

True Love's Kiss and Happily Ever After: the religion of love in American film

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Abstract: In this article I argue that romantic love, as portrayed in film, has in postmodernity become a site both for theological reflection and theological encounter, opening through a popular cultural theological aesthetics a window to experiences of divine grace, beauty and love. I show how historically this has come about through the intertwining of courtly love literature with erotic mystical discourse and through an immanentization of religious and theological discourse. This connection comes out most clearly through my analysis of the function of the kiss motif in films. I look at two film series, The Matrix trilogy and Shrek quadrilogy to see how romantic love as exemplified through the kiss becomes salvific and redemptive. I also note how religious discourse often now takes place under the guise of and in the genre of romantic comedy. In concluding I make a case for treating the theological relevance of romantic love in film more seriously, and also for seeing the positive value of romance in film as a theologically and aesthetically rich site for experiencing (divine) beauty, wonder, and grace.

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Keywords: film, kiss, love, religion, romance, Shrek, The Matrix, theology

Introduction

In this article, I investigate romantic love in American film as a site for experiencing a divine presence in the immanent everyday experiences of love, marriage and family (Williams, *Dante* 6, 8, 40; Williams, *Outlines* 7, 9, 14, 17, 29).[1] To explore this theme I focus on the “kiss” in romantic love scenes in American films. To me the kiss in film is symbolic of a potential theological event where divine grace may infuse itself on the lovers, making their lives sacramental. I explore how the kiss can offer theological insight into how romantic love transforms into a window of grace, beauty and glory through which a divine light shines through the sacrament of love (Williams, *Outlines* 17, 29).

I shall draw theoretically upon several intellectual threads, including courtly love and romantic literature, Christian theology and theological aesthetics, and postmodern theory. Then, rather than look at romantic comedy per se, I shall focus on two different genres and film series, the action-adventure Matrix trilogy, and the Shrek quadrilogy of animated fairy-tales. I look at these films because I am interested in popular films of different genres where romantic love plays a substantial part. Furthermore, the kiss is central to the love plot in both film series and thus they offer good examples of how the kiss functions romantically and theologically. I shall finally briefly visit two romantic comedy films, *The Ghosts of Girlfriends Past* and *Something's Gotta Give*, to see how religious discourse plays out in romantic films.

Before I begin, I note two qualifications. First, this article presupposes and is written within a Christian theological and religious framework, though not adopting or espousing a Christian worldview. I do argue, though, that this Christian framework has left its legacy on modern and postmodern Western culture, including on romantic love and film. Second, while also treating other religious traditions and other international film cultures would enhance this investigation, unfortunately my own lack of expertise in either field limits me to a discussion of Christianity, postmodernity, and romantic love in American film. I hope, however, that this article may spur those with expertise in other traditions and cultures to take on similar investigations.

Courtly Love, Christian mysticism, and romantic theology

In his now dated work *The Allegory of Love*, C.S. Lewis writes of a “religion of love” as one aspect present in the European medieval genre then called courtly love literature, which, according to Lewis, is the precursor of romantic love literature (18).[2] He notes that this religion of love, as well as other aspects of the courtly love tradition, have informed and still inform our conceptions of love and romance, particularly in art and literature (Lewis 1-3). A glance at American film, past and present, would seem to validate Lewis’ idea. Not only is romantic comedy an ever-popular film genre, but romance seems to play its part in many American films. The search for true love, a soul-mate and a happily ever after, sometimes as the telos and summum bonum of life, seems to be an idea which dominates popular culture and which plays itself out as the preoccupation of many films. Moreover, this experience of love, in popular culture and in film, bears almost a sacred, salvific quality.

According to Lewis and other noted scholars, courtly love literature, and the religion of love within it, has not been derived from the Western Christian tradition nor the mystical tradition, where mystics use erotic language and the sentiments and experiences of human, romantic love to describe divine encounters and the soul's relationship with God (Boase 35, 85, 109; Lewis 18, 40). Courtly love and romantic literature from the medieval and early modern period only borrow the language and sentiments of Christian discourse for use in a completely different and profane direction (Boase 109-11; Perella 89-90). The two literatures are not analogous, partly because they differ in the object of love, one of which is human, and finite, the other which is divine, and infinite (Boase 83-85, 109-11). Moreover, the medieval Christian Church had no interest in promoting passion or romance within or outside marriage, while a staple of courtly love literature is passionate expression and desire (Lewis 13-17). Indeed, sometimes courtly love literature could be sacrilegious, extolling the virtues of secular love and erotic or sexual delight while mocking religious chastity and ascetic devotion (Lewis 18). According to this theory, courtly love or the religion of love and the Christian religion run counter to each other.

No doubt there is truth to this thesis. We need only to glance at the plethora of romantic comedy films to recognize this. A good majority of them do seem to worship and venerate this ideal of romantic love, particularly as the acme of human experience and fulfillment. Nevertheless, it would also do us good to question if that is all there is to it, or if there is some connection and relevance to experiences and discourses that have taken place within the Christian tradition, and even more so, if they might not bear some theological meaning and value.

For example, there are striking similarities between courtly love and early modern love poetry and Christian mystical discourse (Perella 85, 268-69). In Christian mystical discourse, as stated above, mystics often not only use erotic language and imagery, but also the sentiments and experience of human, sensual love to describe their experiences of God, from the biblical Song of Songs to the ecstasies of Saint Theresa (Perella 38-40). There is talk of love, sensual delight, passion, and ecstatic union with the beloved, which is here God or Christ (Perella 34-36). Moreover, in figurative art there is the same ambiguity, where representations of divine love or the soul's relation to God are depicted in human amatory fashion (Perella 33). Since the two discourses existed side-by-side, and scholars acknowledge that the courtly love tradition may have borrowed language and sentiments from Christian discourse, is it not possible that when these sentiments are "secularized" within a human, romantic framework, that they might not bear a remnant or a surplus of meaning of the tradition from which they have borrowed? Likewise, could Christian mystical discourse not also bear a remnant of human erotic experience as well, inasmuch as the two might appear more similar than believed in both cases? Why could the influence not flow in both directions? Why could courtly and romantic love literature not have influenced religious thinking, and why could it not become a bearer of actual religious meaning and experience?

