



the feels

megan
milks

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What Is an Emotion? [1884, 1994]

I should say first of all that I would dial the numbers just to listen to your breath. The only emotions I propose expressly to consider are I would stand inside my hell and hold the hand of death. That there are feelings of pleasure and displeasure, of interest and excitement, bound up with how far I'd go to ease this precious ache, would, I suppose, be held true by most readers. Certainly arrangements of how much I'd give or how much I can take, are agreeable, and others the reverse, without just to reach you being sufficient to quicken the pulse or breathing. It is a real intellectual delight to come to my window, and a real intellectual torment to crawl inside and wait by the light of the moon. The case of these promises I know that I can't keep we will at present leave entirely aside, and confine our attention to the more complicated cases in which a nothing fills the blackness that has seeped into my chest. Surprise, curiosity, rapture, fear, anger, lust, greed, and the like become then the names for I need you in my blood I am forsaking all the rest. The bodily disturbances are said to be the "manifestation" of just to reach you, their "expression" or "natural language"; and to reach you itself, being so strongly characterized from within and without, may be just to reach you. Oh.

Our natural way of thinking about these standard emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the precious ache, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to come to my window. My thesis on the contrary is that come to my window *IS the emotion*. Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. I don't care what they think. This order of sequence is incorrect. What do they know about the more rational statement, which is that we feel sorry because we come, angry because we come, afraid because we come, and not because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, anyway.

Stated in this crude way, the hypothesis is pretty sure to meet with immediate disbelief. And yet if you come to my window, neither many nor far-fetched considerations are required. I'll be home soon. I'll be home. I'm coming home to produce conviction of its truth.

—William James and Melissa Etheridge

You know, bad language makes for bad feelings, Dash.
—Sgt. Sprinkles, from "Cupcakes"

...not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought:
practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating
continuity.
—from *Marxism and Literature* by Raymond Williams

I guess when you have like all these emotions and feelings involved,
shit just happens.
—Molly Soda, "Feeling My Feelings" via Kate Durbin, "Feeling My
Feelings"

I'm feeling myself I'm feeling myself I'm feeling I'm feeling my
feeling myself I'm feeling myself I'm feeling I'm feeling
—from "Feeling Myself" by Nicki Minaj with Beyoncé

Witch Team

[feel extractions from “Witch Team,”
a Tara/Willow fic by Spike4MeNow]

the thoughts and feelings she was having
weren't normal friendship-type feelings
these feelings of hers
feel out of place
you made me feel
feel out of place

she knew she had feelings
deep feelings
the feel of her friend
the feel of the soft body
feel the tell-tale wetness
feel the need

obviously there were feelings
the gay-type feelings
these feelings terrified her
feel the crystal's power
it feels real

I Don't Want to Need You

[feel extractions from “I Don't Want to Need You,”
a Harry/Louis One Direction fic by tothemoonmydear]

TAGS

Love Falling in Love Alternate Universe - Modern Setting Alternate Universe - College/University Love at First Sight Pre-Canon Age Difference Underage Awkward Sexual Situations Bromance Epic Bromance Drama Intrigue Explicit Sexual Content Unresolved Sexual Tension Homophobia Slowish Build Feelings Friends to Feelings Some Feelings Supernatural Feelings Realistic Relationship Progression Holding Hands Flirting Those Aren't Real Tags Heartache Heartbreak Promises Goodbyes Lots of People Die Angst and Humor PTSD Implied/Referenced Self-Harm Past Rape/Non-con Love Betrayal War Humor Attempt at Humor Established Relationship Plot What Plot Emotional Hurt/Comfort POV Alternating Non-Canon Time Travel Curses Dragons Non-Linear Narrative Dubious Consent Past Torture Scandal Loss Masturbation Non-Consensual Touching Unwelcome Feels Fluff Smut Crossover AU Future Fic Wolves Skinchangers Demigods Graphic Depictions of Violence Dark Love Dark Feelings Gratuitous Taylor Swift Lyrics Oral Sex Food Friendship Identity Issues Loss of Identity Alternate Universe - Gender Changes Prophetic Dreams Revelations Hope How Does One Feel Threats Politics Possessive Behavior Big Bad Bigger Bad Dubious Morality Confusion I'm Sorry Not Sorry My First Work in This Fandom First Work Ever Other Additional Tags to Be Added Dirty Coward Do You Feel Me Does This Remind You of Anything My God, What Have I Done?

