Commodification of the Human Condition in Dennis Kelly's *Love and Money* (2006)

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to critically examine how the theme of commodification in David Kelly's *Love and Money* functions as a lens through which the modern consumer culture in contemporary Britain is critiqued. Within the human context, commodification refers to the modern capitalist culture's reduction of whatever is human and cultural to its mere economic value. Love, marriage, death, and the human condition at large are conceived as mere commodities whose value is estimated according to their material worth and, hence, lose their inherent human depth and become dehumanized. Throughout the play, the characters are involved in the consumer culture to the utmost either by lusting after buying and possessing and, thus, falling prey to debt or by weighing every human aspect by its monetary value and, hence, suffer emotional emptiness. Through exploring the destructive influence of the consumer culture and commodification on the human condition, this paper argues that Kelly invites his readers to take a critical stance towards their lives, priorities, and values. The first step is by being fully aware of how one's values and priorities are shaped by the materialistic culture they live in, and then comes the second step: altering one's values. The play, hence, encourages people to investigate how obsession with owning and the relentless pursuit of material gains erode human relationships and cause spiritual death; therefore, they are encouraged to pay special attention to the choices they make and the priorities they choose.

Key Words

Dennis Kelly; *Love and Money*; Commodification; Consumerism; materialism; Capitalism

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Dennis Kelley's play, *Love and Money* (2006), dramatically investigates the closely related and intricately intertwined themes of love, happiness, human relationships, and materialism. The play digs deep into the lives of a young couple, David and Jess, to explore how love in particular and human relationships at large are deeply affected by the materialistic environment the characters live in. At the core of the play lies the main issue of how the contemporary culture of consumerism and commodification negatively impacts love and intimacy. Although David and Jess are in deep love with each other, they soon get into trouble and conflict because of financial pressures and debts. As a result of the financial situation they are in, they are enforced to make life choices that not only affect them but all those around; Jess chooses to commit suicide, whereas her husband chooses to accelerate her death instead of rescuing her. In other words, the drama traces the downfall of its main characters when they are trapped by the ease of borrowing and seduction of credit. (Kay)

In *Love and Money*, Kelly attempts to explore how money has seeped into every aspect of our life in the present, how consumption has become an end in itself rather than a means, and how the power dynamics have had the upper hand in any human relationship especially when one party holds financial dominance over the other. "Dominated by money and consumerism," Elzbieta Baraniecka argues, "the world represented in Dennis Kelly's play … is an emotionally vacuous place where … real connection or feeling have become true rarities, as what is often mistakenly deemed as the safer consumerist desire has replaced the far more precarious experience of love and true connection" (171). The play, hence, explores, through the intersection of love and money, the human nature, and the endless quest for happiness in a world dominated by

materialism, at the core of which are the phenomena of consumerism and commodification. In this way, *Love and Money* invites the readers to reexamine how these phenomena have devastated the most intrinsic human values of love and intimacy.

The main objective of this paper is to critically examine how the theme of commodification in *Love and Money* functions as a lens through which the modern consumer culture in modern Britain is critiqued by pinpointing how the commodification of human relationships, at the centre of which is love, leads to the devaluation of such key human bonds. For attaining this objective, the study raises and attempts to answer the following critical questions: What is commodification? How has commodification transferred from the economic sphere to the most intimate human realms? What is the relationship between commodification and consumerism and how both are closely linked to materialism? To what extent has commodification crept into human relationships? How does it affect the most intimate human values of love, death, and friendship? How does Kelly invite the readers to take a critical stance against the dominant culture of consumerism and commodification?

In *A Dictionary of Sociology*, commodification within the Marxist theory is defined as "the production of commodities for exchange via the market as opposed to direct use by the producer." In other words, it can be described as the process by which goods and services that were previously produced for mere use purposes have come to be bought and sold in the market. Commodity, therefore, is defined as "something that is produced for the purpose of exchanging for something else," be it another commodity, service, or money whereas, in the realm of human relationships, commodification connotes "the transformation of relationships, formerly unattained by commerce, into commercial relationships … of buying and selling" (Marxists Internet Archive Encyclopedia).

