



Interrogating Desire in Contemporary Literature: Iterations around Gender and Its Relationship with the Culture of the Digital Realm

Anwasha Dutta

Abstract

Concerns around desire and its murkiness inside contemporary literature mirror anxieties that are distinct to conversations that are happening online. Instead of attempting to structurally de-mystify these anxieties through fiction, the market calls for more books that intentionally blur the lines of morality so that these stories permit even as they punish. This paper would argue this thread in recent books by authors ranging from Lillian Fishman to Miranda Popkey and their multiple iterations of women's sexuality through the lens of establishing a political conversation by way of portraying relationships that mirror larger societal concerns. By problematizing the genre of the auto fiction, I would also invoke their contrast with the works of Annie Ernaux and her distinctly French matter-of-fact approach to articulating desire. In way of doing that, I would talk about the influence these books have on the larger literary culture and what that says about the future of literature dealing with similar themes of female desire, as predicted by the likes of affect-theorists Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai. Even though the argument is built primarily through American literature, they encompass a larger trend of cultural conversations as reflected in digital platforms like Tiktok and Instagram where books are marketed primarily through their proclivity to appeal to the underlying anxieties and the sentimental susceptibilities of young female readers. This, in turn, influences iterations and priorities of contemporary feminism as observed in these digital realms. As we also encounter more of these disillusioned complex female characters in media, the inclination is towards dissociative assimilation with problematic desire as the agencies of these women tend to push and pull according to what is digestible.

Keywords: Sexuality, Contemporary Literature, Affects Feminism, Gender, Auto Fiction, Digital Realm, Dissociative Feminism.