



LOVE SONG

JOHANNA STILLMAN

MASTER'S PROGRAM IN FINE ART
KONSTFACK, 2017

A work of art appears like a promise, if I were to compare it to something else in life it would be a romance. Like a romance a work of art asks me to question myself, step into a new world and transform. A work can be long or short, but always creates a life in itself, some sort of bubble that later must crack. In one sense it all ends when I leave a work as a finished piece. The feeling of it, like a break up. The main drive in the process is passion, but also unsure-ness, I cannot stop exploring the things I do not understand.

Romantic love is one of the strangest things I know of: the language of it, the “you and I”, the feelings, the attractions, the changes and the break ups. The comparison therefore goes in many directions: I make art about romantic love. And my art making is like romances. In this text I ask questions about muses and lovers, as questions about readers and viewers. You, as a reader, should be prepared to follow my unsure-ness. I will dwell on things and I am not sure there will be any answers.

CONTENT

Preface 5 – 9

Part I

Your Song 11 – 13

I Will Come To You 14 – 16

The Heart Wants What It Wants 17 – 20

Words 21

Style 22 – 23

Because Of You 24 – 25

Part II

Toxic 27

Pillowtalk 28 – 29

Irreplaceable 30 – 31

どうして君を好きになってしまったんだろう? 32

Miracle Of Love 33 – 34

Love Without Tragedy 35 – 36

Love You Like A Love Song 37 – 38

PREFACE

I like the feeling of being unsure. Not of being lost. Unsure and lost are two different states of being and most days I feel the opposite of lost. I found a way to make life a captivating adventure. Some might call this approach art, others writing, or just alternative living. I call it different things, different days, depending on what mood I am in, who I speak to and where I am in life. One might see this as a weakness. How can I make myself a future if I do not know how to name it? I see it the other way around; this inability to decide is also an ability to transform. I let my uncertainty guide me. Different situations, definitions and words transform me as I move back and forth between them: a poet, fan girl, academic, lover, writer or something else.

An artist? Yes, some days I am.

I think about the connection between feeling and naming, being and performing, living and writing. “With my burned hand, I write about the nature of fire.”¹ The author Gustave Flaubert once wrote, connecting his bodily experience to his words. I think about that sensation. How do experiences of flames turn to language? And what happens if I put it the other way around: is it possible to set my hand on fire by writing about lighters and gasoline? If performativity is a force that goes in both directions, from being to naming and from naming to becoming, it is. Written stories always bleed into reality.

I did not always like the feeling of being unsure.

“There’s a Swedish woman living here.” I overheard my landlord say when I was in Oklahoma last fall. “She looks like 25 but she is actually 34.” Which was followed by laughter, as if funny. “She doesn’t have a car so she walks and bikes everywhere. She is an artist and writer.” “What is she doing here, in Tulsa of all places?” The conversation continued. “Do you know the band Hanson? She used to be a fan of Taylor Hanson. But she isn’t anymore, or she, has grown up. And now she is writing about that.”

I wrote down the conversation, not to understand, but to feel it and transform it into something I could move on from: a written story, a work of art, a way to handle others expectations on my body. This was not the moment when I decided how to live my life, that happens slowly as I move around, but I think this was when I found relevant words for what I am doing. This might be a story of life choices I thought as I wrote. And then I wrote down that it was: a story of life choices. And I tried to describe it using the word “unsure”.

I let my uncertainty guide me, I wrote.

And some minutes later I felt unsure again. What was I doing in Tulsa, Oklahoma? What did I want

from Taylor Hanson? Was I an artist, a writer, a stalker or a mad woman? I looked at the words I had written, all the questions and then this one reassuring phrase; I let my uncertainty guide me. And I was not lost anymore. The feeling of being unsure had as by magic become likeable, a method and a reason. To hear someone talk about me; to make me into an outsider in a small town who travels around for uncommon reasons also made me realise something else. At first I felt a little put off, lonely and strange in the world, but then I felt something more, stronger.

I really wanted to be the woman my landlord talked about.

Going back to being an artist there are two ways: either you name yourself or you let others name you. In any case, you need a name to become that name. But the question of being an artist is not what usually occupies my thoughts, what I think about is how to make things that matter. In the article “Honesty with the real” the philosopher Marina Garcés writes about the possibility for art to be a form of treatment for the world. She wants art to heal some of the hollowness the world has created, to mend a distance within us, for us to be able to find a “we” in a privatised and personalised world. She also asks if art is able to do these things or if we have to abandon its form and name to free-making from certain structures. “It is hard for me to know.” She answers. “But I do not stop wanting it.”²

And honestly, I do not stop wanting it either.

In many cases categorizations are important, but what I want to write about in this text is a feeling and aim that, for me, is connected to my entire making. When I go into different projects they need different forms and this text needs a collective name for them all. Art? If I am to choose one definition for things I make, “art” is the best one I have heard of so far. Therefore, I will call my making art here, even if what I am talking about when I write “art” is a wide practice that might not always take place in the art context. When it comes to confusion towards art, I am also far from alone in the art world. Discussing and questioning the discourse of art seems to be a part of making for most artists that matter to me.

I think about: Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven coming into a painter’s studio to pose as a model, proclaiming she is the artist and the painter merely the audience. Tehching Hsieh making art out of, not making art for a year. Marcel Broodthaers creating exhibitions in an apartment and calling it: a fictitious museum. And Chris Kraus naming herself a failed artist turned writer, but still writing within the art world.

When Maria Garcés writes about the possibilities for art she proposes a concept she calls “honesty with the real.” I do not know how many times I read the article; and I still do not fully understand everything. But I follow the unsure-ness Garcés awakens in me. She describes how the world is changing and with that of course also art. Globalisation and capitalism have aggravated social inequalities and made knowledge more situated than ever before, this has annulled the distanced place from which artists used to look at the world and give it sense. She must talk about the ideas of

the art world as an autonomous sphere outside of society, “art for art’s sake”³, artworks and white cubes as closed entities. She writes:

Honesty with the real does not countenance re-editing today the game of distances that gave life to the artist-intellectual.⁴

And I think about making. For me there are two types of problem when making. The first one occurs when I attempt to separate art from life, when I go to a studio to do some art works, as if art was any work. This always results in me feeling uninterested and detached, like there is no point to it. But problems also arise when I try to contextualise everything I make as art. The second problem is like the opposite of the first one: it occurs when I attempt to transform everything transformable, as if my whole life was a sort of forced artwork. This might seem like contradictions, but it might also say something about the in-betweens and possibilities of art. Garcés proposes this strategy for making:

From proper distance to proper proximity. From head to body. This is not a displacement between counterposed polarities but between reversibilities. Getting involved is discovering that distance is not the opposite of proximity and that there is no head that is not body.⁵

“There is no head that is not body.” I think about desire. My desire for making is in one sense selfish; I need something to break or change within me. I need to get to a new point by making. This drives me and without it I fall into meaninglessness. What is the meaning of art if there is nothing at stake, an obsession?

I travelled to Tulsa to look for Taylor because I was obsessed with what that story would do to me. The background is the fact that Taylor was my first love. But my desire was not one that made me travel to find him no matter what; my desire was to make art. At a café close to Taylor’s studio I sat and described how it felt to sit there. The story was created between my body moving around in Tulsa and the writing I did there. I really lived and felt the story. It changed me. But the story had a starting point and an end. It was not life as usual. The closest I get to describe a work of art to something else in life is a romance. It can be long or short, but always creates a life in itself, some sort of bubble that later must crack.

In the book *Heroines*, Kate Zambreno describes how the man who wrote with his burned hand, Gustave Flaubert, falls in love. His mistress name is Louise Colet and the two of them are madly in love when he decides to back away. The only reason for his retreat is his writing; he wants to be able to use the experience of being with her in his texts. And therefore decides to turn Colet into a muse instead of a partner.

He was able to distance himself, devote himself, become a mystic/monk for the work, closing off from the demanding, desirous woman.⁶

Zambreno writes. Flaubert might have been able to write about the nature of fire, but I do not know about his method. He did not seem to create a feeling of “we” in the world. Reading the story one should simply sympathise with the muse. But I am ambiguous. Again: unsure. Although I do not identify as a monk, but more as a demanding woman, I recognise something in Flaubert’s decision to part from his lover. Maybe not so much the part of using someone to be able to write a good story, or maybe that too, a tiny bit. (I am sorry Taylor.) But the most striking thing for me is the decision to choose art over love. Flaubert wrote to Colet:

If I were in Paris... how I would love you! I would sicken, die, stupefy myself, from loving you; I would become nothing but a kind of sensitive plant which only your kisses would bring to life.⁷

Only your kisses? A sensitive plant? Oh. Flaubert’s battle seems so embarrassing familiar.