In this sense, commodification indicates the attachment of an economic value to something not previously considered of economic worth. Phrased differently, it refers to the transformation of services, goods, social relationships, and personal assets into

commodities that are salable in the market. In its human sense, the concept of commodification is used to critique the modern capitalist culture that reduces whatever is human and cultural to marketable goods. For example, in the field of human relationships, love, marriage, romantic relationships, and familial ties are treated as having transactional nature that is profoundly affected by the economic conditions of the time and place as is exactly the case in *Love and Money*, where everything human and dear is handled in economic terms; love is exchanged for a luxurious Audi, friendship is bargained for a job, and death is a chance for showing off. In all such cases, the intrinsic human value of a relationship is replaced by its extrinsic financial advantage. Erich Fromm, the renowned psychologist, analyses the state of modern man under capitalism and its concomitant phenomenon of commodification as follows:

> That is the way he experiences himself, not as a man, with love, fear, convictions, doubts, but as [an] abstraction, alienated from his real nature, which fulfills a certain function in the social system. His sense of value depends on his success: on whether he can sell himself favorably, whether he can make more of himself than he started out with, whether he is a success. His body, his mind and his soul are his capital, and his task in life is to invest it favorably, to make a profit of himself. Human qualities like friendliness, courtesy, kindness, are transformed into commodities, into assets of the "personality package," conducive to a higher price on the personality market. If the individual fails in a profitable investment of himself, he feels that he is a failure; if he succeeds, he is a success. Clearly, his sense of his own value always depends on factors extraneous to himself, on the fickle judgment of the market, which decides about his value as it decides about the value of commodities. He, like all commodities that cannot be sold profitably on the market, is worthless as far as his exchange value is concerned, even though his use value may be considerable. (138)

The roots of commodification can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century when the feudal system was replaced by the capitalist one. Instead of producing for actual use and consumption, workers started to produce for the sake of exchange in the market with money considered the main exchange value. The seeds of commodification, thus, sprouted in this age where labour itself was commodified, i.e., workers began to sell their power to work for wages. From that moment on, commodification has dominated every aspect of life extending even to the most intimate personal and social domains.

It was Karl Marx who firstly wrote indirectly about the phenomenon of commodification in his seminal book, *The Capital*. In his book, he critiqued capitalism, accusing it of dehumanizing workers by viewing their labor as a commodity. Under the 18th century capitalism, workers toiled and produce not for themselves or even for others to use their products, but for the new capitalists who sold their products in the market in return for money and bought the workers' own effort in return for wages. Marx shed light on the negative phenomena of alienation, exploitation, and dehumanization that accompanied the capitalist economic system where the human value came second to the market value. In *The Communist Manifesto*, he gave an articulate, meticulous analysis of the new phenomenon:

> The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors", and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment". It has drowned out the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it

> has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. "The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil and has reduced the family relation into a mere money relation. (qtd in Marxists Internet Archive Encyclopedia)

By the advent of the twentieth century, capitalism widely spread accompanied by rapid and unprecedented increase in the production rates, and so did commodification. With the new-market driven ideologies of globalization, privatization, and free market, commodification has been entrenched into daily life, expanding to fields it has not reached before: education, healthcare, and even personal identity, and the value of goods and services has come to be attached more with their exchange value rather than with their true functional value (Slater 32). In other words, the actual functional utility of a product has taken a backseat to its monetary value in the market; people no longer value something for its utility or actual use, but rather for its money worth (return/exchange value), i.e., how much it costs. Matters have worsened by the introduction of a third value, sign value, i.e., the social status that a certain commodity confers on its owners. Sign value has prevailed the contemporary consumer culture where people buy for the prestige and social status the ownership of things bestows on them. Commodities have acquired far more symbolic connotations that have aggravated the tendency for transactional consumerism. This new evolution reflects a consumerist society increasingly driven by the fervent desire for consumption and the symbolic significance of objects where material possessions are intricately related to personal identity and social status.

The commodification of human life is, thus, a complicated and multidimensional process that has deep historical roots. It is no longer the economic process that Marx wrote about two centuries ago; rather, it has infiltrated every aspect of the human life with its accompanying consumerism, reducing the innate value of human relationships to their monetary, economic advantage. Within the commodification context, human bonds, on the top of which is love, have turned into saleable commodities based on their utility.

