TALK OF LOVE

Chapter 6: LOVE AND MARRIAGE

In this chapter I ask how multiple cultural framings of the same issue can coexist side by side. I ask first what maintains the plausibility of a cultural world view, even when people are directly critical of it. And I ask a related question: What larger institutional demands anchor each of the dominant understandings of love? Understanding what circumstances lead people to invoke one of their cultural understandings rather than another is a critical step in untangling the complex relations of culture and social structure.

The middle-class adults I interviewed are not passive victims of popular romance. Indeed, most greet the romantic love mythology with skepticism or outright disdain. Yet I shall show in this chapter that the same interviewees who reject the "movie image" of love use it repeatedly in their own thinking. I will try to account for the persistence of mythic understandings of love in the midst of a dominant, self-conscious "realism." We will begin to see here how culture is organized less by what goes on inside people's heads as they analyze their experience than by the external contexts with which they have to deal. This analysis of two cultures of love, which persist side-by-side even in the minds of the same people, will suggest that culture may be organized as much from the "outside-in" as from the "inside-out."
LOVE MYTHS

To understand the inner dynamics of the romantic love mythology, it is valuable to trace its origins in European cultural history. Scholars agree that courtly love poetry, which emerged in Europe at the end of the eleventh century, created a fundamentally new vision of love, self, and society (Lewis 1959; Bloch 1977; Hunt 1994). Sung by troubadours in the courts of feudal France, it told of knights made virtuous by love and of heroic deeds performed in the service of noble ladies. In courtly poetry, love became an ennobling passion, rather than the dangerous appetite familiar to Greeks and Romans, or the tormenting temptation described by the early Church fathers. Instead, the love of a knight for an exalted noble lady became what "makes a man virtuous and causes him to perform many heroic deeds" (Capellanus 1957:41, excerpted in Stephens 1968). Love could transform the self, forging noble character.

The other side of courtly love was a tragic vision, in which the love that inspired virtue could also lead to betrayal and death (de Rougemont 1956). The paradigmatic courtly love story is that of Tristan and Isolde. Like the later stories of Lancelot and Guinevere or Romeo and Juliet, it portrays a tragic love that violates social obligations. A magic potion makes Tristan fall helplessly in love with his king’s betrothed as Tristan brings her back to marry the king, so that only death can ultimately unite the lovers and
end their betrayal. Courtly love powerfully reshaped the European imagination. It envisioned a new moral complexity in the relationship between individuals and the social world (Elias 1994).

For the courtly tradition, love was (1) a sudden and certain passion ("love at first sight") for (2) an idealized lover. Love could (3) transform the self, making a person virtuous; but it also (4) separated individuals from society, leading them to defy social conventions in pursuit of a more personal destiny. The separate self and a conception of virtue in tension with social commitments is central to the appeal of the love myth.

Courtly love and its accompanying ethic of chivalry remained the code of the European nobility for centuries (Elias 1994; Bloch 1961). But the courtly ideal of love comes to us reshaped by the bourgeois culture of early English capitalism. As Ian Watt (1957) has argued, that culture took its quintessential form in the 18th-century English novel. The writers and publishers who created the novel form courted a newly literate, middle-class reading public and sold their wares in a new kind of cut-throat literary market. Both readers and writers were steeped in the individualism of the world’s most capitalist and Protestant nation. Love became the focal myth of that individualism.

The novel that founds the bourgeois tradition of romantic love is Samuel Richardson's Pamela. In Pamela, the essential drama of courtly love is preserved, but
with crucial changes in its meaning. Pamela, a virtuous servant girl, resists the
determined advances of her employer, Mr. B. In defending her virginity, the physical
integrity of her body, she proves the integrity of her character. Her virtue is rewarded
when Mr. B. abandons his efforts at seduction and marries her instead.

Love in the novel remains a drama about virtue. But rather than simply inspiring
heroic deeds, love becomes a test of individual character. Bourgeois love thus alters the
tension between individual morality and social demands. In bourgeois love stories,
individuals still discover and defend their individual integrity. But rather than betrayal
and death, the bourgeois love story ends with a marriage in which the autonomous
individual finds his or her proper place in the social world. Individual integrity and
social belonging are reconciled through a love that tests and rewards a person’s true
merits.