When I was twenty she sat on my bed in a small room at a Folk high school and I explained that I did not have the time to figure us out. I needed to work on my application for the Art Academies. It might have sounded like a bad excuse, a coward’s way to end something, but for me the struggle between work and romance was real. Typically, I did not get accepted and thoughts of her still scattered my mind. And a year later, while working on a new application I met someone else. He overwhelmed me in a way I could not stop myself from falling. I fell so hard; it took me three more years before I finally got accepted at the Malmö Art Academy. These events, romances and failing to be accepted at the academy might not actually correlate. There are a lot of different reasons; like over five hundred other people who also apply. But in my understanding of my work they started to.

When struggling with continuous rejections I remember hearing, or reading, that the singer Stina Nordenstam always produced a new record after the end of a romance; six records of sad love songs. I search for a confirmation of this information today, but I do not find it anywhere. Stina Nordenstam never wanted to become a public figure and there are very few interviews with her. Also, she has not produced a new record in over ten years.

I often think about love songs as the most telling stories of our time, in a rare interview from 1995 Nordenstam describes her song writing as “therapy.”⁸ My background in Swedish Art Schools during the beginning of this decade makes the chosen word seem somehow off at first. “Therapeutic” was often used as a disparaging remark; we had to make sure our art had a greater purpose than to handle ourselves, or things that happened to us. Art had to transcend into something bigger, neither too literal nor too political. It seemed clear to me: Art Schools were not a place for diary writing. But today I think about Marina Garcés. Maybe therapeutic art is the most hopeful one? The one that can really move us, and the world we live in.

For me, romances and art still stand in conflict with each other. I see them in a glimmer: two similar promises for me to step outside of my own skin, question everything and transform. I do not think it

is a coincidence that the Western view of romantic love and modern art evolved at the same time in history. Everything must be connected, must it not?

A way for me to handle the connection has been to make art out of love and love out of art. In one sense *Love Song* is a very private battle, a longing to understand my position in the world. But on the other hand this world concerns all of us, and what I feel is connected to things other people feel. Art as therapy? The best therapy for modern people might be to sing at the top of our voice to a love song, tears pouring down our faces as togetherness and loneliness merge into one big feeling. Love as therapy? Of course I am very unsure of how to follow these threads, but precisely therefore I am going to.

PART I

YOUR SONG

– It's a little bit funny this feeling inside, Elton John leans over a grand piano in a flowery shirt. He sings with closed eyes behind tinted glasses. The stage has a checked floor and chandeliers.

– And you can tell everybody that this is your song, it may be quite simple, but now that it's done. I hope you don't mind, I hope I hope you don't mind that I put down in words how wonderful life is while you're in the world...

The background shifts from red to orange to yellow and I think about you. Romantic love songs are almost always directed towards a nameless “you” and I need to talk to you.

The first love letter I ever wrote was sent to you. Just as this book was written to talk to you.⁹

Bell Hooks starts her visionary *All About Love* as if all of her intelligent visions were about her own personal relationships. And that might be the most honest and most productive way to put things. This is between you and me, you as the reader and you as my fantasy. You as a hope for me to transform a feeling into a feeling within another person. You as a word, a text on a paper. You in the broadest sense, but also in the flesh of people I have been in love with. “No one wants to speak of love unless it is for someone,”¹⁰ as Roland Barthes writes in *A Lover's Discourse*.

Whether philosophical, gnomic, lyric or novelistic, there is always, in the discourse upon love, a person whom one addresses, though this person may have shifted to the condition of a phantom or a creature still to come.¹¹

In this text I do not call you by your names, instead I address: you. You are one or you are many different ones. I do not want your faces or bodies to matter because this is not a text about you as people; this is a text about romantic love and what it does to us. Or to be more honest and productive: what it does to me. I should not be who I am today if I have not met all of you. Therefore, I hope you do not mind that I try to put it down in words.

– I don't have much money but boy if I did I'd buy a big house where we both could live, Elton John sings in 1970 and *Your Song* is perceived as a song about straight desire. Infatuations may seem vain and laughable, but who sings to whom and in what way matters. Today when publicly identifying himself as gay, very subtle hints of something else can be read in the lyrics of *Your Song*. To emphasise “boy” is perhaps too literal, but I see it as a symbol, a change in the making. The big masses might have been blind to queerness in 1970 but Elton John still sang about you. So to put you in a grander narrative: to talk to you no matter who you are, is a question of power. Love songs are a power structure between bodies. And who sings to who changes.

What I remember, what takes my breath away, are not so much the giddy experiences of moving and the disorientation of being out of place, but the ways we have of settling; that is,

of inhabiting spaces that, in the first instance, are unfamiliar but that we can imagine—sometimes with fear, other times with desire—might come to feel like home.¹²

Sara Ahmed writes in *Queer phenomenology*. And I wonder what it is that makes us take routes outside of the expected. Where does the movement of desire come from? Your gaze as I walk towards you. My hands as they touch you. Your neck when you bend over this text. You might wonder why I write in English. You once wished for me to write in English. I hope you get this, although it is in English. I used to be so intimidated, almost humiliated, by this second language of mine, and maybe that is why. I am learning how to overcome. And I have started to like the fact that my words are different: clumsier and more cliché. To write in English is like infatuation, it makes me a little bit hesitant at first, stupid but at the same time giddy.

Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had worlds instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my worlds.¹³

I return to *A Lover's Discourse*, over and over again. And I wonder if Roland Barthes longs to step out of the language into the loved one, or if he wants to stay in the language about the loved one forever. You? Here you are also, above anything else, words. This text might be seen as a love letter, a way to create and rewrite something, a performance to understand other performances, or just a text for me to vent you with others that have been thinking about you. When Chris Kraus writes love letters in the book *I Love Dick* she describes it as a reawakening.

What I didn't know was that by writing love letters I was writing letters to love, and timidly reawakening all the dormant powers in my rather repressed emotions.¹⁴

She writes. I am not writing this to tell you about the world, I am writing this because writing to you makes my own reawakening possible. I will follow you because as one of the cheesiest of love songs, by Foreigner, tells: "I wanna know what love is, and I want you to show me."¹⁵

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. This seems so clearly the case with grief, but it can be so only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. One may want to, or manage to for a while, but despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel.¹⁶

Judith Butler writes in *Precarious Life*. "I took a sip, from my devil's cup, slowly, and it's taken over me..." Britney Spears sings in *Toxic*. "I can't imagine a life without breathless moments, breaking me down, down, down, down..." Selena Gomez proclaims in *The Heart Wants What It Wants*. "What's love without tragedy?" Rihanna asks again and again in *Love Without Tragedy*.

"One does not always stay intact," writes Judith Butler. Listening to love songs one might think that falling in love is all about poison, toxic, pain and collapse. And that is of course not true, but if one

looks at the construction of romantic love in the Western world today, collapse does seem unavoidable. And maybe that is also why romantic love can make changes in the world. The power of love is dependent on us to come undone. So, this text is also a text about coming undone, a way for me to handle all the things that has and will continue to fall apart, memories of your faces: desire turning to grief, grief turning to desire.

And art? This text is also about art. I asked you to sing a love song for me, but you declined. I travelled the world to see you, but we never met. I spent a month to make drawings of your face, and then burned them.

I made a list with love songs and asked you to pick one. You leaned back on the sofa while Celine Dion, Robbie Williams, Annie Lennox, Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey sang at the highest of their emotional register, and then came Elton John.

– I know it's not much, but it's the best I can do. My gift is my song and this one's for you. You looked at me. “This.” You said. “This is how it feels like.”

I WILL COME TO YOU

I am not sure when I learned it, when you appeared like an unspoken promise of a feeling to come. At first I only expected beautiful things: a mending of two hearts, a soul mate, someone to spend the rest of my life with. There was nothing sexual about you. And nothing heart-breaking.

I always expected too much.

– When you have no light to guide you and no one to walk beside you, Taylor Hanson sings. Some kind of yellow filter makes his androgynous teenage body shine. The year is 1997 and his band Hanson is shimmering on a grey street in a hit music video to make teenagers all over the world understand that they are not alone.

We were not alone.

