

Duane Rousselle, *Real Love: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Religion, Society*, Atropos Press, 2021 (Julie Reshe)

In his astonishing new book, Duane Rousselle is attempting to rescue love. For that reason, he ventures to redefine the psychoanalytic conception of it. Love as such, if one thinks about it, was impossible in 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 as something that makes up for the structural lack of a sexual relationship. With Rousselle's *Real Love*, for nearly the first time in the history of psychoanalytic thought, love is indeed located at the very heart of psychoanalysis and human existence.

For Rousselle, love is not something that makes up for the lack of sexual relationship, neither is it the constitutive lack at the subject's core. Love is not what is there to fill the lack, nor a place to escape our loneliness that springs from the constitutive lack at the core of subjectivity. Real love is not in confrontation with lack, it is akin to lack. It doesn't make up for it or fill it in, 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 — lack is the place where we find ourselves as we fall there. In Rousselle's words, love "is itself there within the fall."¹

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 doesn't have. It is the impossible sacrifice of the core of one's existence — of one's own lack. Rousselle follows Jacques-Alain Miller's claim that "to love is to recognize your

1 Duane Rousselle, *Real Love: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Religion, Society* (New York: Atropos Press, 2021), 30. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically within the text.

lack and give it to the other” (41). Love is, consequently, the sharing of lack. This entails that moving through falling in love is at its core — moving through, accepting, and sharing the primordial wound of existence. In such understanding, the real dimension of love, contrary to the dominant psychological perspective today, is not the sharing of happiness and mutual well-being (not at least at its core), but rather a space of sharing suffering and loss.

Happiness could 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. It, first of all, implies endurance through suffering, and not, as the contemporary naïve interpretation puts it, joy and happiness. Real love is a dedication to what hurts, a deep and painful commitment not to escape loss.

Real love doesn't possess, it doesn't bring lovers together in unity. It is the opposite of possessing and merging. It is the courage of persistence in the state of recognition of the irreversible innate loss (of yourself and of the loved one) and of not possessing the loved one. Orpheus's love for Eurydice is not a symbol of real love. Orpheus didn't 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” (Rousselle, 34). Authentic love is not possessing, but paradoxically the contrary, 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 towards the fantasy of self-fulfillment and happily-ever-after of love. Such ideology is the worst enemy of love. It precludes love at its core. *Au contraire*, real love is the worst enemy of capitalism. Real love is in direct contradiction with the manipulative ideal of Western society — the ideal of productive, efficient harmonious life deprived of inconsistencies and pain. Real love is something that threatens to disrupt our careers, it introduces destabilization and disharmony of well-being. It won't necessarily bring happiness, won't heal from trauma, won't make anyone's life better. But this is precisely what makes it real.

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