Within the romantic love tradition itself some Christian writers do correlate human and divine experiences of love. One may help to lead to or understand the other, and they are inseparable in meaning under a Christian conception of love (Lewis 35, 41; Perella 86-90, 261). In the works of medieval authors such as Andreas Capellanus, for example, courtly love was a chaste and ennobling discipline, whose end was grace bestowed by the lady, grace that elevated the knight to blessedness (Lewis 33; Perella 100). But this

blessedness was not just in a secular sphere, or for secular delights or ends, but was a complement to Christianity: without Christian virtue and practice one could not attain the lady's benediction. Service to the lady was also thought to develop Christian virtues, such as humility, faith, and devotion (Perella 116-20).

The exemplum of the fusion of human romantic and divine love, however, would be Dante. According to twentieth century English (Christian) writer and poet Charles Williams, there is a theological tradition of romantic love, or a romantic theology, present in poets and artists, of which Dante is the greatest figure (Williams, *Dante* 91-93; Williams *Outlines* 7). For Williams, due to the Incarnation of Christ in the world and in the flesh, all human experiences bear a spiritual significance; through Christ's presence, they become possibilities of divine manifestation and an infusion of grace (Williams, *Outlines* 9, 15). For Williams this is particularly acute in romantic experience, including sexual love, particularly in marriage (Williams, *Outlines* 7-9). The experience of this love-feeling has a sacred aura to it that leads to God. There is something about the encounter with the human beloved that facilitates not only divine encounter, transcendence and grace, but also spiritual growth, devotion, and holiness. Williams writes:

The heart is often so shaken by the mere contemplation of the beloved that it is not conscious of anything beyond its own delight. The whole person of the lover is possessed by a new state of consciousness; love is born in him....But in this state of love he sees and contemplates the beloved as the perfection of living things: love is bestowed by her smile; she is its source and its mother. She appears to him, as it were, archetypal, the alpha and omega of creation...the first-created of God. (Williams, *Outlines* 16)

Moving from Dante's experience of Beatrice and the medieval experience of romantic love where passion, even sexual feeling, can be ennobled to a spiritual vision of beauty, the profane here is rendered into a beatific vision, where the two loves meld and mix into one.

Moreover, this vision has the capacity to see the human transformed to the divine, while remaining as it is. Williams continues:

Not certainly of herself is she anything but as being glorious in the delight taken in her by the Divine Presence that accompanies her, and yet is born of her; which created her and is helpless as a child in her power. However in all other ways she may be full of error or deliberate evil, in the eyes of the lover, were it but for a moment, she recovers her glory, which is the glory that Love had with the Father before the world was. (Williams, *Outlines* 16-17)

Just as in the Eucharist the material bread and wine come to bear the flesh and blood of Christ, so the beloved through love becomes a theophany or window to the divine, remaining what she is yet also being more than this. She becomes sanctified and becomes the locus of sanctification through an experience of divine beauty. He finally explains this romantic theology:

This experience does at once, as it were, establish itself as the centre of life. Other activities are judged and ordered in relation to it; they take on a dignity

and seem to be worthwhile because of some dignity and worth which appears to be inherent in life itself—life being the medium by which love is manifested. A lover will regard his own body and its functions as beautiful and hallowed by contact with hers....His intellectual powers will be renewed and quickened in the same way. And—if Romantic Theology is correct—his soul itself will enter upon a new state, becoming conscious of that grace of God which is otherwise, for so many, difficult to appreciate. (Williams, *Outlines* 17)

As in the Incarnation or God coming to the world and flesh through Christ, so these everyday experiences of love and marriage are the very site through which life can be experienced as having a deeper divine reality; indeed, without the Incarnation or these divine hierophanies in the everyday, we would not really understand the divine at all. There is a religious spirit in love, to which poets, especially Dante, have born witness (Williams, *Outlines* 56). Interpreting Dante's writings, particularly *The New Life* and *The Comedy*, through the lens of romantic theology, Williams again asserts the possibility of romantic love experience as a means of Christian grace. He notes that Dante's first visions of Beatrice awaken a *caritas* and *agape* or Christian charity and love in him, and inspire a beatitude (Williams, *Dante* 94-97, 108). In *The Comedy*, she leads him not only to divine contemplation, but also to redemption and salvation because she inspires holiness and virtue within him, an in-Godding or taking of the self into God (Williams, *Dante* 107-08).

The important things to note about Williams' romantic theology is that he finds the sacred in a common everyday experience, here of romantic love, and finds this also to be a means of sanctity and redemption (Williams, *Dante* 111). He writes that "holiness may be reached by the obvious ways as well as by the more secret." (Williams, *Outlines* 46). If we neglect the spiritual meaning of these experiences, then according to him, we neglect a way of sanctity (Williams, *Dante* 111). Furthermore, since according to Christian tradition marriage is a sacrament of the church, it bears the possibility of bestowing grace, and of experiencing other sacraments, including the Eucharist (Williams, *Outlines* 36-37). Through married life, a couple may experience not only Christ's manifestation and grace, but may relive the sacred experiences of Christ's life through their marriage (Williams, *Outlines* 14). However, while they experience this transcendence and grace, the experience also remains human and immanent. It is not an allegory, or merely symbolic; as Beatrice, it remains what it is, two human beings living together, as well as something more (Williams, *Dante* 109).

This theme of romantic love and the intertwining of sacred and profane can also be found in Robert Polhemus' treatment of 19th and early 20th century British literature in his work *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D.H Lawrence*. Though I would disagree with Polhemus' thesis that erotic faith in the British novels of this period is primarily a "religion of love" at odds with and supplanting traditional Christian faith, Polhemus' work highlights the continuance of the courtly and romantic love strain in literature, and also the inextricable links in this literature between eros or erotic faith and religion, religious experience, and religious language (1-6, 22-24). For Polhemus the novel itself is a trajectory of the erotic and erotic faith (3). Though Polhemus characterizes this erotic faith in love as tenser, more complex, more uncertain, and less positive than the "happily ever after" trajectory of romantic love in American films which links them to themes of grace and redemption, nevertheless Polhemus' work also attests to the power of

this erotic faith and belief and desire in the power of love, particularly to redeem and save (or damn in its absence), and its inextricability with traditional Christian theological ideals such as salvation and martyrdom (1-6, 47, 169). Whether it be the chastening and spiritualization of the erotic in Jane Austen (ch.2), the romantic passionate desire for ecstasy and union in Emily Brontë (ch.4), the attempted melding of the romantic, erotic and Christian in Charlotte Brontë (ch.5), the cult of domesticity and family in Victorian novelists such as Dickens (ch.6), the intertwining of the erotic with Christian themes of sacrifice in George Eliot (ch.7), the interconnection of the vulgar and holy in Joyce (ch.10), or the proclamation of the holy in the erotic and sexual in D.H Lawrence (ch.11), Polhemus underlines the importance of erotic love and desire in the lives of the characters, its ennobling and salvific (and sometimes dangerous) potential, particularly for the male, and its tensions with traditional Christianity (1-6, 10-12, 15, 47, 128, 249). Thus Polhemus' work further supports and attests to this legacy of the intertwining of theological and erotic discourse, which carries over into romance in film.

