



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Segal, Naomi (2008) Circuits of desire and loss: Marivaux and "My Best Friend's Wedding". *Journal of Romance Studies* 8 (3), pp. 41-50. ISSN 1473-3536.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/5442/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

Circuits of desire & loss: Marivaux & *My Best Friend's Wedding* Naomi Segal

This essay draws a number of parallels between Marivaux's love comedies and the 1997 Hollywood comedy *My Best Friend's Wedding*. It looks at configurations of desire in terms of a series of 'coloured shapes moving in space': the chase, the chain, a variety of triangles (leaning, here, on comparisons with both classical tragedy and the nineteenth-century novel of adultery) and of configurations of four. What is the nature of the happy ending in comedy that brings resolution out of the defeat of a third party? How do formal arrangements induce in the audience a willingness to loop the circuit of desire in such a way that it can end on reason or dance?

A few days before I delivered the paper on which this article is based, in March 2006, I was listening to a University of London Guest Lecture by the mathematician Sir Roger Penrose. He illustrated his points by a series of marvellous drawings which were, essentially, representations of coloured shapes moving in space. Using something similar in a very different vein, this is the concept of desire that I shall be talking about in this essay. It is, I want to argue, a concept typical of both the love comedies of Marivaux and the 1997 Hollywood blockbuster *My Best Friend's Wedding*.

There is a moment in *My Best Friend's Wedding* that is pure Marivaux. It occurs in the landscaped garden where a pre-nuptial party is taking place. A pretty blonde girl in a green dress is running desperately away from a wooden pavilion in which she has just seen her fiancé kissing another woman. The fiancé in his lounge suit gives chase. The other woman, wild-haired and dressed in jeans and a casual top, takes

off after him, and the three of them, careering like leggy fawns one behind the other, are viewed from a distance by a tableful of mothers who comment indulgently: 'Lovely!' - 'Aren't they?'. All this is presented in long shot, apart from glimpses of three aghast faces calling each other's names, and a view of the ladies seen from behind: a circle of coiffed heads and summer hats around a bowl of roses. The shading is green and pink; cheery classical music plays.

Here is the story so far. Caustic food-writer Julianne Potter has broken up the couple of her 'best friend' Michael & his wealthy, sweet fiancée Kimmy by deception: first she feels deeply ashamed, then pretty triumphant. Believing that Kimmy has manipulated him (and having no idea that Julianne has), Michael has called off the wedding and told Kimmy, but the latter has not told her parents. They all meet at the pre-nuptial party, where Kimmy sees Julianne and Michael kissing in the pavilion. (Further twists and turns follow, of course, before the engaged couple finally marry.)

As in all comic plots based on a series of deceptions, the misunderstandings are multiplied by absences. At the party, the three of them have met up successively *by twos* – hopeful Julianne is immediately enlisted by first Michael and then Kimmy to carry messages between them. Too successful at faking sympathy for Kimmy and at being ambivalently kind to Michael, she succeeds against her will in bringing them back together; we observe envy vying with honesty in her face (invisibly to each of them) as she restores their couple. The wedding is on again. At this point Julianne decides to risk all: she confesses her love to Michael and grasps him in a long-awaited kiss. As he pulls away, he sees Kimmy, who has just come up to the pavilion – and the chase begins.

This chase is one instance of what I am going to call 'the circuit of desire' – here more properly a chain than a circle. Such a circuit is, I will argue, both entirely personal and intimate and a public event always having an audience that goes beyond the primary audience the subject wishes for. In this essay I am comparing two versions of this

circuit, subjectivity and audience, one created in early eighteenth-century France, the other in 1990s America, one for the stage, the other for the screen, and each both representing and answering a sensibility proper to its time and place. I am not suggesting that *My Best Friend's Wedding* is a conscious adaptation of Marivaux – no evidence exists to suggest this – nor of course that it is a translation in anything but the currently popular metaphorical sense. What I am suggesting is that certain very fundamental human encounters, confrontations with world, other and self, are played (my term is not casual) in similar ways in these two instances, and that a close examination of these similarities will help us to think about both the encounters and how they play, what changes and what does not, and what it might mean that psychological suffering is always somewhat theatrical or that nothing is painful without being comical as well.

