love is a many-splendored thing,”¹ stated a popular song written for the 1955 movie of the same name (winning an Academy Award for Best Original Song), becoming very popular thereafter and being used in numerous films and a television series of that name. What this song most importantly captures comes not in the opening line quoted above, but with the line that follows: “It’s the April rose that only grows in the early spring.” The likening of love to a flower, a rose in particular, is of course a centuries-old trope, but this line speaks of an added dimension in explicitly specifying the likeness not to any rose but to a rose in early spring, which, translated to the seasons of human life, means young adulthood.

Indeed, traditional Western concepts of love are heavily colored by a perception of it as the sole province of youth; youth is an aspect assumed intrinsic to our collective definition of love. Thus, Georges’ comment to Anne after the concert about the way she looked – “You look lovely tonight” – is, by default, interpreted as a romantic, youthful expression. Yet, in a film that is filled with alternating shot and reverse-shot of facial close-ups, an atypical technique for Haneke, it is significant that Georges’ compliment is delivered in a long shot of him in the corridor of the couples’ apartment, facing the room where Anne stands, invisible to the camera. The *mise-en-scène* is never arbitrary with Haneke; neither is the fact that it is the apartment that is foregrounded in this shot, the very space that defines the relationship and is inseparable from it throughout. Significant also is Anne’s bemused response – “what’s gotten into you” – which can be understood as coy, slightly embarrassed, but alternatively can be taken at face value as her expression of surprise at his introducing a behavioral pattern from a former phase of the couple’s life, one that, while obviously flattering, is at the same time foreign, in the sense that it is no longer the *raison d’être* for their present relationship. Thus, we agree with Grundmann (2012) that *Amour* is a bold and rare cinematic exploration of the very concept of love – love that is not the proverbial early adulthood love, but rather a kind of love that, in our day and age, is becoming less rare.

¹ Lyrics by Sammy Fain and music by Paul Francis Webster.

We do not argue that old love is different in some fundamental and essential way from young love. It might be better to assert that it often expresses itself differently, sometimes in response to historical and cultural contexts, which we elaborate on later. A major attribute of aged love as exemplified in Haneke's *Amour* is its complex and unexpected attitude toward the past. When Anne, paralyzed but still alert, looks at the couple's photo album, rather than mourn or idealize the past, her response is: "It's beautiful, this long life." The film thus resists the idea that old love is disconnected from the youthful past; it suggests that the power of love depends on the ability to connect present, past, and future rather than relinquish these connections as merely nostalgic. Indeed, Georges' actions are loving, since they adhere to a past conception of love, of shared and sealed intimacy, that he is struggling to retain. His old love is a negotiation between decline and becoming.

April Love Approaching September: *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*

Robert Guediguian's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (2011) pivots on the vicissitudes of April love into late midlife. Its title is taken from a popular romantic French hit from the mid-1960s. The film story is the tale of a middle-aged, long-wedded couple, living in Marseille, for whom this song is associated with their own romantic youthful adventure.

The narrative premise of this film is a sentimental one: the couple, Michel and Marie-Claire, celebrating 30 years of marriage, is given a special gift from their adult children and friends – a trip to Mount Kilimanjaro. This is a trip they have been dreaming of since their courtship days, with the aforementioned popular song the inspiration for that dream. The plot of the film follows Michel, a trade unionist, who chooses not to take his name off the company's to-be-fired list, as he could, in order to spare his fellow workers from being let go during a company downsizing. In the same period, Michel's home is broken into and his and his wife's tickets and money for their anniversary trip to Mount Kilimanjaro stolen. Through random chance, Michel discovers the identity of one of the perpetrators, a young worker who was on the same downsizing list as himself, and he gets him arrested. However, both Michel and his wife find themselves troubled by this seeming "justice" once they understand the culprit's motives and the larger consequences of their revenge.

This synopsis captures the narrative axis of the film as a social drama of conscience. However, parallel to the themes of social responsibility, social justice, and human solidarity is a theme that lifts the narrative from the ideological arena and imbues it with an aspect of credibility that surely saves it from didactic moralization. This parallel narrative involves the portrayal of a long-lasting marriage, on the way to aged love. Corresponding to the social solidarity the film represents, there is another, more intimate solidarity portrayed in the film – one couple's solidarity. It is the amalgamation of the two parallel solidarities that endows this basically mainstream, feel-good cultural product with an added validity, relevance, and credibility.

