

COMMODIFICATION OF HUMAN EMOTION AND MARRIAGE IN CAPITALISM (A READING OF PROBST'S *THE MARRIAGE BARGAIN* FROM A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE)

A MERCANTILIZAÇÃO DA EMOÇÃO HUMANA E O CASAMENTO NO CAPITALISMO (UMA LEITURA DE *THE MARRIAGE BARGAIN* DE PROBST NUMA PERSPETIVA MARXISTA)

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Abstract: This research aims to analyze Jennifer Probst's *The Marriage Bargain* from a Marxist perspective to examine how social institutions like marriage and human emotions are commodified in the era of late capitalism. The novel deals with the theme of love, romance and marriage, but also highlights the commodification of marriage in a capitalist society. The two main characters, Alexandria and Nicholas, use marriage as a means to solve their economic problems, challenging the traditional notion of marriage as a bonding of two souls. This research aims to explore this phenomenon. This qualitative study employs a Marxist literary analysis of the novel, focusing on the commodification of marriage and human

emotions in the late capitalist society. It examines how the novel's characters challenge the traditional concept of marriage and use it as a commodity to satisfy their material needs. The core finding of this research is that under the harsh economic pressures of late capitalism, human emotions and social institutions like marriage are commodified, and people compromise their ideals for economic gain. The novel shows how marriage is used as a commodity to solve economic problems, and how the traditional concept of marriage is being challenged by the utilitarian values of modern societies. The research concludes that *The Marriage Bargain* is an illustrative example of the commodification of marriage and human emotions in late capitalism. The exploration of this discourse clarifies how the institution of marriage is being used as a commodity to satisfy material needs. The novel raises an uncommon issue regarding the marital relationship, and the utilitarian attitude of its characters towards their own marriage represents the emerging social problem of the reification of human relationships.

Keywords: Marxism. Commodification. Human emotion. Marriage. Late capitalism.

Resumo: Esta investigação tem como objetivo analisar a obra de Jennifer Probst, *The Marriage Bargain*, de uma perspectiva marxista, para examinar a forma como instituições sociais como o casamento e as emoções humanas são mercantilizadas na era do capitalismo

tardio. O romance aborda o tema do amor, do romance e do casamento, mas também destaca a mercantilização do casamento numa sociedade capitalista. As duas personagens principais, Alexandria e Nicolau, usam o casamento como meio de resolver os seus problemas económicos, desafiando a noção tradicional de casamento como uma união de duas almas. Esta investigação pretende explorar este fenómeno. Este estudo qualitativo emprega uma análise literária marxista do romance, centrando-se na mercantilização do casamento e das emoções humanas na sociedade capitalista tardia. Examina a forma como as personagens do romance desafiam o conceito tradicional de casamento e o utilizam como uma mercadoria para satisfazer as suas necessidades materiais. A principal conclusão desta investigação é que, sob as duras pressões económicas do capitalismo tardio, as emoções humanas e as instituições sociais, como o casamento, são mercantilizadas e as pessoas comprometem os seus ideais para obterem ganhos económicos. O romance mostra como o casamento é usado como uma mercadoria para resolver problemas económicos e como o conceito tradicional de casamento está a ser desafiado pelos valores utilitários das sociedades modernas. A investigação conclui que *The Marriage Bargain* é um exemplo ilustrativo da mercantilização do casamento e das emoções humanas no capitalismo tardio. A exploração deste discurso clarifica a forma como a instituição do casamento está a ser utilizada como uma mercadoria para satisfazer necessidades materiais. O romance levanta uma questão invulgar sobre a relação conjugal, e a atitude utilitária das suas personagens em relação ao seu próprio casamento representa o problema social emergente da reificação das relações humanas.

Palavras-chave: Marxismo. Mercantilização. Emoção humana. Casamento. Capitalismo tardio.