Prologue

the feeling
room feels lonely

relax when I feel
the pain that I feel
my legs cause I feel
past the tears but I feel

I am the one who feels
feel the crushing

Chapter 1

I definitely feel like part of me is missing
I just feel like—I don't know
I feel bad for

good I'm feeling good
feel like total crap

this feels normal
feel like nothing

his breath is hot on my t-shirt and I can no longer feel

Chapter 2

it feels good to be back here
feels the same way
you know I was feeling
sometimes I just feel

Chapter 3

feel like I
sucked at making him feel
make him feel better
feel needed
I feel him relax
can physically feel
I get the feeling

Chapter 4

he doesn't feel the
feel

make him feel good
it helps him feel better

he can't feel
and I feel
I instantly feel
almost instantly I feel

I hold him I feel

Chapter 5

feel reassured
feel good and then
feel like I am going to vomit

why does it feel like

all the feelings
I can feel his
touchy feely

he made me feel
the feeling

Chapter 6

have you told him how you're feeling
 feel like I can't even talk
 hard for him to feel
 how you feel
 feel like I'm going to cry

 he can't feel
 can't feel
 can't feel

 I can feel
 feel my own dick
 it feels fucking
 feel

Chapter 7

I talked to him about my feelings
 every shitty feeling
 every negative feeling

 my smiles don't feel
 feel his vocal chords vibrate
 makes me feel so
 he can make me feel so
 I can't feel anything
 but it is intense

 I feel his hands slip
 I adjust to the feel
 can feel his cock pulsing

 I don't feel broken
 I don't feel ashamed
 I'm not going to be able to feel

Chapter 8

my throat is feeling
what he's feeling

feel four sets of eyes
feel stupid

feel his dick
feel my lips

to make him feel good
feels like enough

to make him feel good

Chapter 9

think about how he's feeling
his other feelings

I can feel his
almost feel

I can't feel
what it feels like

how weird it must feel
feel a wetness

Chapter 10

all at once I feel
sweat between us should feel
turn me on I can feel
 didn't feel like
 I feel
you maybe have feelings
 say feeling
 he feels
I hate this I feel
 stop feeling

Chapter 11

relaxed and feeling better
tells me how he's feeling

and how were you feeling
my collarbone has been feeling
 feel his arms around me
and his lips blowing little puffs of air
 against my skin

Chapter 12

it still feels too good to be true
sometimes when I'm feeling a little overwhelmed

I'm not sure how I feel
the way I feel

feels different

Chapter 13

I feel like
I feel
because feelings
our feelings
can feel

I love the feeling
I feel
I always feel
I feel all the time

I have never felt better in my life

Epilogue

please feel
my throat feel
like
I feel
SO FULL OF FEELS
OF GOOD FEELS

Comments

[feel extractions from Comments on “The Assassination of Twilight Sparkle,” a My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic death fic by The Rated PonyStar]

it would be difficult to create greater feels than these
ouch the feels
my heart feels
would you feel it was justified
made me feel terrible
conquered my feels
and made them feel
feels has been felt
the subject ceases to feel anything

Comments

[OP Deleuze and Guattari, "The Smooth and the Striated"
from *A Thousand Plateaus*]

to have
felt
implies
an entanglement
what becomes entangled
is in no
way *homogeneous*: it is nevertheless smooth

(it is in principle infinite, open, and
unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor
center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather
distributes a continuous variation).

Of course,
we
felt. For
the body

felt.

Can we not
displace the opposition?

trying to fit them to a pattern or create a pattern out of them
we see
it is *amorphous*.

Yet the complex difference persists.

WHAT DO YOU FEEL LIKE

100x1

Lots of vegetables. Stir-fry? A big salad? Picture kale tossed in tahini
sauce with fried tempeh on top, plus mushrooms and onions, sautéed,
with chopped carrots, or peeled. The rest of that red pepper. The big-
headed broccoli. I could feel like a beer. A light bubbly beer. We could
also go out. We never go out. On the other hand there is meat. Could
feel like meat. Yeah. I'm feeling like meat, and eating. A lot. The feeling
just grows. Gets hungrier and hungrier. Not there. I don't really feel
that. There's also ordering in. What do you feel like?