For Michel, what is in fact early retirement rather than unemployment is less an economic issue – as he is basically secure financially – and more a manifestation of his imminent aging, carrying the hazards of an existential vacuum, as well as threatening his self-image as provider and head of a family. His wife, Marie-Claire, is supportive and cooperative, but unyielding when it comes to confronting Michel as he succumbs to the temptation of self-pity. Returning from her work as a caregiver for an elderly woman, Marie-Claire finds her husband in a semi-depressed mood, complaining about a general indifference and a lack of energy. The ensuing brief scene, early in the narrative, is telling, as it reveals the interplay between confrontation and insight in the evolution of late love:

Marie-Claire: You are like all men, weak.²

Michel (with angered astonishment): What are you saying?

Marie-Claire: Now that you're not working, and you've got time to think all day, you realize you are not Jaures, or Superman, [you're] just an old man who has gone into early retirement. You've lost the power that your status had given you, and you're back to being a regular man facing his limitations, and this you cannot bear.

Michel (anger increasing, approaches her almost ominously): What's with you?! (Changing tone to doubtful questioning) Do you really believe what you're saying?

Marie-Claire (softly smiling): Not all...not all...

While the couple prepares to work out their problems, their now-adult children, themselves young parents, are definitely ill at ease with the

² Authors' translation from the French.

new status of their father. The new situation elicits awkwardness and embarrassment: "He looks depressed... it's hard for me to see him like this..." When Marie-Claire suggests that Michel can profit from the situation and amuse himself, the daughter's response is "How can he be happy, Dad is old, and who cares for old people?" to which Marie-Claire retorts in anger, "Stop talking like that. Are you out of your mind?"

The ensuing developments in the narrative vindicate the older couple's capacity for the joint handling of difficult circumstances, even as it further reveals their offspring's weaknesses. Thus, shortly before Marie-Claire and Michel come to their decision to take the burglar's children into their custody, a scene between Marie-Claire and her daughter Flo unfolds. Flo is surprised to find her mother sitting alone in a café, drinking her favorite Metaxa, and is also concerned about her own relationship with her husband, Jeannot. The exchange unfolds as follows:

Flo: What are you doing here?

Marie-Claire: Drinking. What would you like to drink?

Flo: What's this, alcohol?

Marie-Claire: It's Metaxa. It does me good.

Flo: Are you all right?

Marie-Claire: You know, for fifty years I never went into a bar on my own, and I like it. I go in, get seated, having a small chat with the waiter...

Flo: I think Jeannot found someone in Bordeaux...

Marie-Claire: Maybe you'll have Marie Brizard instead of chocolate?

Flo: What are we going to do, Mama?

Marie-Claire: About what?

Flo: If he found someone...

Marie-Claire: It's not that serious.

Flo: How much have you drunk?

Marie-Claire: Two. I always have two. This is right for me. How do you know? He didn't tell you, did he?

Flo: I can see it.

Marie-Claire: This is different. [pause] It's your life. You have to face it. I think that if he works away from home for a long while you have to go with him.

Flo: I can't, I'm working.

Marie-Claire: This is *your* life. You have to decide.

For a close-knit family, as this family is represented from the film's onset, this scene is an anomaly. The conversation manifests a peculiar incongruity between the two generations of mother and daughter.

This incongruity is mutual: the daughter is blatantly critical of her mother's late freedom, her self-sufficient apparent well-being, which she ignorantly attributes to alcohol, critical also of her mother's light-hearted, matter-of-fact and emotionally cool approach to her son-in-law's alleged infidelity. Marie-Claire, on the other hand, seems to be taking her maternal role into unexpected territory. Instead of the containment and unconditional supportive role, as her daughter expects, she challenges the younger woman's priorities with her own perceptions of marital love and commitment. Seemingly inattentive to Flo, she deconstructs her maternal role, perhaps pleasantly surprised at her well-earned, experience-based wisdom. Her statement "It's your own life" seals the parental distancing from adult children. Marie-Claire is adamant about not buying into her daughter's emotional demands. She is prepared to give advice; she is not prepared to give unconditional sympathy. Interestingly, her advice preempts any moral consideration; that is, the son-in-law's alleged infidelity is of no relevance in her scheme of marital relationship. What does matter is an unconditional solidarity and togetherness, a solidarity and togetherness which she knows from her own life with her husband.