Introduction

This study investigates the escalating commodification of social institutions, such as marriage and human emotions, within the contemporary capitalist society. *The Marriage Bargain*, a literary work by Jennifer Probst, serves as a poignant representation of this stark reality concerning the evolving characteristics of social institutions and human emotions in a late capitalist society. The research is specifically centered on a Marxist analysis of *The Marriage Bargain*, which not only addresses the overarching themes of love, romance, and marriage, but also emphasizes the commodification of marriage. Despite the apparent focus on love and romance, the novel provides ample room for a Marxist literary examination.

Commodification is the process of objectifying human emotions, and is often associated with reification. In Jennifer Probst's novel, *The Marriage Bargain*, the characters Alexandria Maria McKenzie and Nicholas Ryan utilize marriage as a means to solve their financial difficulties, thereby challenging the traditional notion of marriage as a bond between two individuals. By marrying for practical reasons, such as to save a family home or inherit a corporation, the characters view marriage as a commodity rather than a union of emotional and spiritual connection. Marriage, as a social institution, is typically viewed as a compromise

between two individuals of opposite sexes, with love, care, and support being key components. However, conflicts and misunderstandings between partners can sometimes lead to divorce.

Jennifer Probst's novel, *The Marriage Bargain*, sheds light on the challenges faced by traditional marriage in modern societies. The utilitarian values of the characters in the story challenge the conventional concept of marriage, exposing the emerging social problem of reification of human relationships. Late capitalism's economic power replaces the traditional human relations, kinships, and marriage with a definitive term. This process highlights the shifting notions of commodification, where abstract human emotions and norms are traded for objective monetary values. This trend results in the commodification of human emotions, reducing human relations to use value in which they are used and exchanged with materials.

In Jennifer Probst's novel, *The Marriage Bargain*, the protagonists Alexandria Maria McKenzie and Nicholas Ryan enter into a contract that stipulates the terms and conditions of their living arrangement as if they were married. This contractual marriage serves as a means for Nicholas to inherit his uncle's assets. This study aims to examine how the social institution of marriage is being commodified to fulfill one's materialistic desires. Furthermore, the investigation seeks to shed light on the underlying reasons for challenging the conventional concept of marriage and treating human relationships as a commodity.

Jennifer Probst is a prominent lesbian novelist who offers a nuanced portrayal of the complex and transitional society of late twentieth-century America. Probst artfully interweaves her personal experiences with social issues, featuring characters from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite the broad range of topics explored in her works, Probst maintains a stylistic simplicity that blends idealism and realism, rendering her works accessible to a wide readership. Probst's literary contributions in exploring introspective themes are unparalleled, offering a positive and transformative impact on readers grappling with personal struggles and confusion. Her exceptional contributions have earned her a place among the distinguished authors of the modern era, with her unique perspective and style emerging as a singular voice in contemporary postmodernist literature.

Research Objectives

To analyze the commodification of marriage and human emotions in Jennifer Probst's *The Marriage Bargain* from a Marxist perspective.

To examine how the utilitarian values of the novel's characters challenge the traditional concept of marriage and use it as a commodity to satisfy their material needs.

To explore the underlying reasons for the reification of human relationships in late capitalism and how the commodification of marriage serves as an illustrative example of this phenomenon.

Review of Related Literature

Several scholars have scrutinized Jennifer Probst's literary works from various perspectives. Vailas (2004) has shed light on how Probst's writing has effectively disseminated liberal ideals in society. The liberal values that Probst espouses in *The Marriage Bargain*, however, exhibit certain elements of cynicism. Vailas remarks as follows:

On one level, *The Marriage Bargain* deals with the idea of a young generation of New York who have become enamored with deviant passions which leave them uprooted from the established ideals and norms of society. But, on a more intimate level, it examines the idea of happiness and whether or not man (or woman) is destined to ever find contentment. (12)

According to Vailas, *The Marriage Bargain* portrays certain principles that can guide an individual's life in disarray. However, Vailas' perspective towards marriage appears to be one of cynicism, as her characters are portrayed as either unfaithful or marrying for financial benefits. This pessimistic outlook towards life leads to abstract philosophical musings.