We may ask at this point what all this has to do with romantic film. I draw upon these authors and traditions simply to assert that there also has existed a Christian tradition from Dante onwards that did not see human romantic love and divine love as contradictory, but as part of the same continuum, or that may have fused the two experiences. It not only used erotic imagery and love sentiments to describe divine encounters, but saw in the human experience of romantic love a shadow of the divine and a means of grace. This tradition, instead of disavowing passion, eroticism, and devotion or sublimating it to divine being, exalts this passion and eroticism within human relationships as a means to the divine; in other words, eros is also a part of the Christian way to salvation (Williams, *Dante* 111). Indeed, as theologian Richard Niebuhr has explained in his work *Christ and Culture*, within Christian history and tradition, there have been positive understandings of the relationship between Christ and human culture and society. In these views, human culture has its positive value, worth and goodness, where one sees within the human something of the divine, and where the human can become a bearer of divine meaning and significance.

This deeper meaning to romantic love still exists as a remnant and possibility in modern representations, including in romantic film. Though we exist in a secular or post-secular era, Christianity has left its legacy on culture and in art and literature. This deeper religious meaning in romantic literature is one legacy that can be observed in romantic film as well. Moreover, I think this becomes even more relevant in our (Western) postmodern era, where a focus on and an exaltation of everyday life and experience, sometimes to a sacred level, becomes possible. After the "death of God" (particularly a Christian, transcendent God), Western religious discourse has to be displaced to a human, immanent, secular level. Because of this courtly love tradition and its connection with Christian discourse, and this theology of romantic love that also runs through it, romantic love in our postmodern era, particularly in film, has become a bearer onto which religious discourse has been displaced. In reverse of the original situation, human, secular language and sentiment now may be used to describe religious experience and to engage in religious discourse.

A Theological Aesthetics of Popular Culture and Romantic Love

Theological explorations of religion and film often treat issues such as theodicy, suffering, sin, evil, the demonic, or alienation; or they often explore themes of larger relevance such as oppression, injustice, war, violence, and gender.[3] Treatments often deal with alienation and religious or spiritual experience as occluded, particularly in postmodernity (Coates 17-18). Often scholars hold the view that theologically relevant films must be those that unsettle us from complacency and force us to confront the complexities, i.e. evils, in human existence (Jasper 242-44; Deacy, *Faith* 23-24, 26). Films that provide entertainment and pleasure, or make us happy, are sometimes judged as mere “wish-fulfillment” fantasies, considered too “trivial,” escapist and illusory to warrant theological and academic inquiry (Deacy, *Faith* 25-26, 30-31).

Yet, as is the case with the courtly love tradition, Christian mystical discourse, and romantic theology, there is also another side to Christian theology, one that explores goodness and beauty, and sees in the humanly good and beautiful an expression of the divine in the human. According to this theology, to dismiss the beautiful, or here joyous, as something unimportant is to make life miserable, mean, and barren (Häring 338). This view contrariwise explores God’s goodness and love in His relation to human beings and the universe.

Christian theological aesthetics delves more into this theme. It concerns itself with the relationship of God with art and beauty, and with God as perceived and experienced through beauty and art. It often speaks of God’s glory, which includes and is inseparable from God’s beauty, and joy; glory is beautiful, the beautiful is full of joy, and a theology without joy is impossible (Barth 316-19). Beauty points to fact that being is in essence joyous (Viladesau 363). Pleasure and enjoyment are also experienced with God’s beauty (Moltmann 334). To believe in any finite beauty is to believe in the reality of the Absolute, or God; otherwise, joy becomes groundless and illusory (Viladesau 363). Without beauty, we lose our way to God, which makes us miss God’s glory here and now (Chittister 366). Indeed we must surround ourselves with beauty because beauty brings out that the best in life really possible (Chittister 367). Likewise, this beauty is more than just pleasant. Theologically speaking, divine beauty is often linked with truth and goodness (Häring 338-339). What is beautiful is also true, is also good.

Gratitude is likewise integral to the enjoyment of this presence of beauty, which manifests God’s glory (Moltmann 334). Gratitude for beauty and openness to its message are of utmost importance in the sacramental (Christian) life (Häring 341). Anyone who allows the beautiful in knows that life is a meaningful, wonderful gift, a gift of divine grace (Häring 342). God’s gifts of grace transform and enable us to see all things in light of beauty (Navone 358). Furthermore, since nothing exists that we have not been freely and lovingly given, in all creation is a motive for gratitude (Navone 356). God’s gifts manifest God’s will which is God’s love (Navone 357). Eros, a more intimate passionate love and desire than agape, is integral to our worship of God, religious life, and religious commitment, and also integral to God’s love for us (McFague 346-47; Balthasar 322). Without this passion and intimacy, love, human and divine, becomes cold and sterile (McFague 347).

Christian theological aesthetics often link art as the locus for experiencing this divine glory and beauty, and also link (human) beauty and pleasure (in the work of art)

with the divine. Works of art becomes sites for theophanies, where the divine manifests itself; the art form thus remains itself yet becomes more than itself (Bird 3).[4] This often manifests as an event, an encounter in which the divine presence reveals itself to us through itself.[5] The human representation in its finitude thus becomes a sign and symbol of something more beautiful and divine, expressed humanly through art (Balthasar 320). The real and original experience of beauty and joy in the work of art becomes analogous to a higher and more comprehensive experience of divine beauty and joy (Rahner 220-21).