This café conversation prepares the ground for a later confrontation between parents and children. When the parents take the robber's two children into their care, their decision is met with indignation on the part of their adult offspring, fearing the attention they have gotten used to receiving will go to the newly adopted strangers. In this scene, the parents face up to the resentment of both their children, firmly holding their ground, immune to manipulation and in general appearing much more adjusted than their children in their capacity to negotiate complex and contradictory emotions, a capacity the film convincingly presents as a feat of hard-earned marital harmony.

September Love and the Achievement of Coupledness: *Another Year*

A number of recent films have taken up the challenge of representing the world of old people in general and the realities of marital relationships over time in particular. One such example is Mike Leigh's (2010) film

Another Year, which portrays Tom and Gerri, a North London couple who have been happily married for years. Leigh's Tom and Gerri, in their sixties, are younger than Haneke's Anne and Georges, but their several decades of marital bonding both define their close-knit relationship and at the same time set them apart from other people in their surroundings. They are sensitive, compassionate, and helpful to their kin and friends – a gallery of lonely people who have not been blessed with satisfying relationships – offering them shelter and caring attention. However, the core of their being is the togetherness they live when the visitors have left, and it is then that their conversation shows how keenly aware they are of their shared existence. The film's scenes of couple togetherness are interspersed through the narrative as scenes of repose and quiet, of wordless understanding, where they both seem to cherish their distinctiveness from others. What seems to contribute to their intimacy is the growing awareness of aging and death. During bedtime reading, Tom makes a passing reference to his younger self's dislike of the subject of history in school, to which Gerri responds by casually remarking, "We'll be history sometime."

Indeed, it is the sadness of leave-taking on the horizon that seems to endow their togetherness with a wistfully poignant significance. With this sadness in the air, it would be inappropriate to say that Tom and Gerri "celebrate" their togetherness, since their joy is subdued and is mildly incongruent with "classical" romance in being less oriented to the future and more toward the cycle of the seasons. The very title of the film, *Another Year*, signifies a particular sense of time, combining ages and seasons. Indeed, the film is structured around the four seasons, yet not in the usual sense of the cyclical repetition of nature and its symbolic signification for human life (an example of this represented in Kim Ki-duk's 2003 film *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring*). The four seasons here function more as an afterthought regarding the repetitive, yet accumulative, nature of a marriage. (An early scene has Gerri worried about their son being unattached, while in later seasons he brings home a girlfriend, a gesture toward the continuation offered by the next generation.) *Another Year* has as its central trope the weariness of repetition and the quiet, singularly undramatic consolation of "ripe old marriage."

Aged Love as an Equal Mixture: Ruebner's Old Love

The centrifugal movement toward the center of matrimonial existence is further explored in several poems written at the age of 88 by Tuvia Ruebner, a Slovak-born Israeli poet. At the center of Ruebner's most recent collection, *Achronim* ("last ones"), stands a series of poems focusing on his 60-year marriage. The first one's title is a quotation from John Donne and reads as follows:

Whatever Dies, Was Not Mixed Equally

What more
might I say to you
what
say
any more, even
in a whisper
all this noise
of words
while
we are
the two of us
me in you
you in me
Infolded.³

(Ruebner, *Achronim* 2013: 21)

In the Hebrew original, the final word of the poem – *megulgalim*, here rendered as "infolded" – connotes also the metaphysical concept of reincarnation. Since the couple in the poem is intertwined, even reincarnated as one, there is little use in words, and there is nothing "more" to add to the interlocking of identities, no rhyme or reason necessary to establish this interconnectedness, shaped, as it were, in the very visual aspect of the poem, a type of spiral, or the double helix of a joint psychic DNA.

The next poem in Ruebner's mini-cycle of aged love poems has the title *Ma'ariv* ("evening prayer" or just "evening"):

³ The first three Ruebner poems were translated by Rachel Tzvia Back.

