

MASSIMO RECALCATI

In Praise of Forgiveness



CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Front Matter](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Notes](#)

[1 The Ideology of the New](#)

[The Contemporary Degradation of Love Lives](#)

[Resignation or Dopamine?](#)

[Narcissistic Love](#)

[Two Lies for Our Time](#)

[The New Libertine Ideology](#)

[Love as Resistance to the Libertine Worship of the New](#)

[Notes](#)

[2 Encounter and Destiny](#)

[Love as Oedipal Repetition](#)

[Falling in Love with Ourselves](#)

[The Scream of Life](#)

[The Discussion about Barolo](#)

[The Sexual Relationship Does Not Exist](#)

[We Are Loved Not Because of Something, But 'Because of Everything'](#)

[The Loving Encounter is the Birth of a World](#)

[Disappointed Love](#)

[The Eros of the Encounter](#)

[Fidelity](#)

[The Face and the Eternal](#)

Notes

3 Trauma and Abandonment

A Captive Freedom?

Albertine

Is the Promise of Love Always False?

'It's Not Like It Used To Be'

What Is a Trauma?

The First Blow

Trauma is the Flipside of Repression

Trauma in Love

Falling into Non-Sense

The Fall This Side of the Mirror

A Wound With No Cure

Abandonment

Notes

4 The Work of Forgiveness

Courageous Love

The Adulterous Woman

To Forgive the Unforgivable?

Reflection by the Subject

The Impossibility of Forgiving Out Of Love

The Work of Forgiveness and the Work of Mourning

Forgiveness and Gratitude

Why Men Find It More Difficult to Forgive

Violence Without Law

Violence and Love

The Tender Assassin

Absolute Exposure to Love

[Virgil's Gloves](#)

[Narcissism and Depression](#)

[Woman's Foreign Language](#)

['They Are All Whores!'](#)

[Killing Them in Order to 'Love' Them](#)

[The Joy of Forgiveness?](#)

[Forgiving Oneself](#)

[Notes](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

Dedication

To Luciana Sica, to her strength

In Praise of Forgiveness

Massimo Recalcati

Translated by Alice Kilgariff

polity

First published in Italian as *Non è più come prima*. Copyright © 2014, Raffaello Cortina Editore. All rights reserved. Published by arrangement with The Italian Literary Agency.

This English edition (c) Polity Press, 2020

Excerpts from REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST, VOLUME III: THE CAPTIVE, THE FUGITIVE, THE PAST RECAPTURED by Marcel Proust, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, and by Andreas Mayor, translation copyright © 1981 by Penguin Random House LLC and Chatto & Windus. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
101 Station Landing
Suite 300
Medford, MA 02155, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-3491-3

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Recalcati, Massimo, author. | Kilgarriff, Alice, translator.

Title: In praise of forgiveness / Massimo Recalcati ; translated by Alice Kilgarriff.

Other titles: Non è più come prima. English

Description: English edition. | Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA, USA : Polity Press, 2020. | Summary: "An original reflection on betrayal and forgiveness in modern relationships"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019038645 (print) | LCCN 2019038646 (ebook) | ISBN 9781509534890 (hardback) | ISBN 9781509534906 (paperback) | ISBN 9781509534913 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Forgiveness. | Interpersonal relations.

Classification: LCC BF637.F67 R43 2020 (print) | LCC BF637.F67 (ebook) | DDC 158.2--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019038645>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019038646>

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: politybooks.com

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my friend and editor Raffaello Cortina for having believed in me over these last few years, and Maria Egidi with whom I share a great deal of my working life and who, over ten years of working together, has supported me with patience, affection and happiness. Federica Manzon and Lucrezia Lerro for their friendship and for having read and commented upon the narrative parts of the book, giving me invaluable advice. My thanks also to Mauro Grimoldi for having listened to me discuss this book since its conception during our morning runs through Parco Sempione and elsewhere. Last but not least, Enzo Bianchi for his silent presence in me.

The most precious gift that marriage gave me was the constant impact of something very close and intimate, yet all the time unmistakably other, resistant – in a word, real.

