

# **In Praise Of Love**

# **What's in it for me? Rekindle your love life with advice from a French philosopher.**

We moderns are fast forgetting how to love. In a sex-obsessed world that's saturated with pornographic images, and where dating apps present potential partners side-by-side like products on a shelf, love today has been reduced to the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. And this is a shame. Many people are missing out on one of life's most profound experiences, replaced by brief hook-ups devoid of passion. The pursuit of sex has had its cultural moment, and although it was fun for a while, many of us are desperate for something more meaningful. We need to rediscover the pleasures of romance. And that's where these blinks come in. They renew the status of love to its highest pitch – love as a life-changing, existential adventure. They teach us that love is a magnificent undertaking that refashions our world, reveals fundamental truths, and helps us lead more impassioned lives. In these blinks, you'll learn:

why you shouldn't outsource your choice of partner to an algorithm; why love is not only a feeling but an entirely new way of thinking; and how modern dating practices dovetail with a nationalist agenda.

## **Dating-app culture is threatening love by eliminating much of the risk.**

This story begins a few years ago when the author, Badiou, was strolling through the streets of Paris. He noticed posters advertising a French dating site called Meetic, and was immediately troubled by the messaging. The poster's slogans promised things like "find love without chance" and "perfect love without suffering." Now, Meetic is one of these dating sites that asks you a bunch of questions, and then uses algorithms to match you up with people who meet your requirements. The idea is that you avoid a lot of wasted time and heartache by only going on dates with people you're compatible with. If you can ensure your date has the right body, the right job, and the right values in advance, then there'd be a much greater chance of finding love, without the risk of disappointment. In effect, Meetic was suggesting it could eliminate a lot of the riskiness involved in dating. The problem is, for Badiou, love without risk is no love at all. Love is an inherently risky endeavor. For him, the fact that dating apps are helping people eliminate risk from their love life should serve as a dire warning for the dismal state of love today. The key message here is: Dating-app culture is threatening love by eliminating much of the risk. When a dating app removes uncertainty by matching you with people who fit your exact desires, what kind of people do you think you're going to meet? You're probably going to meet people who are just like you – people who have the same tastes, the same background, the same politics, the same ambitions in life. But where's the challenge here? Where are the elements of surprise, of newness, of adventure into the unknown? They're nowhere to be seen. You might find someone with the same Netflix algorithm, or someone who also loves matcha chai lattes, but that isn't love. At best, such a dating app sets the stage for a stable relationship – but not a passionate encounter. What these dating apps promote is more akin to an arranged marriage than true love. In an arranged marriage, there's no risk involved either,

because your parents have vetted your partner in advance to make sure they belong to the same community, class, or religion as you. The only real difference is that nowadays we outsource our romantic decisions to algorithms rather than matchmakers. Risk-free love is really a sterilized idea of love that's all about servicing your desires. True love, on the other hand, is risky because it has the potential to completely change your life by throwing you into contact with people who are very different to you, and who will shake up your entire perspective on life. By eliminating risk, dating apps close us off to the dangerous and exciting element of love – the element which makes it such an intense, existentially challenging experience. For Badiou, it's imperative that we preserve this element of danger against a safety-first culture that avoids risk.

## **People's shallow understanding of love is causing them to sabotage their relationships.**

Part of the problem with modern love is simply that people give up on it too easily. As soon as a relationship encounters an obstacle, there's a tendency to just quit and move on to the next thing. This is a shame because it's usually the challenging things in life that are the most meaningful and rewarding. No doubt dating apps are partly responsible, with their hoards of potential matches ever-ready to meet you. But we can't only blame dating apps. The fact is, people just don't value long-term, committed relationships like they used to. People see commitment as a limitation on their freedom to pursue pleasure. So, many people drop love before it gets too serious. Unfortunately, this attitude completely misunderstands what love really is and why it's important. The key message here is: People's shallow understanding of love is causing them to sabotage their relationships. There are essentially two basic myths about love that one encounters today, and they both teach us to be suspicious of long-term commitment. The first myth is the skeptical position, which says that what we call love is nothing other than sexual desire in disguise. According to this picture, love is an illusion – just a trick our mind plays on us so that we'll fulfill our evolutionary purpose of having sex and perpetuating the species. The message is: you have sexual desires, so fulfill them, but there's no reason to get hung up on the idea that you have to do it with the same person. That whole "love" thing is just window dressing. Forget commitment and sow your wild oats! Frankly, this view of love would be laughable if it weren't so sad. To live without love would be to live a very gray, lonely existence. But it's an all-too-common view these days. The second myth, then, is perhaps more reasonable. It does think love is real; however, it treats it as just a form of pleasure, and therefore not very important. It views love as just another way of enjoying yourself within the wide range of possibilities presented to us by our hedonistic societies. You can take it or leave it – and if love doesn't work out, you can devote yourself to video games, or cheese, or whatever gratification you end up picking. The thing is, this myth falsely equates love with the ecstasy that one enjoys in the first stage of a relationship – the honeymoon period. But, after this initial stage is over, love declines sharply, and the only way to get it back is to move on to someone else. The problem with this interpretation of love is that it's completely self-obsessed. If you're only with someone because of how they make you feel, you're not really in a relationship with them; you're in a relationship with yourself. As we'll see in the next blink, Badiou offers us a third alternative: true love is able to break us out of our lonely little pleasure-seeking bubbles and help connect us to something greater.