Smithson (1979) provides a succinct assessment of Jennifer Probst's notable literary works, delineating a gradual shift in tonality and thematic content. Smithson's perspective is presented below:

Probst's novels bear the mark of imaginary or uncertain crimes. This can be called an innovation in the field of commercial literature. In *The Marriage Bargain*, the billionaire Nicholas Ryan is interested in nominal marriage. He is hopeful that this contract marriage is likely to land him in favorable condition. But the result turns out to be unexpected. At last Nicholas is filled with worry and anxiety. Nick's case of contract marriage is quite different. (17)

Smithson asserts that Jennifer Probst's representative works contain innovative elements. Although the subject matter of *The Marriage Bargain* may be unpalatable and shocking to many readers, it is still relatively new. Probst masterfully dramatizes the societal pressure to conceal one's inner desires and personality in her novels.

Tammy (2001) approaches *The Marriage Bargain* by examining the sequence of events within the novel. She believes that the plot's development is the most captivating aspect of the novel. With this in mind, Tammy comments as follows:

The eventual denouement of the narrative is relatively disappointing. Alex is forced to choose between the naturalness of human emotions and pressures of shifting economic condition. Deciding she has already lost the battle, Alex gives up trying to run his own bookstore and accepts the offer of Nicholas. The moral dimension of the contract between Alex and Nicholas is noticeably striking. It deserves attention and analysis. (17)

In her analysis, Tammy challenges the ordering principle of events in *The Marriage Bargain*, which she finds to be complicated and frequently decisive, leaving the reader unsure. Despite this, Tammy notes that the novel opens up new possibilities even in moments of disappointment and frustration. The characters Alex and Nicholas remain calm and composed in the face of unfavorable situations.

Sander (2001) evaluates Jennifer Probst's novel *The Marriage Bargain* based on her ability to create new terms and neologisms to convey her original ideas. Sander believes that Probst's work promotes the emergence of a new concept of individual freedom and a demand for more space for creative expression. Probst introduces a new type of interpersonal relationship, which she describes using a newly coined term and neologism. This relationship requires understanding and familiarity between married partners to create a greater level of creative expression. Such a relationship can occur between a married woman and her unconventional lover turned fiancé. Probst also uses phrasal expressions and poetic neologisms throughout the novel to convey different implications. These expressions contain the ethos of Victorian protocol, indicating the influence of Victorian mentality on the language used by sober-minded individuals of that era.

Bernard (2005) examines the theme of double consciousness in Jennifer Probst's *The Marriage Bargain*, particularly in relation to women who are aware of their growing passion. He suggests that Probst's text does not lend itself well to feminist analysis due to the author's excessive sobriety. Bernard notes that the character of Alex is intelligent and educated, but also immature and irrational in her decision to marry Nicholas due to financial pressures. He sees a similarity between the author's life and the protagonist's life, and suggests that extreme feminist consciousness harms the character's conscience. The novel is an example of popular fiction with naturalistic fervor and seems to showcase Probst's intellectual prowess through the character of Alexa.

Wade (1999) regards *The Marriage Bargain* as a work that possesses both subtle and straightforward characteristics. The primary issue that Jennifer Probst addresses in the novel

is Alex's struggle between the financial pressures and the demands of her conscience. Stephen Wade presents further insights on the novel with the following statement:

The Marriage Bargain is something of a subtle text in which Alexa is caught between the deterministic forces and conscience. Among Americans of the twenty first century, and especially among the young, morality and sex are interchangeable terms. Frequently the judgment of right and wrong behavior rests almost exclusively on sexual behavior. Evil is identified with sex: there the devil wields his greatest powers. the relaxed social and sexual rituals of his time occupies the forefront of the novel. (27)

Wade argues that Alexa struggles to uphold her moral principles when faced with practical challenges. The novel focuses on the conflict between commercial and ethical values. Probst's uncertainty is evident when she attends a party and is torn between asserting her independence and seeking her father's approval. By highlighting the negative impact of limited financial opportunities, Probst implies the influence of determinism.