To return to the circuit of desire: before I go into its typical characteristics, I want to add two more elements. The first is one we have already noted: the audience. In this case, it is intradiegetic: within the setting of the landscaped park, the impending ceremony, the mothers see (and mis-see). This is pure theatre. Desire may feel like agony but, on display as it must be, it is comedy. The second is the stopping point. How does the madness of displaced desire come to a halt? The chase ends (this was 1997 after all, even though the music is all from the 1960s) with all three characters jumping into cars; Julianne, the comic heroine, hijacks a baker's van. From the van - to the strains of Burt Bacharach's 'What the world needs now is love, sweet love' - she yells through her mobile phone to her editor & friend George, whom her call has interrupted in the midst of a solemn, somewhat erotic New York poetry reading. George attempts to halt the circuit in the typical mode of the *raisonneur*: he reasons with the protagonist,

reminding her both of the truth she does not want to admit and of her [oedipal] duty to accept loss:

Julianne George, this is all your fault! I told him the truth. I said that I loved him, and then I kissed him and this is what's happened!

George Jules: a question. When you kissed Michael, did he kiss you back?

Julianne What do you mean? We were lip to lip!

George I mean: was there anything on the other side of that kiss that leads you to believe that this chase will end happily?

Julianne That's beside the point. We were interrupted.

George Who interrupted you?

Julianne Kimmy! She ruined everything. And Michael started chasing her before he could answer me.

George Michael's chasing Kimmy...

Julianne Yes!

George You're chasing Michael...

Julianne Yes!

George Who's chasing you? Nobody. Geddit? There's your answer: Kimmy.

Julianne No!

George Yes! Jules – you are not the one! And now for God's sake: the wedding is at 6 pm. You have a small but distinct window of opportunity to do the right thing.

He switches off his mobile, turns round and finds the whole of the poetry-reading audience staring raptly at him.

The chase is the simplest version of desire displaced and thus deferred: A loves B who loves C etc. It is a familiar trope from tragedy. In Racine's *Andromaque* (1667), Oreste loves Hermione who loves Pyrrhus who loves Andromaque, who loves her dead husband Hector and their threatened child Astyanax. It is tragic because everyone loses: the stopping-point is not reason but death. Comedy does not eschew loss, quite the reverse – but it allows some to win while the others, who have difficulty resigning themselves to loss, are made to seem rigid, aberrant or stupid (see Bergson 1940).

The other most common form of displaced desire, more like a circuit and potentially less doomed, is the triangle. Another counter-example, which less predictably brings tragedy out of a conventionally marivaudian triangle, is that of Romanticism. In Musset's *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* (1834) [*One must not trifle with love*], the two upper-class protagonists play at pique and jealousy, in order to spin out the light-hearted *peripeteia* that precedes and permits a happy ending. Familiarly, the pretend third party is that false twin, the milk-sister: similar in having shared the breast of the same woman, different in being the latter's child and thus less favoured by class (see Segal 1988: 132). This girl commits suicide – and the couple part for ever.

If we look more closely at the configuration – or the coloured shapes moving in space – of the three parties involved in triangular desire, we usually find three pairs into each of which a 'third party' intervenes. The first pair is that of the legitimate couple: the 'third' in this case is the outsider who desires to enter and break apart. In oedipal terms it is the child seeking to invade the exclusionary primal scene. The legitimate couple is, in conventional heterosexual terms, a male-female pair who form the classical whole of comedy's marriage bond. The second pair is the newly formed adulterous couple bonded by desire and intervening *as a doubled identity* into the marriage; it too is heterosexual

and thus the conventional dual whole. The third pair is the couple formed by rivalry, bonded on the line of jealousy and vengeance, paired by separation and similarity rather than closeness and difference.¹