Every writer is first a reader, and what we read matters.¹⁷

Sara Ahmed writes in *The Promise Of Happiness*. I had a firm belief that I would recognise you right away. The others played love games to prepare for more advanced love games to come. They wrote love lists and claimed that they were together just because someone answered yes on a note they wrote and then cowardly asked a friend to pass over to their interest. Through reading books I learned about true love. The others did not understand. You were not supposed to giggle and run away or have a change of heart once a week. Fake love stories were what they made while I waited for the real thing.

What made me so sure of love, of how it was supposed to be? Ahmed describes how we follow things we learn to be good in the aim of happiness:

Happiness involves a form of orientation: the very hope for happiness means we get directed in specific ways, as happiness is assumed to follow from some life choices and not others.¹⁸

The idea of a soul mate might be one of the most splendid dreams ever, an at first sight easy fix for loneliness, and one that is told over and over again in Western societies. But if I live this splendid dream will it make me happy? Happiness is a relative word, Ahmed use it as a way to speak about expectations of happiness, rather than actual happiness. According to many studies, marriage is one of the most important things in order to live a happy life. An important daydream among young girls is to picture their wedding day, white dresses and happy smiles. But this dream is of course not a guarantee for actual marriage to make anyone happy. What this dream instead tells, is that marriage is a norm, and with Ahmed's terms "a promise of happiness". But for a marriage to be a good promise of happiness, a lot of things have to be considered.

It is not simply that we desire happiness but that happiness is imagined as what you get in return for desiring well. Good subjects will not experience pleasure from the wrong objects (they will be hurt by them or indifferent to them) and will only experience a certain amount of pleasure from the right objects.¹⁹

She writes. The politics of happiness is not as simple as: marriage will make you happy. In order to have a “good marriage” the way you love and who must be regulated and fill up different criteria. I was a white girl who lived outside of a medium-sized town in Sweden with mostly white middle class people, and to follow the norm and be a good promise of happiness you needed to be a white boy in my own age. I imagined how you moved in on the street where I lived, one year older you started in the class above me in the small village school.

I dreamed of things I thought would make me happy.

I dreamed about us talking. Like me you read a lot. And like me, you were a little lost in the world. I would tell you all the things I kept within me, I would tell you about a reasonless sadness that was growing from somewhere within me. Although nothing terrible ever happened to me, I kept crying at night. Could it be because I missed you? What if my sadness was because of a missing puzzle piece in my heart? I had read about the magic of love and how it made people whole. The idea about you made my tears more reasonable. When you appeared you would understand all of this and the understanding would make my sadness disappear.

The only thing was; you never came around.

In the music video for *I Will Come To You*, lonely people walk the streets, everything is grey, everything except Hanson. The three teenage brothers sing and play as if they were the saviours of the world. And maybe they were.

– Sometimes when all your dreams may have seen better days and you don't know how or why, but you've lost your way. Have no fear when your tears are fallin' I will hear your spirit callin'. And I swear I'll be there come what may... Taylor sings. And I still feel it.

Instead of showing up as a saviour at my school you showed up on TV, not at all as I had pictured falling in love. You looked like a girl, and I needed to understand that you were a boy before I got it. You. You were a star in a faraway country. When I felt lonely and strange in the world, I thought about you. We were alike I thought. I had never seen a boy like you before, and all of a sudden everything I read about romance was there. My heart was racing. I dreamed about touching you. I dreamed about living with you in a house full of books and plants. I was a poet and you a musician and we did not feel weird or alone anymore.

Because someone like you existed, I was okay.

But to be a white girl and fall for a white boy like you was not enough to desire well. I wonder if

there is ever a way for us to desire well? I was fourteen. A good desire when you are fourteen is directed towards someone in the close surroundings who feels the same. Being a good fourteen-year-old girl is to discover sexuality through kissing a nice boy, not through dreaming about someone who does not even know that you exist. So, everything beautiful turned messy in my head: shame. Yes. Shame crept into my dreams about you.

And for years shame kept me from telling anyone about my feelings for you.

This, I later in life understood, is something I share with many. Almost as a movement of our time: teenage-girls keep falling for androgynous stars. And shame? Many feel shame, but the shame does not stop our dreams. What is this movement? A change in the making? A dream of something else than worn out gender roles and patriarchal promises of happiness? I am not sure.

The struggle over happiness forms the political horizon in which feminist claims are made. My argument is simple: we inherit this horizon.²⁰

Ahmed writes, and I think about our hearts as a political horizon, desire moving and changing as the tide.

THE HEART WANTS WHAT IT WANTS

A close up of Selena Gomez face, in black and white, her voice is coloured with melancholy:

– This is a modern fairy tale, no happy endings, no wind in our sails. But I can't imagine a life without breathless moments, breaking me down, down, down, down... I close my eyes and listen to the words. You are indeed a modern fairy tale. Or, the way I dreamed and still dream about you is. Some hundred years ago love songs were different. Selena sings about a Western fairy tale.

According to the tale of this love, “courtly love” is almost always cited as the start. This medieval phenomenon started in the castle life in France and spread through Europe. It was a form of courtship towards women, not performed to seduce someone into marriage or sex, but to emphasize nobility. Troubadours spread the poetic narrative of courtly love, like modern pop singers, they toured around to sing and perform songs about a higher love. In *The Making of Romantic Love* William Reddy describes how courtly love, or *fin' amore* as it is also called, can be seen as a rejection of the church view of desire. By the early twelfth century the church saw sexual desire as a sort of appetite. This thirst was widely taught to be sinful, no matter whom you get aroused by you needed to abstain. There was no right way to enjoy sex or to feel desire; married couples liking sex was also sinful. But the troubadours sang about another type of desire, an appetite that was not sexual, but romantic. A thirst like courtly love was not selfish and sinful, but noble; it prevented harmful acts and did not arouse sexuality.

Accounts of the growth of modern love are many, researchers points to different time periods to show that the way we practice and feel romances changes. In *Love In The Western World* Dennis De Rougemont analyses a myth from the late twelfth century: Tristan and Isolde. As many other love stories Tristan and Isolde's ends with them dying in each other's arms. But the course of events that leads to the dramatic ending may seem illogic for a modern reader. In myths about love nowadays a fundamental strife among lovers is to live and be with the loved one, but Tristan and Isolde willingly choose to part and return to their social duties after three years of passion.

It is not too much to say that they never miss a chance of being parted.²¹

De Rougemont writes, and finds the reason for this in the view of passion. When the myth was born people did not see passion as we do today. The very idea of passion was a contradiction to marriage or to live happily ever after. Passion, courtly love and romances were something that happened outside of marriage. When a relationship became reality and a part of everyday life, it was not romantic love anymore and therefore the story of Tristan and Isolde needed events that kept the lovers from spending too much time in each other's arms. Their death in the end is, more than anything else, a symbolic one.

What, then, is the legend really about? The parting of the lovers? Yes, but in the name of

passion, and for love of the very love that agitates them, in order that this love may be intensified and transfigured at the cost of their happiness and even their lives.²²

He writes, and connects this to the heartbreaks that often follow romantic love of today. Although a fallen myth, the story of Tristan and Isolde is still relevant.

The very core of a true passion might still be that it is temporary.

In *Why Love Hurts* Eva Illouz also analyses heartbreaks and the transformation of love. By looking at books by Jane Austen, written in the beginning of the nineteenth century, she paints a picture of romance, far from the passion of Tristan and Isolde. The books of Jane Austen take place in upper class England and describe young women's life and marriage. They are often read as the first books to promote affection as the ground for a good marriage. Austen's characters do in one sense dismiss matchmaking, but social rules and rank are still very important. Eva Illouz points at reactions and feelings between the main characters that would not be that common today. A good match is a person who has the same values as the heroine, and who more than anything else wants the heroine to do the right thing, even if that in many cases today can be read as controlling. The way the hero follows the rules of courtship is crucial to his worthiness. And the rules are many. Illouz describes how this creates another dynamic to feelings in relationships. The heroines cannot let themselves be carried away by passion; the men perform all of the courtships first steps. So, emotions have to build up accordingly with the very slow rituals of romances.

