



Pornocracy (Semiotext(e) / Native Agents)

Catherine Breillat

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The novel by Catherine Breillat on which her acclaimed and reviled film Anatomy of Hell is based.

Pornocracy (Semiotext(e) / Native Agents) Details

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Author : Catherine Breillat

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From Reader Review Pornocracy (Semiotext(e) / Native Agents) for online ebook

Elevate Difference says

A beautiful woman enters a gay discotheque where she encounters a curious man who will follow her and spend three evenings exploring sexual brutality. Sounds like the plot of an erotic thriller guaranteed to tease and please, but was instead the story behind French filmmaker Catherine Breillat's novel, *Pornocracy*.

Adapted from her controversial 2004 film *Anatomy of Hell*, it was one of her first novels to be published in English. Despite the steamy tale and intentions of exploring female sexuality, *Pornocracy* barely simmers, and rather than empowering, only leaves readers confused and bitterly wanting more.

Breillat is no stranger to revealing human sexuality in a different light. Accused of being a “porno auteuriste” in her native Paris, she’s written and directed films that explore the power of sex and how it can forever impact a woman. Some of her most popular films include 2001’s *Fat Girl*, where a 13-year-old witnesses her older sister having painful anal sex with an older Italian student. Six years later, *The Last Mistress* wowed audiences when an engaged suitor makes a final visit to his Spanish lover. Consequently, their ten years of lovemaking stirs gossip in Paris, only proving that old habits die hard. In *Anatomy of Hell*, a woman attempts suicide at a gay nightclub where she’s discovered by a male patron. She then asks the man to watch her for four days, during which she shares her views on sexuality. The novel’s version seems more enticing, but is sadly nothing more than a bore that only delights at the end. Although it’s shocking that such an accomplished and inspiring filmmaker could greatly disappoint, the first few pages easily explain why.

As a director, Breillat’s role is to show her audience a message through the usage of characters that all serve a distinct purpose. *Pornocracy* does the one thing that few writers accomplish: show too much without telling enough. Her language is strikingly poetic, almost wanting her readers to ignore this major flaw. In describing the sensual night, she states, “The teeth through those lips, those lips slightly moistened, glistening with saliva that, like the spider’s thread, can stretch as clear filament, filled with bubbles.” Breillat brilliantly takes a bodily fluid often ignored, or viewed as revolting, and makes an intimate characteristic of sexuality that can be seen in either gender.

The lack of dialogue makes the story less entertaining and more of a psychological analysis of a woman attempting to seduce a gay man. Many of her points are valid, but prove too overbearing and tiresome for a novel. She later writes, “...whatever their love or their hate, as their penises cannot fill the woman’s sex, which is made to expand for giving birth. No member can hope to reach the size of the son it begets. Thus their claim to fury is vain...” Breillat’s theory on how men tirelessly attempt to overpower women with their penises, but never achieve their highest expectations is intriguing. However, does this analysis fit in a sexuality textbook rather than a novel? If so, should a work of fiction solely entertain or stir an unexpected emotion from the reader, rather than attempt to educate? Either way, *Pornocracy* reads like a never-ending poem that loses its meaning after a few pages.

Breillat may be an excellent director who can tell stories of females’ roles when it comes to sex, but her novel didn’t serve its purpose in telling why a woman would pursue a gay man just to have a brutal affair. The scenery could only be guessed, dialogue was lacking, the characters seem more like a stream of consciousness than real people, and the story wasn’t believable. If given the opportunity, readers may want to vote on Breillat trying again with another novel that doesn’t read like a screenplay.

Review by Stephanie Nolasco

Chris says

While it is considered a novel, really Pornocracy functions as a book of sexual philosophy, as propounded by a character, who is somewhere between the voice of the author and the general world. There is the semblance of a plot, and there are, in fact two characters (a third, I suppose, if you count the absentee fiance at the novel's start), but the main interest in the book is not in the story, but in the strange theoretical ways the book talks about sex and the interplay of genders.

For instance, there is a long passage explaining how men have an urge to be violent towards women because they are enraged by the fact that no matter how large their penis is, it can never fully fill the void of woman, as the vagina is prepared to stretch enough to give birth to an entire child, and therefore men are jealous of their own children. Do I think that this theory is true? I don't know, but it's something to think about in relation to sexual experience.

I feel this way about a lot of Breillat's work, both as a filmmaker and a writer; the ideas and stories that are found in her work are not necessarily things that I want to believe can be valid, but do not seem as ridiculous as I wish they did.

However, the ending of the novel is sort of disappointing, and I could not accept it as the only rational way for the novel to end, as expressed in the forward. Also, the afterward essay (?) is one of the strangest things I have read in a while. I could not quite piece together what the author was going for with it. But, I always like a good Andrea Dworkin quote thrown into the mix.

Camille says

Breillat décortique la langue comme elle décortique les corps. L'érotisme devenu anatomie, atteint-il vraiment la pornographie...

Je n'ai pas trouvé, dans Pornocratie, la réflexion que j'attendais. J'ai lu laborieusement, c'est que l'écriture était si laborieuse aussi, si travaillée, si étudiée - qu'elle ne me donnait pas l'impression de vivre ma lecture.

Jamespc says

The introduction, text, and post-text interview with Breillat are brilliant, some of the best writing on male/female relationships I've ever come across. The Afterword by Peter Sotos, however, taints the book and is a perfect example of why American scholarship is currently worthless, and why American writers are having such a hard time being taken seriously.

Esther Lustig says

The translation is WEIRD.

Solange te parle says

Court récit qui donne l'impression d'avoir été écrit en vitesse, voire en transe. Des maladresses grandiloquentes qui font parfois le charme de Breillat. Elle vacille sans arrêt entre lyrisme de communante et haine de soi limite misogyne, comme pour expier on ne sait quoi qui la ronge. J'ai pu me reconnaître dans ce postulat en forme de fantasme naïf : moi femme, je ferai bander un homo. Une lecture plutôt stimulante malgré et/ou à cause de son style exalté et brouillon.

Jon Yates says

This beyond pretentious pile has me wanting to avoid anything emblazoned with Breillat's name for some time. Reads like the journals of a first year Women's Studies major shooting for "transgressive" but lands somewhere between eye-rolling and infuriating. With an afterword by Peter Sotos, doing his best to match Ms. Breillat's impenetrable prose-style but from a "masculine" (if one's definition of 'masculine' is to not be able to see one's own penis in the shower and beating off to Toddlers & Tiaras) perspective. Always wished for a translation of "A Real Young Girl", but having read this, "be careful what you wish for" comes to mind.

Victor says

Difficile d'être porté par l'histoire mais une écriture remarquable.

Sarah says

A must read for everyone 25 and older...

Tristan Goding says

Kind of an irritating book, to be honest. The subject matter is quite interesting and Breillat's writing is certainly different to what you'd find these days. However, the two characters we follow here are borderline impenetrable, emotionally, which is unusual considering what the book is about. Provocative in some ways, but, in the end, to alienated and distant. Peter Sotos' Afterward is kind of funny.
