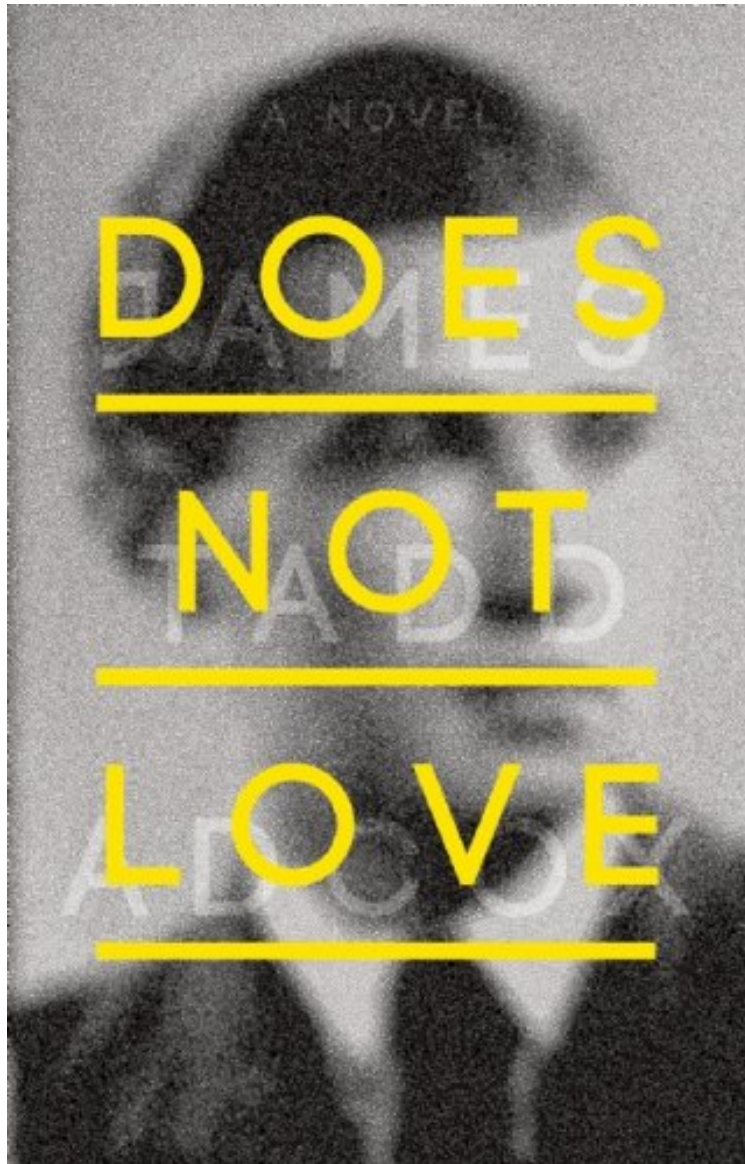


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Does Not Love

James Tadd Adcox

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James Tadd Adcox : Does Not Love before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Does Not Love:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It's pretty rare that I find a novel that's engaging enough ...By SPit's pretty rare that I find a novel that's engaging enough that I feel compelled to read it in one sitting. I did that toady with "Does Not Love."I see DeLillo, I see Vonnegut, I see Orwell. It's meta, it's post-modern, it's fragmented. It's an

