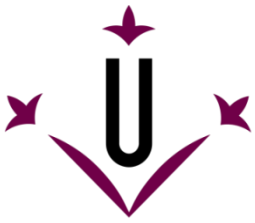

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Part of the Iceberg That Doesn't Show: Romance, Good Husbands, and Mr. Julia Child

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INTRODUCTION: *JULIE & JULIA*, ROMANCE, AND THE ROMANCE HERO

Norah Ephron's film *Julie & Julia* (2009) is a light-hearted and heart-warming culinary comedy that chronicles the parallel lives of two real women who delighted in cooking and turned their passion for food into their livelihood. Based on Julie Powell's memoir *Julie & Julia: My Year of Cooking Dangerously* (2005), and Julia Child's autobiography *My Life in France* (2006), written with her grand-nephew Alex Prud'homme, Ephron's film is also a love story. In fact, a story of many loves. It tells Julie Powell's (Amy Adams) story of love for Julia Child (Meryl Streep), which led her to take up the challenge of cooking the 524 recipes in Child, Louisette Berthole and Simone 'Simca' Beck's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Volumes I and II* in 365 days, keeping a blog about her feat. Ephron's film is also about Julia Child's love story with Paris, France, and French food. She turned this into a career after graduating from *Le Cordon Bleu* with a *Diplôme de Cuisine* in 1951, teaming up with Simca and Louisette to found the cookery school *L'École des Trois Gourmandes*, a culinary experience from which their ground-breaking recipe book emerged. In the third place, the film is also the love story between Julia and her husband, Paul Child (Stanley Tucci),[1] whose partnership not only made *Mastering* possible, but also everything that followed in its wake as Julia Child became a celebrity chef and American icon. Child described his role as his wife's

partner as "the part of the iceberg that does not show" (in Fitch 2012: 314), words I have borrowed for my title.

In terms of genre and discourse, *Julie & Julia* is a rarity in the crowded romance scene: a postfeminist romantic comedy that truly celebrates love, marriage, and household chores while advancing a feminist agenda. In what is variously referred to as "retro-sexism" (Whelehan 2000), "retreatism" (Negra 2009), "enlightened sexism" (Douglas 2010), or "the postfeminist mystique" (Munford & Waters 2014), the plot of some popular postfeminist rom-coms revolves around successful professional women who realise they are not happy and are saved by love into a life of blissful domesticity. These stories endorse a discourse that reinforces "conservative norms as the ultimate 'best choice' in women's lives" (Negra: 4). *Julie & Julia*, on the other hand, portrays Julia as a perfectly happy wife, "set about becoming the consummate housewife so typical of this period later defined by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique"* (Fitch: 145), whose enjoyment of housewifely duties paved nonetheless the way for a successful career as a cookery teacher, cookbook writer, chef, and TV celebrity. The film shows Julia's delight in shopping, cooking, and planning meals and dinner parties for Paul, while he held different positions as a civil servant and diplomat. In the film, as in real life, these chores do not shackle Julia. The pleasure she felt in doing them informed her life and determined her future career choices. She became "the embodiment of feminist achievement and independence" (Fitch: 388) without ever abandoning her kitchen, while playing the part of embassy wife (or just 'plain wife' after Paul's retirement) with gusto and contentment.

Actually, Julia tested her recipes for her books in the kitchens of the homes she shared with Paul. He designed the kitchen for their home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and when she started her first TV show, *The French Chef*, he built a replica of the set in that kitchen so that she could practice.[2] Home and career were this mixed. According to

Fitch, Child declined the 'feminist' label because, though she had nothing to do with other housewives, she was a woman of an older generation. Child, however, was indeed a feminist, even though the feminist community did not recognize her as one since she unabashedly gave her husband credit for her success (Fitch: 387–88; 499–500). Camille Paglia condemned the neglect by the academic feminist establishment and described Child as "one of those figures in history which totally transformed American culture" (in Fitch: 500).

