

Book Note: Why Love Leads To Justice: Love Across The Boundaries, by David A.J. Richards

Hannah Ordman

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Book Note: Why Love Leads To Justice: Love Across The Boundaries, by David A.J. Richards

Abstract

MUCH FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP HAS GRAPPLED with the concept of love in its many forms. Modern love has been understood as a manifestation of harmful patriarchal values, a “curse”² that confines women to rigid gender norms of femininity and passivity.³ However, love has been reclaimed and reconceptualised by some feminists as a powerful force for resisting these patriarchal norms and encouraging self-realization among women, men, and others.⁴ David A.J. Richards’s *Why Love Leads to Justice* makes a valiant effort on the latter understanding.⁵ His thesis is simple: love leads to justice.⁶ In particular, love that is transgressive, which crosses the boundaries of the existing “Love Laws,” leads to justice.⁷ He uses Love Laws to refer broadly to law aimed at criminalizing and otherwise prohibiting sexual and loving relations between certain classes of people. The book narrows in on two kinds of transgressive love: adultery and gay and lesbian love. Using the intimate stories of prominent artists and social activists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Richards draws on the linkages between their personal and public lives to demonstrate a reciprocal empowerment between the two domains. Life in love across legal boundaries is shown to be an act of resistance to patriarchal injustice. At the same time, the stories demonstrate how transgressive love has allowed for the healing of moral injury done to the protagonists by Love Laws designed to suppress and marginalize them. Groundwork is laid for these ideas in the first chapter by looking at the adulterous relationships between George Henry Lewes and Marian Evans—known widely by her penname, George Eliot—as well as Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill.

Book Note

***Why Love Leads To Justice: Love Across The Boundaries*, by David A.J. Richards¹**

HANNAH ORDMAN

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The book narrows in on two kinds of transgressive love: adultery and gay and lesbian love. Using the intimate stories of prominent artists and social activists of

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1. David A.J. Richards, *Why Love Leads to Justice: Love Across the Boundaries*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
 2. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011) at 629.
 3. See e.g. Carol Smart, *Personal Life*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2007); Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013).
 4. See especially bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, (New York City: William Morrow, 2001).
 5. *Supra* note 1.
 6. *Ibid* at 233.
 7. *Ibid* at 3.

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In the chapters that follow, Richards explores case studies of gay and lesbian love under Love Laws in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere. The relationship between composer Benjamin Britten and singer Peter Pears is the object of chapter two. Richards observes that Britten and Pears's personal and professional partnership, in music and as an openly gay couple, points to the compatibility of courage and love, two virtues traditionally divided by the rigid gender binary.⁸ In chapter three, the focus shifts to Britten and Pears's long-time friend, novelist Christopher Isherwood. Less like his peers, Isherwood is characterized as having struggled longer to find his political and ethical voice.⁹ Part of Isherwood's story involves his relationship with poet W.H. Auden, to whom chapter four is devoted. Auden experienced much the opposite of his former lover. Where Isherwood found his voice later in life, Auden is shown to have traced a more tragic path, eventually succumbing to the patriarchal demands of British manhood. In sum, the stories of these four men hang together as a tale of resistance, in its victories and losses, across the boundaries of British Love Laws.

The next two chapters take the reader across the pond to the United States where Bayard Rustin and James Baldwin, two black gay men and civil rights activists, faced their own personal and political struggle and triumph in a climate of acute racism and homophobia. Richards tells Rustin's story as one of incredible strength in his commitment to nonviolence and love, despite being the target of violence himself under pernicious Love Laws at a time of segregation. Similarly, Baldwin is shown to have endured physical and emotional violence, but yet have refused to give-up his "strangeness"¹⁰ and be anyone other than himself in life and love, perhaps the ultimate form of resistance.

The final chapter focusses on women in their unique position within American patriarchal culture. Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Mead, and Ruth

8. *Ibid* at 72.

9. *Ibid* at 93.

10. *Ibid* at 181.

Benedict are placed at the fore as emblems of the power of lesbian love. All three women married men, however this did not stop them from—in different ways and to varying extents—progressively impacting on the social and political norms of their time. Richards captures the intricacies and intimacies of this selection of lesbian, gay, and adulterous love across socio-legal boundaries by drawing from psychology, philosophy, and legal scholarship, animating their experiences as a collective struggle in the advancement of justice.