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WRITING SAMPLE #1

Personal blog post, July 2009 (links included)

The Case for Reading Erotica

[<http://thegreenlightdistrict.org/wordpress/2010/01/the-case-for-reading-erotica/>]

A couple weeks ago I read an [article in the New York Times](#) that I considered blogging about but ultimately did not find compelling enough to do so. This is not because I didn't find the article interesting but rather, I think, because I had not read enough of the work the author referenced to find myself relating to what she was postulating.

The article was about sex writing by male fiction authors of today's and the immediately prior generation. Today I read three pages of [letters to the editor in response to it](#), and those I have found compelling (compelling enough to blog about, obviously). With the qualifier that I have still not read all or even many of the works the author references in her article or the ones mentioned in many of the responses, a consistent theme struck me, and a response began to emerge as I read more and more of the letters.

The summary of the article, written by [Katie Roiphe](#) and titled "[The Naked and the Conflicted](#)," reads,

"We denounce the Great Male Novelists of the last century for their sexism. But something has been lost now that innocence is more fashionable than virility, the cuddle preferable to sex."

The article's general thesis seems to be that the current generation of male fiction authors are shying away from sex in their work, penning ambivalent, self-conscious sex scenes as contrasted with the previous generation's works by authors such as John Updike, Norman Mailer, and Philip Roth, about which she says, for example, "There is in these scenes rage, revenge and some garden-variety sexism, but they are — in their force, in their gale winds, in their intelligence — charismatic, a celebration of the virility of their bookish, yet oddly irresistible, protagonists."

She later laments things like, "But our new batch of young or youngish male novelists are not dreaming up Portnoys or Rabbits. The current sexual style is more childlike; innocence is more fashionable than virility, the cuddle preferable to sex," and "Gone the familiar swagger, the straightforward artistic reveling in the sexual act itself," concluding that in the previous generation's work, ". . . there is in these old paperbacks an abiding interest in the sexual connection."

The [letters to the editor in response](#) are varied, of course, but again, as I read them, a similar theme seemed evident to me.

This is an example of one of the responses:

Katie Roiphe's essay has confirmed my suspicion that I'm not the only one to lament the disappearance of straight male sexual bravado in literature. I'm a feminist, but I still want to see inside the head of a man's animal lust. Why must every roll in the hay be so ironic and self-conscious that it's somehow castrated?

Other responses countered Ms. Roiphe's proposition, but I also saw a few that introduced the idea that the trend she postulated may be resultant of a perceived "hypersexualized" culture and bombardment of messaging, expressed with lines such as, "In a world in which sex has become entirely ironic, and thus detached from real emotion, they find that the most emotional moments are no longer sexual," and "a passing glance at Internet porn should explain why sexual candor no longer seems like much of a touchstone for artistic ambition."

Whether the writers of the letters were agreeing with Ms. Roiphe's hypothesis or expressing disgust or frustration with a "hypersexualized" culture in which explicit sex does not seem a "touchstone for artistic ambition," the same response arose in me. This isn't so much a response to Ms. Roiphe's literary critique of past and contemporary treatment of sex by male authors (nor is it meant to be a discouragement of interpretive critique of literary trends and related societal implications) as it is a practical offering to what so many of the responders (and perhaps Ms. Roiphe herself) seem to be seeking, either overtly or between the lines:

Read erotica. If you're not finding the authenticity, sincerity, directness, fearlessness, nuance, integration, and variety of sexual exploration and articulation you want to see in mainstream literature, read erotica. Read erotica published by [Cleis Press](#), [Black Lace](#) (what will have to be already-published erotica now), [Logical-Lust Publications](#), and any number of publishers listed on various erotica writers' websites. That's what the genre is here for, and if you think it won't be "literary" enough, I am delighted to take the opportunity to direct you to evidence to the contrary.

For starters, pick up [Donna George Storey's](#) novel [Amorous Woman](#), [Charlotte Stein's](#) short story collection [The Things That Make Me Give In](#), erotic short stories written by [Shanna Germain](#), [Craig Sorensen](#), [Alana Noel Voth](#), [Nikki Magennis](#), [P. S. Haven](#), to name a very few. That is a wholly non-exhaustive list, of course, but once you've delved into such things, you will likely discover a network or references with much more you may find of interest. Because that's what this is—literary work that doesn't hide sex, fearfully peeking at it from behind mainstream standards that demand either rebellion against or acquiescence to them. Just integrating sexuality into the work of writing fiction, the same way it is integrated into life.

"Sexual male bravado" and "a man's animal lust" are not write-able only by males, as the above examples readily evidence. Further, there are such things as female sexual bravado and a woman's animal lust that do not seem to be mentioned in either the context of the "traditional male greats" or the supposed watered-down sexual description plaguing contemporary fiction. They are a part of sexuality, however, and may also be found in abundance in the above-cited works.

I have not read all of the referenced authors or work in either Katie Roiphe's article or the responses to the editor. But I have read the list presented above. And I offer it very sincerely as an antidote to what Ms. Roiphe and her responders seem to lament—from whatever perspective they may do so.