

## Liquid Love and the Quest for Connection in *My Heart and Other Black Holes* by Jasmine Waraga

د. عصام عبدالحميد إبراهيم حجازي

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية-كلية الألسن-جامعة قناة السويس

### Abstract:

This research explores the application of Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid love" within the context of Jasmine Waraga's novel *My Heart and Other Black Holes*. Bauman's theory, which describes love as transient, unstable, and shaped by the fluidity of modern social relationships, provides a framework for analyzing the emotional dynamics between the novel's protagonists, Aysel and Roman. Through their suicide pact, the novel examines the fragility of modern romantic connections and the ways in which personal traumas, societal pressures, and mental health issues influence the formation and dissolution of intimate relationships. The research delves into the complex portrayal of love and alienation in the novel, positioning Bauman's thesis of liquid love alongside critical readings of young adult fiction that addresses mental health. It argues that the instability and impermanence of Aysel and Roman's relationship reflect broader societal trends in which emotional bonds are increasingly shaped by individualism and a consumerist approach to intimacy. In addition, the study highlights the psychological implications of liquid love, particularly in the context of identity formation, self-esteem, and the characters' shared experience of alienation. This interdisciplinary analysis contributes to both literary and sociological scholarship by connecting Bauman's theoretical framework with contemporary narratives of youth and mental health in fiction. It suggests that *My Heart and Other Black Holes* offers an example of how liquid love manifests in modern relationships, while also challenging traditional understandings of love, identity, and societal expectations in the fluid age.

**Key Words:** Liquid Love, Zygmunt Bauman, *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, Jasmine Waraga, Modern Relationships

"الحب السائل والبحث عن الاتصال في قلبي والثقوب السوداء الأخرى للكاتبة جاسمين وراجا"

### المستخلص

يستعرض هذا البحث تطبيق مفهوم "الحب السائل" لزيجمونت باومان في سياق رواية جاسمين وراجا قلبي والثقوب السوداء الأخرى. تقدم نظرية باومان، التي تصف الحب بأنه عابر وغير مستقر ومتأثر بسيولة العلاقات الاجتماعية الحديثة، إطاراً لتحليل الديناميكيات العاطفية بين بطلي الرواية، أيسيل ورومان. من خلال الميثاق الانتحاري بينهما، تفحص الرواية هشاشة الروابط الرومانسية الحديثة والطرق التي تؤثر بها الصدمات الشخصية والضغوط الاجتماعية وقضايا الصحة النفسية على تكوين العلاقات الحميمة وتفككها. يتناول البحث التصوير المعقد للحب والاغتراب في الرواية، مشيراً إلى أطروحة بومان حول الحب السائل، إلى جانب قراءات نقدية لأدب الشباب الذي يتناول قضايا الصحة النفسية. ويظهر البحث أن عدم الاستقرار وعدم الدوام في علاقة أيسيل ورومان يعكسان اتجاهات اجتماعية أوسع، تتشكل فيها الروابط العاطفية بشكل متزايد من خلال الفردية والنهج الاستهلاكي تجاه الحميمة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الآثار النفسية للحب السائل، خاصة في سياق تكوين الهوية، احترام الذات، وتجربة الاغتراب المشتركة بين الشخصيتين. يساهم هذا التحليل متعدد التخصصات في الدراسات الأدبية والاجتماعية من خلال ربط إطار بومان النظري بالروايات المعاصرة التي تتناول الشباب والصحة النفسية في الأدب.

ويقترح أن قلبي والثقوب السوداء الأخرى تقدم مثلاً على كيفية ظهور الحب السائل في العلاقات الحديثة، مع تحدي الفهم التقليدي للحب والهوية والتوقعات الاجتماعية في عصر السيولة.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الحب السائل ، زيجمنت بومان ، قلبي والثقوب السوداء الأخرى ، جاسمين وارجا، العلاقات الحديثة

## Introduction

The psychological dimensions of liquid love are particularly salient among younger generations. In her novel *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, Jasmine Warga illustrates how mental health struggles intersect with the fragility of modern relationships. The protagonists bond, formed within a suicide pact, embodies Bauman's notion of relationships contingent on immediate needs rather than enduring commitments. Their shared alienation underscores Bauman's claim that "the instability of modern relationships exacerbates feelings of insecurity and self-doubt" (2003, p. 56). This intersection of liquid love and mental health is further explored by scholars examining the effects of societal individualization on young people. Bauman's contention that "relationships are increasingly shaped by market logic, prioritizing convenience over commitment" (2003, p. 62) resonates in studies of millennial and Gen Z relationship patterns, which emphasize flexibility and independence but often result in emotional disconnection.

## Research Objective:

The objective of this paper is to investigate how Bauman's theory is reflected in the themes of love, alienation, and identity in Warga's narrative. Specifically, this research will explore how the fluidity and impermanence of relationships, as theorized by Bauman, are observable in the interactions between Aysel and Roman. Furthermore, the research addresses the psychological impact of depression and othering, examining how these factors shape the characters' perceptions of love and connection.

## Research Questions:

1. How does Bauman's concept of "Liquid Love" manifest in the relationship between Aysel and Roman in *My Heart and Other Black Holes*?
2. What are the broader implications of liquid modernity on the characters' sense of identity and emotional connections?
3. How do the social and psychological effects of alienation contribute to the emotional fragility and instability portrayed in the novel?

## Synopsis of *My Heart and Other Black Holes*

Jasmine Warga's *My Heart and Other Black Holes* is a deeply emotional novel that explores themes of depression, trauma, and the human need for connection. The story follows **Aysel Seran**, a sixteen-year-old girl who is haunted by her father's crime—a tragedy that has left her ostracized in her small town and burdened by overwhelming guilt and sadness. Isolated and struggling with suicidal thoughts, Aysel becomes obsessed with planning her own death.

Desperate for a way out, she stumbles upon a website where individuals seek **suicide partners**—someone to share their final act with. This is how she meets **Roman**, a boy equally determined to escape his pain. Roman is haunted by his own tragedy—he blames himself for his younger sister’s death and believes that ending his life is the only way to atone for his perceived failure.

As Aysel and Roman spend more time together, a strange but undeniable bond begins to form between them. While they both carry deep scars, Aysel slowly starts questioning whether she truly wants to go through with their plan. Roman, however, remains unwavering in his decision. The novel follows Aysel’s internal battle as she starts to see glimpses of hope, realizing that her emotions are not static and that perhaps her life can still hold meaning beyond the shadows of her past.

At its core, *My Heart and Other Black Holes* is a raw and heartbreaking journey into the minds of two young people battling depression, yet it offers a profound message about the importance of human connection, the possibility of healing, and the idea that even in the darkest moments, there is a chance for light to break through.

