

All That is Holy Profaned? The Disenchantment of Romantic Love Under Global Capitalism

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In modern times, the taken for granted assumption that love and money are marriageable ends frequently goes unchallenged. While love is considered to be an abstract philosophical value or a Christian virtue, money has strong materialist moorings. In the popular imagination, however, a distinction between these two concepts seems blurred and is even glorified to be reconcilable.

The main research question of this paper is: Does capitalism commodify love? The foremost issue it raises is to ascertain whether market principles impinge on romantic relationships. Can exchange principles that characterize economic relationships be used to understand the role of resources that spouses inevitably bring with them in a marriage? And if social exchange does take place, does it undermine in any way the conceptual purity of romance? Does it render erotic injustice? Does it lead to fetishism and commodification? Is there an entirely pure erotic motive in the first place? It also brings to the fore an issue as to whether one can espouse an absolutely compartmentalized view of the logic of desire and the logic of capital—which necessarily begs the question whether an erotic motive can co-exist with an economic motive and may still consider that relationship as based

on “love”? Can a “pure relationship” be truly possible?

THE RISE OF ROMANTIC LOVE: CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL FORCES

Romantic love is a child of modernity. Hendrick and Hendrick (1992, p. 4) pointed out that “romantic love was not a prerequisite for marriage until the modern era.” In *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Anthony Giddens (1992) traced the emergence of romantic love after the Middle Ages, particularly in the late 18th century. It is noteworthy that the rise of the institution of marriage had predated the notion of romantic love as a basis for marriage.

In a study of marriage and romantic love as co-variants among male and female college students over a 30-year period in Western societies, romantic love was widely viewed as a necessary component of marriage— a result scarcely found in the 1960s (Campbell & Berscheid, 1986, as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick 1992, p.4). Furthermore, the authors claimed that earlier generations had been willing to enter

marriage even with the absence of romantic love. However, present generations required it not only as a basis for marriage, but as a basis as well for staying in a marriage.

Several academic disciplines, particularly in the social sciences and biology, offer conceptualizations of love based on paradigms and theories specific to their own field.

Psychological Definitions of Love

In psychology, for example, one approach was to distinguish between love and liking (Rubin, 1970, as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 5). Commitment is viewed as an important component of romantic love (Sternberg, 1986, as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 5). Love is defined in myriad ways by psychologists, notably as “an intense form of liking,” a “form of addiction,” a “facet of personality,” a “learned behavior,” and a “part of evolutionary heritage” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 5).

Following the Freudian tradition in psychology, many researchers of romantic love also view the concept in relation to sexual desire. A veteran love researcher claimed that love is “... about 90 percent sexual desire as yet not sated” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 5).

Biological Definitions of Love

Meanwhile, the field of biology inscribes romantic love in the very nature of the human species. Under the biological approach, romantic love is purveyed as a “natural part of the human condition” and is believed to be “natural to other higher order species” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p.6). Love, in fact, is seen as relevant to human evolution and survival.

One of the earliest achievements in this approach was Harry Harlow’s research on the socialization of monkeys in 1974 (as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, pp.6-7), where he concluded that a baby monkey’s experience

of love is crucial for its proper development to adulthood. Typical of most conclusions of psychological experiments involving monkeys which are considered to be the closest in likeness to the human species within the order of primates in the Linnaean taxonomic system, Harlow concluded that the patterns of care and handling exhibited by monkeys can be considered parallel to human responses.

Another interesting biological approach is the work of Mellen (1981, p.8, as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, pp.8-9) that used evolutionary theory to explain how love evolved and how natural selection or sexual selection was useful to human adaptation and survival. Mellen explained that the nurturance of the female and the protection of the male were not enough to ensure the successful transmittal of genes. It required another mechanism that involved a “type of emotional bondedness between breeding pairs of males and females” which, according to Mellen, was “the beginning of love.” Hence, Mellen underscored the “evolutionary advantage” of love among early humans, and further claimed that groups who evolved with love as a bonding agent had a “slightly greater differential reproductive success” than groups where love did not develop.

