



Reprezentace lásky a drog v písních Janis Joplin

Bakalářská práce

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The Representation of Love and Drugs in Janis Joplin's Songs

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- 1) studium odborné literatury
- 2) analýza textů písní z hlediska kulturní hodnoty
- 3) identifikace symbolismu a role drog, mezilidských vztahů a lásky ve tvorbě Janis Joplin
- 4) zjištění souvislosti mezi užíváním drog a jeho dopad na mezilidské vztahy v písních autorky.

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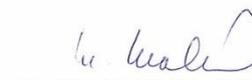
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Anotace

Cílem bakalářské práce s názvem *Reprezentace lásky a drog v písních Janis Joplin* je zjistit, jakým způsobem spolu souvisí dětství, zážitky z rodného města a životní styl zpěvačky s následnou reprezentací lásky a drog v jejích písních. Kromě textů písní práce analyzuje také rozhovory, ve kterých se Janis Joplin vyjadřovala ke své minulosti i k jiným otázkám. Dále se tato práce skrze analýzu biografii a dalších zdrojů pojednávajících o životním stylu a působení Janis Joplin snaží interpretovat osudy zpěvačky, souvislosti těchto osudů se symbolickou reprezentací lásky a drog v jejích písních a také případné souvislosti jejího působení s feminismem či následky minulosti jako je psychická deprivace.

Klíčová slova

alkohol, drogy, feminismus, Janis Joplin, láska, psychická deprivace,

Annotation

The aim of this bachelor thesis called *The Representation of Love and Drugs in Janis Joplin's Songs* is to describe the way the singer's childhood, hometown experiences, and lifestyle is related to the representation of love and drugs in her songs. Besides the lyrics, this thesis analyzes also the interviews in which Janis Joplin expressed herself about her past and about other questions. With the help of the analysis of Janis Joplin's biographies and other sources, this thesis also tries to interpret her fates, relationships between these fates and the symbolical representation of love and drugs in her songs and also connections between her behavior and feminism or between her past and emotional deprivation disorder.

Key words

Alcohol, Drugs, Emotional Deprivation Disorder, Feminism, Janis Joplin, Love

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1 Introduction

The bachelor thesis you are holding in your hands at the moment is called *The Representation of Love and Drugs in Janis Joplin's Songs*. Generally speaking, artists having performed in the 1960s are almost automatically connected with the motto "Sex, drugs & rock'n'roll". The American postwar generation differed from their parents very distinctly and especially some middle-class youth wanted to experiment with everything they could. (Dulová 2016, 38) In such conditions the motto "Sex, drugs & rock'n'roll" might easily become almost something like a philosophy. And it is not very far from the truth to claim that Janis Joplin was an iconic name which many people would casually associate with this "philosophy".

Yet not only an abundant consumption of drugs and her controversial opinions about love life and sex life have made her an icon. It is also her music and the passion with which she used to sing and altogether all these characteristic signs blended into an unforgettable aura.

Further, Janis Joplin is also known for her deformed emotional life (Amburn 1995, 10). The aim of this bachelor thesis is to prove that her experiences in childhood and adolescence, the alcohol and other drugs she had consumed, and all the sacrifices she had made could influence the lyrics she wrote for her music.

She performed many songs, some of them were written by her friends for her to sing them as her own songs, some of them were songs of other bands and then, there were songs for which she composed both the music and the lyrics, or songs with music composed by some of the members of her groups for which she wrote the lyrics. For this bachelor thesis only those song lyrics which were written by Janis Joplin are used because the thesis wants to prove a connection between love and drugs in Janis Joplin's life and songs, therefore only lyrics written by her can be used. "Catch Me Daddy", "Ego Rock", "I Need A Man To Love", "Mary Jane", "Misery 'n'", "No Reason for Livin'", "One Good Man", "Road Block", "What Good Can Drinkin' Do", and "Women Is Losers" are the songs which are used as texts to be analyzed.

With the help of the application of the sources like Janis Joplin's biographies (*The Obsessions and Passions of Janis Joplin* by Ellis Amburn and the Czech translation of Amburn's book – *Perla Janis Joplin, Scars of Sweet Paradise* by Alice Echols, *Buried Alive: The Biography of Janis Joplin* by Myra Friedman, and *Janis Joplin: Take Another Little Piece of My Heart* by Edward Willett) and theoretical sources like books (*Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity* by Sheila Whiteley, *Psychická Deprivace v Dětství* by Zdeněk Matějček, and *Feminist Nightmares: Women at Odds: Feminism and the Problem of Sisterhood* by Susan Ostrov Weisser and Jennifer Fleischner), articles (“Enough to Make You Want to Sing the Blues: Janis Joplin's Life and Music” by Ulrich Adelt, “Janis Joplin. Mark Paytress assesses Columbia's three-CD Janis' retrospective” by Mark Paytress, and “Janis Joplin: The Hippie Blues Singer as Feminist Heroine” by Jerry Rodnitzky) and interviews in Pop Chronicles, on The Dick Cavett Show, and at the Port Arthur High School Reunion, this bachelor thesis will try to analyze those songs mentioned above and show how love and drugs are represented in Janis Joplin's songs.

2 Janis Joplin and Port Arthur

Wanting to analyze Janis Joplin's songs in terms of love, we should try to focus on the period of her life when she could for the first time feel something that may have influenced her future emotional life. The reason for this is that in my opinion, as it is to be shown below, it is possible to find in the lyrics of her songs emotions and relationships which were heavily influenced by her past.

“Port Arthur is a city in Jefferson County within the Beaumont–Port Arthur Metropolitan Statistical Area of the U.S. state of Texas” (Wikipedia). The city was at its best in the 1960s, and since that time everything in the city has been declining (Wikipedia). Janis Lyn Joplin was born there on January 19, 1943, in St. Mary's Hospital. Her mother, Dorothy Bonita East was a registrar at a business college, and her father, Seth Ward Joplin was an engineer at Texaco. Janis had two younger siblings, sister Laura and brother Michael.

When Ellis Amburn was visiting and interviewing all the people who knew Janis Joplin (so he could write her biography), her father was already dead and her mother did not really want to say much. She just said that people do not understand anything and that she used to know Janis. She wanted Ellis to bring materials about him and everything he had got about Janis. When he met her, they did not talk about Janis more than a minute, then Dorothy wanted to tell Ellis which of the songs having been sung by Janis she liked, but she did not even remember the name of the songs. Then she took all of the material that he had brought. She said she would not tell him more about Janis until she would talk to the rest of the family and to her lawyer (Amburn 1995, 15-16). This might indicate that there was something unhealthy between Janis and her mother. At the very least Dorothy did not really seem to have a clear conscience.

Janis Joplin was by all appearances a child loving her parents and younger siblings. Joplin's parents always taught their children to be sparing, to have control over themselves and not to drink. (18). But Janis already as a child saw the world as a shining palace full of pleasures, which should be explored right there and right then (19). Therefore her relationship with her parents, no matter how strong their love to each other used to be, was hard to retain. Janis wanted more and more attention. She befriended a group of outcasts at her high school and with them started to listen to blues artists like Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Odetta, Billie Holiday, Lead Belly and Big Mama Thornton.

Weird rumors about Janis started to appear. “I was a misfit. I read, I painted, I didn't hate niggers” said Janis (Weisser & Fleischner 1994, 363).

Other students and residents of the city started to call her a “slut” (Amburn 1992, 16) and they would throw penny coins at her. They simply saw her as a disgusting, ugly prostitute who did not belong to Port Arthur (Amburn 1995, 19-22).