Evening

All your beauty inward and shining
From your face, enwrapping your wrinkles, extolling in song.
In the forest of your hair a cave has been found –
Twilight glow and moving shadows.
The words have grown fewer and my hearing is weak.
From time to time, a small sigh.
Your height mine too have moved closer to the ground.
Not a dream of youth.
Love of old age.
(Ruebner, *Achronim* 2013: 22)

Rather than telling the reader what love of old age is, Ruebner is more explicit about what it is not: it is not the dream of youth. This poem adds to the wordlessness of the previous one a sense of the real, and its reality of old-age love is unromantic. The physical uprightness of the young body becomes a dream, an illusion. The physical form of this reality gets smaller, moves toward the ground, even as a spiritual essence grows – beauty radiating from within, words becoming sighs, and wrinkles emitting light. It is in the alternation between traditional lyrical vocabulary (“beauty,” “shining,” “extolling in song”) and their transformation through aging that the fugitive meaning of old-age love can be accessed and contemplated. Indeed, it is the contemplation of long-lived love that is Ruebner’s invaluable contribution to the discourse of love and partnership during the last phase of life.

The theme of love of old age juxtaposed with its earlier, youthful love and the gradual, time-consuming, age-related transformations from early to late love are further defined in the next poem.

An 88-Year-Old Man Says to an 80-Year-Old Woman upon Waking

Before I saw you I didn’t dream of you
When you came you didn’t capture my eye
But now with you lying beside me I am home
And without you I am not
Am not I.
(Reubner, *Achronim* 2013: 23)

This poem takes a further step toward severing old-age love from youthful romantic love. Indeed, this poem introduces a fear of old-age love

that is particularly pertinent to any moral discussion of euthanasia/killing in *Amour*: the ubiquitous sensation of impending abandonment through death. In the words of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (quoted in Scalabrino 2013:10), "it is by the possibility of abandonment that one knows the possibility, inverted or lost, of love." A parallel idea is forcefully expressed in Derrida's (1995) *The Gift of Death*, where he says that our awareness of mortality is the only thing that gives meaning to our lives. The ultimate gift is the gift of death – death as a mark of our singularity, which cannot be substituted, and you cannot take another's dying from them even if you can die for them in some particular affair (Derrida 1995: 42). Death is important as a condition of our responsibility: "only death, or rather the apprehension of death can give this irreplaceability, and it is only on the basis of it that one can speak of a responsible subject, of the soul of a conscience of self, of myself, etc." (Derrida 1995: 51).

Ruebner's version, and vision, of old love is not linked to momentary, ecstatic consummation, the vegetable growth of Andrew Marvell in "To His Coy Mistress," or the blossom-becoming-wilted flowering, neither to its opposite, the promised land of eternity, but to love evolving according to its own logic. This growth model provides its own mythology. Contrary to the initial fixed quantity diminishing with chronological advance, Ruebner in this poem subverts and inverts the traditional terms of measuring love. Thus, long-lived love is not judged *vis-à-vis* its initial state, and, perhaps most importantly, is independent in its life span course from sexual attraction. Against "love at first sight," the poem offers the notion of "love at last sight." Its sensuality, though, is not lessened but rather transformed, as the next, and last, poem in the Ruebner series exemplifies.

To Come into Your Shadow

To come into your shadow, to be covered by it,
To come under your roof, to come
Under your arch, as if I had never come
Before.
What a wonderful moment of forgetfulness
A sublime fleeting moment of being-not-being,
So much happiness, so much happiness
For a fleeting moment, some dream that
Even a dream it wasn't.
(Ruebner, *Achronim* 24)

The picture of late-life love that emerges from these poems, written of course from first-hand experience, has no place for nostalgia, romantic or otherwise. On the contrary, it implicitly challenges, even overturns, youthful romantically charged models of love. Thus, the metaphor of the dream is offered and then rejected, in favor of a state of mind that is neither dream nor reality; this might be considered a liminally located love, offering a supreme, fleeting moment of "being-non-being," drawing from the now-palpable, actual proximity of the state of non-being through biological death.