Ephron's film also challenges the centrality of the hero in rom-coms. Romance may be a genre for, about, and by women, but, according to Deborah Philips, the hero owns the story (2021: 59–60). He may have fewer scenes than the heroine but the heroine's relationship with the hero drives the plot. In fact, Jayne Anne Krentz explains, "In a romance novel, the relationship between the hero and the heroine *is* the plot" (1992a: 108; original emphasis). In *Julie & Julia* the plot is both Julia's burgeoning career and her relationship with her husband, which shows they can develop in perfect equilibrium. Paul is as important for Julia as her career, and he, in turn, shares her interests, enjoys her company, supports her choices, and celebrates her successes. In the film, Paul emerges as an unconventional man not just for his times but for ours, when men are not yet fully eschewing patriarchal practices and embracing softer, detoxed forms of masculinity as a response to various forces that have, since the nineties, progressively undermined the patriarchal edifice that sustained traditional masculinity. These forces include the diminishing value of the physical, labouring male body in a technologised and bureaucratised society, but also women's triumphant assaults on male citadels of privilege—the "genderquake" (Wolfe 1993: 20) that has led to men's loss of the authority and power they held undisputedly in the past. Add to this the 2017 #MeToo movement exposing women's experiences of sexual harassment and sexual abuse, which has also

triggered a profound questioning of hegemonic masculinity by many men who feel the dominant narrative of masculinity as toxic does not match their actual experience of being men and their roles as romantic partners, fathers, or friends.[3] The film paints an accurate picture of an anti-patriarchal man whose fictional portrayal tallies with the real man behind the woman, as it transpires from the pages of the many texts devoted to Julia's success story, especially her already mentioned autobiography *My Life in France*; Joan Reardon's compilation of the letters between Child and Avis DeVoto, *As Always, Julia: Food, Friendship, and the Making of a Masterpiece* (2012); Noël Riley Fitch's *Appetite for Life: The Biography of Julia Child* (1997); or Alex Prud'homme's *The French Chef in America: Julia Child's Second Act* (2016). Both the film and the biographical texts provide a portrayal of a sensitive man and a good husband who can also function as a perfectly viable and refreshing, feminist alternative to the prototypical hero of romance. The part devoted to Julia Child in the film reads as a romance precisely because it records the genesis of *Mastering*, showing that Julia's success story flourished *because* of her loving relationship with a good husband. Yet, as I show next, this is the figure missing in romance.

The Hero of Popular Romance: Old Patterns

Julia and Paul's relationship fits the definition of romance provided by the Romance Writers of America: "a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending" (Kamblé, Murphy, and Teo 2021: 2). They met in Ceylon when they were both working for the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) in the summer of 1944, and became friends before they were lovers. Part of a larger group of friends, they did not like each other, at least not romantically, at first. In his letters to his twin brother, Charlie, Paul described Julia as "an old maid" (she was 32 when they met) who had a good mind but

was a “sloppy thinker” given to “wild emotionalism” and who “lack[ed] *savoir faire*” (in Fitch: 102). Since she did not resemble his ideal of “*la femme intégrale*” (121), Paul expressed a lack of physical passion for her. He, in turn, did not match Julia’s “image of Western manliness” (Fitch: 122). As she wrote in her diary, Paul was probably not the man for her “as he [was] not constant nor essentially vigorous enough”, and he even seemed “to lack a male drive” (in Fitch: 124). She was indeed interested in Paul from the beginning, and her frustration with this lack was probably her reaction to his sexual unresponsiveness, bluntly recorded in his letters. He noted Julia was curious about sex and he knew “what the cure [was]”, yet “it would be too much for Dr Paulski to risk attempting” (102) (that was the nickname he used for himself). Julia, however, grew on him, and separation made them realise they wanted to be together. After dating informally abroad, the courtship continued, intensified, and became explicitly passionate (by mail) once back home when they were living with their families in different parts of the States. Having decided to travel together across the country to test their compatibility, they met their respective families, and finally married in September 1946.