One not only reveals but also comes to feel sentiments after the performance of rituals of conduct and the decoding of their meaning.²³

Illouz writes. A good marriage does therefore not have to do with couples expressing their true self. In a successful marriage the couple has the capacity to play the given roles successfully. A capacity that, of course, also has to do with feelings and emotional commitment, but not with a requirement for the heroine to dig deep inside and see who and what she really, really wants. Austen's heroines choose according to their sense of right and wrong, they do not escape and leave their families for a passion. Illouz describes this as "a performative (i.e., ritual) regime of emotions"²⁴ that stands in contrast with the regime of today, "a regime of emotional authenticity."²⁵

Authenticity demands that actors know their feelings; that they act on such feelings, which must then be actual building blocks of a relationship; that people reveal their feelings to themselves (and preferably to others as well); and that they make decisions about relationships and commit themselves based in these feelings.²⁶

She writes about the regime of today.

– Save your advice 'cause I won't hear. You might be right, but I don't care. There's a million reasons why I should give you up. But the heart wants what it wants, Selena sings. Do we live in a regime of

emotional authenticity? It seems like a feeling has taken over Selena, and when “the heart wants what it wants” there is not any reasoning that can stop it.

– And every second's like torture, heroin drip, no more so, finding a way to let go. Baby, baby, no, I can't escape...

Selena cannot escape. And the same goes for me. I tried to live without you. But even without you, you are still here: “a phantom or a creature still to come,”²⁷ as Roland Barthes writes. I want to let go, but I am unable to free myself from presuming that romantic love will strike me once again.

In a common Western way of feeling, romantic love is paired with sexual desire. The lovers feel both at once.²⁸

Reddy writes. When the idea of courtly love blended with sexual desire, romantic love as we feel it today appeared. This feeling also arose at the same time as the idea about marriage as a personal choice became more and more common. The passion of Tristan and Isolde and the reasoning of Austin's characters emerged as something at both contradictory and seducing. The dream I have of this person to be: all I ever wanted.

The creation of this dream can be explained in a complex puzzle of feminist claims, consumption, free will, ownership, secularisation and law making, but it is hard to tell what leads to what. What is for certain though is that all of this gave rise to ideas such as the importance of being faithful, the longing for a soul mate, sexual acts becoming closely linked to identity and the importance of authentic feelings and honesty.

In 1799 a German promoter of the Romantic Movement Friedrich Schlegel wrote *Lucindé*, the book is often cited as the first to describe romantic love as we see it today. Schlegel builds the book on his own experience of falling in love with an older married woman, and deciding to stay together and eventually also marry despite going against the values of society. He describes his feelings as:

What I dreamed of wasn't just a kiss or the embrace of your arms; it wasn't just a wish to break the tormenting thorn of yearning and cool the sweet flames in surrender; I didn't yearn only for your lips or your eyes or your body. It was, rather, a romantic confusion of all these things, a wonderful mixture of the most various memories and yearnings.²⁹

The modern fairy tale Selena is performing is also part of a famous love story. Two of the biggest pop stars of our time Selena Gomez and Justin Bieber fall in love. A public affair and a narrative are played out in the tabloids and in pop music. At first the lovers manage to keep the relationship a secret, but when the secret is out there is no escape. Soon their passion also turns into an on and off relationship. And over and over again they sing about each other. Analysing romantic love? Talking to each other through music?

The actor playing Selena's lover in the music video of *The Heart Wants What It Wants* can be seen as

symbolising Justin's inability to be faithful. His eyes and hands slip over someone else body when he thinks she does not see. Is Justin a douche bag? An idiot?

– Is it too late now to say sorry? 'Cause I'm missing more than just your body, Justin sings in the song *Sorry* when Selena has left him. Sexual desire and romantic love at the same time, yes. But maybe that is not the most romantic way to put it? When all of her love songs stop being about him finally he understands what his heart wants?

I think about Tristan and Isolde, how they needed to part to keep the passion alive.

But in the story about Selena and Justin, he does not get more chances, because star-crossed lovers do not die in each other's arms any more. No, the common myth of today is one where we break each other's hearts, a kind of small death, and then we move on to someone new. And often these love stories need a winner, and a loser. And in this story the loser is Justin. According to the narrative played out he is not worthy of Selena. In the tabloids and in his songs he is forever doomed to miss her. Like a symbol of all the douche bags in the world he never stops regretting his behaviour. Never stops dwelling over his lost love.

– I know, you know that I made those mistakes maybe once or twice. And by once or twice I mean maybe a couple of hundred times. So let me, oh, let me redeem, oh, redeem, oh, myself tonight. 'Cause I just need one more shot, second chances... He sings while Selena flies to Italy with her new lover The Weekend, or Abel Makkonen Tesfaye as the singer's real name is, to go on romantic boat rides and visit art museums.

WORDS

The rain pours down over Boyzone, in a typical boy band scenario; they pull their wet hair and sing.
– It's only words and words are all I have to take your heart away.

And I wonder about words, what words? All these symbols and descriptions of romantic love seem at once so familiar and strange. What do Boyzone mean by taking a heart away? Is the heart where sexual desire and romantic love coexist? To take a heart away, could that also be described as to start a passion that takes control and carries you away? Or: to make you fall in love?

You were in love. It felt strange to tell me. I stared at the words: In love. Strange. I did not know what the words meant to you, but you never told me that you were in love with me. And I could not hinder myself; I wrote this long message to let you know how “I felt bitter over your choice of words”. I mean I never told you that I was in love with you either, but still. “We were both so unsure and never talked about feelings like that” you answered me. Memories flashed in front of my eyes. Your face and hands. Your words. Your honesty. You did not write the only thing that would make my bitterness disappear; that you at some point were in love with me too.

I search for the words, because I am unsure of them. What do I mean when I write romantic love? What is this text really about? I see romantic love as a feeling that is connected both to sexual attraction and romantic obsession. It could be a dream about a stranger passing by on the street, a one-night stand, a short passion, a longer affair or a life-long commitment. Romantic love is not singular, it could be directed and lived out towards many people at the same time. In the discourse of this phenomenon many glossaries are used: to take a heart away, passion, obsession, Eros, intoxication, infatuation, to fall in love and love. And in this text I use them all.

Still, I am unsure about the line between them. When does infatuation turn into being in love? And when does being in love, turn into loving? And why was it so important for me if you at some point were in love with me or not? Was I driven by jealousy? Maybe. But mostly I think I wanted you to put words to a feeling I could not describe, for you with your sudden knowledge about definitions to give us a story in retrospect.

In the music video of *Words*, Boyzone hang out at a crowded pub when the rain suddenly starts to fall inside. Boyzone are drenched in water. Someone tries to write on a piece of paper. The heavy rain makes it all smudgy. Black ink flows and the words become blurry: unreadable. “To be at loss of words” might be an almost as common symbol of falling as “to take a heart away”. I look at the blurry characters in Boyzones music video, still searching for the wording between us.

STYLE

I once asked you to learn and record a love song for me, but it made you feel uncomfortable. And I did not want to force you into my art, so I did not bring it up again. Our relationship was not a work of art. But here you are anyway. You? I did not even ask for your permission. Are you a muse? I do not want to make you into a muse, especially if that makes you unconformable. But I really need to know about you and that might actually be the same thing, or the difference might be insignificant.

In the music video for *Style* Taylor Swift is wearing one, for fans, very familiar necklace.

– Midnight. You come and pick me up, no headlights, the song starts. Pictures of Taylor projected in the bedroom of the handsome actor in the music video. Like a symbol the necklace connects the fiction in the video to reality: the singer Harry Styles gave it to Taylor when they were a couple. Of all the singers using their own experiences in pop songs, Taylor is the most famous. She has made it into a method to date male sex symbols and make her experience of them into hits.

– You got that James Dean daydream look in your eye. And I got that red lip, classic thing that you like. And when we go crashing down, we come back every time. ‘Cause we never go out of style, we never go out of style, she sings about Harry and herself.

And I think about Chris Kraus and the book *I Love Dick*. The book is an autobiographical story about Kraus, who becomes obsessed with and writes letters to a man called Dick. The story starts with her feeling strongly attracted to him, and even if she does not know him the attraction soon grows into an infatuation. The infatuation makes her feel more alive than she has for years and her letter writing becomes an artistic method to get into an emotional flow. She writes:

What hooks me on our story is our different reading of it. You think it’s personal and private: my neurosis/.../I think our story is performative philosophy.³⁰

In my understanding Taylor Swift is similar. She examines a situation. For people to date her it is almost like a contract: the lovers become love songs from the beginning. Her romances are like performances to be able to write, but not only. The feelings in the romances are still as real. Taylor does not seem to fake things. When Dick calls Kraus’ letter “a game” she answers:

It’s more a project than a game. I meant every word I wrote you in those letters. But at the same time I started seeing it as a chance to finally learn something about romance, infatuation. /.../ Don’t you think it’s possible to do something and simultaneously study it?³¹

You once said it would be good for me to do things just because I felt like it and not make them into art. Like making art was an unnecessary excuse and if I stopped making excuses, stopped mixing up life and art I would start to live authentically, and truly happy. I never really understood how you meant: for me art always felt like the most authentic way to handle life’s complexity.

