

## The Characteristics versus the “Myths” of Romantic Love

Paula Cañaveras<sup>1</sup>, Garazi Lopez de Aguilera<sup>2</sup>, Mengna Guo<sup>3</sup>, Elisabeth Torras-Gómez<sup>4</sup>, Alba Crespo-López<sup>3</sup>, Benjamín Menéndez-Martínez<sup>5</sup>, M<sup>a</sup> del Pilar Fernández-González<sup>6,5</sup>, Lidia Puigvert-Mallart<sup>1</sup>, & Ramon Flecha<sup>1</sup>

1) *Department of Sociology, University of Barcelona, Spain*

2) *Department of Curriculum & Instruction, University of Wisconsin-Madison, United States*

3) *Department of Theory and History of Education, University of Barcelona, Spain*

4) *Vicerectorate of Research, University of Barcelona; Department of Sociology, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain*

5) *IES Alfonso II, Spain*

6) *Department of Educational Sciences, University of Oviedo, Spain*

### Abstract

The scientific literature has already demonstrated the benefits of romantic love as a key protective factor in the prevention of violence. Some recent publications affirm that romantic love is a powerful cause of gender violence following two steps. First, they attribute a list of causes of violence to romantic love calling them “the myths of romantic love”, including lack of freedom and the normalization of coercion. Nonetheless, research has not explored in depth yet whether what they call “romantic love myths” are consubstantial characteristics of romantic love or not. To that end, this study conducts a historical literature review of scientific articles, books, literary and musical works from diverse cultures and periods. Findings show those myths are not characteristics of romantic love; on the contrary, the literature reviewed shows six main characteristics of romantic love that demonstrate it is the opposite of those myths, as it has freed women from feudal and other subjugations throughout history.

### Keywords

Romantic love, history, freedom, gender violence

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**Corresponding author(s):** Lidia Puigvert-Mallart

**Contact address:** lidia.puigvert@ub.edu

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## Las Características versus los “Mitos” del Amor Romántico

Paula Cañaveras<sup>1</sup>, Garazi Lopez de Aguilera<sup>2</sup>, Mengna Guo<sup>3</sup>, Elisabeth Torras-Gómez<sup>4</sup>, Alba Crespo-López<sup>3</sup>, Benjamín Menéndez-Martínez<sup>5</sup>, M<sup>a</sup> del Pilar Fernández-González<sup>6,5</sup>, Lidia Puigvert-Mallart<sup>1</sup>, y Ramon Flecha<sup>1</sup>

1) *Departamento de Sociología, Universidad de Barcelona, España*

2) *Departamento de Planes de Estudio e Instrucción, Universidad de Wisconsin-Madison, Estados Unidos*

3) *Departamento de Teoría e Historia de la Educación, Universitat de Barcelona; España*

4) *Vicerrectorado de Investigación, Universitat de Barcelona; Departamento de Sociología, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, España*

5) *IES Alfonso II, España*

6) *Departamento de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de Oviedo, España*

### Resumen

La literatura científica ya ha demostrado los beneficios del amor romántico como factor de protección clave en la prevención de la violencia. Algunas publicaciones recientes afirman que el amor romántico es una poderosa causa de la violencia de género siguiendo dos pasos. En primer lugar, atribuyen al amor romántico una lista de causas de la violencia denominándolas "los mitos del amor romántico", entre las que se incluyen la falta de libertad y la normalización de la coacción. Sin embargo, la investigación aún no ha explorado en profundidad si lo que denominan "mitos del amor romántico" son características consustanciales al amor romántico o no. Para ello, este estudio realiza una revisión bibliográfica histórica de artículos científicos, libros y obras literarias y musicales de diversas culturas y épocas. Los resultados muestran que esos mitos no son características del amor romántico; por el contrario, la literatura revisada muestra seis características principales del amor romántico que demuestran que es lo contrario de esos mitos, ya que ha liberado a las mujeres de la sumisión feudal y de otras sumisiones a lo largo de la historia.

