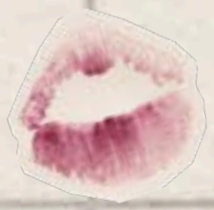
THE EXCHANGE JOURNAL

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I LOVE MOVIES I LOVE MOVIES

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A Message From The Editors

Thank you to everyone who submitted photos and articles to the 2025/6 Exchange Journal: Love!

It has been wonderful to read all of your contributions, and bring them together to produce an edition teeming with emotion, creativity, and gratitude. Every piece has come from a vastly different perspective, but all of the experiences described are heartfelt and clearly very meaningful.

It is fabulous to see how much you are all enjoying your year abroad, through new connections made, new places explored and reflections on everything you miss at home.

We hope you *love* this edition just as much as we do - we already can't wait to read more about your time away!

Until next time...

The Exchange Journal Team



Salamanca: LOVING FREELY



Across Europe, there is a stereotype of the British as emotionally reserved — some might even say repressed. Public displays of affection can often be a source of embarrassment or discomfort. However, after having spent nearly five months in Salamanca, I can confidently say the opposite is true of the Spanish attitude towards love and affection.

It starts with the way people greet one another. When referring to these open displays of affection, I do not simply mean romantic love, but also platonic and familial affection. The first and most striking difference is the greeting of dos besos being completely commonplace. In the UK, a kiss on the cheek often feels reserved for formal settings. In Spain, however, it is the default. Meeting a friend for a coffee? Bumping into someone at the gym? Being introduced to someone for the first time? All these interactions will start with dos besos.

This simple greeting already sets a precedent of warmth and emotional openness, standing in stark contrast to the cold, firm handshake or insincere hug that remains the standard in the UK.

Platonic affection is expressed in a far more tactile way. Friends walking arm in arm, leaning on each other or small touches here and there is entirely normal here. It feels worlds away from the post-Covid culture that still loiters in the UK. At times, I genuinely cannot imagine how social distancing ever functioned in Spain.



Public displays of affection between couples are even more visible — and entirely accepted. Holding hands, hugging, kissing, constant physical contact: it's everywhere. Regardless of age or location — in the street, the library, cafés or clubs — it is simply part of everyday life. There is a pride in being in love, in wanting to engage openly with your partner, that feels noticeably distant from British romantic culture.

Despite my initial reservations — having to pass multiple couples passionately kissing while trying to do my food shop or grab a coffee — I've found myself adopting an unexpected sense of joy in witnessing it. We claim as a society to consider love as beautiful, yet it seems in the UK our instinctive reaction to seeing it expressed is often one of discomfort or even disgust.

Living here has made me question our attitude towards love. Why in the UK does it hold a sense of restraint, whilst in Spain, affection is allowed to exist unapologetically? Why do we appear to shy away from it rather than openly celebrate it?

I hope to take this home with me: the fact that love should be loud and that there is no shame in loving openly.

Grace Nason



Take the Chance.

I didn't know whether to take a chance
I was scared of the unknown, of the distance
I'm only here for one semester, I said
Give it a chance, he said

I gave in.

I gave it a chance
And what a whirlwind it has been
The best decision I ever made

Love blossomed and I never looked back
Now how could I ever live without him

What a semester it has been

Take the chance
Say yes
Be brave
Take the chance.

Emma Noro

OBSERVATIONS OF LOVE AND FULLNESS

LOTTIE EDMUNDS

A man in a cafe sits across from his wife. They are both over fifty, and I think they have known each other for a long while. Pots of jam and of honey, bunches of grapes and crumb-covered plates furnish their little square table. A single half-sliced egg sits on a fork under his nose. She watches him, then watches the egg; their eyes share a moment, and he is forced to slide his egg off the fork and roll it upon her plate. She eats it in silence, and as she is chewing she is satisfied with the knowledge that this mouthful of boiled egg is undeniably the best way to finish her breakfast. As she is chewing, he is satisfied as he watches these conclusions stir around her mind, made visible through her tightly closed eyes and intermittentment hums of contentedness. She wipes her hands on napkin-covered knees and they both leave feeling very full.