Macey (1992) sees both optimism and pessimism in *The Marriage Bargain*. The novel portrays the pessimistic condition arising from the growing poverty of the working class. However, Macey believes that there is also a ray of hope in this pessimistic world. He argues that the novel shows that even in the midst of corruption and sickness, there are yearnings and inarticulate strivings for a better world and a life with more dignity. Macey praises the novel's portrayal of financial liberation and pragmatic choices, but he criticizes the lack of reflection on the decency and dignity of human ambition.

Knopf (2003) praises Jennifer Probst's personal style in *The Marriage Bargain* and her ability to convey emotion without being overly sentimental. He notes that the novel combines introspection with stream-of-consciousness techniques and that the narrator's sarcasm and peculiarities contribute to its success. Knopf emphasizes the author's wit and flair, and describes the novel as a matchless piece of art.

Previous studies on *The Marriage Bargain* have overlooked the issue of how human emotions and feelings are commodified in a society dominated by commercialization and industrialization. The novel portrays the bleak fate of financially weak individuals and the lack of affection and emotion in prosperous people who prioritize monetary values over humanity. The protagonist, Alexa, agrees to be the wife of a wealthy man, Nicholas, for financial gain, and Nicholas needs a wife to secure his dead uncle's properties. The financial concern leads to the rapid commodification of human emotions and even sacred social

institutions like marriage. The researcher identifies this as a new and original topic to explore in the novel.

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study utilizes the theory of Marxism to examine the issue of proletarians as others. Marxism, which has had a significant influence among workers and intellectuals in capitalist countries, has been utilized by non-Marxist intellectuals, particularly sociologists and historians in Western countries. Many liberation groups in Third World nations now clearly understand the character of their opponent thanks to Marxism, which has been adjusted to deal with the particular combination of primitive and sophisticated capitalist circumstances.

The researcher adopts Marx's dialectical approach, which views actual changes in history as the outcome of opposing tendencies or contradictions. Marx's materialism is also used to analyze the interaction between social conditions and behavior, and people's ideas. Marx's theory of alienation in the labor system is based on four relations, which are investigated. These relations include the worker's alienation from productive activity, the product of that activity, other human beings, and the distinctive potential for creativity and community.

Marxist critics' application of the perspective of Marxism in interpreting literary texts is also examined. The study emphasizes the significance of literature in supporting capitalist ideology since it is consumed mostly by the middle classes. Writers who sympathize with the working classes and their struggle are regarded favorably by Marxist critics. On the other hand, writers who support the ideology of the dominant classes are condemned. The research draws upon the insights of various Marxist theorists, whose interpretations may differ in breadth and sympathy.

Analysis of Probst's *The Marriage Bargain*

This study employs a critical analysis to investigate the commodification of human emotions and feelings in the literary work titled *The Marriage Bargain*, written by Jennifer Probst. The novel presents a clear depiction of the conflict between revered human emotions and the prevalent forces of corporate capitalism. The story portrays how monetary values have eroded the sanctity of human institutions such as marriage, rendering them transactional and exchangeable. The character of Nicholas Ryan, who is the nephew of the head of a corporate house, Uncle Earl, highlights the significance of wealth in this narrative. Nicholas

Ryan eagerly anticipates being included in his uncle's will as a beneficiary of his vast properties and wealth.

