

explains that happens in court the day that Bernice is finally sentenced to jail. Although Bernice, in a letter to Aurelia, promises to give her account, characteristically she cannot bring herself to relate the story. It is clear that Bernice was unprepared for the implications that resulted from her failure to conform to society's regulations. In fact, after her jail sentence, correspondence between Bernice and Lily reveals a more thoughtful but still delightfully eccentric young woman.

The letters to the Salon des Muses, a satirical attack on a feminist artist group, and a proposal to Wisconsin Arts Conclave are entertaining reading. They reveal Ressemeyer's own very shrewd insights into the artistic lesbian community. Bernice's submission of a dusty and dilapidated xerox machine with a poem, 'Ode on a Xerox Machine,' etched in the dust, to be published in its entirety, is only one example of Ressemeyer's cutting, fond attack on the artistic community. When the collection draws to an end, the reader wishes the eccentric Bernice an affectionate farewell.

These two collections compliment each other. While *Falling From Grace* explores a sensitive and terrifying issue, mastectomy, from the point of view of one woman's painful experience, *Bernice* examines the lesbian artistic community with lighthearted humor. Both works together provide balance and perspective.

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Women Against Censorship, Ed. by V. Burstyn.
Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre Ltd., 1985.

The Censorship Trap Revisited

Women Against Censorship is an interesting group of essays that reflect quite accurately the position of the anti-censorship feminist con-

tingent. The thesis of the book, well articulated by editor Varda Burstyn and reiterated throughout by many of the other contributors, is that censorship, even pornography is not the issue, but rather "Sexist pornography is a product of the economic and social conditions of our society—not vice versa." (p.24) In principle, of course, it is impossible to quarrel with such a position. No one is naive enough to believe the implied reverse position i.e. that pornography per se causes sexism. It does help to perpetrate it however, and this is a point barely alluded to in the present volume. After struggling with the book for some time, and carefully considering its variety of anti-censorship essays, I am left with an uncomfortable, gnawing feeling that something is not quite right. This something, however, is not so much a problem with the book as it is with the Women Against Censorship movement, which has been gaining in respectability as a legitimate political perspective on the feminist horizon. The book, like the WAC movement, is a Catch 22.

As Burstyn herself points out quite clearly, the book looms as a warning, directed in particular I suspect at feminists who have fallen into the "censorship trap." It reiterates over and over again that pornography is only a symptom. "Censoring pornography is like using an Aspirin to cure cancer." (p.79) "Censoring pornography is like killing the messenger who brings bad news." (p.97) More importantly, WAC argues that pornography and censorship are distracting us from more important problems relating to women's inequality. Yet the very focus of the book, like the energy orientation of the WAC movement suggests rather clearly that these women haven't sidestepped the censorship issue at all. In fact, they are obsessed with it. As someone who agrees with the book's basic premise that censorship is indeed a red herring, it is disappointing to see many articulate feminists attending to it so intimately. While the book pinpoints some of the crucial questions which are embedded in the pornography/censorship

controversy, e.g. the difference between erotica and pornography, sex and sexism, image and reality etc., it ultimately veers away from these issues in favor of a politico-legalistic direction. In fact, the book does exactly what it accuses its procensorship sisters of doing—it takes on a vigilant political stance before sufficient analysis of the problem. First and foremost—what is pornography? I am still not sure. Of the 10 essays in the book excluding introduction and conclusion, only 2 of them deal with the ideology of pornography in any substantial way. The rest are more concerned with the ideology of censorship. In short, WAC are no less seduced by the censorship trap than the majority of rank and file feminists. They are merely on the other side.

Yet, in spite of this gnawing niggle, the book does offer some interesting reflections, a range of viewpoints, that will be especially useful to those who have not been so caught up with the issue. Personally, I'm afraid that like many others I practically suffer from pornography burnout. In this respect, I would have to agree with the authors that the issue has commanded a disproportionate amount of time and energy. This point is well elaborated by Snitow in her essay on the politics of the anti-pornography movement in which she analyses the collective function of the anti-pornography bandwagon.