Against this background, Kelly's *Love and Money* can be critically read. In Kelly's play, commodification of the human condition represents the main theme around which all events of the play revolve, underlining the characters' relationships and their quest for happiness and satisfaction. In the drama, monetary values are invasive of and distorting to human ties in a contemporary world where love and human values are reduced to mere transactional bargains and, therefore, are subject to the laws of marketplace (Slater 16). Commodification in the play is manifest in the way the characters deal with one another as means to materialistic ends, often preferring financial gain over genuine emotional bonds. The play investigates the dire consequences of commodification on the human condition, pinpointing the emotional and moral emptiness that results when all human values are weighed according to their economic value. In that sense, *Love and Money* is considered a strong critique of the contemporary consumer culture and its concomitant commodification where the fervent search for wealth and social status erodes the basic human foundations of intimacy and integrity.

Love and Money is about a loving couple, David and Jess, who are crushed under the heavy feet of contemporary capitalism in Britain. Once they get married, they are overwhelmed by the consumer culture to their ears, buying, or at least hoping to buy, whatever they see on TV or in shop windows, be it a bunch of cheap CDs or an expensive Audi. The logical result is that they fall prey to debts. Under the pressure of their miserable economic state, Jess commits suicide and David, instead of helping her, accelerates her death by pouring Vodka in her throat while she was struggling with death. Interwoven within the tapestry of characters are different samples of people whose talks and deeds are mainly centered on money, power, and economic value of things: Jess's father and mother, who are driven by an inferiority complex based on their low financial status; Val, David's ex-girlfriend, who dreams of photosynthesizing cash; Dunkan who is desperate to exploit others for making money; and Debbie, who "gives the middle finger to

capitalism" (Betteridge). Through the interaction between these different models of characters, the play presents "a powerful look into how capitalism is seeping into our relationships with others and with ourselves" (Lygaki).

The play's main critique of capitalism and its ensuing phenomena of materialism, consumerism, and commodification is made crystal clear through the main narrative line of David and Jess who find themselves trapped in the vicious circle of consumption and debt, echoing the major dilemma of contemporary society that encourages consumerism and commodifies the human condition at large. Through a non-linear plot that begins the incidents from the end and goes back to the actual start of the story and through the sophisticated portrayal of representative characters of contemporary people, *Love and Money* uncovers how obsession with money and consumerism destroys personal relationships, corrodes individual identity, and devastates the moral values of a society. The characters are portrayed as having insatiable desires for material success and commodity ownership. These desires, however, lead to the devastation of their lives both physically and spiritually. For example, Jess's unquenchable desire for possessing drowns her in debt, which finally destroys her romantic relationship with her husband and leads to her suicide at the end of the play. The capitalist society is to be hold responsible for this dilemma as it equates self-worth with the material possessions one has.

From the very beginning of the play, the strong sophisticated relationship between money on the one side and the psychological and human values on the other side is clearly stated by the protagonist. On being asked by his French love bout how he feels at the present moment, he answers expressively, " I feel worthless because I'm not getting a pay upgrade this year" (Kelly 12). David's words deeply reflect the profoundly intertwined relationship between money and one's self-esteem in the contemporary world. Wealth and financial stability have become the measurement of one's worth. They boost one's self esteem by providing a sense of psychological security and social status, whereas financial concerns

lead to bitter senses of worthlessness and failure. The reason beyond this complicated connection between money and self-image is that modern cultures equate success with monetary achievement, which in turn affects how people see themselves and perceive their status in the world. David, further, explains to his girlfriend how he, and by large all people in contemporary Britain and the whole world without exaggeration, live under daily stress and a permanent sense of insecurity: "I live this life here where everything is measured in pay grades and pension schemes and sales targets … when your orders are cancelled and you are scared of losing your job" (13). The quote reflects the daily socio-economic pressures sensed by individuals within the context of contemporary capitalism. David indirectly, yet harshly, critiques contemporary capitalistic Britain in which man's worth is measured by such economic factors as pay grades, pension schemes, etc. The stress and anxiety felt in such situations aggravate one's deep sense of alienation from their societies and their selves alike and reminds instantly of the Marxist theory about alienation and how capitalist systems commodify human life and undermine personal identity.

