

After “I Do”: Turkish Harlequin Readers Re-Imagine the Happy Ending

By Heather Schell

Published online: March 2020

<http://www.jprstudies.org>

Abstract: Readers of Harlequin romance novels know they can expect a happy ending, but what does a happy ending require? A 2012 survey presented Turkish Harlequin readers with an excerpt from Shirley Jump’s *Back to Mr and Mrs*, published in Turkish in 2010 as *Bir Şans Daha*. The quoted passage detailed a quarrel between the hero and his father that would appear to lead to estrangement. Participants were asked to explain how they imagined the relationship between hero and father by the end of the novel. Of the 178 coded responses, only 15% of participants correctly predicted that the rift would continue; the majority of the participants anticipated a romantic happy ending that included reconciliation with the hero’s father. I employ Geert Hofstede’s theory of the cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism to explore the difference between the American happy ending, in which family relationships are not a required component, and Turkish happy endings, in which the protagonists’ parents are expected to play an ongoing role.

About the Author: Heather M. Schell is an assistant professor in the University Writing Program at the George Washington University, as well as an Area Chair for the Romance Area at the Popular Culture Association. Her research incorporates social science methods into traditional humanities approaches. She is currently at work on a book-length project examining the resurgence of Orientalist romantic fantasy circulating in post-9/11 America and Turkey, from neo-Ottomanism to the imperialist feminism of the sheikh romance and Turkish soap opera. The research in this paper was made possible by a grant from the RWA.

Keywords: collectivism, family, happily-ever-after ending, Harlequin Romance, individualism, popular romance fiction, reader response, romance reader, Turkey

In the fall of 2011, with the support of a grant from Romance Writers of America, permission from Harlequin (HQN) Enterprises, and the enthusiastic support of Arda Gedik, who headed their Istanbul office, I boarded a plane to the Middle East with ambitious plans to conduct a study of Turkish HQN readers.[1] My goal was to learn more about why HQN romances appeal to Turkish readers. I hoped to interview translators and survey readers, perhaps as many as twenty if all went well. The survey included some general questions

about demographics and marketing, but the heart of it centered on a novel by Shirley Jump, *Bir Şans Daha (Back to Mr and Mrs)*, originally published in 2007. I asked participants to evaluate the characters and the plot for how well they fit expectations about gender, nationality, and tradition. I also invited them to speculate about how they would respond to situations in the book, if they were the protagonist.

HQN Türkiye vetted my survey, nixed some questions, suggested others, and fine-tuned my translation. They agreed to post an announcement about the survey on their website and their Facebook page. They also provided an incentive by offering to mail a free book to the first fifty participants. By spring of 2012, the survey was approved by my university's Internal Review Board and ready to go. Three hundred and seventy-one HQN readers responded. This paper explores a small side-project prompted by the survey's final question, which asked readers to speculate about the repercussions of a scenario from Shirley Jump's novel: after the wedding, what will happen between the hero and his estranged father? Readers' responses give us a window into how romantic beliefs translate across cultures.

When we look at representations of love across cultures, we face a challenge of interpretation. If a romance novel popular in the United States works well in Turkey, what does this indicate? Does it stem from parallels between American popular romance and Turkey's long literary heritage of love stories? Do Turks relish these novels for the same reasons Americans do? Or is their enthusiasm a symptom of Turkish aspirations to be more like Americans or whatever "American" evokes for them? We might wonder if this is simply a case of a powerful nation shoving its popular culture down another culture's throat.[2] Such questions are highly relevant in the context of HQN romance novels, which are sold in more than 150 countries around the world. If we follow the seemingly straightforward logic that the novels are popular because they celebrate love, and the idea of love is universal, even there we encounter a substantial debate. Researchers have found conflicting results about the cultural experience of romantic love. For example, within the field of anthropology, one faction makes a tempting argument for romantic love as a basic human experience (see Jankowiak) and another faction presents equally compelling evidence for romantic love as a culturally specific phenomenon (see Lindholm). Some see this emotion as a biological component of what it means to be human, "a mammalian drive to pursue preferred mates" (Fisher et al. 51); others posit love as a mediated experience, as in Eva Illouz's thesis that romantic love is intimately entwined with and constituted by late-capitalist consumption. Even the language scholars use reveals a free-wheeling reluctance to settle on a definition that could easily be pinned down. In the introduction to a collection on "romantic passion," Jankowiak breezily notes that this is "sometimes referred to as romantic love, infatuation, or passionate love" (Jankowiak 14); his fellow anthropologist William Reddy calls this "longing for association" (Reddy 6). The first set of terms evokes a sexual, possibly fleeting experience, while the second suggests a different kind of craving, one that some consider a state of transcendence or encounter with the sacred. As Lindholm notes, "How investigators characterize love will make a vast difference in the number of societies in which they find it" (15).