Janis Joplin moved away from Port Arthur when she was twenty years old, in January 1963. After one year, she returned for a while, but she did not stay for a long time. “A thoughtless prankster officially named her ‘Ugliest Man on Campus’ in a contest. Janis then wrote her parents about the cruelty of the Austin campus and told them she must leave. Shortly thereafter, Joplin and a male friend hitchhiked to San Francisco” (Rodnitzky 2002, 9).

3 Janis Joplin in Dick Cavett's Talk Show

When she was planning to visit Port Arthur again in 1970, she talked about it in a famous interview with Dick Cavett in his TV show in June 1970.

Janis Joplin: I'm going to my 10th annual High School Reunion, would you like to go?

Dick Cavett: Well, I don't...I didn't have any friends in your high school class.

Janis Joplin: I don't either. I don't either, believe me (Cavett 1970, 4:56-5:15).

Until that moment she was very happy, making jokes and laughing loudly. But after the next question she became unsure. Dick Cavett did not know what was her time of being a teenager in Port Arthur like, otherwise he probably would not have given her such a question.

Dick Cavett: And do you think you'll have a lot to say to your old high-school classmates?

Janis Joplin: I don't have a lot, man.

Dick Cavett: You were not surrounded by friends in high school?

Janis Joplin: They laughed me out of class, out of town, out of state, man.

She said this with a really sad intonation but in a second she again tried to turn it into a joke (Cavett 1970, 5:39-5:55).

4 Thomas Jefferson High School Reunion in August 1970

A few months later, when she really made it back to Port Arthur for the High School Reunion, there was a press conference with Janis before the reunion, because the organizer of the reunion was afraid that Janis would take all of the attention primarily intended to be focused on all of the almost 600 students graduating in 1960 at Jefferson's High School (Amburn 1995, 235). At the conference, Janis was joking about the organizers inviting her for The Last Supper. She felt that they still did not like her in Port Arthur. But she tried to turn everything into a joke. She became unsure when the interviewer asked her what she remembered the most about Port Arthur. Her voice skipped and she said "no comment". He kept asking her very uncomfortable questions.

Interviewer: How were you different from your schoolmates when you were a teenager?

Janis Joplin: I don't know, why don't you ask them? (Houston Chronicle 1970, 3:05-3:13)

From this question onwards, Janis was again really nervous. She did not know how to answer. The questions of the interviewer, unlike in Cavett's case, however, seemed to try to make her feel uncomfortable. I cannot claim what exactly the interviewer was thinking while he was asking Janis such questions, nor can I judge if he was purposely making her feel uncomfortable, especially when his face is not shown in the video at all. Nevertheless, watching the video and listening to the interviewer's questions and Janis's answers, one gets the feeling that he had an intention to make her feel that way. He was probably not any random interviewer, presumably he had known in advance whom he would be interviewing, which means that he had very likely found out something about her past and prepared himself for the interview before he asked her those uneasy questions. Also he had to notice her sad intonation and her nervous facial expressions definitely caused by the feelings resulting from his questions, but he did not care and continued asking her other uncomfortable questions.

Interviewer: Did they make you different?

Janis Joplin: No.

Interviewer: Otherwise were you different in comparison with them, or were you?

Janis Joplin: I felt apart from them.

Interviewer: Did you take a part in football games?

Janis Joplin: I, I don't remember. I think not. I didn't go to the high school prom, and err...

Interviewer: Oh, you were asked, weren't you?

Janis Joplin: No, I wasn't...they didn't think...they...I don't think they wanted to take me (Houston Chronicle 1970, 3:14-3:51).

In her answers to the questions of the interview at the reunion one can read a lot. When one tries to get to know Janis through all her performances, interviews, and everything, it seems possible to read about her personality as if she was a very outgoing and sociable person. In a similar vein, it is also quite easy to see in the interview video from the reunion that she really was an extrovert person. She would be probably able to talk about anything even when surrounded by foreign people.

But in this case the interviewer was almost all the time moving around a topic which was very painful for her. Answering the questions mentioned above she did not talk very much anymore, she only tried to answer as briefly as she could or she just tried to answer only that she did not remember and even that seemed to be very painful for her. Her attempts to laugh were really nervous. She was obviously in a pain coming across the topic including her teenage experiences.

It is also obvious that she would never blame herself as much as she did her schoolmates. She knew that she had felt apart from them, but she would not try to explain if she was different or why she was different, she believed that they should answer such a question. She remembered that she did not go to the high school prom, but she believed that it was because her schoolmates did not want to have her there. She felt very hurt and all the guilt she put on her schoolmates, not on herself.

But still, during the whole interview, she did not want show herself as a broken person and in the end she again turned everything into a joke. (“I’ve been suffering ever since! It’s enough to make you wanna sing the blues!” (Houston Chronicle 1970, 3:51-4:00))

She did not want to show to all of the people how hurt she was in her memories of childhood and adolescence in Port Arthur. But it is visible in what she said about the city that the feeling of being a castaway of Port Arthur was still very strong deep inside of her.

It is quite interesting to compare Janis’s approach when she is sharing her emotions resulting from her memories of the hometown in her songs with that when sharing it in interviews. In the interviews when forced to talk about her past, no matter how hard she tried to look and sound secure, she was usually almost like a victim of the interviewer who seemed to be the one trying to humiliate Janis.

But when singing about the same past experiences, her approach was quite different. There was no problem for her to sing about her hometown, about the people who did not understand her at all, about all of her love errors and about anything that was hurting her during her past.

There might be two reasons for this.

Firstly, she actually explained it herself in the interview at the reunion when she said: “I got liberated! I don’t know, I just started to sing and singing makes you want to come out [...] and once you start singing it just sort of makes you wanna talk to people more and go out more and, you know, your lifestyle becomes more a come-out, flow-out thing, instead of a hold-it-and-be-quiet type.” (Houston Chronicle 1970, 2:45-3:06) In other words she said that normally it was hard to talk about some things, but that singing made her want to share her emotions with the others.

The second reason could be the fact that whatever she sang, no matter what the lyrics were about, she could sing about anything because in the song it was not actually her as Janis Joplin, it was not the same person like in real life, it was the lyrical voice that sang the song and she could in fact hide beyond this lyrical voice and then maybe she did not feel so insecure and uneasy like she did in the interviews.

Analyzing her childhood and adolescence in Port Arthur, one might get a feeling of understanding why Janis thought she just had the right to put all the blame of her life disappointments on her past in the home town. Her relationships with the members of her family were not healthy, at school she was a great target of mockery and rumors, even people from outside of the school were showing her that she did not belong to the city and in the end she moved. When she tried to come back and give her hometown and her “normal life” a second chance, some schoolmate made her feel again like she did not belong there, so she moved for good.

Whenever she got the chance to talk about Port Arthur (on interviews or in songs), she has never said anything nice about the city. Even when she came back for the High School Reunion in 1970, she experienced a huge disappointment. For this event, where she was supposed to be just part of a crowd, one of the 600 former students, she was dressed as if she should spend the evening on a stage (Amburn 1995, 238). She was drunk, under the influence of drug, and she made a lot of the people present at the party very upset because she was rude and vulgar. The biggest disappointment for her was that they did not ask her to sing. After the party she realized how miserable her life was. She could not get on well with anybody, with her family, not even with people who were similar to her (240).

