

Discourse, Love and Extimacy

Pamela King

“Lacan refers to the fact that there is no pre-established program between two speaking bodies as a sexual non-rapport.”¹ If there is no sexual relation, then what is there? Jacques-Alain Miller has a response: “Not being able to rely on a signifying rapport at the sexual level, the couple relies on a relation at the level of jouissance.”² What is this relation at the level of jouissance? There *are* couples, and we hear about them often in our clinical practice. If there is no sexual relation, in other words, if each one of us is alone in our jouissance, how do these couples work?

This thing that is not written – the sexual non-relation – allows for something: for contingency. Another name for this contingency is love. Love is not a direct, instinctive experience. It is mediated by the symptom. This is why Lacan could define love as, “nothing but encounter, the encounter in the partner of symptoms and affects, of everything that marks in each of us the trace of his exile [...] his exile from the sexual [relation].”³ Exile is this place of jouissance constructed from the signifying apparatus in my intimate heart, and at the same time is outside the signified – in a way, interdicted. It’s what we call *extimate*. What is interesting here is that love is not only about “there is no sexual relation,” but also about in what intimate way do I encounter this sexual non-relation, how has it been articulated to the drive, in my case? When it comes to love, we can ask the question, how is the trace of this exile marked in me? What symptoms and affects do I encounter? Love can be defined as the encountering of the symptoms and affects that trace my exile.

Rooted in the fundamental exile of the *parlêtre*, love clearly has its share of pain. Despair, passion and misunderstanding play their part. With love, everyone is touched in their most intimate self, because it comes as a supplementation to an unbearable real.

¹ Erbe, J., Presentation of the theme of CSD17, *Is This Love?* Available at <https://lacaniancompass.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CSD17-Presentation-of-the-Theme.pdf>

² Miller, Jacques-Alain, *Analysis Laid Bare*, trans. A. Duncan, WAP Libretto Series, New York: Lacanian Press, 2023, p. 70.

³ Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton & Co., 1999, p. 144.

Interestingly, the word “intimacy” is often mentioned by young patients as something to be avoided. For example, “going all the way” was once the expression of a woman’s most ardent love; today, it’s often an act performed under the injunction, *Enjoy!* And yet, whether it’s a fear of intimacy, a refusal to be dominated or a fight for equality – new norms of discourse showing “a politicization of the intimate [...] attacking a patriarchy already in decline”⁴ – the question for each one remains in what intimate (*extimate*) way she encounters the non-relation.

The paradox is that this exile from the sexual relation is the basis for the very possibility of the encounter. It’s the new factor⁵ that makes it possible to reconsider love as something not just narcissistic, not necessarily doomed to failure, but as a supplementation to be invented on the basis of the symptom.

⁴Bosquin-Caroz, P., *Painful Loves*. Presentation of the 2025 NLS Congress Theme,. Available at :<https://www.amp-nls.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ENG.-PBC-Presentation-of-the-2025-NLS-Congress-Theme-FV.pdf>

⁵ Cf. Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore, op. cit.*, p. 39; “a new doctrine of love,” Miller, J.-A., “La théorie du partenaire,” text published on the website of the Clinical Sections of Rennes, consisting of excerpts from his course, in collaboration with Éric Laurent, *l’Orientation lacanienne. L’Autre qui n’existe pas et ses comités d’éthique* (1996-1997). Available at <https://sectioncliniquenantes.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Jacques-Alain-Miller-Theorie-du-partenaire.pdf>