Though the romantic relationship between Jess and David starts strong and promising as we know from Jess's parents' talk and from Jess herself at the very end of the play, it soon fades away under the pressure of their economic condition. "The breakdown of [the] relationship is symptomatic of an entire global culture's collapse," Charlie Pullen argues in his review of the play. The dissolution of the David-Jess love is therefore symbolic of a much broader societal decline under the nagging demands of the capitalist system where consumerism has become a trend and debt has destroyed strong bonds of love. The failure of the main characters to sustain their love reflects the malfunction of the modern capitalist society at large. Fragmented personal relationships and instable love ties mirror the broader social and cultural disintegration where money and financial security have taken precedence over human values. *Love and Money*, hence, warns us not only about the burdens of debt, "it also forces us to re-examine what we mean by

happiness" (London Theatre). Is happiness in love or money? Does consumption give us a permanent sense of happiness or a mere shadow of it? Where should we search for happiness: in a strong human relationship or in a splendid commodity? – All these are questions raised by the love-money conflict the play highlights.

The main problem of the couple in Kelley's play lies in their insatiable desire for buying and possessing, even if they are penniless. We know, for example, that David was test-driving a luxurious Audi "with ABS braking, climate control, and satellite navigation" the same day his wife committed suicide though he himself admits later that "we had debts, big debts" (Kelly 15). As for his wife, she is helpless against her voracious appetite for buying. She purchases anything and everything that comes her way, exemplifying the contemporary consumerist culture in which consumption is an end in itself rather than a means. In such a case, material possessions function as a substitute for true happiness and genuine self-fulfillment. Lyn Gardner comments in this regard that "true happiness [in contemporary world] is not just love, but an MFI kitchen as well." By setting love and material possessions in contrast with each other, Gardner questions the pursuit of happiness in consumerism, critiquing the priorities and values of modern culture in which goods and possessions are no longer for their actual use value but for their monetary and, much worse, for the sign value they confer on their owner. With the increasing interest in the social value of possessions, everything has been commodified in modern life resulting in much psychological void rather than happiness and fulfillment. Purchasing more and owing much do not necessarily "equate to being better off, or more importantly, to being happier" (London Theatre). For that reason, Jess finally commits suicide.

Beyond Jess's suicide is a long history of consumerism and commodification. The play portrays her as the direct victim of her desperate desire for buying, ending by decent in debt and melancholy (Kay). Throughout the play, she is after buying, whether she needs or not. She is one of those who know the price of everything but the value of nothing; as a result, she owns things for

the sake of owning, seeking a temporary sense of happiness that rapidly vanishes leaving behind deep void that cannot be filled but with love and true human relationships. She lives a precarious life, depending on external, uncontrollable factors for attaining happiness. This dependency introduces fear and anxiety in her life and finally leads her to commit suicide in an attempt to get rid of her psychological unfulfillment (Baraniecka). Although Jess's words in the final scene, the actual beginning of the story, marks her enthusiasm to begin a new life full of happiness and love with David, the actual course of the play shows that such hopes and excitement are determined to come to an end in a materialistic culture in which love can be exchanged for a luxurious Audi and dreams are encapsulated in a splendid house. There is no room for love or hopes in this world and, thus, she ends her talk about her new romantic life saying, "That's it." (Pullen).

If suicide for Jess is a means of terminating her suffering, debt, and sense of void, for David it is an opportunity for a splendid lifestyle. Seeing her struggling with approaching death, he does not feel or show any sign of sympathy for her; rather, he thinks of his future welfare and a life free of debts and financial struggles. What comes to his mind in the death scene is the Audi he is planning to buy. Tom Williams comments in this regard that, "we witness David in a long monologue via a text messaging to his French girlfriend wherein he admits that his wife's suicide allowed him to buy an Audi Automobile." Davis's attitude and bahaviour spell out the pure capitalist congruence between personal tragedy and materialistic gains. "One of the main sins of capitalism, …" M. R. A. Habib argues in his *A History of Literary Criticism From Plato to the Present*, "was that it reduced all human relations to commercial relations. Even the family cannot escape such commodification" (534). As such Jess is a commodity for her husband. Her death is equated to a splendid Audi and an end to all debts. When he comes home finding his wife struggling with death, the first ideas that spring to his mind are that "I'll be able to afford a car now," and "that seventy thousand pounds worth of debt had just

died" (Kelly 16). The protagonist's attitude towards the death of his wife typically reflects a selfish, materialistic mindset within the context of the modern capitalist culture where one's values are basically centered around self-interest and utilitarian gains rather than love and compassion. However, as the play points out, David still has faint traces of fading humanity that temporarily conflict with his huge materialistic heritage on seeing his wife dying. He is hesitant what to do: to respond to his humanity and rescue his wife and, hence, remains for the rest of his life struggling with his financial problems or to accelerate her death and, therefore, put an end to all his financial troubles. The last choice wins, and he decides to behave in accordance with his capitalistic code of ethics: "The debt was crushing us … You just feel crushed. I understood what she was doing. Then I'm thinking 'The car is going. I can see the Audi going.'" (16-17). Finally, he decides to contribute to her death by pouring Vodka into her throat by force to speed her death in one of the most horrifying scenes ever. This master scene pronounces a death sentence on the remainder of humanity under capitalism and announces the predominance of commodification in contemporary society, alienating people from their true human essence and the richness of their interpersonal connections.