Their wedding is not the highlight of their story, as is the case of popular romances that deliver the HEA (‘Happy Ever After’) finale, but do not quite delve into the ‘ever after’ and the minutiae of coupledom. Julia and Paul’s romance continued throughout their married life until his death, and, given the evidence provided by family, friends, and their own accounts, it never faltered. Paul developed a heart condition and, in 1974, had a bypass operation. During surgery, several small strokes affected his brain and he never fully recovered. Julia looked after him, involving Paul in all her activities while he was well enough to follow her schedule. When it became obvious that he needed permanent care, she placed him in a rest home. She visited him every day, often more than once. When she was away, her assistant visited and Julia called more than once a day. This

long-lasting companionship makes their story more comforting than the one provided by popular romance.

Popular romance, in fact, is a fantasy for readers who "seek a necessary distraction from the increasingly depressing world in which we exist" (Treacher 1988: 88), a "pleasurable respite from the vexations of everyday life" (Putney 1992: 99). Therefore, romance texts are "Of course unrealistic, that's *why* we like them" (Owens Malek 1992: 75; original emphasis). They celebrate eternal love even though they compensate for what we know about relationships in real life: "relationships fail, [couples] struggle and get disappointed" (Treacher: 78). Furthermore, romance relies on heightened emotions and intense passion, and does not report the trivial aspects of the lovers's everyday life. As Treacher writes, "not for [romance] lovers the arguments over the wedding arrangements, the boredom over the breakfast boiled egg, or the drudgery of domesticity" (78). Life as a couple quenches the flames of passion, so romance has no more to say after the protagonists start their life together. Paul and Julia's story, instead, proves what romance often promises but does not actually develop in depth, that "true happiness happens when two people find and prioritise love" (Rodale 2015: 13), and that it is important to actually "[like] the person you [are] going to spend the rest of your life with" (22).

When scrutinised through the narrative of romance, Julia and Paul's relationship is, therefore, remarkable because it flourishes and grows beyond their wedding, and thrives in and celebrates life together as a couple. It also shows that romance can accommodate different types of men and still be romantic, an issue that has concerned critics trying to come to terms with the appeal of the traditional hero of popular romance (Radway 1984, Radstone 1988, Krentz 1992a and 1992b, Regis 2007, Rodale 2015). Romance is not a monolithic genre and, like other popular narratives, it has responded to broad social changes (Pearce and Stacey 1995; Pérez-Fernández and Pérez Ríu 2021).

Feminism has left its mark on romance fiction, especially in the last two decades with the arrival of a fourth wave of feminist activism (Pérez Casal 2021: 123–128). According to Eric Murphy Selinger, early studies that condemned romance for its conservative and patriarchal messages, notably Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* (1988), are dated and do not do justice to the genre, "which has long since evolved and diversified, not least in response to feminist critiques" (2007: 310). However, the changes feminism has brought about have mostly affected the construction of the heroine, so new romances are increasingly "populated by strong female leads, whose aspirations and interests sometimes go beyond marriage" (Pérez Casal: 128) and show that there are "more things to a woman's existence than sitting at home minding the babies, the stove, and the sewing" (Rodale: 20).

The genre, though, remains a "bastion of hegemonic masculinity, which might be understood in common parlance as a kind of 'toxic masculinity'" (Allan 2021: 444). There are appealing, sensitive, kind and gentle men in films like *Sleepless in Seattle* (Nora Ephron, 1993), *While You Were Sleeping* (John Turtletaub, 1995), or *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Joel Zwick, 2002). However, the question "why is traditional masculinity pleasurable in fantasy?" (Illauz 2016: 58) still puzzles feminist critics. The phenomenal success of series such as Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* nine-novel saga (1991–2021) or E.L. James's *50 Shades of Grey* novels (2011–2021), and their adaptations, suggests that romance has not truly responded to the proliferation of masculinities in society or the shifting standards of acceptable masculine behaviour (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Heasley 2005; Hill 2007).

