

The Invention of Pornography, 1500-1800: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity

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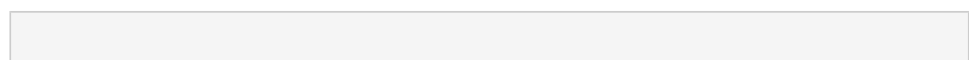
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In America today the intense and controversial debate over the censorship of pornography continues to call into question the values of a modern, democratic culture. This ground-breaking collection of ten critical essays traces the history and various uses of pornography in early modern Europe, offering the historical perspective crucial to understanding current issues of artistic censorship.

The essays, by historians and literary theorists, examine how pornography emerged between 1500 and 1800 as a literary practice and a category of knowledge intimately linked to the formative moments of Western modernity and the democratization of culture. They reveal that the first modern writers and engravers of pornography were part of the *demimonde* of heretics, freethinkers, and libertines who constituted the dark underside of the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. From the beginning, early modern European pornography used the shock of sex to test the boundaries and regulation of decent and obscene behavior and expression in the public and private spheres, criticizing and even subverting religious and political authorities as well social and sexual norms.

Contents: Introduction, *Lynn Hunt*. Humanism, Politics, and Pornography in Renaissance Italy, *Paula Findlen*. The Politics of Pornography: L'Ecole des filles, *Joan Dejean*. Sometimes a Sceptre is only a Sceptre: Pornography and Politics in Restoration England, *Rachel Weil*. The Materialist World of Pornography, *Margaret C. Jacob*. Truth and the Obscene Word in Eighteenth-Century French Pornography, *Lucienne Frappier-Mazur*. The Pornographic Whore: Prostitution in French Pornography from Margot to Juliette, *Kathryn Norberg*. Erotic Fantasy and the Libertine Dispensation in Eighteenth-Century England, *Randolph Trumbach*. Politics and Pornography in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Republic, *Wijnand W. Mijnhardt*. Pornography and the French Revolution, *Lynn Hunt*.



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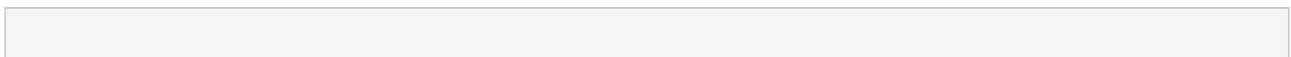
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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This book, whose contents were presented at a conference at the University of Pennsylvania in 1991, provides insight into social and political history not often examined by the historian. The reader is offered nine essays, an introduction, an extensive bibliography, and notes dealing with the source materials. The essays, which trace the evolution of pornography from 1500 to 1800--that is, from its infancy through the French Revolution--reinforce the thesis that pornography evolved as a political tool. The book is replete with drawings representing the originals found in the press of the period under discussion and supporting the narratives. The work is too specialized for general library collections but nonetheless serves a valuable service for scholars.

- *Arthur K. Steinberg, Livingstone Coll., Salisbury, N.C.*

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Review

Fascinating...a fiercely intelligent and provocative collection that provides new insights into both the origins of modern pornography and the dynamics of cultural modernity.

(**Michiko Kakutani** *New York Times*)

From the Back Cover

In this groundbreaking collection of essays, historians and literary theorists examine how, between 1500 and 1800, pornography emerged as a literary practice and a category of knowledge intimately linked to the formative moments of Western modernity and the democratization of culture. The first modern writers and engravers of pornography were part of the demimonde of heretics, freethinkers and libertines who constituted the dark underside of the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. From the start, early modern European pornography used the shock of sex to test the boundaries and regulation of obscene behavior and expression in the public and private sphere. As such, pornography criticized and even subverted political authorities as well as social and sexual relations.

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