I think about the relationship between Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Marcel Duchamp.

Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, the real artist behind the pseudonym R. Mutt and the ready-made *Fountain*; a urinal often referred to as the most influential modern artwork of the 20th century. And Marcel Duchamp, the fake artist behind the pseudonym R. Mutt and also named the father of modern art. When they first met von Freytag-Loringhoven, or the Baroness as she is often called, was obsessed by Duchamp. According to history, Duchamp politely declines her crazy sexual invites. In one performance she takes an article about his painting *Nude Descending a Staircase*, rubs the print ink on her naked body and recites a poem whose refrain goes:

Marcel, Marcel, I love you like Hell, Marcel!³²

Is she trying to make a muse out of herself by force? Or does she talk about the future of art? Her future? Oh the history of art! Duchamp once named her art “the future” but then he chooses to forget. Of course she cannot know what history will make Duchamp into, and how history will forget, or tell the story about her as a mad woman, at best a muse for the geniuses.

In another performance she comes to the painter George Biddle hired as a model. When he ask her to undress she threw open her coat. Wearing among others a bra made of two tomato cans she simply declares that she is the real artist, and he the audience. And I wonder if the painters always were the audience and the real artists: the muses. And in that case, what does it say about our relationship?

I wish I could have Taylor Swift, Chris Kraus and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven to meet and talk about you, so I could learn how to treat you, how to connect and disconnect romance and art.

BECAUSE OF YOU

Your eyes were on me. Your face across the small gallery space. Distance and closeness. Did you speak English? Yes, your texts were in English. Yes, all your sculptures fell in on me. I am not sure of how to describe anything of this. At a loss for words again. You were so mind-blowingly beautiful. And that is not enough. And that might even be degrading. There was so much more than a surface. Or? What made my heart race? Something about your body, the way you moved and your hair? It might all have been because of your hair.

Your hair got me dreaming.

– I can't help it, I love the way it feels. It's got me stuck between my fantasy and what is real, Ne-Yo proclaims. While he dances he holds two fingers up in the air and looks confused between them. He found this pleasurable feeling somewhere between "a fantasy" and "what is real."

When the philosopher Byung-Chul Han writes about passion he uses the word Eros. Eros was the Greek God of sexual attraction; his Roman counterpart was Cupid (famous for shooting arrows at people making them desire each other). In *Eros agoni* Byung-Chul Han describes how the others absence in the meeting is what creates Eros. He sees Eros a fantasy of something unfulfilled: someone at the same time present and not, a hidden face. As in forth play Eros lives in what is not yet there, a kind of yearning. For romance to be a transfiguring force we therefore need to never fully meet. "Stuck between my fantasy and what is real," as Ne-Yo sings.

Everything was in one sense, so shallow. I did not know anything more about you then your look and your art. I yearned for a fantasy about you. But still, you seemed so specific, like no one I have ever met before. And you walked towards me.

A beautiful woman in the bathroom of a club suddenly kisses Ne-Yo. After making out she just leaves him. He is left to stare at his own face in the mirror, desperately trying to cool down by splashing water on it.

– Think of it every second, I can't get nothing done, only concern is the next time, I'm gonna get me some... He sings. And in the next scene, he hangs out with his girlfriend instead of the one who left him in front of the mirror.

If niceness and a matching partner are what we want to gain thru Eros, then we have completely misunderstood something, Han claims. Passion as a nice, healthy and pleasurable feeling contradicts what it is all about. And this ideal makes Eros slowly die. Han talks about the biggest reasons for this being capitalism. Because capitalism makes everything and everyone surrender under consumption. And consumption makes all things appear as graspable and validated, which leaves no room for us to dwell in the absence of each other. All fantasies need to be fulfilled and we are fooled to believe we

can get everything we want if we work hard enough. But in fact we are trapped in a society that tells us that every failure is our own fault, making us into both slaves and masters in one body.

And this logic also goes for romantic love.

I think about the graspable and the not graspable. In Western societies “a good promise of happiness,” with Sara Ahmed words, is one we can make our own. To be successful is to realize romantic dreams and sexual desires with our own bodies. All dreams seem to be there to be fulfilled. Unrequited love, like love for idols is a symbol of failure, because only a loser desires someone they cannot touch. And love stories slipping out of our hands before we have fully realised them is tragic.

Were we tragic losers? I thought it sad that I was to move back to Sweden so soon after we met. I wanted to know where our feelings could lead us. I thought we needed to live it all out, but you did not mind me leaving. “I like you as a fantasy,” you said.

She says she wants to keep the rose dress I wore the first night she saw me. When I tell her I want to give her a going-away present, she says she wants some of that perfume she smelled in my house, to evoke memories.³³

Anais Nin writes about June Miller in one of her many diaries. It is 1931 and both of them are married to men, and having romances with other people. After I left you started to wear my old bra “to evoke memories”, nobody but us knowing. And I did not want to hold back my imaginations anymore. This was not a tragedy, but something spectacular.

We went to edge, with our two imaginations.³⁴

As Anais Nin describe her and June Miller relationship.

But isn't desire always the same, whether the object is present or absent? Isn't the object *always* absent?³⁵

Roland Barthes writes. To live in different parts of the world, or to have a secret passion outside of marriage, must not be a requirement for us to dwell in the absence of each other, in Han's way of thinking. What Barthes and Han write about is also an absence, a longing that is there when the person is close. Han describes how Eros awakes before the lovers face, a face that “at the same time hide and show the other.”³⁶

The mystery of the other never seems to end.

PART II

TOXIC

– Baby, can't you see I'm calling. A guy like you should wear a warning, it's dangerous... I'm falling. Britney Spears is a flight attendant in a futuristic setting serving and spilling champagne for the plane's passengers. Turquoise flight attendant suit, sparkling eyes and seductive moves: something intoxicating has taken over her.

It is you again.

And all of a sudden my whole world turned into desire. I could not think. I dreamt of your glances. I dreamt of your hands. Your touch. I tossed and turned all night. I tried to hide it. But because of you something reawakened. Inappropriate dreaming. A thousand of sparkling diamonds on Britney Spears' body stocking as she crawls around singing, and flirting.

– It's getting late, to give you up, I took a sip, from my devil's cup, slowly, and it's taken over me...

I could not stop.

What will the world, what will the other do with my desire?³⁷

Asks Barthes. You took mine and made it yours. Or was it the other way around? Yours became mine? Movements between our bodies in the middle of the day, in a park, at dawn, by the sea, late at night, in a bed, under the sheets: I searched for your mouth. The intoxicated space between us, when we did not touch, when we played. Colleagues at work.

I liked you as a secret.

Hence the prospect of a passionate experience has come to seem the promise that we are about to live fully and more intensely. We look upon passion as a transfiguring force, something beyond delight and pain.³⁸

De Rougemont writes. Who would not want that? My hands moved in slow motion: in one big emotion. Your lashes against your cheeks when you closed your eyes. Burning skin at the same time soft and warm. The fine hair on your neck in the sun. All the small things in those movements, in those moments, that allowed me to step out of myself. Was this the power of passion?

In "passion" we are no longer aware of what "which suffers", only what is "thrilling".³⁹

De Rougemont writes. Yes. You were so damn "thrilling" I forgave and forgot where this feeling had led me, and what it did to me before

PILLOWTALK

It is hard to give words to sex. We moved in something wordless.

There are no words. I just want to say there are no words. I'm glad you came; and I'm glad you came.⁴⁰

Wark Mckenzie writes to Kathy Acker in an e-mail conversation after their first romantic and sexual meeting. The conversation continued, and collected in *I'm very into you*.

– Climb on board. We'll go slow and high-tempo. Light and dark. Hold me hard and mellow. Zayn Malik sings in *Pillowtalk*. In the music video he makes out with his real lover, the super model Gigi Hadid. Always these real lovers! All of a sudden everything smudges out, as in Boyzone's *Words* black ink flows. And Gigi's blond hair is all over the screen as a pattern, Zayn's body disappearing in a blur...

– In a bed all day, in a bed all day, Zayn mumbles.