Author Susan Elizabeth Phillips explains that some romance writers have accommodated "a sensitive, caring, enlightened male standing steadfastly at the heroine's side as she works through her troubles", but that these stories do not give her the rush and

comfort she finds "in books with dangerous heroes, cynical men who have grown jaded with life and love, men of action who not only refuse to stand by the heroine's side from the beginning (…) but who frequently make life more difficult for her" (1992: 56). Romance authors and readers go to great lengths to justify why women enjoy stories of heroines who fall in love with men who are clearly patriarchal and not essentially good, decent, caring, or non-violent. Author Daphne Clair, states that "Sweet, sensitive, New Age men (…) may be wonderful husbands in real life" (1992: 71), but they are not worthy adversaries for the types of strong, confident, successful heroines of romance. For her, passion has to be laced by danger since "It's no fun having a tame tiger about the house if it's toothless" (68). This explains the proliferation of amorous vampires and other such creatures accommodated within the contours of the romance narrative in subgenres such as the gothic or the paranormal romance. It also explains the persistence of the problematic plot that revolves around the taming of the rake/rogue. Firstly, it constructs the process of falling in love as warfare, a conflict of opposites that need to be subdued/reformed before they start a life in common. Secondly, the power of love allows us to see rakes/rogues as desirable, which suggests that in romance (unfortunately in real life, too) "love sanctions and justifies often unreasonable actions of heroes and heroines" and "transforms the faults of the hero—moodiness, arrogance, and occasional cruelty—into expressions of caring" (Hubbard 1985: 117). Thirdly, women's real power and strength are ultimately measured by their capacity to bring the prince out of the frog, or, more pertinently, the husband/partner out of the beast. Women's greatest power, at the end of the day, is still the power of attraction, and it is mostly limited to a woman's ascendancy over one man who becomes more committed after he falls in love. It has no bearing on patriarchy as an institution, as romance heroes do not necessarily give up their authority or their control of the public space at the end of the story.

In the case of romance, therefore, genre and gender work hand in hand to legitimate the appeal of traditional masculinity, which then has to be tamed and reconstituted to meet the needs of women, so that the genre can bask on the transformative power of love. Whether the transformation is real and men can be (or are worth being) kept in a loving relationship is not for us to know, since the stories end the moment the lovers start living together and do not go beyond that point. Consequently, the process of being a good husband is not contemplated in a genre whose plot revolves around finding one. One may argue that what happens in a romance narrative is dictated by the romance formula, so the genre's main function is not to educate women, romance's main target readership, but to entertain by exploiting a story that women clearly enjoy. Women can distinguish between fiction and reality, so they know that popular romances are fantasies and "do not expect the imaginative creations of romance to conform to real life any more than they expect the fantasies of any other genre to conform to the real world" (Krentz 1992b: 2). Still, romance is "the most popular and bestselling genre of fiction produced and consumed [by women] in the world today" (Kamblé, Murphy, and Teo: 1), and its success shows that "romance is a primary category of the female imagination" (Teo, 2021: 476). Women's fantasies, therefore, are nurtured by a genre that, more often than not, "continues to work with very traditional characterisations of masculinity" (Philips: 72), and which does not provide templates of good husbands beyond the premise that Alpha males have to be confronted with the realisation that, once they fall in love with the heroine, monogamy is now their destiny and have to turn into husbands and, in time, dads.

A Real/Really Romantic Alternative: Mr. Julia Child

As stated, the part of *Julie & Julia* devoted to Julia Child is a salutary exception to the norm of ending romance at the point when couples decide to be together. Norah Ephron concentrates especially on Julia and Paul's relationship while she learns French, shops for food and cooks for Paul, enrols at the Le Cordon Bleu, meets friends Simca and Louisette, and they begin their fruitful collaboration. The film hardly touches on Paul's job as a diplomat, focusing on Julia and Paul's intimate moments or, occasionally, with friends or family. This allows audiences to appreciate what makes Paul's role as Julia's husband proper romance material. His love for Julia, the film shows, combined tenderness and passion with profound admiration and respect. Ephron highlights his unwavering support and encouragement in all her pursuits, including the time-consuming job of testing and writing the recipes for *Mastering*, and his frank satisfaction when Houghton Mifflin accept her book for publication. The film celebrates Paul's steady encouragement and acceptance not only of Julia's quirks and peculiarities but also of all her activities. It shows that marriage can be romantic when the couple keep the fire burning because they are well-adjusted and compatible. Most importantly, Ephron provides a romantic account of what it is like to be married, as Julie puts it in the film, to a really nice guy who, it must be stressed, is not a purpose-made character created to serve a feminist agenda but a close portrait of a real-life man.

