AN INTERVIEW WITH MANUEL
ON THE TOPIC OF LOVE LETTERS

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INTRODUCED by
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What follows is the transcript of an interview which occurred on 12/11/2026.
The transcript has been edited for the purposes of concision and readability.

INTRODUCTION

The Dishonest Love Letter is not Un-True.

"If intense literature seems very often to have an autobiographical character...this is not primarily because a life expresses itself, it is far more a matter of an intergrated life being haemorrhaged into the laceration of writing."

Nick Land, in *Thirst for Annihilation*

'We have to go down to the root of our desire in order to tear the energy from its object. That is where the desires are true in so far as they are energy. It is the object which is unreal.'

Simone Weil, in *Gravity & Grace*

I want to introduce Manuel's interview by recalling the conversation we had after it. We talked about what honesty really means; is it to recall and recount the particularities of something? Is honesty concerned with the facts of the case? In a love letter, what are we to be honest to? The state of a relationship? A shared history? Perhaps fantasy, in which case, does honesty regard love's longevity, or only that which feels right in the immediate?

It seems to me that honesty has much more to do with disclosure than truth. Honesty is to surrender your understanding of whatever a question concerns in the moment of asking. That disclosure, however, doesn't necessarily pay fidelity to our love; we all know the ways in which honesty can contravene romance. One must at times be dishonest if they are to act in the spirit of their feeling, which is surely truer than any particular or pedantic specificity. That is the lover's acceptable glissement; the slip, is exactly where the truth of love comes to expression.

Which is not to admit the analyst's dream; the love letter is not a theatre of the unconscious. The lovers' dance (by the borderlands of seduction and confession) need not be decrypted. To do so will bring the two little closer. Rather, I intend to say that the love letter cannot but express the confluence of Eros which comports their situation, and is therefore – regardless of pretence – relentlessly faithful to their love as such. Which again, is not to say the love letter pays fidelity only to one's beloved, but rather the dynamic weave of desires which articulate each and every one of us, in every aspect.

A love letter might affect the adoration of its addressee, less for the author's unique devotion to them, but as the writer's cultural capital and romantic ideals come to bear. Another letter might abandon style, necessitated by the contingencies of a frantic moment – the errors and omissions which populate such a letter are not slips of the Freudian type, but nonetheless speak to the throws of sensation and situation. We'd hope, also, that most of these letters neglect the tone-deaf inclusion of anything "brutally honest". To praise in love, a fidelity to truth - rather than unrepentant honest - is really to advocate a shared discretion.

One can derive from this position, a romantic and a pragmatic reading. The romantic would argue that, as a fragment of one's Dasein, the love letter assumes whatever value it might from its being a singular expression of our beloved's being-there. The pragmatist will insist that regardless of any transcendent meaning, their occasional dishonesty is faithful to their truest intentions, and proper to the poetics of romance. I am unsure which of these readings are more proximate to Manuel's thinking – if either. But what is definitely shared between each perspective, Manuel, and myself, is the assertion that love need not be honest to be true.

MANUEL

What makes a good love letter?

I guess it depends. In a general way, I'd say being able to communicate the feelings you want to communicate – that's the main thing, the general thing. But speaking for myself, I would say... high literary quality. I, as a writer, feel that because I have the capacity to write very well, I would like to go even further in a love letter. It can express more deeply how I feel for this person – taking the effort to write something very beautiful.

Is that an expectation you hold for yourself alone, or is that something you'd expect from others – if you were to receive a letter?

If I were to receive a letter – which it is not clear to me I ought expect – I would not expect it to be beautiful. If it is sincere, it will come from wherever it comes. If the person isn't a writer, maybe they won't feel they have the capacity to write well. Maybe it isn't something they themselves expect in a love letter and they'd rather be more direct. I think it depends – I don't expect [anything].

When you write these letters – or, first of all, do you write love letters?

