

The English Rogue & Sexuality

Preparations for the Presentation:

- Think about the purpose of erotica and pornography
 - Think about the possible educational character of the text
 - Think about sexual taboos, things you don't want to read in a novel
 - following chapters are recommended to be read:
 - The Character of a Bottle of Canary (p. 63ff, 1st pagination), especially the part starting on page 68.
 - The later part of Chapter LXIX (p. 87ff, 4th pagination)
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I have looked into 'The English Rogue' (1666) by Richard Head and especially the topic of sexuality, pornography and eroticism. The book deals quite frequently and openly with the topic of sexual intercourse. The handling of this topic is very diverse and changes in style and function. I will deal with some of these aspects more closely.

Difference in Style

There are great differences in the style of writing regarding the text passages dealing with sexuality. They range from an eloquent and elegant style to a rather simple and smutty language. And as a second aspect, the author makes use of both flowery and straightforward metaphors as well as being explicit. Consider this text passage taken from the 'The Character of a Bottle of Canary' (p.69):

There was not any thing wanting that might please our senses. Fearing lest that Oven I had heated might cool, I made ready my Batch: for such things are *Soon cold, soon hot*. Delays in love-affairs are dangerous: Women love not to be too long Tantalized ; there is a certain critical time to know their inclination ; which if you punctually observe, you shall assuredly reap the fruits of your desires ; if not, you may perpetually wait, but never enjoy the like opportunity. Wherefore the Iron glowing hot, I thought good to strike, giving her a taste for liking ; being not satisfied, I was forc'd to stay her stomach till Supper.

Here the description is done in metaphors that are rather abstract. A few lines later we find the following sentence “we could not but now and then bear part with them [musicians in the adjacent room], our Prick-song keeping time with their Instrumental Harmony.” (p. 69). This change in style from one sentence to the other appears quite frequently throughout the book (cf. p. 77).

Difference in the Description

There is also a difference in the description of sexual acts. Sometimes they are just hinted at, e.g. “what our Nocturnal passages were, I'll [sic!] give the Reader leave to imagine.” (Chapter XXX, p. 110, 2nd pagination). Other times it is just shortly mentioned as in this passage “I seldom was home but at night, & then in bed with my Mistress, ...”(Chapter XIX, p. 33, 2nd pagination). And, like the above example, they are sometimes extensively discussed and described in detail.

Function of the sex in the context of the story / plot

There are two functions of sex concerning the story or the plot. Either sex is a means to an end, or it is the goal itself. There may be a third function, or rather non-function, gratuitous sex. But this is reserved for further research as I have yet to find a proper definition and criteria and then apply them. The first two, however, may be clearly identified.

Sex as a means to an end may be encountered in chapter XXVI (p. 83ff, 2nd pagination) where he,

posing as a bachelor in search of a marriage, seduces maids in order to steal their money. There are cases where sex is something of both, e.g. in chapters XXVI to XXVIII and XXIX (p. 62 to 82, 2nd pagination) where he pays his rent in sexual services. And there are many cases where sex is his primary goal.

Issues of Gender

In most cases the male partner is the active pursuer of sexual pleasures, initiates sexual actions and is more experienced than the female partner. The female partner, though enjoying the act, is shy and naïve, often unaware of the consequences of such action; namely loss of reputation if found out and often pregnancy. Especially in the latter case the female partner has to bear the load alone, the male partner already engaged with another love affair (cf. “Canary”, p. 63ff, 1st pagination and chapter XIX, p. 31ff, 2nd pagination). In the case of adultery it is the cuckold who has to bear the load (cf. Chapter LXX, p. 94ff, 4th pagination where this is criticised).

There are cases, however, where the female part is the instigating party, older and more experienced and using the male partner for her pleasure. This is, as already mentioned, the case in the chapters XXVI to XXVIII and XXIX, but also in chapter LIV (p. 11ff, 4th pagination).

Educational purposes

Although the author warns the reader to “Read, but don't practice” (front page), this may only hold true for the roguery presented, not for the sexual act itself. Interpreted this way the explicit scenes may serve as means for sexual education. As far as education goes there is the purely “technical” side to it (penile-vaginal penetration, masturbation, pregnancy). However, due to the mostly metaphorical description of the sexual act these instructions would have to be interpreted by the prospective student. For the text to be of real educational value it would have to be more explicit and descriptive. This, however, might have not been possible out of fear of censorship or worse.

But aside from the technical point of view, this text may also be seen as an education in a social sense. By showing the downfall of so many naïve maids a prospective female reader might be taught how not to fall for the same manipulations. Or, if not abused, a male reader could learn how to woo and court women.

Finally there is a bit of multicultural education if one takes the description of the *Indies*, and their sexual and social habits seriously. Although their habits are described most often in a derisive manner, the author works out some facts that he esteems positive (chapter LXX, p. 94ff, 4th pagination). Although it would certainly be too much if this text would be taken for a lesson in inter-cultural education and understanding (considering that the description of the *Indies* is likely not first-hand knowledge but taken out of travelogues and a stereotypical notion of the *Indies* being a strange place with stranger customs).

Pornographic function

There is a difference between pornography and erotica. “Pornography or porn is the explicit depiction of sexual subject matter with the sole intention of sexually exciting the viewer”. It focuses solely on the satisfaction of the sexual drive whereas Erotica focuses on psychological arousal of the mind among other things. These definitions are taken out of Wikipedia and will be replaced by quotations of scientific worth ASAP.

Applying these definitions to the English Rogue I come to the conclusion that the work as a whole is certainly not pornographic due to the fact that it does not exclusively deal with sexual content. As the whole text is made up of interrelated and continuous, but in themselves independent chapters, single chapters may qualify as pornographic. But given the lack of explicitness and prevalence of metaphors I am inclined to rather catalogue them as erotica.

Sexual Themes

There are a lot of different sexual themes described in the text. This ranges from masturbation (chapter XXII, p. 44ff, 2nd pagination), to homosexuality (chapter XIII, p. 87ff, 1st pagination), from

incest (chapter IV, p. 22, 1st pagination) over adultery (too many to quote) to paedophilia (chapter LXIX, p. 87, 4th pagination).

State of research

I have done online research and am currently engaged in reading 'Memoirs of a Lady of Pleasure' by John Cleland. I will search out further secondary literature dealing with the topic of erotic literature and pornography in general.