#### **Methodology:**

The methodology involves textual analysis through Zygmunt Bauman's "Liquid Love" framework. The study applies close reading and thematic analysis to the interactions and relationships in the novel, focusing on the characters’ internal struggles and their attempts to explore emotional connections in a fluid, modern society. The analysis is contextualized within Bauman’s sociological theories and supported by secondary literature on liquid modernity and its effects on personal relationships.

#### **Literature Review:**

Zygmunt Bauman’s exploration of "liquid love" offers a profound critique of relationships within the broader dynamics of modernity. Introduced in his seminal work *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (2003), the concept reflects the transient, unstable, and commodified nature of intimacy in the contemporary era. This review synthesizes multiple interpretations, critiques, and empirical applications of Bauman’s ideas, illuminating their relevance to sociology, psychology, and cultural studies.

#### **Foundations of Liquid Love and Liquid Modernity**

Bauman’s concept of liquid love is rooted in his broader theory of liquid modernity, which describes the dissolution of stable societal structures in favor of a world characterized by constant change and individualization (Bauman, 2000). Liquid love captures how this fluidity manifests in relationships, emphasizing their ephemeral and conditional nature. Bauman asserts, “What matters is not the durability of the bond, but its flexibility” (Bauman, 2003, p. 12). This reflects a shift from long-lasting commitments to transient, convenience-driven connections shaped by consumerist drive.

In Bauman's view, modern relationships mirror the transactional nature of consumer capitalism. Individuals, much like shoppers, seek connections that provide immediate gratification without long-term responsibilities. "People shop for relationships as they shop for products" Bauman observes, highlighting the commodification and disposability of modern bonds (2003, p. 19). This commodification is evident in practices such as online dating, where relationships are reduced to choices based on superficial criteria, echoing the consumerist ethos of "matching needs" rather than fostering mutual growth.

### Key Themes and Psychological Impacts

#### 1. Fear of Commitment

Central to Bauman's analysis is the pervasive fear of entrapment. He notes, "The fear of entrapment outweighs the longing for security," as individuals seek autonomy and self-fulfillment over shared stability (Bauman, 2003, p. 45). This fear results in fragile connections, where individuals maintain emotional distance to protect themselves from vulnerability and dependence.

#### 2. Virtual Intimacy

Bauman critiques the role of technology in reshaping intimacy, particularly how digital communication fosters superficial connections while undermining deeper bonds. He argues that "online interactions allow us to connect without the vulnerabilities of face-to-face encounters" enabling a form of "micro-managed intimacy" that is shallow and controlled (2003, p. 78). This echoes research by Sherry Turkle in her study *Alone Together* (2011) who explains how technology influences human relationships and emphasizes the fragility and superficiality that emerge in digital life. Drawing from over fifteen years of interviews and observations, Turkle explores how digital communication and robotic companionship erode the depth and authenticity of human connections. Her work identifies two central phenomena: the rise of sociable robots and the consequences of networked living.

## Sociable Robots and the Illusion of Intimacy

Sherry Turkle critiques the increasing reliance on sociable robots, such as companion robots for the elderly or robotic toys for children. These robots, designed to mimic emotions and responsiveness, provide an "illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship" (Turkle, 2011, p. 1). For example, Turkle recounts how elderly individuals form emotional bonds with robots like Paro, a robotic baby seal, as a substitute for human interaction. While these interactions might offer comfort, Turkle argues that they diminish the value of genuine human relationships, as the robot lacks real emotional understanding or reciprocity. The desire for "no-risk relationships" with robots, as illustrated by Turkle, reflects a broader societal shift toward avoiding the complexities and vulnerabilities inherent in human intimacy. She discusses how this preference stems from fear of disappointment and rejection in human interactions, which she labels as a "retreat from authenticity" (Turkle, 2011, p. 6). This highlights a paradox: while robots offer emotional safety, they ultimately reinforce loneliness by replacing meaningful connections with shallow simulations.

## Networked Life: Connection Without Communication

The second part of Turkle's analysis focuses on how digital technologies reshape relationships through constant connectivity. She introduces the concept of "alone together" to describe how people remain perpetually tethered to their devices, creating a paradoxical sense of isolation despite being digitally connected. Turkle provides poignant examples, such as teenagers preferring texting over face-to-face communication to maintain control over their social interactions. She observes, "We'd rather text than talk," as digital messaging allows for editing and curating responses, reducing the risk of vulnerability (Turkle, 2011, p. 2).

### 3. Mental Health and Alienation

The instability of modern relationships intensifies feelings of insecurity and self-doubt, leaving individuals vulnerable to emotional fragmentation. Bauman's observation that "the liquid nature of modern life leaves individuals vulnerable to isolation and existential despair" (2000, p. 73) resonates with psychological studies linking transient intimacy to heightened anxiety and reduced well-being.

## Interdisciplinary Critiques and Counterarguments

Bauman's deterministic portrayal of liquid love has drawn criticism for its perceived pessimism. Giddens (1992), for instance, contrasts Bauman's bleak outlook with his theory of "pure relationships" which posits that modern partnerships, while flexible, can foster equality and communication. Giddens's optimistic stance highlights the potential for adaptive and mutually satisfying connections in a rapidly changing world. Similarly, Illouz (2007) challenges Bauman's emphasis on commodification, arguing that despite structural pressures, individuals continue to seek meaningful and enduring relationships. She contends "While the structures of modernity may influence relationships, they do not wholly define them" (Illouz, 2007, p. 134). This critique underscores the resilience of human bonds even within a consumerist framework.

## Empirical Applications of Bauman's Theory

Empirical research has validated and extended Bauman's ideas, particularly in exploring the intersection of liquid love, technology, and consumerism. Studies on digital dating platforms exemplify the commodification of intimacy that Bauman critiques. Ansari and Klinenberg (2015) examine the rise of dating apps like Tinder, noting how they promote a "shopping" approach to relationships. They observe, "Modern dating platforms encourage users to approach relationships as shoppers, comparing options and maximizing utility" (p. 56). This mirrors Bauman's assertion that relationships in liquid modernity are treated as investments, valued only for their immediate returns (2003, p. 14). Similarly, Turkle (2011) highlights the paradoxical effects of technology on intimacy. While digital tools create new opportunities for connection, they also erode the authenticity and depth of relationships. Turkle's concept of "alone together" aligns with Bauman's critique of virtual intimacy, where individuals prioritize curated online personas over genuine emotional vulnerability.

## Liquid Love and Ethical Implications

Bauman's analysis extends beyond sociological critique to ethical considerations, particularly the adiaphorization of relationships. Drawing from Foucault's concept of biopower, Bauman argues that consumerism imposes a "substitute conscience" on individuals, detaching intimacy from moral obligations (Best, 2018). This detachment reframes relationships as transactional, diminishing the ethical responsibility toward the other. However, some scholars dispute Bauman's emphasis on individual detachment. They argue that societal norms, such as legal frameworks and cultural narratives, continue to enforce ethical boundaries in relationships. For example, contemporary sex education policies often reinforce traditional family structures, reflecting a tension between individualization and societal regulation (Best, 2018).

