

**Digby, Tom. *Love and War: How Militarism Shapes Sexuality and Romance*. Pp. 240. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. US \$25.00 (paperback). ISBN: 9780231168410.**

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Published online: March 2019

<http://www.jprstudies.org>

In this compilation of a series of his talks, feminist philosopher Tom Digby seeks to demonstrate that war-reliant societies are steeped in “cultural militarism,” one result of which is that they venerate heterosexuality but cast men and women as “opposite sexes” engaged in a battle. Such societies build their military might through structuring interpersonal relations as occurring between only two genders and then eroticizing the alleged differences between them for “procreative efficiency” (18). These actions stem from their belief that antagonistic relationships between groups are standard, which permeates all levels of discourse and practice even in civilian life. Digby concludes that such societies’ reliance on using force in a perceived zero-sum game of winner/loser or dominant/submissive poisons the possibility of equality between people, including those in love relationships. As he puts it: “the gendered domination-submission model of heterosexual love has its roots in the faith in masculine force and the presumption of adversariality that I ... described as lying at the heart of cultural militarism” (28).

Real love is doomed in such culturally militaristic societies since it is shot through with antagonistic emotions that weaken it. Digby therefore claims that the heterosexual love model in militaristic society is “intrinsically weak and even tragic” (30). He finds it foundational to the spectrum of misogyny in that society and notes that it also extracts an economic cost. But he points out that militarism is not the norm in all societies, and that the amount of effort that war-reliant ones put into training people in enacting these values show that they are not natural; ergo, we can deprogram ourselves and establish more equitable communities and erotic bonds.

Digby reiterates this argument over the course of eight chapters, often repeating his central claims at various lengths. This, along with his use of popular texts such as polls in news articles and statistics from TV magazines—he rarely uses traditional scholarly sources—is an enactment of his stated belief that academic writing must reach wider audiences in order to facilitate real change. The style and the repetition of his thesis certainly makes for easier reading, and would be useful in undergraduate classes, especially when attempting to explain the intersection of sexual violence, mass-shootings, and Othering

rhetoric that accompanies war and genocide. It is also a timely book in light of the #MeToo movement, providing a useful perspective on the rhizomatic nature of misogyny, but a reader will have to work out their own practices for how to implement his (understandably) philosophical theory on undoing the problem. The book may also resonate with scholars and readers of popular romance texts, since it is attempting to diagnose and detoxify erotic relationships (though largely between straight pair bonds). Moreover, its reading of how women's changing economic situation has now made traditional love (with its patriarchal constraints) merely a thing of fantasy or play for them, even as men have become more invested in that story, might provide an interesting lens through which to examine mass-market romance narratives.

In a chapter entitled "Battle of the Sexes," Digby points out that heterosexual love is represented in our culture as desirable and yet loaded with danger and misery. He traces connections between this and the establishment of a gender binary as a norm, with each gender being trained to enact certain behaviors and self-presentation and to find these attractive in each other in order to result in procreation. Proscriptions against masturbation and homosexuality in militaristic societies are to him another version of this policing and tied to the goal of "procreative efficiency" (18-19). He provides examples of religion and history of such programming (and its punishment of violators). Even outside actual combat, men are programmed (such as through media) to think of themselves as naturally inclined to using force while women are programmed to please them. His attribution of this dynamic to a nineteenth-century shift to companionate marriage (where the idea of love becomes integral to heterosexual relationships), as well to female suffrage and rejection of male authority, feels somewhat clunky. To explain this seeming paradox, he turns to Nietzsche, who claimed that men and women are given different cultural programming about what love means, leading to men being deemed weak if they love devotedly—i.e., like women, rather than like men (for whom love means being worshipped) (26-7). Digby seems to agree with Nietzsche placing blame on this "male domination and female subordination" model for the "'antagonism" in heterosexual relationships" (28).