This paper will not tackle the nature of romantic love. Instead, it explores a more modest subsidiary question, looking at expectations about romantic love, particularly the romantic happy ending, as depicted in HQN romance novels. To examine expectations, we do not need to consider people's actual experience of love so much as their beliefs about it.

These beliefs show up both in popular romance novels and in readers' responses to them. Because readers' expectations are mediated by their knowledge of the romance genre, and the genre's narrative structure is built upon key beliefs about love, we would expect to see substantial overlap between readers' beliefs and the beliefs expressed in the books they read. Cases where readers' expectations do not match the book could reveal a disjunction either between a reader's and the genre's romantic beliefs, or between the book itself and the genre. In the case of the HQN romance, where consistency within a series is key in marketing, a divergence between genre and reader should draw our attention. Such a mismatch holds the potential to reveal differences stemming from national or cultural background and might help explain what North American romance novels mean to readers in the international marketplace.

Counterintuitive though it may seem, the best place to begin investigating this question is at the end or, more precisely, the happy ending. The happy ending is perhaps the single most stereotypical element of American popular culture. James MacDowell, in his 2013 study *Happy Endings in Hollywood Cinema*, notes that this "cliché" "evokes a whole host of assumptions about mainstream American filmmaking," the most famous of which is that the film will end with "the union of a romantic couple" (1). Popular romance novels in the U.S., by reputation and definition, also require a happy ending. Influential scholar Pamela Regis identifies the happy ending as a formal feature of the genre, noting that "readers insist on" it (9). While the Romantic Novelists' Association in the U.K. has pointedly declined to define the genre,[3] their U.S. equivalent, the Romance Writers of America, has built the happy ending into their definition of popular romance. It seems safe to say that most American romance readers, writers, and publishers expect what they commonly refer to as an HEA ("happily ever after"), or at least an HFN ("happily for now"). Even in Turkey, Harlequin readers in my study who happened to mention genre agreed that "the books must end nicely," and that happy endings are "typical."

Romances with happy endings are typified by Harlequin Enterprises, famed for their monthly publications of short category fiction. Of course, Harlequin is not solely a North American phenomenon, nor do all its authors and readers hail from this continent. Before it became a global behemoth, Harlequin began as a small family business in Canada, back in 1949, republishing popular light fiction in paperback format (Markert 26). At the time, it offered between 25-65 books a year (Markert 27); it now publishes 110 new books every month, at which point those novels are backlisted to make way for new titles. Since 1971, Harlequin has also owned Mills and Boon, the well-known British publisher of romance fiction. Today's Harlequin is a division of Harper-Collins. This acquisition gave Harper-Collins access to Harlequin's distribution and sales networks in 102 international markets. While Harlequin is still headquartered in Toronto, we can more accurately think of Harlequin romances as representing the Anglosphere, with the majority of its authors and its heroines coming from the UK, the US, and Australia. Though the happy ending seems to be most strongly associated with the US, this key expectation of the popular romance genre is thus shared across borders.

The triumph of the happy ending in the romance genre affirms a romantic belief widely held in the United States: that "love will find a way." Psychologists investigating what they term "romanticism," or an individual's orientation towards love, have identified a set of core beliefs that comprise an ideology of romantic love (see Sprecher & Metts 1989). These beliefs tend to be fairly consistent across gender and race and vary more widely between

cultures (Sprecher & Toro-Morn; Regan & Anguiano). In America, the beliefs in love triumphing over obstacles, love at first sight, one true love, and the loved one as perfect have a long history; researchers have documented them as far back as the mid-eighteenth century in a content analysis of colonial magazines (Lantz et al.). Of all of these, the conviction that “love will find a way” is arguably the core belief embedded in the American popular romance, marking the genre’s difference from love stories with tragic endings, where family, fortune, or fate keeps the lovers apart.

Despite an American preference for happy endings, it remains unclear what precisely a happy ending entails. What constitutes happiness? How long is “ever after”? Is it enough if, on the last pages of the book, the protagonists feel happy and we know of no looming disaster that might change this? Does it matter that the characters deserve their happiness? For example, if our heroine has saved the day for the serial killer hero by murdering her devoted mother and framing her little sister for the crime, can that count as a happy ending? Finally, aside from the two lovebirds, how inclusive does the happy ending need to be? When the Romance Writers of America (RWA) decided to define the romance as a “love story” that requires an “emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending,” they left those questions to the reader (Romance Writers of America). In this essay, when I write about “the popular romance,” I’ll be referring to the RWA’s “American” model.