This text describes the story of Nicholas Ryan and his uncle Earl, who is the head of a corporate house with significant wealth and properties. Nicholas is hoping to become his uncle's legitimate heir and inherit his estate, but his uncle puts a condition on his will that requires Nicholas to get married and live with his wife for at least one year before he can inherit everything. Unfortunately, Nicholas has a history of frequently changing romantic relationships, and his uncle is doubtful that he can have a stable family life. As a result, Nicholas seeks a marriage that is purely transactional, and he looks for a woman who will act as his wife for just one year, with the sole purpose of fulfilling the conditions of his uncle's will.

The present study employs the theoretical perspective of Marxism as its primary theoretical framework. The research methodology is based on this approach. The theory of Marxism, as developed by prominent theorists such as Marx, Lukacs, and Adorno, is referenced throughout the analysis. The researcher asserts that Marxism is an appropriate lens for this study, given that *Of Mice and Men* examines themes of economic oppression, dispossession, and other forms of social injustice. As such, the theoretical perspective of Marxism is particularly salient to the analysis of the novel.

Marxism is a theory he created that explains how society functions as well as the development of human history. Marx (2001) held that all other facets of society are primarily determined by the state of the economy and the structure of the productive system. Marx's theory describes the characteristics of capitalism, which he believed to be profoundly unsatisfactory and wished to eradicate through a bloody uprising in order to build a communist society. Marx (2001) disagreed with reformers who claimed that a simple shift in ideas could transform society because he argued that prevailing ideas are the outcome of material or economic realities.

Nicholas maintains a platonic relationship with his contract wife by refraining from any sexual interaction with her. He seeks a wife who will cohabitate with him solely for the purpose of fulfilling a contractual obligation without any emotional or physical expectations. The contract stipulates that the wife will receive a lump sum payment at the end of the year for fulfilling her role as a contractual wife. The following excerpt details the peculiarities of this proposed contractual agreement between Nicholas and his prospective spouse:

A Woman who does not love me.

A woman i dont desire to sleep with.

A woman who does not have a big family.

A woman who does not have a big family.

A woman who does not have any animals.

A woman who does not want any children.

A woman who has an independent career.

A woman who will view the relationship as a business venture.

A woman who is not overly emotional or impulsive.

A woman whom i can trust. (18)

The extract describes Nicholas's view of marriage as a tool to secure his inheritance rather than a traditional emotional bond. He seeks a woman who will live with him as his wife without the expectation of sexual or emotional intimacy. Nicholas sees marriage as a commodity that can be traded and converted into monetary value, which sets him apart from traditional views of marriage as involving emotion, attachment, responsibility, trust, and cooperation.

According to Marx, the interaction between the forces of production and the relations of production largely determines the kind of society and the course of social evolution. While the latter relates to the social structure of production and who owns or controls the productive resources, the former refers to the technology employed for production. In a capitalist society, the owners of the producing resources are also those who pay the employees. Marx saw that the new social relations of production under capitalism eventually hindered the full development of the new forces of production, leading to contradictions and revolutionary change. David Riazanov, a supporter of Marxism, also emphasized this contradiction in contemporary capitalist society.

Nicholas is in search of a contractual wife who does not require emotional or affectionate attention, and is content with a purely transactional relationship. His main objective is to secure his inheritance of his uncle's properties, and he sees marriage as a tool to achieve this end. Despite having fond memories of Gabriella, a sharp conversationalist who he enjoyed spending time with, he dismisses the idea of marrying her as he fears she is already falling in love with him. According to Nicholas, the supermodel he is currently dating is ideal for social functions and sex, but not for marriage. He is afraid of emotional attachments and seeks a loveless marriage that would only last for a year.

Nicholas concluded his quest for a wife when he meets Alexa, who is in dire need of money to save her bookstore from imminent bankruptcy. With the help of Maggie, Nicholas eventually meets Alexa and presents his proposal that she become his wife for a year, which she agrees to. Nicholas explains to Alexa that their marriage is essential for him to secure his inheritance of his uncle's properties.