In "Let's Make a Deal," Digby says that "transactionality" is the chief reason for the antagonism in heterosexual love in war-reliant societies, noting seven causal elements (including het- and cis-normativity) in that model of love. He argues that in the resultant culture, people are encouraged to seek a profit from their partner in the context of heterosexual relationships. To him, societies that treat women like chattel with different exchange values is an extension of this transactional attitude. As women gain economic independence and find the traditional transaction less necessary, men who refuse to accept the change turn: 1) to prostitutes, who are still lacking power; and 2) to porn. But their sense of entitlement and the fact that substitutes for women can't provide emotional support makes them angrier, leading to tragic heterosexuality. Digby suggests escaping the heterosexual economy and seeking egalitarian relationships as a way to reduce the antagonism and strengthen het- love, but it's not clear how one can do so because while he shows what such love looks like, he doesn't quite explain how a couple achieves that state (49). The section instead resorts to maxims about sharing, respect, caring, etc., and then pivots to the claim that this antagonistic heterosexuality (along with expectations of coupling across genders and rigid gender roles) goes hand in hand with homophobia. The chapter ends with the claim that this antagonism marks domains like parenting and politics and we need to escape this programming.

In “How to Make a Warrior,” and “Keeping the Battle of the Sexes Alive,” Digby suggests that understanding “warrior masculinity” can help us escape the “zero sum gender game,” where men and women are made to see each other as enemies (52-3). He describes how boys are trained to “toughen up,” i.e., emotionally conditioned for potential warrior status (57-8). He links this unnatural conditioning to rates of PTSD and veteran suicides. He then suggests that this training is also linked to misogyny because it is predicated on a gender binary, and boys are made to believe that if they want to be “real men,” they must limit their ability to be caring. He includes disturbing examples of hard core porn, especially watched at “gonzo porn” parties where men display their masculinity to each other by voicing approval of images of women being humiliated and dehumanized, an element that he sees as common to military torture. He links this to militaristic societies’ faith in masculine force as an effective solution to problems. He also examines the faith that people place in love in these cultures and returns to his previous recounting of Nietzschean ideas about gendered cultural programming. He adds that there is a connection between the unequal dynamic between couples in a heteronormative militaristic culture and Christianity’s exhortation that one must surrender to Jesus and be taken. He reiterates that men are taught to seek women’s devotion and women to worship them, and links this to examples of domestic violence. He says that when the legality of treating women as chattel was challenged by feminism, it turned into “heterosexuality by faith—specifically the faith of the woman, both in a particular man and in a particular idea of heterosexual love” (85). He notes Nietzsche’s idea that this woman’s faith “is inseparable from romantic passion” and says that women start to equate heterosexual love with being taken/owned by a man, who gives nothing and aggrandizes himself through his acquisition (85). He then attempts to show that the old “cultural programming directed at women” is not so different from current popular culture by citing an interview with romance novelist Christina Dodd where she says alpha males are attractive because they have power and quotes a review of her 2011 novel as having “scenes of aggressive seduction” (86-7).

His subsequent exploration of Nietzsche’s claim that men want to be loved/worshipped is weakened by an odd choice to cite the lyrics of George Michael’s song “Faith” as evidence that heterosexual strong men want devotion from women, even torturing them to get this submission/love (87). He says that while he understands that such men are afraid of the impact to their erotic entitlement caused by women’s changing lives, he is unsure why women were devoted to this notion of love and a “soul mate” (89). But he finds it unsurprising that more men are turning to it, and points to popular media articles that report that “men are more likely to have beliefs about love that reflect traditional romanticism” (90). He calls this buy-in “masculine romanticism,” and mentions other responses in these articles that suggested men want long-term commitment and contrasts it to less romantic beliefs among women (and even says that novels like Dodd’s only have fantasy appeal for some). He then cites another Dodd interview as evidence that as women gain financial independence, they are less interested in traditional ideas of love that allow men to control them. The following claim would be welcomed by romance fiction readers tired of the assumption that they cherish patriarchal structures:

Today there are many women who understand that the traditional male dominant/female subordinate model of romantic love is a fantasy. They may

see it as an arena for play, which they prefer to enjoy only when they want a break from the more important things in their lives, such as careers (94).