She felt hurt by her family, therefore she talked about them the way she did – later she said that when she was visiting Port Arthur for this reunion, her family did not have a bed for her, they had sold it. She said that for her next visit of her hometown she would have to go to a motel (237-238). She felt hurt by her former friends, schoolmates and other residents of Port Arthur and she did not spare them from bad names neither. When she could not decide if to go to the High School Reunion or not, she told her friend that in Port Arthur a few disgusting things happened to her (235). A woman who organized the reunion complained that everybody was already tired by Janis saying too many disgusting things about the city and its residents. Most of the broken relationships between Janis Joplin and the rest of the world were reversible, but the dominant result of Janis’s past in Port Arthur was nevertheless just pain and sorrow in her heart.

All of the facts mentioned above tell us really a lot about the relationship between Janis Joplin and her family, residents of Port Arthur, her classmates, and the city itself. And what the facts themselves do not express, the song “Ego Rock” says even more explicitly.

5 “Ego Rock” for Port Arthur

“Ego Rock” is the eighth song on Janis Joplin’s fifth album called *In Concert*. The album was released posthumously in July 1972. “Ego Rock” was performed as a duet by Janis Joplin and her guest star, Nick Gravenites. He was a blues performer and several of his songs Janis actually covered herself (“As Good as You’ve Been to This World”; “Buried Alive in the Blues”; “Work Me, Lord”). Their duet is a more than 7 minutes long track of an amazing performance that could be understood as blues improvisation. But this song is more than a blues duet with a friend. It is demonstrably Janis Joplin’s indictment of the city of Port Arthur. It was hard for her to talk about her experiences from the city when she was asked in interviews, but in this song she released herself.

Janis sings:

I just had to get out on the Texas plane,
Lord, well it was bringing me down.
Yeah, I had to get out of Texas, baby,
Lord, it was bringing me down.
I been all around the world,
But Port Arthur is the worst place that I’ve ever found. (Joplin 1972, 0:12-0:47)

The text is direct in its treatment of the topic: the lyrical voice hates Port Arthur and believes that it was the state and the city which was bringing her down, not alcohol, nor drugs. The origin of all problems and troubles is in Port Arthur.

I guess they couldn’t understand it there,
Honey, they’d laugh me off the street!
Lord, I guess they couldn’t understand me, baby,
Honey, they’d laugh, I said they’d laugh me right off the street, yeah.
I said I want to keep on moving, baby,
Be the last person I ever wanna meet. (Joplin 1972, 0:50-1:23)

This is almost exactly the same as what she said on the TV Show to Dick Cavett. She knew that she was different; she was too different, at least for some of the students and other residents of the city. They just could not understand what she was trying to say by her behavior. Therefore, as she says, “they’d laugh her off the street”.

Yeah, yeah, yeah,
Honey ain't it hard when you're all alone.
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah,
Honey ain't it hard, Lord, when you're all alone.
I might die real old lady
But I'd never call Texas my home,
No, no, no, oh! (Joplin 1972, 1:25-2:02)

This is probably the scariest and saddest fact one could ever say about their home. Having lived there for twenty years and then having to say that it was not her home and it will never in her life become a home to her. She was born there, her whole family was there, very many people lived in Port Arthur in those times and she was at school where people usually have at least some friends, but the lyrical voice claims that she was “all alone”.

Nick Gravenites sings:

You say you come from Texas, baby,
She says she left Texas with just her name.
(That's what she told me.)
[...]
Yes, well I swear when that girl came to the big city
Lord, she learned a brand new game.
Well, yeah! (Joplin 1972, 2:04-2:41)

These verses sung by Nick Gravenites show us that Janis was talking in this spirit always when somebody asked her about her home. She believed there was nothing that the city of Port Arthur had given her. She always trusted that any other bigger city would make her life much more joyful and give her more opportunities to meet people who would really understand her.

Janis sings:

Honey, I hear you talkin' about sorrow,
Baby but you don't know my pain — that's right!
Mercy! Mercy!
I hear you talking about my sorrow,
You don't know my pain.
You know there's an inside kind of sorrow. (Joplin 1972, 2:43-3:12)

She knew that everybody was talking about her, her former schoolmates, her friends, her family, the residents of her hometown, even people whom she could not know, everybody knew her name and a lot of people were trying to talk about her life and to analyze why she behaved the way she did and that was really annoying for her. She felt depressed about her past experiences in Port Arthur and she was upset when people around her were trying to act or talk like they understood her. She felt as if nobody, not even her friends, would ever understand her.

Janis Joplin's feelings resulting from her memories of her hometown were really hurt. In the previous chapter we could see that it was very hard for her to share her feelings in interviews, but in the present analysis of the lyrics of "Ego Rock" we learnt that she was not afraid to be too honest. She hated her hometown so much that she hyperbolized when she sang that among all the places on the entire world Port Arthur was the worst place to be found. She again blamed everybody, except herself, for her sorrow. It was Port Arthur residents' fault that they could not understand her, that she had to move and that she felt alone. After causing all of this, they did not even understand her pain. She felt like she was all alone for everything. Even in the duet she is in the end on the other side than her singing partner. He is a person to whom she said everything, and yet he does not understand her completely either. It seems like there was really not a single person who could understand her feelings about the hometown – the people living *in* Port Arthur hated her and the people living outside of Port Arthur could not understand it either because they did not live there.

6 How Did Childhood and Adolescence in Port Arthur Influence Janis Joplin

6.1 Emotional Deprivation Disorder

Actually, there is a diagnosis which fits perfectly for Janis Joplin's behavior when she was already an adult. It is called Emotional deprivation disorder and according to Matějček, the broadest definition would be that it is a state resulting from those life situations in which a person is not given any opportunity to fulfill their basic psychic needs to a large enough extent and for a long enough period of time. Sometimes it is also called affective deprivation, affect deprivation, emotional starvation, maternal deprivation, educational deficit, environmental retardation, frustration neurosis, psychic deprivation, and various other names depending on what exactly was the person missing in their past and also depending on how the concrete psychologist calls it in their research (Matějček 2011, 23-26). When a person suffers from a lack of unconditional love during their life, it can lead to emotional deprivation disorder, which is then characterized by a feeling of imperfection, inadequacy, and inconvenience in establishing relationships or sustaining relationships. People with emotional deprivation disorder are also very sensitive to the criticism of others and at the same time they need other people to reassure them frequently about their qualities (Psychology Wiki).

In her family, she seems to have had some hinterland of unconditional love. According to her friend James Langdon, Janis loved her father very much, respected him and believed that he was musically educated.

Yet, although this could mean that Janis's father was a great role model for her, Janis once told a reporter that both her parents had labeled her as a "hopeless case" already when she was a little girl and that they have never changed their opinions. Her mother wanted her to be like other people in the city and when Janis was about 14 years old, her parents threw her out of their house (Amburn 1995, 22). As a result, she must have felt unloved. The lack of unconditional love is also very clearly represented in a song called "No Reason for Livin'", first released in 1975, also written by Janis.

Well, I ain't got mother to love me,
Ain't got no father to care.
Lord, I ain't got mother to love me,
Ain't got no father to care.
Lord, I ain't got no reasons to go on,
Give me no cause to stay here.
I got these blues, I gotta finally know why. (Joplin 1975, 0:40-1:14)

Because she felt unloved, she began to feel like she had to *do* something to deserve love and admiration from her schoolmates. At the beginning of high school, she was unremarkable and therefore ignored and it made her long for attention. She had her own special ways of drawing attention and these ways made it even harder for the schoolmates to like her. Because she desired attention (at this time it was already the result of the lack of unconditional love in her childhood), she was rude, rough, vulgar and kitschy and therefore the boys avoided her. The lack of interest of the boys made Janis's behavior even wilder. She did not want to put up with the schoolmates not liking her and with all the boys not wanting to date her. She already knew that there was probably no chance for her of winning competitions like "The most likeable girl of the school". She really longed for joining Red Hussar Majorettes but was not accepted to the group either (Amburn 1995, 21-23). There were also some other denials and rejections in Janis Joplin's life and all of these things, which in themselves may have been unimportant, could have influenced her future emotional life and especially her love life.