Across the room, another couple sit opposite each other at a similar sized table. They have not ordered yet, and the clean marble that lays between them holding the weight of neatly-ordered condiments and phone-gripped hands feels much larger than all the tables in the room. For the first five minutes they make no attempt to talk, yet that is all they came to do. He sits anxiously staring at his phone and glancing at the surrounding bustle of mug-clinked chatter as if his whole heart were not right in front of him.

As his gaze flicks from this to that, hers fixates on the cracks in the marble that run between them. She runs her fingers down them, moving tentatively towards him. Occasionally they look up at each other, holding a gaze that tightens both chests. They pass curious gazes outside of the window bordering their table, watching slowly as the drips of January light get drained from the sky. They curl up lips to communicate this and that, but neither are really saying anything.

Her gaze is steady and fixed and wide, and so familiar to those who have shared its glare. It looks like vacancy; letting time roll by as you have a moment inwards, but it is not this. It is everything but vacancy. It is thousands of words that sit in the heart and the throat, nervous that if they fall out they might break something, and if they do not you might choke.

Deciding to choke or to break is momentarily interrupted by two large slices of cake placed on the table, each thick layer of sponge making a mockery of the neighbouring coffee cups that dwindle beside them. Now that he has something to do with his hands, his eyes and his mouth, he can safely put his phone in his pocket without fearing that he might face something he does not yet want to see.

Her invasive and repetitive thought-loop of choke or break, choke or break, is softened by a first fork-full of decadent coffee sponge, sandwiched between lashings of chocolate icing and laced on top with mysterious white-piped swirls. The swirls are too much, she decides, and pushes them onto his plate.



It is thousands of words that sit in the heart and the throat, nervous that if they fall out they might break something, and if they do not you might choke.



He leaves for the bathroom and the plates are left empty, the journey of cake-piled forks from one's hand to the other's mouth seems to have sewn an invisible line of togetherness between them, though this handwork is very frail. As he is gone, she places her head to her hand, resting on an elbow, and returns her gaze to the sticky-purple night, watching as dusk climbs and settles itself into the sky. She knows she is not yet brave enough to see if the marble table between him and her is strong enough to carry all the words stuck in her throat. There are, after all, many cracks made already. He returns and pays the bill, her lips curl and the corners of her eyes fold into creases.

They leave, and I can't tell if they are full at all. Those two slices of cake were very large, so at least they won't be hungry.

Heart Filled Up

Freya Krishnadasan Bennet
Amsterdam, Netherlands

As put famously in “Love Actually”, Love I have found on my Exchange is actually all around.

In moving to Amsterdam, I have fallen in love with many things I had never considered before; the ease of biking (despite the numerous times I have fallen off), Frikandelbroodje pastries, which are essentially elevated sausage rolls (sorry Gregg’s) and particularly, navigating living in a city that I had little to no preconceptions of before arriving in August.

Even now, six months into my exchange, I find that every week, I am exploring a new area and unlocking new experiences. Ranging from unique nights out that ebb into the early hours of the morning, to trying new bike routes to university. I live in an area of Amsterdam that is a 25- minute bike ride from the city centre, and I am hoping to eventually fall in love with this daily commute. But when the weather alternates between wind and rain, it is more of a love-hate relationship; I am counting down the days to spring.

I have fallen in love with many people since being here. People from Ireland, Australia, Germany, Sweden and other Edinburgh students I had not met until now, all of whom have become important to me in such a short amount of time. The love I have for these friendships makes my heart feel full to the brim, and I am hopeful that they’ll last. Despite the temporary nature of these connections, I hope that when the time to say bye does come around, it will be a goodbye only for now.

The impermanent nature of exchange is what I have fallen in love with. We recently had a send-off for the handful of friends here, only for a semester. And despite how sad it was, and the number of tears shed, I could feel so much love in the room. On our final evening out with everyone, one of my friends and I left for a cigarette, outside, she exclaimed, ‘I love our friends!’ I kept looking around at everyone that evening, and my tipsy brain wanted to create snapshots of every moment, which in reality resulted in quite a few blurry photographs. Really, I just wanted to slow down the inevitability of having to say goodbye to these people I had grown to love.