But in contrast to Mellen that defined love as an emotion or feeling, there is a biological approach to love that argues for a conception of love as an “act”. This approach was developed by Buss in 1988 that sought to drive the idea that love is an act. Buss (1988, as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p.10) underscored that love emerges in acts involving mating and kinship relations, manifesting primarily in intimate relationships, specifically within the context of marriage and parent-child relations. According to this approach, love had evolved to support reproduction; and without this act, human genetic line would have gone extinct.

Sociological Definitions of Love

The sociological approach to love locates the emergence of romantic love in connection to the development of notions of the self over a hundred years ago (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p.20). In contrast to the essentialist tendency of the biological approach to love, the sociological approach assumes a social constructionist stance as it looks at love as a “learned phenomenon, culturally transmitted from one generation to the next by example, stories, imitation, and direct instruction” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p.14). In this approach, the experience of love presupposes an understanding of the notion of a *self*. As Hendrick and Hendrick (1992, p.15) put it, “Sociologically speaking, in order to experience love, one must possess or be a ‘self’.”

Hence, in sociology, one of the major theorists that offered an arsenal of analytical tools on the relationship between the concepts of *selfhood* and *love* was the French thinker Michel Foucault (1990) through his work, *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault wrote about human technologies, and particularly relevant to this paper was his notion of “technology of the self” – referring to “all the ways in which the individual acts upon himself or herself in the course of social life” (Foucault, 1990, as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p.15).

Integrative Conceptualization

But while sociology framed romantic love as a modern cultural invention—particularly in the work of the sociologist Anthony Giddens—there are studies claiming for the universality of romantic love as a cultural belief and practice, assuming that it was already present much earlier than what sociology had claimed. These studies contest the sociological argument that “romantic love depends upon a strong sense of self-identity”—a self that has appeared only in the last few

centuries (Giddens, 1992; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 23).

The study by Hatfield and Rapson (1987, as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p.23) that made use of a Passionate Love Scale is an illustrative example. Their data suggested that romantic love had existed in all historical eras, occurred in different age groups, and across different ethnic enclaves.

Hendrick and Hendrick (1992, p.26) sought to resolve the different positions of the two general approaches on love where its historical point of origin is concerned by pointing out that sexual passion—framing it as a form of love—had been existent since the human species appeared. But the latter emergence of complex culture and a strong sense of selfhood among individuals were responsible for “elaborating” sexual passion into romantic love. Historical change also saw the emergence of *choice*, wherein individuals can choose whom to fall in love with, and is now closely attached to notions of sexual expression and marriage. Nowadays, when sexual passion fades, it is considered an exercise of choice to file for divorce in order to end a marriage, and to begin another one which spurs excitement and romance (Macionis, 2012, p.430).

Another study done by Lystra in 1989 even promotes the idea that romantic love shares a relationship of *elective affinity* with individuality. Elective affinity (*wahlverwandtschaft*) is a concept by the sociologist Max Weber, which suggests that ideas and interests are related. For instance, elective affinity is demonstrated when the trajectory of Protestant ideas helped fuel the growth of capitalist interest during the early stages of capitalism in Europe (Gerth & Mills, 1946, as cited in Howe, 1978, p.366). Lystra (1989) claimed that romantic love was a “powerful force in the growth of individualism in America” (as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 23). Sarnoff and Sarnoff (1989, as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p.23) also

claimed that love expands the boundaries of individuality.

Love and self is seen as intimately linked and a sense of choice as the bridge between them. However, while connections have been possible between love and selfhood, most literature could not clarify the link between sex, sexuality, and love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 24). This is a point where Karl Marx's views on human needs and powers can contribute (to be discussed in a separate section later). Corollary to this, Wilson (1980) asserted that sexuality is a distinct concept from love, even as they "tend to become heavily entwined in ongoing life" (as cited in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 24).

The Global Ecumene and Christian Definitions of Love

The sociology of religion also has something to contribute to the discourse of love. Ulf Hannerz (1992, p. 218) wrote about the emergence of a global *ecumene*—wherein entities routinely called as cultures are becoming more like subcultures to a wider entity. The sociologist Michael Mann (1986) discussed the universal features of Christianity as an *ecumene*—an innovative, diffused kind combining extensive and intensive power, which spread throughout the major classes of Western societies; a class transcendence that was world-historical in terms of influence. Mann (1986, p. 307) described the Christian *ecumene* as a "universalistic, egalitarian, decentralized, and civilizing community."

