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## Book Review Essay: *Real Love: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Religion, Society* by Duane Rousselle, Atropos Press, 2021

by Julie Reshe<sup>1</sup>

In his astonishing new book, Duane Rousselle is attempting to rescue love. To this end, he ventures to redefine the psychoanalytic conception of love. Love as such, if one thinks about it, was impossible in traditional psychoanalysis. It was always buried in the shadow of other structures. For Freud, it was a byproduct of sexual desire. Lacanian psychoanalysis put love in inverse relation to sex; it considered love something that makes up for the structural lack of a sexual relationship. With the essays in *Real Love*, for nearly the first time in the history of psychoanalytic thought, Rousselle locates love at the very heart of psychoanalysis and human existence.

For Rousselle, love is not something that makes up for the lack of sexual relationships, and neither is it the constitutive lack at the subject's core. Love is not what is there to fill the lack, and not a place to escape the loneliness that springs from the constitutive lack at the core of subjectivity. Real love is not in confrontation with the lack; rather it is akin to lack. Love does not make up for the lack or fill it up, but rather reveals and actualizes it. Real love directly coincides with the fundamental lack constitutive of being itself; it exists as lack-in-being. This is why we *fall* in love: the lack is the place where we find ourselves when we fall. In Rousselle's words, love "is itself there within the fall" (Rousselle, 2021, p. 30).

Since love has no other substance except for lack, when we are in love relationships, there is nothing for us to share except for the lack. Giving love is always giving what one does not have. It is the impossible sacrifice of the core of one's existence—of one's own lack. Rousselle follows Jacques-Alain Miller, who claims that "to love is to recognize your lack and give it to the other" (cited on p. 41). Consequently, love is the sharing of lack. Thus, at its core, falling in love means moving through, accepting, and sharing the primordial wound of existence. With this understanding, the real nature of love, contrary to the dominant conventional psychological perspective, is not the

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Reshe is a philosopher and negative psychoanalyst of Ukrainian Gypsy origin. She is a professor at the School of Advanced Studies at the University of Tyumen in Siberia and director of the Institute of Psychoanalysis at the Global Center for Advanced Studies.

sharing of happiness and mutual well-being (at least not at its core), but rather a space of sharing suffering and loss.

Happiness may be a time of rest from the work of love, but it is not the core substance that constitutes love—it is optional. Real love is impossible without pain and anxiety. First of all, love implies endurance through suffering, and not, as the contemporary naïve interpretation has it, joy and happiness. Real love is a dedication to what hurts, a deep and painful commitment not to escape loss.

Real love does not possess; it does not bring lovers together in unity. It is the opposite of possessing and merging. It is the courage to persist while recognizing the irreversible innate loss (of yourself and the loved one) and the inability to possess the loved one. Orpheus's love for Eurydice is not a symbol of real love. Orpheus did not know how to love since he was not willing to accept that love necessarily exists in relationship to foundational loss; he "did not realize that there is an intimate connection of love with primordial suffering" (p. 34). Authentic love is not possessing, but paradoxically, the contrary—the acceptance of not-having.

Rousselle's conception of love directly contradicts the dominant capitalist ideology on love. The latter aims to rescue subjects and their love relations from anxiety by moving toward the fantasy of self-fulfillment and the happily-ever-after of love. This ideology is the worst enemy of love, as it precludes love at its core. In fact, real love is the worst enemy of capitalism because it is in direct contradiction with the manipulative ideal of Western society—the ideal of productive, efficient, harmonious lives deprived of inconsistencies and pain. Real love is something that threatens to disrupt our careers and introduce destabilization and disharmony. It won't necessarily bring happiness, won't heal us from trauma, and won't make anyone's life better. This is precisely what makes it real.

Rousselle argues in favor of a "revolutionary commitment of love" (p. 23). Such a commitment constitutes a rather strange revolution, one that maybe subverts the very idea of revolution in a conventional sense. If revolution is associated with progress, a revolution of love is not one that would lead to any progress or bring any kind of betterment to the world. From the perspective of the aim of betterment, a real love revolution is entirely useless. The lovers "will render themselves useless for this world" (p. 23). On the other hand, what constitutes capitalism is exactly the logic of usefulness and betterment. To love is to become a "saint," that is, one who is useless to capitalist society. A revolution of love also lacks another quality of revolution in the conventional sense: it is not a revolution of the masses. It is small-scale revolution, invisible and meaningless. It only needs the world, or rather, the world is there to be a useful contrast to the lover's useless sanctity.

## Reference

Rouselle, D. (2021). *Real Love: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Religion, Society*. Atropos Press.