Ruebner's line "without you I'm not I" is the old-age equivalent of April love's "Can't live without you." However, there is a difference between the latter's "I don't have a life without you" and the former's "I don't have an existence/identity outside of us." The first suggests dependency, while the latter, late-life version suggests a homogenized identity, "equally mixed." In another poem titled "Sitting Across From You," from a collection published shortly before *Last Ones*, Ruebner (*Contradictory Poems* 2011: 11) expresses a difficulty in sitting *across* from his wife, as *across* denotes separation, while all these old love poems clearly imply a being of one within the other, using images of cyclical inclusion, of being wrapped, rolled, enveloped, in one another, not an inter-subjectivity but an inner-subjectivity.

Back to Haneke's Old Love: *Amour*

The idea that killing someone can preserve the unity of a love relationship is clearly not only associated with old age, as all the variations on the theme of Romeo and Juliet illustrate. However, in *Amour* this theme is given another distinct old-age touch. Georges' refusal to recruit help puts him in a position of caregiver, changing his role from a loving partner to a person supplying services to another. However, Georges in the role of a caregiver is a *false I*; it is a false I because it contradicts the fused, couple identity Georges and Anne have created together. This is not to say that being a lover and being a caregiver have to be separate identities. Giving care, as noted in the concepts of care as reciprocity and person-centered care, can also be an integral part of love, especially of long-lasting love, which, by its very nature, has already had to adapt to decades of change.

However, for Georges, the growing emphasis on care becomes progressively more difficult to maintain, until he decides to put an end to the impersonation and to return, not to the role of lover (as Grundmann [2012] suggests) but to the shared being, whose only way to continue is to become a shared non-being.

The film supports the notion of identity fusion from the start: the couple is wrapped in their own space, separated from their environment, even as they sit among a crowd of listeners in the concert hall scene, or travel a crowded bus on the way home from the concert. This sealed intimacy is established from the very first image of the film wherein firemen break into the sealed-off apartment in order to enter it. The couple's literal and figurative shared space, sealed off from the world already at the narrative's beginning, becomes more so as Anne's condition worsens. What seems to some commentators as a growing, elective isolation can be also seen as a defense against invasions that puts their shared identity in danger. Communal and social involvement do not necessarily threaten the solidity and stability of de-differentiation in mature love – but they appear to be taken as such a threat in *Amour*. Thus, professional care, medical consultation, even overtures from family and neighbors are not perceived (by Georges as well as Anne) as helpful offers but rather as unwelcome, feared intrusions that are therefore rejected.

The use of framing techniques provides a central organizing motif and metaphor in Haneke's exploration of old love. The director's meticulous construction of the film's frames has been noticed by many critics (e.g. Grundmann 2012; Stewart 2013). This emphasis is more than a testimony to the director's outstanding talent; it also defines the space within which old love takes place. Haneke frames the narrative within the walls of the couple's apartment, locks the couple within the confines of this space, and locks the external world out of it. Framing is a physical, palpable existential necessity for Anne and Georges. Early in the narrative, when the couple comes back to the flat from the concert and discovers an attempted break-in, Anne tells her husband about a burglary in a neighboring flat, where the paintings were cut out of their frames. Her recounting of the burglary, told in a matter-of-fact, emotionally flat manner, barely conceals her anxiety at being de-framed, left without the frame that holds the picture together, literally as well as metaphorically.

Much later in the story, the paintings in Anne and Georges' apartment are taken out of frame, "burglarized" as it were, by the brutal intrusion of the first, then the second stroke. Just after Georges slaps Anne's face for refusing to be fed, and just before he suffocates her, Haneke inserts a sequence of shots of several paintings in various rooms of the apartment, now stripped of their frames, as if the threat of un-framing in the early scene has now been actualized. It is not clear, and left to the viewer's guesswork, who is behind the un-framing, but it is clear that tearing the picture out of its frame anticipates the actual termination of the now-one life and one identity of Anne and Georges. Their picture has been taken off the walls, and it can only be reframed, as it were, with an equally unsettling act – the act of framing Anne's body with flowers, as it is found by the firemen in the first scene.

Haneke offers a perspective so devoid of fantasy, so barrenly realistic, that the appearance of quasi-fantasy at the film's end has baffled critics and viewers alike. The mystical reappearance of the healthy figure of Anne before Georges' eyes has been attributed to Haneke's late style (Grundmann 2012), yet "lateness" (Cohen-Shalev 2002; Hutcheon & Hutcheon 2012; Said 2006) is rarely characterized by comforting resolution, proposing instead troubling, fragmented, and irresolvable denouements. Other commentators, from the social and medical professions, regard the phantasmic appearance following the act of killing as a part of Georges' pathology (Gullette 2014), or caregiver overstrain (O'Neill 2012).