In Mann's discussion, ideology appeared as the transcendent power of Christianity. In line with the concern of this paper, Christianity had offered an ideology of love that is reflected in some Biblical passages. According to Corinthians 1:4 (New International Version), "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about

injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance." Meanwhile, Corinthians 1:13 states that, "Three things will last forever – faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love." However, Mann (1986) was aware that such Christian conceptualizations of love may no longer be dominant during the age of modernity. Mann (1986) explained that, "Our age has been accustomed to contrast faith and reason. But this was not so of Christ's age. Greek philosophy was moving toward combining the two. Indeed, by rejecting mysteries, ritual, and magic, Christ (or his gospel writers) was appealing to rational forms of faith" (p.305). But there are sociologists like Anthony Giddens who recognized how Christianity played a critical role in defining the modern conception of romantic love. In Chapter 3 titled "Romantic love and other attachments" of his book *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Giddens (1992) noted that the ideals of romantic love had a religious dimension as they bore the Christian principle of devotion.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES ON LOVE: AN OVERVIEW

This overview of sociological theories on love and sexuality consists of two major divisions: (a) theories that focus on social structure (e.g. on social stratification and social inequality), and (b) theories dealing with social exchange.

Sociologists studying love accept the premise that love is a kind of emotion in contrast to emotion theorists who reject this notion. They traced connections between emotion, culture, and economy, arguing that emotion is one of the various mechanisms that facilitate the linkage between culture and economy (Stets & Turner, 2006, p. 391).

Structural Approaches: The Sociology of Social Stratification and Social Inequality

Sociologists study love as an emotion but in the context of the wider societal, cultural, and institutional patterns surrounding it (Stets & Turner, 2006, p. 397). Goode (1959, as cited in Stets & Turner, 2006) talked about the power of love in “The Theoretical Importance of Love” to disrupt the stratification and kinship systems in societies. Thus, parents usually intervene on mate choice, marriage, and mating issues, because according to Goode (1959, as cited in Stets & Turner, 2006, pp. 397-398), random mating will shake up the very foundations of a society. There are two existing powerful critiques on the experience of love in society: feminism and Marxism. The latter applies the Marxist notion of “commodification” to an analysis of love.

Feminism: The Use and Abuse of Romantic Love and its Ideological Role in Women’s Subordination

Feminism tends to view romantic love as an ideology that keeps women tied to domesticity. Love is demonized as a “major tool that aids in expropriative social arrangements”—its bonds seen as “insidious and destructive” (Ehrenreich, 1983, as cited in Stets & Turner, 2006, p. 400). Studies on paternalism such as the one done by Jackman (1994, as cited in Stets & Turner, 2006) posited that dominant groups in society seek to preserve their power by means of “sweet persuasion” rather than hostility as a preferred tool. Jackman argued that, “Love and affection offer a coercive energy and a soothing balm that cannot be matched” (1994, as cited in Stets & Turner, 2006, p.400).

Janet Saltzman Chafetz’s Gender Equity Theory, a feminist theory committed to explaining gender stratification, argues that gender stratification is linked to the macro-level

division of labor in a society. According to her, if the division of labor is gendered—in the sense that the assigning of work is determined by a person’s sex—males usually get more economic advantage than females. Then males use their greater material access to evade housework and then use their greater bargaining power in terms of interpersonal demands. As wives face “double burden,” it becomes difficult for them to compete with men in procuring resource-generating work outside the home (Turner, 2003, pp.186-188).

Meanwhile, Catherine Mackinnon (1982) talked about sexual objectification as the “primary process of the subjection of women.” She also distinguished the feminist notion of objectification, as experienced by women, in contrast to the Marxist notion of objectification. She explained that in the Marxist concept, materialism, objectification, and alienation are viewed separately. But in the experience of women, Mackinnon asserted that objectification and alienation are experienced jointly. She stated, “Women have been the nature, the matter, the acted upon, to be subdued by the acting subject seeking to embody himself in the social world” (p. 187).