To conclude, Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquid love remains a vital framework for analyzing the complexities of modern intimacy. By highlighting the transient, commodified, and often superficial nature of relationships, Bauman provides a sobering critique of contemporary life. Yet, as critics like Giddens and Illouz suggest, human connections possess a resilience that transcends societal structures. Empirical studies and interdisciplinary analyses continue to validate and expand upon Bauman's ideas, underscoring their enduring relevance. In the fluid world of liquid modernity, as Bauman aptly notes, "love itself becomes an act of balancing impermanence and the yearning for connection" (2003, p. 84).

## Theoretical Framework: Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*

### 1. Ephemeral Nature of Relationships

In Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, the theme of the transient and fragile nature of modern relationships is central to his analysis of contemporary intimacy. Bauman argues that relationships in liquid modernity are no longer valued for their endurance but for their adaptability and convenience. He writes, "What matters is not the durability of the



bond, but its flexibility” (Bauman, 2003, p. 12). This observation underscores how modern individuals prioritize relationships that can be easily altered or ended to suit changing circumstances, reflecting the fluidity of contemporary life.

Bauman also highlights the tendency for relationships to mimic consumer goods, emphasizing disposability over permanence. He likens modern partnerships to a form of investment, stating, “Commitment is a spin-off from other things: how satisfied we are with our relationship; whether we see a viable alternative to it” (Bauman, 2003, p. 62). This transactional view reduces relationships to temporary arrangements, contingent on immediate satisfaction and devoid of enduring mutual obligation.

Moreover, Bauman explores how the instability of modern relationships stems from a deep ambivalence between the desire for connection and the fear of entrapment. He notes, “Relationships are perhaps the most common, acute, deeply felt, and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence” (Bauman, 2003, p. viii). This duality leads to a constant renegotiation of intimacy, with individuals seeking bonds that offer both closeness and freedom.

The ephemeral nature of relationships is further amplified by the rise of “networks” over traditional partnerships. Bauman explains, “In a network, connections are entered on demand, and can be broken at will” (Bauman, 2003, p. xi). This shift represents a move away from committed, long-term relationships to more flexible, superficial connections that mirror the transient nature of digital and consumer interactions.

In conclusion, Bauman’s insights into the ephemeral nature of relationships in liquid modernity reveal a profound shift in how intimacy is understood and practiced. Relationships, once seen as enduring commitments, are now fragile constructs shaped by individualism, consumerism, and the pervasive uncertainty of modern life.

## 2. Individualism and Consumerist Intimacy in *Liquid Love*

Zygmunt Bauman’s *Liquid Love* critically examines the profound influence of individualism and consumerist values on modern intimacy. In liquid modernity, relationships are increasingly commodified, treated as disposable assets subject to constant evaluation and performance reviews. Bauman captures this shift by likening emotional bonds to market investments, asserting that “promises of commitment are meaningless in the long term...like other investments, they wax and wane” (Bauman, 2003, p. 62). This analogy underscores the volatile and transactional nature of modern relationships, where permanence is replaced by impermanence, and love is governed by the logic of utility.

Bauman highlights how consumer culture has infiltrated the realm of intimacy, reshaping relationships to mirror the characteristics of goods and services. He observes that modern relationships are valued for their immediate utility and discarded when they no longer provide satisfaction. “Relationships, like cars, should undergo regular MOTs to make sure that they are still roadworthy” (Bauman, 2003, p. 60). This analogy starkly reveals how intimacy is subjected to constant scrutiny, where its continuation is contingent on perceived benefits rather than

emotional depth. The commodification of relationships reduces them to temporary exchanges, leaving little room for the enduring emotional connections that once defined human bonds.

The rise of individualism further intensifies the fragility of modern relationships. In liquid modernity, autonomy and self-interest are prioritized, often at the expense of mutual sacrifice and enduring commitment. Bauman captures this tension, noting that “the desire to relate is undermined by the fear of being tied down, of losing one’s freedom” (Bauman, 2003, p. 55). This ambivalence creates a paradox where individuals simultaneously crave connection and resist the obligations and compromises it entails. The pursuit of personal freedom, a hallmark of individualism, undermines the relational stability necessary for deep intimacy, leaving relationships in a constant state of tension and fragility.

Flexibility emerges as a defining feature of what Bauman terms “consumerist intimacy.” Individuals seek relationships that are “light, portable, and disposable,” prioritizing convenience over commitment (Bauman, 2003, p. 58). This emphasis on flexibility reflects a significant departure from traditional notions of love and partnership, where commitment and permanence were once central. In liquid modernity, relationships are increasingly structured to minimize emotional entanglement, enabling individuals to disengage easily when connections become inconvenient. This approach, while offering freedom, also fosters superficiality, as deeper emotional bonds require time, effort, and sacrifice—qualities at odds with the consumerist ethos.

Bauman further contrasts traditional bonds with the modern concept of “networks.” Unlike bonds, which imply mutual obligation and permanence, networks are characterized by their fluidity and transactional nature. “In a network, connections are entered on demand and can be broken at will” (Bauman, 2003, p. 61). This model of relationships applies seamlessly to the consumerist emphasis on convenience and efficiency, reducing intimacy to a series of easily terminable connections. While networks offer flexibility, they fail to provide the security and depth associated with enduring emotional ties, leaving individuals unmoored and vulnerable to the uncertainties of relational instability.

The emotional consequences of this commodification and prioritization of individualism are profound. Bauman observes that these dynamics foster insecurity, dissatisfaction, and a pervasive sense of instability. The constant assessment of relationships through a consumerist perspective creates an environment where trust and deep connection are difficult to sustain. He poignantly writes, “Love becomes a mortgage loan drawn on an uncertain, inscrutable future” (Bauman, 2003, p. 8). This metaphor captures the precariousness of intimacy in liquid modernity, where the commodification of relationships abrogates their foundation, leaving individuals emotionally adrift in a sea of impermanence.

Through his incisive critique, Bauman exposes the contradictions and consequences of consumerist intimacy in a world dominated by individualism. The commodification of relationships, while offering convenience and freedom, undermines the stability, trust, and depth that are essential to meaningful human connections. His analysis invites reflection on the cost of prioritizing flexibility and autonomy over enduring commitment, urging a reevaluation of how intimacy is constructed and valued in liquid modernity.



### 3. Ambivalence in Modern Bonds

Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* examines the inherent ambivalence that defines modern relationships, exposing the paradoxical tension between the yearning for intimacy and the fear of entrapment. Bauman encapsulates this duality when he writes, "In a liquid modern setting of life, relationships are perhaps the most common, acute, deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence" (Bauman, 2003, p. viii). This observation reveals the fraught nature of contemporary intimacy, where the desire for deep emotional connection is counterbalanced by an equally potent anxiety about losing one's autonomy. This dynamic creates an unstable foundation for relationships, where individuals struggle to reconcile competing impulses.