enjoyable read and very fast-paced, the sort of novel where there's a bit of something for everyone. Even in the relative sparse, direct prose, there is still the emotional punch despite the world of grey.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Amazing debut novel By Eric K. The thing that is done in reviewing books these days seems to be to compare them to other books, or to mash-ups or pastiches of other books: "It's like a postmodern Middlemarch" or "It's like Nineteen Eighty-four but with Harry Potter." I'm going to resist doing that to *Does Not Love*, because it deserves better. James Tadd Adcox (whom I have the pleasure of knowing slightly) is a student of linguistics and a former editor at *Artifice Magazine*, a journal that publishes metafiction. As he ably proved in his earlier collection, *The Map of the System of Human Knowledge*, he is capable of writing fascinating, even gripping, stories that nonetheless do not bother with the pretense of being "real." *Does Not Love* arose out of some of the short fictions that were cut from the final edit of *Map*, vignettes featuring *Does Not Love*'s central characters, Robert and Viola St. Clair, a married, upwardly-mobile couple in their mid-thirties living in Indianapolis. As the ostensible plot of the novel begins, Viola, a children's librarian, has just had a third miscarriage and is not dealing well with the loss. Her corporate attorney husband--whom she married more for his emotional and financial stability than his negligible audacity or imagination--doesn't know how to console her, especially once she begins expressing an interest in rough sex. Meanwhile, there begins a series of mysterious shootings in which researchers at the Big Pharma corporation Robert's firm represents are targeted, a new "secret law" takes effect, and an FBI agent begins lurking about the library branch where Viola works, expressing a frank and relentless interest in her. As Viola's grief and Robert's ineffectuality pull their marriage apart, she begins an impulsive, sinister affair with the FBI agent, who treats her sadistically even as he admires and even grows to love her. As all these elements converge, pulling both Viola and Robert down a rabbit-hole into a seamy, violent underworld of physically devastated pharmaceutical test volunteers and brutal, fascistic police, the powerful dualities at work in Viola and Robert's lives cancel out and leave them...back where they started, as a married couple trying to make the best of their relationship. Part of the charm of *Does Not Love* is that it deliberately resists verisimilitude, going instead for a mannered simulacrum of reality. Robert and (especially) Viola, tend to speak in intellectualized soliloquies rather than "natural" dialogue, as if they are narrating a documentary about their lives instead of living them. There are jarring contrasts between the specificity of consumer brand names mentioned and the vague, oddly generic names given to more important features in the characters' milieu ("the secret law," which of course has its parallel in our world, being the most obvious). It's an eerie--and certainly deliberate--effect, as if the characters aren't sure if they're dreaming what they're experiencing. This technique is alternately hilarious and chilling. In one early scene an FBI spokesman addresses a press conference: "Primarily, the FBI is going to investigate. That's something that the FBI is very good about. The FBI has labs like you wouldn't believe, full of technologies so new they don't even have names yet, and we bring the full weight of this technology to bear on investigating. Plus, the FBI can fit into very tight spaces. Any space large enough for the FBI to get its head into, it can fit into that space." And on, and on. Then there's a beautifully haunting scene in which Robert's grandmother, whose incipient dementia (or perhaps lack of salt, or maybe the medications she's taking) manifests in the form of hallucinations, insists to Robert, after a terrifying bout of visitations by imaginary people, that she "was just playing" at believing the people were actually there--before begging him not to let "those men in my house anymore." Her inability to discern, and to admit that she cannot discern, what is really happening to her and what she is imagining is almost a synecdoche for the entire novel. The sorts of symbolic meanings that literature students are taught they must painstakingly parse from texts, Adcox just puts right out there. You would have to be willfully dense not to notice the endless dichotomies at play: awkward vs. authentic (though what is authentic?), trust vs. secrecy or uncertainty (though what can we trust?), impulsive vs. deliberate, volatile vs. stable, rational vs. emotional, compartmental vs. organic, artificial vs. natural. Viola constantly contradicts herself, depending on who she's talking to ("Stages [of grieving] have been discredited by the most recent theoretical models", Viola lectures her co-worker on p. 39; "This is grief, Robert. It's a process", she scolds her husband on p. 47). There's even an idle doppelgänger or two deliberately thrown into the mix, almost as a tip of the hat to Lacan or Nabokov, or maybe just for comic effect. Who knows? And that would seem to be precisely Adcox's point, insofar as there is one. We are always staring down the receding hall of mirrors, in the world, in fiction, and within our very selves, looking for "REALITY" and "STABILITY" and "IDENTITY," as if these are qualities that exist and can be attained. But they do not, and cannot. Everything is an endless succession of moments subject to many interpretations, no matter how we try to stabilize our lives with money and babies and things, our minds and emotions with drugs and belief systems and relationships, our sense of security with experts and police and "secret laws." Has a lot happened to Robert and Viola between page 1 and page 272? You bet. Are they the same people? No. Would they have been the same people if no drama had intervened between those two points? Nope. Are they even real people? Are you?

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. HOLD ON TIGHT By Joe Peterson DOES NOT LOVE by James Tadd Adcox is a dystopic-marriage-catastrophe novel. I speed read the thing into a state of readerly asphyxiation. Indeed the clean, nearly flawless and objective prose reached out seductively and grabbed my attention like a gloved hand and it did not relent its hold until the final pages. The novel starts out conventionally enough with a well observed and sensitively drawn portrait of a couple who struggle with love and sex in the wake of their miscarriage. There is plenty of blame, hurt and self-abuse to go around. The wife, Viola, makes the strange claim that

her womb has become a grave and she repeats this to her husband who rebuts the absurd claim, but one senses he rebuts it in vain. The novel takes place in depopulated Indianapolis whose citizens are haunted by the notion of a secret law. Big Pharma is somehow conjoined to the secret law and lurking members of the FBI are the secret enforcers of the secret law. In the daylight of objective day, this is all absurd conspiracy theory. But once this married couple starts grinding up and consuming pharmaceuticals whose prescriptive purpose is to bring couples together "like happy voles" the dark side effects of the medicine takes hold and the couple falls helplessly into a labyrinthine alternative world of guinea-piggers who inhabit the subterranean tunnels below Indianapolis. In this world, horned children of savage intensity prowl the streets; mobs of helpless guinea-piggers (people who have been forcibly coopted by Big-pharma in their experimental drug trials) are controlled by baton wielding police and former lovers take on horrific doppelganger-like qualities. Long story short... what starts out as a straight-forward portrait of a marriage ends up as a wonderfully imagined dystopic and noirish catastrophe that left me, at least, thrilled to have gone along for the ride.