“The anti-pornography movement has attracted women from many sectors of women's liberation. But this unity has a high price, for it requires that we oversimplify, that we hypothesize a monolithic enemy, a timeless, universal, male sexual brutality. When we perform a sort of ritual of purification.”(p.113)

The book begins with an Introduction and an overview essay by Varda Burstyn which offers a useful precis of the women's movement and the contextual place of the current pornography controversy. Burstyn lays out her general feminist framework and the framework for the book

which is largely a Marxist/materialist one. While I have no quarrel with that in and of itself, this framework signals one of the things that is sadly missing from the book, a more cultural or symbolic perspective, which would attempt to deal seriously with the relationship of ideology and image to power and social structure. This objectivist or positivistic bias is also reflected in the pornography research overview in the appendix which reviews behaviourist studies in some detail, but only gives nod to so-called “cultural” studies of pornography. Unfortunately this burgeoning dichotomy between *materialist* i.e. political vs a so-called *cultural* feminism (I hate the term-it makes feminism sound like an artistic event!) is applicable to a wide range of contemporary feminist writing and debate, and it represents a very real dichotomy or schism which must be reckoned with if feminist studies mean to progress. It is certainly particularly germane to pornography which centers on the meaning and impact of the image. Unfortunately, however, the articles in WAC sometimes appear to trivialize the image (save the articles by Diamond and Steele to be discussed later.)

In this regard, June Callwood's essay is especially disappointing. Although she begins by saying “None of us believe that hard-core pornography is harmless” (p.122), she also notes that “There is strong reason to doubt that pornography is as prevalent and horrific as the public has been led to believe, and arguments about its power to influence behaviour have not been convincing.” (p.129) While there may be some truth in her remarks, I am a little disturbed by the fact that she spends such an inordinate amount of time decrying the social significance of pornography, even resorting to “positivistic” statistics which show that kiddie porn is not really as prevalent as supposed (only 3%—how encouraging). Callwood ends her essay on a familiar polemical note “When women have the same economic power that men do, the male-female relationship will begin to be egalitarian...”. (p.129) Some libertarians perhaps, but not all.

Probably not even most. It is at this point I become increasingly anxious about WAC politics. On the one hand, they sometimes (though not in this text) accuse pro-censorship women and rightly so—of sleeping with Canadians for moral decency. In retrospect, many feminists are acknowledging that it was a great political/strategic mistake. But I am equally skeptical about WAC's own choice of bedfellows, i.e. male liberals. What all of these materialist murmurings seem to ignore is a point which pervades the best in feminist analysis e.g. Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Namely, structuralism is only half the story. It alone cannot explain the persistence of ideology and the perpetuation of gender mentalities. Thus, like much of western sociology, feminism, and pornography in particular, seems to be caught up in the senseless old chicken egg argument. Does form (ideology) follow structure or structure follow form?

The bulk of the book then deals with the pragmatics of censorship, the political implications of legalisation and the futility of most legal reform i.e. It will only be "used against us." The volume also includes a thorough analysis of the infamous Minneapolis Ordinance. And it presents a predictable piece on pornography and lesbianism "Anti-porn legislation can only hinder the making of sexually pluralistic society..." (p.106). By contrast there is a brief but reflective article by writer, Myrna Kostash which while not profound, touches a chord which aptly reflects the crux of the problem. "Once upon a time I thought I had pornography all figured out...Nowadays I am not so sure. As the anti-pornography debate and campaign have matured, broadened, become more complex, I have become more confused." (p.32) Pornography is indeed a very complex matter articulating both ideology and sociology, and as such requires our careful attention. But the only articles in the book which really do this, i.e. which really grapple with the relationship between sex, gender and power, are those by Diamond and

Steele. This is because they are the only papers which take seriously the pornographic image and its meaning.

...any systematic analysis of imagery that posits porn as the bad end of the visual spectrum is bound to run out of steam before it gets to the overwhelming banality of most television and advertising, which are by far the more prevalent influences in our media landscape."