In the central nineteenth-century bourgeois genre, the novel of adultery, the 'third' is of course the outsider (usually a younger man) but, given that it is a romantic genre, we side with this outsider's desire, so we tend not to see it as disruption. In the theories of René Girard and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the rival same-sex couple is the key one, linked by the investment of jealousy (see also Segal 1992: 59). What puts a stop to adulterous couples? Death, conventionally the death of the woman (Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Effi Briest, Hester Prynne etc). In this sense as in many others, Romanticism is the first cousin of tragedy.

But to return to comic mode and in particular to Marivaux: if we assume, conventionally, that happiness is a blissful couple, then the maths is simple enough. This is how Arlequin puts it in *La Double Inconstance* [*The Double Inconstancy*]:

Trivelin Silvia plaît au Prince, et il voudrait lui plaire avant que de l'épouser. L'amour qu'elle a pour vous fait obstacle à celui qu'il tâche de lui donner pour lui.

Arlequin Qu'il fasse donc l'amour ailleurs ; car il n'aurait que la femme, moi j'aurais le cœur ; il nous manquerait quelque chose à l'un et à l'autre, et nous serions tous trois mal à notre aise.

Trivelin Vous avez raison ; mais ne voyez-vous pas que, si vous épousiez Silvia, le Prince resterait malheureux?

Arlequin A la vérité il serait d'abord un peu triste; mais il aura fait le devoir d'un brave homme, et cela console. Au lieu que, s'il l'épouse, il fera pleurer ce pauvre enfant ; je pleurerai aussi,

moi ; il n'y aura que lui qui rira, et il n'y a point de plaisir à rire tout seul. (Marivaux 1964 : 110)

[Trivelin The Prince has taken a liking to Silvia and he wants her to like him too before he marries her. Her love for you is in the way of the love he wants her to feel for him.

Arlequin Let him find someone else to love, then, because he would only have the woman, and I would have her heart; each of us would lack something, and all three of us would be out of sorts.

Trivelin You're right ; but don't you see that if you married Silvia the Prince would be left unhappy?

Arlequin It's true he would be a bit sad at first, but he'd have done his duty like a good bloke and that cheers you up. Whereas, if he marries her, he'll make her cry; I'll be crying too – he'll be the only one laughing, and it's no fun to laugh on your own.]

The primal scene is a scene of laughter, Arlequin implies; laughter has to be shared; the excluded third person must console themselves with virtue. The Prince is no more likely to find this a comfort than Julianne – though both end up resigning themselves to something like it. The goodness of laughter and the impossibility of pleasure without company are two premises of comedy: weeping, whether singly or *à deux*, is against its laws.

So the one who intervenes and the one who is left alone at the end, whether they are the same person or not, are always transgressors against the general good; like heroes, murderers and scapegoats, they are meant to be shunned. We all wish to laugh in company; on the other hand, we have all been that outsider, in infancy at least if not

since. It is the logic of the triangle that, for the 'normal' comedic outcome of a happy united couple to emerge, one person has to end in a state of loss – death or deprivation. Someone must be denied the joys of matrimony and sex if the primal scene is to be restored. The outsider must resign himself/herself to being the child outside the door, believing that everyone is having fun except them.

Unless there are four. Now there are many versions of the configuration of four – we've seen one in the ending of the *My Best Friend's Wedding* chase – but the 'normal one' (whether comedic or tragic) is actually two couples set side by side. Here is a variety of examples, in chronological order: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare, 1590s), *La Double Inconstance* (Marivaux, 1732), *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* [*Elective Affinities*] (Goethe, 1809), *The Golden Bowl* (Henry James, 1904). In each of these, after the muddle of misplaced desire, two pairs emerge. They may be odd couples, like the father and daughter in the Henry James, and the solution to the *peripeteia* may come about by magic or cold reason; but what is common to all these very different fictions is the fact that four, like three, is actually an arrangement (or mis-arrangement) of twos.