The biographical texts on Julia present Paul Cushing Child (1902–1994) as a very unconventional man, especially for his times. It is now an accepted argument in Gender and Masculinities Studies that gender is not an essential category, unchanging and trans-historical, but a social construct resulting from intersecting historical, cultural, and social factors. It is also taken for granted that there are different ways of being men, and that different historical periods favour particular forms of hegemonic masculinity — understanding it as "the culturally idealised form of masculine character" (Donaldson

1993: 646–47)—which are then "supported by an enormous weight of expert opinion, moral sentiment and public bias, both within popular culture and the elite centres of academic wisdom" (Brittan 1989: 1–2). Paul Child had attributes we associate with mid-20th century adventurous masculinity. In his youth,

> he had sailed from the United States to Panama on an oil tanker, hitched a ride on to a little ferry from Marseille to Africa, crossed the Mediterranean and Atlantic from Trieste to New York, crewed aboard a schooner that sailed from Nova Scotia to South America, and served briefly aboard a command ship in the China Sea during World War II. (Child 2009: 12)

His jobs before he started working for the government as an officer for the United States Information Service (USIS) in Paris included painting sets in Hollywood and even making stained-glass windows for the American Church in Paris, where his work for the trickiest windows earned him "the nickname Tarzan of the Apse" (Child: 42); he also taught at Avon Old Farms School in Connecticut. Paul was very "muscley" (Julia in Reardon 2012: 78), "his hard body" the product of "years of physical labour aboard oil tankers and at a munitions factory in Lowell" (Fitch: 122). He was also "a masculine black belt in jujitsu" (97), "an unusually strong man (…) able to hoist cases, furniture, etc, without busting a gut" (Julia in Reardon: 149), and a jack-of-all-trades who could also "build you a house or wire your lamp without batting an eye" (Child: 117).

However, Paul was also sickly and given to accidents and afflictions including "blindness in one eye, car accidents, exotic diseases caught in foreign lands, and occasional severe headaches and double vision" (Fitch: 135). Raised in Boston by a bohemian mother, Paul was unlike other men in his line of work; he despised Foreign Service and army types, who "spoke in Southern accents, usually about sex and women" (Child: 211). He was also unlike "the Western boys [Julia] hung around with" or "any of the men her friends married" (Fitch: 5). Paul was "a natty dresser and spoke French beautifully, and he adored food and wine" (Child: 5). He was also artistic. He played the violin, was a skilled photographer and had a "grasp of poetry, music, painting, languages,

and the sciences" (Fitch: 122). Even though he had no college education, he was "an erudite man" (Prud'homme 2016: 5) and "an intellectual, in the sense that he had a real thirst for knowledge, was widely read, (…) and was always trying to train his mind" (Child: 85–86). He worried about his physical appearance, dieted when he thought he was not fit or trim enough and dressed elegantly if also extravagantly. He wore "scarves in his open-necked dress shirts" (Fitch: 136), favoured "a turquoise ring" (Prud'homme: 140), and liked bright-coloured clothes—for his fiftieth birthday he dressed "in a brilliant-green wool waistcoat with brass buttons, a bright-red tie, and bright-red socks" (Child: 130). Paul cultivated the sensual and "would have been seen as effete in [Julia's] native Pasadena" (Fitch: 5). In fact, "Some observers considered [his] attributes effeminate" (140). Because of his sensibilities and outlook, his masculinity was even questioned. When he was interrogated by agents from the USIA's Office of Security during McCarthy's witch hunt, he was asked about "his patriotism, his liberal friends, the books he read, and his association with Communists" (Child: 215). There was no foundation for the political suspicions that led to the interrogation, as Paul was a liberal and a Democrat. The Childs's closest friends were also similarly politically oriented intellectuals and artists; they had communist friends but Paul was not involved in anti-government activity. He was a man of honour and a faithful friend and gave support to friends who were persecuted by the McCarthy administration, which he hated. In a letter to Avis DeVoto, Julia wrote: "He has a wonderful judgement, is so deeply human in his approach, and is damned realistic (…) and is a man of such integrity" (Julia in Reardon: 236).