Film can also be a very good medium for manifesting the divine. Experiencing pleasure in film images can open the viewer up to experiences of the beautiful, which lead to experiences of the good and true (Verbeek 172-177). Moreover, film is a total experience, operating on multiple levels. It works on us on a semi-conscious level that viscerally affects us as an embodied experience (Plate 59-60; Marsh 95-101). Emotion, sentiment and mood color our experience of film (Tan and Frijda, 51-55; Marsh 87-95; G. Smith 111-117). It affects us through images which cause emotional reflection (T. Martin 120). This emotional, immediate experience links it with all art in making it amenable to divine encounter (O'Meara, 213). It is a more totalizing experience than other forms of art (T. Martin 46), which may make it easier to experience the beautiful, which we are to experience in the totality of our being (Häring 338). Films also make us see in new ways through the more careful lens of the film experience (T. Martin 139; Plate 57), which may allow us to see the holy, or divine goodness present within them (Johnston, *Reel* n. pag.).[6]

When film becomes a site for divine manifestation, it shows us the divine possibilities for God's manifestation anywhere and everywhere in a world-affirming way, including in everyday life (Greeley 92, 93, 95). Popular culture can be important theologically because it shows us how people may be experiencing the holy in everyday life. In an era of postmodernity (or post-post), popular culture in embodied life is the medium with which most people relate, and the site in which groups such as Generation X are having religious experiences (Lynch, *After* 96-102, 112-121). It can allow the divine presence through images which a postmodern audience may perceive and understand as potentially sacred.[7] What is necessary is a theological aesthetics of popular culture that relates it to everyday life in order to explore how popular cultural forms may enable transcendent experiences of encounter and also beauty, pleasure, and joy (Lynch, *Understanding* 189-194).

Furthermore, in the postmodern era, the divine encounter may be displaced, represented and manifested differently through popular culture, in secular or human forms that bespeak the same reality and experience in a form more comprehensible and authentic to a postmodern, secular audience (Eliade, "Artist" 179-80; Deacy n. pag.).[8] With the focus on personal experience of the self and the aesthetic inner life in postmodernity, theophanies that flow through human forms and narratives in film may be more effective art forms (Lynch, "Sociology" n. pag.). [9] Pop or rock music may work better than classical, and embodied narrative styles than the abstract.[10] Most importantly, exploring divine manifestation through forms of everyday life allows us to view this life sacramentally, to see it possibly in a higher light as a manifestation of God's beauty, joy, love, and glory infused with grace (Greeley 17, 92, 93, 95).

Popular films are an extension of the theological value of popular culture. In postmodernity, Hollywood and popular film also can provoke religious experience of the sacred (Graham, "Theology" 36, 41; Johnston, "Theological" n. pag.).[11] Romantic love,

because of its history with the courtly love tradition, Christian mystical discourse, and romantic theology, seems to be one bearer of this remnant of Christian theological aesthetics, where a divine beauty may be perceived to manifest itself in the forms of everyday life in film. The love of a divine Other may be held to manifest and represent itself through love of a human other. Indeed, as in romantic theology, in an era where Jesus struggles with temptations of marriage and family in *The Last Temptation of Christ* and where he is married in *The Da Vinci Code*,^[12] romantic love, marriage, family, even sex, are not perceived as antithetical to or precluding manifestations of God's presence in film. Moreover, discourse on love in film sometimes may stand in for discourse on religion. This shows us that the love story in postmodernity can sometimes bear the remnants of the former Christian story about grace and redemption.

The Sacramental Kiss in Romantic Films: The Matrix and Shrek

According to early Christian scholars, the kiss did hold meaning in Greco-Roman society. Often erotic and shared privately within the family, public kissing for reasons of friendship and reconciliation was also practiced (Klassen 126-27; Penn 6, 10; Phillips 5-6). But with early Christianity the kiss took on new meaning and importance, being not only practiced but discussed in the writings of Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Clement, Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine (Penn, *passim*). From New Testament origins in St. Paul's writings, the kiss finds itself in the Christian liturgy or worship service by the second century. Begun as a greeting among Christian brethren at church, by the fourth century it also found its way into the Eucharist and into Christian baptism (Perella 17-18; Phillips 7, 16-17, 27). It could thus be viewed as a means of the infusion of grace (Perella 43; Phillips 30). The kiss was also known as the kiss of peace, or *pax*, and thus was viewed as a form of communion, reconciliation, and forgiveness; the kiss of peace established concord and unity (Klassen 135; Penn 43-47). Moreover, from Greco-Roman times the kiss was thought to contain a magical-mystical meaning, thought of as a means of spiritual exchange; in Christianity it signified an exchange of souls (Penn 20, 37, 40-41; Perella 5, 26-28; Phillips 5). In Christianity the kiss thus also obtains a pneumatological significance; a kiss was a way of exchanging Christ's spirit, and also of sharing the Holy Spirit (Perella 15-19; Phillips 8-11). The kiss must also arise from the heart in true affection; if it did not, then it could become the Judas kiss of betrayal, instead of the kiss of peace (Penn 65, 112-18; Perella 28). Though Christian authorities attempted to regulate the kiss's erotic possibilities, at one time banning the kiss between members of the opposite sex (Penn 13, 80, 110-12; Phillips 24), a certain eroticism may have still remained, particularly evidenced through the use of the dove as the symbol of the kiss of peace and the Holy Spirit transferred thereby, since the dove also held erotic connotations in Greco-Roman culture (Penn 48-49; Perella 253-57).

In the Christian mystical tradition and in courtly love and romantic literature, the kiss conceit also continues. The erotic kiss could symbolize the kiss of God to the human, or the embrace of the soul with God (Perella 31-38). The kiss could also represent the completion of mystical experience, or illumination and an infusion of grace (Perella 43-45, 52-58). In medieval courtly love literature, while the kiss becomes profane, and perhaps

more erotic, it still appears, partially in the idea of a union of hearts or souls, and exchange of spirits (Perella, 90-91, 95-96). The kiss could also exemplify the telos of the devotion, and could signify a bestowal of grace or benediction, this time by the lady (Perella 101, 116). This idea of an exchange of hearts or souls in the kiss, and the kiss as an ecstatic moment, continues into love poetry during the Renaissance and Baroque periods (Perella 181, 184, 189).

The Matrix trilogy

The kiss is central to the Matrix films. This kiss theme is more than just romantic; it is salvific, having a resurrecting power. In the first movie of the trilogy, when it appears as if agent Smith has killed Neo, Trinity tells Neo:

I'm not afraid anymore. The oracle told me that I would fall in love and that that man, the man that I loved, would be the one. So you see, you can't be dead, you can't be, because I love you.