Many happy endings in the popular romance novel do not include happiness for protagonists’ families, or even require any family at all. A terrible upbringing gives a protagonist the chance to find a happy ending by joining the loved one’s contrastingly “good” family, or at least escaping her own. This pattern long predates HQN stories, extending back to the works by Jane Austen that many see as setting the stage for the popular romance genre. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Lizzy’s and Jane Bennet’s love marriages free them from living with their mother. Sometimes, especially in short-format novels such as Harlequins, the parents double as antagonists. By vanquishing these authority figures, the heroine or hero can demonstrate the type of personal growth readers want to see.[4] Cutting ties with kin allows independence from their rules and worldview and opens the possibility for further personal growth.[5] Many happy endings result, at least in part, from the protagonist casting off a bad relationship with a parent or setting firm parameters to limit the parent’s future role.[6] In Regis’s terms, the parents can supply the barrier that impedes the love union, and the point of ritual death might involve a game-changing confrontation or estrangement from them (see Regis Ch. 4).

This is certainly the case in *Back to Mr and Mrs*, the 2007 novel by Shirley Jump that I used in my study of Turkish Harlequin readers in 2012. The novel opens with the protagonists’ disappointing life after their original happy ending. Melanie and Cade are on the verge of divorce; she is making a fresh start with her own coffee shop, while Cade struggles to rekindle their lost relationship. Other characters appear infrequently, aside from their daughter. Cade’s father, Jonathon, is primarily a villain, insofar as Cade’s time-consuming work for his father’s law firm has essentially turned our hero into an absentee husband and father. Jonathon’s law firm expresses a masculinist, work-oriented view of the universe; his patriarchal heritage is nothing but a trap for Cade, and it forms the barrier that has sabotaged Cade’s relationship with Melanie over the years. Cade decides that he will prove himself to Melanie by taking a short leave from the law firm to help with the coffee shop. This decision tells us that Cade wants to change his focus from his father’s needs to his wife’s needs, both of which are exemplified by their jobs. In a pivotal scene, Cade informs his

father that he will be away for a week. This quickly escalates into a confrontation, in which their painful honesty results in Jonathon firing his son. Cade's shock at this bitter quarrel, his determination to stand up for Melanie, his decision to leave law to follow his own dreams, and his subsequent soul-searching discussion with his wife all demonstrate to readers that Cade has had a breakthrough in self-understanding and now has the potential to be a better partner and parent. With his own part played, Jonathon disappears from the book for good.

I asked the participants to read an excerpt of this confrontation, in which Jonathon insists that the law firm must take priority over Melanie. The scene I provided was an almost verbatim version of the published Turkish translation. I posed a number of questions about Cade's and Jonathon's behavior, with a final, open-ended question that asked, "By the end of the book, Cade and [his] spouse renew their wedding vows. After that, what ought to happen between Cade and [his] father?" [7] To explore the role of the extended family in the happy ending, I first translated all of my participants' answers, with the help of my research assistant. I then coded these to answer three questions. The first question evaluated whether the participant predicted reconciliation or continued estrangement between father and son. The second looked for any explanation the participant offered for how her ending came about; I focused particularly on expressed norms about families, personal growth, references to work, and genre expectations. Finally, I noted whether Cade, Jonathon, or someone else was the main agent in bringing about this ending (generally, this person was the sentence's subject, as in "Cade needs to apologize").

EXCERPT:

Late one Sunday evening, Cade enters his father's law firm, where he also works. He finds his father at his desk.

"Cade," his father said, laying the brief aside. "Glad you came in. I wanted to talk to you about the Tewksbury case."

"I'm not here to work, Dad." The look of surprise on his father's face told Cade he'd spent far too many weekends here. "I wanted to talk to you." He slipped into one of the two claw-foot chairs facing his father. "I'm taking next week off."

"Off?" his father echoed, surprise in his tone, his brows arched above the gold frames. "What could possibly be more important than the Tewksbury case?"

"Melanie." Cade swallowed. "I'm going to work in her coffee shop this week."

The silence in the room was as heavy as a steel beam. "You're *what*?"

"Going to—"

"I heard you the first time." His father scowled. "What the hell are you thinking?"

"I'm trying to save my marriage."

"At the expense of this firm. She's divorcing you, Cade. Let her go, for God's sake."

“She’s my wife.”

Jonathon waved a hand in dismissal. “You can always get another. A hell of a lot easier than I can find a lead attorney on this Tewksbury mess.”

Anger boiled inside of Cade. He knew, since the day he’d told his father Melanie was pregnant, that the marriage had been a disappointment, a detour from the path Jonathon had planned for the son he saw as the heir to the firm. “Is that how you look at wives? Interchangeable?”

“That’s how I look at the ones who walk out on their husbands for no good reason.”

(Shirley Jump, *Back to Mr & Mrs*, pp. 135-36)

Before turning to the results of my survey, I want to set the stage by comparing my Turkish survey participants with the general Turkish and American populations, and then reviewing some intriguing research on romantic beliefs.