Death is commodified in Kelly's play not only by the husband whose first thought on seeing his wife dying is that "£70000 of debt has just died" (Gardner), but also by the parents who see in their daughter's death an opportunity for pretense and showing off. The play, therefore, sketches prototypical contemporary characters who prioritize social prestige and financial gains over true human relations and genuine connections. They do as such out of an exaggerated interest in social expectations and how others may think of them. The results are devastating, and commodification dominates every aspect of life, including death itself. Erich Fromm comments in this regard that commodification in modern life has extended to domains never thought of before, giving a striking, imaginary example of how modern man's religious views are affected by commodification:

> Modern man, if he dared to be articulate about his concept of heaven, would describe a vision which would look like the biggest department store in the world, showing new things and gadgets, and himself having plenty of money with which to buy them. He would wander around open-mouthed in this heaven of gadgets and commodities, provided only that there were ever more and newer things to buy, and perhaps that his neighbors were just a little less privileged than he. (131)

In *Love and Money*, Jess's suicide because of her addiction to possessing and therefore descent into debts and financial troubles becomes the pivot around which all themes of commodification of the human condition revolve. The father-mother talk about the death of their daughter, the way she is buried, and how her tomb looks in comparison to the adjacent tombs embodies much about how death itself, not just love, is commodified. Throughout their conversation, we feel a striking, shocking tone that they are speaking about a commodity not their daughter's death. All they are concerned about is the appearance and cost of their daughter's grave. "Even in grief," Gardner notices, "Jess's parents eaten up with envy because of the woman in the grave next to their daughter's will have a bigger, more expensive headstone." "What a monument, what skyscraper is going to tower over our daughter," as such the mother shows deep sorrow, but not for her daughter's death but for their social status that will be damaged by a Greek monument with "great black stone, gold inlay, columns pillars, crosses, photographic reproductions in stone of the deceased" (Kelly 20-21). The father concludes the comparison saying that, "they're very respectful of their [dead]," in a direct hint that death, respect, and, by large, any human relationship or intimate feeling is to be measured by the amount of money spent, not the genuineness of the feeling involved. Death has, thus, become financially costly as the spending goes even after Jess's death (Pullen). The parents go on comparing their daughter's death to that of the Greek woman's on a mere materialistic basis, stating that the grave cost "three thousand eight hundred pounds … it's two thousand five hundred pounds for the plot alone for the

space, for the dirt that you put your daughter inside" (21-22). Such a comparison of the graves' cost reflects an ostentatious culture that only pays attention to appearances (sign value). The father-mother talk epitomizes the commodification of one of the most sacred and intimate aspects of human life, death, on two levels. The first is the capitalist societal level in which death and burial are commodities to be traded; one has to pay in order to find a space for burying a family member. The second level is that of the personal human sphere where parents are mainly concerned about the amount of money they have spent and how people would look at them in case another's person's memorial was more expensive and elegant than their daughter's.

The main problem of Jess's parents, and all characters by large, is that they have been raised in a capitalist society where everything is estimated by either its monetary value or social merit. They buy and possess for showing off rather than for using and they are so worried about their image in people's eyes even in their deepest intimate moments. The play is pregnant with such examples; the father, for instance, expresses his deep worry that the Greek man may judge them negatively in case he knows about their daughters' suicide, "is he judging us!" (Kelly 23). Another occasion is when he compares their "three thousand eight hundred pounds" monument to the "twenty-five thousand pounds" monument of the Greek lady, asking horrifyingly, "what does that say about us … I mean what does that say about our love for …" (24). The previous question about what people will think of them when they notice the mediocrity of their daughter's grave compared to its adjacent Greek one reflects the extent to which love and grief are measured by materialistic means: buildings and expenses. The parents' sorrow at the humble tomb of the daughter due to their modest economic status suggests how love and death have become subject to the dynamics of the market like any other commodity. The father's questions about how people may perceive them underlines the disturbing idea that the depth of their feelings and the intimacy of their love is judged by the splendidness or mediocrity of their

daughter's grave. In that way, modern capitalism has succeeded in commodifying the deepest emotions of people and their special moments of joy or sorrow by subjecting them to the values of the market and, therefore, reducing them to their monetary values instead of their humane ones.

