



A Vindication of Love: Reclaiming Romance for the Twenty-first Century

Cristina Nehring

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"A fierce and lively book. . . . This is one of those rare books that could make people think about their intimate lives in a new way." — *New York Times Book Review*

"A rousing defense of imprudent ardor and romantic excess. . . . It's difficult to deny that [Nehring] is on to something." — *Wall Street Journal*

A thinking person's "guide" that makes the case for love in an age both cynical about and fearful of strong passion. Bold and challenging, *A Vindication of Love* has inspired praise and controversy, and brilliantly reinvigorated the romance debate. A perfect choice for readers of Alain de Botton's *How Proust Can Change Your Life* and Pierre Bayard's *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*.

A Vindication of Love: Reclaiming Romance for the Twenty-first Century Details

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From Reader Review *A Vindication of Love: Reclaiming Romance for the Twenty-first Century* for online ebook

Suzanne says

Nehring is not writing in a prescriptive way. She does, however, make the mistake of assuming her audience is entirely boring & sexless & etc. I think more of us understand the value of transgression than she allows. Still, she's arguing against a conservative retrograde culture, and that's valid.

There's a lot that's great here: I love the way she allows her erotic (and maternal) life to enter her critical writing. I love the space she allows for inconsistency in the feminist-subjective identity. I love her take on Mary Wollstonecraft, who was as passionate in love as she was in her politics (a non-marriage and multiple suicide attempts), or Emily Dickinson's abject "My Master" letters. I love her takedown of Coetzee and specific vindication of Katha Pollitt ("Pollitt never comes close to stating men are rats. What she stated was rather: Men matter. Men matter to women intellectuals.") I love being reminded of Carolyn Heilburn's *Writing a Woman's Life* which I read in college, which argues that female biographies are written as LOVE narratives while male biographies are written as QUEST narratives. (This recalls Virginia Woolf's *Ms LaTrobe*, both a romantic vision and an epic quest narrative. I love that Woolf did that in *BETWEEN THE ACTS*, which was left unfinished at her death. A novel about the theater, about a woman of the theater.) And I love that Nehring takes it further, linking the Quest to the Love, arguing that Love is always a Quest, for a man or a woman.

Perhaps the greatest point of her book is to argue for the power of abjection, that the abject lover is ultimately a hero & that the position is transformative and transcendent. In this way her text is not unlike Chris Kraus' *I LOVE DICK*, except that Nehring reads loving Dick as a transcendent act. Which it is, bien sûr.

Iris says

A true polemic. With this literary, historical treatise, Cristina Nehring punches out a wild argument while going to extremes to remind us of the dignity of lust and the intelligence of flirtation.

Love, she claims, is a quest as grand, or grander, than the quest for justice or glory. The peaks:

- Readings of Tristan and Isolde, Heloise and Abelard, Antony and Cleopatra.
 - An argument that Simone de Beauvoir, the more ground-breaking philosopher of the couple, ought to be remembered for more than "putting up with" Sartre's hundreds of one-night stands.
 - The candid last chapter and Acknowledgements section, both of which narrate the author's life while calling readers to action, *à la* all great polemics.
-

Lynn Weber says

My favorite book in a long time, it says everything I've been thinking about over the last year.

Cheryl says

It starts out like the author's doctoral dissertation, so I almost gave up out of lack of interest, but I'm glad I stuck it out. While it's unclear whether the author really did want to make a statement about the status of what she calls "romantic love" in our romanceless age or whether she wanted to chastise all the critics who treat the great female writers and artists in history as wanton tramps unworthy of fame just because they "lowered themselves" so much as to fall in love, the colorful examples of the great true love stories that led to synergistic intellectual and artistic greatness made up for the confusion of theme. If nothing else, this book has made me want to read more about the lives of Heloise, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Simone de Beauvoir, among others. And it does, as all good books should, make me question my own opinions and perceptions-- in this case, about love, society's treatment of love and relationships, and passion.

Eduardo Santiago says

Nice little fantasy romp, but ultimately unsatisfying. Nehring claims that passion is missing from our lives -- but is it? The case studies she presents certainly illustrate her points, but only in the way that J.P. Morgan and Warren Buffett would illustrate a "Personal Finance for Beginners" book: as extremes, even caricatures. In comparison to Diego and Frida, yes, most of us have tame love lives. But how is that a bad thing? Most of us aren't -- and don't want to be -- fiery temperamental rich artist types.

Kudos to Nehring for her insightful breakdown of the elements of ardor: power inequality, taboos, challenges. Most of us can take something home from that. But what is she really trying to accomplish with this book, with her over-the-top examples? Who among her readers will tell their spouse "see, honey, it's perfectly fine and even necessary for me to have an affaire de coeur"? It seems almost like she's defending her own needs.

Ultimately, though, I enjoyed this book. It's engaging, entertaining, educational, even inspiring.