Let’s begin with the hostile yet pervasive stereotype that imagines readers of genre fiction—especially romance readers, and most especially Harlequin readers—as uneducated. On examining the demographic data from my survey, I found that 95% of participants reported at least a high school degree, and 61% had completed college. This represents a highly educated group of Turkish women.[8] According to the 2013 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey, only 31.1% of Turkish women of childbearing age had completed high school (Hacettepe University).[9] U.S. Census data in 2015 reports that 89% of women 25 and older had a high school degree, while 43% had attained a college degree of associates or higher (US Census 2). In other words, the Turkish Harlequin readers who took my survey are highly educated, by both Turkish and American standards. Since these participants were recruited from HQN Türkiye’s Facebook page and website, rather than a random sample, it is possible that they do not accurately represent the population of HQN readers; indeed, the general editor for HQN Türkiye insisted that my results could not possibly be correct, because educated women would not read these novels. However, as HQN had never (at least up until 2012) conducted any research on their Turkish readers, my data is the best available. Also, a 2005 RWA survey found that American romance readers are far from ignorant, instead mirroring the U.S. population at large; 89% reported completing high school, with 49% attaining college degrees.[10] These results parallel my findings and suggest that the stereotype about romance readers derives less from reality than from literary snobbery.

Another common stereotype imagines romance readers in general as less likely to be married than their peers who do not read romance. This stereotype works from the assumption that only women driven by lonely desperation would read romance, which is similar to insisting that mystery readers are motivated by their frustrated inability to solve murders in their own communities. My study results run counter to this stereotype: for participants 40 and older, only 15% are unmarried, in keeping with the Turkish norm (Hacettepe University). It is the case that younger participants are more likely to be single than the national average would suggest. However, national data reveals that age of first marriage for Turkish women is inversely correlated with education level; it increases from

18.9 years for women with no education to 24.6 years for women who attained a high school degree (Hacettepe). If that pattern holds, age of first marriage is likely to be even later for women with college degrees. While American marriage rates are fairly similar to Turkish rates (only 17% of women 25 and older have never been married, according to Wang and Parker, Ch. 2), higher social status in the US is correlated with higher rates of marriage (Lundberg & Pollack).

Another useful tool for comparing these populations is the Romantic Beliefs Scale developed by Susan Sprecher and Sandra Metts. The survey's fifteen questions assess the four key romantic beliefs mentioned earlier: "love finds a way," "one and only," "idealization" (of the partner and of the relationship), and "love at first sight." Answers to individual questions are not typically very useful on a survey about beliefs or attitudes, since a single question cannot capture a complicated belief. There also tends to be a tremendous amount of variability among individual responses. Therefore, to uncover the larger concepts that individual questions express, Sprecher and Metts began with more than forty questions and identified underlying constructs with the help of a statistical procedure known as a factor analysis. This procedure can uncover patterns in a large dataset—in this case, the romantic beliefs listed above, which can be efficiently assessed with just fifteen questions.

The Romantic Beliefs Scale has since been validated for a number of different populations, both by the original researchers and by others. It is important to keep in mind that Sprecher and Metts originally developed their scale working primarily with white American university students from the Midwest. Researchers using the survey on different populations often ask participants the questions and then perform their own factor analysis to see how the questions cluster; to the extent that the same clusters hold true between two populations, we can conclude that those core romantic beliefs are shared. This allows us to compare romantic beliefs across cultures, nationalities, genders, generations, and so forth.

Although I did not include questions from the Romantic Beliefs Scale on my survey, two Turkish researchers, Küçükarslan and Gizir, used the measure on 957 university students in Turkey. Their factor analysis found the same four core beliefs.[11] "Love finds a way" was the belief that participants endorsed most strongly. This suggests that, for the most part, American and Turkish college students adhere to the same romantic beliefs. It is reasonable to assume that my survey participants also share these expectations and did so before they ever read a HQN novel.

To assess whether a respondent believes that "love finds a way," the Romantic Beliefs Scale includes items such as these: "If I love someone, I will find a way for us to be together regardless of the opposition to the relationship, physical distance between us or any other barrier," and "If I were in love with someone, I would commit myself to him or her even if my parents and friends disapproved of the relationship." As noted earlier, the assumption that "love will find a way" is key to the structure of the popular romance, in which "opposition to the relationship" can form the barrier that builds essential narrative tension, while overcoming this opposition brings about a happy ending. The passage I chose from Shirley Jump's novel illustrates a moment at which readers see the hero defy his father, removing the barrier and opening a path for the protagonists, Melanie and Cade, to reach a happy ending.