### Palabras clave

Amor romántico, historia, libertad, violencia de género

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**Correspondencia Autores(s):** Lidia Puigvert-Mallart

**Dirección de contacto:** lidia.puigvert@ub.edu

Scientific literature has clarified that gender violence does not happen only in stable relationships, but also in hookups (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Basting et al., 2023; Kennair et al., 2018). However, many experts have said and written that gender violence happens in stable partners or in former stable partners (Lelaurain et al., 2021; Ruiz-Pérez et al., 2017; Verschuere et al., 2021). This hoax has had many harmful consequences (Valls et al., 2008; Yuste et al., 2014). The Spanish law against gender violence was based on this hoax (Organic Law No. 1, 2004). Under this law, the killers of girls in their disdainful hookups could not be condemned for gender violence because they were neither stable partners nor former stable partners of their victims. In addition to many programs of violence prevention, much of sexual or emotional education has focused on preventing girls from falling in love and on promoting the considered free and safe sporadic dates (Sánchez-Jiménez et al., 2018; Velasco et al., 2021).

The orientation of the current dialogic society towards social impact and co-creation is reversing those mistakes and their consequences (Flecha et al., 2022). Legislation, policies and programmes are increasingly taking into account the scientific evidence of social impact, including the voices of victims and survivors; they are now oriented against gender violence in relationships of any kind of duration (Kenney et al., 2024; Racionero-Plaza et al., 2021; Reynolds & Fissel, 2019). Multiple and very diverse victims and survivors of dating violence have spoken against the coercion they have suffered from these programmes to subdue themselves to disdainful hookups (Joanpere, 2019; Lopez de Aguilera, 2024). Top health scientific literature has clarified the consequences of disdainful hookups (Puigvert et al., 2023). Until 2022, all kinds of institutions made campaigns against romantic love on days like February the 14th. In 2023 only very few did; in 2024, none (ALLINTERACT Consortium, 2023).

Still, not all research on gender violence prevention follows international scientific evidence of social impact. In relation to some programs' previous focus on the danger of stable relationships, without even touching upon sporadic ones, some literature has emerged attributing the key cause of violence to romantic love (Couture et al., 2023; Lelaurain et al., 2021). This literature has built many and diverse lists of what it calls “the myths of romantic love” (Bosch et al., 2007; Institut Català de les Dones, 2009). All those lists point to the lack of freedom and the normalization of coercion as consubstantial characteristics of romantic love, considered an Eurocentric creation later imposed on other cultures. Although scientific literature has clarified that the lack of freedom and the normalization of coercion does not only exist in stable relationships, but also in hookups (Kelly, 2012; Norris et al., 2021), the literature on the “myths of romantic love” affirms that romantic love is the origin of such problems (Ferrer-Pérez et al., 2008; Rivas-Rivero & Bonilla-Algovia, 2021; Cubell-Serra & Calsamiglia Madurga, 2015). Although there is extensive literature about the origin of romantic love, there is still no research contrasting it with the idea of the “myths of romantic love” and, specifically, with the lack of freedom and the normalization of coercion as consubstantial characteristics of romantic love.

## **Methodology**

The present study entails a historical review aiming to thoroughly examine the characteristics of romantic love to establish whether the so-called “romantic love myths” are consubstantial to it or not. Considering the objective of this study is to comprehensively examine romantic love, the authors have conducted searches across a diverse range of works from different disciplines, spanning several times and cultures, addressing the origin, history and representation of romantic love and its precedents around the world.

On the one hand, a review of the existing scientific literature has been conducted. The search strategy focused on Web of Science (WoS). Several keywords were used, starting the search with general terms such as “romantic love”, “romantic love + origin”, “romantic love + history” to identify main scientific texts about the history and origin of romantic love. In a second search phase, more specific concepts regarding the object of study were conducted, including “coercion”, “freedom”, “rape”, “slavery”, “droit du seigneur”, “right to the lord”, “feudalism”, or “courtly love”, among others. The bibliography of the texts analyzed was also revised and led to more research related to the study.

On the other hand, works of literature, including both prose literature and poetic works that deal with romantic love or its precedents, were thoroughly analyzed, looking for a diversity of literary works that deal with the origin and concept of romantic love in different times, places and cultures. Music related to the ideal of romantic love was also examined to enhance the depth of the analysis.

Last, books that were either cited in some of the articles found or which were found online when searching for specific literary, musical or historical aspects related to romantic love or its precedents and its relationship with freedom were analyzed.

After all the sources were analyzed, six main characteristics of romantic love have been found, which are presented in the following section.