Marxism: The Hypocrisy of Bourgeois Marriages and the Illusion of Romantic Love Under Capitalism

Sex as power and need. Marxist concepts that are particularly relevant to the understanding of sexuality and romantic love would be the notions of *powers* and *needs*. Powers refer to the “faculties, abilities, and capacities of people” while needs pertain to “the desires people feel for things that are usually not immediately available.” Marx distinguished needs and powers from those that are *natural*, suggesting that it is shared with other animals; and those that are *species*, which include only those that are “uniquely human.” Using these concepts, sex is purveyed as a behaviour common between

humans and animals, hence serving as one of the “natural powers and needs.” But it becomes “species powers and needs” once it is expressed in “uniquely human ways” (Ritzer, 2000, p. 49). While one can assume that this “uniquely human way” by which sex is expressed as a “natural power and need” may refer to romantic love, Marx did not explicitly identify romantic love and give it a place of honour as a form of human expression that translates sex into a “species power and need” (Ritzer, *ibid.*).

Corollary to this, Catherine Mackinnon’s (1982) discussion of sexuality parallelized with Marx’s view of sex as power and need. Mackinnon considered sexuality as a form of power. According to her, “Gender, as socially constructed, embodies it, not the reverse. Women and men are divided by gender, made into the sexes as we know them, by the social requirements of heterosexuality, which institutionalizes male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. If this is true, sexuality is the linchpin of gender inequality” (Mackinnon, 1982, p. 185).

Commodification of romantic love. A central theme in the sociological critique of romantic love argues that the root of the commodification of love is capitalism (Fromm, 1956, as cited in Stets & Turner, 2006). Marx and Engels, in *The Holy Family* (1845/1956), located the origins of the modern division of labor to the family, “where wife and children are the slaves of the husband” (as cited in Ritzer, 2000, p. 63). In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels (1978) surveyed the dynamics of the family as a social institution from Greek period to the bourgeois period. He found that the family subjugated women to men and the same institution preserved private property through laws of inheritance. For him, a monogamous bourgeois affectionate marriage is simply an illusion driven by class rather than emotion. In the end, Engels views bourgeois marriages as a marriage of convenience rather than an emotional relationship. It is his belief that only the working

classes can feel romantic love as they have no property to lose or gain. In the *Communist Manifesto*, the utopia that Marx and Engels (1967, as cited in Illouz, 1997,) envisioned, suggested dichotomies between commodity and sentiment, economic interest, and love, as a “precondition for authentic, fully human relationships” (p. 7).

Members of the Frankfurt School such as Erich Fromm (1956) and Herbert Marcuse (1963) sought to refine the Marxist critique of capitalism by combining it with Freudian ideas. According to Illouz (1997, p. 7), Fromm and Marcuse shared the assumption that the “reality principle” that underpin capitalism subjects desire to the “iron law of productivity”. As Illouz (1997) pointed out, Fromm and Marcuse framed the relationship between love and society as a political issue, lending sexuality, desire, and love to political criticism. Marcuse (1963) also posited his concept of *repressive de-sublimation* wherein individuals, as capitalist repression intensifies, de-sublimate through consumerism—a strategy that Marcuse regarded as pseudo-liberation in the face of modern consumer capitalism. Marcuse proposed that desire should thus be freed from the psychic pressures of the capitalist mode of production. While Fromm shared Marcuse’s critique of capitalism, he differed in his view of the connection between love and capitalism. In *The Art of Loving*, Fromm (1956, as cited in Illouz, 1997, p.7) likened the modern romantic couple to a “working team” whose relationship must now be governed by values and norms typical to modern economic relationships; the conception of modern love now becomes akin to that of capitalist economic exchanges.

Romantic love versus confluent love. In *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Anthony Giddens (1992) traced the historical evolution of romantic relationships between the opposite sex, focusing on the concept of romantic love and the social forces surrounding its emergence and development.

Giddens (1992) recounted how in pre-modern Europe, the institution of marriage provided a differential experience to the lower classes and the aristocracy. While the poor experienced it as a “means of organizing agrarian labour,” the convenient material conditions for sexual freedom enjoyed by the aristocratic class became conducive to the development of the romantic ideal during the late 18th century. Giddens noted the religious dimension of romantic love through the notion of devotion; the introduction of narrative into individual lives; the appearance of the novel as a literary form; the social evolution of sexuality, intimacy, and relationships; the creation of the home and transformation of family linkages; the conception of children and child rearing; and the invention of motherhood.