The USIA men also asked Paul whether he was homosexual. Julia's biographers do not know whether "an informant interpreted Paul's European refinement as fey" or it was assumed he was gay by association, since "during McCarthy's reign, communists were frequently linked with homosexuals and aliens" (Fitch: 226). Sexually, Paul was

unambiguously heterosexual, and as his letters and poems demonstrate, had a healthy sexual life with Julia. He even had a reputation of being a ladies' man before meeting Julia. Paul was "a great admirer of women with beauty and brains" (Fitch: 101), and he had courted various women abroad, when working for the OSS. He was no womaniser but wanted to "replace the great love of his life" (96) before Julia: Edith Kennedy, "a sophisticated divorcée twenty years older than Paul" (Prud'homme: 31–32) with whom he had lived for more than a decade, and whom he described to his brother as "flirtatious, witty, naughty, dynamic and intelligent" (in Fitch: 101). Edith died of heart failure just a few months before he joined the OSS, during WWII, and he was left "indescribably lonely" (Fitch 109). He wrote to his twin Charlie that "None of the women seem[ed] to be the answer to loneliness", and that Edith's death had left him "empty, unbased, and bereft (…) rootless, or soil-less" (in Fitch: 116–17). Julia "lifted [Paul] from his isolation" (5). Thirty-five years after their wedding, in 1981, he told a Boston newspaper that without Julia he would have become "a sour old bastard living off in a cave" (5). He felt she was "an unconscious therapeutic agent for [him]" and that their happiness was based on their like-mindedness, since they were "twinnies in [their] reactions and tastes" (206). A friend of the couple reported that it was "as if his life didn't really begin until he met [Julia]", and Paul wrote that life without her would be "like unsalted food" (315). Their relationship was solid and grounded in "reason, good sense, and endless affection" (Fitch 313). Paul was in awe of Julia, "delighted that [they] met at all, that [they] had the good sense to marry each other, and that [their] life together [was] such a pleasure" (in Fitch 253). For her forty-seventh birthday, he wrote to her: "Thank you for every concession, every restraint, every thoughtfulness, every cooperative act, every darling endeavour, that you contribute to our mutual life" (253).

Paul's job as a diplomat meant that Julia and he did not have any say "in how [their] lives were to be lived" (Child: 204), since they could be sent anywhere, anytime with little or no notice. Paul contemplated alternatives, such as becoming a photojournalist, but, when he thought of "the ulcers and deadlines that these glamorous photojournalists faced", he decided it "was a hell of a life" (206), so he stuck with government work. Paul was never ambitious. He did not bother to cultivate connections and was not eager to take positions that involved more responsibilities and that were more demanding of his time. In Paris, he wrote to Charlie, "comes Friday night (…) and down comes the iron curtain between job and what I *really* like doing. Wham! And I'm off with Julie on the flying carpet" (157, original italics). He retired in 1961, aged 59, to enjoy photography and painting, even though he "could have stayed on to reach the twenty-year mark and earn three thousand dollars a month" (249). Yet, when Julia's career took off relatively late in life (she was ten years his junior), he devoted all his time, energy, skills, and creative drive to her ambitions. Paul had been supportive of Julia's interests while he was working, and he never asked her to prioritise her role as a wife. Julia loved being Paul's wife, but there were moments when she felt there were "many things pulling in (…) many directions" because she had "responsibilities as a consular wife, as a wife, as a house-fixer-upper and as a cookbook [writer]" (Julia in Reardon: 150). However, she was not overwhelmed or discontented. Being married to Paul was not a source of stress or arguments.