However, faint traces of humanity are still there struggling for survival under the pressure of modern materialism; an example of that is the father's ecstasy on destroying the splendid temple-like grave of the Greek woman. This pleasure can be justified on the ground that he feels that he has managed, even if partially, to break off the fetters of the capitalist ideology with its accompanying commodification of human values. He, therefore, enthusiastically articulates his tremendous joy as follows:

> I lifted the sledgehammer and cracked it down on the Virgin Mary's skull and I felt fantastic. I swung it into the columns and I felt God-like as they cracked, as they exploded into white dust, I felt like I had molten iron running through my veins when the roof caved in and I laughed when the stone photographic representation cracked into three pieces and fell to the floor. (Kelly 26)

In destroying the luxurious monument, the father feels that he has snatched victory over capitalism with its sweeping commodification though he himself is part and parcel of it. He feels that he has restored the human part to its natural position by destroying such an expensive monument in a symbolic act of getting rid of the shackles of the monetary values according to which the worth of anything is estimated. He has eked out victory over the contemporary materialistic culture with its fatal weapon, namely money: "I felt power over money. I felt righteous. I felt that this was an act of goodness, of the triumph of the little man" (26). The triumph of the little man here is over materialism, consumerism, and commodification that have belittled man in contemporary world to a mere commodity; hence, he immediately feels that " my Jess was being brought back into life" (26) because he has triumphed over the forces that dehumanized her while living, led to her suicide, and

desecrated her death later on. In other words, he has restored the sanctity of death as an intimate human phenomenon.

In Kelley's *Love and Money*, commodification is also intertwined with the theme of power relationships. The play deeply investigates how the economic pressures and the fervent desire for possessing destroy personal relationships and turn them into mere commodities on the marketplace. Characters have two different, yet complementary, attitudes in this regard; the powerful manipulate others for the sake of achieving financial gain and social status, whereas the powerless attempt to sell their potential for whoever can pay. Both cases result in the pervasiveness of a power dynamic where personal traits are measured by their monetary value. Fromm comments in this regard:

> What is modern man's relationship to his fellow man? It is one between two abstractions, two living machines, who use each other. The employer uses the ones whom he employs; the salesman uses his customers. Everybody is to everybody else a commodity, always to be treated with certain friendliness, because even if he is not of use now, he may be later. There is not much love or hate to be found in human relations of our day. There is, rather, a superficial friendliness, and a more than superficial fairness, but behind that surface is distance and indifference. There is also a good deal of subtle distrust. (135)

Through the unhealthy relationship between the protagonist and his ex-girlfriend, *Love and Money* presents a bleak image of how modern man has turned into a mere commodity for his fellow man. The interaction between David and Val regarding a work opportunity that the latter may secure for the former reflects much about how commodification has perpetuated every aspect of modern life, resulting in hierarchical power dynamics in which the rich can exploit the poor while the poor help them in their mission. As a typical capitalist, Val aggressively exercises her power over David on all levels: psychological, social, and sexual. She keeps manipulating him, asking him embarrassing questions that are meant just to humiliate him and belittle his self-worth; she asks him

if he still loves his wife, how he is going to feel working with her, and if he would be aware of the boundaries between her as an employer and him as an employee. She also keeps repeating every now and then that "I am doing you a favour" and "I would be doing you a favour" in an attempt to demarcate the boundaries she has told him about before. The power manipulation of David is not only exercised psychologically by diminishing his self-esteem, but sexually as well by approaching him physically and then detaching herself on time in an attempt to play with his feelings. Val's behaviour can be understood on a personal level as a deep unconscious desire for avenging David's known pride and his being loved by all their mutual acquaintances while she is not. On the wider social level, however, Val's attitude seems so natural in a capitalist culture where man is a mere commodity for his fellow man. In his illuminating book, *Disposable people: New Slavery in the Global economy*, Kevin Bales call such exploitation "new slavery": "the total control of one person by another for the purpose of economic exploitation" (6). He further explains the phenomenon as follows:

