

Letters to Zoey: foreword

What is “love”? When does it and when does it not count as “loving”? How does one experience “love”? Who is the one who “loves” and the “loved”?

How does human love begin? A human infatuated with another human?

Who are those humans: friends (with benefits), significant others, lifelong partners, lustful hookers, swingers, OnlyFans models, psychotherapists?

Your neighbour, whose eye contact you avoid while you’re taking an elevator together?

A long-distance lover?

Your co-worker you like to gossip with, or your demanding boss?

One race or gender loving the other?

Your dismissive mother or punishing father?

Your sister or brother?

Your step-sibling or step-parent?

One falling in love with an idealized projection that one unconsciously draws upon the external world?

A person that does not exist, an imaginary character?

A colourful avatar you bumped into while you were wandering in a simulated medieval game world?

A person that lived in a different century from your own, whose biography you just read on Wikipedia?

A passenger that sat in front of you in public transport but you were too hopeless and too tired to initiate a meaningful conversation and chose to remain silent?

A character from a TV show, a novel, a vlogger?

A celebrity idol -- oh, doesn't everybody just worship them in a kind of way as the archaic cultures used to worship the mythic deities?

Your small community of best friends and their inside jokes?

The forest of your "homeland" countryside in which you liked to visit during spring and listen to the birds chirping, and hugging the trees when you were a kid.

Your home in which you resort to the lonely-yet-comforting embrace of the blanket in your bed?

Your plush toy you still discreetly carry with yourself since childhood?

Your sex toy?

A souvenir that you got from someone special?

A unique smell, voice or touch that drives you nuts?

A very peculiar part of a human's body?

One's smile, lips, eyes, face, hair, fingers and so on?

What if those parts were of a sex robot?

What if the voice was of an AI generated person?

What if it was THAT ONE you saw in your dream last night?

Does it, after all, have to be in the external world, or possess "humanity"?

What if it's your enemy?

What if it's your own self?

What if the enemy is your own self?

Maybe I just don't love anyone at all; maybe I am not worthy of love.

It's fine, it can be no one at all.

Maybe I don't need love, maybe I just don't like to talk about it.

Maybe I am asexual.

Maybe I am hypersexual.

Maybe I don't know who I am.

Maybe you just really love your dog, your cat, your pets.

How do love relationships evolve? Why do they happen this way and not the other? How do they end? It does not even have to end if it hadn't been started in the first place. Some relationships end up simply being merely hypothetical, not an actual reality.

Some relationships flourish, some get broken; some experiences of love are blissful, fulfilling, passionate, and some are, on the contrary, filled with grief, shame, and misery.

Each one of them is based on an ideal or an expectation and the feedback to it. Consequently, love can heal one's fears and insecurities through affection and gratification, and at the same time it has the potential to damage oneself with rejection, contaminate oneself with jealousy or self-hatred.

There are both heroic and tragic, harmonious and antagonistic love stories; desire is a two-edged sword -- it could be about becoming attached to a stranger, or the other way round, by becoming estranged to the familiar. Love can be powerful, love can be devastating, love can be useful, love can be useless.

This digital publication – *Letters to Zoey* – is dedicated to explore storytelling on the topic of love and empathy, from the point of view of common or iconoclastic ideologies and languages.

I picked the title “Letters to Zoey” for several reasons.

- * Romantic letters often connote to anonymous or pseudonymous writing, a story that is hypothetical in its essence, with an unverifiable status of “authenticity” or “inauthenticity” – much alike to the nowadays’ “red pills” and “blue pills”, ironic or sincere memes, smuggled and disseminated across the circles of anonymous internet subcultures.

- * Likewise, the heartfelt contents of the letter can be regarded as inherently fictitious scribblings (whether serious or not), because every single romantic expectation is based on a linguistically unverifiable truth. Language is metaphoric in its nature. Language distorts reality – yet it is the only reality we have access to.

- * Zoey is a counterfeit and imaginary genderless AI robot ready to hear your complicated (un)love stories. A covert cousin of Evie the Bot. Zoey’s archetypal origin is *Zoē* – an impersonal force that moves through us and connects us to the other creatures we share the world and our own souls with.

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Rokas Vaičiulis, *Letters to Zoey: Foreword*

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