In the novel, love both reveals and reforms character. Pamela shows that she is
truly virtuous, down to the last fiber of her being. She resists and eventually overcomes
not only her employer’s lust, but all the social forces arrayed against her. While
Pamela’s character is tested, Mr. B.’s is transformed by love. Pamela’s goodness
redeems him, and in loving her for her virtue he becomes virtuous himself. Thus love is
the drama through which individuals find and define themselves. Individuals who
preserve the self against social forces are rewarded by finding a place in the social world.
In the bourgeois myth, then, love is a matter of individual character. Love is, first, a clear, decisive, and unwavering choice. Love crystallizes the self, so that discovering whom one "really" loves is discovering one's true self (as in Jane Austen's novels, for example, where heroines outgrow their immature willfulness, learn to know themselves, and then can recognize the true value of their beloveds). Love must thus be certain, as the core of the self is certain.

Second, true love must be unique and exclusive ("one true love"), embodying the uniqueness of the individual self. The loved one is idealized in the sense that only true love could justify an exclusive choice. Third, love can overcome obstacles both personal and social ("love conquers all"). Through love individuals assert their integrity in the face of social forces (marrying for love, not money, for example). Finally, love is enduring, even as the self is enduring. The love story has a decisive ending ("happily ever after") that resolves the dramatic struggle of the individual to define his or her self within the social world.

In sum, bourgeois love is (1) a clear, all-or-nothing choice; (2) of a unique other; made (3) in defiance of social forces; and (4) permanently resolving the individual's destiny. To put it in different terms. "They met, and it was love at first sight. There would never be another girl (boy) for him (her). No one could come between them. They overcame obstacles and lived happily ever after."
REAL LOVE

When the middle-class adults I interviewed talked about love, they debunked precisely this mythic vision. "Movie" love is intense, overwhelming, and sure, they said, but real love is often ambiguous, gradual, and uncertain. Indeed, if we examine what people actually say about love, it is almost the opposite of the mythic ideal: (1) Real love is not sudden or certain. It grows gradually, and is often ambivalent and confused. Love does not require a dramatic choice, but may result from circumstance, accident, or inertia. (2) There is no "one true love." One can love many people in a variety of different ways. (3) The kind of love that leads to marriage should not depend on irrational feeling in defiance of social convention, but on compatibility and on practical traits that make persons good life partners. The fewer obstacles people have to overcome, the happier they are likely to be. (4) Love does not necessarily last forever. Love and marriage do not settle either personal identity or social destiny. Rather than guaranteeing that one will live "happily ever after," love requires continuing hard work, compromise, and change.

I call this anti-mythic view of love "prosaic-realism." It is just as "cultural" as the mythic view it claims to debunk. It appears both in autobiographical accounts, when
people describe how they came to love or marry as they did, and in general observations on what love is or should be.

A middle-class homemaker, married eleven years and the mother of two, actively involved in the Baptist church, reflects a view of love fairly common among the people I interviewed. For her, love was not a sudden, inexplicable passion:

As for why I married the person I did, he was the right person at the right time at the right place. We met while we were going to school and we spent a lot of time together and we decided fairly quickly that we wanted to be married and share our lives. [26 111–115]

Far from claiming that her husband was uniquely right in some ineffable way, she lists quite straightforwardly the traits that make them well-suited.

He's an awful lot like my father. I'm an awful lot like his mother. He was the kind of person I felt I could share a lot with, who had similar ideas and a similar outlook on life. We were very compatible. We enjoyed doing a lot of the same things. We were good friends. [118-122]
There was no love at first sight. Indeed, she insists on describing as gradual what was, by some standards, a whirlwind courtship. "It grew very gradually. Well, we were going to school, and he was hanging around a lot....and I was avoiding him a lot, but within two months we decided to get married." [129-133] Rather than describing a decisive choice, she describes her marriage as something she and her husband fell into without really realizing what they were doing. What a novelist might romanticize, she seems almost intentionally to make prosaic:

I tried to avoid him, but he was fairly persistent, and the more I got to know him, it was all right.... He was attracted to me, but I don't know if you would call it love. Maybe. He was on a rebound, I think, a little bit, having been rejected by somebody else. He was just looking for somebody to be friendly with, but as I say, within two months we had decided that we did want to be married."

[135-148]

This homemaker describes love not as an intense, all-or-nothing passion, but as an experience grounded in the small ups and downs of daily life. She is not avoiding passion or emotion in her description, but she reserves intense feeling for the prosaic, everyday kind of love. She is "much more in love" [343] with her husband than when they married because, for her, real love develops only over time. "It's partly just living together and sharing your lives and getting to know each other, and partly because I
know more of what love is." [347-349] Love is "a growing thing" that "will change and
will manifest itself in different ways." It involves "caring for each other and the concern
and the willingness to share your life and to be part of another person's life, and to take
responsibility for that."