Furthermore, Giddens (1992) characterized the notion of romantic love that emerged during this period as sublime love—a notion of love that is detached from sexual ardour. Hence, love is distinguished from sex or sexuality. With the idealized notions of love and marriage popular at that time, a meeting of souls and psychic communication were regarded as more essential to marital relationships rather than sex. Moreover, romantic love was closely linked to the notion of identity.

But as Giddens (1992) noted, intimate relationships had undergone a transformation. This age is now marked by a crisis in masculinity, a drive for an egalitarian project or a pure relationship, where men and women can have an emotional give and take relationship. This refers to the emergence of the notion of “confluent love,” which is based on a “mutual active engagement” to ensure that partners derive sufficient benefits from the relationship in order to sustain the partnership. In this kind of relationship, sexuality is seen as separate from reproduction and women are emancipated from male domination. On a practical level, men and women are expected to constantly negotiate emotionally.

Interactionist Approaches: Social Exchange Theories

The interactionist approaches relevant to a sociological analysis of intimate relationships are clearly enunciated by social exchange theories on sexuality. Although the Marxist implicit theory of social exchange does not elaborate on the dynamics of dyadic relationships at the micro-level, the basic principles were included since they can lend support to the assertions of the social exchange theories on sexuality, and this paper would argue that its key principles resonate with the latter.

Karl Marx: Implicit Theory of Social Exchange

Containing a series of propositions about exchange dynamics involving unequal distribution of resources, Marxist dialectical conflict theory is a sub-variant of and a contribution to exchange theory. According to Marxist implicit theory of exchange and conflict, (1) “Those who need scarce and valued resources that others possess but who do not have equally valued and scarce resources to offer in return will be dependent on those who control these resources”; (2) “Those who control valued resources have power over those who do not”; and (3) “Those with power will press their advantage and will try to extract more resources from those dependent on them in exchange for fewer (or the same level) of the resources that they control” (Turner, 2003, pp. 280-281).

Susan Sprecher: Social Exchange Theories on Sexuality

Sprecher (1998, p. 32) foregrounded *costs* and *rewards* as the two key concepts used in various social exchange theories applied to the study of sexuality. According to her, these theories share three common assumptions: (1) “Social behavior

is a series of exchanges”, (2) “individuals attempt to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs,” and (3) “when individuals receive rewards from others, they feel obligated to reciprocate.”

Equity Theory

Extending the justice theories of sociologists George Homans and Peter Blau, equity theory contains four propositions that echo Marxist principles on social exchange. According to Sprecher (1998, p. 33), the first proposition states that “individuals will try to maximize their outcomes (where outcomes equal rewards minus punishments).” The second proposition states that “groups (or rather the individuals comprising these groups) can maximize collective reward by evolving accepted systems for equitably apportioning resources among members” and “groups will generally reward members who treat others equitably and generally punish members who treat others inequitably.” The third proposition proposes that “when individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they will become distressed.” And the last proposition claims that “individuals who discover that they are in inequitable relationships will attempt to eliminate their distress by restoring equity”.

Equity theory makes use of three basic concepts: inputs, outcomes, and total outcomes (Sprecher, 1998, p. 33). Inputs refer to “the participant’s positive and negative contributions to the exchange that entitle him or her to reward or punishment.” In contrast, outcomes pertain to “the rewards and punishments the participant receives in the relationship.” Total outcomes are defined as “rewards minus punishments”.

Sprecher (1998, p. 35) further noted that early equity theorists have developed the so-called “matching hypothesis” which proposes two principles: (1) “The more socially desirable a person is (in physical attractiveness, social standing, intelligence, etc.), the more socially

desirable he or she would expect a dating, marriage, or sexual partner to be”; and (2) “couples who are matched (both partners are equally socially desirable) are more likely to have happy and enduring relationships than couples who are mismatched (one partner is more socially desirable than the other).

The Outcome-Interdependence Theory and Investment Model

While equity theory focused on justice and fairness principles, this model caters to the “rewards and costs derived from the relationship for the individual” (Sprecher, 1998, pp. 33-34). The important concepts used here are rewards, costs, comparison level, and comparison level for alternatives. Comparison level is defined as “one’s expectation of what one deserves in such a relationship and is a standard for evaluating the relationship that develops based on past experiences and an awareness of the expectations of others.” In comparison level for alternatives, individuals compare what they could possibly get given an alternative, available relationship, or what can they obtain from a social network without getting involved in another primary relationship. Commitment is believed to be related to one’s feelings of dependence on a relationship, forged once an individual is convinced that the relationship one has is the best among other available alternatives.