However, reading the film (and the act of killing/euthanasia in particular) as an outcome and expression of old love, the apparition may be viewed as the mind's act of preservation of hermetic coupledness. The threat of cessation of lifetime coupledness that Anne's condition posed drove Georges to forego his responsibility as caregiver and to assume the responsibility for the intactness of the union, the guard of aged coupledness. The last scene vindicates that responsibility and symbolically preserves the unity split by fate. It is Haneke's way of expressing the idea that runs throughout the film, that what matters is the profound love, the old love of Anne and Georges.

The state of hermetic union, being a psychological attribute of aged love, also has far-reaching consequences for intergenerational relations. Cinema has its complicated, frequently culturally subconscious ways of exposing

socially sanctioned secrets. In his rejection of mainstream commercialism, Haneke pushes to the extreme what several recent films have only hinted at, which is the exclusion of adult children from the parental aged love unit. In *Amour*, Eva, the estranged daughter, comes home and is received almost as an intruder. It is true that her demeanor is officious, harsh, and selfish and that she proceeds with brute efficiency in all she does, yet she has the good intentions of trying to ameliorate the suffering she sees. However Georges will have none of this and resists allowing Eva to have any contact with Anne. Thus, the “blame” for the tension between and estrangement from each other – father from daughter, daughter from father – is shared. What *Amour* seems to be saying is that the adult children of long-lasting married couples, couples whose togetherness has evolved to the state of hermetic unity, stand to face an impassable barrier when attempting to “break through” and participate in situations that involve intimacy.

Concluding Comments

Gerontology has so far been slow in responding to the cultural need of understanding long-lasting love in old age. The ego development theory of Erik Erikson defines *love* as the positive basic ego strength resulting from a surplus of experience of intimacy over isolation in the sixth stage of development, corresponding ontogenetically with early adulthood (Erikson 1994). Although Erikson argues that each and every developmental dilemma in his epigenetic model undergoes transformations across the life cycle, the theory does not explicitly specify these transformations and modifications in late life. Categorizations of love beyond early adulthood have yet to be formulated, since there seems to be a variety of mature or late-life love, and they all may show different trajectories. Love in old age can be seen stereotypically, from without, as a thin reflection of “young love.” Popularly disseminated by various cultural texts (e.g. film, television, and literature), we encounter the possibility of falling in love in old age as a means of late or belated self-fulfillment, an overdue compensatory correction for missed opportunities or as a means of fighting late-life loneliness (e.g. *Last Chance Harvey* [Hopkins 2008]). However, a “second time around” love relationship is not the same as late romance in an old-age home, or the rekindling of a previous love relationship in old age

(e.g. *Quartet* [Hoffman & Harwood 2012], *Innocence* [Cox 2000]). Such forms of love, seen from within, unfold in tandem with age or life phases that affect the pace, emotional, and interpersonal nature of the partnership. In this study we focused on artistic representations of old love as opening a window into the subjective perception and experience of this phenomenon from within, in contrast to its social stereotyping from without.

When it does endure, the April love model reiterates the midlife anti-aging myth of being “forever young.” This is a postmodern variation of the mind–body duality: the body ages but the soul, in the form of disembodied love, remains intact. Aged love, on the other hand, as seen from the elderly’s point of view in *Amour, Another Year*, and, to some extent, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, is an evolving system, ongoing, renewing itself the older it becomes. It is not forever young but constantly aging, an acquired synchronicity that slowly and gradually matures.

Is it possible to transfer these proposals into agendas for a developmental science of age-related love? First of all, we need to be critically reflective of how ageist views of April love may spill into scientific studies. In the 1960s, a number of studies reported in this vein an “inevitable” linear decline in marital satisfaction (Blood & Wolfe 1960). Not just the decline model, but also the assumption of stability over time, is in question. The spectrum of old love should remind us that marital relationships can shift between vital and total, utilitarian and corrosive (Carstensen 1992; Levenson et al. 1993; Weishauss & Field 1988). Moreover, some of the aspects characterizing late love may suggest a hybrid construction that transcends earlier dichotomies. Late love might be regarded as one that is not just passionate or tiring, but is jointly stabilizing and satisfying. Late love can also provide us with a more nuanced and complex understanding of so-called convenient or utilitarian relationships. The sealed intimacy described in so many depictions of old love should be interpreted as a new context for constructing relationships in which partners, especially women, see themselves first and foremost as intimate subjects rather than sexual objects (Connidis 2006). Such sealed intimacy, however, may sometimes also be a response to ageist practices that often insist on separation as a solution to many of the difficulties associated with old age, rather than as an integral part of growing older.

