

## Open Section: Love and Joy

# Various Insights into the Relationship between Love and Joy

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“When I was a child, it was clear to me that life was not worth living if we did not know love” (hooks ix). The simple notion of the love we experience as children grows and changes as we ourselves grow and change; it develops alongside us. We learn that ‘love’ is not a simple entity but rather comes in a multitude of ways. It is complex and beautiful, strong and painful. It can be examined analytically, picked apart at the seams, sewn back together with threads of happiness and joy, tears and sorrow. It is a deeply personal, abstract construct that can only be experienced in an incredibly subjective, yet oddly universal way. We long for love, to love someone, something, anything? We long for someone to love *us* and are willing to endure whatever that might entail. “As we grow we can give and receive attention, affection, and joy. Whether we learn how to love ourselves and others will depend on the presence of a loving environment” (hooks 53). At the end of the day, there is no way to accurately describe what ‘love’ actually is. Describing it would entail *understanding* it. And fully understanding love seems to be almost as impossible as filling eternal happiness into a bottle and taking a sip whenever we feel like it.

Nonetheless, this sense of happiness or joy seems to be intricately intertwined with the notion of love. Without love there cannot be joy. And without joy there cannot be love. “We all long for loving community. It enhances life’s joy” (hooks 140). But joy by itself is just as complex as love. We might understand joy to be synonymous with happiness, but joy can be beauty, beauty can be love, love can be pain – rather confusing, don’t you think? All these entities necessarily take up a large portion of our lives. In their light, we “begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves capable of” (Lorde 57). In this Open Section, we have attempted to bring together the complexities and paradoxes entailed by the notions of love and joy. We have chosen different forms to express what love is, what it does, and what it can be. We have tried to capture the various ways in which love surfaces and attempted to connect it to its intricate joy without losing sight of the complexities of these notions.

The first piece, “An Autotheoretical Approach to Trauma and Love,” captures the painful reckoning with intergenerational trauma and the love and longing that accompany the relationships born out of this trauma. It shows the difficulties of finding a place of one’s own in a new world, with a head full of dreams but without losing the grip on reality. The text expresses the passion, joy, and love that can be found amongst the pain and the trauma with a drive to achieve something



and to build something new, all the while showcasing the impossibility of leaving the past behind, since “even in the worst places one finds beauty” (Hartman 22).

Next, the short story “The Game,” written by Marielle Tomasic, follows two people while they fight their way through a world that does not lovingly open its arms to welcome them in. At its core, the story engages with the following questions: How can those who are not meant to find love, joy, or even acceptance survive the harsh reality that is their life? What do we do when we are not granted a loving community, when day in and day out we are being reminded of not being wanted and not belonging? How can we deal with the pain that comes with this? And is there a way to find joy when we were never meant to do so? “The Game” paints a vision of resistance for those who have always been denied access to love and joy.

The short story is followed by the poem “Big Bright Eyes,” which explores childhood memories from an adult’s point of view. While centering the experiences made as a child, a now-grown woman reflects on change – particularly on how her experience of joy has changed over the years. “Big Bright Eyes” confronts the adult woman with this shift and with her childhood self while she tries to gain back the ease with which she experienced joy as a child.

The curatorial essay “The Photographic Construction of Kissing, Late 19th to Mid-20th Centuries” by Jia Shen Lim asks questions about the illusions that masquerade a kiss shared between a couple in order to lay claim to the idea of love. The text alongside the photographs foremost serves to raise an aesthetic awareness that simultaneously displaces our reality and alters emotions associated with seeing people kiss. Therefore, an art-historical approach to the subject matter adopts qualities beyond its commonly related meanings that are not explicitly expressed.

With their seemingly contradictory nature, the two poems “You” and “Note to Myself” by Jessica Hille demonstrate the ambivalent relationship between love and joy. Being in love means making yourself vulnerable and exposing your deepest emotions; a fear of being hurt. However, it is also a powerful feeling that enables dimensions of joy we might not find elsewhere – this power lies at the heart of “You.” Love is not always tied to a second person, though. “Note to Myself” is a way of processing years of struggling with self-love. It shows that the resulting wounds may never heal completely yet accepting them and finally giving yourself the love you deserve will bring you peace.