## **Results**

The results show that there is much research, literature, art and many other sources that demonstrate that romantic love is the opposite of what the “myths of romantic love” state. Across the literature analyzed we have found six main characteristics of romantic love - and its precedents - that dismantle and contradict those myths. In this section we explore and provide supporting evidence on each of the characteristics.

- 1) The most relevant and currently referenced ancient writings on romantic love are the love poems of a key feminist from 26 centuries ago: Sappho de Lesbos. The ideal of romantic love has not been created by the patriarchal imposition of heterosexual couples normalizing coercion and lack of freedom.

Looking at what has been written about the ideal of romantic love in literature throughout history it is easy to demonstrate that it has not been created by the patriarchal imposition of

heterosexual couples normalizing coercion and lack of freedom. On the contrary, there are examples of women who did not subjugate to impositions that attempted to remove their freedom and, many centuries ago, wrote about the ideal and feelings of what is now referred to as romantic love. Sappho de Lesbos, the most relevant and referenced author from Ancient history (Finglass & Kelly, 2021), wrote love poems as early as in the 6th century BCE (Park, 2019), being one of the creators of lyric literature (Elkins, 2020). In a period of epic literature praising violence, where men who killed people were portrayed as the heroes, Sappho was one of the main promoters of lyric literature praising sentiments. This is one of her poems: (Sappho, 2002):

He seems to me equal to the gods that man  
 whoever he is who opposite you  
 sits and listens close  
 to your sweet speaking  
 and lovely laughing

Centuries later, more examples of love poems can be found in the *lais* of Marie de France, a French poet from the 12th century CE who wrote a series of twelve short narrative poems celebrating courtly love (Beston, 2013; de France, 1999). For instance, her *lai* *Chevrefoil* tells the story of Tristan and Isolde. This legend, despite having different versions and representations - including Wagner’s famous opera *Tristan und Isolde* -, tells the story between a knight and a princess who defied feudal norms to fight for their love. Her *lai* about this love tale includes the following lines: “Their love so true, so pure, from which their sorrows multiplied” (de France, 1999).

Feminist scholars have also discussed the role of female writers of fairy tales in the 17th century in this regard. In a time and context in which women still had very limited privileges in public life, some of them wrote fairy tales as a way of promoting the transformation towards the utopia (Aguilar-Ródenas, 2023). Not only did women write fairy tales but, as Aguilar-Ródenas (2023) argues, women dominated the production of the *conteuses* [storytellers] literary movement, making up to three fourths of all fairy tales: “Together with Charles Perrault, Préchac and Jean de Mailly, the *conteuses* initiated and cultivated the genre, contributing a more extensive and original production than the male writers. These authors are Mademoiselle Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier de Villandon (1664-1734), Mademoiselle Catherine Bernard (1662-1712), Mademoiselle Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force (1654-1724), Madame Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, condesa de Murat (1670-1716), Madame Durand, Madame Louise de Bossigny, condesa de Auneuil (1670-1730) y Madame d’Aulnoy (1651-1705)” (Aguilar-Ródenas, 2023, p. 59).

Decades later, during Romanticism (late 18th century), female authors who wrote about romantic love can also be found, such as Jane Austen or Emily Brontë. The latter wrote the following verses in her poem *Come walk with me* (Brontë, 1992). In addition to literature, some examples of female composers who have created music about romantic love can also be found. One such example is Fanny Mendelssohn, a composer and pianist from the early Romantic era whose work was, in part, published under her brother’s name (Larry-Todd, 2009). Within her *Gartenlieder*, Op. 3, made up of six songs based on different German poems, *Schöne*

Fremde is among the most famous ones. The lyrics include the following verses about love: “The stars all around me are glowing, Bright eyes of the realms of love, Of future joy they are telling, In far distant lands above”.

Examples of female writers who have written about the ideal of romantic love can also be found in Asian countries. Li Qingzhao, a renowned Chinese poet and essayist from the Song Dynasty (960–1279), wrote a poem titled “《丑奴儿·晚来一阵风兼雨》” [Wind Blows in a Rain at Twilight]. The poem captures a moment shared between her and her husband, detailing how, after playing the Sheng Huang (a musical instrument), she adorned herself lightly in front of the mirror. With a smile, she remarked to her husband about the chilly night awaiting them on the gauze tent's pillow mat. This verse preserves a beautiful moment shared between them.

