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Book Review - International Exposure: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography, 1800-2000 (L. Z. Sigel, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005)

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International Exposure: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography, 1800-2000, edited by Lisa Z. Sigel. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005. 283 pp. NPL cloth. ISBN: 0-8135-3518-2. NPL paper. ISBN: 0-8135-3519-0.

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As Sigel proclaims in her introduction, the objective of this work is to explore "the cultural impact of pornography" (p. 1) in Europe and to ground discussion in the "historic framework" as well as "locate sexuality within complex frameworks that hinge upon changing definitions of obscenity, emerging forms of representations, and shifting cultural contexts" (p. 7). While some chapters are superior in providing clearly-directed and in-depth analyses, overall this collection offers nuanced explorations of pornography's role in the cultural/sociopolitical context of Europe.

Sigel adeptly opens with a presentation of the production and definition of pornography in Europe from 1800 to the present, providing the historical context in which to ground the subsequent chapters. She also reviews previous research to contextualize this volume in the broader scholarly discussion of pornography, noting that this collection's "panoply of approaches can help the study of pornography emerge from the contentious legacy left by previous debates over free speech, social morality, and social protection" (p. 6). The contributors hale

from a range of disciplines, including literature, history, telecommunications, media studies, and various cultural studies. While this inclusion of multidisciplinary approaches is argued by Sigel as advantageous, it may contribute to a sense of disjointedness in the volume as a whole. However, Sigel's introduction skillfully weaves the foci of the subsequent chapters into the broader historical and cultural context and thus somewhat alleviates this disjointedness.

As in any edited volume, some chapters in this collection stand out against the others. The chapters by Sigel, Colligan, Romanets, and Borenstein not only provide directed, in-depth examinations, but they more closely converge on analytical frameworks and thus assuage the disjointedness that challenges the collection's cohesion. Likewise, of the multidisciplinary approaches, these chapters, in my opinion, will be more appealing to this journal's audience. Specifically, these chapters present analyses that adroitly explore the reflexive relationship between pornography and the broader sociopolitical context.

Sigel offers an engaging examination of incestuous pornography in turn-of-the-century England. Sigel grounds her discussion in the "middle-class ambivalence" (p. 101) toward incest legislation and judicial proceedings, proposing that examining the rhetoric of incestuous pornography might shed some light on this ambivalence. Her close reading of incestuous pornographic novels reveals that the children in these narratives about middle-class families were not constructed as victims but rather as highly-sexualized beings complacent in if not seductively pursuant of these incestuous relationships with

their elders—thus allowing the primarily middle-class male readers to "fantasize about precocious children who looked back on them with an equal measure of desire" (p. 120). Sigel subsequently discusses the co-emergence of this pornographic subgenre and Freud's theory of children's sexuality that "together displaced desire onto children" (p. 119). She concludes by bringing these two cultural phenomena to bear on the aforementioned "middle-class ambivalence" toward incest, succinctly observing, "Against these developments Parliament's inability to legislate against incest begins to make sense" (p. 120).

Colligan traces the evolution of flagellation fantasies in English pornographic literature from late eighteenth to early twentieth century. Establishing that flagellation was a recurring theme in late-eighteenth-century English pornography, she explores how the abolitionist "flogged slave woman" narratives were subsequently appropriated into pornographic literature throughout the nineteenth century. Colligan argues that the transatlantic appropriation of the flogged slave woman imagery served various roles, among which was "disassociat[ing] the fantasy from the English" and thus "enabl[ing] the inclusion of English homoerotic fantasies about sodomy…while blaming such acts of degeneracy" (p. 81) on the American slave system. She then discusses how the flogged black slave woman imagery evolved to white slave woman flagellation in late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century pornographic literature and then to "the figurative trope of master and slave" (p. 90) illustrated in sadomasochistic metaphors. Colligan concludes by suggesting that all "whipping

fantasies" (p. 90) in English pornographic literature are predicated on the transatlantic imagery of the flogged slave woman.

Romanets and Borenstein's explorations of pornography in post-Communist nations (the Ukraine and Russia, respectively) closely converge analytically and thematically. Acknowledging the previous totalitarian constraints on sexual expression, Romanets and Borenstein examine the concomitant boom of pornography in post-Communist societies. While both discuss the impact of globalization on representations in Ukrainian and Russian pornographies, they primarily analyze the expression of political ideologies and post-Communist anxieties in pornographic media. Romanets explores Ukrainian pornographic media as both a site that reinforces the lingering "desexed socialist realism" but also attempts to subvert this "Soviet hygienic moral code" (p. 216). Similarly, Romanets argues that tropes of male mastery/female submission in Ukrainian pornography can be viewed through a postcolonial theoretical lens as not merely reproducing traditional pornographic scenarios but as representing post-Communist anxieties about masculinity rooted in men's political emasculation under Communist regimes. Similarly, Borenstein argues that Russian pornography "allegorizes the culture's obsession with embattled masculinity, wounded national pride, and the country's perennially fraught relations with the West" (p. 234). Borenstein subsequently explores how pornography serves as an arena for men to reclaim their masculinity stripped by Communist rule while simultaneously rejecting elements of Western culture and embracing Russian nationalism.

In conclusion, while this collection suffers from some disjointedness, the described chapters provide engaging insights into the complex, reflexive relationship between pornography and the broader sociopolitical context. As a whole, I would recommend this volume to those studying the role of pornography in the broader cultural/sociopolitical context, both in Europe and globally.