There is a list of the symptoms of the emotional deprivation disorder and some of the symptoms accurately fit Janis's personality. To start with, people with emotional deprivation disorder may be extremely fearless and energetic (Psychology Wiki). Myra Friedman talks about Janis Joplin's "astounding right-to-the-edge all-stops-out kind of energy, the extraordinary courage she showed in displaying to the public her deepest personal feelings" (Friedman, 2011, xxviii).

Emotionally deprived people may be also exaggeratedly sensitive to the judgments, verdicts, criticism and opinions of other people (Psychology Wiki). When Janis Joplin played with the Kozmic Blues Band in Memphis, their audience did not really like them and Janis said that “it was a very cold audience. It was a terrible audience, and I don’t know why, but I came on very struck, scared, scared to death....They were really dispassionate – they wanted a show. I’m used to playing for people who feel what I feel. They don’t give a shit about feeling. [...] It’s not my crowd.” (Adelt 2010, 108-109). She just could not put up with the criticism, especially when somebody did not like something which she believed was her strongest point.

In addition, emotionally deprived people believe they can avoid criticism and rejection, get appreciation, and gain approval when they please others (Psychology Wiki). In an interview in New York, Janis revealed her belief that she could play in the Big Brother & the Holding Company band only because she had sex with Travis Rivers (Amburn 1995, 66).

People with emotional deprivation disorder, as I already mentioned above, may need to be much more frequently reassured about their qualities and may be worried about the opinion of others (Psychology Wiki). It was also the case of Janis Joplin. There were usually a lot of people after her concert, at least the band or manager, who would reassure her that she was really good or who would encourage her before the concert. And if not, she even talked to herself trying to calm herself down and to reassure herself that she will make it through the show (Amburn 1995, 99).

But there are also many other symptoms of the emotional deprivation disorder which fit Janis Joplin’s personality perfectly. Although she was capable of social contact with others, when one reads that in four years she sang in three bands, met hundreds of people, slept with countless of them, but never got married, never got to live with any of her lovers for a longer period, never had a real *home*, one has to admit that she could not find emotional satisfaction in those social contacts (Amburn 1995). This incapability of finding satisfaction in social contacts is also sometimes represented in the lyrics written by Janis. For example, in a song called “Road Block”, firstly released in 1992, she sings:

Why can't I love ya, baby?
You're trying to block my road.
Trying to block my road.
Trying to block my
Road, alright, alright, right now! (Joplin 1992, 5:00-5:25)

There is somebody who would like to spend time with her, but she is not able to appreciate it.

Also in a song called "Catch Me Daddy", firstly released in 1993, we can find a situation where the lyrical voice is very indecisive about its relationships.

Hon, when I'm sittin' round late in the evenin', child,
I'm wonderin' why, why, why did I ever leave.
[...]
Woke an' found myself alone,
Hey, I don't like it!
Well, cold sheets made me realize
Catch me, daddy, 'cause I'm movin' on.
[...]
'Cause I got to find me my daddy, now now
Said, I got to find me my man
I'm searchin', oh babe I said I'm searchin' now,
[...]
Oh, I may take a plane, baby,
Or I may take a train, baby.
Oh, I guess you might find me walkin' there.
Yeah, I gotta, gotta, gotta, gotta... (Joplin 1993, 0:36-4:12)

She is very unhappy about her former decision of leaving and wonders why she had ever decided to do so. She wants to move and find another man to be with, but in the end she again decides to go somewhere else, to leave.

A very prevailing amount of the songs written by Janis are about love. There is a webpage called "The Janis Joplin Song File" where we can find alphabetical order of all of the songs she has performed and we can also see which of them were written by her.

She performed about 80 songs written by various artist including her, four of them have the word 'love' already in their titles, five of them have the word 'baby' in their titles, seven of the songs have in their titles male proper names or names used for male individuals (words like man, intruder, Harry, Bobby McGee). If we focus only on those songs for which Janis Joplin wrote the lyrics herself, we can see that 62 percent of them are about love. Not a single song of these 62 percent of Janis's songs is about satisfying love.

Janis Joplin wrote lyrics for 21 songs of which the following 13 songs are about love: "Catch Me Daddy", "Harry", "Hey Boy", "Intruder", "I Need A Man To Love", "Kozmic Blues", "Misery 'n", "Move Over", "One Good Man", "Road Block", "The Last Time", "Turtle Blues", and "Women Is Losers". Therefore it is more relevant trying to find the symbols of love in her songs than trying to find other symptoms of emotional deprivation disorder.

7 Love

Janis Joplin has performed a huge amount of songs, some of them written by her friends, some of them by other bands, and some of them just by herself. But as it is shown in the previous chapter, we could easily make the generalization that a great part of the songs performed by Janis were songs about love and almost all of them about very unhappy love.

As I mentioned in the chapter about the High School Reunion, it was hard for Janis to share her feelings and memories of Port Arthur in interviews, but she never really had any problems to share them in her songs. Therefore the huge amount of her songs being about very unhappy love may be very likely Janis's way to compensate for all the terrible experiences in Port Arthur and putting up with Emotional Deprivation Disorder. As she explained it herself, she believed that once she started singing, her lifestyle changed, she started to feel like she should share her emotion with others (Houston Chronicles 1970, 2:45-3:06). She was standing on a stage in front of thousands of people and she had no difficulty to share all the past experiences that had broken her heart. Janis also explained this herself:

But when I sing, I feel, oh I feel, well, like when you're first in love. It's more than sex, I know that. It's the point two people can get to they call love, like when you really touch someone for the first time, but it's gigantic, multiplied by the whole audience. I feel chills...it's a supreme emotional and physical experience...I live for that one hour on stage. It's full of feeling...it's a rush honey (Rodnitzky 2002, 14).

She would always compare singing to love because the music really had the power to heal her from the pain that resulted from the lack of unconditional love and from unrequited love. Her life was full of rejections and to sing about it was for Janis probably the easiest, most effective, and most joyful way to put up with it.

When we compare Janis's behavior during her life and her behavior on stage with the lyrics she wrote, we have to consider some kind of abyss between the behavior and the lyrics.

According to Rodnitzky, her behavior on the stage made the audience always feel like Janis wanted them to have a good time, to be with her, to take everything they wanted because she was willing to give them everything they wanted (Rodnitzky 2002, 11). Also in the interview at Port Arthur High School Reunion she did not really want to talk about her plans, nor her feelings about the city, but she told the interviewer: “My advice is everyone come to California and I’ll buy you a drink” (Houston Chronicle 1970, 0:29-0:33). It may look like a little thing, but even this tiny attempt at a joke is just Janis’s way to hide her real feelings of wanting to have somebody to care about her. We can see that when surrounded by people, she would always behave like she had got a lot to give to everybody, but when she was expressing herself in her lyrics about love, she was very honest about her feelings and her approach was much different. She suddenly became the one who needs somebody to love, or just one good man, or somebody to catch her, etc. Therefore, Janis Joplin’s approach to life and especially to love could be figuratively described by a quote: “I believed that I wanted to be a poet, but deep down I just wanted to be a poem.” (Gil de Biedma on Wiki Quote) Poems are created by poets. If we focus only on this fact (if we forget about the reader for a while), we could say that the poet is always the one who cares, who does something for someone, who creates beautiful things and feelings, who is simply the creator. The poem then is the object that is created, that somebody cares about, that is treated with beautiful feelings by the creator. When we compare Janis Joplin’s approach to life and love to this relationship between poet and poem, it means that Janis behaved as if she wanted to be a poet, she believed that she had enough energy and love to share with everyone and actually people sometimes felt like she really did. The people from her audience often described their feelings about her like that her “singing made you feel she was calling out to you from the second-story window of a bordello, inviting you up” (Rodnitzky 2002, 11). On the other hand, it is obvious that she wanted to be a poem in the sense that she wanted to be the one who is treated with as much love as possible as it is to be explained below through the analysis of the song called “I Need A Man To Love”.