On the other hand, *Amour* should also remind us that coupledness may have a steep price when the knot is untied. Gerontological studies have focused on “couplehood” among older adults as conferring everyday interaction and performance advantages, in the form of “compensation through collaboration in cognitive aging” (Dixon 2011). The representations from within of intensive late love should also alert us to the fact that too much identity de-differentiation may be disabling when the dyad becomes dysfunctional. Either way, representations from within of old love provide us with a still-much-needed reminder that we require a more dyadic perspective of how couples cope together, rather than individually (Berg & Upchurch 2007). When couples face a health crisis, the resources of both partners may be activated to maintain or restore a state of homeostasis, as long as this is achievable.

Corresponding Author

Esther-Lee Marcus, Geriatric Division, Herzog Hospital, POB 3900, Jerusalem 91035, Israel. Email: estherlee@herzoghospital.org

References

- Ask, H., Langballe, E. M., Holmen, J., Selbæk, G., Saltvedt, I. & Tambs, K. (2014). Mental health and wellbeing in spouses of persons with dementia: The Nord-Trøndelag Health Study. *BMC Public Health* 14: 413.
- Askham, J. (1995). The married lives of older people. In S. Arber & J. Ginn (eds.), *Connecting Gender and Ageing: A Sociological Approach* (pp. 87–97). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Berg, C. A. & Upchurch, R. (2007). A developmental–contextual model of couples coping with chronic illness across the adult life span. *Psychological Bulletin* 133(6): 920–954.
- Blood, R. O. & Wolf, D. M. (1960). *Husbands and Wives: The Dynamics of Married Living*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Bosch, J. M. (2013). *Amour* killing? *The Gerontologist* 53(3): 518–519.
- Brody, J. E. (2013). The loving feeling takes a lot of work. *The New York Times*, 14 January. Available on http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/14/that-loving-feeling-takes-a-lot-of-work/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&r=1 (Accessed: August 16, 2015).

- Carstensen, L. L. (1992). Social and emotional patterns in adulthood: Support for socioemotional selectivity theory. *Psychology and Aging* 7(3): 331–338.
- Chivers, S. (2011). *The Silvering Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cohen-Shalev, A. (2002). *Both Worlds at Once. Art in Old Age*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Cohen-Shalev, A. (2009). *Visions of Aging: Images of the Elderly in Film*. Portland: Sussex Academic Press.
- Connidis, I. A. (2006). Intimate relationships: Learning from later life experience. In T. M. Calasanti & K. F. Slevin (eds.), *Age Matters. Re-Aligning Feminist Thinking* (pp. 123–153). New York: Routledge.
- Cox, P. (Director/Writer). (2000). *Innocence* [Motion picture]. Australia: Strand/New Oz Productions.
- Derrida, J. (1995). *The Gift of Death*. Trans. D. Wills. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Dixon, R. A. (2011). Evaluating everyday competence in older adult couples: Epidemiological considerations. *Gerontology* 57(2): 173–179.
- Drake, V. C. & Drake, W. (2014). *Amour* (2012). Written and directed by Michael Haneke. *Psychological Perspectives* 57(1): 118–121.
- Erikson, E. E. (1994). *Identity: Youth and Crisis (Austen Riggs Monograph)*. New York: Norton.
- Evans, D. & Lee, E. (2014). Impact of dementia on marriage: A qualitative systematic review. *Dementia* 13(3): 330–349.
- Godwin, K. M., Swank, P. R., Vaeth, P. & Ostwald, S. K. (2013). The longitudinal and dyadic effects of mutuality on perceived stress for stroke survivors and their spousal caregivers. *Aging and Mental Health* 17(4): 423–431.
- Gravagne, P. H. (2013). *The Becoming of Age: Cinematic Visions of Mind, Body and Identity in Later Life*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Gronstad, A. (2013). Haneke's *Amour* and the ethics of dying. In D. Sullivan & J. Greenberg (eds.), *Death in Classic and Contemporary Film: Fade to Black* (pp. 185–196). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grundmann, R. (2012). Love, death, truth, *Amour*. *Senses of Cinema* 65, Available on <http://sensesofcinema.com/2012/feature-articles/love-death-truth-amour/> (Accessed: August 16, 2015).