George Lukacs' theory of totality is essential to his own thinking and the subsequent development of Western Marxism. He had a desire for totality even in his early works, and it became the center of his book "History and Class Consciousness," where it is seen as the core of both Hegel's and Marx's methodologies. Lukacs (2001) warns against being too orthodox in interpreting Marxism and emphasizes the importance of the concept of totality. The theory of totality is crucial to later Western Marxists' interpretation of the metaphysical tradition and Marx's philosophy and their critique of the modern world. Therefore, understanding Lukacs' theory of totality is helpful in finding the right way to the entire tradition of Western Marxism.

After extensive dialogue and deliberation, Alexa has ultimately decided to accept Nicholas's proposal. The two parties intend to derive mutual benefit from their union, which has been forged out of economic necessity through the execution of a contract to cohabit as spouses. Upon the conclusion of their one-year marriage, Alexa will receive a specified amount while Nicholas will inherit his deceased uncle's assets. Subsequent to this, their marriage shall be deemed null and void. The excerpt portrays how their marriage has been arrived at primarily due to financial considerations:

"I am marrying you for business reasons, Alexa. Not your family." Her chin tilted up. He made a mental note of the gesture. Seemed like a warning before she charged into battle. "Believe me, i am not happy about this, either, but we have to play the part if people are going to think this is real." His features tightened but he managed a nod. Fine. His voice dripped with sarcasm. "Anything else?" She looked a bit nervous as she shot him a glance, then rose from the chair and began pacing the room. (30)

Alexa accepts Nicholas's proposal due to economic pressure, but is uncomfortable with the idea of being his wife and sharing a home. She feels nervous about the situation.

Lukacs' theory of totality is considered Hegelian and has played a significant role in Western Marxism. The defeats of proletariat revolutions in the early 20th century and Lukacs' work in History and Class Consciousness led to the formation of Western Marxism. Lukacs'

thought has been viewed positively for raising the philosophical level of Marxist studies, but some argue that it confines Marx's philosophy to the logic of classical German philosophy. However, Lukacs and other early Western Marxists aimed to transform the present world, not just criticize official Marxism. Lukacs recognized the limitations of classical German philosophy in fulfilling this mission and saw the tension between his thought and Hegel's philosophy, which he used to critique bourgeois society.

Prior to accepting Nicholas's proposition, Alexa retires to her residence to ponder the proposal. She finds herself in a state of dilemma, as circumstances compel her to opt for an option that is not congruent with her internal preferences. The excerpt sheds light on Alexa's predicament:

The man before her struck out on everything she believed in. This was no love match. No, this was business, pure and simple, and so very cold. While her memory of their first kiss rose from the recesses of her mind, she bet he had forgotten the moment completely. Humiliation wriggled through her. No more, she had her money and could save her family home. But what the hell had happened to her list? (32)

When materialistic pressures become overwhelming, concerns regarding morality and social decency are often overlooked. However, women like Alexa are hesitant to enter into loveless and commercialized relationships. It is typical for someone in Alexa's position to consider the potential negative consequences of agreeing to live with Nicholas and to contemplate how such a decision would affect her social status and reputation.

During their discussion about their proposed marriage arrangement, Nicholas and Alexa have a conversation about the topic of sex. Nicholas suggests that they should be discreet about their sexual activities, which causes Alexa to feel shocked and uncomfortable. To alleviate her concerns, Nicholas explains that he deals with high-end clients and has a reputation to protect, so they must be extremely discreet. Despite feeling odd about Nicholas's proposition, Alexa tries to maintain her composure and not show any change in expression.