I have written them. I don't know if I was conscious of them being love letters when I was writing them. But they can be thought of [as love letters] I suppose...

What do you mean by that? Because, if you're writing these very deliberate, high-literary letters, how could you confuse them for anything else when writing them?

I think... my mother has always been prone to sending little cards and stuff – for Christmas or Valentines Day. I think it has to do with that habit. If I'm leaving a place for example – I do try to write my friends a letter, telling them how good they've been to me [...] thanking them for the experience... I think that when I've written love letters in the past, I have thought of them within that context; in the context of an experience ending, and trying to communicate how I felt about that experience. What I'm trying to say is that, because I also do it with friends – I didn't think about it in a "love" way, but seeing it now... I can see how they were love letters. Maybe these friendly letters were also love letters – that's a possibility.

Let's explore that possibility. Speaking strictly for yourself, do you think there's a way to meaningfully distinguish between a letter you'd write because you love a friend, as opposed to a letter which is decidedly romantic?

I don't think so, I feel I'd probably go about it with the same point of view. I'd try to make them equally beautiful for all the same reasons I mentioned before. I don't think there'd be anything purposefully different just because one's for a love interest. I think it would be different by virtue of the feelings being different...

You're someone who has moved through – or been processed by – an academic humanities system; you're very familiar with, for example, post-structuralist critiques of language and its limitations. Considering that knowledge and in its shadow, I wonder how you reckon with these perceived limits as you write about such deeply personal, overwhelming emotions. Can your writing contain them, or is there something beyond the letter – in its gesture, or in the gesture...

I think it's a lot of things. Definitely the gesture – I appreciate the ritual of giving someone a letter. Also, the person's forever having this piece of paper [...] It's a memento. But then there is an extent to which I want to be able to translate my feelings – I don't think this is something I expect to be able to do... The last time I wrote one, I was... I wasn't drunk anymore, but I had been drunk; I loved the night before, and I was being hungover; I had slept very little, I was aware my brain wasn't fully functional... So, I could say "I like you a lot, a lot, a lot; I really, really, really like you", but the extent wasn't translated into words. I didn't really try to, because I knew I couldn't. The expression of it's enough – the expression of there being a feeling is enough.

So, the failure to reach that literary standard doesn't implicate the necessary failure of the letter itself – there's something in your having written it, you're feeling compelled to write it in that moment, which in failure successfully evokes a gesture toward a feeling?

Definitely. I think, in this day and age, people aren't really writing letters. It signals something, that I took the time to sit down - thick and hungover and ready to kill myself - I took the time and wrote this thing. That's what's more valuable to me than the contents of it. Of course, if you write something really low effort, I also feel that's not great. But I think the gesture of it seems more important than anything.

But, nonetheless, you aspire toward certain qualities in your writing. And I'm wondering now what those qualities are – what does high-literary quality mean in this context? What is it you're aspiring toward?

That's a difficult question because it's not something I can point to in particular... I would say, at this moment, I am not a poet. I have been in the past. Right now I am not, so I don't think I'd aspire for poetry. I think something close to poetry, but also, I do want to be understood – sometimes poetry gets in the way of that. Maybe... adornment; metaphor, allegories, [&c.]. It's not that I'm thinking I'll make the text beautiful by adding stuff, it just feels right, and I think that that in itself is very rare.

I like this idea of adornment, and I want you to expand on it and why you think it's important. But I also want to ask on a point of clarification, is adornment decoration?

I think the problem with words like decoration is that it implies something isn't necessary. To me at least, it is always necessary when I'm sending a letter. It's not something put-on as an afterthought; it is always an integral part of what I'm writing. So... the question was what? Why I think it's necessary?

Yeah, what does that adornment do? Does it have a function? What exactly do you mean by it...