The question I posed made it obvious to the readers taking the survey that Melanie and Cade would reunite. What the excerpt did not indicate, however, is how or whether Jonathon, Cade's father, would play a role. In the actual book, he disappears after the quarrel

at the law firm. It is telling, therefore, that most of my participants assume he will play a part in the happy ending. Out of the 172 responses that I could code, 77% imagine that Cade and his father will eventually reconcile. Of those, by far the most popular explanation is a *change of heart*, which characterized 33% of the responses. Here are some examples, in the readers' own words:

- “[Jonathon] realizes he was wrong and forgives Cade and his wife.”
- “[Jonathon] understands he was wrong and seeks his son’s forgiveness, will live happily ever after and be a slave to his granddaughter.[12]”
- “[Jonathon] recognizes his mistake and shuts up ... after a lot of trouble, of course...”

A related response highlights the irresistible draw of *family* relationships: seeing one’s child happy, loving one’s grandchild, and so forth. One quarter of responses offer this type of explanation, such as “I think that the aforementioned baby probably fixes the relationship” and “[Jonathon] must have watched their oath-taking ceremony with tears in his eyes.” Notice that this variant does not require any characters to change. A subset of these family-oriented responses expresses core expectations about the nature of family. These comments base their speculation about the ending on generalizations about how familial relationships function, such as,

- “Family comes before work.”
- “A father never gives up on his son.”
- “Blood is thicker than water.”
- “I don’t think a father could cause trouble for a couple who have loved each other this long.”
- “In general, fathers are sensible about this kind of situation.”
- “Fathers eventually forgive their kids. They have to.”

Other reconciliations were primarily *pragmatic*, decisions made to maintain the relationship but without any reference to forgiveness or a change of heart. One clear-cut pragmatic response suggests that Cade’s father “understood that [the couple] was on the path to love and that compromise was his last resort.” In another example, a participant speculates, “When [Melanie and Jonathon] realize that Cade can’t choose between them, they reconcile.” This type of pragmatic scenario was imagined by 21% of the respondents.

The passage that participants read sets up tension between familial love and romantic love as a choice between the demands of two different kinds of work (the law office and the coffee shop). This motif of relationships as work is ultimately resolved through the commitment ceremony, which, appropriately enough, takes place in Melanie’s coffee shop. However fascinated I was by the meaning of work in this novel, it did not appear to resonate with the readers who took the survey. This may be partially due to the translator’s decision to render “coffee shop” as “cafeteria,” thereby removing the warm, cozy associations that make Melanie’s small business an extension of the home. Regardless, the responses rarely allude to work in their description of the ending. Several speculate that Cade would lose his job. A few readers refer to work in statements about the primacy of relationships, as in this response: “Cade’s father has learned that real love and family are more important and valuable than work, I hope :).”

Only nine readers imagine a rapprochement that is somewhat incomplete or marred by lingering bad feeling. For instance, one participant suggests that their relationship will get better but adds, “Even though you fix the broken glass, it will leak water. This is going to be

something like that.” Another fourteen readers (11%) speculate about permanent estrangement. A few put Cade in charge of this decision, or do not specify who did it, as this example illustrates: “The father is no longer a part of things. That is how it should be.” However, out of these pessimistic responses, most suggest that Jonathon is the instigator, speculating that he will fire Cade, disown him, or even, in one unfortunate turn of events, “[turn] against [the couple] and [try] to ruin them in every way.” Some of these responses hinge on strong expectations about the patriarchal family, such as these:

- “Cade’s father had strict rules and had to part ways with Cade; even a grandchild does not soften it.”
- “Ultimately, he’s the father. His every decision must be supported.”
- “Unfortunately, in Turkey the family decides like they are the third person in the marriage.”

A few participants stop short of positing permanent alienation and instead note that Cade or his father would be very angry, or unwilling to forgive the other, or would need to ask for forgiveness. One reader remarks, “If it were me who was the father and male, I would show my teeth.” If we combine these angry options with the ones that specify a breach, we still have only 15% of the responses predicting the estrangement that actually happens in the book.

One fascinating subset of responses expresses an explicit understanding of genre. For example, one respondent writes, “It’s reversible. This story always has a happy ending.” Her response clearly indicates a conviction that a happy ending must include reconciliation. Another comments, “Since everyone will be happy, it is possible that there will be a happy ending.” Because the question explicitly stated that the couple renewed their wedding vows, this respondent apparently feels the wedding vows were insufficient to guarantee a happy ending; for that to come true, Cade and his father would have to be on good terms. One participant speculates about two outcomes, suggesting, “Either Cade turned his back on his father OR according to the happy ending, his father accepted his bride.” If we consider these intriguing remarks alongside the high percentage of respondents who imagine a reconciliation, then it seems clear that most Turkish Harlequin readers see good family relationships as an essential part of the happy ending.