What do you like best sexually? This has to be... hot memories. 'Cause who knows what the future bears and sexuality's always changing... Details, please.⁴¹

Acker writes to Mckenzie, later in their romance. Maybe writing about sex is not any different from writing about anything else. Or maybe the problem of it has to do with pornography and orientation. If I would describe movements between our bodies they would turn into porn, pleasurable for some and strange for others. What turned you on and in what way? How did we act to lose control, to find control, to give up and give in? What kind of body is a body of yours? I thought about your body as a landscape, where I slowly lost myself.

– Nobody but you, 'body but me, 'body but us. Bodies together. Zayn sings.

“Bodies together.” Is it possible to write about the notion of Western romantic love without porn? These splendid dreams of sex and love, or love and sex, in one person.

I
Tremble –
Do
Not
Laugh!⁴²

The Baroness writes to one of her supposed lovers Djuna Barnes, in one of her drawings where handwritten words fall like pictures. The Baroness often wrote about sex, making it into choreography-like poems, movements between bodies and words, both serious and fun, sometimes

graphic but not as graphic as porn.

It is – is it - ?
heart white sheet!
kiss it
flame beat!
in chest midst
print teeth
bite ---
this green
ponderous night.⁴³

She writes and I think of you. Erotic pictures played as a film in my head a long time afterwards: how beautiful you were, but also arousing, a trigger of the best kind. Maybe erotica and porn are two different things. Byung-Chul Han describes how he sees explicit porn as a part of why Eros is dying. The graspable again, when everything becomes explicit as in porn, there is no room to dwell on the mysteries of the other, but when it comes to erotica this is different. “The erotic is never free from secrets.”⁴⁴ Han writes.

Even in moments of sex, of bodily nakedness, you were never free from secrets.

IRREPLACEABLE

I could not put my finger on it. It was like a sudden emptiness, a growing feeling of irritation and betrayal. How did you betray me? It was as if you became someone else. We used to talk for hours. Now I stayed quiet while you talked, I bet my tongue and held my breath. I waited for something impossible; a moment in time that would never come back. Had I turned into a stranger too? I waited while we fell into strange roles. My passivity scared me, but I did not dare to break it because; what if you came back?

Perfect passion usually end when we awaken from our enchantment and find only that we have been carried away from ourselves.⁴⁵

Bell Hooks writes in *All About Love*. Had I been carried away? What if this was you? All of a sudden we seemed to have so little in common. What did we desire in each other? Did we really desire each other? I sat on your bathroom floor and looked out of the window at the buildings on the other side of the square and hesitated. I hesitated while we disappeared in front of each other.

In *A Lover's Discourse* Barthes uses Wolfgang Von Goethes book *The Sorrows of Young Werther* as an example of romantic love. The book ends with the main character, a young upper class male, collapsing in unhappy lover's sorrows and taking his life. In *A Lover's Discourse* the text is a way to prove that romantic love is a loop, two lovers can never fully meet. The thought is, just as in the De Rougemonts analyse of Tristan and Isolde, or Han's worries about Eros: passion dies when the loved one stops being a fantasy. Lacan, Nietzsche, Freud, Proust, Wagner and many other men get to describe a lover's agony through their language. Barthes shows romantic love as a balance between life and death, the sorrows of Werther become Barthes, or the other way around.

Love goes away when your mind goes away and then you're someone else.⁴⁶

Kathy Acker writes in *Blood and Guts in High School*. Your mind was somewhere else, but your body was still there. Suddenly, as a relief from all the confusion: your soft skin against mine.

As if sex was the only certain thing between us.

– You must not know 'bout me. You must not know 'bout me, Beyoncé sings in *Irreplaceable*. Moving around in front of a mirror half-dressed, she looks content and confident.

– I can have another you by tomorrow. So don't you ever for a second get to thinking you're irreplaceable... She proclaims, while throwing her hot lover out of her luxurious villa.

Is romance that easy? Could I have another you in a minute? I did not think so. Beyoncé kicks her lover out because he has been unfaithful; a broken promise has made her see him very differently. – Since I'm not your everything, how about I'll be nothing, nothing all at all to you, she sings.

“Your everything”? That is not a little to ask of someone.

I did not want to be your everything and you did not break any promises but I still felt so disappointed. “It is simple, you used to get a kick, get high from seeing each other and that is addictive.” My sister said to me. “So, now your body thinks that it is going to happen every time. And when you meet and you do not get a kick you get sad and disappointed. Not that romantic, but very human, it is called infatuation.” I nodded.

Infatuation.

The lover's constant thought: the other owes me what I need. Yet, for the first time, I am really afraid. I fling myself on my bed, I mull over the situation and I decide: from now on, I will not make any attempt to possess the other.⁴⁷

Roland Barthes writes in the end of *A Lover's Discourse*. Did I possess you? Had I thought you owed me what I needed? The feeling of it all was indeed like a spell. Like being hit by one of cupid's arrows, and then one day the spell was over. “My infatuation is gone.” You said. “Infatuation is complex, it comes and goes.” Comes and goes. The spell seemed to have disappeared almost over a night: we fell asleep in each other's arms and woke up like strangers. I think about Anais Nin writing about her romance with Henry Miller:

Finally he awoke to say, “I'm only what you imagine me to be.”⁴⁸

I looked at you. You looked the same, but also so very different.

どうして君を好きになってしまったんだろう？

I wanted to understand the logic: were you only what I imagined you to be? Was falling in love a feeling of being stuck between a fantasy and what is real? And did this, dwelling in the absence of each other, have to be a two-way communication?

For some reason I choose you, at the time I did not know much about you and maybe I still do not. I think it had to do with your looks; you were beautiful. It must also have had to do with the distance; you were a star in a faraway country and everything I read about you was translated to English by fans. I had seen you sing your Japanese hit *Why Did I Fall In Love With You* on YouTube getting tears in my eyes although I did not understand a word.

You seemed unreachable and it captivated me.

There is a passage in Richard Prince's book *Why I go to the movies alone* where he describes how the main character longs to make a person that he feels is "too real to look at"⁴⁹ into fiction by placing her on a flat paper.

He had to have her on paper, a material with a flat and seamless surface, a physical location which could represent her resemblance all in one place, a place that had the chances of looking real, but a place that didn't have any specific chances of being real.⁵⁰

He writes. Like Richard Prince I longed to make you into a fantasy, but not because you seemed too real to me but because you were unreal and far away. I longed to create a fantasy that made things far away from me feel close.

I started to set up rules. Each day I made a new drawing from pictures I found of you online. I also centred all of my romantic and sexual daydreams on you. I spent hours to look at videos, read interviews and listen to your songs. And if I thought about someone else I watched a video of you to make sure you were the only one on my mind. I did not kiss anyone else, but stayed true to you.

I was interested in two things, firstly if I could make myself fall in love and secondly if the feelings in that case would transport into the drawings. I fell head over heels for you, after a month of obsessing I was in love. Was this the power of romantic rules? "To feel sentiments after the performance of rituals."⁵¹ As Eva Illoz writes in *Why Love Hurts*. Yes, I think so. I looked at the by then thirty drawings. They bugged me, because they did not resemble your beauty or my feelings for you at all. Flat and ugly they lay in front of me. Was this the power of infatuation? Like words, drawings were not enough to describe you.

I began to understand, nothing is ever enough to describe you.

MIRACLE OF LOVE

- How many sorrows do you try to hide in a world of illusion that's covering your mind? Annie Lennox of Eurythmics sings; her androgynous voice feels close, electric guitars in the background.
- I'll show you something good. Oh, I'll show you something good. When you open your mind you'll discover the sign that there's something you're longing to find....

No matter how often we turn our minds and hearts away – or how stubbornly we refuse to believe in its magic – true love exists.⁵²

Bell Hooks writes in *All About Love*. True love? I automatically clench at the wording. And then I feel stupid for doing so, I changed so much of my dreams since childhood, and at the same time not. But what is this? Bell Hooks is a very intelligent woman. How can she claim such a thing exists?

- The miracle of love will take away your pain. When the miracle of love comes your way again... Annie, another intelligent woman sings, time and time again. *Miracle Of Love* seems to be a song about romantic love, but the video shows a bigger picture: wars and demonstrations. I try to understand.

How can the toxic Britney Spears sings about all of a sudden turn to miracles?

When you moved I felt dizzy, out of place, scared. What was I afraid of? To visit each other on weekends had been a way to have passion and a normal life to co-exist. Now it all came crashing down on me. I remember it in a haze. I panicked. But you asked the right questions, and listened. I think it was sometime around here you covered my ears and told me that you loved me.