The difference between being a poet (i.e. treating something with love) and being a poem (i.e. being treated with love) is also possible to sense behind one of Janis’s famous quotes: “On stage I make love to 25 000 people, then I go home alone” (Whiteley 2013, 62). This quote shows that she realized what she was doing on stage.

She behaved as if she really wanted to make love to all the audience, she would do anything and give anything out of herself so that the audience got the feeling that she was there for them and she was capable of anything.

She behaved like a poet creating a poem and putting all of herself into it and for some time she felt happy about this position because it made her feel like it was really only her who was the star of the moment. But then, after the excitement of the concert was over, she realized that the people she “made loved to” were “only” her audience and that, in fact, in the end she had to go and sleep alone.

In the texts of the following songs (“I Need A Man To Love”, “One Good Man”, “Misery ’n”, and “Women Is Losers”) I will try to focus on how the pain of unhappy love is represented in her songs, I will try to find out if she was satisfied with making love to 25 000 people or if she would rather go home with just one person who would really love her and I will try to analyze if she wanted to be a poet or a poem.

7.1 “I Need A Man To Love”

“I Need A Man To Love” is a song written by Janis Joplin and Sam Andrew. For the first time the song appeared as the second song on the *Cheap Thrills* album released in August 1968. The album called *Cheap Thrills* was recorded when Janis Joplin was in her first band – Big Brother and the Holding Company.

Whoa, I need a man to love me.
Oh, don't you understand me, baby?
Why, I need a man to love.
I want me someone to hold me when I, I call out for aid.
Someone to be around me so I won't be afraid.
Because it can't be now
Can't be now
Can't be now
Can't be now
Whoa, won't you let me hold you?
Honey, just close your eyes.
Whoa, won't you let me hold you, baby?
Hey, hey, I want to just put my arms around ya, like the circles going 'round
the sun.
And let me, let me hold you, daddy, I said, at least until the morning comes.
(Joplin 1968, 0:30-2:14)

This song shows us, how much Janis Joplin desired to have a man who would be there for her when she needed help, who would just simply be around her, who would exist for her. It may sound like a commonplace, maybe it seems like she does not have any special wishes. But in her lyrics we can feel that although (as she said) she used “to make love to 25 000 people” she was drowning in loneliness.

At the same time she makes the description of her sorrow and wishful thinking a little bit ironical when she says: “Let me hold you, daddy, I said, at least until the morning comes.” It sounds like she has already put up with the fact that no man will stay with her more than one or a few nights. At the beginning she sings that *she* needs *someone* who would hold *her*, then the song continues and this “holding” or “helping” turns the other way around – she wants to help somebody by staying with him.

But in the final part of the song it is the same like in the beginning again – she needs someone who would stay with her and help her. That has a lot in common with those two quotes in the previous chapter called “Love”. She believed that she wanted to be a poet and that she could give love to people and help people and sometimes she was pretending that “making love with thousands of people” fulfilled her. But in fact, deep inside, she wanted to be a poem – she needed someone to help her, to put everything into a relationship with her, to love her, to simply treat her like a poem, not to leave her in her dark loneliness. She did not want to go home alone.

7.2 “One Good Man”

“One Good Man” is the third song on the album called *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama*. This album was released in September, 1969 as her first solo studio album. Janis wrote this song by herself.

Honey, I love to go to parties
And I like to have a good time,
But if it gets too pale after a while
Honey and I start looking to find
One good man.
Hmm, don't you know I've been searching,
Oh yes I have!
One good man,
Oh ain't much, honey ain't much,
It's only everything, whoa. (Joplin 1969, 0:25-1:10)

This is only one year after “I need a man to love” and she does not pretend anything anymore. She admits that going to parties and having a good time there can get pale after some time and the only thing that could make her satisfied is one good man. She also realizes that to have this one good man is a lot to ask for but at the same time she believes that she deserves him.

An' I don't want much outa life,
I never wanted a mansion in the South.
I just-a want to find someone sincere
Who'd treat me like he talks,
One good man.
Oh honey don't you know that I've been looking.
Oh, one good man
Ain't much, honey it ain't much,
Oh, it's only everything.
All right. (Joplin 1969, 1:13-2:00)

At this time she was already very famous and this stanza seems to be saying that Janis has become bored with money and also with material goods like “a mansion in the South” referring to the residents of Porth Arthur. When Janis’s mother wanted her to be similar to the other people in the city, she could also mean she wanted Janis to settle down maybe in a mansion in the South (Amburn 1995, 22).

She has also had a lot of boyfriends and even more one-night stand experiences but deep inside she knows that this has got her tired, too.

Some girls they want to collect their men,
They wear ‘em like notches on a gun.
Oh honey, but I know better than that,
I know that a woman only needs one.
One good man, oh,
Oh baby don’t you know I’ve been looking, hmm.
One good man,
It ain’t much, no, no honey it ain’t much,
Oh, it’s only every little thing,
Just-a everything, everything
Ah yeah. (Joplin 1969, 2:50-3:42)

Although she knows girls who *collect* their men and she also knows that exactly the same is thought of her, she expresses her dissatisfaction with this lifestyle. She has already realized that she can do better than that, and that she wants something completely different: she longs for a stable, long-term relationship.

7.3 “Misery ’n”

“Misery ’n” is a song written by Peter Albin, Sam Andrew, Dave Getz, James Gurley and Janis Joplin and it is the third song on the album called *Farewell Song*. This album was released posthumously in February 1983. The “Misery ’n” performance on this album is a live performance.

The lyrics of this song are again a typical example of Janis Joplin’s cry of suffering. When Dick Cavett asked her: “Do you actually sit down when you get up in the morning and, and write out a song, or do you...When you say you write it, you compose it...?” she answered: “You just make it up. I don’t write songs, I make them up.” He still did not understand: “They don’t exist on paper your songs, don’t they?” So she explained it again: “Sometimes I write down the words so I don’t forget them, but I mean, I don’t write songs, that’s a whole different concept. I just make them up”. (Cavett 1970, 3:50-4:10) When she said that, she probably wanted to say that she would never just sit down at a table to start thinking and trying hard to make up something deep and meaningful, because she could just live the way she did and sometimes (usually when she was very desperately lacking love or disappointed in love) some words just came on her mind and she only wrote them down so she would not forget them. The lyrics of “Misery ’n” may be very representative for this concept of “making up songs”.

I’ve been misery ’n,
Ever since my daddy gone, yeah.
I’ve been, honey, I’ve been misery ’n, yes I have, now.
Ever since my, since my daddy gone, gone, gone.

But I believe that it won’t,
Baby, it won’t be too long,
If I just could hang on,
Yeah, until my, till my misery
Will all be gone.

Whoa, I said my rooms, you know,
They're so empty, empty, empty, empty, empty.
Filled up with sadness, sometimes, yeah.
My rooms are so empty, empty, empty, empty.
Child, filled up with sadness, honey, sometimes, sometimes.