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

Introduction

The psychoanalyst hears the woes that accompany love lives on a daily basis: emotional isolation, sexual inhibitions and symptoms, the compulsive quest for relationships that fail to satisfy, the ensuing disappointment, the initial ecstasy of falling in love, infidelity, boredom, jealousy, a decline in desire, separation, abuse, the inability to love, the difficulty of finding the right man or woman. And yet today's trials and tribulations of love seem to be different from those of the past. Sexual freedom and female emancipation, to cite just two of the most relevant phenomena of the last few decades, have upset a certain stereotype of amorous suffering. The desperate Platonism of those who, faced with a frustrating reality, cultivate their inhibited passions in secret has given way to a diffuse disinhibition and the multiplication of sexual and loving experiences in an entirely liberated way. Everything seems to be consumed far more quickly, without moral censure or obstacles. Criticism of any institutionalization of bonds between the sexes seems to have become the politically correct norm, whilst the collective cult of a love without ties is an illusion that has generated nothing more than will-o'-the-wisps. The invocation of absolute freedom and the intolerance shown to any form of bond that implies responsibility have led to a new master. We no longer have the master who carries the stick of prohibition, but one who demands an enjoyment that is always New and that consequently experiences a long-term relationship as a gas chamber killing off the mysterious fascination of desire. One father dies and another takes his place: the time of mourning is maniacally rejected as unnecessarily sad and extravagant. Rather than painfully processing the loss of a beloved object, it is preferable to replace it as quickly as

possible, conforming to the dominant logic that governs the capitalist discourse: if an object no longer works, you mustn't feel nostalgic about it! Exchange it for an upgraded model!

At a time in which everything seems to respond to the perverse siren song of the New, this book aims to be a song dedicated to love that resists and that persists in its vindication of the bond with what does not pass, with what is able to stand the test of time, with what cannot be consumed. It does not deal with those infatuations that burn out without a trace in just one night. It delves into that love that lasts a lifetime, that leaves its mark, that does not want to die, that disproves Freud's cynical belief that love and desire are destined to lie apart because the existence of one (love) necessarily excludes that of the other (sexual desire).¹ It looks at that love in which desire grows and does not fade with the passing of time because with it the horizons of the lovers' bodies, and the world itself, are erotically expanded. That love in which the ecstasy of the encounter insists on repeating itself, on wanting the other again, on staying faithful to itself, in which the headiness is not diluted but gives meaning to time, rendering it eternal. This is a love animated by what the poet Paul Éluard, once cited by Jacques Lacan, defines 'le dur désir du durer' ['the firm desire to endure'].²

This book asks what happens to these bonds when one person cheats on the other, when one falls short of the promise made, living another emotional experience mired in secret and deceit. What happens to those loving relationships crushed by the trauma of betrayal and abandonment? What happens when the person who has cheated then asks for forgiveness? What if they ask to be loved once more, despite having decreed that it was not like it used to be, and want everything to go back to how it was before? Is forgiveness truly possible in these cases? Or

must we limit ourselves to repeating the Freudian sentence according to which all love is a narcissistic dream, a promise that does not exist, a love that never lasts 'forever', there being no love for the Other that is not love for ourselves? Must we spit on love, making fun of lovers in their efforts to make love last?

Freud's analysis, developed in his 'Contributions to the Psychology of Love',³ is only interested in describing the neurotic version of love. His theory on the gulf between sexual desire and love that leads human beings to split the object of their erotic enjoyment from that of their love has often been misunderstood, as if reconciling the level of the body's sexual enjoyment with that of love as a gift of oneself to the Other were a structural impossibility. We must be clear: if psychoanalytic treatment deals with this (neurotic) split between sexual enjoyment and loving tenderness towards the Other, this does not mean that such a split is the structural cipher of love. What is the point of psychoanalysis if not precisely to make bonds possible that allow loving desire towards the Other to converge with the erotic enjoyment of the body? Isn't this one of the most relevant issues at stake? We know it from experience: love in which loving desire is not in any way split from sexual enjoyment but grows exponentially alongside erotic passion for the body of the Other does exist. This was what led Lacan to define love as *the only* possibility of allowing desire to converge with enjoyment without any neurotic disassociation.⁴

This book does not delve into the pathology of the split between desire and enjoyment, but examines an aspect of love that is as important as it is strangely sidelined by psychoanalysis: forgiveness. It treats forgiveness as one of the most noble and difficult tests awaiting lovers.