“The feeling” I do not know how many times I used the expression in this text. I have been writing about feelings, because in modernity feelings create the narrative of romantic love. But what if that is what makes it so confusing? Is love best described as a feeling? Not according to Bell Hooks.

The word “love” is most often defined as a noun, yet all the more astute theorists of love acknowledge that we would all love better if we used it as a verb.⁵³

She writes. Love is not a feeling “love is as love does”⁵⁴. There is this idea that we “fall” in love, as if there was no choice, no responsibility. Attraction and passion needs to be acknowledged for what it is, according to Bell. It is an intimate connection, but it is not love. In the Western world we confuse things by believing that feelings/passion/Eros/infatuation automatically leads to love. But passion and love are in reality two very different things. And according to Bell, we can decide how to act on a passion. It would be so much better if we instead of saying; “I think I am in love”⁵⁵ would say; “I

will love”.⁵⁶

When I talk to individuals about approaching love with will and intentionality, I hear the fear expressed that this will bring end to romance. This is simply not so. Approaching romantic love from a foundation of care, knowledge, and respect actually intensifies romance.⁵⁷

Bell writes. I thought of us as a never-ending discussion. And I think that was why the infatuation never left me. Maybe words about romance can make us overcome after all?

True love does have the power to redeem us but only if we are ready for redemption. Love saves us only if we want to be saved.⁵⁸

She writes. Yes, we learned how to love each other. I learned to love. It did not happen automatically because of passion. But our love was never free from passion. And I wonder where desire comes into all of this? Is passion possible to stop? I always desired you so very, very much. There was this gigantic desire for you to stay, for us to love each other. Maybe desire, or passion even, can be seen as a power to help us overcome fears: to get us to love.

Because of you I came undone. From romance to something else, and then back to romance again. You were at times a hidden face: a mystery, an everlasting infatuation. And at other times: a partner, the closest one of all. Here I go with the dualism of modern love again. This might also sound as the myth of the soul mate. You came and changed me.

What Bell, however describes as true love, is not a fairy-tale. And even if it at times felt like it, we were not a fairy-tale either. According to Bell the tales are, one of the things, what keeps lovers from really loving. Love is not a feeling, but hard work. And even if we are able to create love, it does not mean that it lasts forever.

True love does not always lead to happily ever after, and when it does, sustaining love still takes work.⁵⁹ /.../ Usually we imagine that true love will be intensely pleasurable and romantic, full of love and light. In truth, true love is all about work.⁶⁰

She writes.

LOVE WITHOUT TRAGEDY

You said you would end up like Ennis in the movie *Brokeback Mountain* if I left. There is a scene in the end of the movie; Ennis ageing by himself in a caravan with almost no furniture, opens his closet, in the closet hangs an old skirt and a postcard of Brokeback mountain. He adjusts the postcard and strokes his hand over the skirt, tearing up at the thought of its owner.

Maybe it is ridiculous to compare, Ennis' lover Jack dies. And none of us are dead. But still. I hear your voice in my head and it feels like some sort of death.

There are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about.⁶¹

Jean Rhys writes about romance.

– What's love without tragedy? Rihanna asks again and again. Yes, what is love without tragedy? Because if true love is dependent on us to come undone like Bell Hooks means: what happens then when we part?

We could not stay apart. Every time we tried it was the same. Your body. It was as if something physical was missing, our bodies had grown so close that they were almost one, and without yours mine was broken. But the emptiness was placed both inside and outside of me. My best friend. It was as if I was not myself anymore, as if I did not know how to think and talk, as if something died.

Again death.

– Let's capture the moment, cause even forever ain't forever, I swear by the moment, as long as we got each other. Die in the moment. I'm prepared to die in the moment, Rihanna sings and I think about us. All the times we got back together. I swore by the moment, the moment was the only thing that mattered. As long as we had each other, we died in the moment.

Yes, we died in the moment.

But why? Why did we not manage to stay together?

What is wrong are not dysfunctional childhoods or insufficiently self-aware psyches, but the set of social and cultural tensions and contradictions that have come to structure modern selves and identities.⁶²

Eva Illouz writes. Her main thesis in *Why Love Hurts* is that love hurts. It does not have to be as

newspapers, psychologists and self-helping books suggest that it is due to a bad childhood or self-destructive behaviour. We cannot learn romantic love without being hurt. Heartbreaks are part of the construction of romantic love. Most grownups will sometime during their life suffer in the name of love because suffering is an inevitable part of how we live and experience romances today.

Inevitably.

When we finally managed to break up I could only focus on one thing: to stay alive without contacting you. For half a year I stayed alive. Memories flashed in front of my eyes. Guilt, shame and fear. What did I do to you? All your friends stopped contacting me. What did we do to each other? I stayed hidden at my parents' place in a small town where no one knew me.

When we finally spoke. You told me you met someone new, so simple. A tragedy, a strategy, a way to keep on going...

And my life continued.

It was not your fault. I wanted to tell you time and time again, until you got it. All the things that fell apart were not your fault.

All these small deaths of beloved ones whose hearts continue to beat for someone else is how it goes with modern love.

None of it is your fault.

LOVE YOU LIKE A LOVE SONG

I closed the doors and stayed inside, hidden from others gazes, books covered my eyes. I wanted to see something about words, something about the world, about you... Are you still there? I think I wrote this to make you less powerful. To make you go away even. I tried to follow you, but I am unable to. Because you keep slipping in and out of my language, of my dreams, never completely leaving because you stay a mystery, and mysteries never end. As Han writes about Eros: a hidden face. I read Warsan Shire. She asks:

Were you ever lonely? Did you tell people that songs weren't the same as a warm body, a soft mouth?⁶³

I closed my mouth and looked into the mirrors. I did not know what I wanted from you. And I still do not know. Love? Maybe the biggest problem of romantic love is that words are not enough? Or are words too powerful? I still do not know. This text might miss a warm body.

I still know nothing about you and often fear for you because of it; I cannot imagine you doing any of the things the rest of us here do, I should have a castle for us and have you come to me, so that you can be my enchanted master in it, we will have a great many carpets inside and music, and we will invent love.⁶⁴

Ingeborg Bachmann writes in a letter to Paul Celan, when they are falling in love. Can we invent love or is everything already predetermined, a never-ending loop of feelings? You come.

And you go.

Eva Illouz ends *Why Love Hurts* with the words:

Like all waking up after heavy drinking, a sobered endorsement of modernity does not have the fervor of utopias or of denunciations. But it offers the quiet hope that with lucidity and self-understanding, we can better live these times and perhaps even reinvent new forms of passion.⁶⁵

“To better live these times.” Maybe that is my key to this text. I might not want you gone after all. It might even be the other way around. I want you to stay. And to make you stay I need to acknowledge you as a love song. Or: as many different love songs. Falling might not be that healthy, but I did. I fell for you on the screen, in the gallery, at work, by my own rules. I fell for you time after time again, in everyday life, on repeat.

– I, I love you like a love song, baby. I, I love you like a love song, baby. I, I love you like a love

song, baby. And I keep it in re-pe-pe-peat. I, I love you like a love song, baby. I, I love you like a love song, baby. I, I love you like a love song, baby, Selena Gomez sings in a karaoke bar. Performing both on the karaoke screen and in front of it in a love song about love songs.

“I can be your Muse,” you once said. “I do not want to be your Muse,” you also said. You picked me a love song, refused to sing me a love song, sang me a love song and became a love song. Just before I left, you filmed me for an artwork. I was standing on a street close to the gallery where we first met. It was spring soon turning summer. And you asked me when I was the happiest. “When does everything make sense in your world?”

Some months later you send me the film. I talk about the feeling I get when I let my uncertainty guide me, when I write and make art. And I have never seen my face like that before. I see myself shimmer on a grey street. I smile. Oh, how I smile. I gaze at the camera. Is that how I looked at you?

How I look at you.

¹ Gustave Flaubert, often cited.

² Marina Garcés, translation from Spanish: Julie Wark, “Honesty with the real”, 2012, p. 6.

³ Théopile Gautier, often cited.

⁴ Marina Garcés, translation from Spanish: Julie Wark, “Honesty with the real”, 2012, p. 4.

⁵ Marina Garcés, translation from Spanish: Julie Wark, “Honesty with the real”, 2012, p. 4.

⁶ Kate Zambreno, *Heroines*, Semiotext(e), 2012, p. 87.