Alexa finds herself in a predicament where she is unable to disclose to her parents about her decision to enter into a contractual marital agreement with Nicholas, with the intention of securing funds to rescue her bookstore and support her family. She is constrained to fabricate a falsehood due to her inability to reveal the truth. In her soliloquy one evening, Alexa ponders on the hypothetical response of her family towards her

mechanical matrimony with Nicholas. The given extract portrays Alexa's perturbed psychological state:

His offer suggested a real relationship between them, and it made her long for more. She should have introduced her family to a real-life love-not a fake. The lies of the night pressed down on her spirits as she realized she had made a bargain with the devil for cold hard cash. Cash to save her family. But cash nonetheless. (59)

Alexa and Nicholas enter into a contractual marriage to overcome financial difficulties, but they have to lie to their parents about it. Alexa feels guilty about keeping this a secret from her parents but is compelled by their dire financial situation. However, they both treat marriage as merely a means to an end, disregarding its societal significance.

Marx criticized capitalism for alienating workers from their labor and turning them into robotic objects that prioritize profit over human need. He argued that the only way to overcome this alienation and create a democratic, planned society is through a class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, Luxemburg (2001) questioned the feasibility of abolishing advanced market-based societies and replacing them with a fully planned and controlled society, and criticized the shaky assumption underlying Marx's notion of alienation. Marx's scientific socialism was based on his theory of value and concept of alienation, which exposed the contradictions of capitalism and the necessity of the class struggle.

During their conversation regarding her dire financial situation, Nicholas asks Alexa about the extent of her desire for the money and notes that she does not seem enthusiastic about marrying him and participating in a sham wedding while lying to her family. He questions whether this is all solely for the purpose of business expansion. This inquiry from Nicholas leaves Alexa perplexed, and she considers disclosing the truth to him, that:

The lack of medical insurance to pay the staggering bills. Her brother's struggle to get through medical school while supporting a new family. The endless calls from collectors until her mother had no choice but to sell the house, already heavily mortgaged. And the weight of responsibility and helplessness Alexa carried along the way. "I need the money", she said simply. "Need? Or want?" She closed her eyes at the taunt. (60)

Alexa's financial desperation leads her to accept the offer of a man who wants to use her for a year in exchange for a sum of money. On the other hand, Nicholas is motivated not by need, but by greed or the desire for money, which leads him to enter into a fake marriage contract.

After a few weeks of living together as a contracted couple, the initial terms and conditions agreed upon by Nicholas and Alexa fade away. Alexa begins to feel the negative effects of their commercialized marriage, while Nicholas tries to follow the predetermined rules. Alexa realizes that telling Nicholas the truth would be self-destructive and instead decides to protect herself from his condescending behavior by cultivating his hatred towards her. She believes that this will allow her to maintain her pride and family's reputation while avoiding his unwanted advances. This shows that when a genuine relationship is based on commercialization and commodification, it can lead to harmful outcomes. Despite Nicholas' failure to uphold their agreement, he crosses a line with Alexa that poisons their relationship, and she takes deliberate steps to safeguard herself from his mechanical passions and sterile affection.

Jameson (2005) critiques structuralism in literary criticism for its failure to consider historical context. He advocates for a dialectical criticism that takes into account both synchronic and diachronic aspects of texts. Critics accuse Jameson of trying to create a totalizing theory of interpretation, but Jameson denies making transcendent claims and asserts that his theory is openly ideological and superior to other theories in terms of comprehensiveness.

In order to safeguard her family's reputation, Alexa determines that the most effective strategy is to provoke hatred in Nicholas. She adamantly rejects any notion of accepting pity from him. Despite the transactional nature of their marital arrangement, their innate bodily desires cause them to forget the conditions they had established. They consciously maintain a boundary between them even though they are legally married. However, their repressed sexual impulses periodically manifest themselves, ultimately overpowering and overwhelming them. The following passage illustrates how their suppressed sexual impulses and instincts weaken their resolve and motivate them to transgress the boundary they had established:

Primitive sexual energy swirled between them like a tornado gaining speed and power. His eyes burned with a sheen of fire, half need, half anger as he stared down at her. She realized he lay between her open thighs, his hips angled over hers,

his chest propped up as he gripped at her fingers. This was no longer the teasing indulgence of a brother. This was no old friend or business partner. This was the simple want of a man to a woman, and Alexa felt herself dragged down into the storm with her body's own cry. (84)

Nick and Alexa fail to uphold the terms of their contractual marriage as they succumb to their sexual desires. Despite Alexa's attempt to make Nick hate her, their attraction for each other is too strong. Their agreement does not constrain the power of human emotions and impulses, which are not rule-bound.