Oh well it just, it just moves in,
Like the fog rolls in.
And I find I, well I can't see you, baby,
For my tears.

But I've tried.
Don't you know I've tried.
Cried, cried, cried, cried, cried.
Baby now, I've been missin' you.
Oh, I've been missin' you, babe!

Yeah, and it all seems to bother me
Much more that it seems it should be.
So, baby, now, now,
Baby, now, now,
Baby, tell me why,
Does it have to be
Oh, so wrong for me?

I never thought I could ever want anybody,
No, no, no, never did, I never did.
Why am I feelin' so strange?
Whoaaaaa, I never, never, never needed nobody, no, no,
But maybe you could help me —
Why am I feelin' so strange ?

Yeah, an' I've got me a great,
An' I've got a great big bed
With two pillows for my head.
Hey, but lately I been sleepin', sleepin' alone.

Tried,
Don't you know I've tried.
Cried,
Cried, cried, cried, cried,
Baby now, I've been missin' you. (Joplin 1983, 0:18-3:40)

She tends to repeat several times those words which carry the meaning of sorrow and despair. She wants to say that her rooms are empty, but she says: "My rooms are so empty, empty, empty, empty", because she wants to emphasize that everything in her life and even herself is empty "ever since her daddy gone", or generally her life is empty without a man. In a similar amount of desperate screams she uses the words "gone" and "cried" in this song. She profusely repeats only the words with connotations of sadness and despair. In this song, there are also some lines with a little piece of hopeful light ("But I believe that it won't,/ Baby, it won't be too long,/ If I just could hang on,/ Yeah, until my, till my misery/ Will be gone.") But the words in these lines are not emphasized by repetition and it makes readers and listeners believe that all those profusely repeated words of despair are for the lyrical voice more important than these few slightly optimistic lines.

8 Women and Love

We could make the generalization that all songs that were written by Janis Joplin and their main topic is love, are at the same time full of sadness, despair, pessimism, resignation, submission and unrequited feelings. She really believed that it is a destiny of women to be always those who try hard to chase their men. When she was interviewed by Dick Cavett, she described how she felt about being a woman.

Janis Joplin: Did you ever see those mule carts?

Dick Cavett: Yeah.

Janis Joplin: They, er, there's a dumb mule on there, right, and a long stick with a string and a carrot, and it hangs over the mule's nose, and it runs after it all day long.

Dick Cavett: Who is the man in this parable, the mule, or the person holding the carrot?

Janis Joplin: No, the woman is the mule. Chasing something that somebody's holds her way.

Dick Cavett: Constantly chasing the man...

Janis Joplin: Yeah.

Dick Cavett: ...who always eludes her.

Janis Joplin: Well, they always hold something more than they're prepared to give. (Cavett 1970, 2:55-3:30)

In Dick Cavett's show Janis Joplin figuratively expressed her belief that all women try to chase men, but the men always elude the women. She probably felt like that because she went through all kinds of refusals by men many times. One of the worst denials for her was probably the one by Seth Morgan. He was her lover and they were supposed to get married in the summer of 1970. However, Janis had a suspicion that even this relationship would be a disappointment for her. He was spending too much time in San Francisco while she lived in Landmark and she admitted that even though they were supposed to get married they did not really get on well with each other (Amburn 1995, 242). It seems she may have felt she just really was not predestined to love the right man.

8.1 “Women Is Losers”

The belief in this destiny of women is something we can recognize almost in every text written by Janis Joplin. Another song with lyrics written by her is really revealing. We could find a summary of her feelings already in the title of the song. “Women Is Losers” is the sixth song on the first album featuring Janis Joplin. The album is called *Big Brother & the Holding Company* and was released in the summer of 1967.

Women is losers
Women is losers
Women is losers, oh,
Say honey women is losers.
Well, I know you must have heard it all,
And everywhere
Men always seem to end up on top.

Oh, if they told you they want you
They'll come around by your door.
Whoa I say they'll hurt you, they'll desert you,
They'll leave you and never be here for more.
Oh yeah!

Women is losers
Women is losers
Women is losers, Lord, Lordy, Lord!!!
So now I know you must-a heard it, Lord, it's true,
Men always seem to end up on top.

They wear a nice shiny armor
Until there is a dragon for to slay.
Any day now,
Course with men beggin' to pay 'em
Then they'll turn and run away, oh!

Women is losers

Women is losers

Women is losers, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord!!!

So I know you must have heard it, Lord,

Everywhere

Men always seem to end up on top, oh! (Joplin 1967, 0:15-2:33)

These lyrics state much more than what could be ever said by any explanations, definitions or quotations. Some kind of a game is a metaphor of love in this song. People play this game all the time and therefore everybody knows and we “must have heard it everywhere” that in this game women are always losers and men are always those who win. She admitted that men would do at least something to achieve this victory – “Oh, if they told you they want you/ they’ll come around by your door.” But immediately she added “Whoa I say they’ll hurt you, they’ll desert you./ They’ll leave you and never be here for more.” It means that sometimes men may do something good for women, but it is always only when they need something or when they just want to fool women by pretending that they are not that mean. But right after women start to believe them, men hurt and desert them again. The stanza “They wear a nice shiny armor/ Until there is a dragon for to slay/ Any day now/ Course with men beggin’ to pay ‘em/ Then they’ll turn and run away, oh!” again figuratively says that men are here for women only when there is something advantageous in it for them. If men would have to start to work on something, they would always run away.

8.2 Janis Joplin as a Feminist Heroine?

One of the interpretations of Janis Joplin's songs has been suitable for some feminists. "Joplin was a new kind of aggressive female singer who became a unique rock superstar and inadvertently a feminist heroine by crossing gender lines and raising gender issues" (Rodnitzky 2002, 8). If somebody interprets her songs as feminist, the world "inadvertently" (for her being a feminist heroine) is really accurate. Actually even Jerry Rodnitzky admits that Janis was oblivious to most 1960s activism including feminism, but according to him, for younger women she served as an unconscious feminist symbol (2).

In the 1960s there was a radical feminist group called "Redstockings" in New York and this group tended to glorify women as victims by standing up for women and not blaming them for their oppression. According to them, women's struggle with sexism grew more credible with the increasing amount of marks of suffering they could show. Janis Joplin's songs reflecting the pain of love and the pain of being a woman perfectly fitted in this philosophy of "Redstockings" because her songs obviously glorified pain and suffering.

But her songs never suggested ways of solution for this suffering nor goals to work toward (Rodnitzky 2002, 12-13). More than about the lyrics of Janis Joplin's songs, Rodnitzky talks about something else when trying to prove her connection with feminism:

Janis's most universal influence came through her popularization of naturalistic dress and hairstyles. Then, as now, millions of young women often dressed in ostentatious "poverty" in uniforms of blue jeans and work shirts. But their hair and makeup often came directly from high fashion magazines such as *Vogue*. Moreover, on dates, jeans were usually discarded in favor of panty girdles and dresses. Joplin hardly originated the natural look that she picked up in San Francisco, but she did spread it nationwide. Janis liberated millions of young girls from makeup and girdles, while she pioneered the braless look and wild, loose, individualistic clothes. Also, Joplin's long, brown, usually lack-luster hair helped free many women from the exaggerated brush, wash, set, color, and spray syndrome that still grips America through long and short hair fashions.

Janis brought new confidence to girls who had always worn their locks short or their clothes long because they had “bad” hair or “bad” figures. With the new, diverse, natural styles, many women who could never be beautiful in classic ways radiated a unique personal charm (Rodnitzky 2002, 8).