Finally, a short piece of writing by Ahmet Servet, titled “Another Attempt: The Chemistry between Love and Joy,” tries to explain the complex relationship between love and joy. Time, experience, reality, truth, and happiness are complementing love and joy. There are no straight roads that may reach the frontiers of love and joy but only intuitions. Souls, locations, and times are dynamic elements; love is unpredictable, it is unique, and it is independent. It is always a mixture of reality and illusion.

Taken together, the contributions to this Open Section break down the dualisms so often associated with concepts of love and joy. Where there is joy, sorrow may not be far away, and love is often closely tied to heartbreak. Just as love and joy so often appear to be feeding of each other, the contributions bring to light the possibilities of love and joy to exist in rougher circumstances. Even if we do not know how to define love and joy, and even when it seems that they have been buried a long time ago, there is always the chance that just when we least expect it, they sneak up on us and surprise us in all their complex yet beautiful ways, making our lives and hearts richer once again.

## Author Biographies

**Jessica Hille** studied English and Geography at Leibniz University Hannover (LUH) to pursue a career in education. After finishing her B.A., she decided to focus on English literature and is now in her third semester of the M.A. program North American Studies. In her previous research, she focused on television and feminist media studies.

**Jia Shen Lim** is a student in the MA North American Studies program at Leibniz University Hannover (LUH). Prior to his enrolment at LUH, he received his BA in Graphic Design and Art History from the University of Hertfordshire, UK, then went on to work as a fashion and art writer for a newspaper. His job was invigorating and fun but it was not enough – intellectually speaking –, so he decided to leave his job to study again. His research interests include gender and transcultural identities in visual art, periodical culture, and the combination of close reading techniques with critical theory.

**Nathalie Rennhack** is a graduate student of North American Studies and the Teacher Training Program at Leibniz University Hannover (LUH). In 2021, she received a bachelor's degree in English and Biology from Leibniz University Hannover. Her research interests are in the fields of Gender Studies and women's representations in Early American literature. In her bachelor's thesis, she analyzed the genre markers of sentimental literature and domestic fiction in Sukey Vickery's *Emily Hamilton* with a particular focus on representations of women's mental health.

**Ahmet Servet** has previously studied International Relations at Eastern Mediterranean University (Turkey) where he received his B.A. as well as an M.A. degree. During his previous studies, he served as a teaching and research assistant for two years. In 2012, Ahmet was part of an Erasmus exchange program at the University of Osnabrück, doing research in Political Science. In 2015, Ahmet joined the Forschungsinstitut für Philosophie Hannover (FIPH) as an Erasmus exchange student for further research and for attending seminars until September 2016. Ahmet is currently a student in the master's program Atlantic Studies in History, Culture and Society at Leibniz University of Hannover (LUH).

**Harishnavi Sriskanthan** is a graduate student of North American Studies and the Teacher Training Program at Leibniz University Hannover (LUH). Her research interests are Early American and Settler Colonial Studies with a focus on inter- and transgenerational (settler) trauma. Moreover, she is interested in African American Studies and Black Feminism, where she is particularly intrigued by Saidiya Hartman's and Marisa Fuentes' works on the archive. In 2021, she received a bachelor's degree in English and German Studies from LUH. Her bachelor's thesis engages with settler colonial trauma in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* with a focus on the spatial and psychological effects of settler trauma and Indigenous erasure that can be found in the novel as a result of its struggle against its own historical context.

**Marielle Tomasic** is a master student of North American Studies and holds a B.A. in English and Philosophy from Leibniz University Hannover. Besides being a student, she is also an editorial assistant for a publishing house. In her research, she is particularly interested in literature that crosses the boundaries of fact and fiction as well as those between the personal and the theoretical, and thus focuses on studies of autotheory, autofiction, life writing and liminal studies.

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