> Slavery is a booming business and the number of slaves is increasing. People get rich by using slaves. And when they've finished with their slaves, they just throw these people away. This is the new slavery, which focuses on big profits and cheap lives. It is not about owning people in the traditional sense of the old slavery, but about controlling them completely. People become completely disposable tools for making money. … In the past, slavery entailed one person legally owning another person, but modem slavery is different... Slaveholders have all of the benefits of ownership without the legalities. Indeed, for the slaveholders, not having legal ownership is an improvement because they get total control without any responsibility for what they own. For that reason, I tend to use the term slaveholder instead of slave owner. (5)

In response to Val's manipulation of him as an object, David shows utter surrender to the way he is treated in. Throughout

the conversation between them, he manages to show the submissive face of a modern slave who says and does what he is dictated to say and do. For example, when she states more than once that she is doing him a favour by offering him a job opportunity, he immediately attempts to satisfy her inflated ego by giving her what she exactly wants, "That's what I'm here for; I'm here to ask you for a favour" (Kelly 35). On reminding him of the social boundaries between an employee and his boss, he also responds approvingly that "If you employ me, I will be aware of where the boundaries are" (33). Finally, she expresses her fear of his pride in an attempt to subjugate him utterly to her will as an employer, and in response he reassures her that "I'm not proud anymore" (35). Deep inside his consciousness, David is aware of the rules of the commodification game in contemporary society; he is to present himself as sellable commodity in the marketplace for whoever pays more. "Making oneself a sellable commodity is a DIY job, and individual duty," Zygmunt Bauman argues in his *Consuming Life*. In the same direction, Fromm writes that the main mission of modern man is to experience himself as a commodity, an investment, "to sell himself as profitably as possible on the market. His values as a person lies in his salability, not in his human qualities of love, reason, or in his artistic capacities" (348). In this way, David's reactions and behaviour can best be understood.

In *Love and Money*, Val represents the ugliest face of modern capitalism with all its concomitant phenomena of materialism, consumerism, and commodification. In her talk with David, she sums up the malady of the modern age so meticulously: "Five star life on a two star salary" (Kelly 34). The statement encapsulates how people within the context of consumer culture are constantly striving for a luxurious and extravagant lifestyle, regardless of their actual income. The motivation for buying and owning is fueled by the facilities the society provides for people through the easiness of credit cards and the abundance of luxury goods that entice them to live beyond their limits and, thus, easily fall prey to debt and commodification. Once debt-ridden, the individual is willing to sell

their skills and abilities for whoever pays more in the same way a commodity is sold for money in the market. Val also embodies the inherent conflict between the religious values that celebrate whatever is human and spiritual and the materialistic ones that cherish what is material and worldly. In her talk with her ex-boyfriend, she announces that she does not believe in God anymore; rather, she has replaced Him with the god of modern capitalism: cash. "Money. I believe in money … That's my thing now," she asserts to David (37). She goes further by striking an analogy form botany about how she photosynthesizes money the same way plants generate energy: "And in the same way that a plant takes oxygen and nutrients and uses the process of photosynthesis to turn sunlight into energy, I take customers and employees and use the process of hard fucking work to produce cash. I am a photosynthesist of cash" (37). By comparing herself to a plant that converts sunlight into energy, she indirectly compares employees and customers to mere tools and means that can be exploited for achieving this end, reflecting the bleak utilitarian view of human relationships within the capitalist systems. Reducing human interaction to mere transactions that lead to the accumulation of cash mirrors the dominant impact of commodification on society. The metaphor underlines a worldview which subordinates all human aspects of life to their material worth and their contribution to the accumulation of wealth.

The rest of the characters in the play contribute through their behavior, speech, and attitudes to the critique of modern capitalist societies in which commodification of the human condition is prevalent. A full act, for example, is dedicated to symbolic number characters who comment on the state of contemporary societies, describing the world we live in as "an almost terminally cynical world" (Kelly 41); they also remind the audience of the true essence of man, i.e., to help his fellow man not to commodify him: "The only thing that is real is the thing that you have done to another human being," and that "systems and numbers and the way we do those things are in some way not real" (47). There is also a

conversation between a sexually obsessed character, Duncan, and a sadistic woman, Debbie, who both complete the panoramic portrait of the commodified contemporary society through their attitudes; Duncan commodifies people by turning them into sexual objects for the sake of earning more and living a life of abundance, while Debbie pours her anger on her bosses by attempting to poison their coffee machine (Williams, Tom). However, Duncan attempts every now and then to dig into the human nature to understand it and reach its true essence as when he asks Debbie to tell him about the true Debbie not the faked one that she pretends to be, "The real Debbie … something you've never told anyone else" (60). The request reflects how the person feels anxious and psychologically restless when they get away from their true human nature and fall prey to consumer cultures that stripe them of such a nature.