Well, one learns about love letters through media, and I think – because of my education – I learnt about them through the French. 'The Princess of Cleves' for example, [...] 17th century court literature; [...] 'La Préciosité' [...] precious things [...] It's adornment, right? You're not aiming to write the way people speak, but in a very beautiful, adorned way. I learnt about love letters with that context, and I think I'm striving to match that image I have in my brain. When I think about love letters, I think about France; the courts, paper that smells like something, bows [...] That all contributes because, again, it's part of an effort, but there's also an aesthetic I'm trying to reach; an aesthetic of love – that I have in my brain, that exists somewhere...

Let me propose a theory, and you can rebuke it, or agree with it, or change it – whatever. It's a little unusual to think of adornment or even decoration as being useful or functional, but here it does seem to have a strange utility. Exactly in its being excessive, it traces effort, it traces time; it refers back – maybe symptomatically – to something essential. Even if adornment isn't necessary for a letter's prosaic [communicative] purpose, there is meaning in its being more-than. Does that make sense? Does it touch on what you find important?

Yes, definitely. Thinking of gifting someone something – which I guess, in some ways, love letters are gifts – I'm always particularly offended by people who go looking in the sale [...] It's like you don't care about your partner [...] For me, it's always a question of translating an effort, my care; otherwise it seems like your just writing "I love you" on a piece of paper. To me, it means less, because there isn't that effort.

Referring back to that hungover love letter, would it have meant more for you to have waited until you could write it the way you really wanted to? Or is there meaning in your inability to wait? Or is this totally irrelevant and there's context I'm missing?

I think the context matters. I was leaving Paris, and he, my... the person I was writing it to, lived in Paris. I think as well, it would have meant less if I had sent it by text; the material was important to me in that moment. So I definitely think it was because of that context. But also, I do think that doing it in that moment, when you're hungover and it's inconvenient, and you have to stop and buy a notebook and a pen

MANUEL

[...] He knows, or I hope he knows, I didn't just do it quickly in the bathroom. [...] Maybe it did mean more because I wrote it thinking of him there, rather than just [...] when I was in a perfect state of mind.

You said that being understood is important. You also said that your hesitation around poetry – at least in part – has to do with that; the possibility of being misunderstood.

Yes.

So I want to ask how much, in general, that fear of being misunderstood might affect your writing; the anticipation of an Other's gaze, or another's misunderstanding?

I think that's overstating how afraid I am of being misunderstood. I think it's just that I cannot picture myself writing a poem for someone and giving it to them, because the way I'd write it – presumably – wouldn't be the most obvious... It's not that it seems useless, but what's the point of giving someone something to whom it's illegible?

I was talking to another friend about this sort of thing. They were saying that relationships are founded in difference, and that that difference is more or less immutable. They said that the interpersonal aspect of the relationship is where compromise happens, but the love letter is where you must insist upon your feelings, your perspective, even if its unintelligible to the other person. They value the honesty of saying what's true to you, even when the other person may not be able to understand. I wonder what you think of that position? Perhaps you've already answered this, but is the love letter strictly a vessel for self-expression, or is it communicative?

Well, it really depends. I mean, if I'm writing in my diary – which I could sometimes consider a sort of love letter – I think that that's purely personal expression. But I do think there's a difference between what I'd write in my diary about this person, and what I've given him. When I write in my diary it's about expression, but when I'm giving something written to him, it's similarly expressive – only it's an expression I want him to receive. I suppose it's both at the same time, I'm just aware that another person's going to read it - so I'll only give away so much. When it comes to friends, I'm much more liberal in telling them my real feelings, because I don't think I'll scare my friends away by telling them how much I love them. But sometimes I feel very intensely; with this guy in particular, in Paris, I didn't want to highlight the extent of my feelings for him because I don't think he feels the same way. I don't think he needs to know these things [...] Sometimes you ought to keep things to yourself – precisely to maintain something. Being honest doesn't make for a good relationship all the time. I don't know who's thinking that, but not people who live – my life.

So, honesty isn't a core value of a love letter - for you?

No.