The fantasy teleology of desire is, of course, the closed pair-bond. Desire has one course: the chase; and two possible outcomes: gratification or loss. In the terms of comedy there must be a happy ending for someone, and happy endings come in pair-structures in which an end-point freeze-frames a impending start-point that will not get investigated. 'They lived happily ever after' is where the fairytale ends; or, in the performance equivalent, before the curtain can come down there is a marriage-moment sealed by a dance. This is exactly how *My Best Friend's Wedding* ends. The erotic pair departs in the Rolls – to what one must only suspect might be a quite problematic future (*Match Point*, anyone?)² - and the friendship pair is reconstituted, through the

replacement of sex by dance and of the couple based on one kind of difference (heterosexual woman + heterosexual man) by a couple based on another kind of difference (heterosexual woman + homosexual man, both destined for a different kind of pleasure):

George (*on his mobile phone to Julianne*)

Has God heard your prayer? Will Cinderella dance again? ... Suddenly the crowds part – and there he is. Sleek, stylish, radiant with charisma. Bizarrely, he's on the telephone – but then, so are you. (*Rises.*) And he comes towards you – the moves of a jungle cat. And although you quite correctly sense that he is - *gay* – like most devastatingly handsome single men of his age are – you think: what the hell. Life goes on. (*Puts away her phone.*) Maybe there won't be marriage. Maybe there won't be sex. But by God, there'll be dancing.

The message of this comedy is that there are other kinds of happy ending. Are we convinced? Cheated of her obsessive aim to marry Michael, nevertheless Julianne smiles and dances. Maybe only for the moment. But after all the marriage ending is also not what it seems, as I have suggested...

What has happened in *My Best Friend's Wedding* is that the protagonist has gone through a cycle from stable, slightly anxious singlehood supported by a male 'best friend', via the shock of desire – absolutely obsessive, as frustrated desire is, wreaking in her cheery character the deviousness, wanton cruelty and humiliation of the demand to win – back to her original state. She ends a little more anxious, a little less supported in

one sense (George is unlikely to marry her, but then nor was Michael, as we and she discovered) but a little more supported in another sense: this won't happen with George, will it? And she ends with the 'consolation', if that is what it is, of having told the truth and done the right thing.

The implicit fallacies of the comic happy ending are, as we've seen, essentially two. The first is that the couple will be frozen in happiness for ever: they won't, or wouldn't, if they were real. Now *that* consoles, not just because it compensates for the general unfairness of distribution, but also because of course it means there will be another story, another triangle, another season, another reason... The second fallacy is that there is a person or a place in whom there is no desire: conventionally, this is the maternal position, for instance Pauline, the perfect mother/sister in Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs* (1925), who absents herself from the circuit of pleasure while handing it out with touching 'resignation' to everyone else, all males.³

Here the maternal/best friend role is taken by the 'devastatingly handsome', 'oozing charisma' George who famously, in the person of actor Rupert Everett, 'steals the show'. He does this in a number of ways, not least at the moment when he wows the crowd by his performance of 'I Say a Little Prayer', drawing together an audience of all ages and sexes, sappy couples and duetting cousins, strangers and family, and drawing us in too, while we continue to observe (with pain) Julianne's embarrassment and (with some pleasure) a dawning doubt on Michael's face. George is perfect not only, let us remember, because he is attractive and amusing (we'll see in a moment how this is connected to his gender mobility), but also because he is the film's centre of truth and reason, its delightful reality principle – in the terms of French classical comedy, its *raisonneur*.

George stealing the show also succeeds – and we, like Julianne, smile our way out of this fiction – because, in fact, the object of her obsession is so very different. Why does Michael need to be such a hopeless wimp, so basically without charisma? Because of course the assignment of value to a particular love-object is sometimes completely, and always somewhat, arbitrary. No one is worthy of the passion that desire invests in them. The specifics of character in a desire narrative – and this is why it is always, in one sense, a comic plot – are arbitrary.

