

Since "romance," then, is a cultural construct which dates back to the 11th century, deconstruction becomes a formidable task. The second major goal of Holland and Eisenhart begins this process. The interviews with the students are carefully analyzed against the background of earlier studies in the field by renowned scholars such as Adrienne Rich. By focusing on the structural perspective, the authors demonstrate that gender oppression is significantly different from that of class or race. Awareness of this essential difference, so clearly delineated in *Educated in Romance*, provides a formidable challenge to all educators to change the structures in which women work and live. Continuing the education of young women by fitting them into the same patterns originally designed for the education of men only perpetuates the oppression of women within both peer and adult cultures.

Thirdly, this book serves as an illustration of the very process of deconstruction. It breaks new ground and, as R.W. Connell, a leading Australian feminist theorist, points out in an excellent foreword, Holland and Eisenhart "have made a notable contribution to the process of change."

We are, [she states], involved in a change away from a professionalized, hierarchical masculine model of social science towards a democratic, participatory and inclusive model. It is no accident that women are leaders in this move. (p. vii)

The authors have demonstrated an ability to learn from the experience of others, and to codify and record their learning in a way that is comprehensible to those outside the disciplines of the social sciences. They have not only listened carefully to their informants, but they have also shifted and selected from their own hours of listening in a way that the reader, too, becomes engaged in objective listening. They thus develop a new methodology for improving the learning process for the lay reader as well as the specialist. The book demonstrates a rare ability to acquire and use feedback on the performance of the researchers as well as that of their student subjects. This self-analytical as well as subject-analytical style begins the important process of reader orientation to subject and theory.

The tools of learning developed here can help women readers direct their own destinies and begin a whole process of self-renewal. For these reasons, I would hope that this book does not end only on the bookshelves of academics and feminists. It should be mandatory reading for teachers at all levels as well as for parents and students themselves, not only for the points made about the corrosive effects of peer culture, but also for invaluable insights into how to change those cultural constructs which limit development of our full human potential.

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**Pornography: The Other Side.** F.M. Christensen.  
New York: Praeger, 1990, Pp. 188.

During the 1980s, debates on pornography have split the women's movement, with some feminists intent on devising ways of controlling or censoring it, while others either defended it or, at least, argued that it was not all that bad.<sup>1</sup> Neither side, however, will be pleased with Mr. Christensen's *Other Side*, for although he tries to enter the discussion as the voice of reason, he gradually reveals that the roots of his thinking are firmly planted in the men's movement — the anti-feminist backlash. The "Other Side" boils down to the claim that men need pornography, that it harms no one, and that feminists who want to take it away are mean and hostile sexists.

At the outset, Christensen defines pornography as material "denoting sexual content whose purpose is to arouse or satisfy sexual feelings." He distinguishes the "pornographic" from the "obscene" (something that "refers to extreme offensiveness in general and need not involve sex"), but not from the "erotic," which is "anything relating to or tending to cause sexual arousal" (1). Men need pornography, he says, because they are more oriented toward visual stimuli than women and because, on average, they have stronger sex drives, which they can use pornography to satisfy vicariously. Although Christensen cites a number of

studies that "prove" these two items of conventional wisdom, a sceptic might wonder how reliable such studies are, given the tendency of those researching gender differences to find what they are looking for. Remember all the 19th-century scientists who concluded, after weighing men's and women's brains, that women were incapable of benefiting from higher education?

However, studies that purport to demonstrate connections between pornography and oppression of or violence against women do elicit Christensen's selective scepticism (although studies arguing that many rapists had sexually repressive mothers do not). Christensen persuasively argues that there is nothing degrading to women in pornographic representations since:

The desire to share sex with another person is no more degrading than is the desire, e.g., to share companionship. And presentations that arouse or vicariously satisfy sexual desires are no more to be despised than those that arouse or satisfy the desire for friendship, love, or self respect. (23)

Any attempt to show that pornography debases or exploits women more than men is to insist on the double standard "and hence to reinforce the societal blame directed at women who violate it" (75). As for depictions of rape and other kinds of violent pornography, Christensen castigates (falsely) opponents of pornography for their indifference to other kinds of media violence, most of which involves the assaulting or killing of men. Christensen allows that a steady diet of media murder and mutilation may be bad for us, but does not think that an incessant barrage of ruptured female bodies should bother anyone.

In his zeal to defend male sexuality and male needs, Christensen fundamentally mischaracterizes the feminist critique of pornography. This critique arose from frustration with social resistance to moving forward on women's demands for equity, and it challenges the whole image system that turns bodies into replaceable parts and sex into the lubricant that sells everything from vacations to cigarettes. Unfortunately, the critique sidetracked

onto an emphasis on pornography and began making claims about male sexuality not so different in kind, though antithetical in tone, from those Christensen himself puts forward.

