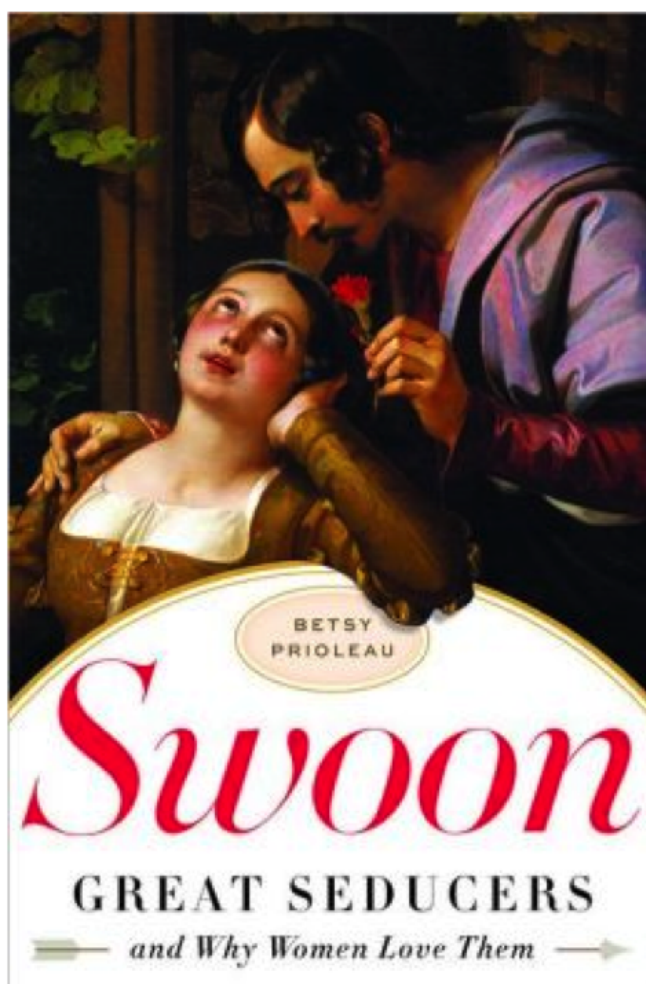


Betsy Prioleau Demystifies the Ladies' Man in Her New Book 'Swoon'



By Michelle Danzig

In a world full of bad boys, players and ladies' men, it may be difficult for women to find a partner who truly loves them. Constantly falling into their web, women dub these men toxic and don them with a negative reputation. However, author Betsy Prioleau challenges these views. After writing a book about famous female seductresses, which exposed an intellectually compelling woman with the ability to land – and keep – the best men, Prioleau set out to discover their counterpart. In her new book, *Swoon: Great Seducers and Why Women Love Them*, she describes notorious Casanovas as unexpected lovers with a true appreciation for the opposite sex. In an exclusive interview, Prioleau tells us what inspired her to investigate this type of man, what makes him tick and what type of woman is his perfect match.

In your first book 'Seductress,' it seems you have an affinity for powerful, seductive women. Why turn the tables and write a book about seductive men?

In both cases, I was intrigued by why some people consistently enchant and win over others. Plus, I wanted to see if seducers were as misunderstood as seductresses. These ladies' men have never been studied before. And I found that they've been just as distorted by myth and prejudice as their female counterparts. They offer a privileged window into what women want and can even help men become better, sexier and more cherished in the love game.

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Where did you find your inspiration for 'Swoon'?

My inspiration came from two men in my life: my charismatic father, who was so fond of women and they, of him, and my husband, a born women-charmer.

Another inspiration was a course that I taught at New York University four years ago. In this class, we explored ladies'

men throughout history, and the seducers we studied, both fictional and real, baffled every preconception and raised a host of questions. What made them so unique, sexy and irresistible to women? Why were they always censured and punished?