Comic characters are 'the young lead', the 'spoilt rich girl', the attractive gay man', the pedant, the harlequin, the bellboy, the prince, etc: stars of stage or screen, *Commedia dell'arte* familiars, Julia Roberts, Cameron Diaz, '*Elena Balletti dite Flaminia ... et Zanetta Benozzi dite Silvia, qui est naturellement Silvia*' (Marivaux, 57, italics in original) [*Elena Balletti, known as Flaminia ... and Zanetta Benozzi, known as Silvia, who of course is Silvia*] (Marivaux [1720] 1964: 57).

Having set up the 'coloured shapes' of comedy from 1723 to 1997, I want to look now at the modes of movement, developing a few further points about how desire circulates in these comedies.

The first of these is the significance of the gaze. In comic drama, we watch with a smile while someone goes through what they believe is agony. The gaze of the audience has perhaps three main functions: superior knowledge, voyeurism and, the most subtle, being the watcher of the watcher. As ever, in each, I shall be considering the balance of pleasure and pain, what Arlequin calls 'rire' and 'pleurer'.

As examples of the audience's superior knowledge, we could return to the sequence with which I began. We know Julianne's desire, which is unknown to

complacent Michael & Kimmy, and we know the meaning of the chase, which is unknown to the mothers; these aspects respectively *pique* our pleasure in sharing a character's suffering and enjoying the stupidity of others. Or, in the scene in the church where George introduces himself as Julianne's fiancé to Kimmy and her hysterical family, we enjoy everyone's discomfiture, known or unknown, alongside the unpredictability of George's next move. In this and other moments of his pretended love-partnership with Julianne, an added fillip for us is the delight this wealthy family takes in his 'New Yorker' sexual ambivalence – an ambivalence that, of course, worries Michael. I shall return to this.

The second function is voyeurism. Surely a majority of the scenes of this beautifully modulated film represent the experience of desire as exclusion. The audience member observes through the eyes of the outsider; being extradiegetic, cannot help them; and thus takes the full force of their exclusion. Theatrical as this experience is, the shot-reverse-shot technique places us further inside the other's psyche than staging can. Thus we see Julianne's tears over Michael's shoulder as they slow-dance on the boat, or gaze with her at the wedding-ring or the fatal email. One effect of these moments of observed vulnerability is that the audience has to switch from condemning or admiring the manipulateness of the author-like 'knower' to responding to a more direct emotional demand. Very often, the tension of these moments is broken by a pratfall, reminding us that we are here to laugh, not cry, even when the characters do. The fullest effect of voyeurism is when we are, again, placed behind the shoulder of the protagonist, watching the watcher: in the karaoke bar, after Kimmy's very acceptance of abjection has won Michael back, we dwell on Julianne's stillness as everyone applauds and they embrace.

What about Marivaux? In theatre, the conventional proscenium arc gives us the 'full picture' and, in that sense, the audience, always consciously multiple as the cinema

audience is not, has a God's eye view. The whole world is a decor for the delightful problem of love. I have suggested that cinema, and this film in particular, is the most poignant is where it is the least theatrical – although, because of the stress on a kind of ritual movement, the principles of dance and song, it is never so for long. What is common to both kinds of performance, in this particular kind of comedy, is the manipulation of the two levels of outsiderhood. Exclusion for the characters is, for the audience, an entry point.