All these examples prove that, opposed to the myth's attribution of the creation of romantic love to the patriarchy, several women have made literary, musical and artistic creations about the ideal of romantic love throughout history from different parts of the world. Not only are they female but, moreover, some of them are considered feminists. Sappho is, in fact, considered by many to be the first feminist in history (Pleše, 2018) due to her highly relevant contributions to women's rights: she created the first known school for women in the world. Still, diverse references to the ideal of romantic love can be found even earlier than Sappho. Hatfield (2012) and colleagues show evidence that dates what they refer to as passionate love as far back as around the 3500 BCE, where the oldest love letter on which there is proof was found in Sumerians' clay tablets.

2) It has not been created only by Western societies, but also by others from diverse cultures.

Another myth wrongly attributes the origin of romantic love to modern, Western societies. There is extensive scientific literature that demonstrates the universal and cross-cultural characteristic of what is now known as romantic love (Bode & Kushnick, 2021; Fletcher et al., 2015; Hatfield et al., 2012). This is confirmed by many scientific articles that show evidence of its existence in different epochs and cultures: the Tang Dynasty in China, from 618 to 907 (Daniel, 2009); the Joseon Dynasty in Korea, which lasted approximately from 1392 to 1897 (Seongsook, 2022); the Middle Ages, dating approximately from the 5th century to the Renaissance (Burge, 2018); the Romantic period, from around the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Barclay, 2020; Botting, 2019); among black enslaved communities in Southern USA during the 19th century (Reader, 2023); or in Central America throughout the 21st century (Martínez-Alpizar, 2022).

Furthermore, Baumard and colleagues (2022) review the presence of love in literary fiction in 19 different geographical settings and throughout 77 different periods that cover 3.800 years. In their analysis, romantic depictions of love were found, for instance, in literature from Ancient Greece (12th-9th centuries BCE) and Rome (8th century BCE to 5th century CE), or in the Classical Age in India (320 to 550 CE). These studies therefore dismantle the characterization of romantic love as a modern and Western invention, demonstrating that multiple cultures have written about, longed for, and expressed the ideal of romantic love for centuries.

- 3) The precedents of romantic love were, for centuries, reduced to the persons with higher socioeconomic status. Romantic love, with this name, was progressively spread to the general population during Romanticism.

The Cambridge Dictionary understands romantic as “relating to love”. The official Spanish dictionary (RAE) states the following meaning: “sentimental, generoso y soñador” [sentimental, generous and dreamy]. In that sense, “romantic love”, with this terminology, came simultaneously with the democracies, but the path to get what this means came through a struggle initiated by Saphho and others as a clear statement that “love is based on one’s own sentiments” and took diverse names throughout history. Therefore, the ideal of romantic love, in its different names, and the desire and dreams toward it have been present in humanity in different cultures over millennia, and there have always been women and men who have fought for it. However, before it became known as “romantic love” during Romanticism, it was limited to individuals from higher socioeconomic status (Aguilar-Ródenas, 2023, p. 59). For instance, troubadours - poets and musicians, most of them nobles, from Medieval Europe - usually wrote and sang poems about courtly love between knights and damsels (Sawczuk-Szadkowski, 2022). In most cases, courtly love existed between members of noble families (Beltran-Pepió, 2021).

It was not until Romanticism that romantic love, with this name, was progressively spread throughout the general population. As Parkin (2021, p. 278) puts it, in post-Renaissance Europe, “both men and women eventually came to be valued for themselves, not in relation to their natal kin groups. As a result, notions of romantic love and individual choice became dominant”. Dias-Martins and Baumard (2024) analyze the relationship between the evolution of living standards and the expression of romantic love in theater plays. Their findings confirm earlier evidence on the importance that romantic love gained in the 18th century in France and England, a period in which family arrangements and interpersonal relationships underwent significant changes (Dias-Martins & Baumard, 2024).

Along this line, Baumard and colleagues (2022) study the increasing importance romantic love has had throughout history in different cultures through analyzing its depiction in literature. Their findings show a generalized relationship between economic development and an increased presence of romantic love in literary works from very different cultures. One of their hypotheses for this correlation is that economic prosperity might liberate individuals from family pressures or constraints, providing greater freedom to choose partners based on love rather than on economic or other strategic aspects (Baumard et al., 2022).

