

Teo, Hsu-Ming, ed. *The Popular Culture of Romantic Love in Australia*. Pp. 371. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Limited, 2017. A\$ 39.95 (paperback). ISBN: 9781925588316.

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Scholarship into the culture of romantic love has tended to put an emphasis on defining the constitutive elemental concepts (culture and romantic love) and answering specific questions to which their combination gives rise. Hsu-Ming Teo's edited collection, *The Popular Culture of Romantic Love in Australia*, taps into these debates strategically; the concept of culture is holistically analysed in relation to both popular practices and its memetic representations, and the book explores how romantic love is operationalised through its understood meanings, representations and practices. Despite the risks of 'vagueness' that this approach is susceptible to by its porous nature (that is, the refusal to define romantic love or culture in a specific way and then only study that phenomenon), Teo has turned this into an unquestionable strength of the book. While it does not necessarily lend itself to a straightforward delineation of how Australians constitute or experience romantic love, it enables contributors to explore the expressions of love in multiple Australian cultural contexts, across different times and mediums, by different producers and for different audiences. As is its aim, this collection is an unfettered exploration into '*how love is produced culturally*' (20, sic), as well as the changing sets of ideas and practices that constitute romantic love in Australian popular culture.

In an epistemological tradition that mirrors the charge against Australians for 'preferring satire to sentimentality' (5-6), Teo successfully mixes scholarship with popular culture; a rigorous literature review of the history of romantic love in academic scholarship, from its Platonic roots to its sociological and psychological iterations, is seamlessly incorporated alongside references to Paul Young and TV sitcom *The Flight of the Conchords*. The intricacy of Teo's epistemological form is sustained throughout the subsequent twelve chapters. The contributing authors chronicle popular cultural practice in Australia from the nineteenth to twenty-first century, representations of popular culture within particular media industries, and the final two chapters examine the explicit relationship between these two domains. Contributors seem to engage in a constitutive and progressive dialogue despite writing from a variety of disciplines, with the range of research detailing 'archival collections,

oral histories, letters, advertisements, newspapers and magazines, Valentine's Day cards, film, television mini-series, romance novels, comics, music, the literature of sexology, and representations and political debates about same-sex marriage' (26).

Cultural practices of romantic love in early colonial Australia are explored by Penny Russell in 'Love in a Colonial Climate' and Matthew Bailey in 'The Rise and Decline of Valentine's Day'. The latter argues that cultural practices and products associated with Valentine's Day, and their rise and decline in popularity over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are, in a very Bourdieusian tradition, 'used to reinforce cultural constructions of class' (81) and are reflective of 'appropriate behaviour, respectability, and taste' (85). Providing an important intersectional perspective on the enduring history of colonisation in 'A History of Indigenous Marriageability', Andrew King outlines how Indigenous Australians have (and have not) been represented as 'marriageable' in popular culture. King examines the controversy surrounding the 1959 public proposal between Mick Daly and Gladys Namagu (a white man and Aboriginal woman) and the recent marriages of Aboriginal celebrities, Ernie Dingo and Cathy Freeman. The importance of representations of who does and does not fall in love in Australian media is emphasised in the following chapter by Catriona Elder ('Romance and History on Australian Television') who states that the family, and romantic love by extension, are 'often imagined as a metonym for the nation' (129). Scrutiny into who is included in and excluded from this narrative, such as King's, is thus vitally important.

Jonathan Rayner's chapter 'Romantic Love in the Australian Cinema' builds on this consideration by analysing Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* and 'Red Curtain trilogy' as contemporary examples of the way Australian filmmakers are portraying romantic love in complex ways. Like Luhrmann's films, he argues, Australian cinema 'assumes an instinctively ironic stance' (175) in its approach to portraying romantic love: mocking while observing conventions, clichés, and outcomes. Jodi McAlister and Hsu-Ming Teo explore 'cultural changes in the discourse of love' (194) in twentieth-century mass-market romance novels. In 'Love in Australian Romance Novels', McAlister and Teo analyse historical representations of gender, sexuality, and intimacy in Australian romance novels in order to conceive a type of romance that is distinctly Australian. In so doing, they trace the legacy of novels that may be considered Australian in tone, setting and characters across the twentieth century that culminate in the marketable 'rural romance' subgenre. In 'Same-Sex Love in Late Modern Australia: On the Political Straight and Narrow?' Leigh Boucher and Robert Reynolds offer a strong and poignant resolution as they examine the ways in which political debates about and representations of same-sex love have intersected in Australian media texts.

The inclusive approach of this monograph provides multifaceted insight into the ways various Australian cultural domains have grappled with the concept, feelings and representations of romantic love over the past two hundred years. The contributors have been well selected to cover a range of case studies that work as fascinating standalone snapshots but also culminate to provide a highly nuanced conception of romantic love that is distinctly Australian.