The second point is the function of difference. Again here, I want to take three angles. The first is class difference – in Marivaux, a clear-cut starting-point. The premise of his pair bond is class similarity: like should bond with like, the pretty peasant girl with the good-hearted peasant boy, sophisticates with sophisticates etc. The *peripeteia* is the lesson that has to be learned by going through a reversal of settled class arrangements – as, fatally, in the Musset I referred to earlier. Marivaux's outcomes are one version or another of normalization. In *Arlequin poli par l'amour* (1720) [*Harlequin refined by love*], the hero goes back to his beloved Silvia and the Fée [Fairy] has to give in since, Julianne-like, she has resorted to artifice, magic & deception to try to win love and discovered that it cannot be done. In *La Double Inconstance*, the manipulative Flaminia uses no magic except the susceptibility of the two simple characters to a combination of vanity, material pleasures and pique. Part-Julianne and part-George (and part Mme de Merteuil almost sixty years ahead), she understands what the others do not but is herself permitted to sustain and gratify desire alongside power, ending up with lovable rogue Arlequin. Are we convinced when she ends delighted to marry him? Surely not, except for purely sexual motives, keeping her cleverness to herself like the most conceited author figures.

As the example of class shows, established difference is always the engine and sometimes the resolution of desire. It keeps the wheels turning, while alliances are made and unmade. As we have just seen with (even) Flaminia, the drama of *difference from oneself* is perhaps Marivaux's most powerful weapon against his characters' false beliefs: they are caught out, in the midst of plotting against others, by the 'surprise' of love, discovered or displaced. They learn – as does Julianne – that they cannot coincide with themselves for long.

In *My Best Friend's Wedding*, the essential eighteenth-century difference of class power is replaced (this is Hollywood after all) by wealth; and Marivaux's country/city difference, simplicity versus sophistication, is also given an American slant. This leads us to the second type of difference, the type that overrides similarity. Here the very rich person is the simple one. Kimmy is a problem for Julianne:

Julianne What I mean when I say she's annoyingly perfect is that there's nothing annoying about her perfection. It is vulnerable and endearing. And that is annoying as shit.

George Ah, you like her.

Julianne If I didn't have to hate her I'd adore her.

Class and wealth differences are undercut, in 1990s America, by the sympathy among women but the latter is broken by rivalry, so that other similarities take its place. Julianne's wish for Michael focuses on their commonalities, and her jealousy highlights what separates her from Kimmy: the latter can choose to give up on a career for love, Julianne could not. George is around 40, we assume; Julianne and Michael are 28; Kimmy is a student. Thus, parallel in age, character (best friends, after all) and situation, Julianne and Michael are the proper American heroes, poor and 'driven': he does not

want to work for a rich man but to pursue his career. It is, Julianne explains to Kimmy, the difference between crème brûlée and jello:

Julianne Crème brûlée: it's beautiful – it's sweet – it's irritatingly perfect.
 But he's comfortable with jello. Jello... makes him feel...
 comfortable.

Kimmy I can be jello!

Julianne No. Crème brûlée can never be jello.

Kimmy I have to be jello!

The circulation of differences and samenesses across the sexes leads, as in *Marivaux*, to the negotiations that end up cementing alliances.

There is a third type of difference that functions significantly in both comedies – maybe more in *My Best Friend's Wedding* than in *Marivaux*, tho I did see a curious production of *La double Inconstance* years ago where Flaminia was played by a man – and that last difference is gender. If there are two kinds of women in each case, the 'simple' Kimmy/Silvia type and the clever Julianne/Flaminia type, this difference is far from absolute. For both these types manipulate others, and it is not a difference between greater and lesser coefficients of femininity, *femmes de cœur* or *femmes de tête* [women of heart and women of head], as the terminology used to go. The whole point of *My Best Friend's Wedding* is that Julianne has a heart too, and the lucky pair who survive her plotting do so partly by the strength of their self-centred insensitivity. Neither ones nor couples, neither women nor men, neither rich nor poor are innocent.

