

The Realities of Romance

SABRINA JEFFRIES GIVES READERS A LESSON IN LUST — AND FEMINISM

By Jennifer Peters

SABRINA JEFFRIES is one of the undisputed queens of historical romance, and in her newest book, *The Study of Seduction* (Pocket), out this month, she uses her incredible talents to tackle some difficult issues — and still gives readers the happily-ever-after they've come to expect. We chatted with her about how she fits modern-day issues into her historical-set tales, the role of women's sexuality in romance and how she fills her free time between penning bestsellers.



The Study of Seduction starts off as a marriage-of-convenience story, but you also tackle the problem of sexual assault. Where did you get the idea for the story? I've been wanting to do a story on the subject of women traumatized in this way for years and years, so the idea grew out of these characters, who I thought would be perfect for that sort of situation (I'm trying not to give away spoilers).

Was it difficult to address such a topic within the historical context? Um, no? It happened a lot, probably more than it does now, because it didn't take much for society to blame the woman. That's where all those fallen women came from. Some were country girls who were "forced" by a man and ruined, some were servants whose male employers felt free to do as they wished with them and discarded them once they got pregnant and some were ladies who were the victims of guys like Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* or were forced by some friend of their husband.

Part of the plot focuses on how Clarissa has never experienced sexual pleasure. In a time when a woman's pleasure is considered risqué by much of the mainstream media, that seems like a bold inclusion. Why did you feel it was necessary to show Edwin's desire to pleasure his new wife — and her enjoyment of that moment? I think this is another misconception about the past. Did most men not care if their wives had pleasure? Probably at least as many as don't care now. And yes, the conventional wisdom at that time was that wives couldn't or shouldn't have pleasure. But people aren't stupid. Just as there were people in the Regency who weren't bigots, there were people who didn't have a problem with sexual relations being torrid between husband and wife. You can't tell me that every man wanted his wife to lie there like a slug while he did his business. And remember that most of these men weren't going to whorehouses like the rakes in our books. They

were as inexperienced as the women for their wedding nights. So if the two of them found that they enjoyed something, there was no one to tell them it was "wicked." I firmly believe that women should embrace their sexuality fully. So yes, I wanted to show that a man who cares about his spouse also cares about her pleasure. It's important.

Why do you think, so many years after the Regency, we still, as a society, have such a hard time coping with female pleasure when male pleasure is so pervasive? Do you think we've made much progress in allowing women's pleasure to be seen and heard since? I do think we've made progress, but it's slow and it's going to take some time for the children raised by women who are confident in their sexuality to absorb that attitude as a normal one. There's still far too much slut-shaming for my taste.

On a lighter note, in addition to your books, you post "Will and Jane's Excellent Adventure" comics on your website. They're so cute! What made you start that? And how much time do you spend hanging out with Will, Jane and their co-stars when you should be writing? It was a three-step process. My critique partner, Rexanne Becnel, gave me a Jane Austen action figure. Then my husband gave me a Shakespeare caricature figure. I put them together — tall, sensible Jane and short, goofy-looking Will and a bunch of funny interactions sprang into my head. Then my brother showed me a software called Comic Life and I had to write all those interactions into a comic.

I don't really hang out with them. I buy stuff for them, rearrange them with the seasons and set them up for photo shoots, but it's not like I'm playing with them. Honestly, it's not!

You'll be attending RT's 2016 convention in Vegas. What's your favorite part of convention? What are you most looking forward to this year? I love the reader events — getting to meet and talk to readers. That's the extrovert in me. This year, I'm really excited about my event on the High Roller Ferris Wheel, where I and 23 readers party aboard a cabin complete with a bar. That should be fun! ✧

For more from this interview, check out our Web Extra on RTBookReviews.com, and for more about the author, visit SabrinaJeffries.com.