I would argue that the readers’ responses reveal a meaningful cultural difference in the understanding of the happy ending. Cross-cultural studies of personal relationships have found strong, persistent differences in how people respond to questions like this one: “Suppose your fiancé(e) and your parents do not get along well. What would you do?” (Goodwin 22). These differences, as originally described by Geert Hofstede, can be understood by looking at the inherent structure of cultural values. Hofstede described values as continuous dimensions, which are organized around “fundamental issues in human societies to which every society has to find its particular answers” (Hofstede 83). In other words, cultural differences arise from where people fall on those different value dimensions. I would like to propose that one of these dimensions, individualism-collectivism, helps explain the values expressed in Turkish readers’ imagined endings.

Individualism refers to a value common among cultures in the Western world, which set great store by “attending to the needs of the self over others”: “for most Westerners it is the attainment of personal happiness, rather than group happiness, that is highly regarded and sought after” (Chang, Asakawa & Sanna 477). This is epitomized by the Declaration of Independence, a document that enshrines Americans’ belief in the right to life, liberty, and

the pursuit of happiness (477). Not surprisingly, the U.S. is widely held to have the world's most individualistic culture.

In sharp contrast, cultures considered to be collectivist prioritize “group solidarity, sharing, duties and obligations, and group decisions” (Buunk, Park, & Duncan 24). Turkey, despite some individualistic values, is highly collectivist (Ayçiçeği-Dinn & Caldwell-Harris 10). While these values interact in complicated ways and are not mutually exclusive (see Kağıtçıbaşı), I want to focus on one key distinction: “the emphasis on loyalty to one’s family and giving in to the wishes of one’s family” in contrast to individualistic cultures’ insistence “on following one’s own desires and preferences” (Buunk, Park, & Duncan 24). This cultural dimension can exert a meaningful influence on dating and romance. Collectivist societies expect parents to play a role in their child’s selection of a spouse; we can see arranged marriages as an archetypal example. Research has shown a strong connection between how much of a role parents have in their children’s selection of partner and how collectivist their culture is (Buunk, Park, & Duncan 36).

It’s important to emphasize that there is no inherent virtue in either an individualist or a collectivist society. For example, using women’s rights as a test case, both societal models have historically been effective structures for patriarchy; both have also been approaches used by feminists, from many countries. And storytellers have offered us countless tales of love, happy and unhappy, in collectivist and individualist contexts. After all, both *Pretty Woman* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* have happy endings.

That said, individualistic societies are more likely to stress the importance of love-based unions. In the U.S., for example, while certainly there are people who marry for reasons other than love, such as financial advantage or parental approval, such arrangements tend to be judged harshly by the general public, as greedy, weak, or otherwise flawed. The right to marry for love is so highly cherished that many Westerners find it hard to imagine love resulting from an arranged marriage (except, of course, for the many romance writers and readers who relish a nice marriage of convenience or forced marriage as a plot device).[13]

The results of this study of Turkish HQN readers suggest a reconciliation of collectivism and individualism: the protagonists achieve individual happiness based on choice—love finds a way—while they also obtain parental approval. A partial explanation for this hybrid happy ending lies in the founding of Turkey as a republic, when leaders intentionally and dramatically imported “modern” Western values and imposed them on a more traditional culture. This project began in the nineteenth century among Ottoman elites and had, by the time the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923, become an ambitious program of national reform, intended to implement Western ideals such as democracy, modernization, and civil and political rights for women while also promoting nationalism.[14] This epistemological break (as Nilüfer Göle describes it) was drastic, upending even the country’s language and alphabet. As part of the modernization project, the “ideals of the companionate marriage and child-centeredness” were celebrated as nationalist goals (Duben & Behar 106-107). Reforms included banning marriages without spousal consent (Baykara-Krumme 2153). Many of these changes paired individualism and nationalism, associating traditional, intergenerational family ties with old-fashioned Ottoman ways. The elites who supported these reforms, known as Kemalists after the charismatic Kemal Atatürk, tended to posit a very Western binarism between civilized modernity and backwards traditionalism.

Lived experience is, as always, more complicated than ideals. As Nilüfer Göle notes, “the majority of the Turkish population easily create hybrid forms to integrate their daily practice of religion, their traditional conservatism, and their aspirations to modernity” (16). For example, the practice of arranged (and sometimes forced) marriage does still persist; a national survey from 2013 found that 7% of women reported being in a marriage to which they had not consented (Hacettepe University 190). However, arranged marriages and love marriages in Turkey are not mutually exclusive. Both frequently incorporate dating and choice, as well as family involvement and financial support (Hortaçsu). In that same 2013 study, 49% of women said their marriage was the couple’s decision, and another 40% reported that they had consented to marriages arranged by their families (Hacettepe University 190).