Christensen, however, lumps feminists along with Christian fundamentalists and other right-wing opponents of pornography into a group guilty of what he calls "antisexualism," which he seems to think is the dominant social discourse on sex. In fact, there are so many competing discourses on sexuality these days that the result is not "repression," as Christensen claims, but confusion.

Since pornography's very purpose is to promote sexual arousal, attitudes toward it ultimately tend to come down to basic feelings about sexuality itself. Christensen is enthusiastically pro-sex. For him, the only real problems with sex come from repressive, "anti-sexual" social attitudes. If only we could all free ourselves from those, we could presumably enjoy healthy, guilt-free, sanitized sex lives. This sort of simplistic thinking ignores the connections of sexuality to ultimate issues of birth and death, as well as to deep, unsatisfiable longings and wishes, or to the vulnerabilities brought with us from childhood. As numerous feminists have pointed out, exploration of sexuality involves both danger and pleasure, risk and reward.

Although Christensen would like us to see him as a man of reason, he is actually a man with a chip on his shoulder. He believes that women have much more social power and influence than feminists claim and that they use it to make men feel bad about their desires and needs which are "downgraded as less important, less noble, and downright ignoble" (53). Poor grown-up little boys, made to feel their sexual urges are nasty and disgusting: these are the real victims of "antisexualism" for whom Christensen would have us feel compassion.

To give Christensen credit where credit is due, his opposition to censorship is laudable, and his arguments against the notion that pornography degrades women are well written. Although Christensen presents himself as an advocate of gender

equity, his ability to see in the feminist critique of pornography only the attack on male sexuality and his failure to understand its real substance reveals him for what he is: a man who thinks the women's movement has gone "too far" and who thinks the balance needs to be redressed, in favour of men.

## NOTE

1. For the record: I published a couple of articles in this debate, defending pornography from feminist attacks and vigorously opposing censorship of any kind. See, for example, Eileen Manion, We objects object: Pornography and the women's movement, in *Feminism now: Theory and practice*, Marielouise and Arthur Krocker, Pamela McCallum and Mair Verthuy (Eds.), (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1985), 65-80. I began reading Christensen's book thinking that I would agree with him.

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**The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925.** Mariana Valverde. *Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991, Pp. 205.*

Mariana Valverde's book is about discourse or, more properly, varieties of discourse. The book is about the talk of people as they formulated the work of moral reform at the turn of the twentieth century in Canada. The analysis is of the speeches of leaders of those movements, the texts of pamphlets and tracts. *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water* is an analysis of those discourses and, more elliptically, of how discourse is an arena for the constitution of social relations.

In *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, Valverde discusses the social purity movement in Canada, its position on moral reform and philanthropy, and the world view of its activists. Central to an examination of this world view is an account — and not merely an exposition — of how the activists and their audiences had certain myths and images which sustained the potency of their work. Valverde sees the movement as an early attempt at positive sex education, organized around the social concerns of prostitution, immigration, and urbanization.

Valverde tries to set herself apart from possible detractors by contending that her work is neither historicist, idealistic, or materialistic, nor about social panics or a simple project in women's history. This clarification of the parameters of the project and what it is not about is too brief. For example, she starts off contentiously by saying that "historians cannot gather facts because facts, as well as the subjects who think they know them, are generated and given meaning in discourses" (p. 9). She then proceeds to relate the facts of moral reform in Canada almost matter-of-factly, yet with the emphasis that subjects are those who write, live, and enact history.

This explicit rejection of mainstream historical research is based on a theoretical paradigm upon which Valverde could have elaborated. In some ways the analysis is quite traditionally historical — a recounting of the efforts of the Methodists, the National Council of Women, the Salvation Army, the YMCA, and so on. The analysis documents the work of the multifaceted social purity movement in Canada, and its work in the slums and ghettos among prostitutes, immigrants and alcoholics. What is novel is the analysis of rhetorical tropes, metaphors and allegories, and their application to this movement. The lineage of this type of analysis could be discussed more, however, as it is important to the historical analysis of texts and documents.

What is unclear in Valverde's project is how she is able to make the interpretations she does of those subjects. From our perspective in the late twentieth century, we interpret the author's interpretations of how subjects at the turn of the century interpreted the discourses in which they were immersed. How are we to sort through the layers of interpretation? This is more than just an academic quibble, for, as she states, "the meaning of texts ... can only be deciphered ... through a thorough knowledge of the social context in which the texts were produced" (p. 43). While I believe that texts should not be analyzed in isolation, and that they should be examined in relation to their social contexts, I think that the idea that this analysis could ever be "thorough" is optimistic. In the analysis of discursive rhetoric, more room should be left for