Then Trinity gives him a kiss, and his heart revives. Getting up again, Neo suddenly is able to fight the agents without effort. He can stop bullets; as Morpheus says, "He's beginning to believe" that he is the One, and acts accordingly. He is able to defeat the agent by going into his body and causing the agent to implode.

It is love that gives Neo the power to be the One, love as expressed through the kiss. This kiss thus is more than just a kiss; it confers a supernatural power. Moreover, Trinity's name, as a representation of the Christian Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, must be significant here, as it is Trinity's love that repeatedly saves Neo. But the kiss is pivotal as the symbol through which this resurrecting power of love occurs. The kiss is thus salvific, and transforms Neo into the One.

This romantic love through the kiss develops further in the next film, *The Matrix Reloaded*. First, since Trinity and Neo's love has already proven salvific, the erotic love scene between them shows us the importance of eros, intimate passion and desire, in romantic love, but also perhaps in something deeper, in our religious devotion and experience. It shows eros as a necessary aspect of human and divine love (McFague 346, 347; Greeley 165). This passion, since it is expressed by Neo the Savior, is not just a human passion but perhaps also a divine one (Balthasar 323).

In *The Matrix Reloaded*, the Merovingian, the dastardly Frenchman, also acts as one foil to Neo. He explains his philosophy of life thus:

Causality—there is no escape from it. We are forever slaves to it. Our only hope, our only peace is to understand it, to understand the why... why is the only real source of power. Without it you are powerless and this is how you come to me...another link in the chain.

What the Merovingian represents is a mechanistic universe of necessity, of rational and logical calculation, control, and manipulation. It is not only without eros, but without joy,

beauty, or love, and thus without goodness or truth. Neo, contrariwise, acts out of love and passion, here exemplified by his love for Trinity, which is what makes him a savior. Persephone, the Merovingian's wife, and symbolic in her namesake, the Greek goddess who inhabits the underworld, is willing to help Neo if he gives her a kiss, that is, if he brings that passion, love and beauty back into her life and resurrects her. She explains:

You love her [Trinity]; she loves you. It's all over you both. A long time ago I knew what that felt like. I want to remember it, I want to sample it. That's all.

She also tells Neo that he has "to make me believe I am her." The first kiss is terrible, but then Neo gives Persephone a long kiss as if she were Trinity, and she agrees to help them.

Neo then enters the Matrix and meets the architect. The architect also tells Neo that all the previous five anomalies were created to be attached to humanity, but declares that "while the others experienced this in a very general way, your experience is far more specific vis-à-vis love." The architect refers to love as

an emotion, designed specifically to overwhelm logic and reason, an emotion that is already blinding you from the simple and obvious truth—she is going to die and there is nothing you can do to stop it.

He also calls hope "the quintessential human delusion." Yet Neo chooses the door back to the Matrix, rushes to Trinity, and catches her just in time. Though she appears to die, Neo says, "I'm not letting go. I can't. I love you too damn much." This time, he resurrects her. She says, "I guess this makes us even," and they kiss.

The architect, similar to the Merovingian, is interested in logic and reason, control and balance, not in love, joy or desire. What is missing in this technological means-end world is beauty and joy; here we value efficiency instead (Chittister 366). But Neo, as the sixth anomaly, is different, because he does love, and in a passionate, intimate way, exemplifying this love and passion in a way that shows how grace and love transcend this world of efficiency and utility, filling it with delight and lifting spirits (Häring 338, 341). Moreover, this love is once again salvific: contrary to the architect's predictions, Neo is able to resurrect Trinity from death through the power of love, this time again consummated and exemplified in the kiss.

In the last film of the trilogy, *The Matrix Revolutions*, the kiss does not play as central a role, but we do find a religious discourse taking place in the name of romantic love, where this love bestows a semi-sacredness to everyday life and the human sphere, bestowing (Christian) religious virtues. Rama-Kandra, whom Neo meets in the nether-subway world at the beginning of the film, explains why he is trying to save his daughter Sati:

I love my daughter very much. I find her to be the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. But where we are from that is not enough. Every program that is created must have a purpose. If it does not, it is deleted.

Neo remarks that he has never heard a program speak of love, and thinks of it as a human emotion. Sati's father answers:

It is a word. What matters is the connection the word implies. I see that you are in love. Can you tell me what you would give to hold on to that connection?

Neo replies: "Anything." Sati's father also remarks that he is grateful for his wife and daughter, and that they are gifts. What is interesting here is the ability to appreciate everyday life and its beauty and goodness, here the beauty of a child and family, in an almost sacrosanct way which almost seems to appreciate them as gifts of grace. This also runs very counter to the technological, mechanical world of the Matrix.

Likewise, when Trinity is dying, she is grateful for the love Neo and she shared, without regret and fear. As she is dying, Trinity explains how much she loved him, and says:

How grateful I was for every moment I was with you, but by the time I knew how to say what I wanted to it was too late, but you brought me back, you gave me my wish, one more chance to say what I really wanted to say.

She asks Neo to kiss her one last time, and dies. Gratitude, often an integral part of divine grace, helps Trinity see the nature of life in an almost sacramental way, infused with (divine) goodness. Thus, in the Matrix trilogy we can see a romantic love discourse that bears the remnants of a religious discourse, of salvation, of grace, of beauty, goodness, and of gratitude. Moreover, this discourse becomes heightened in postmodernity. There are certainly religious themes present in the Matrix, including Christian ideas, concepts, and symbols, and these link together with the love story in a meaningful way. We see this most clearly through the motif of the kiss.

The Shrek Quadrilogy

At first glance, the Shrek quadrilogy does not seem to merit theological relevance. Yet these animated tales do play with love, romance and the kiss in such a way that also evidences remnants of religious discourse and experience within the romantic love story. In the first movie, *Shrek*, princess Fiona is waiting for "true love's first kiss" which will release her from a spell that turns her into an ogre at night, and then she will take true love's form. After she meets her true love, Shrek the ogre, they embrace and then comes their true love's first kiss. Fiona is lifted up into the air amid light and sparks and comes down again in ogre form. She does not understand why she is not in love's true form and says: "I don't understand. I'm supposed to be beautiful," but Shrek tells her: "But you are beautiful." Then it is happily ever after.