- 4) Romantic love and its precedents were defenders of individuals’ free choice to have sexual-affective relationships, challenging their subjugation to the decision of the lords or members of their families.

Indeed, on the contrary of what the myths claim, romantic love and its precedents were born to give individuals freedom to choose sexual-affective partners. In different periods and contexts, the ideal of romantic love has freed individuals, especially women, from the normalized subjugation to have relationships with and/or marry whomever lords or family members

imposed. Before romantic love, in many regions - including Western and Asian countries - that were dominated by feudal societies there was no freedom to choose love, and it was usually the fathers or grandfathers who decided who their children would marry. However, many individuals fought for the right to love and, with the increased freedoms that the progress from medieval societies to modern ones brought, provided women the greatest freedom of all: the freedom to choose who to marry or have a relationship with.

Several literary works addressing the struggle against the oppression of love can be found in both Western and Asian countries, such as *Butterfly Lovers* (China) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Italy). Originating within contexts of subjugation, the lovers in both stories challenged coercive norms and fought for the freedom to live their love (Liu & Yu, 2020).

Bulcroft and colleagues (2000, p. 66) explain the increased freedom from social institutions during modernization in relation with an increased freedom to choose partners based on romantic love:

Most scholars would agree that with modernization has come a transformation of social institutions and a lessening of their influence on individual behavior. (...) Accompanying this change has been the nearly complete breakdown of socially regulated mate selection and the emergence of an increasingly autonomous mate selection system based on romantic love and more elaborate and significant premarital relationships

In this line, Parkin (2021) finds a clear distinction: arranged marriages on the one hand and marriages formed by free choice grounded on notions of romantic love. Similarly, Fletcher and colleagues (2015) characterize the latter with a free choice of partners, whereas in the former, “choice” is influenced by family members or societal constraints. These findings are confirmed by an integrative review of research on romantic love from different fields, which shows that the role and increased importance of romantic love in the process of choosing partners is related with a decline in arranged marriages, contributing greater sexual freedom and equality for women (Bode & Kushnick, 2021).

Again, the freedom provided by the ideal of romantic love is not only a Western or European phenomenon. Nelson and Jin Yon (2019) state that the increase in South Korea’s knowledge on Western marriage practices towards the end of the 19th century contributed to the popularization of romantic love as a criterion for marriage based on free choice. Reader (2023) discusses the historical literature on the notion and emotion of love among black enslaved communities in the south of the United States during the antebellum and early postbellum (19th century). While acknowledging that these communities’ expressions and practices around love are complex, the author argues there is an overall consensus in the reviewed scholarship that “love as experienced by Black enslaved communities of the South (...) remains, on the whole, characterized as being formed from free choice, unfettered from coercion, societal pressure, or pragmatic considerations” (Reader, 2023, p. 466). Indeed, the author finds that these communities opposed coercion and love as mutually exclusive, distinguishing intimate partnerships that were coerced - usually from the enslaver - and those born from love. All these studies oppose the coercion or imposition that arranged marriages involve to the freedom to choose a partner that romantic love provides.



- 5) The fact that in the first opera from Romanticism the woman is the one who saves the man, and many other and diverse empirical realities, challenge the idea that in romantic love men always impose on women the need to be their protectors and saviors.

Another myth states that in literature, tales, or other artistic representations, romantic love is always depicted as the men being the heroes who impose their role as women’s protectors and saviors. However, many of these representations, as well as empirical realities, prove this myth false. *Fidelio*, Beethoven’s only opera, is considered the first opera from Romanticism (Lockwood, 2006). Contrary to the myth, it is the woman, Leonore, who saves the man, Florestan, her husband. After Florestan gets imprisoned for attempting to dismantle the crimes committed by another man, Leonore takes on the guise of a man and risks her life to rescue him. The portrayal of Leonore's character in this opera highlights her boldness and bravery, challenging traditional gender roles and underscoring the complexity of romantic narratives (Pearson, 2014).

