

‘Why do Lovers Break Each Other’s Hearts’ (1972)

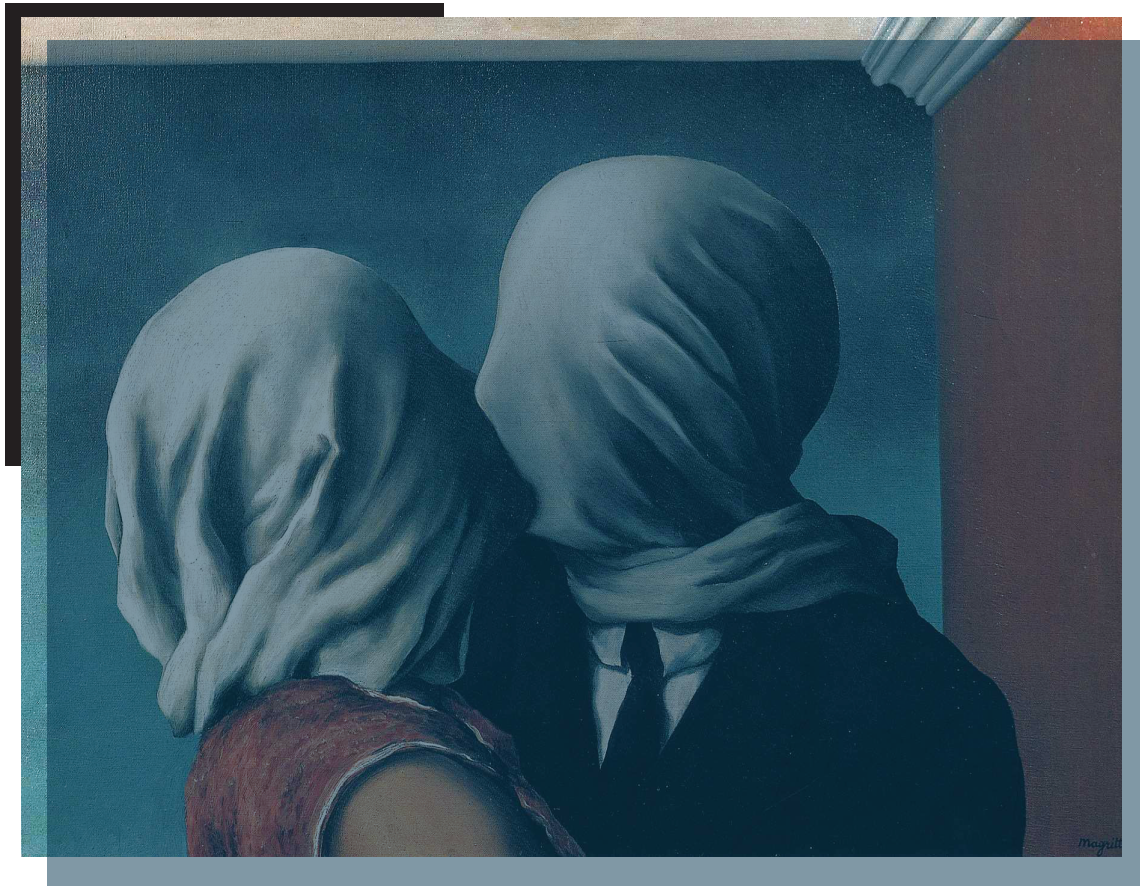
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“Sexual love is the movement that breaks the rules; an uprising of the senses that abolishes propriety. Time alters. A gasp lasts an hour, a night separates into heaps of minutes, a conversation from bar to bed to bus stop and has it been a fortnight or a day? Objects floor you with sudden meanings; a weed becomes a flower beside a canal that is an ocean. A shell swells with feelings. Touches echo, nerves misbehave, hands ricochet. Eyes kindle and melt in a world of constantly altering surfaces. Love offers a glimpse of the most intimate communication that we have experienced. Everything that’s said about love is true, except the happy ending.

To love under capitalism has an especially bitter intensity. It is to repossess feelings to which we have become foreign. Emotions without rules or prices or power attached to them. In love’s bed, mutual subjectivity allows absolute altruism. The precious is given without price, the delight lies in delighting another. We recover that which we have been taught to withhold or avoid or simply have had shaken out of us by parents and teachers and each other. It is a state of revolution against the discoloured flatness which is ‘normal’, sleep-work-play life. Lovers win a short parole permission to trail after the ditch-flowers, to stare through the swirls of harbour water to the stone and become entranced by the dart and hover of storm clouds. Sexual love cannot be hoarded, accumulated or displayed. Neither moth nor rust can corrupt it. In general, the individualism so avidly developed in us by the capitalist system is for external application. We are persuaded to distrust our emotions when they conflict, as they usually do, with competitive success. If we are going to ‘get somewhere’ and ‘make something of ourselves’, education, not experience should be our guide. The adverts school us, the slogans batter us down. Get without giving. Take what you can. Look after No. 1. ‘The less you are, the less you express your life, the more you have, the greater is your alienated life and the greater is the saving of your alienated being’, wrote Marx. But even the bourgeoisie flounders on love which it is obliged to honour however much it loathes its expression. For love is a zone of subjectivity which also has official approval, a precarious holiday where feelings and finance are supposed to rule. Love allows you, briefly, to return to what was once yourself. . .

