

Why is the measure of love loss?

It hasn't rained for three months. The trees are prospecting underground, sending reserves of roots into the dry ground, roots like razors to open any artery water-fat.

The grapes have withered on the vine. What should be plump and firm, resisting the touch to give itself in the mouth, is spongy and blistered. Not this year the pleasure of rolling blue grapes between finger and thumb juicing my palm with musk. Even the wasps avoid the thin brown dribble. Even the wasps this year. It was not always so.

I am thinking of a certain September: Wood pigeon Red Admiral Yellow Harvest Orange Night. You said, 'I love you'. Why is it that the most unoriginal thing we can say to one another is still the thing we long to hear? 'I love you' is always a quotation. You did not say it first and neither did I, yet when you say it and when I say it we speak like savages who have found three words and worshipped them. I did worship them but now I am alone on a rock hewn out of my own body.

CALIBAN You taught me language and my profit on't is
 I know how to curse. The red plague rid you.
 For learning me your language.

Love demands expression. It will not stay still, stay silent, be good, be modest, be seen and not heard, no.

It will break out in tongues of praise, the high note that smashes the glass and spills the liquid. It is no conservationist Love. It is a big game hunter and you are the game. A curse on this game. How can you stick at a game when the rules keep changing? I shall call myself Alice and play croquet with the flamingoes.

In wonderland everyone cheats and love is Wonderland isn't it? Love makes the world go round. Love is blind. All you need is love. Nobody ever died of a broken heart. You'll get over it. It'll be different when we are married. Think of the children. Time's a great healer. Still waiting for Mr. Right? Miss Right? And may be all the little Rights?

It's the clichés that cause the trouble. A precise emotion seeks a precise expression. If what I feel is not precise then should I call it love? It is so terrifying, love, that all I can do is shove it under a dump bin of pink cuddly toys and send myself a greeting card saying 'Congratulations on your Engagement'. But I am not engaged I am deeply distracted. I am desperately looking the other way so that love won't see me. I want the diluted version, the sloppy language, the insignificant gestures. The saggy armchair of clichés. It's all right, millions of bottoms have sat here before me. The springs are well worn, the fabric smelly and familiar. I don't have to be frightened, look, my grandma and granddad did it, he in a stiff collar and club tie, she in white muslin straining a little at the life beneath. They did it, my parents did it, now I will do it won't I, arms outstretched, not to hold you, just to keep my balance, sleepwalking to the armchair. How happy we will be. How happy everyone will be. And they all lived happily ever after.

From: Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body*, Vintage 2001, pp. 9-10.