In the golden age of Spanish drama, in Lope de Vega’s *Fuenteovejuna* (Oechler, 2018), Laurencia claims herself for justice after being the victim of abuse and gender violence. Importantly, devastated for the rape and the impossibility of enjoying her love with Frondoso, she stands up for all women in the village as well as for the dignity of men and becomes a leader who is able to mobilize all the community to protect freedom for love and justice to stop abuse.

Other examples in which women are the heroes can also be found in Asian literature. For instance, a study on the comparative analyses of love poems from the Tang Dynasty in China and the Romantic Period in English literature showed that the Tang Dynasty poems often featured a female heroine (Daniel, 2009).

The false myth is also challenged by empirical realities. There is much research on gender violence on the importance of providing support and acting in favor of victims, as well as towards those who support the victims (Baldry & Pagliaro, 2014; Miller et al., 2012). Support and help are necessary to prevent the further revictimization that many victims suffer when they dare to break the silence; without such support, it is very difficult for victims to overcome it and to transform into survivors (Flecha, 2021). Importantly, regardless of whether the savior or supporter is a man or a woman, it is the victims themselves who ask them to be saved (Machackova et al., 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2022). Doing so is now considered a key requirement in feminism, as society asks bystanders to be upstanders.

- 6) The sexual relationships outside the marriage before the romantic love were mostly not a free decision but an imposition of the powerful men.

In the 4th characteristic of romantic love we have already proven that it has freed individuals from subjugating to arranged or unwanted marriages. There is also evidence of forced and coerced relationships outside of marriage before romantic love, under this term, was created. Romantic love has therefore also freed women to subjugations to sexual-affective relationships outside of marriage. Unlike what is sometimes believed, before romantic love, sexual-

relationships outside of marriage were almost never chosen in freedom; many women, throughout time and across cultures, were forced and subjugated to have sexual-affective relationships without their consent (Digeser, 2023; Milburn, 2023). Indeed, these types of relationships have existed for centuries, including prostitution, rape, slavery, or *droit de seigneur*, among others.

Women's rapes, both within and outside marriages, have existed for millennia, and there are multiple documentations of this in different contexts and epochs. The last documented judicial duels in history has received considerable attention, with a movie released in 2021. It took place in France in 1386. Sir Jean de Carrouges accused his former friend Jacques Le Gris of raping his wife, Marguerite de Carrouges. Marguerite got pregnant, but Jacques Le Gris denied the accusation, so it was decided that the truth would be determined through the duel: whoever survived the duel would win and, therefore, hold the truth - and, if Jean de Carrouges lost, Marguerite would be sentenced to death due to the "false" accusation (Jager, 2005; Wikipedia contributors, 2024). There is also evidence demonstrating the use of rape from the military to women and girls as a war weapon in different wars throughout history (Heineman, 2011; Vihervalli, 2022). The use of women as sex slaves in different periods and cultures has also been reported, with some cases in which it was actually legal for men to have sexual relationships with their female slaves (Myrne, 2019).

Another widely known and documented subjugation to sexual-affective relationships outside of marriage is the *droit du seigneur* or *jus primae noctis*, quite generalized in the feudal system from the Middle Ages. In the climate of the struggle for women's rights, feminists turn their attention to the *droit* in their fight for liberation from male oppression and exploitation (Litvack, 2005). The *droit* gave the overlord the right to the virginity of his vassals' new brides and daughters on their wedding night (Litvack, 2005). This right of the lords was practiced and transmitted as a matter of custom (Litvack, 2005), with its roots in the condition of unfree people in relation to marriage customs (Wettlaufer, 2000). The right of the lord was an instrument of feudal abuse and persecution, as well as a tool of feudal lords' privilege. While it was mostly extended throughout Medieval Europe, including England, France, Germany, and Italy (Litvack, 2005), there is also evidence of its existence in America (Cortazar, 2023; Litvack, 2005), entailing that, throughout history, it has been used as an abuse against those in love in very different contexts (Cortazar, 2023). Thanks to romantic love, lovers fled from their first fate, the system of *pernada*, to live in freedom (Cortazar, 2023).

### Discussion and Conclusion

The six characteristics of romantic love analyzed in this study clearly demonstrate that not only are what some experts refer to as "myths of romantic love" not consubstantial characteristics of romantic love, but also that romantic love, since its origin and even from its precedents, is the opposite of what those myths claim. On the contrary to causing gender violence, romantic love has brought to humanity the freedom to choose sexual-affective partners, serving as a protective factor against gender violence (Yuste et al., 2014).