At the heart of Bauman's critique lies the paradox of intimacy in liquid modernity. On one hand, people crave stability and companionship; on the other, they fear the limitations that relationships might impose on their freedom. Bauman describes this dilemma succinctly: "The principal hero of this book is human relationship... desperate to 'relate'; yet wary of the state of 'being related'" (Bauman, 2003, p. viii). This ambivalence drives individuals to enter relationships tentatively, often marked by short-lived emotional bonds that are continually renegotiated. Relationships, in this context, become transient and transactional, reflecting the broader liquid modern ethos of impermanence and flexibility.

The tension between connection and freedom is a recurring theme in Bauman's analysis. He argues that modern relationships are fraught with uncertainty because individuals resist the permanence that comes with commitment. "Being twosome means consent to undetermined future," Bauman asserts, highlighting the precarious balance required to maintain intimacy while preserving autonomy (2003, p. 19). This balance is difficult to achieve in a cultural milieu that prizes individual freedom over collective stability. As a result, relationships are often shaped by a constant push and pull between dependency and independence, leading to a fragile and uncertain dynamic.

A significant barrier to enduring relationships, Bauman argues, is the pervasive fear of enclosure. He writes, "The pleasures of togetherness come in one breath with the horrors of enclosure" (Bauman, 2003, p. xi). This fear compels individuals to keep their relationships fluid, avoiding commitments that might feel restrictive. While this approach provides a sense of freedom, it often undermines the very stability and security that relationships are traditionally meant to offer. By prioritizing flexibility and avoiding entanglements, individuals may inadvertently sabotage the depth and endurance of their emotional connections.

Bauman's analysis reveals the profound challenges of navigating intimacy in liquid modernity. The ambivalence that characterizes modern relationships reflects the broader cultural contradictions of a society that values both connection and freedom but struggles to reconcile the two. This tension leaves individuals in a state of perpetual negotiation, where the desire for closeness is constantly undermined by the fear of losing oneself. Through his incisive critique, Bauman exposes the fragile and transitory nature of intimacy in the modern age, urging a deeper reflection on the meaning and purpose of relationships in a world increasingly defined by impermanence.

#### 4-Counseling and the Pursuit of Balance

Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* offers a critical examination of the rise of counseling and self-help culture as a defining feature of liquid modernity. He situates counseling within the broader context of relationships characterized by ambivalence, instability, and transience. For Bauman, counseling is not only a response to the uncertainties of modern intimacy but also a symptom of its frailty. It reflects the struggles of individuals navigating the competing desires for freedom and connection, leaving them in a state of perpetual emotional flux.

Bauman observes that counseling has flourished because many individuals feel ill-equipped to manage the complexities of modern relationships. He notes, "The complexity is too dense, too stubborn and too difficult to unpack or unravel for individuals to do the job unassisted" (Bauman, 2003, p. ix). This reveals the disempowerment many experience when faced with relational challenges, particularly the tension between autonomy and emotional dependency. Counseling, in this sense, becomes a tool for reconciliation, offering a space where individuals seek guidance on how to balance these conflicting desires. However, Bauman critiques this reliance on counseling as indicative of a deeper cultural shift, where traditional sources of wisdom, such as family or community, have been supplanted by professional expertise.

The consumerist ethos of liquid modernity permeates the counseling industry, which Bauman likens to a commodified service promising quick fixes to emotional turmoil. He argues, "Counselors abound, though more often than not they do little more than raise common practice to the level of common knowledge, and that in turn to the heights of learned, authoritative theory" (Bauman, 2003, p. ix). This critique highlights the performative and transactional nature of counseling, where intuitive solutions are repackaged as professional advice, fostering dependency on external validation. Counseling becomes less about fostering genuine self-awareness and more about perpetuating the illusion of control over inherently uncertain and unpredictable emotional dynamics.

Bauman is particularly critical of counseling's tendency to reinforce the illusion that relationships can be managed and controlled through rational strategies. He writes, "What they hope to hear from the counselors is how to square the circle: to eat the cake and have it, to cream off the sweet delights of relationship while omitting its bitter and tougher bits" (Bauman, 2003, p. ix). This critique underscores the unrealistic expectations counseling often cultivates, where the inherent risks and vulnerabilities of intimacy are perceived as problems to be solved rather than realities to be embraced. In doing so, counseling paradoxically exacerbates the anxiety it seeks to alleviate, as individuals strive for a perfection in relationships that cannot be achieved.

In Bauman's analysis, the rise of counseling mirrors the fragmentation and uncertainty of liquid modern life. As traditional support structures dwindle, individuals increasingly turn to professionals to navigate personal and relational challenges. Bauman notes, "The agitation of modern relationships collapses into a paralysis of action," necessitating external interventions (Bauman, 2003, p. ix). This outsourcing of emotional labor reflects a broader societal trend where reliance on experts becomes a coping mechanism in the face of a rapidly changing and

unpredictable social landscape. Yet, this reliance on professional guidance often perpetuates dependency rather than fostering resilience.

Bauman also critiques the limitations of counseling, emphasizing its inability to address the root causes of relational instability. While counseling may provide temporary relief, it fails to resolve the deeper structural issues inherent in liquid modern relationships, such as pervasive individualism and consumerist values. These cultural forces shape modern intimacy in ways that counseling, as a commodified service, cannot fundamentally challenge. Instead, counseling often reduces complex emotional dynamics to simplistic solutions, leaving individuals caught in a cycle of dissatisfaction and return visits for further guidance.

Moreover, Bauman critiques counseling as a reflection of the transactional nature of modern relationships. He writes, "Relationships are investments like any other, but would it ever occur to you to take an oath of loyalty to the stocks you have just bought from the broker?" (Bauman, 2003, p. 14). This analogy underscores the commodified mindset that frames relationships as calculable investments, where counseling serves as a tool to mitigate risks. However, Bauman contends that this approach is fundamentally flawed, as it fails to address the ambivalence and instability that define modern emotional bonds. By treating relationships as transactions, counseling inadvertently reinforces the very insecurities it purports to alleviate.

Bauman's critique of counseling in *Liquid Love* reveals its dual role as both a response to and a symptom of the instability of modern relationships. While counseling offers temporary relief and guidance, it often perpetuates the illusions and dependencies that exacerbate relational challenges. Through his analysis, Bauman invites us to question the commodification of emotional labor and the cultural forces that shape intimacy in liquid modernity, urging a deeper examination of how we navigate the complexities of human connection.