Of course, this tale cleverly plays upon the fairy-tale ideal of romantic love. Yet, at the same time, "true love's kiss" not only shows the influence of the romantic love ideal and literature derived from the courtly love tradition, but also evidences the importance of the kiss. The kiss is not only the completion and attainment of "true love," but also bestows a grace, and inspiration, and gives a sanctity and blessedness to Shrek and Fiona's love. The kiss takes place in a church, in front of a clergymen, and the sparks and lifting in the air show that there is something magical, supernatural to it. Being in a church, the kiss takes

place as the consummation of the marriage ceremony, which can be taken as sacramental. Yet, Fiona and Shrek remain the same; what this signifies is that the grace and blessedness bestowed on them, while transfigurative, is also something that can be found within their human lives and human experience of marriage.

In *Shrek* the music often helps to convey the mood and experience of falling in love.[13] The theme song for the movie is “I’m a Believer,” which starts with:

I thought love was
Only true in fairy tales
Meant for someone else
But not for me
Love was out to get me
That’s the way it seems
Disappointment haunted
All my dreams

And then I saw her face
Now I’m a believer
Not a trace
Of doubt in my mind
I’m in love
I’m a believer
I couldn’t leave her
If I tried.

We need only to think of Williams and Dante and their romantic theology to see how a vision of the beloved transforms experience and makes ready an acceptance of the good. The language also recalls religious discourse; the man becomes “a believer” or begins to have faith after this vision.

These themes, and the kiss motif, continue through the next three *Shrek* films. In *Shrek 2*, we have the evil Prince Charming trying to replace Shrek as Fiona’s rightful husband. In order to compete with him Shrek steals and drinks the potion called “Happily Ever After” which promises “beauty divine” to whoever drinks it, and becomes a hunk. Yet though Fiona has changed back into human form and Prince Charming pretends he is Shrek, a love potion does not work on Fiona, and Charming’s kiss to wed himself to Fiona is not effective. When Shrek finds Fiona and offers her his new and improved human form if they kiss before midnight, Fiona prefers the old Shrek. After midnight is their true love’s kiss as ogres with light, magic, and sparks. Fiona’s parents also accept Shrek now and again we end in a happily ever after.

Going back to the Christian theology of the kiss, we should remember that a kiss not from the heart, not with true affection, and not full of faith cannot have effect, cannot bestow the holy spirit or confer unity and peace, cannot knit the souls of the kissers; it becomes a Judas kiss instead. That is why Charming’s kiss cannot work. But since Shrek and Fiona are “soul-mates,” that kiss will always be effective in bestowing love and grace, and in transforming the lovers.

Shrek 2 continues a postmodern religious discourse through this legacy of a Christian theological remnant and hyper-meaning within this romantic love tradition. For example, Shrek's potion "happily ever after" promises him "beauty divine." But in the end it does not really work. The theological significance that this could bear is akin to grace and mystical discourse. Mystics cannot make a divine encounter happen, cannot transform themselves into divine beings or experience divine union. God must "kiss" them, must do the initiating. The same holds true with grace; its infusion is something God bestows, not something we can attain by our effort. Romantic love often works in the same way in film; it is something that happens and that we cannot control, and which transforms us unexpectedly. Here, this theme is present not only with Shrek's potion, but in the story of Prince Charming. He cannot make Fiona love him or manipulate the circumstances of love and happiness through his own efforts. Here one cannot make love happen, just as one cannot make beauty, goodness, or truth happen. The theme song of *Shrek 2* is the Counting Crows' "Accidentally in Love." Some of the lyrics read: "Well I didn't mean to do it; but there's no escaping your love." It is thus not for humans to control or decide but something that happens to one as a gift of grace.

The religious discourse through the romantic love story also continues in the third film, *Shrek the Third*. A disgruntled Prince Charming gathers an army of disgruntled fairy-tale villains who desire their own happily-ever-afters, and again unsuccessfully try to make them happen. Yet here a young King Arthur convinces these fairy-tale villains to repent and reform, while Shrek tells Charming to seek his own happily ever after, after which Charming is killed by a tower prop. Arthur tells them:

- A: You're telling me you just want to be villains your whole lives?
V: But we are villains; it's the only thing we know
A: Didn't you ever wish you could be something else?

When they reply discouragingly, Arthur quotes Shrek's speech to him:

Just because people treat you like a villain, or an ogre, or just some loser it doesn't mean you are one. The thing that matters most is what you think of yourself. If there's something you really want, or someone you really want to be, then the only person standing in your way is you.

The villains lay down their weapons and ponder other professions, such as growing daisies or opening spas. In other words, they have seen the error of their ways, have repented, and are redeemed and reformed of their wickedness.

We also see in *Shrek the Third* the repeated theme of "happily ever after," not only in the plot ending, but throughout the film as a motif and desire. The "happily ever after" scenario in romantic comedy can be a romantic ideal, but understood theologically, it could signify (Christian) hope in life and in divine redemption and salvation (Greeley 108, 112; Brown 219) to be experienced on a human as well as divine level. Bringing back Williams and his romantic theology again, it helps us link the good, or even wondrous, in human experience with a divine goodness. Moreover, in these films, happiness is something that is constantly lost and must constantly be regained; read theologically, this could also symbolize the sacrament of marriage, which constantly bestows a grace that renews the

difficult or dull moments by bringing that grace or experience of love (Williams, *Outlines* 53). It is likewise salvific or redemptive; it constantly rescues Fiona and Shrek from evils and tribulations, and is sealed by the kiss (Williams, *Outlines* 47).

The last film, *Shrek Forever After*, ties everything together. Though Shrek is happily married with ogre triplets, he finds this life dull and monotonous. Because he cannot be grateful for his life, he nearly loses everything. Without his love story with Fiona, he ends up in a dystopia. Yet again the answer is “true love’s kiss,” which Shrek must receive by midnight. Though in this dystopia Fiona has no interest in love and dislikes Shrek, Shrek slowly restores her faith and makes her fall in love with him again. Though true love’s kiss does not work the first time, it works in the end, just in time, and reality is restored to normal. Shrek goes back to his children’s birthday celebration, grateful for all that he has, and we have the final happily ever after.