In the affection that Turkish Harlequin readers hold for their family-oriented happy endings, we see a similar hybridity: these endings embrace the idea of a love match central to American romance, but also expect that the couple will become an integral part of an affectionate extended family. American and Turkish endings, side by side, point to a strong cultural difference in what readers most value. In Shirley Jump’s American story, we find an individualistic happy ending made possible by Cade’s personal growth, resulting from the divisive disagreement with his father. As the more collectivist Turkish readers reimagine the end, Jonathon will also experience meaningful personal growth, a change of heart that will ultimately reunite three generations of their family. My study, while preliminary, exemplifies why we need to pay more attention to the way in which other cultures imagine their happy endings. If we explore the various iterations of a happy ending across cultures, we can understand more about what cultures most value, or perhaps instead what types of happiness they imagine as reasonably within human reach. If we learn how to read the happy ending, we can decode the secret map to the cherished fantasies of the human heart.

[1] This project would have been impossible without the assistance of HQN Türkiye’s editor, Irem Yerlikaya, and Ali Onur Sengul, my research assistant.

[2] This option of course has to be considered, but Turkey’s thriving culture industry, with its cosmopolitan embrace of traditional, imported, and hybrid forms, make cultural imperialism seem less probable as an explanation for Turkish Harlequins.

[3] The RNA notes, “We all think we know what love is—but just what is a romantic novel? That’s a harder question than you might think.”

[4] For a good example, see the character of Ben Hausman in *Truly* (2014), by Ruthie Knox. On the verge of destroying his burgeoning relationship with the heroine Mae, Ben makes a trip to his childhood home, where he can at last repudiate his father and reject his own heritage of anger. Only then can he return to Mae and offer himself as a worthy love object.

[5] Alyssa Cole’s *A Duke by Default* (2018) features Tavish McKenzie, who runs an armory but is heir to a dukedom. Tav is inspired to reclaim the title in order to wrest the duchy from a dangerously xenophobic cousin. This new position will allow him to thwart the prior duke’s anti-immigrant policies.

[6] Jennifer Crusie’s *Bet Me* (2005) traces the heroine Min’s romantic adventures, which parallel the hero’s successful efforts to help her free herself from the self-hatred she was taught by her judgmental mother.

[7] Turkish pronouns do not convey gender.

[8] One key limitation to this study is that participants were not asked whether they were male or female. Editorial staff at HQN Türkiye firmly vetoed that question, on the grounds that the HQN readers they had met or who had joined the HQN Türkiye Facebook group were women. Since the majority of my study participants were recruited from that Facebook page, I am working with the assumption that these participants were female.

[9] This 2013 survey is the one most proximate to my 2012 study. However, it did not collect data on higher education.

[10] The RWA data was collected by the market research firm Corona Research. I drew my data from a question that allowed participants to provide multiple answers, including “college degree,” “post-graduate work,” and “bachelor’s degree or higher.” The total for the first two (27% and 15%) match the percentage reported for bachelor’s degrees (42%), so I combined this 42% with the 7% who reported associate’s degrees to parallel the Census Bureau’s “associate’s degree or higher.”

[11] Two of the fifteen individual items were not significant in the Turkish study, but the remaining thirteen clustered in exactly the same way as in the original study, with the only difference being that “love at first sight” emerged as more important than “idealization.”

[12] This response clearly fits two categories: “change of heart” and “family” (see discussion of this category below), in which a grandchild’s mojo works its magic. In such cases, I coded both. Mathematically-inclined readers will thus notice that the percentages mentioned in the next few pages do not total to 100%.

[13] For example, see Quek’s discussion of arranged marriage, which she sees as perilously close to forced marriage (629). While I share Quek’s concern about forced marriage as a human rights issue, the article sets “love marriages” outside this continuum of patriarchal “coercion and pressure” (629), a move that seems driven more by cultural bias than by documented differences in rates of marital happiness.

[14] Kemalists did not invent Turkish feminism. Ottoman women were already debating ideas about women’s rights, as historians have traced in women’s magazines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; one key concern focused on whether or not feminism was unacceptably “Western” (Çakır 72). However, egalitarian policies were not actually enacted until the early days of the Turkish Republic (White 145).