## 5- Desire vs. Love

Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love* explores the contrasting dynamics of desire and love, presenting them as fundamentally different yet interconnected forces in human relationships. Desire, according to Bauman, is inherently consumptive and self-centered, while love is marked by care, preservation, and the attempt to transcend self-interest. This duality highlights a tension central to the modern experience of intimacy, where fleeting passion often conflicts with the enduring demands of commitment.

Bauman succinctly captures the essence of these forces when he writes, "If desire wants to consume, love wants to possess. While the fulfillment of desire is coterminous with the annihilation of its object – love grows with its acquisitions and is fulfilled in their durability" (Bauman, 2003, p. 9). Desire, as Bauman portrays it, is driven by an urge to conquer and assimilate the other, stripping alterity of its distinctiveness to satiate the self. In this process, desire inevitably leads to the destruction of its object, as the act of consumption renders the other meaningless once satisfaction is achieved. The cyclical nature of desire, therefore, breeds dissatisfaction, leaving individuals in a constant state of longing and emptiness.

In contrast, love is a force of creation and expansion. Bauman characterizes it as an act of giving and preservation, where the lover seeks to care for and nurture the beloved. "Love is about adding to the world – each addition being the living trace of the loving self," he explains, emphasizing how love requires a relinquishing of self-interest in favor of a shared existence (Bauman, 2003, p. 9). This dynamic, however, is fraught with its own challenges. Love's protective instinct, while nurturing, can transform into possessiveness, leading to a tension between care and control. As Bauman notes, "The protective net which love weaves caringly around its object love enslaves its object" (2003, p. 9). This duality illustrates how love, despite its aspirations of selflessness, can also impose constraints on the beloved, mirroring some of the destructiveness associated with desire.

Bauman's analysis further delves into the temporal dimensions of desire and love. Desire, he argues, is transient and momentary, a force that thrives on the immediacy of gratification. In contrast, love is inherently forward-looking, rooted in the hope of permanence and continuity. Bauman's metaphor of love as "a mortgage loan drawn on an uncertain, and inscrutable, future" encapsulates this distinction, highlighting how love demands faith in an unpredictable and often precarious future (2003, p. 8). This forward-looking nature of love, however, makes it vulnerable to the uncertainties of modern relationships, where commitment is increasingly viewed as a risk rather than a foundation.

The interplay between desire and love also reveals deeper societal influences. Bauman's critique aligns desire with the consumerist ethos of liquid modernity, where relationships are treated as commodities, easily discarded once their utility diminishes. He observes that desire "needs no other prompt but the presence of alterity," reducing the other to an object of consumption rather than a partner in mutual growth (2003, p. 9). Love, on the other hand, resists this commodification by emphasizing preservation and shared responsibility. Yet, even love is not immune to the pressures of individualism and impermanence that define liquid modernity, often leading to a fragile balancing act between autonomy and connection.

Ultimately, Bauman's distinction between desire and love underscores the complexities of human relationships in a world dominated by fleeting gratification and anxiety over permanence. While desire offers immediate satisfaction, its consumptive nature leaves individuals hollow and alienated. In fact, love, with its aspirations of care and continuity, provides a counterbalance but is fraught with its own vulnerabilities and contradictions. Bauman's exploration of these forces serves as a poignant reflection on the challenges of forging meaningful connections in an era where intimacy is both yearned for and feared.

To conclude, Bauman's theory emphasizes how this liquid form of love is deeply intertwined with individualization. In a world where people are expected to manage their lives independently and pursue personal happiness above all, relationships are no longer anchored in collective or communal responsibility. As such, the idea of commitment has become flexible, contingent, and temporary (Bauman, 2003). This individualistic approach to love and relationships leaves people vulnerable to feelings of isolation, as relationships, once relied upon as stable foundations, are no longer guaranteed to provide long-term emotional support. This idea is critical in examining the relationship between Aysel and Roman in Warga's *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, where both characters struggle with isolation and a fluid understanding of connection.

## Discussion

As mentioned earlier, Bauman compares love in modernity to the properties of a liquid: formless and adaptable to whatever situation it is placed in, yet unable to maintain a stable shape. His view of love matches the fluidity of personal relationships in the late modern world, where long-term commitment is no longer the norm. He describes this phenomenon as a form of emotional liquidity, where relationships are pursued for personal satisfaction but quickly discarded when they no longer serve the individual's needs.

In *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, the concept of liquid love is vividly portrayed through the relationship between Aysel and Roman, two teenagers bound by their shared suicidal ideation. At the outset, their bond is shaped by their mutual desire to end their lives, which underscores the fragility of their connection. The nature of their relationship is not built on love or affection in a traditional sense but rather on a desperate need to escape their emotional isolation. Their suicide pact is emblematic of Bauman's description of liquid love, where connections are not built for longevity but are instead functional, formed to serve an immediate emotional need: "There is no after us. There is only tonight" (Warga, 2015, p. 217). Aysel's internal dialogue reflects the temporariness and conditionality of their connection, highlighting the existential crisis both characters experience.

The novel's depiction of Aysel and Roman's relationship emphasizes Bauman's notion of the self as a commodity in liquid modernity. For Aysel and Roman, their connection is largely transactional: Roman helps Aysel confront her fear of life, while Aysel helps Roman confront his guilt over his sister's death. As Bauman explains, modern relationships often become instrumental, where individuals are used as tools to meet personal desires, a stark contrast to the more stable, solid relationships of the past.

## Fluidity of Identity in Liquid Love

A key feature of Bauman's theory is the notion that relationships are subject to the same uncertainties as modern identities. Just as relationships become fluid and uncertain, so too do individuals' identities become fractured and precarious in the liquid modern world. Bauman points out that modern individuals face a constant struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self amidst the ever-changing circumstances of life. He argues that this fluidity extends to how individuals perceive and engage in romantic relationships.

In *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, Aysel's identity is heavily shaped by her isolation and self-perceived otherness. She struggles with guilt over her father's actions, which have led to her becoming ostracized by her community. This isolation feeds into her desire to die, as she sees no possibility of overcoming the black hole that has consumed her emotionally: "I am terrified of becoming the person I am growing into" (Warga, 2015, p. 8). Aysel's internal conflict reflects Bauman's idea that liquid modernity forces individuals to continuously reassess their sense of identity, often leaving them feeling lost and fragmented.

Similarly, Roman's identity is fractured by guilt over his sister's death. Like Aysel, he is unable to reconcile his feelings of responsibility with his sense of self-worth, which contributes to his

decision to pursue suicide. Bauman's theory can be applied here to show how the characters' struggles with identity are intertwined with their inability to form lasting, meaningful connections. In the fluid world of liquid modernity, where personal identities are constantly in flux, relationships like those between Aysel and Roman are bound to be short-lived and unstable.