Gender puts a stop to the carousel of heterosexual difference, just as the chase across a landscape garden comes up with a shock against urban George at the end of a

phone. It may seem fallacious – urban gay men are not famous for living celibate lives – but the brake on unstoppable desire in this fiction is homosexuality, that same-same impulse that challenges the standard fantasies of heterosexual complementarity. Kimmy's family adore George in the role of Julianne's supposed fiancé both because he removes Julianne as a rival and also because he is feminine in the most charming way, leading them all so brilliantly in song that even Julianne's narcissism is finally roused. Here again he proves Michael the lesser catch, but in a way that no one needs to voice. He is pure theatre, Michael is only legitimate love. And again, as we saw earlier, it is George's warmth, constancy, intelligence and the replacement of dangerous sex by innocuous dance that allows at least a temporary halt to the pain of loss.

My third and last point about the circuitry of these comedies is the ambiguity of the state-between: in the comic triangle, mediation is also interruption, interruption is also mediation.

We have sampled many scenes of triangularity in *My Best Friend's Wedding*. We've seen Kimmy's gaze break up a kiss, Michael's misreading of the couple of Julianne and George, Julianne's defeat at the karaoke bar. But the structures of mediation are not only human ones. Two hundred years ago, the dramas of skewed communication were multiplied by the time it takes – to lift a line from Lacan – for a letter to reach its destination: this is central in texts as different as Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) and Constant's *Adolphe* (1816). In 1997 the tragicomic devices that turn the sublime into the ridiculous or an error into a crime are mobile phones (twice they interrupt and then the third time they are the instrument of restoration) and emails. In the second most cited scene of the film, we watch Julianne stare, fingers poised, at a computer screen that asks her 'Do you wish to send? Yes ... No...'. Prevarication does not work. An unknowing secretary clicks the mouse for her and her wish comes truer than she wishes.

Finally, I want to close the circle – or the circuit – on the question of what is perhaps the most marivauldian aspect of *My Best Friend's Wedding*. The first time I watched it, the man I was with cried almost the whole way through (mind you, he laughed at *The Piano*). It is, of course, a drama about the refusal of desire and the banality of loss. As in Marivaux, the closing resolution is comic, happy, accompanied by a dance – and, like what has preceded it, unbearable.

Works Cited

Allen Woody (2005) *Match Point*

Bergson Henri (1981 [1940]) *Le Rire [Laughter]* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France)

Gide André (1996) *Journal* vol I 1887-1925, ed. Éric Marty (Paris : Gallimard)

Girard René (1961) *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris : Hachette), translated by Yvonne Freccero (1965) as *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins)

Hogan P. J. (2003 [1997]) *My Best Friend's Wedding*

Marivaux (1964) *Théâtre complet*, ed. Bernard Dort (Paris : Seuil)

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1985) *Between Men* (New York: Columbia University Press)

Segal Naomi (1988) *Narcissus and Echo: women in the French récit* (Manchester: Manchester University Press)

----- (1992) *The Adulteress's Child* (Cambridge: Polity Press)

¹ I am not unaware of the partiality of using the heterosexual bond in this conventional way; obviously when we are (as in the nineteenth-century novel) talking of marriage and adultery, the sexes are distributed as I have put them here. Equally obviously, they do not need to be, but what does hold is the base of the rivalry bond in sameness (parallelism, occupation of similar positions) and the base in difference of the originary couple proved horribly separable by the shock of new desire.

² I am referring to *Match Point* (2005), written and directed by Woody Allen, where we get the future consequences of a happy-ever-after: reverse-sexing Cinderella and adding a heavy dose of present-day cynicism, a marriage between a rich girl and a poor man has a messy outcome.

³ Gide wrote in a Journal entry of 1907: 'Les plus belles figures de femmes que j'ai connues sont résignées ; et je n'imagine même pas que puisse me plaire et n'éveiller même en moi quelque pointe d'hostilité, le contentement d'une femme dont le bonheur ne comporterait pas un peu de résignation' (Gide 1996: p. 573) [The most beautiful women's faces I have known are resigned ; indeed I cannot imagine that a woman whose happiness did not include a little resignation could appeal to me; such a woman might even evoke a touch of hostility].