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Shields, David. *The Trouble with Men: Reflections on Sex, Love, Marriage, Porn, and Power*. Pp. 155. Mad Creek Books, an imprint of The Ohio State University Press, 2019. $18.95 (softcover) ISBN: 9780814255193.

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The Trouble with Men: Reflections on Sex, Love, Marriage, Porn, and Power by David Shields is, in some ways, a lengthy meditation on marriage, being married, and all the foibles and fragilities of marriage, and yet, at times, doesn't feel lengthy enough. This short book, at 160 pages, is full of ideas written in a vignette style reminiscent of Roland Barthes, but this book is not so much *A Lover's Discourse* as *A Husband's Discourse* or *A Longtime Lover's Discourse*. Readers find less of the freshness of love than one does in *A Lover's Discourse*, perhaps, if one could imagine such a marriage; *The Trouble with Men* is where Laura Kipnis's *Against Love* (2003) meets *A Lover's Discourse*.

The book is divided into a series of sections that reflect on, as the subtitle indicates, sex, love, marriage, porn, and power, which, in some ways, are the themes of romance novels themselves. One might be inclined to see this as an ideal book for scholars of romance, and in some ways, it is, but in other ways, it isn't. This book wants us to think and so we are provided with quotations from other authors, often left untouched and standing alone. These quotations could remain alone, or they could function as a kind of hyperlink, in which the reader seeks out more information.

While this is not a book about popular romance, we do see reflections on popular romance; for instance after noting that "In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the human body is defined as a wound with nine openings" (89), readers find reflections on Toni Bentley's memoir *The Surrender* (2004). Next, Shields writes: "*Fifty Shades of Grey*—male dominance, female submission—is (was) culturally acceptable, but male powerlessness is (still?) offensive" (89). Readers find rhetorical aphorisms that seem as though their goal is to provoke thought, perhaps to "wound" the reader in some way, a kind of "social acupuncture" in the words of Darren O'Donnell (2006). Such a question – "still?" – may be the author's question towards himself: he asks, "Did I instinctively know you would be my unraveling, and protest though I might, do I not crave this disintegration?" (92) As one reads through these seeming hyperlinks, one imagines the critics who are not present. Is disintegration the same or similar to Bersani's "self-shattering"?

Perhaps the chapter most interesting to the study of romance is the interlude on pornography. So much of romance scholarship has been haunted by a question of whether or not the romance novel is a kind of pornography: a pornography for women as Snitow once imagined it (1979). Or, as Shields might write: "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different. [Ann Barr Snitow]". All quotations are closed with the boxed-in author. But the discussion on pornography is important and reflexive; it encourages readers to think about pornography, a topic that has, in truth, appeared throughout *The Trouble with Men*. Perhaps it is pornography's excesses that are so difficult for critics of romance to grapple with and Shields thinks about these excesses and admits his own confusion.

So much of what Shields writes is untouched, for instance: "Perversion can be defined as the sex you like and I don't. [Muriel Dimen]" (115). Without elaboration, we ask ourselves: who is Muriel Dimen? Why this quotation? But the quotation does work and encourages the reader to think through each of these aphorisms which appears within a section on a given topic: "Purity always flirts with defilement. [Kipnis]" (116). The pornography section thinks through tropes and I wonder if this same kind of thinking might not work for popular romance studies, for instance, "Nothing is hotter for me than the porn trope Hot for Teacher (moi as student)" (119). Could such an approach not be useful for popular romance, for instance, the virginal heroine and the ruthless billionaire?

Admittedly, this book is not a traditional scholarly monograph, and this may present challenges in terms of how to make this book useful for popular romance studies. It certainly wouldn't be the textbook one would assign for a course, but it would surely get its readers thinking about a range of issues that cluster around the popular romance novel. Maybe this is a book that lives in the "happily ever after." This is what marriage looks like after a while. But this book is another book in a growing collection of essays that are thinking deeply and carefully about how we learn to live together, as Barthes might say, and for this reason it is a valuable contribution to the study of popular romance, which is very much about how two (or more) characters learn to live and love together.

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