The novel further illustrates Bauman's theory in the way both characters are unable to fully commit to their relationship. Their bond is always on the verge of disintegration, as both characters are too consumed by their personal struggles to invest in one another fully. This aligns with Bauman's description of liquid love, where individuals fear the permanence of emotional bonds and prefer to keep relationships fluid, knowing they can end them at any moment.

### **The Role of Depression and Alienation in Liquid Love**

Depression and alienation are central themes in both *My Heart and Other Black Holes* and Bauman's theory of liquid modernity. Bauman suggests that one of the consequences of living in a liquid society is a deep sense of alienation, as individuals become increasingly disconnected from stable, long-lasting relationships and community ties. This alienation can lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair, much like the emotions experienced by Aysel and Roman.

Throughout the novel, Aysel frequently refers to her depression as a black hole, a metaphor for the all-consuming nature of her mental illness. Roman, too, feels trapped by his guilt and depression, describing his emotional state as a burden he cannot escape. The characters' shared depression is what initially brings them together, but it also prevents them from forming a solid, lasting bond. In Bauman's terms, their relationship is "liquid" because it lacks the stability and commitment that would allow them to overcome their individual struggles.

In conclusion, the relationship between Aysel and Roman exemplifies Bauman's theory of liquid love, as it is characterized by impermanence, fragility, and a lack of deeper emotional connection. Their bond, like many modern relationships, is formed out of necessity and dissolves just as quickly once it no longer serves its purpose. Bauman's insights into the fluidity of love and identity in liquid modernity provide a valuable framework for understanding the themes of love, alienation, and identity in *My Heart and Other Black Holes*.

Relationships in the novel reflect the instability and fluidity that Bauman emphasizes in contemporary human connections. This section will focus more on the interpersonal dynamics between Aysel and Roman (referred to as "FrozenRobot"), the protagonists of the novel, as their bond deepens in the context of shared trauma, alienation, and their plans for a mutual suicide pact.

### **Bauman's Concept of Liquid Love: Fragility and Instability**

Bauman's theory of "Liquid Love" posits that modern relationships are characterized by uncertainty, ephemerality, and a lack of commitment. This mirrors the nature of Aysel and Roman's connection, which is not built on a stable foundation but rather on the shared plan of



mutual destruction. Their relationship exemplifies the fragility that Bauman suggests is typical in a liquid modern world where human bonds are continually at risk of disintegration. Bauman writes, "Modern relationships are frail and vulnerable to dissolution at any time. The freedom that liquid modern individuals enjoy is also a burden" (Bauman, 2003, p. 38). Aysel and Roman's connection is rooted in this very vulnerability. They do not meet in the context of a shared future but rather with the idea of ending their lives together, which reflects the temporality that Bauman describes. Their bond is tenuous and contingent upon their mutual plans to die, reflecting how, in liquid modernity, relationships are increasingly becoming short-lived and conditional. In *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, Aysel reflects on this fragility when she says, "I feel like an anchor, dragging him down with me" (Warga, 2015, p. 144). Aysel's feelings of being a burden mirror Bauman's notion that love in liquid modernity can often feel oppressive and temporary because it is centered around the individual's need for liberation rather than mutual growth.

### **Mutual Alienation and the Search for Connection**

Aysel and Roman's bond is predicated on a mutual sense of alienation. Both feel isolated from their families and peers. Bauman asserts that love in liquid modernity is a reaction to the overwhelming alienation individuals feel in their lives, a need to connect even when the relationship is inherently unstable. Aysel's relationship with her mother and step-family reflects this alienation, as she feels she does not belong. Roman, on the other hand, struggles with the guilt and grief surrounding his sister's death, further isolating him from his family. Bauman argues that "in the liquid modern world, the need for intimacy stems from the overwhelming sense of loneliness that pervades modern life" (Bauman, 2003, p. 51). Aysel and Roman's bond grows not from a healthy place of mutual support, but from their shared desire to escape life's pain. Their bond reflects Bauman's description of love in modern times as an attempt to momentarily ward off the dread of loneliness, even when that connection is doomed to be short-lived. The transient nature of their relationship is underscored when Aysel begins to develop feelings of attachment and starts questioning their pact. She says, "I don't want to be dead anymore, but how do I tell him that?" (Warga, 2015, p. 207). This moment marks a critical juncture where Aysel's feelings of connection to Roman become more permanent, but she realizes that their bond, built on the fragility of shared despair, might not withstand this change in her perspective. Bauman's notion that liquid love cannot withstand the pressures of solid commitment is evident here.

### **Identity Formation and Love as Escape**

Bauman further suggests that relationships in modern times often function as an escape from the overwhelming task of identity formation. The fluidity of relationships means that they can often act as a distraction from the painful process of self-definition, especially in a world where individual identity is constantly in flux. Aysel and Roman's relationship is emblematic of this. Both characters are struggling with their sense of self, not only as individuals but also in relation to the people around them. Aysel's identity is clouded by her father's crime, and she internalizes the town's judgment of her as an outsider. Roman, similarly, is haunted by the death of his sister and struggles with his identity as a "good son" versus someone who wants to end his own life. In *Liquid Love*, Bauman asserts that, in liquid modernity, individuals frequently use relationships as

a means of avoiding the difficult work of self-identity: "Love becomes a shelter where individuals hope to hide from the constant anxiety of self-definition" (Bauman, 2003, p. 63). Aysel and Roman's decision to form a suicide pact is not only about escaping life but also about escaping the identities they feel trapped in. Aysel, especially, sees their bond as a way to sever ties with her past and the pain that comes with it. However, as their relationship develops, Aysel begins to question whether their connection is enough to define her, marking a turning point in her personal growth. Aysel's internal dialogue reveals this shift when she reflects, "I'm more than just my father's daughter. I'm more than what happened to me. But how do I tell Roman that?" (Warga, 2015, p. 242). Here, Aysel grapples with the challenge of asserting her individuality and self-worth outside of the pact with Roman, which aligns with Bauman's theory that modern relationships often serve as temporary shields from the overwhelming task of self-construction. In conclusion, the fluidity, impermanence, and fragility of the bond between Aysel and Roman in *My Heart and Other Black Holes* echo Bauman's concept of "Liquid Love." Their relationship is not built to last but instead serves as a means of mutual escape from the alienation and identity struggles they both face. This fragile bond, rooted in shared despair, ultimately cannot survive once Aysel begins to resist the idea of death and embrace the possibility of life, suggesting that relationships in liquid modernity often falter when they are based on transient needs rather than solid commitments.

