

# LOVE SONGS

## Listening to Couples

*Perrine Moran*



First published in 2025 by  
Karnac Books Limited  
62 Bucknell Road  
Bicester  
Oxfordshire OX26 2DS

Copyright © 2025 by Perrine Moran

The right of Perrine Moran to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80013-267-2 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-80013-299-3 (e-book)

ISBN: 978-1-80013-300-6 (PDF)

Typeset by vPrompt eServices Pvt Ltd, India



[www.firingthemind.com](http://www.firingthemind.com)

*To Graham  
To George, Katya, Louis, Ruby, and Rosa*

*With gratitude, respect, and affection for the couples whose hopes  
and determination inspired me to write this book.*

# Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
About the author	xi
Introduction	xiii
1. Connections	1
2. Push and pull: <i>Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me</i>	17
3. Disappointment: <i>Don't Think Twice, It's All Right</i>	33
4. Enmeshment: <i>I've Got You Under My Skin</i>	47
5. Difference: <i>Somewhere . . .</i>	59
6. The unspoken: <i>If You Could Read My Mind</i>	73
7. Separation: <i>They Can't Take That Away From Me</i>	87
Afterword	111
References and song, film, and stage listings	115
Index	123

# Acknowledgements

Chapter 2, Push and pull:

**HOLD ME, THRILL ME, KISS ME**

Words and Music by HARRY NOBLE

© 1952 (Renewed) EMI MILLS MUSIC, INC.

Exclusive Print Rights Administered by ALFRED MUSIC

All Rights Reserved

Used by Permission of ALFRED MUSIC

Chapter 3, Disappointment:

**MARDY BUM**

Words and Music by Alex Turner

Copyright © 2005 EMI Music Publishing Ltd.

All Rights Administered by Sony Music Publishing (US) LLC, 424 Church Street, Suite 1200, Nashville, TN 37219

International Copyright Secured All Rights Reserved

*Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Europe Ltd.*

Chapter 4, Enmeshment: *I've Got You Under My Skin* is based on an article that was previously published under the title: "I've got you under my skin: borderline states in couple relationships", in 2020 in *Couple*

*and Family Psychoanalysis*, 10(1): 59–71. It is published with the kind permission of Karnac Books Limited.

Chapter 5, *Difference: Somewhere* is based on an article that was previously published under the title: “Somewhere (There’s a place for us) ... A cross-cultural approach to psychoanalytic psychotherapy with cross-cultural couples”, in 2017 in *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis*, 7(2): 153–167. It is published with the kind permission of Karnac Books Limited.

Chapter 5, *Difference*:

**LET’S CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF**

Music and Lyrics by GEORGE GERSHWIN and IRA GERSHWIN  
© 1936 (Renewed) IRA GERSHWIN MUSIC and GEORGE GERSHWIN  
MUSIC

All Rights on behalf of IRA GERSHWIN MUSIC Administered by WC  
MUSIC CORP.

All Rights Reserved

Used by Permission of ALFRED MUSIC

Chapter 6, *The unspoken*:

**FAMOUS BLUE RAINCOAT**

Words and Music by Leonard Cohen

Copyright © 1971 Sony Music Publishing (US) LLC

Copyright Renewed

All Rights Administered by Sony Music Publishing (US) LLC, 424  
Church Street, Suite 1200, Nashville, TN 37219

International Copyright Secured All Rights Reserved

*Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Europe Ltd.*

Chapter 7, *Separation*:

**THEY CAN’T TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME**

Music and Lyrics by GEORGE GERSHWIN and IRA GERSHWIN  
© 1936 (Renewed) IRA GERSHWIN MUSIC and GEORGE GERSHWIN  
MUSIC

All Rights on behalf of IRA GERSHWIN MUSIC Administered by WC  
MUSIC CORP.

All Rights Reserved

Used by Permission of ALFRED MUSIC

## About the author

**Perrine Moran**, MA, is a psychodynamic psychotherapist and a couple psychoanalytic psychotherapist. She is a visiting lecturer and supervisor at Tavistock Relationships. She has taught psychoanalytic couple theory internationally as well as on two master's programmes at Tavistock Relationships. She was a supervisor at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. She is the arts editor for *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis*, and a member of the editorial board of the *Revue* of the International Association for Couple and Family Psychoanalysis. She is bilingual, works with individuals and couples in English and in French, and has a private practice in London.

Before training as a psychotherapist, Perrine Moran was a lecturer in French literature at the University of London, and an actress in Paris, where she ran a fringe theatre in the basement of a Cuban restaurant.