⁷ Kate Zambreno, *Heroines*, Semiotext(e), 2012, p. 86.

⁸ Eva Strömberg, “Stinas sång terapi” Göteborgsposten, 1995, the article says “terapi” in Swedish.

⁹ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, dedication on the first page, not numbered.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse – Fragments*, original: *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, 1977, translation from French: Richard Howard, Edition du Seuil, 1978, p. 74.

¹¹ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse – Fragments*, original: *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, 1977, translation from French: Richard Howard, Edition du Seuil, 1978, p. 74.

¹² Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology – Orientation, Objects, Others*, Durkham and London, 2006, p.10

¹³ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse – Fragments*, original: *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, 1977, translation from French: Richard Howard, Edition du Seuil, 1978, p. 73.

¹⁴ Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*, Semiotext(e), 2006, p. 111.

¹⁵ Mick Jones, “I Wanna Know What Love Is”, Electra, 1984.

¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, Verso, 2004, p. 23 – 24.

¹⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise Of Happiness*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 19.

-
- ¹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise Of Happiness*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 54.
- ¹⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise Of Happiness*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 37.
- ²⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise Of Happiness*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 59.
- ²¹ Dennis De Rougemont, *Love In The Western World*, Pantheon Books, original: *L'Amour et l'Occident*, 1972, translation from French: Montgomery Belgium, 1983, p. 37.
- ²² Dennis De Rougemont, *Love In The Western World*, Pantheon Books, original: *L'Amour et l'Occident*, 1972, translation from French: Montgomery Belgium, 1983, p. 37.
- ²³ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, Polity Press, 2012, p. 30.
- ²⁴ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, Polity Press, 2012, p. 31.
- ²⁵ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, Polity Press, 2012, p. 31.
- ²⁶ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, Polity Press, 2012, p. 31.
- ²⁷ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse – Fragments*, original: *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, 1977, translation from French: Richard Howard, Edition du Seuil, 1978, p. 74.
- ²⁸ William M. Reddy, *The Making of Romantic Love*, The University of Chicago, 2012, p. 1.
- ²⁹ Friedrich Schegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, original: *Lucinde – Bekenntnisse eines Ungeschickten*, 1799, translation from German: Peter Frichow, University of Minnesota, 1971 p. 44.
- ³⁰ Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*, Semiotext(e), 2006, p. 211.
- ³¹ Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*, Semiotext(e), 2006, p. 153.
- ³² Elsa Von Freytag Loringhovén, *BODY SWEATS – the uncensored writing of Elsa Von Freytag Loringhovén*, edited: Irene Gammel, Suzanne Zelazo, MIT Press, 2011, p. 13.
- ³³ Anais Nin, *Henry and June – from a journal of love (1931-1932)*, Harvest Book, 1989, p. 20 – 21.
- ³⁴ Anais Nin, *Henry and June – from a journal of love (1931-1932)*, Harvest Book, 1989, p. 44.
- ³⁵ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse – Fragments*, original: *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, 1977, translation from French: Richard Howard, Edition du Seuil, 1978, p. 15.
- ³⁶ Byung-Chul Han, *Eros Agoni*, original: *Eros Agoni*, 2012, translation from German to Swedish: Ola Wallin, Eratz, 2015, the text say ”som på en gång visar och döljer nästan” in Swedish, p. 26.
- ³⁷ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse – Fragments*, original: *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, 1977, translation from French: Richard Howard, Edition du Seuil, 1978, p. 53.
- ³⁸ Dennis De Rougemont, *Love In The Western World*, Pantheon Books, original: *L'Amour et l'Occident*, 1972, translation from French: Montgomery Belgium, 1983, p. 16.
- ³⁹ Dennis De Rougemont, *Love In The Western World*, Pantheon Books, original: *L'Amour et l'Occident*, 1972, translation from French: Montgomery Belgium, 1983, p. 16.
- ⁴⁰ McKenzie Wark, Kathy Acker, *I'm very into you – correspondence 1995-1996*, Semiotext(e), 2015, p. 19.
- ⁴¹ Kathy Acker, McKenzie Wark, *I'm very into you – correspondence 1995-1996*, Semiotext(e), 2015, p. 74.
- ⁴² Elsa Von Freytag Loringhovén (poem written ca 1918-1922), *BODY SWEATS – the uncensored writing of Elsa Von Freytag Loringhovén*, edited: Irene Gammel, Suzanne Zelazo, MIT Press, 2011, p. 207.
- ⁴³ Elsa Von Freytag Loringhovén (poem written 1920), *BODY SWEATS – the uncensored writing of Elsa Von Freytag Loringhovén*, edited: Irene Gammel, Suzanne Zelazo, MIT Press, 2011, p. 53.
- ⁴⁴ Byung-Chul Han, *Eros Agoni*, original: *Eros Agoni*, 2012, translation from German to Swedish: Ola Wallin, Eratz, 2015, the text say “Det erotiska är aldrig fritt från hemligheter.” in Swedish, p. 44.
- ⁴⁵ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 179.
- ⁴⁶ Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School*, 1984, often cited.
- ⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse – Fragments*, original: *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, 1977, translation from French: Richard Howard, Edition du Seuil, 1978, p. 231.
- ⁴⁸ Anais Nin, *Henry and June – from a journal of love (1931-1932)*, Harvest Book, 1989, p.239
- ⁴⁹ Richard Prince, *Why I go to the movies alone*, 1983, p. 11.
- ⁵⁰ Richard Prince, *Why I go to the movies alone*, 1983, p. 11.
- ⁵¹ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, Polity Press, 2012, p. 30.
- ⁵² Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 186.

-
- ⁵³ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 4.
- ⁵⁴ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 172.
- ⁵⁵ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 177.
- ⁵⁶ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 177.
- ⁵⁷ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 173.
- ⁵⁸ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 169.
- ⁵⁹ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 181.
- ⁶⁰ Bell Hooks, *All About Love – New Visions*, William Morrow and Company, 2000, p. 183.
- ⁶¹ Jean Rhys, cited by Kate Zambreno, *Heroines*, Semiotext(e), 2012, p. 101.
- ⁶² Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, Polity Press, 2012, p. 4.
- ⁶³ Warsan Shire, *Teaching my mother how to give birth*, flipped eye publishing, 2011, p. 23.
- ⁶⁴ Ingeborg Bachmann, in a letter written 1949 to Paul Celan, original: *Lass uns die Worte finden*, 2008, *Correspondence*, translation from German: Wieland Hoban, Seagull Books, 2010 p. 11.
- ⁶⁵ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, Polity Press, 2012, p. 248.

Songs mentioned in the following order:

- “Your Song”, Elton John, Berine Taupin, 1970.
- “I Will Come To You”, Isaac Hanson, Taylor Hanson, Zac Hanson, Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil, 1997.
- “The Heart Wants What It Wants”, Selena Gomez, Antonina Armato, Tim James, David Jost, 2014.
- “Sorry”, Justin Bieber, Julia Michaels, Justin Tranter, Sonny Moore, Michael Tucker, 2015.
- “Words”, Barry Gibb, Robin Gibb, Maurice Gibb, 1967, originally performed by The Bee Gees in 1968, recorded by Boyzone, 1996.
- “Style”, Taylor Swift, Max Martin, Shellback, Ali Payami, 2015.
- “Because of you”, Mikkel Storleer Eriksen, Tor Erik Hermansen, Shaffer Chimere Smith, 2007.
- “Toxic”, Cathy Dennis, Christian Karlsson, Pontus Winnerberg, Henrik Jonback, 2004.
- “Pillowtalk”, Zayn Malik, Levi Lennox, Anthony Hannides, Micheal Hannides, Joe Garrett, 2015.
- “Irreplaceable”, Shaffer Chimere Smith, Mikkel Storleer Eriksen, Tor Erik Hermansen, Beyoncé Knowles, Espen Lind, Asmund Bjorklund, 2006.
- “どうして君を好きになってしまったんだろう?”, Doshite Kimi o Suki ni Natte Shimattandaro?, in English: Why did I fall in love with you? lyrics: Lambsey, composition: Fredrik Odesjo, Sylvia Bennett-Smith, Mats Berntoft, 2008.
- “Miracle Of Love”, Annie Lennox, David A. Stewart, 1985.
- “Love Without Tragedy/Mother Mary”, Terius Nash, Robyn Rihanna Fenty, Carlos McKinney, 2012.
- “Love You Like A Love Song”, Antonia Armato, Tim James, Adam Schmalholz, Performed by: Selena Gomez and the Scene, 2011.