### Depression and Emotional Alienation

Aysel and Roman's relationship is grounded in a shared sense of despair, isolation, and an overarching theme of depression. Bauman's concept of liquid love describes relationships as lacking permanence and commitment, often forming out of a deep sense of alienation rather than genuine intimacy. For Aysel and Roman, this rings true as they meet not through mutual affection but through a suicide pact website. Their connection is less about love and more about a shared need for emotional escape. Aysel describes herself as emotionally detached, feeling "like an anchor, dragging him [Roman] down with me" (Warga, 2015, p. 144). This sense of self as a burden reflects the depressive thought patterns discussed in cognitive therapy literature, where individuals see themselves as inherently flawed or unworthy of connection. Aaron Beck's cognitive theory posits that depression distorts an individual's perception of self-worth and fosters negative automatic thoughts. This is evident when Aysel reflects, "The black slug of depression crawls through my body, eating away at every last bit of who I am" (Warga, 2015, p. 98). Such a metaphor encapsulates the insidious nature of depression, as it consumes Aysel's sense of identity, rendering her unable to fully engage with others or herself. Roman's struggle is similarly rooted in guilt and alienation, stemming from his sister's death. He repeatedly blames himself, saying, "She's dead because of me," and uses this guilt to justify his suicidal ideation (Warga, 2015, p. 89). Roman's grief becomes an emotional shackle, as described in the novel: "The more I stare at him, the more I see his grief wrapped around him like shackles he can never take off" (Warga, 2015, p. 99). Bauman's notion of liquid love is built on the fragility of modern human connections, where emotional baggage often prevents individuals from forming meaningful and enduring relationships. Roman's grief acts as such baggage, preventing him from being fully present in his relationship with Aysel and making their bond more about shared pain than mutual support.

### Identity Formation and the Struggle for Self-Worth

Bauman also argues that love in modern times is often a means of avoiding the difficult task of identity formation. For Aysel and Roman, their relationship becomes a way to momentarily escape from their painful realities and from the internal struggle to define themselves. Aysel's identity is marred by her father's crime, which leads her to internalize the shame and ostracism from her community. She reflects, "That's what they should write on my tombstone: Aysel Leyla Seran, the Girl Who Never Fit" (Warga, 2015, p. 26). This stark statement highlights her deep-seated belief that she does not belong, a belief reinforced by her depressive thought patterns. Roman, on the other hand, grapples with his identity in the wake of his sister's death, feeling responsible for her demise and unable to separate his guilt from his sense of self. He admits, "I don't know who I am without her" (Warga, 2015, p. 108). Bauman suggests that liquid love often thrives in contexts where individuals are unsure of their own identities and seek connection as a way to avoid confronting their insecurities. Aysel and Roman's relationship serves this purpose, as it allows them to focus on their shared goal of suicide rather than on their individual identity crises. Their bond is also marked by an attempt to maintain control over their circumstances, something Bauman discusses as a key feature of liquid modern relationships. Relationships are no longer about mutual sacrifice or compromise; instead, they are about maintaining autonomy and ensuring that the other person does not become a burden. Aysel and Roman's suicide pact exemplifies this transactional nature. Roman initially tells Aysel, "We don't owe each other anything beyond the pact" (Warga, 2015, p. 75), reinforcing the idea that their relationship is bound by a contract of mutual destruction rather than any emotional or psychological support.

### Emotional Escape vs. Genuine Connection

Throughout the novel, Aysel and Roman's relationship oscillates between moments of closeness and distance, reflecting Bauman's description of modern love as "liquid," where connections are formed and dissolved easily. Aysel admits at one point, "When we're talking or laughing, I don't feel like I know him" (Warga, 2015, p. 142). This illustrates the superficiality that often characterizes relationships in liquid modernity, where emotional depth is lacking, and connections are based on fleeting moments rather than sustained intimacy. Bauman writes, "Love's transience and fragility is felt with particular poignancy in modern life, where intimacy is always at risk of collapse" (Bauman, 2003, p. 38). For Aysel and Roman, this fragility is apparent in their discussions about the future—or lack thereof. Roman bluntly states, "There is no after us. There is only tonight" (Warga, 2015, p. 212), underscoring the temporality of their bond. Their relationship is not built to last; it is built on the shared understanding that they will not be around to see it through. Ultimately, their relationship becomes a means of emotional escape. Aysel finds solace in Roman's presence, despite knowing that their bond is rooted in their mutual plans for suicide. This is reflective of Bauman's assertion that love in liquid modernity is often about avoiding loneliness rather than building lasting connections. Aysel's fear of being alone is evident when she questions, "What will I do if I'm not with him?" (Warga, 2015, p. 231), revealing that her attachment to Roman is driven not by love, but by fear of facing her life alone. In conclusion, the relationship between Aysel and Roman in *My Heart and Other Black Holes* is a powerful example of Bauman's theory of liquid love. Their bond is marked by instability, emotional fragility, and a shared sense of alienation. As they navigate their depressive states and identity struggles, their relationship serves as both a temporary escape and a reminder of the ephemerality of human connections in liquid modernity.

## The Evolution of Aysel's Perspective and Its Impact on Her Relationship

Aysel's transformation throughout the novel is pivotal in understanding the shift in her relationship with Roman. Initially, both characters bond over their shared desire for death, which reflects Bauman's theory of *Liquid Love*—a transient connection born out of necessity rather than long-term emotional investment. Their initial bond is an agreement, a contract to die together, and is representative of the impermanence and fluidity that Bauman describes as characteristic of modern relationships. As Bauman (2003) explains, "In liquid modernity, relationships are stripped of their stability. They are fleeting and based on short-term needs rather than lifelong commitment" (p. 17). In the context of Aysel and Roman's suicide pact, their connection is similarly fleeting, formed not out of love but out of a shared existential crisis. As the novel progresses, however, Aysel's feelings toward life begin to change. Her transformation can be seen as a rejection of the liquid nature of her relationship with Roman, as she begins to seek something more permanent and meaningful. Aysel reflects, "I'm not sure if I want to die anymore, but I don't know how to tell Roman" (Warga, 2015, p. 207). This internal conflict marks a significant shift in Aysel's emotional state and her understanding of relationships. She no longer views her connection with Roman as a means of escape from life but starts to desire a deeper, more emotionally fulfilling relationship that goes beyond their pact. This shift in Aysel's mindset mirrors Bauman's discussion of the tension between security and freedom in relationships. Bauman (2003) argues that in liquid modernity, individuals are constantly balancing the need for emotional security with the desire for personal freedom. For Aysel, her relationship with Roman initially offers her a sense of freedom—the freedom to escape her life and her depression through death. However, as she begins to consider the possibility of life, Aysel starts to crave the emotional security that comes with genuine connection. This tension is evident when Aysel contemplates, "What would life look like if I chose it? If I chose to stay?" (Warga, 2015, p. 233). Her desire to live marks a shift from seeking freedom through death to seeking emotional security through life, which in turn complicates her relationship with Roman.