That is more than true. She might not really have known about it, but in this fashion approach she was and still may be a feminist heroine, and so was in her representation of women’s suffering in abusive and unfair relationships. In the fashion approach it may have been on purpose, at least she for sure dressed up the way she did on purpose and it does not matter if she wanted to shock or show something deeper through her clothing or if it was just her wanting to feel comfortable, she just dressed up like she wanted to and at least that could have been suitable with the feminist approach. Other aspects of Janis Joplin’s life could have been even more adequate for some feminists, but in her case it was much more complicated as it is to be shown in the following chapter.

9 Sacrifices

Also when we realize what she sacrificed for her singing career, we should admit that there is some relationship with the feminist approach in her behavior. Ulrich Adelt says:

Joplin openly slept around with men and women and did not actively pursue marriage and children, although she exemplified the mixed blessings of the sexual revolution by undergoing an abortion in 1968 and by repeatedly stating her frustration with one-night stands and her desire to marry and settle down (Adelt 2010, 100).

She found out that she was pregnant on Christmas 1967 and there were only speculations about who the father of the baby could be. According to James Gurley, Janis underwent the abortion because she was just on the top of her career and the baby would be an obstacle for her. She did not want to give up on the career. She underwent the abortion on the day of her twenty-fifth birthday celebration and according to Amburn, too late then she regretted that she had ever done so (Amburn 1995, 134).

There was also another opportunity to live “a normal life”, which she refused. In 1966 she had a lover, Travis Rivers, they lived together and in July, Travis proposed to Janis. She said just “no”, then she was waiting for his reaction, she was nervous because he did not say anything and she was smoking and was really upset because he was not urging. She made him ask her why not, so he asked and she answered, that she would not marry him because she knew that she would be really famous and therefore able to have any boy over fourteen she wanted and she did not want to miss such an opportunity (Amburn 1995, 75-76).

She believed so much in her own singing career that she would sacrifice almost everything.

For music, she gave up on her family, home, children, marriage or any other stable relationship and that is the reason why a lot of feminists even now believe that she did so on purpose to prove that she was an independent and emancipated woman. “Feminists tended to marry later than the average woman. Also, feminists urged younger women to establish themselves in careers before marrying. Joplin seemed to fit this profile” (Rodnitzky 2002, 14).

Yet, knowing the childhood, life, songs and destiny of Janis Joplin, as it was shown above, it would be appropriate to admit that it was much more complicated in her case, and her specific life history and her reactions to it, as well as the resulting psychological complexes might have just as much to do with her behavior.

10 The Vicious Circle Including Drugs

Some feminists believe that she tended to show her sufferings of being a woman because she wanted to struggle with sexism. But she did not make any of these sacrifices systematically, nor did she make them on purpose, sometimes not even consciously. Rather than struggle with sexism, Janis Joplin's music was part of the vicious circle of her life and artistic conviction – she suffered a lot in Port Arthur, therefore she moved and started to sing and take drugs at the same time. She started to write lyrics influenced by her unhappy past and unrequited love. She started to take drugs because she frequented circles where drugs were a part of life and, according to Myra Friedman “dope would bring her (Janis) *belonging*, and that, above all, was what she was after, always” (Friedman 2011, 48).

At the same time, Janis claimed that if you want to sing the blues, you have to be black and deserve a “license” for singing the blues by suffering (Adelt 2010). In other words, although to some extent she sang blues about suffering because she suffered in the past, she also wanted to suffer even more, because she wanted to feel eligible to sing the blues and therefore she took drugs (because she believed that when her fans had a connection between drugs and her personality it made them feel like she suffered and therefore was eligible to sing the blues. And that is nothing but a vicious circle.) In Adelt's words:

To overcome her lack of blackness and to live up to the blues singers' mystique, Joplin consumed drugs and alcohol. As Chet Helms, manager of Big Brother and the Holding Company, remembered: "She felt she had to pay her due to sing the blues. She felt in some sense she had not suffered enough." Joplin noted that, "maybe my audience can enjoy my music more if they think I'm destroying myself" and justified her use of heroin by stating, “you can't eat yogurt and sing the blues”. (Adelt 2010, 105)

It may be hard to settle for her defense of her drug use, as it actually sounds as if she just wanted to tergiversate. In the summer of 1970, she told reporter David Dalton: “I wanted to smoke dope, take dope, lick dope, suck dope, fuck dope, anything I could lay my hands on I wanted to do it” (Friedman 2011, 47-48). Not only music and the passion in which she used to sing made Janis Joplin an icon.

“Sex, drugs & rock ‘n’ roll” was kind of a philosophy or at least a motto for many people in the 1960s, and Janis Joplin is an iconic name which many people would probably very easily think of in connection with this motto. Her consumption of drugs and alcohol was simply abundant. Children in Port Arthur are even now still told stories about the ghost of Janis Joplin – if they want see the ghost they have to enter a dark room and say “marihuana” three times and then turn around to see the ghost of Janis Joplin (Amburn 1995, 11). She smoked marihuana and hashish, she was addicted to cocaine, amphetamine, methamphetamine, heroin, and she also dealt all of these (46–52).

Yet, regardless of the extent to which she took drugs so she could feel eligible to sing the blues or if she had different reasons, nevertheless, the presence of drugs in some of her song lyrics is clearly tangible.

10.1 “Mary Jane”

“Mary Jane” is a blues song recorded in San Francisco 1965 with Dick Oxtot Jazz Band. It firstly appeared on the 1975 compilation album *Janis*. The song is often incorrectly attributed to Bessie Smith. The recording is a live performance (Wikipedia). Mary Jane is a literal English translation of the Spanish personal name “María Juana”. “The traditional association of the marihuana drug with this personal name is probably a folk etymology” (Wikipedia). But based on the lyrics, there is no doubt that Janis Joplin was singing about marihuana.

Now when I go to work, I work all day,

Always turns out the same.

When I bring home my hard-earned pay

I spend my money all on Mary Jane.

Mary Jane, Mary Jane, Lord, my Mary Jane (Joplin 1965, 0:07-0:29).

This stanza says that no matter how long and how hard she works or how much money she earns, she spends it all on the drug. As it was proved in the previous chapters, she was really hurt by lacking love in her past, especially in her family and at school, and also by all her relationships with men during her life. In this stanza she could be trying to somehow put up with her destiny of hurt woman – during her life she had learnt that one can never buy love or any other real relationship with money. When one needs love, money is not enough in any amount. But it is different in case of drugs. She works hard and she earns a lot. Therefore it is very easy to buy drugs with money and then, when having the drugs, it is very easy to take them and to get at least something like a shelter from the pain resulting from the lack of love.

Oh if a man should look tame now, mean and mature,

They all turn out the same.

‘Cause they can’t do nothing to make a man feel good

Like my old Mary Jane.

Mary Jane, Mary Jane, Lord, my Mary Jane (Joplin 1965, 0:30-0:52).

The money she spent in the first strophe was worth it because there is nothing that could make a man feel good like the drug can. Men maybe sometimes try to satisfy their women in a relationship, but the lyrical voice has learnt during her life that it actually never really works, she does not believe any man anymore, she better relies on the drug because it is much safer to rely on something that one can control with their own effort. The lyrical voice knows that one can never control their partner with their own effort because the partner has always its role in the relationship. Therefore the easiest way to put up with the pain resulting from the lack of love and the solution for the sadness remaining after a farewell is the drug.