It is not hard to see why such an unruly state of mind has to be strictly rationed and kept controlled with greeting cards, marriage licenses and marzipan cakes. It is unpredictable, disorderly and bad for industrial

relations. It’s too simple and too difficult and doesn’t consume enough. For the effective growth of commerce, it should only occur once in life, its emotions must be surrounded with regulations, icing sugar and lace, and made as well-behaved as possible. It would be easier if it didn’t exist, this love, and for many it never does. But it has proved quite impossible to remove the gnaw or eradicate the itch. So it has been turned into something quite different, a mouldy, consoling sort of emotion which, for men, is made palatable by bouts of ‘sexy’ sexuality which must be purchased or forced rather than discovered. Sex itself must be turned into work, with its own rules and games. It is forced back into the black sack of marriage, a contract to feel in a matter whose very essence lies in its voluntary nature. It is not just a case of love ‘withering under constraint’, as Blake, one of the first rebels against the laws



of trade, marriage and scholarship, put it. Love is buried by love’s forms and sexual love becomes an acted insincerity ...

The echoing sense and unbroken subjectivity are made silly and impossible to sustain, for such love needs leisure and more space than five football fields. That kind of love becomes, in practice, a privilege for the rich. The rest of us are left to read about the affairs of ballet dancers and the loves of princesses. Ordinary love is locked up in its own company, given guards called Jealousy and Fidelity, taken out in public once a month, and stifles to death beneath the TV and the nappies. The underside of love surfaces and passion now wants its penalties. A once equal love capsizes and itself becomes the subject of the division of labour. The man is the human being who has to be kept fuelled and sustained, fit to do his stuff in the outside world. As time passes, it is mysteriously the man who comes to fill it, placates, anticipates, mollifies, sacrifices, and then becomes bitter and made lonely by what love has become. The labour of love becomes just another labour.

Love can quickly become a species of tyranny, a word offered and withheld like a dog’s biscuit. A word that turns suddenly into a slap, a trap, a threat. ‘Do you love your mummy?’ means ‘reward me for your dependence.’ ‘Mother knifed baby to prove she loved it’, says a local paper. Love becomes

involuntary, a system of emotional green stamps; promised, stored and exchanged. The platitude that love is close to pain becomes cruelly true, the intensity of violence replaces the gentleness of love. Not just broken alcoholic men, but smart young executives find violence sexy when the fun has gone out of love.

Violence is the occupational disease of a wife. Men who would never harm their dog beat their spouses regularly. But the slow death of love is a different sort of pain, full of guilt and dread and exhaustion. Love becomes an oath or a pang or a regret; the grease in the spoon, the hook in the tune. Women are less keen to forget; that is why they are called sentimental. But mulling over memories while contriving to be lovely-to-come-home-to is apt to produce a mawkish and sickly romanticism, no use to anyone. The evidence of loveless marriage lies concealed and unrecorded in doorstep grumbles and corner shop intimacies and smoothed-over-rows in public bars, to be kept from the outside world if it can be...

How the economic set-up of the family mutilates the emotions of love and the unequal relations of the sexes and turns a particular pair of lovers into sparring partners are not the most important crimes of a system which can starve whole continents and destroy and make ugly entire cities. But it is one of the saddest. Feelings which have regulated life itself are relegated to a mere memory. A glimpse of something which has become a taunt. Once mixed up with marriage and corrupted with cash, love is bent into a certain shape which no longer fits feelings. People are sorted into twos and marched up to the wedding cake while relatives make bitter jokes behind their backs and hire purchase agents lick their pencils. The family is a convenient self-financing unit of competitive consumption and indoctrination, the original sweatshop where production and repair and reproduction are carried out by an unsafe, unpaid and under-appreciated women workforce. For the state is it cheap at the price. How much easier than spending on good public transport or comprehensive group care for young children or community centres and restaurants which provided much better and cheaper food and entertainment than the commercial outfits if everyone does it at home once by one. Exhaustingly, inefficiently, expensively. And then sits in front of the TV to watch still more invented happy families serving out their Shreddies. The family provides certain certainties and keeps us all well wadded with stupidities. If it is breaking down, that is the occasion for rejoicing not dismay. We need to start finding alternatives and demanding the facilities to make them work, not trying to force the broken pieces back together again."