This model was extended by Rusbult (1980, 1983, as cited in Sprecher, 1998) by adding the concept of “investment” in the model. Investment is defined as “the resources one gives to the relationship that cannot be retrieved if the relationship were to end.” In this additional component, commitment is seen not only relative to satisfaction and comparison level for alternatives, but dependent as well to investments put into the relationship. This model, like equity theory, was found helpful in explaining the onset of sex among dating partners. It can predict

how “sexually active dating partners become” (Sprecher, 1998, pp. 35-36).

The Interpersonal Model of Sexual Satisfaction

This model extended the previous two exchange theories to sexual satisfaction. Developed by Lawrance and Byers (1992, 1995, as cited in Sprecher, 1998), it is focused on exchange within a sexual relationship and the outcomes of sexual satisfaction. Similar to the concepts used of the previous two social exchange theories, this model applies the concepts of rewards, costs, comparison level, and equality—in a way bringing together the Equity Theory and the Outcome-Interdependence Theory and Investment Model into a more focused study on the exchange dynamics of sexual relationships. Based on this model, sexual satisfaction is achieved depending on the cumulative process by which the three components of sexual relationships accrue: sexual satisfaction (rewards-costs), comparison level of rewards, and equality of rewards (Sprecher, 1998, p. 34). Lawrance and Byers (1995, as cited in Sprecher, 1998, p. 36) tested this model on the level of sexual satisfaction among married or cohabiting couples.

Capitalism on Trial: All that is Holy Profaned?

As Illouz (1997, p.7) brilliantly puts it, love is “a privileged site for the experience of utopia”. That is why for feminists and Marxists, the subjugation of women and children in the family—an institution supposedly established on the basis of romantic love—casts a dark glow on this romantic utopia. And if the economic language used in social exchange theories on sexuality is of any indication, love (and sexual satisfaction) appears to be measured at this point using the weights dictated by the market similar

to a business transaction. The major criticism hurled at social exchange theories on sexuality is centered on their treatment of marital stability as some sort of an accounting balance sheet, discounting for instance a needs-based approach. Economic principles such as rewards and cost are used to measure intimate relationships. The “selfish cost-benefit analysis” is also haphazardly applied to the logic of sexuality and romance (Sprecher, 1998, p. 40).

For Marx and Engels, a reconciliation of the erotic motive and the economic motive is impossible. For them, the inclusion of economic motive renders the erotic motive suspect, which led them to claim that the upper classes could not experience romantic love due to the underpinning exchange of property involved. In contrast, the lower classes who are bereft of property are viewed to have a more authentic experience of romantic love. The Marxist view suggests an answer to one of the issues raised at the beginning of this paper by operating on a conceptually pure notion of romance that supposedly should not be tainted by an economic motive. Consumer impulses should ideally not mix up with sentiment. Erotic desires, meanwhile, are viewed as animalistic and banal, and treated only as fully human once expressed in a unique way, that is, romantic love. Marxism may also deconstruct Giddens’s notion of confluent love by dismissing it as merely a tentative solution to difficulties and maladjustments suffered by families due to the material conditions wrought by global capitalism.

But Marx failed to specify exactly how romantic love fits into the picture, with the concept of sentiment being the closest thing he brought into his discussion of intimate relationships. If the ideology of love espoused by the global Christian ecumene is used to evaluate the Marxist standpoint, the latter will not be able to stand its ground in its claim that only the lower classes are capable of experiencing romantic love. With its egalitarian and universalist appeal, a classist distinction would be rejected

by Christianity, classifying the Marxist view as discriminatory in its own way.

Going beyond this point of contention, Christianity and Marxism would find a common ground in asserting that in this day and age, with the “worship of the body” that global consumer capitalism promotes, even love has become a commodity for sale. As lovers negotiate property and other assets when they come together in a marital union, marriage is transformed into a business transaction. In an age of global capitalism, romantic love is exposed as a mere illusion, and disenchantment begins when all things holy become profane.

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