# **Love is an encounter with another being that completely changes the way you think and live.**

The Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa once wrote that “love is a thought.” Now, that’s a strange idea. We’re often told that love is about emotion, or desire, or bodily intimacy. But, never is love connected to reason and thinking. But why not? It’s not as though the realm of thought is immune to the onslaughts of love. It would be weird, wouldn’t it, if our thoughts remained intact while the rest of our being is warped and tormented by intense passion. So, what kind of thinking does love inspire? Well, consider it from this angle. How would your thinking change if you were to incorporate another person’s perspective? That’s what love is, according to Badiou. It’s a way of thinking as though you were looking from the perspective of two rather than one. The key message here is: Love is an encounter with another being that completely changes the way you think and live. All creation of the new is linked to what Badiou calls an event. This is a pivotal concept in Badiou’s philosophy, so it’s worth fleshing out. For Badiou, the vast majority of what happens in life is just a predictable continuation of our everyday world. That is to say, there’s a tendency for life to congeal into routine and habit. And most of what we do and think each day is just a continuation of these routines. An event, however, is something that doesn’t fit the pattern. An event is a chance encounter that erupts into our world from the outside, shaking our basic assumptions and injecting something new into our thinking. Love is a perfect example of an event because it always takes the form of a chance encounter that bursts into our life, and refashions it in unpredictable ways. Love has the power to change everything from our daily routines to our future plans, to our fundamental values. And how does love exert such a profound influence? Well, no other experience has the power to rupture our solitary, egocentric world that love has. When we fall in love, we open a door for another being into our world. To live in a loving relationship is like seeing the world from two perspectives at the same time. It’s like we’re adding an extra dimension. That’s exactly why philosophers, artists, and thinkers of all stripes ought to be lovers – because love reveals new aspects to reality that otherwise we wouldn’t have access to.

## **Saying "I love you" transforms a trivial event into one that gives meaning to the whole of life.**

The little phrase “I love you” is sometimes thought to be a rather meaningless sentence – just a convention that couples always say to one another, kind of like “please” and “thank you.” But, if that were true, why does it sometimes feel so difficult to say it? There are times, especially at the beginning of a relationship, when these three little words are charged with such intensity that we find it unbearable to utter them. And that’s because, at some level, we’re aware that these words possess real power. The phrase “I love you” is a perfect example of speech that alters the world when it is uttered. When you say it, you’re not just presenting information; you’re exerting a real force on your relationship. The very act of saying “I love you” is enough to bind two lives closer together. That’s exactly why some people get stage fright the first time they

try to say it. They know that the moment they declare their love is the moment a relationship transitions from a chance encounter to two intertwined destinies. The key message here is: Saying “I love you” transforms a trivial event into one that gives meaning to the whole of life. Love always starts with a chance encounter. Maybe you meet someone at a work event, or at a bar, or even at the supermarket – it doesn’t really matter. Eventually, there comes a time in the relationship when the trivial nature of the first encounter has to be transformed into something more significant. This usually happens a short while in, when a couple decides to declare their love. By saying “I love you” to one another, a couple transforms the fragile, uncertain nature of the relationship into something more solid and resilient. Of course, that doesn’t mean that one declaration of love makes a relationship. Love is something that has to be built and reinforced over time. That’s because relationships aren’t static. They’re full of trials, temptations, and new developments. And every time a relationship faces a new obstacle, you have to reaffirm the initial declaration of love. With each declaration, it’s as though you’re back at the beginning, reaffirming the decision to be together, and repeating those three critical words, “I love you.” Given the imminent danger of separation, lovers continuously feel a deep urgency to reaffirm their connection. This explains why couples say “I love you” so frequently. And it shows us that the paradox of love has always been how a random, trivial encounter can evolve into something so significant that it gives structure and meaning to an entire human life.