For this active Baptist, real love is permanent, but not because one inevitably
lives happily ever after:

I think if you love someone enough and you commit your life to them in marriage
you'd make it permanent. There will be times when you don't feel like you're in
love, but since you've made a commitment and are willing to honor that
commitment then you will work towards bringing back the love." [434-439]

Thus for this middle-class wife, as for many of the people I interviewed, love
involves hard work rather than sudden passion. It depends on such ordinary things as
compatibility, sharing, and common interests, even when "physical attraction and
romance" are also important. If there is a central organizing principle to her view of
love, it is an ideal of maturity. She is "much more in love with [her] husband now,"
because you can love someone more when you have shared a life together. Far from
being a sudden and certain choice of a unique other that resolves the problems of life,
love for the prosaic-realistic culture starts out as gradual, uncertain, and conventional
and deepens over a lifetime.

PERSISTING MYTHS

At times, even the most prosaic view of love can suddenly shift, however, revealing a mythic understanding quite impervious to the "realism" that dominates ordinary experience. Remember, for example, the engineer in Chapter 2, whose arguments for "respect" between independent spouses were swept away by an image of all-or-nothing love when he contemplated what he would do if his wife were ill: "Nora is the most important thing in my life. ...[S]he’s important because she’s—I love her." This interview was somewhat unusual—both because this rationalist engineer was so resolutely unromantic and because the question may have invited a histrionic answer. But this reemergence of a mythic vision of love occurred over and over in other interviews, even if in less dramatic ways. It was as if something were pulling at the experience of these conventional, middle-class interviewees—something that eluded their common-sense view of the world.

This lurching back and forth between mythic and prosaic views of love also affected Ted Oster, the successful lawyer we met in Chapter 2, who had "really flipped"
over his wife. In his case conflicting views of love showed themselves as an internal
debate he could not seem to resolve. He described having fallen for his wife, in
something very much like love at first sight. But he vacillated between the mythic view
that there is "one right person" for each person, and what he himself saw as the more
rationally persuasive idea that many people could be acceptable spouses, with
circumstance and accident determining whom one actually married. He reluctantly
accepted the "realistic" view after breaking off an earlier engagement: "I suppose...I had
developed the feeling that nothing is perfect in that there wasn't just one person I could
be with." But he could not quite abandon the idea of one true love, despite its
implausibility: "Maybe I just didn't rationalize it as being simply impossible. It can't be
[true] because that many coincidences couldn't happen all the time. You see a lot of
people successfully married." Yet despite his rational reservations, he found himself
clinging to the belief in one right person. "I had been told, and I really did believe
because I wanted to believe the idea that, boy, when you meet that one special person
you'll really know it. I guess maybe there's more than one special person. Maybe
there's quite a few. Maybe there are quite a few people with whom you could be equally
happy in a different way, but you have to find somebody from that group." [#22
470-481] For this young lawyer, the mythic idea remained somehow true, despite his
conscious skepticism.
How can we understand the alternations in Ted Oster’s thinking—and in that of almost every person I interviewed—between a "realistic" and a "mythic" view of love? Let me first try to describe more clearly what I think is happening, before offering an account of why it happens. I do not think that people are simply responding to a culturally-induced myth—a kind of brainwashing. As is evident in the quotes above, the prosaic-realistic ideal of mature love is every bit as cultural as the romantic myth. People use just as stereotyped language in rejecting infatuation and insisting that love grows slowly or requires hard work as they do when using a mythic vocabulary in which love solves all problems. But what we observe is not just a compromise between mature realism and mythic romance. People seem instead to alternate between different frames for grasping reality, suddenly slipping into a mythic vocabulary at variance with the ways they normally think. While vehemently rejecting "infatuation" or "movie-star love," they periodically invoke images of love—as all-or-nothing, certain, enduring—which violate the common-sense understandings they normally use. These are not delusions or mistakes, however. Instead, there is a structural reality behind the mythic view of love which continually throws people back on a way of thinking they may consciously reject.

