

Art of Love

Paintings by Colleen Hennessy

Thoughts from Rubem Alves

New London Librarium

Happiness is an
experience of
fitting together, quite
like that of the fitting
together of the bodies
of people in love, in the
act of love.

In each of us
resides an Emptiness
that waits for
something to fill it.

We are all feminine.





Love can't stand
forgetfulness.

Love can't stand to lose
what it has loved.





I love you, yes,
but it isn't actually
you I love.

I love some other
mysterious thing
that I don't know
but which I seem to see
flowing in your face.



How can one long
for someone who
is present?

The answer is simple: we long for a person who is present when he or she is in the process of leaving.



This is the pain of unsatisfied passion: the impassioned wishes to possess the object of the passion, but it always gets away. Thus the lover's suffering. Driven by pain, the lover wants to possess the loved. But the lover doesn't know that, for passion to continue to exist, the beloved must continue to flee. Passion loves only free objects, like birds in flight.

Love is born,
lives, and dies
by the delicate power
of the poetic image
lovers think they see
in the face of
the beloved...





That's how
old loves are:
faithful
and weary.

love letters

I read and re-read a poem by Álvaro de Campos. I don't know whether I should believe it or doubt it. If I believe, I doubt. I doubt because I believe. Because it was he himself who said—or better, his other person, Fernando Pessoa—that he was a pretender. “All love letters are ridiculous. They wouldn't be love letters if they weren't ridiculous...”

In my office I have a reproduction of one of the most delightful paintings that I know of. *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). A woman, standing, reads a letter. Her face is lit by the light of a window. Her eyes read what is written on that piece of paper that her hands hold, her mouth slightly open, almost in a smile. She's so absorbed that she doesn't even notice the chair at her side. She reads on foot. I think I'm capable of reconstructing the moments that preceded the one that the painter froze. Knocks at the door interrupt the household routine. She opens the door, and there's the mailman with a letter in his hand. By simply reading her name on the envelope, she knows who sent it. She takes the letter, and with that gesture she touches a distant hand. That's why love letters are written. Not to give news, not to tell anything, not to

silence of solitude, the calm of the pen poised over the table, waiting for and choosing thoughts and words. The telephone does away with solitude. In a telephone call we never say that which we would say in a letter. For example: “I was walking down the street when all of a sudden I saw a blossoming pink ipê tree that made me remember that time when....” Or “Re-reading Neruda’s poems I found this one which I imagine you would like to read....”

The difference between a letter and a telephone is simple. The telephone is an imposition. The conversation has to happen right then. It lacks the essential element of the word that is said without expecting a response. And once it’s over, the two lovers are left with empty hands.

But the woman has in her hands a letter. The letter is an object. If she had not been able to take it into her solitude, she would have been able to put it away in her pocket in the delicious expectancy of an opportune moment. A telephone call can’t wait. The letter is patient. It stores its words. And after being read, it can be re-read. Or simply caressed. A letter against the face—could anything be as loving? A letter is more than a message. Even before being read, even inside its closed envelope, it has the quality of a sacrament: a palpable presence of invisible happiness...

These thoughts came to me after reading the letters of a young scientist, Albert Einstein, to his girlfriend, Mileva Maric. It was they that led me to the poem by Álvaro de Campos. They were ridiculous. All love letters are ridiculous. I think the editors thought the same. And as an