What makes the relationship particularly outstanding is how readily Paul jumped into the role of Mr. Julia Child. She claimed that she "would never have had [her] career without Paul Child" (Child: 5) and that "[her] husband's support was crucial to keeping [her] enthusiasm high" (68). Paul did more than simply encourage her. They were true partners who even referred to themselves as "Pulia" (217) before her career took off.

When she became successful, he made it "his mission in life to see that everything worked for her" (Fitch: 274), including testing recipes with and for her, producing her TV shows (*The French Chef* and those that followed), or organising tours and cooking demonstrations. He was "Julia's amanuensis, publicist, adviser, and alter ego" (315–316), always there as "porter, dishwasher, official photographer, mushroom dicer and onion chopper, editor, fish illustrator, manager, tester, idea man, resident poet, and husband" (Prud'homme: 143). A boxing aficionado, he saw himself as Julia's "'cornerman', (…) [keeping] his fighter fit" (107). Paul did not do all that because there was a need to "[keep] the Julia-banner flapping" (in Fitch: 314), but because of an honest desire to help. He never stepped into the limelight or demanded recognition, being perfectly happy "an accessory-after-the-fact of Julie's rhythms" (370) and "part of the iceberg that doesn't show" (314). Julia had followed him in his posts and adapted to their new circumstances without complaining; and when success came, he felt it was his turn: "I feel", he wrote, "Nature is restoring an upset balance" (in Prud'homme: 88).

CONCLUSION

The field of Masculinities Studies is increasingly preoccupied with deconstructing the negative effects of patriarchy as more men "experience an abrasion between the concepts of privileged manhood (…) and other experiences to which they try to fit their masculine ideals" (Rosen 1993: xiii). Masculinity is not "a fixed essence chained to biology" but rather "the outcome of socio-historical and cultural struggle and change" (Beynon 2010: 55), and culture is a site of gender interrogation, negotiation and redefinition. Popular culture is no exception, as it is one of the "region[s] of cultural practices where masculinities are modelled, negotiated or reinforced" (Pfeil 1996: xv). In the last decades, there have been conscious attempts to reformulate notions of patriarchal

masculinity in different popular genres. However, romance fiction remains one of the most recalcitrant areas, since the excitement of the story is served by a plot in which the love of the heroine turns a brute into a prince. It seems there is no romance story in loving and being loved by a good guy, so women's romantic fantasies are fed by texts that focus on relationships with unreconstructed men.

Julie & Julia is an interesting exception. As I have argued, the plotline devoted to Julia and Paul Child's relationship proves that marriage can be romantic and that sensitive, caring and supportive husbands can function as heroes of romantic stories. Also importantly, the film introduces Paul Child to an audience that may not have known about him and whose persona is vividly conveyed in the books about his wife, all of which delve in depth into "the value of [the] loving marriage of devotion and mutual interest" that "ignite[d] and sustain[ed] Julia's career" (Fitch: xxi). Reading these books, we find that Paul Child may not have been a great man but he was an interesting man, knowledgeable and entertaining, whose life may have been lost in oblivion had he not met Julia. Most remarkably, he was a thoroughly anti-patriarchal husband who understood there is nothing unmanly, emasculating, or embarrassing in deciding to devote his life to the ambitions of the woman he loved.

NOTES

1. The part devoted to Julie also focuses on her relationship with her husband, Eric (Chris Messina). However, it is not as relevant, or romantic, as Julia's relationship with Paul, mainly due to her obsessiveness and selfishness.
2. The kitchen itself became the setting of three of her TV shows: *In Julia's Kitchen with Master Chefs*, *Baking with Julia* and *Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home*. Her kitchen in the house in Cambridge is now on display on the ground floor of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.
3. See Kimmel (2015) and Faludi (2000) for how (white) men have rejected any attack against their sense of entitlement.

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