Now I walk in the street now lookin' for a friend
One that can lend me some change.
And he never questions my reason why,
'Cause he too loves Mary Jane.
Mary Jane, Mary Jane, Lord, my Mary Jane. (Joplin 1965, 0:53-1:15)

She better spends time in the streets or among people who have the same conviction about drugs as her, than anywhere else. There are people who always have the drug or money for the drug for her, they never question her reasons why, they never judge her for using the drug because they do exactly the same.

Oh, when I'm feelin' lonesome and I'm feelin' blue,
There's only one way to change.
Now I walk down the street now lookin' for a man,
One that knows my Mary Jane,
Mary Jane, Mary Jane, Lord my Mary Jane. (Joplin 1965, 1:39-2:00)

In this stanza the two subjects from the second stanza (a man and the drug) meet in the same space-time. The lyrical voice is willing to admit that she needs a man sometimes, but only when it is a man who can get her the drug because, as we already know, she was never really satisfied in a relationship the way she was in her drug use.

The drug means everything to her, at least in this song. When anything bad happens to her, there is only one option to work it out – the drug.

Lyrics about drugs written by Janis Joplin suggest that she was never desperate, nor pessimistic about drugs, she was never unhappy with the states that drugs gave her. This approach changes slightly in the case of alcohol as it is to be analyzed in the following chapter.

11 The Alcohol Addiction

A probably even bigger addiction than all of the drugs mentioned above, was alcohol. Edward Willett says: “Janis’s ‘drug of choice’ was always alcohol. Her drink of choice, by 1968, was Southern Comfort, a sweet mixture of peach, vanilla, cinnamon, sugar-and whisky. She usually had a bottle of it onstage as she performed” (Willett 2008, 90-91).

Of course, Big Brother & the Holding Company featuring Janis Joplin was a psychedelic band and they were not significantly different from other bands of the 1960s. Therefore, nobody was surprised seeing them drinking or knowing that they took drugs. James Gurley, the guitar player of the band, admitted that every time before they performed with the band, every one of them needed a couple of shots of hard liquor. Big Brother & the Holding Company even used to call themselves an “alcydelic” band (66).

But Janis drank really hard even compared to them. One morning after a concert in California, “Janis told Myra Friedman she could not even remember how she had sung or how the band had played, because she has been drinking so much that she passed out after the concert” (114). In fact, Janis Joplin used to drink the Southern Comfort so much and so often that she

decided the Southern Comfort folks owed her for all the free publicity she was giving their product. She directed Albert Grossman’s office to flood the company with newspaper clippings mentioning her fondness for Southern Comfort, and the company ended up giving her a check for twenty-five hundred dollars, which she put toward the purchase of a lynx coat. Once she got the coat, Janis plugged herself, not the product. “Oh man, that was the best hustle I ever pulled-can you imagine getting paid for passing out for two years?” (Echols 2000, 187)

She was apparently completely obsessed with alcohol and it also influenced her writing. Actually the first song she had ever written was about drinking alcohol, and is analyzed in the following chapter.

11.1 “What Good Can Drinkin’ Do”

“What Good Can Drinkin’ Do” is a song from the same album as the “Mary Jane” song, the album called *Janis* (sometimes *Early Performances*) released in 1975. “What Good Can Drinkin’ Do” was written by Janis Joplin herself in 1962 and it is the first song that she has ever recorded (Paytress 1994, 140–141). In the intro of the song Janis says: “Uh, this is a song called “What Good Can Drinkin’ Do”, that I wrote one night after drinkin’ myself into a stupor” (Paytress 1994, 140–141).

What good can drinkin’ do, what good can drinkin’ do?

Lord, I drink all night but the next day I still feel blue.

There’s a glass on the table, they say it’s gonna ease all my pain,

And there’s a glass on the table, they say it’s gonna ease all my pain.

But I drink it down, an’ the next day I feel the same. (Joplin 1975, 0:03-0:53)

She wants to drown all of her sadness, pain and blues in a glass of a drink because people say it is possible to ease the pain like this. But when she tries it, there are no results.

Gimme whiskey, gimme bourbon, give me gin.

Oh, gimme whiskey, give me bourbon, gimme gin.

‘Cause it don’t matter what I’m drinkin’, Lord, as long as it drown this sorrow I’m in. (Joplin 1975, 0:55-1:25)

She does not even care *what* she drinks as long as it can drown her sorrow. It means that when it is liquid and alcoholic then it is enough.

I start drinking Friday, I start drinking Friday night.

Lord, I start drinking Friday, start drinking Friday night.

But then I wake up on Sunday, child, there ain’t nothin’ that’s right. (Joplin 1975, 2:28-2:58)

She is capable of sacrificing three days to try if drowning the sorrow in alcohol may work but still with no results.

My man he left me, child, he left me here.

Yeah, my good man left me, went away and left me here.

Lord, I'm feelin' lowdown, just give me another glass of beer. (Joplin 1975, 3:04-3:34)

She was drinking so much that even her man left her. She feels very bad about it but again she believes that a glass of alcohol will help.

Already her first song was full of blues and sadness and already so soon she believed that all her sorrow could drown in a glass. And if something bad happened because of alcohol, the solution was again alcohol. That was the same vicious circle as when she believed that she had to take drugs to be eligible to sing the blues.

This song is similar to the "Mary Jane" song because both these songs are about her drug addiction – "Mary Jane" about her marihuana addiction and "What Good Can Drinkin' Do" about her alcohol addiction. But "What Good Can Drinkin' Do" is different in the lyrical voice's approach to the drug. Although she still tries to solve all of her pain resulting from the lack of love by the influence of the drug, she admits that this time it is not helping anymore. No matter what she drinks and how much time she is willing to sacrifice, it never really makes her feel better. But even this state was convenient for her because it fit her image of a blues singer – she had to suffer to be eligible to sing the blues.

Analyzing the last two songs, we found out, that unlike in the case of the songs about love, the lyrics of the songs about drugs are not so desperate or pessimistic because she was very satisfied with the state marihuana gave her. And if yes, if she was sometimes disappointed about the consequence of a drug (alcohol) use, it was always that she was disappointed that the drug did not help her with her problems with love and it means, as it is also already mentioned above, that her drug use was a part of the vicious circle of her life.

12 Conclusion

After reading such an amount of information about Janis Joplin's childhood and adolescence experiences, about all those troubles she went through, sacrifices she made and difficulties she kept trying to put up with, it is easier to identify the symbolism of all of these experiences in her songs.

Analyzing the lyrics of Janis Joplin's songs, I have found out that the distinctly dominant part of the lyrics written by her are lyrics about love and in most of the cases this love is unhappy, unrequited, desperate, pessimistic, submissive or in some other way ruined, broken and unhealthy and it is clearly visible that the feelings she directly or metaphorically expresses in her songs have roots in her love experiences and other interpersonal relationships from her life experiences.

Janis's approach to the image of love is also very often understood as a feminist approach. In my analyses, however, I showed that although her lyrics, her behavior and her lifestyle might resonate with feminist theories, they are neither directly inspired by feminism, nor are necessarily and only the result of beliefs parallel with those feminism.

There are also lyrics written by Janis Joplin which are directly or metaphorically about drugs. Although there are not that many of them as about love, but whenever she wrote about drugs, it was demonstrably never like the lyrics about love. The lyrics about drugs suggest that she was never desperate, nor pessimistic about drugs, she was never unhappy with the states that drugs gave her. And if yes, if she was sometimes disappointed about the consequence of a drug use, it was always that she was disappointed that the drug did not help her with her problems with love and that was something which she could again put into those songs about love. That is also another vicious circle in Janis Joplin's life.

Her life, drugs in her life, love in her life and her art were so linked with each other that altogether they make a bottomless source of inspiration for us and for future generations.

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