Not only have I experienced a love for my life and the people here, but also for the life and relationships I had and will return to in Edinburgh. On numerous occasions, I've gone down a rabbit hole of looking at the photos I have taken from the top of the Crags, longing to re-experience the feeling of seeing the city stretched out beneath me.

Although the Canals here are beautiful, they cannot compete. My love for my friends in Edinburgh has become a comfort and something that, on days when I feel overwhelmed by nostalgia, I am especially grateful for. Distance does indeed make the heart grow fonder, and though calling is not always easy with 6-hour time differences or alternating timetables, I find that sending many (many) 'I miss you' messages keeps those bonds and that love alive.

I like to think that the amount of love we give out into the world finds its way back to us. I have received and experienced so much love since starting this exchange, and will be celebrating with many glasses of wine and heart-shaped foods this Valentine's, alongside some truly lovely friends.







5000 Kilometers

Josie Salmon
Montreal, Canada

It is strange, transitioning from living a few cobblestones apart, to a relationship where we exist on different tectonics, separated by that stark fault line running down the middle. The change from showing up late after class at the other's flat for dinner, to trying to make the late-night FaceTime calls work, living around the unavoidably awkward time difference. One of us rushing to get to a lecture, the other returning from a night out, brushing their teeth. A relationship where we celebrate our anniversary online, where the movie doesn't quite line up, where we post presents through Amazon because paying for postage between Canada and Scotland is expensive. Where snow piles up outside my door, rain outside his.

It is a funny feeling, knowing we are building lives far from one another. Me, in a city he's never visited, surrounded by people he may never meet, making new memories he is absent from. Him, in a city I know like the back of my hand, meeting up with friends I miss so much, continuing to live a life I now feel so far from. Us, going back for Christmas where there are still four hundred miles between our hometowns, but at least there are no longer three thousand. Seeing each other for the first time in four months, learning how to breathe as one again, only to be banished to those separate tectonics, those separate lives.

But the distance also has a certain beauty to it. The new-found knowledge that despite that wide, yearning ocean, we still reach across it, existing as magnets, irrevocably drawn to one another. The birth of a new truth, that we want each other, not that we need each other: a subtle, distinct difference. The creation of a new language, formed of pixels.

Pictures of mountains from me.

Pictures of Authur's Seat from him.

Videos of me ice skating.

Videos of him swimming in Portobello.

Calls where I tell him how much I miss him. Calls where he tells me how much he loves me.

But even despite this beauty, it remains that the sound I hate the most is the phone call ending. That reminder of the fault line between us, pulling us apart.



It's The Thought That Counts

Eloise Longstaff

Brisbane, Australia



I have been living in Australia for nearly seven months now, and have found the distance between me and my loved ones to be one of the hardest parts about moving away.

Technology has played such an important role in keeping me connected to my family and friends. Catch-ups over coffee or a walk in the Meadows have become an exchange of audio messages and photo compilations. Our now-separate pub trips require the sending of a pint picture, captioned, "Thinking of you!". Christmas morning took place over a FaceTime call. The nine-hour time difference often complicates finding the right moment for a phone call, so I don't take the sound of my mum's voice or a conversation with my dad in real-time for granted anymore.

Whilst a little more expensive and inconvenient to send and receive, physical media has been just as important to me and my relationships. Postcards and letters decorated with doodles and familiar handwriting litter the walls of my temporary bedroom, which helps me feel closer to home. One of my favourite things on my shelf is a picture my sister sent me a few months ago, which she painted with the help of my two dogs, their paw prints stamped into the canvas.

It hasn't been easy to navigate, but this experience has taught me that distance may change how you communicate with people, but it doesn't change how you feel about those people. I was scared that leaving would damage my friendships, but this hasn't been the case. I think that moving abroad and maintaining relationships is a testament to their strength, and a reminder that a little effort goes a long way - it's the thought that counts.