WHAT DO YOU FEEL LIKE

100x2

Hard. Salami. Machine. Or a slippage. A suck. You feel like the real. Feel I can feel. You feel like a sticking. A sinking. A seal. A mold or a plug. An urgent tug! You feel like a fullness. A with. An against. You feel like some trope, or a hope, so intense. You feel like my insides, a sometimes, or then. You feel like that steady, dumb rush of my pen! You feel like a peal. Like language must feel. You feel like that felt on the tip of my tongue, like everywhere felt and now you feel done.

WHAT DO YOU FEEL LIKE

100x3

asks Shane, crouched between Jon's legs.

"Lots of vegetables. Stir-fry? A big salad?"

Shane lubes up.

"Or," Jon cracks some toes around her head. "We could go out. What do you feel like?"

"I don't know," she rubs Jon's hole with the tip of her cock, then pushes in. "You tell me."

"Seriously?" Jon gasps.

"I'm waiting."

"You feel like a...hard..."

"Be creative."

"...salami. Machine. Or a slippage. A suck. A fullness slipping or—an against...you feel like... my...feeling—"

Shane watches the feels flicker across Jon's face.

"Let's order in." She peers outside. "Feels like it's going to storm."

Feelosophy

In December 2014 I facilitated a workshop at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as part of the Andrew W. Mellon Art + Scholarship program. Titled “Open Channels: Slash Aesthetics and Queer Affect,” the workshop consisted of, first, a lecture-based portion exploring slash fiction as both a popular genre and a model of influence for queer writing; then an interactive portion during which participants tried out a number of slash writing exercises, or Feel Machines. These exercises developed from my own experiments in slash writing as a genre and a method, some of which are collected here.

Slash fiction is a genre of fan fiction that stages queer romantic and/or sexual encounters between popular characters or celebrities. “Slash” has been traditionally used to indicate stories featuring male-male relationships, with female-female relationships categorized as “femslash.” Because these categories are constrictively binary (surprisingly so for a genre that produces so much genderbending), I use the category of “slash” to describe fan fiction involving queer romantic and sexual encounters of all genders.

As Kristina Busse and Alexis Lothian have observed in an essay on feminist and transgender discourses in slash, fan fiction is “based primarily in affect: love for the source, desire to continue it into different contexts, annoyance with the things it does badly, and pleasure in the friendships and shared desires that circulate in fan communities” (17). In fan fiction, the fan’s affective excess finds form in a proliferation of narratives drawn more or less closely from a popular text, mixing its recognizable feel with analysis through strategic modifications to readymade, familiar worlds and characters. The source text functions as a scaffold for invention of all kinds.

Through these inventions—or fantasies—fan fiction “reorients” a source text, as fan studies scholar Ika Willis has argued, “opening its fictional world onto a set of demands determined by the individual

reader.” (This is especially true in slash.) Through this reorientation, Willis suggests, fan fiction “occupies a charged crossing point” between the reader’s “desiring subjectivity” and their knowledge of what is possible in both the actual world and the world of the text. In these terms fan fiction is not (or not only) a genre but a practice—an affective technology that “feels out” a text to find (often hidden or subtextual) emotions and desires.

The Feel Machines that follow are designed to explore the relationship between affect and language, using slash fiction as either source text or methodological model. Go on. Have a feel day.

WORKS CITED

Busse, Kristina and Alexis Lothian, “Bending Gender: Feminist and (Trans)Gender Discourses in the Changing Bodies of Slash Fan Fiction.” *Internet Fiction(s)*. Ed. Ingrid Hotz-Davies, Anton Kirchofer, and Sirpa Leppänen. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar’s Press, 2009.

Willis, Ika. “Keeping Promises to Queer Children: Making Space (for Mary-Sue) at Hogwarts.” *Rethinking Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Internet Age*. Ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006.

Feel Machine 1: I Want to Come Over

(after Sarah Dowling's "Sunshine Honey")

1. Choose one page from William James's "What Is an Emotion?" (1884) and lyrics from one classic Melissa Etheridge song (1993-1995), e.g., "I Want to Come Over," "Come to My Window," "I'm the Only One."
2. Collage these two texts to create a prose poem using any of the following strategies:

—Cut up the lyrics line by line and insert them into the essay with tape.
 —Cut up both texts and combine them on a blank piece of paper.
 —Fold or cut the lyrics sheet to get rid of white space and tape the lyric column into the center of the essay. Then transcribe the result, altering the language, if you like, for semantic and/or syntactical purposes.
 —Replace every other line in the essay with a line of lyrics; transcribe the result.