- Guediguian, R. (Director/Writer) (2011). *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* [Motion picture]. France: Agat Films and Cie [French, English Subtitles].
- Gullette, M. M. (2013). Amour: How can we embrace a film that is so clearly an advert for euthanasia? Enamoured as we are by Michael Haneke's Oscar-winning film, we're missing the dangerous social fallacies at its core. *The Guardian*, 28 February. Available on <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2013/feb/28/amour-advert-for-euthanasia> (Accessed: August 16, 2015).
- Gullette, M. M. (2014). Euthanasia as a caregiving fantasy in the era of the new longevity. *Age Culture Humanities* 1 (Spring). Available on <http://ageculturehumanities.org/WP/euthanasia-as-a-caregiving-fantasy-in-the-era-of-the-new-longevity/> (Accessed: August 16, 2015).
- Kim, K. (Director/Writer) (2003). *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter ... and Spring* [Motion picture]. Korea Pictures. [Korean, English Subtitles].
- Haneke, M. (Director/Writer) (2012). *Amour* [Motion picture]. France: Le Films du Losange, [French, English Subtitles].
- Hoffman, D. (Director) & Harwood, R. (Writer) (2012). *Quartet* [Motion picture]. UK: Headline Pictures.
- Hopkins, J. (Director/Writer) (2008). *Last Chance Harvey* [Motion Picture]. USA: Overture Films.
- Hutcheon, L. & Hutcheon, M. (2012). Late style(s): The ageism of the singular. *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 4, 31 May. Available on http://arcade.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/OCCASION_v04_Hutcheons_053112_0.pdf (Accessed: August 16, 2015).
- Leigh, M. (Director/Writer) (2010). *Another Year* [Motion picture]. UK: Thin Man Films.
- Levenson, R. W., Carstensen, L. L. & Gottman, J. M. (1993). Long-term marriage: Age, gender, and satisfaction. *Psychology and Aging* 8(2): 301–313.
- O'Neill, D. (2012). Amour, ageing, and missed opportunities. *BMJ Group Blogs*, 23 November. Available on <http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2012/11/23/desmond-oneill-amour-ageing-and-missed-opportunities/> (Accessed: August 16, 2015).
- Ringstrom, P. A. (2014). Review of the movie 'Amour'. *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology* 9(2): 157–161.

- Rose, H. & Rose, S. (2012). Grow old with me. *Lancet* 380(9849): 1219.
- Ruebner, T. (2011). *Shirim Sotrim [Contradictory Poems]*. Raanana: Even Hoshen. [Hebrew].
- Ruebner, T. (2013). *Achronim, Shirim 2011–2012 [Last Ones, Songs 2011–2012]*. Tel Aviv: Keshev Leshira. [Hebrew].
- Said, E. E. (2006). *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain*. New York: Phantheon Books.
- Scalambrino, F. (2013). Filming the impossible: Orpheus and the sense of community in “Amour.” *Unpublished paper presented at Film-Philosophy Conference: Beyond Film, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, July, 1–15*. Available on https://www.academia.edu/4105027/Filming_the_impossible_Orpheus_and_the_sense_of_community_in_Hanekes_Amour (Accessed: August 18, 2015)
- Stewart, G. (2013). Haneke’s endgame. *Film Quarterly* 67(1): 14–21.
- Quinodoz, D. (2014). Amour. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 95(2): 375–383.
- Weishaus, S. & Field, D. (1988). A half century of marriage: Continuity or change? *Journal of Marriage and Family* 50(3): 763–774.
- Wijdicks, E. F. M. (2013). Film review: Palme d’Or-Awarded ‘Amour’ – The neurologic dying of a loved one. *Neurology Today* 13(5): 25.