MARRIAGE

The "mythic" view of love is grounded, I believe, in a structural reality. People recognize that it poorly describes the uncertainty, ambiguity, and impermanence in their own experiences of love, yet they continually return to its way of interpreting certain experiences. That structural reality is marriage.
(Even for those who do not marry, or those like gays and lesbians who are denied the legal right to marry, the structural features of marriage provide the dominant model for love relationships.\textsuperscript{1} As I make clear below however, those who truly bypass or abandon a marriage-like model of relationships may also stop thinking of love in mythic terms.\textsuperscript{2})

As an emotional state love may not be all or nothing, unique, heroic, and enduring. But despite the prevalence of divorce, marriage still has this structure: One is either married or not (however ambivalent the underlying feelings may be); one cannot be married to more than one person at a time; marrying someone is a fateful, sometimes life-transforming choice; and despite divorce, marriages are still meant to last.\textsuperscript{3}

The dual character of marriage lies behind the conflicting ways people use the concept of love. Much of the time, they use ideas of love to manage and interpret ongoing relationships. Here they employ a "prosaic-realistic" view of love. Such a view

\textsuperscript{1} Despite a rising age at first marriage, about 90 percent of American women eventually marry (Cherlin 1992:10-11), and even among those who divorce, most eventually remarry (Cherlin 1992:28). And the aspiration to marry remains nearly universal (Goldscheider and Waite 1991:14). Thus most cohabiting couples, even those who reject the legal form of marriage, are seeking the same kind of enduring, all-or-nothing, committed relationship marriage would involve.

\textsuperscript{2} Like Thomas DaSilva, quoted at length later in this chapter, those who are not thinking about marriage may substitute notions of sexual passion, friendship, or simple exchange of companionship for ideals of "love" (see also Nardi 1999 on gay men's friendships). Or, they may equate love with intense passion rather than with permanence. In contrast, as I show below and in chapter 7, Americans oriented to the married ideal assume that a love that dies was not real love in the first place.
is not realism in the sense of a neutral assessment of experience. It is shaped by conventional formulas and ideals, especially that of maturity. But it does attend to psychological variability, and to the ups and downs of daily life more than does the mythic view. It is an ethic about being married (or "coupled"), offering suggestions about how to manage an ongoing relationship. The prosaic-realistic view has its own romantic ideal—of down-to-earth, gradually evolving love. But its fundamental concern is with established relationships describing how people can get along, understand each other, and work out their difficulties. As Betty Dyson, the middle-class homemaker, put it, "it's not essential at the beginning of a marriage for there to be love, but it is essential that it be a growing relationship and that love will develop from that." [738-741]

The mythic view persists because it answers a different set of questions—questions, I would argue, about a decisive choice, implicitly the choice of whether or not to marry, or stay married. It reproduces the institutional features of marriage, recasting them as matters of individual volition.

A decisive choice ("love at first sight")...

In a revealing exchange, Betty Dyson responded to a vignette—about a woman who must decide whether or not to stay with her severely depressed husband—with a
peculiar, but acute, observation. She insisted that the wife’s decision could not depend on "how much" she loved her husband:

It’s a yes-or-no situation. You’re either for him or agin’ him. I don’t think there’s a measure on love. There are times when you feel more romantic. There are times, you know, when I hate him. You have a lot of emotions involved, but the underlying feelings, the commitment, are always in there. [886 894]

Earlier she had acknowledged that love can vary in degree or intensity (she loves her husband "more" than when they married), and she asserted it again as a psychological truth, with "There are times when you feel more romantic. There are times...when I hate him." But she nonetheless subscribed to one of the central mythic properties of love—that it is an all-or-nothing phenomenon, that you can't put "a measure on love."

And of course she is right—not that love cannot be measured, but that the choice of whether to stay with someone or leave is pretty much a "yes or no" decision.

The dual properties of marriage—as relationship and as institution—also account for the dramatic alternations in the thinking of our sober engineer between prosaic and mythic love. In talking of his marriage as an ongoing relationship, he described such things as getting along, understanding each other, and respecting each other's independence. But a question about what he would do if his wife became ill raised the
issue of marriage as a commitment. When the choice was would he stay or go, the answer was "[S]he's the most important thing in my life…. I love her."

I do not mean to argue that choices about whether to marry, or whether to stay married, are actually determined by "love"—or even that the question of love plays a significant role. People may stay married out of convenience; loveless marriages often endure; and many apparently loving ones fail. It is rather that the culture of love—precisely in its mythic form—gives people a way of talking about the all-or-nothing consequences of choices they may be quite confused and ambivalent about making.