Feel Machine 2: Feel Extraction

1. Choose a published slash fiction teeming with feeling. Lengthy fics will work best for this exercise. ArchiveofOurOwn.org is a good source for angsty, steamy fics. Try searching for fics tagged "angst" with a word count of ">20000".
2. Skim the text and extract, copying over onto a new page, all phrases that involve variations of the word "feel" ("feeling," "felt," "feels," etc.). Optional: Add other words to your extraction vocabulary. Suggestions: "want," "need," "hurt."
3. From this list of phrases, build a poem. Feel free to edit and lineate as you like. Feel.

Feel Machine 4: Drabble Generator

A *drabble* is a flash fiction that is exactly 100 words long.

A *ship* refers to a romantic/sexual pairing.

1. Take two plastic cups. Fill one cup with slips of paper indicating ships; and the other with affective genres (see example lists below). If working with a group, consider first agreeing on a list of fandoms that everyone is loosely familiar with, then ask participants to generate their own ships based on this list.
2. Take a slip of paper from each cup.
3. You now have a pairing and a genre. Use these as a prompt to write a 100-word scene. If you're feeling ambitious, try a series of three drabbles (100x3).

List of Ships (For Example)

- Harry / Draco (Harry Potter)
- Sam / Dean (Supernatural)
- Buffy / Faith (Buffy the Vampire Slayer)
- Cersei / Sansa (Game of Thrones)
- Shawn Hunter / Cory Matthews (Boy Meets World)
- Emily (Pretty Little Liars) / Jessica Wakefield (Sweet Valley Twins)
- Jamal (Empire) / Kanye West
- Olivia Pope (Scandal) / Annalise Keating (How to Get Away with Murder)
- Olivia Pope (Scandal) / [wild card]
- Tegan Quin (Tegan and Sara) / Harry Styles (One Direction)
- SpongeBob SquarePants / Rainbow Dash (My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic)
- King Sombra (My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic) / Charlie (Unicorn Forced Me Gay)
- Rachel Maddow / Ellen DeGeneres
- Ilana (Broad City) / Nicky (Orange Is the New Black)
- Dark Willow (Buffy the Vampire Slayer) / Nancy (Fairuza Balk in The Craft)
- Joan Holloway (Mad Men) / Beebo Brinker (I Am A Woman in Love with a Woman... Must Society Reject Me?)
- Captain Janeway (Star Trek) / Red (Orange Is the New Black)

List of Affective Genres (For Example)

- Emotional Hurt/Comfort: one character emotionally hurts, the other one comforts, as prelude to attachment/sex
- Plot What Plot: aka Porn Without Plot: nothing but steamy sex scenes
- Crack: ridiculous; absurd; bizarre; often humorous
- Fluff: lighthearted nonsense, often humorous
- Angst: dark, depressing; ft. torment, internal struggle (possibly shaped by homophobia) and unrequited lust

Feel Machine 4: Desiring Machine

Channel a popular character or celebrity. In a letter that will never be sent, write your desire for another character/person you're not supposed to desire. You are ashamed. Hate your feelings. Then love them. See what happens next.

For example:

TO JON FROM SHANE

Imagine promiscuous, self-destructive hair stylist Shane McKutcheon (*The L Word*) writing a letter to noble bastard Jon Snow (*Game of Thrones*), who keeps showing up at her salon in creaky leather for regular trims of his luscious locks. Shane and Jon: from two different worlds. Categorically lesbian Shane never imagined she would ever be attracted to a...someone like Jon. Her feels are so big and scary she can't even look at him in the mirror while running her hands through his hair. She can't even look at herself. Shame: The word sounds like Shane.

That's why she's writing this letter: to tell him she can't cut his hair anymore. He'll need to find a new stylist. But...she recalls the well of hurt lurking in his eyes, the vulnerability with which he entrusted her as she stood there embarrassed, with nervous shears. Would this letter hurt him? *Could* this letter hurt him? She pauses, her pen stuck in the air. Fuck you, Jon, for making her care. She's no good with your hair anyway. Why do you keep coming back? Her stomach goes dizzy with the flood of possibility. Could it be? Are you drawn to her too? She has to know. I have to know *now*, Jon. Could it be? Do you feel these feelings too? I'll never send this letter. Love, Shane.

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