Set in an archly comedic, alternate-reality Indianapolis that is completely overrun by Big Pharma, James Tadd Adcox's debut novel chronicles Robert and Viola's attempts to overcome loss through the miracles of modern pharmaceuticals. Their marriage crumbling after a series of miscarriages, Viola finds herself in an affair with the FBI agent who has recently appeared at her workplace, while her husband Robert becomes enmeshed in an elaborate conspiracy designed to look like a drug study. James Tadd Adcox's first book *The Map of the System of Human Knowledge* was published in 2012 by Tiny Hardcore Press. His work has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *the Literary Review*, *PANK*, *Barrelhouse*, and *Another Chicago Magazine*.

"James Tadd Adcox is a curator of the curious and the intimate, the real and the surreal. More than anything, Adcox is a writer who knows how to make the reader believe the impossible, in his capable hands, is always possible, and the ordinary, in his elegant words, is truly extraordinary."—Roxane Gay, author of *An Untamed State* and *Bad Feminist*"In James Tadd Adcox's first novel *Does Not Love*, marital love disintegrates for complex time-tested reasons, but this reeling couple is packaged in a gritty contemporary milieu with pharmaceutical human guinea pigs run amok underground, and an FBI agent both creating and participating in SM sex tapes with a librarian staggering in grief over her numerous miscarriages. A swirl of cultural satire and palpable pathos.—Cris Mazza, author of *Various Men Who Knew Us as Girls* and *Is It Sexual Harassment Yet?* Not since Don DeLillo's *White Noise* has a novel made me feel as though the Earth's axis has tilted a hair the wrong way – not, that is, until James Tadd Adcox's *Does Not Love*. This novel is both deadpan funny and sinister, written in prose that's cool and crisp: a smart page-turner. It's as though *Revolutionary Road* had been written by Denis Johnson, and then some menacing FBI agents were thrown in. Three words of advice: Read this book. —John McNally, author of *After the Workshop*"This is a brisk and biting novel, its horrors roiling beneath a pharmaceutical tone. Adcox deftly situates marital turmoil within the context of cultural turmoil, making *Does Not Love* a domestic novel for our times."—Christopher Bachelder, author of *U.S.!*"Adcox's *Does Not Love* is a book I didn't think was possible: a perfect balance of relationship drama, biting social satire, and noir thriller. The story moves at a quick clip, skipping seamlessly from moment to moment. Not until the last page, did I come up for air, look behind me and wonder, 'How did he pull that off?'"—Jac Jemc, author of *A Different Bed Every Night* and *My Only Wife*"Like the instructional DVD on rough sex watched by its married protagonists, James Tadd Adcox's *Does Not Love* starts gentle, then builds to higher intensities. A funny-sad story of the heroism of retaining human emotions in a society quick to pathologize them, this novel looks hard at the possibilities and emptinesses of love."—Kathleen Rooney, author of *O, Democracy!*"Like our best contemporary writers, James Tadd Adcox sees the prevailing gray of the age, the maps drawn with fuzzy, evaporating borders, and the hilarity that results from our institutionalized abuse of language. Lucky for us, he has the philosophical chops to confront them. Can "betrayal" exist in such a realm of gray? "Plot"? Yes, no, it depends. In *Does Not Love* collusion is a regime, sexuality is violence, and human emotion lurks like a dark-suited government agent. Brilliant, cumulative, and surprising, Adcox's debut novel represents a rare and valuable thing: a love story that succeeds in changing your mind."—Kyle Beachy, author of *The Slide*"James Tadd Adcox's prose in *Does Not Love* is spare, precise, and elegant, not unlike the subtleties in emotional distress that his characters undergo in this gripping novel. Lost love, lost almost-lives, painfully lusty fantasies, and cultural criticism all play out in this book that is characteristically funny, if you've already read Adcox's short fiction, and surprisingly so if you have not. Do yourself a favor and get started here, with this book."—Jamie Iredell, author of *I Was a Fat Drunk Catholic School Insomniac*