## **Love has the power to bridge divisions and connect different social groups.**

There’s an expression in French called “amour fou,” which literally means “mad love.” The expression evokes that uncontrollable form of love that borders on obsessiveness. Amour fou is one of the most intense passions a person can experience. It’s a force that’s both destructive and creative. The person afflicted with such intense love could just as easily leave a broken family behind them, only to start a new one with someone else. This tendency to disrupt the general order of things has led many artistic and political movements to be interested in love as a potentially subversive force. The Surrealists, for example, experimented with different forms of love in an attempt to bring about a revolution in living. Love has always represented a danger to the established order. That’s precisely why it’s so frequently been subject to control, by the family, the community, and the state. The key message here is: Love has the power to bridge divisions and connect different social groups. The reason love has always presented such a danger to the established order is that it’s generally indifferent to the social boundaries erected by humans. Love doesn’t usually ask what a person’s background is before making a bond, and as a result it has the potential to cut across social divisions like class, nationality, or cultural identity. The classic example of this, of course, is Romeo and Juliet – two people from warring clans who disobeyed their families so that they could be together. Of course, parents have been taking an interest in their children’s love life since time immemorial. The whole institution of arranged marriage, for instance, was designed to control children’s amorous passion by channeling it into a safe outlet. In practice, that usually meant someone of the same class, race, or religion. At a political level, states employ similar tactics to control the love lives of the entire population – only in this case it’s done for the sake of maintaining a national or cultural identity. Consider policies designed to limit immigration, for example, by putting time limits on foreign workers’ visas. Policies like these effectively minimize amorous relationships between citizens and foreign populations. From this



perspective, we can see how modern dating-app culture actually dovetails with a nationalist agenda. These apps, by pairing everyone up with people who are just like them, serve to reinforce rigid group identities and divisions. If we're genuinely committed to breaking down boundaries and creating a more equal and inclusive society, we need to defend love's power of bringing different kinds of people together.

## **Artists can promote love by writing narratives about love that lasts.**

Modern culture has a love affair with love stories. There are so many songs, films, and books about love, that it just goes to show that love has an almost universal appeal. That being said, most love stories are really only about the beginning stage of love – the passionate first encounter and the struggle to be together. But as soon as they succeed and get married, the story ends with “and they lived happily ever after.” The storybooks have very little to say about the hard work of actually maintaining a relationship. But this is a serious omission. It's contributed to a culture that fetishizes the initial rush of passion in a relationship and puts no value whatsoever on love's duration. We need to write new narratives that are actually up to the task of communicating the value of sustained romance. The key message here is: Artists can promote the power of love by producing narratives about love that lasts. One art form that's always had a strong relationship with love is the theater. The struggle between young love and family order has to be one of the most widely performed conflicts on the stage. A great many plays, such as “The Triumph of Love” from Marivaux, relate how young lovers go to great lengths to elude their parents and get what they want, namely marriage. This is an inherently political narrative. The theater has always served a political role in expressing social tensions and staging dramas of liberation. And, in a time when people were not free to be with who they wanted, narratives like these would have been very subversive. The problem is, the times have changed. Today, we're generally free to choose who we want to be with. So, old-fashioned stories like these no longer promote love, but actually serve to undermine it. That's because by exalting the passion and ecstasy of love's beginning, they feed a commitment-phobic culture that thinks it's all downhill after marriage. Artists need to invent new narratives of love – narratives that are capable of expressing enduring love that is real love, and not only the fetishized first encounter. One of the playwrights we can look to for inspiration is Samuel Beckett. His play “Happy Days,” for example, is about an elderly couple that is constantly reminiscing and talking about all the happy days they had together. The overwhelming feeling one has is just how much of an impact their love has had on their lives.

## **Final summary**

The key message in these blinks is that: Modern societies are fast forgetting the meaning and value of love. We're in serious danger of trading one of the most potent sources of pleasure and existential transformation possible for shallow, passionless hook-ups that revolve around sex. Romantic love needs to be rediscovered and reinvented for the modern world. On the one hand, this means creating new narratives of love in our artistic creations which remind people why love is actually worth pursuing. On the other hand, we must also change our own orientation to love so that we no longer see it as a danger or sacrifice, but as an adventure and source of profound insight. And here's some more actionable advice: Avoid dating apps that match you with

people like you. For better or for worse, dating apps have fundamentally transformed the way that modern people meet and date. Avoiding dating apps completely is simply unfeasible for many people. But dating apps in themselves aren't the problem. They're still capable of throwing you into the path of people who lead very different lives to you. So here's some advice. Try to use dating apps that don't only show you people who have a similar profile to you. Some dating apps even have a "blind date" function that pairs you up with people completely at random. This might sound a little scary, but uncertainty is one of the sources of excitement in a relationship. Try to be open-minded, take risks, and don't write anyone off until you've spent a bit of time with them. You may just be pleasantly surprised.