Marais Me

Martha Mines



Being in the city of love, a ten-minute walk down through the Marais brings me face to face with couples at every turn — young, in love, in Paris. They linger outside boulangeries, sharing cigarettes on street corners. Through a shop window, a man sits in an armchair beside the dressing room, as a woman steps out in a flowing dress and twirls slowly, awaiting judgement. On a bench, a duo face each other, toes touching, reading. A pair of runners pass me, headphones in — one glancing back again and again to check the other is keeping up. A gaggle of young Parisian girls blush and giggle as they talk to some boys, all clearly on their school lunch break.

Yet when the Marais empties of daytime shoppers and the bars begin to fill, a different side becomes visible. Arguments spill onto street corners, and girls cry at four a.m. outside dingy clubs while their friends drunkenly attempt to comfort them, doing their best to conceal the fact that they would much rather be back inside. Beneath the city's romantic reputation, lie relationships just as imperfect as anywhere else.

Watching all these couples, at their best and at their worst, I can't help but think about how different love looks for me right now. Mine exists across time zones, screens, and countdowns to the next visit.

We call while walking home from class, narrating our days as the streets pass behind us. Sometimes barely speaking, just the comfort of knowing the other is there, breathing on the other end of the line. Evenings now consist of virtually racing to finish the daily Times crosswords, sending screenshots of half-filled grids and celebrating when we get the final clue.

The untranslatable French word "retrouvailles" means the joy you feel after seeing someone you haven't seen in a long time. As I wait at the arrivals gate of Charles de Gaulle, I understand the word more than ever. There is nothing romantic about it – fluorescent lighting and the blaring tannoy system, yet people stand on their toes to see over shoulders, children holding handmade signs dusted in glitter, waiting for the sliding doors to open. And when they do, recognition lands all at once, — families reunited, tears shed, suitcases flung to the floor as arms wrap tightly around familiar shoulders.

Perhaps that is what studying abroad has changed in me the most. The Marais may make love easy to see, but I have learned to recognise it elsewhere.



Language Learning: A Labour of Love

Aislinn McSharry
Augsburg, Germany

A young child on a warm summer's day is fascinated by the abundance of colourful insects crawling in the green grass, uncovering an exciting and bewildering ecosystem. Language learning evokes a childlike wonder: unique intricacies are revealed, hidden meanings unfold – a ladybug climbs onto a blade of grass, is swept up by the child, cupped in the hollow of their hands.

Despite being mocked for its clashing consonants and harsh-sounding mouth movements, I love the German language. I enjoy attempting to echo perplexing pronunciations; I take pleasure in overhearing conversations on public transport, deciphering what gossip is being retold or what slang is being used; I cherish memories of club nights, the whole room alive with energy when *Major Tom (völlig losgelöst)* comes on.

The words that resist translation – entirely unique to the colourful ecosystem of German – are a constant source of intrigue. My personal favourites include: *Verschlimmbessern* (the process of making something worse, whilst trying to improve it), *Weltschmerz* (depression at the state of the world), and *Gemütlichkeit* (cosiness, friendliness, or peaceful belonging) - the latter an integral element when searching for new coffee shops or pubs.

The "labour" side of this love comes in two forms: the horror of German grammar (a nightmare for those of us who aren't great at paying attention to smaller details...) and the frustrations I often feel that, in school education, language-learning isn't prioritised for native English speakers. Without this necessity factor, we progress more slowly; the beauty of languages can feel far out of reach. The thicket of German grammar feels like dense undergrowth – intimidating, but alive, teeming with structure.

Whenever I find myself frustrated at my language skills – for example, my constant inability to distinguish my pronunciations between *Karte* (card) and *Kater* (hangover), leading to a few miscommunications – I remind myself that this labour is a part of the love. Like the warm summer sunlight on a curious child, I feel myself basking in the cosiness and geniality – *Gemütlichkeit* – of Germany.



until next time...

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