Kristen says

I read a review for this book in the New York times and immediately decided I needed to own it. I had to special order it from the book store, but never regretted the purchase for one moment. This book challenges the very fabric of modern concepts of love and reflects on the history of unconventional romances. It celebrates the struggles, triumphs, failures and the journey of love and aborts this contrived notion that our society and culture has come to accept of romance - so often manifested in speed dating, one night stands, and general mediocrity. I was encouraged to achieve greatness in love or to die trying, to respect the value of failing, but whatever I do, don't accept or perpetuate half-heartedness. In love it is all or nothing.

Bookmarks Magazine says

"Nehring's book stirred much debate among critics, who generally disagreed that her answers to our sad state of love -- romantic excess and passion -- offer feasible solutions. After all, asked the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, what is so gratifying about love as a "'tumultuous, emotional struggle [filled with] tedious existential angst'"? Other critics took issue with the idea that modern-day society lacks passionate love. The *Wall Street Journal* further pointed out that Nehring's prescription rests on a type of feminism that impedes our emotional well-being -- and disagreed that passion thrives on gender inequalities. Although provoking and ambitious, *Vindication* left most critics with the feeling that "'we should strive for something beyond her notion of love-as-heroic-quest'" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*) -- and that readers should probably move on."

rory says

What Celeste said. Also badass; also presents a refreshingly nuanced feminism, and how it could possibly be reconciled with the fact that women continue to like men (incomprehensible but true).

Anne says

I loved it. Nehring argues that a major flaw of contemporary feminism is the absence of love: "The more intelligent (a woman) claims to be, the more ironical and distant must be (her) relation to love." While men are permitted to become absorbed in their relationships, and are praised for doing so, intellectual women are supposed to bracket love away, and must "either renounce romantic love altogether or box it into a space so small in her life that it attracts no attention".

Nehring's work is a highly literary treatise on love, but at the same time very easy to read.

Risa says

ok i am adding this to my "to read for free in Borders but burn out your eyes right after" list because while reading about my beloved Joanie of Mad Men on www.nymag.com i happen to wander over to the New York Times book review section. gads.

Katie Roiphe - who postulated that women are partially responsible for their own rapes-- REVIEWS A Vindication of LOVE. Whew! great pairing of author and reviewer- like Coors Light and Dometic Violence!! A "Vindication" is a book that seeks to bring back the messy, sometimes, impossible loves of the past centuries that have fallen out of fashion (so says Katie) with our strange 20th-century urge for such un-romantic things as...ugh...equity? Safety? Relationships that are not capitalist exchanges of female bodies passed between men like cattle? I am so Out.Of.Fashion.

God, I am so glad some uber-hot blond gal is asking us to consider the value of tormented, messy, sure-to-end relationships while posing demurely in the doorway of what my suddenly-too-tight-pants are hoping is an expensive hotel in Berlin or someplace old world and naughty. i am so glad because between these amazing new/old/recycled Rimbaud-ideas and her looks she may have just created herself as a brand of

feminism that I haven't seen lately and everyone knows, i LOVE brand creation and i LOVE feminism so this one is right up my alley: Bombshell Suggests the Exact opposite of Current Thinking in Order To Create Controversy and Launch Career. Oh wait...i HAVE seen this before... Ann Coulter? No wait...it turned out she didn't know how to reason after all--let me see...i think-- wait--wasn't that exactly Katie Roiphe's approach as well??? Oh...i think we see some padding of the reviews for this book here. what ever happened to peer review? well, here it comes. i am reading this precisely because i think maybe someone with some actual feminist consciousness ought too. Nothing personal Katie, i'm sure your fifteen minutes of feminism made you more-than qualified to be the last word and authority on this book but that is precisely what concerns me.

quail says

Just finished the foreword. Reads like a college term paper - didn't get to a fresh image until page eight. But I like her thesis and I think she might be doing something consciously with her overwrought prose. Will keep y'all updated.

Lauren says

No real conclusions and sometimes this feels like an academic treatise, but I enjoyed spending time with Nehring's thoughts and enjoyed spending time in consideration of romantic love. Transgressive, distant, mythical, easy, slow, artful love. And I appreciate most of all that she doesn't reclaim love by capping romance with marriage. For all her academic examples, she ends up working outside the books. I like that.

Alan Alexandrino says

Livro muito bom.

Anna Karol says

Very interesting view about love... Nice biographies too...

Robin says

It was an ambitious goal - trying to show that romantic love is something to strive for by reviewing its existence through classic literature and the lives of its authors. While I very much enjoyed reading about these love stories (I added a LOT to my book list), I do not think that the author accomplished her overall goal. Some subjects; "Love as Heroism", "Love as Failure", Nehring did a very nice job and showed great examples to support her argument. In other subjects, such as "Love as Wisdom", the author fell short. The book sometimes reads like a Social Sciences Dissertation and sometimes like a mid-level college literature paper. Overall, read it for the short love stories and not for Nehring's defense of romantic love.