It is the decisive consequences of choices about marriage that make the love myth compelling, even when people find its particulars implausible. If a friend comes for advice—about whether to marry, whether to break off a relationship, whether to divorce—we may listen to the psychological and circumstantial particulars, but then find ourselves asking, "Well, do you love him (or her)?" We may know perfectly well that our friend is confused about precisely this point—or she may say, yes, I still love A but I love B too. But none of this knowledge, nor even a distaste for this whole way of thinking about love, is likely to prevent us from acting as if the problem were whether or not she "really" does love A—because in the end she is either going to stay with A or leave. The mythic understanding of love recognizes the structural reality of just such choices.
Of a unique other ("one true love")…

The love myth also posits one perfect mate for each person. (This accompanies the ideal of "love at first sight," in which recognition of the "right" one is instantaneous and unwavering.) My interviewees, however, did not describe their courtships or their mates in such romantic terms. While the young lawyer "flipped" over his wife, and others reported swift courtships, what is striking is how little most interviewees had to say about why they married the people they did. Rather than elaborate romantic stories, they reported:
Why did you marry the person you did? "Well, because he was the one I met, I guess. I could have married someone else had I met somebody else.... It wasn't love at first sight, but it was like a steady growth of support and friendship and love." [#71 Sara Tennant, thirty-eight-year-old nurse, married 7 years, one child].

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... I always assumed I would get married, there was no question about it in my mind, and I thought I was awfully late at the time.... I felt very lonely much of the time between I suppose getting out of high school until I got married... I couldn't find somebody that I was happy with. And vice-versa, that she would be happy with me.... It has worked out very well. [Harold Lemert, forty-four-year-old engineer, married 17 years, 4 children, #31, 148-179]

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We kind of grew on each other, I guess.... [Why did he decide to marry his wife?] Tough question. I love her. Why her and not anybody else? I guess it's just her personality. She's up all the time. [Dick Hanson, twenty-six-year-old accountant, married one year, no children; #44, 66-81]

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"...we met at a time when, I don't know, I guess we just happened to be right for each other at the right time." [Jemina Pearson, thirty-four-year-old administrator, married 9 years, one child # 48]
Indeed, the word that recurs consistently in these descriptions is "right"—the right person, the right relationship, and the right time. But the word "right" operates in two very different senses; bridging two distinct meanings. One is the prosaic attitude: "There were no fireworks; it just seemed right." The other is the mythic experience in which one's beloved is "just right," special, perfect.

In their everyday experience people see their relationships as contingent, imperfect, and ordinary. Yet in one sense the myth of "one perfect love" is true—true of the structural experience of an exclusive, long-enduring relationship. One may not marry the uniquely perfect person, but that relationship does become unique. One's marriage partner becomes irreplaceable, not because one could not have had an equally happy marriage with someone else, but because one could not have had this marriage, these experiences, this love.

This sense that one's marriage is now the only reality explains why most people give such feeble accounts of why they married the persons they did. It is hard to give reasons for what in retrospect seems inevitable. Indeed, when recounting their decision to marry, many couples describe it as hardly having been a decision, but as having developed naturally out of the relationship itself. One couple, married for twelve years, were highschool sweethearts. When they married, the husband said, "there wasn't a lot
of discussion." His wife was "the kind of girl I wanted to marry," and "somewhere along the line I just made the assumption that that's where our relationship was headed."

But despite this prosaic account, there was a "rightness" that was almost like romantic destiny. The wife said, "I asked my sister...about love.... I was looking for a definition of love because I felt, at eighteen, how could I know that I was in love. But even her words didn't really put it. I knew that's where I was." The husband, too, "spent a lot of time trying to figure out what love should be." But in the end, "I felt so good about us that that's probably what it was. If it wasn't that, I wasn't really concerned about it because that just felt good enough that [that] was the right feeling, the right place." [p. 9]

The young lawyer's reasoned opinion that "there wasn't just one person I could be with" is in this sense less true than his mythic ideal of "one special person." The person one marries is special—legally and institutionally unique, however ordinary or extraordinary his or her personal attributes. A thirty-five year old, self-employed businessman explained how being married to someone makes her "right" in the sense that she is both so uniquely perfect as to be irreplaceable and so familiar that her virtues are impossible to describe: "I guess because I've been married for twelve years, and the person I love is my wife, and I don't really remember any other relationships that much. Because this is the only one that really counts." [#35, p. 34] The social organization of
marriage makes the mythic image true experientially, even when it wrongly describes the facts.

That overcomes obstacles ("love conquers all")...