What stands out to me in this last movie as regards romantic discourse as a bearer of theological meaning and religious experience is the romantic theology of love, marriage and family as sacramental, holy experiences that can lead to redemption. Shrek lives in a state of ingratitude at the beginning of the film. He has forgotten to see his life as a gift of grace. After he has lost it all, Shrek realizes this. He states that “my life was perfect and there’s no way to get it back. I didn’t know what I had until it was gone.” He now sees all the good to be had in his everyday life, and is grateful for it. He tells Fiona: “You’ve already done everything for me Fiona. You gave me a home and a family.” Upon their true love’s kiss, Shrek tells Fiona: “You know what the best part of today was? I got the chance to fall in love with you all over again.” At the end of the story, he likewise remarks to Fiona: “I always thought that I rescued you from the dragon’s keep.” Fiona replies: “You did.” Shrek then answers: “No, it was you that rescued me.” He thus has seen his life in a new sacramental way, which has bestowed beauty and light upon it and has redeemed it and redeemed himself.

In this dystopia, we also see Fiona’s redemption from skepticism, and restoration of her faith. Fiona is cynical, faithless, and loveless. After Shrek kisses her and nothing happens, Shrek remarks:

- S: I don’t understand. This doesn’t make any sense. True love’s kiss was supposed to fix everything.
- F: Yeah, you know that’s what they told me too. True love didn’t get me out of that tower. I did. I saved myself. Don’t you get it? It’s all just a big fairy tale.
- S: Fiona don’t say that. It does exist.
- F: And how would you know? Did you grow up locked away in a dragon’s keep? Did you live all alone in a miserable tower? Did you cry yourself to sleep every night waiting for a true love that never came?
- S: But, but I’m your true love.
- F: Then where were you when I needed you?

She has lost faith not just in love, but in the good and beautiful in life, especially as freely given gifts. Everything now depends on her own human effort and will against a cruel world. That is why the kiss did not work; she no longer believes, or loves.

Yet even here, there is still a ray of hope. After one of Shrek's failed attempts to connect with Fiona, Puss remarks:

I am not believing what I have just witnessed. Back there—you and Fiona, there was a spark. A spark inside her heart I thought was long extinguished. It was as if for one moment Fiona had actually found her true love.

It is thus up to Shrek to restore her belief and faith in love through love. Through the sacrifices Shrek makes to save Fiona, Fiona comes to believe in Shrek and the power of love again: in the power of goodness, and in beauty and happiness. When Shrek apologizes for not having been there for her, Fiona says that it does not matter, that he is here now. Her life and her past are beginning to be redeemed through this experience of love, and her faith and hope are renewed. Then comes true love's kiss, in which both Shrek and Fiona find redemption, and a renewal of the sacramental grace bestowed upon their love. Moreover, here true love's kiss transforms the world and restores it to its rightful order as well, showing the power of love to renew the phenomenal world, exemplified in the married couple (Williams, *Outlines* 32). Without that love, in a world of cynicism, faithlessness, and disbelief, everything is a dystopia. With the grace and beauty of love, it is beautiful and joyous again, showing how love repeatedly renews the world (Williams, *Outlines* 32).

In the last movie, we see clearly the analogous relation of romantic love and religious faith, and how this romantic love narrative and discourse could stand in for that of religious faith, showing once again the transposition of Christian theological themes into romantic discourse. We can read the love story again as more than just a romantic love story, as that through which in postmodernity, due to the historical relation of romantic and Christian discourse, discourse on religion, God, and faith take place, albeit in a secularized, human form.

Love as Religious Discourse in Romantic Comedy

In postmodernity the genre of romantic comedy also becomes a site in which religious discourse takes place, where discourse about love can be read as discourse about religion. What these romantic comedies show even more clearly than the above films is how the love story in film acts as a foil to the modern secular story of hedonism, value-neutrality, scientific rationality, skepticism, cynicism, and disbelief. Romantic love acts as a site which challenges this secular viewpoint by allowing for an experience of love which contains the possibility of a deeper significance as a divine, religious experience.

For example, in the 2009 comedy *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past*, Connor Mead is a New York City playboy, cynical about love and marriage. When refusing to give the toast at his brother's wedding, he states that:

To me marriage is an archaic and oppressive institution that should have been abolished years ago.

He goes on to say about love:

Love, it's magical comfort food for the weak and uneducated. Yeah, it makes you feel all warm and relevant but in the end love leaves you weak, dependent, and fat.

Continuing on a little later, he says:

I wish I could believe in all this crap. I do. I also wish I could believe in the Easter Bunny....I am condemned to see the world as it really is, and love, love is a myth.

We could substitute religion, faith, or God very easily here for the word love, and probably marriage, and we would probably recognize this speech as the modern, secular, skeptical view of religion.[14] In the film, Connor seems jaded, cynical, and shallow, enjoying the swinging bachelor's life. His moral reformation begins when his deceased lecherous uncle Wayne visits him, warning him to repent of his ways. This movie is playing upon Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* where Ebenezer Scrooge is warned to repent of his life and ways. The connection signifies religious and moral meaning, requiring the repentance and reformation of Connor. Connor does see the error of his ways, and begins a new life, a life of committed love.

Likewise, in the 2003 movie *Something's Gotta Give*, Harry Sanborn is a sixty-three year old New York City bachelor also enjoying the hedonistic single life. He meets Erica Barry, the divorced mother of his girlfriend, and while he is convalescing in her home from a heart attack, they develop a special romantic relationship which turns into love. When they first make love, it is as if they have both experienced something new and wondrous in their lives, an openness and vulnerability but also passion and elation. That was the first night either of them had ever slept eight hours. We can chalk it up to just sexual desire, but something happens that also transforms their lives. Erica, repressed, uptight, and unemotional, can then not stop weeping, which finally helps her overcome her writer's block and enables her to write her next play, and which opens her up to a relationship with another younger man. She appears happier than ever, and explains to her daughter it was because she let love in, even if it did not work out. Meanwhile Harry attempts to go back to his former playboy life, but to no avail. He is unhappy, and every time he sees Erica he has an anxiety attack which he fears is another heart attack. Realizing he needs to change, he goes back, tries to find every woman he has ever wronged, and makes amends. He looks for Erica in Paris, but finds her with another man. Yet she returns to him. When Erica tells him she's still in love with him, Harry says: "If it's true, my life just got made." Harry then remarks: "I finally get what it's all about. I'm 63 years old, and I'm in love, for the first time in my life." And we have a happily ever after.

Erica and Harry's first night together was a transformative experience, akin to a moment of grace. Whether realized before or not, it brought something missing from their lives into it, love, passion, or wonder, that changed and transformed them. They had to change their lives for the better: in Erica's case learning to let go of control, open up and let love in; in Harry's moral reformation and responsibility. Harry's comment that he is in love

for the first time at 63 can be read as the possibility of redemption at any age and stage, which has been a part of the Christian message as well.

