Susan Wolf and Christopher Grau (eds.). Understanding Love: Philosophy, Film, and Fiction. Oxford University Press 2014. 414 pp. $105.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780195384512); $31.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780195384505).

This book contains seventeen articles by scholars from across the humanities. Each article focuses on some aspect of love, broadly construed. There are essays on romantic love, filial love, love of animals, and even authorial knowledge as love. No two essays deal with the same film or novel. This has the virtue of exposing the reader to a variety of artistic contexts through which puzzles about the nature of love are posed and explored. There is absolutely no need to read the book from start to finish. Rather, I recommend focusing on those articles where some prior knowledge/interest of the subject matter is possessed. I will review five articles in order to give a sense of the range of material.

The first article, by Macalester Bell, investigates the relationship between humans and non-human animals through an analysis of Werner Herzog's 'Grizzly Man' (2005). The documentary contrasts Timothy Treadwell's sentimental attachment to grizzly bears with Herzog's own sense of wariness, which emphasizes the violent and unpredictable potential of nature. Between these two contrasting accounts, Bell argues that non-human animals can indeed satisfy genuine human need. This is so despite the obvious asymmetry in such relationships. No matter what happens, humans cannot communicate with non-human animals the way they can with other humans. Bell concludes that although we must be critical of sentimentality, it nevertheless plays an essential role in relationships based on love. For Bell, this is why the documentary ends in such an ambiguous manner, almost as though Herzog himself comes to concede this point to Treadwell.

Lawrence Blum's 'False Racial Symmetries in Far from Heaven and Elsewhere' is noteworthy for introducing and developing the concept of false symmetry, which he defines as when an immoral action is assumed 'to carry the same moral significance' (37) when it has two distinct targets. Blum's focus is the interracial love between Cathy Whitaker, played by Julianne Moore, and Raymond Deagan, played by Dennis Haysbert. Other contentious issues are explored, notably the homosexuality of Whitaker's husband. Homosexuality functions as a parallel phenomenon to interracial romantic love in that both are taboo in 1950s America. There is an interesting discussion that deals with which form of oppression is most abhorrent–sexism, racism, or homophobia. Yet the main thrust of Blum's argument is that there is a false symmetry in how both the white and black communities are depicted in their condemnation of the romantic relationship. The film portrays both communities as equally harsh and for the same reason–prejudice. Consider the scene where Raymond brings Cathy to a local bar in the black part of town, insisting that it is friendly place. The disapproval by the local patrons is overt. For Blum, this scene conveys symmetry between the two communities. But, in fact, in the 1950s, black people were significantly more accepting of interracial relationships than white people and it was only in the context of the black community that such relationships could blossom. Blum also does an excellent job sketching the altogether different rationales of the black community's suspicion of interracial relationships. So we always need to be aware of wrongly equating experiences, even within the same general subject. Blum goes on to analyze false symmetries in 'Ali: Fear Eats the Soul' (1973), 'In the Heat of Night' (1967), and finishes with Supreme Court arguments about race.

One of the strongest articles is by one of the editors, Christopher Grau's 'Love, Loss, andIdentity in Solaris', whose focus is the 2002 Steve Soderbergh directed film. Grau explores the

puzzles concerning romantic love and personal identity that unfold, finally arguing 'that the ending…is ambivalent' (98). Chris Kelvin, played by George Clooney, arrives on the space station orbiting the planet Solaris. Mysterious things are happening. Kelvin goes to sleep and is shocked when his dead wife, Rheya, seems to have materialized from his dreams. Understandably disturbed, Kelvin eventually lures Rheya into an escape pod and ejects it into space. Rheya returns in the same way as before. This time, Rheya realizes she is a copy of someone else, but Kelvin has apparently adjusted to the situation and attempts to placate her. Solaris' puzzle is a familiar one and stretches all the way back to Plato. When one romantically loves another, is it the person—their irreducible particularity—that one loves, or the qualities of that person? If it is just the qualities, then the affection, in principle, can be transferred to another instantiation of these valued properties. Once the second copy of Rheya arrives on the scene, Kelvin is resolved to develop a relationship with her and be a better partner than he was before. As Grau persuasively argues, Kelvin is disrespecting both Rheyas. He should recognize that his dead wife is not present and that the present person is not Rheya. Concerning the ambivalent conclusion, Grau argues that Kelvin has actually stayed on the ship and was absorbed by Solaris. The Kelvin the viewer sees is a copy. He is not living on Earth, but resides on a recreation of Earth by Solaris.

David Paletz's article begins by considering three explanations for why documentaries so rarely deal with romantic love. First, since documentaries often seek to capture reality, they are more unscripted than fiction films. Second, documentaries rarely idealize, and romantic love is almost always idealized by fiction film. The final issue is a lack of access. How can a documentarian be present at the early stages of romantic infatuation? A fourth reason is brought up later in the article, namely the possible tension between romantic intimacy and the camera. Paletz's focus is the documentary 'Sherman's March' (1986), which despite some caveats from Ross McElwee, the director/star, is concerned with the quest for romantic love. Paletz claims that McElwee's documentary reveals 'many aspects of romantic love' (237). Throughout the documentary, McElwee spends time with seven women, who come from a variety of different socio-economic backgrounds. Each woman 'gives promise of romantic love, contain elements of it, and end in failure' (243). The article rehearses each encounter. What emerges is that McElwee is an idealist, fully believing that the next woman he meets will be his perfect match. The women, by contrast, are depicted as 'more pragmatic and more realistic' (248) about romantic love. Nevertheless, each woman is celebrated 'in all their idiosyncrasy and individuality' (249). Despite its aim, Paletz never adequately explains how each relationship contains elements of romantic love. In fact, my overall sense is that most of the women excite him as one might be excited at the beginning of any romantic relationship. The gaping hole, then, is recognition that genuine romantic love, the kind that McElwee seeks, is accessible only after one invests significant time and effort.

George Wilson's 'Love and Bullshit in Santa Rosa: Pastiche in *The Man Who Wasn't There*' hinges on Harry Frankfurt's concept of bullshit. This can be defined as 'any mode of groundless speechifying in which the speaker proceeds in more or less complete indifference to the truth' (352). How does this relate to the Coen brothers' film? For Ed Crane, played by Billy Bob Thornton, bullshit permeates 1940s Santa Rosa. Wilson notes the reversal of the usual noir genre here—humanity is so corrupt that there is little worth saving. Crane is alienated. In the midst of this alienation, Wilson argues there is an 'odd affirmation' (347) of love in marriage between Crane and his wife, Doris, played by Frances McDormand. The couple is childless and they haven't had sex in years. One might expect that Doris amounts to nothing but another example of bullshit, but Wilson interprets their relationship as more nuanced. When Doris, for example, throws out the Macadam tar salesman, there

appears to be a bond between them, one of 'tacit understanding and practical complicity' (360). The origin story of their love is unremarkable, but that they agree in their expectations, however low they may be, is sufficient for what might be called love. Ultimately, in the face of 'maximal alienation and repression on both sides' (368), perhaps such a relationship is all one can reasonably expect.

This book is by no means an introduction to the philosophy of love or film. As a specialist book aiming at scholars pursuing these questions, the book offers many interesting insights about the depiction of love in film, in all of its confusion and complexity. At times, the sheer variety is overwhelming, which is why I recommend focusing on articles that pique one's interest.

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