

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

(accounting for) the place of the author, and how she selects from a range of possible interpretations.

The overall interest in discourse is an interest in how language is a medium which constitutes social relations, under our noses, almost invisibly. Language is a medium through and within which social relations are mediated and articulated as signifying practices. The rhetorical tropes of moral reform were an early sex education movement. In the words of the author, "purity work was not simply a question of banning obscene books or suppressing prostitution but was rather a campaign to educate the next generation" (p. 17). The discourse of social reform, then, was constitutive of specific moral relations.

The social reform discourse was recursive and dialectical, constituting and yet mirroring the subjectivity of the participants. On the one hand, the language of reform was constructed from a particular class position, using myths and allegories of social evil contemporary for that historical audience. Social reform posited a problem in the world which needed correction, and used concepts familiar to that audience. On the other hand, that discourse was not simply functional as an appeal for support and mobilizing action, reaffirming the world view of its public; that discourse also constructed the social reform project as the identity of that class. In Valverde's words, the "subjectivity of the intended audience is transformed by their own receptivity to the images" (p. 42).

Social purity work also involved the training of the subjectivity of the objects of reform as well as its advocates. Education in thrift, hygiene, loyalty to one's contract, and the value of work were all necessary values to inculcate in those people needing guidance and reform... These were values suited to a subject in capitalist society. In this sense, the social purity movement was part of wider social concerns: the remaking of social relations, coping with an increasingly urban environment, and training immigrants to assimilate.

Valverde does not use the word "control," but

rather stresses how the processes she analyzes were part of a regulatory process. Regulation is a better word than control, in part because hegemony and control is never complete, but also because it captures some of the structuring of individuality continually being accomplished in social life. As an example of regulation, the social purity movement focuses on education in the sexual and moral aspects of social life. Valverde's analysis, however, focuses more on gender than it does on sexuality. Because of her earlier work, I kept expecting her to discuss sexual regulation in a broader way but, aside from the obvious sexual management in the white slavery campaign, I was disappointed.

At times it appears that the regulation of gender was almost an indirect result of a larger campaign of moral reform. As an example, the concern over child abuse was worked up as a lower-class problem, and thus served as a locus of class reform. Identifying child abuse in this way, however, ignored the deeper dimension of parental authority and gender, and how those might be factors in the violence. In this way, the "moral panics" over child abuse were not simply mythical, but practical, in that they "serve[d] as the site for social debate on a number of important and interrelated issues" (p. 90).

The philanthropy movement did not smoothly transform into state mechanisms as capitalism developed, nor was there a mutually exclusive rift between them. Valverde shows how the state often used moral categories to justify control, just as the social purity campaigns tried to justify interventionism. The apparent willingness of the government to leave moral concerns to the domain of the philanthropists, however, is seen as due to the difficulty of justifying the invasion of privacy in a liberal democratic state. Conceptualizing behaviour as requiring correction is problematic at the best of times.

Overall, I find interesting Valverde's analysis of the work of the social reform movement in Canada (i.e., how it was an attempt at positive regulation, not simply repressive control). I also find that this

treatise serves as an exercise in the analysis of discursive relations. It is a recursive look at our history which could be extended to the present.

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Ceremonies of the Heart: Celebrating Lesbian Unions. Becky Butler (ed.). Seal Press, 1990, Pp. 308.

This 1990 publication breaks a long silence in gay and lesbian literature on the commitment ceremonies of lesbian couples. I read *Ceremonies of the Heart* with some anticipation, hoping that there would be considerable analysis of lesbian living. However, the focus is narrow and restricted to description rather than analysis of union/ceremonial activities. Nonetheless, Butler has provided a rich account of the diversity of women's choices around ceremonies between lesbian couples.

Butler intended *Ceremonies of the Heart* as a resource book for lesbians and, in particular, for lesbian couples looking for ideas to celebrate their relationships. The book is not an academic work. There is no account of the method used to select the stories, no theoretical framework of same-sex relationships or of the need for and implications of union ceremonies. Further, neither the relationship between the politics of feminism and of lesbian union ceremonies nor the common threads amongst the stories are discussed.

The book consists of three parts: an introduction, an historical section and a section of accounts of actual union ceremonies. The introduction is refreshingly reflective. Most importantly, we find that Butler has herself experienced a union ceremony and has a passionate commitment to preparing a book that will help other lesbians construct their own ceremonies.

The second part is a well-written and researched history of lesbian partnerships with an extensive bibliography. It is written to appeal to a "popular" audience and there is an abundance of

American references. This part details the struggle of lesbians for recognition and acceptance of lesbian partnerships. The topics addressed cover, in chronological order, sapphic spirit (Antiquity), intolerance (Roman times), cross dressing (Middle Ages), romantic friendships (18th and 19th century), deviance and pathology (beginning of the 20th century) and three sections on the increasing liberation of the 20th century. Butler's conscious effort to have diversity at the forefront is an important plus for this book.

The third part consists of 27 chapters, each an account of a ceremony provided by one or both of the women involved. Through these, the reader gets a bird's-eye view of culture being created by lesbians and their families. These are first-person accounts but, occasionally, the words of parents and friends are used. The reader is left with a feeling of richness — a feeling of having vicariously experienced the intensity and delight of others as they recount the process of agreeing to, organizing and living through a ceremony of the heart.

Each chapter contains a photo of the "partners," the story of how the idea of a ceremony surfaced between the women, how the ceremony was devised and presented and, finally, a small biographical note on each woman.

Despite the heavy emphasis on American couples (fully 89% come from the U.S.A., 44% from California alone), a great diversity of heritages (e.g., African, Aboriginal, Irish, Mexican, Chicano, etc.) and of spiritual backgrounds (e.g., Mennonite, Catholic, Jewish, Wicca, Quaker, atheist) is represented. In some ceremonies, women were able to combine unlike heritages and spiritual backgrounds to create unique, tailor-made experiences.

The selected couples introduce a number of issues. Some write about who to invite and who was involved: their children, colleagues, parents and siblings. For example, two New Zealand women decided to invite 13 women, "which is the size of a coven." Others write mainly about what was to be said during the ceremony. For some, "coming out" as a lesbian was a natural though risky part of