Nick and Alexa experience natural human desires such as the need for intimacy, care, and sexual satisfaction, yet they impose strict rules on their relationship. The restrictions they place on their marriage lead to the manifestation of intense and unfulfilled desires. Nick struggles to reconcile his bodily impulses with the contractual obligations he has made with Alexa, causing inner turmoil. The following passage illustrates this conflict:

Her voice was raspy. Hesitant. Her nipples pushed against the soft fleece with demand. His gaze raked over her face, her breasts, her exposed stomach. The tension pulled taut between them. He lowered his head. The rush of his breath caressed her lips as he spoke right against her mouth. "This means nothing." His body contradicted his words as he claimed her mouth in a fierce kiss. (85)

Nick and Alexa's marriage is based on a commercial agreement that does not allow them to seek love or mutual affection. However, they are both overpowered by their passions, and their attempts to control them result in violent and deviant behavior. Despite trying to maintain a distance from each other, they are drawn to one another, and their hunger for sexual satisfaction knows no bounds. As a result, their marriage does not follow the path they expected it to take.

In contrast to other theories, Marx asserts that the reasons for a product being considered a commodity can be traced back to human needs, desires, and practices. In other words, the "use value" of a commodity is determined by its ability to satisfy human wants, while its "exchange value" is dependent on the desire of people to exchange it for something else. Additionally, a commodity's exchange value can only be quantified if it possesses a value derived from the exertion of human labor power, and that value is calculated based on the average labor time necessary to produce similar commodities.

In their marriage, intimacy is a threat to both Nick and Alexa, but they are compelled to stay together due to practical reasons. Their happiness is tinged with fear, and the tension

between them is highlighted in a scene where Nick corners Alexa in the kitchen. Despite the threat of a more intimate touch, Nick wants to fulfill his sexual desire for Alexa and keep her as a long-term partner. This is a departure from their initial contractual marriage arrangement, and Nick is surprised by the turn of events. Alexa also seeks to cheat on him, and their marriage is marked by a reversal of normal things.

During their marriage, Alexa announces that she is pregnant, which shocks Nick. Despite his clear reluctance to have a child, Alexa remains hopeful that Nick's feelings will change with time. This is highlighted in the provided excerpt, where she tries to convince him that he may feel differently in the future. However, Nick is reminded of Gabriella's words, which haunt him. Their marriage began as a business transaction, but the unforeseen consequences of such a union have become a reality. It remains to be seen if Nick will accept the baby that Alexa will give birth to.

In light of the foregoing, it may be deduced that the ramifications of the transformation of human emotions and revered social institutions, such as marriage, into commodities inflict immense suffering upon both Alexa and Nick. The compelling force of human desires renders economic and non-economic incentives irrelevant. The practical truth cannot be disregarded in favor of immediate financial gain.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the commodification of human emotions in the era of late capitalism. *The Marriage Bargain* by Jennifer Probst illustrates how sacred institutions like marriage are treated as commodities that can be traded and transacted with money. The core finding of this research is that under harsh economic pressures, human feelings and emotions are no longer the pure bonding between two individuals. Alexa, a woman from a respectable family, enters into a contractual marriage with Nicholas for money. While Nicholas is seeking a wife to inherit his uncle's properties, Alexa is compelled to collect money by hook or crook due to her business's financial difficulties. As their marital life proceeds, both Alexa and Nicholas enter into a sexual relationship, and Alexa gets pregnant. The attempt to commodify human emotions incurs hazards and discomforts, ultimately ruining the beauty of human relationships.

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