## Introduction

Some love songs strike a chord with a strength that takes one by surprise. They unexpectedly transport us to places and people we have loved, still love, or dream of, and sometimes regret loving. Part of the emotional impact comes from the shock of experiencing a slice of one's personal life conjured up by the voice of a stranger, as evoked in Roberta Flack's hit *Killing Me Softly with His Song* (Fox, Gimbel, & Lieberman, 1972). Part of the enjoyment is realising that the emotion is shared and that one is not alone. A love song may bring to mind an intimate moment for a particular listener, but the reason it is "popular" is that it speaks to many. It is both private and public and occupies a place in the collective memory of a nation or a culture.

The weaving of what is personal and what is shared is also a characteristic of psychotherapy in general, and of couple psychotherapy in particular. Each case that a psychotherapist has the privilege of hearing in the privacy of the consulting room is unique. Yet it presents issues that are common to many.

Love songs and the narratives couples bring to therapy are not always declarations of love. What they convey may be hurt, resentment, hatred. This book considers the power of popular love songs to trigger emotion and capture what is at the heart of couple dynamics. Songs are thought



about through the lens of couple therapy rather than considered as the subject of a musical or literary analysis. Some songs are looked at in more detail than others and the choice of songs is undisguisedly subjective. On occasion, a title alone is enough to prompt associations connected to a particular couple or couple issue. Clinical vignettes and case studies illustrate the couple issues that are raised. In songs, music and words—the non-verbal and the verbal—combine to create a unit. In couples, two people create a unit that combines togetherness and individuality, a blend that poses a challenge. The dilemma of how to be emotionally dependent on another without losing oneself underlies many issues that couples bring to therapy and is the stuff of many love songs. Its management results in different dynamics that the chapters of this book identify and which place partners in couples on a spectrum going from too close to too far apart. A psychoanalytic understanding of the connections between early, primary relationships and those formed in adulthood sheds light on the experiences of couples. In order to clarify these connections, some fundamental psychoanalytic concepts relating to child development are presented in the early chapters and referred to throughout.

At this point, I would like to say a word about my psychoanalytic approach to the material, particularly in view of the importance given in what follows to the primary relationship between infant and caregiver and its impact on adult couple relationships.

Contemporary psychoanalysis points to the limitations of a theory based on a traditional heterosexual nuclear family model. Shelley Nathans writes:

Clearly, there is a lag between psychoanalytic theory and the reality of present-day family relations, where many families are not composed of two parents, one of whom identifies as male, the other as female. (2022, p. 25)

However, I strongly second Nathans' suggestion that some of the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, in particular in relation to the importance given to the relationship between the infant and the primary caregiver and to the oedipal situation, should be revitalised rather than rejected.

So first, a point of semantics. In view of present-day family set-ups and means of procreation, the relationship which we refer to with the primary caregiver should be understood to take place regardless of the caregiver's gender or biological link to the baby. This applies even when, as we shall see in some of the literature, the words "mother" or "maternal" are used. This is not to say that the experience of the foetus in the womb is irrelevant. It is in itself significant, whether the primary caregiver and object of postnatal attachment is the baby's birth mother or not.

Second, the psychoanalytic view of child development is historically anchored in Western society. It is based on observation of the interactions between infant and caregiver in a society where focusing on individual development prevails over learning to conform to a communal environment. Cultural differences and values are also reflected in the rules relating to how couples are formed and behave in different societies.

Differences are important and should be acknowledged and respected, and social contexts taken into consideration. The theoretical model this book rests on puts forward that the infant's relationship to the primary caregiver, be it an individual or a community, is fundamental, because it is in this interaction that trust in the other does or does not develop. As for the notion of a couple, it refers in the following pages to a committed dyadic relationship, the rules of which may vary.

The first chapter touches on some of the relevant literature and sets a background for the clinical material gathered from "listening to couples" in my consulting room. Each of the following six chapters focuses on a particular couple dynamic or issue and the song/s and couple/s that relate to it. Clinical vignettes and case studies are either composites based on work with several couples presenting with similar concerns, or pieces which clients have authorised and which have been written with full respect for the protection of privacy. For ease of reading, rather than the repeated use of "he or she" when referring to an infant or child in general terms, "she" and "he" are used alternately throughout.

A playlist is available on digital streaming services to listen to while reading. To access the links, visit [karnacbooks.com](http://karnacbooks.com) and search for the book record by title, author or catalogue number 97939.