Works Cited

- Ayçiçeği-Dinn, Ayse, and Catherine L. Caldwell-Harris. "Individualism-Collectivism among Americans, Turks and Turkish Immigrants to the U.S." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2011, pp. 9-16.
- Baykara-Krumme, Helen. "Impacts of Migration on Marriage Arrangement: A Comparison of Turkish Families in Turkey and Western Europe." *Journal of Family Issues*, vol. 38, no. 15, 2017, pp. 2150-2177.
- Buunk, Abraham P., Justin H. Park, and Leslie A. Duncan. "Cultural Variation in Parental Influence on Mate Choice." *Cross-Cultural Research*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2010, pp. 23-40.
- Çakır, Serpil. "Feminism and Feminist History-Writing in Turkey: The Discovery of Ottoman Feminism." *Aspasia*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 61-83.
- Chang, Edward, Kiyoshi Asakawa, and Lawrence Sanna. "Cultural Variations in Optimistic and Pessimistic Bias: Do Easterners Really Expect the Worst and Westerners Really Expect the Best When Predicting Future Life Events?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 81, no. 3, 2001, pp. 476-491.
- Duben, Alan, and Cem Behar. *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility, 1880-1940*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Fisher, Helen E., et al. "Reward, Addiction, and Emotion Regulation Systems Associated with Rejection in Love." *Journal of Neurophysiology*, vol. 104, no. 1, 2010, pp. 51-60.
- Goodwin, Robin. *Personal Relationships across Cultures*. Routledge, 1999.
- Göle, Nilüfer. *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*. University of Michigan Press, 1996.
- Hortaçsu, Nuran. "Family- versus Couple-Initiated Marriages in Turkey: Similarities and Differences over the Family Life Cycle." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2007, pp. 103-116.
- Hacettepe University, Institute of Population Studies. "2013 Turkey Demographic and Health Survey." Hacettepe University, 2014, <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-fr352-dhs-final-reports.cfm>. Accessed 29 Oct. 2017.
- Hofstede, Geert. "Cultural Dimensions in Management and Planning." *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1984, pp. 81-99.
- Illouz, Eva. *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. University of California Press, 1997.
- Jankowiak, William. *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?* Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Jump, Shirley. *Back to Mr and Mrs. Harlequin*, 2007.
- Kağıtçıbaşı, Çiğdem. "The Autonomous-Relational Self." *European Psychologist*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1996, pp. 180-186.
- Küçükarslan, Müzeyyen, and Cem Ali Gizir. "Romantik İnançlar Ölçeği'nin Uyarlanması: Geçerlik ve Güvenirlik Çalışmaları [Adaptation of the Romantic Beliefs Scale: Validity and Reliability Studies]." *Mersin Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2013, pp. 461-69. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307840115_Romantik_Inanclar_Olcegi'nin_Uyarlanmasi_Gecerlik_ve_Guvenirlik_Calismalari. Accessed 29 Oct. 2017.

- Lantz, Herman R., et al. "Pre-Industrial Patterns in the Colonial Family in America: A Content Analysis of Colonial Magazines." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1968, pp. 413-426.
- Lindholm, Charles. "Romantic Love and Anthropology." *Etnofoor*, 2006, pp. 5-21.
- Lundberg, Shelly, and Robert A. Pollak. "The Evolving Role of Marriage: 1950-2010." *The Future of Children*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2015, pp. 29-50.
- Quek, Kaye. "A Civil Rather than Criminal Offence? Forced Marriage, Harm and the Politics of Multiculturalism in the UK." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2013, pp. 626-646.
- MacDowell, James. *Happy Endings in Hollywood Cinema*. Edinburgh University Press, 2013.
- Markert, John. *Publishing Romance: The History of an Industry, 1940s to the Present*. McFarland, 2016.
- Reddy, William M. *The Making of Romantic Love: Longing and Sexuality in Europe, South Asia, and Japan, 900-1200 CE*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Regan, Pamela C., and Carlos Anguiano. "Romanticism as a Function of Age, Sex, and Ethnicity." *Psychological Reports*, vol. 107, no. 3, 2010, pp. 972-976.
- Regis, Pamela. *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Romance Writers of America. "About the Romance Genre." *RWA*, n.d., <http://www.rwa.org>. Accessed 29 Oct. 2017.
- . "Reader Statistics [2005]." *RWA*, n.d., <http://www.rwa.org>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2016.
- Romantic Novelists' Association. "About the RNA." *RNA*, 2017.
- Ryan, Camille L., and Kurt Bauman. "Educational Attainment in the United States." *Current Population Report P20-578*. US Census Bureau, 2016, pp. 1-11.
- Sprecher, Susan, and Sandra Metts. "Romantic Beliefs: Their Influence on Relationships and Patterns of Change Over Time." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 16, no. 6, 1999, pp. 834-851.
- Sprecher, Susan, and Maura Toro-Morn. "A Study of Men and Women from Different Sides of Earth to Determine if Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus in Their Beliefs about Love and Romantic Relationships." *Sex Roles*, vol. 46, nos. 5/6, 2002, pp. 131-147.
- Wang, Wendy, and Kim Parker. "Record Share of Americans Have Never Married." *Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends*, Sep. 2014, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/09/24/record-share-of-americans-have-never-married/>. Accessed 29 Oct. 2017.
- White, Jenny B. "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman." *NWSA Journal*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2003, pp. 145-159.