There was also a defining moment when it dawned on me that we have such a misguided idea of seductive men. One night, I got a call from a stranger – a Catholic priest, of all people – who'd heard I was studying ladies' men. He said, "You've got to talk to this man. I have no idea what he has, but every time we go out for coffee, women sort of appear and are all over him." A month later, I finally met this babe-magnet and was floored. He was older, only average-looking and ingratiating in the most unexpected way. He was courtly, soft-spoken – almost diffident – and spoke of the women he'd loved and how he courted them with deep, genuine affection. That's when I realized I had to try to get a handle on this mystery and figure out who these ladies' men really are and what makes them tick.

Based on your research, who would you say was the number one Casanova?

After Casanova (who was very misunderstood, by the way), I'd say the number one ladies' man was the eighteenth-century duc de Richelieu. This man was a diplomat, marshal of France and a famous general. He was also a hero of the boudoir and adored by women everywhere. Charming, kind, and vivacious, he received ten to twelve love letters a day and romanced nearly every beauty in Paris. With his "wolfish grin," they used to say that "he could ruin a woman with a smile."

Women were so wild for him that he caused one of the greatest scandals of his day. Two court ladies who were competing for his favors, dueled over him in the Bois de Boulogne. They arrived on the scene dressed as Amazons and fired pistols at each other; the marquise de Nesle fell to the ground, drenched

in blood. She survived (it was only a surface wound), but Richelieu was too universally desired to belong wholly to anyone. He sired a child in his 80s and died at 92, still irresistible to women.

In your opinion, who would you say is today's modern-day celebrity Casanova? Is there one?

With all the Hollywood spin, it's hard to say for sure. But based on women's testimonials, I'd single out three: sexy peacock, Johnny Depp, Hugh Jackman, and Ashton Kutcher. Jackman is a Mr. Romance who studies the art of pleasing in etiquette classes, creates enrapt female audiences, and still woos his wife. And charmer/activist Ashton Kutcher, by reputation, is a "honey-dripping, chick magnet." None may have the whole package, but they're avatars of change and challenge the canard that Casanovas are an extinct species.

What are your thoughts on Hugh Hefner?

Hugh Hefner now is just pathetic—a grotesque rhino (an old guy who chases girls), with a purchased blond. But in his day, he was dangerous. He sold men on the idea that women were playthings, seduced by expensive props, cool moves, and satin sheets. Since he ignored love craft—charm and conversation, for starters—he left a generation of men laid but unloved. His legacy still lingers in the PUA (pick-up artist) culture, but happily most of the male population have wised up considerably since then.

What are three common characteristics of ladies' men? And what attribute do you feel that women would find most surprising?

I'd say the three most common characteristics of ladies' men are: sexual charisma (that indefinable radiance, which may be genetic), a genuine love for women and a mating effort. Unlike most men, great seducers court women energetically and are perpetual suitors.

I think the most surprising attribute of great seducers is their androgyny. Contrary to the popular view that women swoon over he-men, almost every ladies' man turned out to have a strong feminine streak.

What women would make the best partner for seducers?

The best partner for a seducer is his match: a seductress in full possession of her erotic powers. That's why so many enchantresses of history, like Cleopatra or Annette Bening today, paired up with seducers—and made them faithful. As Picasso said, "The lion mates with a lioness."

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Do you have any advice for women on how to seek out and appreciate the type of men in your book?

If you're lucky, you won't have to go far. Great lovers, though still a minority, are everywhere: they turn up at parties and work or on trains and planes.

The bigger question is how to appreciate them. These darlings of women can be mercurial and faithless, but it's possible to corral a great seducer if you're savvy and seductive enough. The best way to appreciate them is to harvest their love arts and teach them to be ordinary men. As the love philosophers say, every man should be Don Juan to his wife.

You can purchase a copy of 'Swoon: Great Seducers and Why Women Love Them' in bookstores and online from Amazon. For more information about Prioleau, please visit BetsyPrioleau.com.