Conclusion

The kiss and romantic love in film can operate religiously and theologically. They have the capacity not only to bear a theological significance, but to offer an opportunity for divine encounter and transformation, as well as containing the possibility of a religious discourse. This is due to the origins of medieval courtly love and its relationship with Christian theological discourse, where medieval courtly love borrowed the sentiments and language of Christian discourse, particularly mystical discourse. Moreover, something of the humanly erotic also remained within sublimated mystical discourse, fusing the two experiences and making it more difficult to distinguish one from the other. This paved the way for romantic love, the descendent of courtly love, to contain the possibility of this deeper theological meaning and religious experience within it. In postmodernity, where God is dead, and where transcendence has been displaced onto immanence and the divine onto the human, this dormant religious and theological possibility of romantic love in culture and art can sometimes be activated, and can become pregnant with meaning. This holds particularly true in film. Moreover, in postmodernity romantic love in films can sometimes stand in for and represent religious experiences of God or for religious discourse. Therefore, I contend that romantic love in film can be one style, form and representation through which religious experience and reflection are taking place in postmodernity. It thus shows the religious and theological possibilities of popular culture and popular cultural manifestations.

Finally, I hope looking at romantic love in film in this light, in relation to theological aesthetics, contributes to opening up and freeing theology and film studies, which seldom treats the theme of romantic love as theologically or religiously pertinent. Theology and film studies should welcome more often these positive engagements with film and religious studies and popular culture. To quote the Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf:

I see happiness as a right. I think that it is a human right to be joyful. The person who makes a dark, realistic film in India is wasting his time....Many things must yet change in India before the people's lives become better...So why should the people be depressed by movies like that? They must be allowed to have some pleasure in life. The person who has had to sell his body for a morsel of food – you want to make a film for him about social justice? What is he supposed to do after seeing that film? (92)

Going on to speak about his profession, he says that “we filmmakers are here only to illuminate, to bring joy to life. All I seek is that, after seeing a film of mine, a person feels a little happier, and acts with a little kindness towards the world” (93). Like Makhmalbaf, we can aim to take seriously those filmmakers who by treating romantic love desire to bring a little more happiness and joy to life and to the world, and consider such a goal a legitimate

enterprise. We can also appreciate films (and scholarly work) that reveal and point us toward this joyous side to life, and realize their value.

I close with a discussion of the ending of *Cinema Paradiso*. At the end of the story Salvatore/Toto, who is now a famous filmmaker in Rome, watches the film his old friend and father-figure Alfredo left for him upon Alfredo's recent death. The film is a composite of all the love and kissing scenes that Toto's hometown's Catholic priest had censored out of the movies. The film brings tears to Toto's eyes, perhaps for the memories of his youth and the love for film that has made him rich and famous, perhaps for memories of Alfredo and how he changed his life, perhaps for remembering the past that he left behind. But it signifies something else as well: the kisses signal passion, wonder, beauty, ecstasy and joy, treated in courtly love and romantic literature, but also having origins in Christian mystical discourse and the Christian sacrament of the kiss. I hope this kiss can begin to be understood as that which sometimes graces life, not just in romantic love, but in all our everyday moments, and which may be read and understood as a symbol of human or divine goodness, not to mention the hope, faith and belief in the good, the beautiful and the true, and perhaps the happily ever after of romantic love or Christian redemption. Let us hope that we, unlike the priest, do not censor this out of film or religion, its study, and certainly not out of life.

[1] Though Williams, as an Anglican, more clearly identifies the romantic love in the sacrament of marriage with the Incarnation and the life of Christ, I translate that here also to mean a divine, sacramental presence in romantic love and marriage.

[2] For readers not familiar with it, the courtly love literature and tradition is thought to have arisen in the 12th century in the Provence region of France, and was popular during the high Middle Ages. It concerned a knight's love for and devotion to a lady of superior social standing, usually married, and consisted not only of a description of the knight's passionate devotion, but also his service and humiliation to the lady. There existed also a system of rules and observances which must govern this service.

[3] See for example Zwick, Graham, May, Deacy *Faith*, and Deacy and Ortiz.

[4] The idea of a hierophany stems from religion scholar Mircea Eliade; a hierophany is an eruption of the sacred into the mundane or profane realm, where the sacred manifests itself into something profane, making that something both what it is and something more. A theophany is the same idea only with the eruption of God or the divine into the mundane. For more information see Eliade, *Sacred*.

[5] French philosopher of religion Jean-Luc Marion has written extensively about the event of God's manifestation, sometimes called the saturated phenomenon, a revelation that gives itself from itself to a human subjectivity, and that human beings cannot control but are controlled by. The revelation can also often manifest itself through a work of art, as an encounter; it entails the revelation through the work of art to a passive subjectivity. Most of the writings of Marion are a propos to this phenomenon, but in particular *Being Given* may be of use in explaining this idea.

[6] This is a Kindle edition of the book without pagination, but the citation can be found in paragraphs 2 and 3 of section 2, entitled "Seeing life."

[7] For a discussion of the use of postmodern styles in relation to theology, see Detweiler, and Detweiler and Taylor.

[8] This is a Kindle edition of the book without pagination, but the citation can be found in paragraphs 5, 8, 12 and 14 of section 3, entitled “Cupitt and Bonhoeffer meet the Kranks.”

[9] Again this is a Kindle edition of the book without pagination, but the relevant passages can be found in paragraphs 7-14 of section 2, entitled “The Subjective Turn in Modern Spirituality,” and in paragraphs 2-3 of section 3, entitled “Reading Film in the Context of the Subjective Turn.”

[10] See Detweiler and Taylor.

[11] This is a Kindle edition of the book without pagination, but the citation can be found in paragraphs 1 and 2 in section 5, entitled “Finding God in the movies.”

[12] Though I reference the film, I actually have not seen *The Last Temptation of Christ*, but am just depending on what I have heard about the film.

[13] See J. Smith and Taylor.

[14] Ben-Ze’ev and Goussinsky consider the “ideology of romantic love” as an unattainable, unrealistic transcendental ideal that under certain circumstances can lead to fanaticism and violence, much in the way many modern intellectuals view religion, particularly fundamentalism (xii-xiv).

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