In “Can Men Rescue Heterosexual Love,” Digby cautions that reversals in old economic imbalances between men and women as well as technological changes in militaries has meant that men can no longer frame themselves through the Protector, Procreator, and Provider elements that made up traditional masculinity in war-reliant societies; subsequently, even as they look for romantic love to give them some assurances of their status, women’s detachment from it is leading to a “dangerous masculinity cocktail” (115). In presenting a hypothetical situation where a man invested in “masculine romanticism” could persuade women to this fantasy—though he takes an illogical swipe at romance fiction fans as likely candidates (who he has already argued are a demographic unlikely to want this fantasy to come to life)—he demonstrates why the situation is unlikely to prosper. He uses an interview from a BBC show to explain Nietzsche and Simone De Beauvoir’s argument that men have limited ability to be lovers and if this man who is “disabled as a loving partner” wants the happy ever after myth, it can be a drawn out tragedy (106). He then lists examples of virtual violence against women in video games, offers more details on parties where men bond by watching “gonzo” or “bangbus” porn, and describes responses from interviews of male college students as evidence of men’s anger about the loss of women’s devotion and bodies, which they have been trained to think as their right. While he adds that greater consciousness of misogyny means women may turn away from het-love as a desirable route to fulfillment, he thinks it is possible to reverse this misogyny.

He expands on a solution in “Gender Terrorism, Gender Sacrifice” by first explaining that a society that holds to a gender binary creates conditions that harm both men and women. Through subjecting boys to “gender terrorism” from a young age so they don’t cry and learn to not be like the “opposite sex,” we create a “sacrificial masculinity,” which he says is visible in violent sports such as football, in which men are programmed to risk serious bodily harm (137, 130). This military masculinity goes hand in hand with misogyny, and he lists various examples of its negative impact on everyone. “Misogyny terrorism,” he believes, is directed at women as a natural extension of military masculinity. But he cautions against only blaming the immediate perpetrators since it is the culture that creates an endless supply of such men. To him, the broader approach should be toward changing boy parenting to protect both men and women. He ends with what he hopes is an optimistic note—the presence of male allies who support women against misogyny. He says more men haven’t joined them because they misunderstand feminism and he offers what he thinks is a less divisive definition of feminism as “a preference that girls and women not be subjected (by society or individuals) to disadvantage just because they are girls or women” (150). He thinks this definition will help men break away from a culture that harms them and that eventually we can abandon the gender binary itself.

In “The Degendering of Militarism” and “The Demilitarizing of Gender,” Digby says that the U.S. military is becoming degendered and performs a close reading of a speech at West Point by former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates as evidence of the move away from a tough guy stance to one about empathy and caring for the troops. He also reads the impending threats that Gates lists (e.g. cyber attacks) as not requiring direct confrontation/combat in the traditional warrior masculinity mode but ‘nerd’ and diplomatic skills. Where terrorism is concerned, instead of armed retaliation through the military, the

response needs to be expanded economic opportunity to shrink the pool of potential terrorists, as well as improving health and education (especially for girls and women). In other words, he says, implementing the key ideas of feminism is the way to lower threats against the U.S. He lastly points to the “counterinsurgency doctrine” of David Petraeus—which encouraged empathy, listening, understanding civilian and enemy combatants—as evidence that the degendering of combat is a better way to tackle new threats. (170). He posits that this is a turn from coercive force-style masculinity to what has been associated with femininity in war cultures—“listening and empathy” (173).

In “The Demilitarizing of Gender,” Digby sums up his major claims about the way warrior masculinity in war-reliant societies (based on masculine hegemony) suffuses the culture. Both men and women are expected to lead in this way, and everyone is expected to apply the same masculinity (of not caring) for each other (especially for disadvantaged fellow citizens) as they would to enemies. But as war changes and direct combat and loss of life declines, the need for that military masculinity will change and this will affect interpersonal relations, with less pressure on women to procreate. He envisions this situation as reducing opposition to birth control and reducing homophobia as well as the oppositional and dom/sub nature of current heterosexuality. He thinks this “truce in the battle of the sexes” could ripple outward from individual relationships, reducing the misogyny and sexism in all aspects of society (178). He cites a speech by an Australian General condemning misogynistic emails against female soldiers as evidence that the military is changing and valuing its female members’ contributions. But he says that the General’s rebuke of those who want to humiliate others implies that militaries themselves have to change profoundly since they are built on a masculinity that is nurtured by making men humiliate those who don’t seem tough, i.e., are like the other gender. The uneasiness about the answer to what masculinity can be if not humiliation and violence, he suggests, is why conservatives express moral panic about the changing dynamic between men and women, but he is optimistic that society is slowly reducing its faith in training men (and boys) to be violent.