## The Emotional Burden of Responsibility

As Aysel begins to change her perspective on life, the burden of responsibility for Roman's well-being becomes an increasingly central theme. Bauman discusses how relationships in liquid modernity are often characterized by a fear of responsibility, as individuals shy away from emotional commitment in order to maintain their personal autonomy. Bauman (2003) writes, "The greatest fear of the liquid modern individual is the fear of becoming bound by responsibilities that might restrict their personal freedom" (p. 39). In the context of Aysel and Roman's relationship, this fear of responsibility becomes apparent as Aysel starts to realize that by choosing life, she may also be responsible for saving Roman. Aysel's internal conflict about her responsibility for Roman's fate is evident when she reflects, "If I don't go through with it, what happens to Roman? Is it my fault if he dies alone?" (Warga, 2015, p. 234). This moment captures Aysel's growing awareness of the emotional weight of her relationship with Roman. No longer is their connection a simple transaction based on a mutual desire for death; it has become something far more complex, with Aysel now feeling responsible for Roman's well-being. Bauman's theory of liquid love suggests that modern individuals often avoid deep emotional ties because of the responsibility that comes with them. Aysel's growing sense of responsibility for Roman reflects this tension. She feels conflicted about whether she can bear the emotional

weight of trying to save Roman when she is still unsure about her own life. This is a significant moment in the novel, as it marks the point where Aysel begins to shift from seeing Roman as a partner in death to seeing him as someone she might have to save, which adds a layer of emotional complexity to their relationship.

### **Roman's Inability to Evolve**

While Aysel's perspective evolves as the novel progresses, Roman remains trapped in his guilt and despair. Bauman's discussion of love in liquid modernity often highlights the imbalance that can occur in relationships, where one partner grows and changes while the other remains stagnant. Bauman (2003) argues that "the asymmetry of modern relationships lies in the fact that one partner may embrace fluidity, while the other clings to permanence" (p. 56). In the case of Aysel and Roman, this asymmetry becomes increasingly apparent as Aysel begins to embrace the possibility of life, while Roman remains committed to the idea of death. Roman's inability to change is tied to his overwhelming sense of guilt. He states, "I can't go back. I can't undo what I did to her" (Warga, 2015, p. 189). This reflects Roman's belief that his fate is sealed and that he is incapable of redemption. While Aysel starts to envision a future for herself, Roman remains anchored to the past, unable to imagine a life beyond his guilt and grief. This imbalance in their relationship creates tension, as Aysel starts to question whether she can continue their pact when her feelings about life have shifted. Aysel's changing perspective also highlights Bauman's argument that in liquid modernity, relationships are often subject to rapid changes in dynamics. Bauman (2003) writes, "The fluidity of modern relationships means that they are always in a state of flux, subject to sudden changes and shifts in emotional investment" (p. 63). Aysel's growing desire to live and Roman's continued commitment to death create a growing emotional divide between them, which ultimately leads Aysel to question whether their relationship can survive this change in perspective.

### **Aysel's Final Decision: Choosing Life and Rejection of Liquid Love**

In the final stages of the novel, Aysel makes the difficult decision to reject the suicide pact and choose life. This decision marks a turning point in her relationship with Roman and in her own personal development. Aysel's decision to live is a rejection of the liquid nature of their relationship and a desire for something more stable and enduring. She reflects, "I don't want to die anymore, but how do I leave him behind?" (Warga, 2015, p. 245). This moment captures Aysel's internal struggle between her desire to live and her fear of abandoning Roman. Bauman's theory of liquid love suggests that relationships in modern times are often characterized by impermanence and a lack of deep emotional ties. However, Aysel's decision to live represents a rejection of this fluidity and a desire for something more permanent. Aysel's growth throughout the novel highlights the possibility of moving beyond the liquid nature of relationships and embracing emotional commitment and responsibility. While Roman remains trapped in his desire for death, Aysel's decision to choose life reflects her ability to move beyond the limitations of their transient connection. In a nutshell, the relationship between Aysel and Roman in *My Heart and Other Black Holes* serves as a poignant example of Bauman's theory of liquid love. Initially defined by its impermanence and emotional fragility, their relationship reflects the transient nature of modern love, where individuals connect out of necessity rather than deep emotional investment. However, as Aysel begins to shift her perspective and embrace



the possibility of life, the imbalance in their relationship becomes more apparent. Ultimately, Aysel's decision to choose life marks a rejection of the fluidity that defines their bond, illustrating the possibility of growth and emotional stability even in a world characterized by liquid modernity.

## Conclusion

This study has sought to interrogate the manifestation of Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid love" within Jasmine Warga's *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, exploring how the theory illuminates the themes of love, alienation, and identity in the relationship between Aysel and Roman. The analysis reveals that Bauman's framework—positing modern relationships as transient, contingent, and shaped by the fluidity of liquid modernity—offers a compelling perspective for understanding the protagonists' bond. Their connection, forged through a suicide pact, exemplifies the ephemeral and instrumental nature of liquid love, driven by immediate needs rather than enduring commitment. As evidenced by Aysel's reflection, "There is no after us. There is only tonight" (Warga, 2015, p. 217), their relationship initially meets with Bauman's depiction of intimacy as fragile and disposable, a product of mutual despair rather than mutual growth.

Addressing the research questions, this investigation demonstrates that "liquid love" manifests in Aysel and Roman's relationship through its instability and transactional quality. Their bond, rooted in shared alienation and depression, reflects Bauman's assertion that modern intimacy often emerges as a response to isolation, yet lacks the depth to transcend it (Bauman, 2003, p. 51). The broader implications of liquid modernity on their identity and emotional connections are equally pronounced: both characters grapple with fragmented selves—Aysel burdened by her father's crime, Roman by his sister's death—mirroring Bauman's contention that fluid social structures destabilize personal coherence (2003, p. 63). Furthermore, the social and psychological effects of alienation, compounded by mental health struggles, underpin the emotional fragility of their tie, reinforcing Bauman's critique of modernity's isolating tendencies. However, the analysis diverges from Bauman's deterministic outlook with Aysel's pivotal decision to reject the pact and embrace life. This shift complicates the narrative of liquid love, suggesting a capacity for agency and resilience that Bauman's theory does not fully anticipate. While Roman remains ensnared by guilt, Aysel's evolution—from viewing herself as "the Girl Who Never Fit" (Warga, 2015, p. 26) to seeking a future—hints at the possibility of transcending the impermanence of liquid modernity. This finding enriches the theoretical discourse, proposing that individual transformation can challenge the pervasive fluidity Bauman describes, particularly within the context of youth narratives.



## References

- Ansari, A., & Klinenberg, E. (2015). *Modern Romance*. Penguin Books.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2003). *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Polity Press.
- Best, S. (2018). *Liquid Modernity and the Ethical Turn: Bauman and Beyond*. Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1992). *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford University Press.
- Illouz, E. (2007). *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Polity Press.
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books.
- Warga, J. (2015). *My Heart and Other Black Holes*. Balzer + Bray.