All these stories about consumerism and commodification are told in a non-traditional narrative line as the whole story begins from the real end, the death of Jess, and then rolls back to the actual beginning, Jess so happy and optimistic about her romance with David. No flashbacks are used, just the plot runs in reverse. Throughout, a collection of stories is juxtaposed with a subtle thread that unifies all of them, i.e., criticizing commodification of the human condition. "Kelly juggles characters back and forth over time to create startling juxtapositions," David Bendict notices and adds, "The play is more a contrasting set of snapshots on the debt question than a traditional narrative." The target beyond this reversed plot narration technique is twofold: making striking contrasts and employing dramatic irony. An example of a sharp contrast achieved by the narrative technique is between the beginning and end of the play. The play ends with Jess full of joy and happiness because of her approaching marriage to David; her eyes are bright with optimism about a promising future and a thrilling romance to begin: "I feel so blessed and lucky and grateful and looking forward. I'm just looking forward" (Kelly 87). However, the play begins, contrastively, with the heroine committing suicide because of debts and a failed marriage. The

opposition is also made clear through the parents' talk about the wedding and how everybody talked then about the romantic love story between the couple. These sharp contrasts are meant to highlight the painful journey the couple passed through till they reached the tragic end, with consumerism and commodification in the foreground of the misfortune.

Dramatic irony is also an important device utilized by Kelly to underline the devastating impact of consumerism and commodification on the characters' lives and personal relationships in *Love and Money*. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience are aware of what will happen as well as the motivations of the characters while the characters themselves are not. As such is the case in most events of Kelly's play. The audience understand the key reasons beyond the descent of the heroine and the financial and moral dilemma of the hero though the characters themselves are unaware of them until too late. Jess's suicide is the direct result of her obsession with buying and owning beyond her daily income. Throughout the play, she is keen on assuming a social status that is not hers through accumulating her material possessions with the intention to impress others by her splendid lifestyle. The irony lies in the fact that she imagines that wealth and property will grant her happiness and satisfaction, while the audience knows in advance that these will be the ultimate cause of her despair and suicide. In a similar way, David pretends throughout to be the rational party in the romantic relationship by seeking a job to increase his income or blaming Jess for being a spendthrift. The dramatic irony lies in the fact that the audience know that all his deeds and words are hollow as he himself is involved in game by his irrational decisions. He is the one that keeps dreaming of an expensive Audi that is far beyond his financial state and the one that contributes criminally to the death of his wife by not rescuing her when dying. The audience are also aware of how he presents himself as a sellable commodity to Val, agreeing voluntarily to be part of the commodification game. The use of dramatic irony aggravates the sense of human tragedy in the play

as the characters are blind to the real causes beyond their dilemmas, namely their fervent pursuit of wealth and material possessions.

Through its dramatization of how commodification has crept into every aspect of human life in contemporary societies, *Love and Money* sharply critiques the modern materialistic culture and its values. The play portrays how consumer culture and commodification can reduce intimate human relationships such as love to mere bargains and, therefore, they lose their inherent human depth and become dehumanized. In most times, the characters are portrayed as struggling with their life circumstances under the pressure of the sweeping waves of consumerism and commodification in modern societies which destroy genuine love, deform the sanctity of death, and erodes mutual human relationships. This portrayal functions as a reminder of the devastating impact of the consumer mentality on the human condition at large, which finally leads to alienation and emotional void. Through exploring the destructive influences of the consumer culture and commodification on human relationships, the playwright invites the readers to take a critical stance towards their lives, priorities, and values. The first step is by being fully aware of how one's values and priorities are shaped by the materialistic culture they live in, and then comes the second step: altering one's values. The play, hence, encourages people to investigate how obsession with owning and the relentless pursuit of material gains erode human relationships and cause spiritual death; therefore, they are encouraged to pay special attention to the choices they make and the priorities they choose.

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