Very few interviewees described heroic struggles to marry against social or family opposition. Indeed, even where a prosaic remark hints at possible drama ("Even when...I was trying to date somebody else in college...I knew I was in love with [him]." [#7, p. 9]; or Betty Dyson's "He was hanging around a lot...and I was avoiding him a lot." [#26 131-3]), the drama seems underplayed. There was an occasional marriage against parental opposition, but little was made of it. These interviewees on the whole seemed perfectly content to have married just the kinds of people their parents wanted for them, and indeed, they frequently said just that.

Heroic struggle to marry has largely disappeared from the accounts my interviewees give of their lives, but it has been replaced by another powerful heroism—the heroic effort necessary to keep relationships together. Interviewees insist that one must "work at" a relationship. Even more, they insist that a whole range of virtues—from honesty and a willingness to face change, to stamina and a willingness to stick by one's commitments—are necessary to preserve a modern marriage. Thus love again becomes a test of character, but it tests a different kind of character than that of the rebellious youth
fighting for his or her true love. This is the mature heroism of adulthood (see Swidler 1980). Its virtues are self-knowledge, honesty, and a willingness to face difficulties squarely.

The heroic themes of the love myth have thus been transposed from the drama of choosing to the drama of sustaining a marriage. In some ways, this violates the pattern in which mythic love is invoked when people think about choosing to form or leave a marriage, while prosaic realism flourishes when people consider how to manage day-to-day relationships. The secret of this apparent reversal in which prosaic love becomes heroic is that the institutional structure of marriage—all-or-nothing, exclusive, requiring a decisive choice—has been partially transformed by the difficulty people have in staying married. The mundane problems of getting along in a relationship immediately raise the more decisive question of whether the partners have the commitment, make the choice, to work at getting along (see Ilouz 1997:193-196). Thus prosaic love requires heroic commitment. The institutional insecurity of modern marriage introduces a mythic element right into the heart of marital mundaneness, making ordinary, everyday actions heroic tests of individual character.

Here prosaic love and mythic love meet. Interviewees insist on the ordinariness of their love relationships as a transmuted myth of the heroic. In this view, even the frequent pettiness and indifference of daily life ("There are times where I don't even
think about his day..." [12, p. 14]; "...you're living together, see each other every day, you don't sometimes pay attention." [22 932-3]) simply demonstrate the demanding moral struggles love requires. Love "conquers all" not by overcoming social obstacles, but by meeting the mundane demands of ongoing relationships.

I have been arguing that the mythic culture of love relocates the institutional features of marriage—exclusive, all-or-nothing, transformative, enduring—in the interior of individual psyches. The prevalence of divorce has left the institution of marriage intact but has changed some of its social meanings. The prosaic-realistic culture of love is made plausible by this change in the institutional significance of marriage.

The successful young lawyer, like almost all the people I interviewed, thinks of marriage at least in part in terms of the possibility of divorce. Asked whether love "is forever," he responded immediately by stressing the need to "work at it to keep it going forever." His sensitivity to the mundane details of relationships, his interest, for example, in making sure he and his wife regularly find time to "communicate" reflects this sense of vulnerability. "It makes me nervous at times because I know that I'm not, or perceive that she's not, working hard at it, or working in the right way, or that I don't have the energy level or the whatever to do what's necessary." [22 686-9] The prosaic culture's critique of mythic love comes from its insistence that the really heroic moral struggle is that which occurs within ongoing relationships.
And lasts forever ("happily ever after").

Despite its fragility, the institution of marriage makes plausible the fourth, and arguably most implausible, element of the traditional love myth: the ideal that true love lasts forever. This, of course, has been the stuff of poetry for centuries—from "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds" to "I'll be yours for endless time"—as poets find ever new ways of saying "forever."\(^{13}\) (It is also the stuff of ironic poetic reaction as in Christopher Marlowe's "Had I but world enough and time;" Carole King's "Will you still love me tomorrow?," or Edna St. Vincent Millay's "I loved you Wednesday, yes, but what is that to me?")

The people I interviewed vacillated about whether true love endures. As we have seen, many insist that love does not last by itself, that "You have to work at it." Indeed, they are haunted by the fragility of marriage. Divorce is a continual danger, as well as a continuing option. They recognize that feelings of love are transient, so that, as Betty Dyson said, "There are times when I hate him." And finally, many interviewees responded to the vignettes by saying that a person should leave a relationship when it is no longer satisfying, as long as she or he has made honest efforts to work out the difficulties. While one can pledge love that lasts forever, apparently one cannot be bound by such a promise.