This study therefore dismantles the hoax that associates lack of freedom and the normalization of coercion to romantic love, proving what some experts call the “myths of romantic love” wrong. The lack of freedom and the normalization of coercion, along with other items usually listed among those myths, are undoubtedly related to gender violence, both in stable and sporadic relationships (Kelly, 2012; Norris et al., 2021). What is wrong and false, as this study demonstrates, is to claim that those causes of violence are inherent characteristics of romantic love. In order to successfully overcome and prevent gender violence, society needs - and demands - scientific evidence of social impact (Flecha et al., 2022). So far, the experts on the “myths of romantic love” have done the opposite: while criticizing and attacking romantic love and the people who want it, they have coerced them to have hookups, many of which are full of violence and disdain (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Basting et al., 2023; Kennair et al., 2018). This study therefore makes an essential contribution to the prevention of gender violence by showing the true characteristics of romantic love, demonstrating that it is intrinsically liberating from coercion and violence.

Indeed, romantic love and the ideals that preceded it were created precisely to provide freedom to individuals. Many women, some of them now considered feminists, have created artistic works about the ideal romantic love many centuries ago, as are the examples of Sappho, Marie de France, the conteuses, or Fanny Mendelssohn, among others. These women’s works demonstrate that the ideal of romantic love was not created by patriarchy and the normalization of coercion and lack of freedom. They also show, along with the multiple articles and books reviewed in this study, that it is not a Western nor modern creation. Indeed, while romantic love came to be named as such during Romanticism, its precedents can be traced as back as to 3500 BCE (Baumard et al., 2022; Hatfield et al., 2012). Results also show the ideal of romantic love can be found in several and diverse cultures: the Classical Age in India, Ancient Greece, the Tang Dynasty in China, the Joseon Dynasty in Korea, and many others, proving it is universal (Bode & Kushnick, 2021; Fletcher et al., 2015; Hatfield et al., 2012). Still, before it was termed romantic love, its precedents were not generalized and, in fact, they were reduced to individuals from high socioeconomic status, such as nobles. It was during Romanticism that it became more generalized and spread across the general population.

Yet, even when the ideal of romantic love was not a reality for most individuals, both romantic love as such and its precedents were created to liberate individuals, especially women, from the sexual-affective relationships they have been subjugated to, both within and outside of marriage (Bode & Kushnick, 2021; Jager, 2005; Litvack, 2005; Vihervalli, 2022). The body of literature that opposes sexual-affective relationships based on notions of romantic love and arranged marriages that have been the norm across cultures and for centuries is extensive (Fletcher et al., 2015; Parkin, 2021). The former were the alternative that provided freedom from the latter. Importantly, there is also evidence showing that the ideal of romantic love has freed women from impositions of unwanted sexual-affective relationships outside of marriage. These have existed throughout history, including prostitution, rapes, was rapes, the droit the seigneur, or slavery (Digeser, 2023; Litvack, 2005; Milburn, 2023). Furthermore, in most cases in which relationships outside of marriage did exist before romantic love, it was not out of women’s free choice, but because they were forced to them. Therefore, the ideal of romantic love has always aimed at overcoming the lack of freedom and the normalization of coercion that has subjugated many women for centuries.

As the findings reported in this study show, there is plenty of evidence that dismantles the “myths of romantic love” and proves that romantic love is and has always been, since its precedents, the opposite of violence and coercion. This is the first study so far that has contrasted the characteristics of romantic love with the myth that claims that it entails lack of freedom and the normalization of coercion (Bosch et al. 2007; Lelaurain et al. 2021; Couture et al. 2023). This research constitutes a fundamental milestone in the comprehension of romantic love, based on scientific evidence which state it as grounded in freedom of choice and as a protective factor against gender violence. In this way, the study dismantles the hoax of the “myths of romantic love” that claim romantic love to be the origin of gender violence; a hoax that has caused great harm in pushing many girls into disdainful hookups full of coercion and subjugation. Fulfilling Article 27 of Human Rights, which states everyone has the right to participate and benefit from science, this article sheds light on the freeing and non-violent inherent characteristic of romantic love.

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