It is unfortunate, (however, economically understandable) that there are no pictorials to accompany her excellent analysis of contemporary ads, especially the Calvin Klein ones, because the nuance of her decoding and feminist critique is something that can only be appreciated in a visual context. We need to see more of this kind of empirically grounded feminist critique. More importantly, Steele is the only contributor who even alludes to the materialistic bias in contemporary feminist writing. She gets right to the heart of the matter when she writes "Up until this point, many women have said that culture was not a "real" political issue; that we had to work on those issues that were more important: employment, equal pay, reproductive rights, violence against women. Culture would have to wait its turn. I think, as women, we can no longer afford to wait." (p.76) In fact, she is so vigilant that one almost wonders what she is doing in the volume. Clearly her anti-censorship position is coming from a somewhat different place than the other contributors. For her, sexist imagery is not trivial at all. It is everywhere and indistinguishable. "Is a "sexy" automobile in a television commercial—or a dancing candy bar, for that matter—any less harmful visually and physically than a fragmented female form..." (p.59). In short it is a terrific piece.

Diamond's is also a thoughtful probing piece which while raising more questions than it could possibly answer, at least gets the frontal lobes working and attempts to sidestep anti-

ensorship polemics. She also deals with the image, the nuance of the facial expression etc. Similarly her work could also have benefited from appropriate accompanying illustrations. Diamond also allows her own ambivalences to come through which is a refreshing change from some of the more didactic essays which follow, and she acknowledges the intense power of pornographic imagery. But she tempers this with the assertion "that there is a wide gulf between fantasy, no matter how grotesque and the reality." (p.48) Her comments about women's fantasies are reminiscent of the reflections on female sexuality in Carol Vance's new book *Pleasure and Danger*: "There is a wide gap between the fantasies of submission that we construct for ourselves and those that porn fabricates for us." Diamond's work really tries to dig deep into the phenomenology of pornography and sexuality for women while refusing to accept the victim view of relations implied by state censorship.

"The women's movement is currently devoting vast economic and human resources to fighting existing pornography and other media imagery. It is my feeling that we would gain more by seeking resources to allow women to flood the market with feminist productions..." (p.53)

And like others, in the volume Diamond is vehement about the power and necessity of sex positive imagery.

Interestingly enough, the notion of sex positive imagery is mentioned by the editor and several contributors but nobody does much with it. And I can't help asking myself whether the energies that were put into this book could not have been better spent cultivating this particular domain. If it is true that censorship is really a non-issue, then feminists, WAC in particular could do better to preach by example. In fact, there is no need to address censorship at all. Rather we should be addressing by analysis or even better by example the relationship between

gender, sex, power and violence. Perhaps a book titled *Beyond Censorship* would better get to the crux of the matter.

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Jean Webster, Storyteller, by Alan and Mary Simpson with Ralph Connor. *Little Compton, Rhode Island: Tymor Associates, 1984.*

There are so many reasons to rediscover Jean Webster. The most successful of her childrens' books, *Daddy Long-Legs*, is still in print today, 74 years after it was written, giving continued pleasure to generations of children and adults in its book, play and three film versions. Webster's subject is the "emancipated" woman—going to college, participating in social reforms, and discovering her own definition of relationships. The grand-niece of Mark Twain, Webster possesses in her books many of the same characteristics as her revered relative, but with a feminine and feminist slant that deserves to be rediscovered and reexamined. Most important, she was a practical, independent, liberated, happy woman—and this positive attitude toward life provides the reader of her biography with a rare philosophy for a rewarding existence.

Why there has been so little written about her has long been a mystery to me. As a child, I polished off *Daddy Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy*, then, discovering that none of her other books were in print, went about looking for information on the author. I assumed, as did all the girls I knew, that Jean Webster was the heroine, Jerusha Abbott, who had escaped from the oppressive environment of her orphanage with the help of an anonymous benefactor as attractive and mysterious as "Daddy Long-Legs," and when we found no biography to contradict us, were content with the one she wrote. The recent Bantam edition of *Daddy Long-Legs* promotes this mistaken assumption, stating explicitly that Jean Webster was an orphan.