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Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis

David Shumway

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My ideas of romance came from the movies' said Woody Allen, and it is to the movies as well as to novels, advice columns, and self-help books that David Shumway turns for his history of modern love. Modern Love argues that a crisis in the meaning and experience of marriage emerged when it lost its institutional function of controlling the distribution of property, and instead came to be seen as a locus for feelings of desire, togetherness, and loss. Over the course of the twentieth century, partly in response to this crisis, a new language of love 'intimacy' emerged, not so much replacing but rather coexisting with the earlier language of 'romance' Reading a wide range of texts, from early twentieth-century advice columns and their late twentieth-century antecedent, the relationship self-help book, to Hollywood screwball comedies, and from the 'relationship films' of Woody Allen and his successors to contemporary realist novels about marriages, Shumway argues that the kinds of stories the culture has told itself have changed. Part layperson's history of marriage and romance, part meditation on intimacy itself, Modern Love will be both amusing and interesting to almost anyone who thinks about relationships (and who doesn't?).

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