



The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England

Steven Marcus

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Taking as his point of departure the authors, the audience, and the texts of Victorian writings on sex in general and of Victorian pornography in particular, Steven Marcus offers a startling and revolutionary perspective on the underside of Victorian culture. The subjects dealt with in *The Other Victorians* are not only those to have been "shocking" in the Victorian period. The way these subjects were regarded--and the way our notions of the Victorians continue to change, as the efforts of contemporary scholarship restore them to their full historical dimensions--are matters today of some surprise and wonder.

Making use, for the first time, of the extensive collection of Victoriana at the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research, Marcus first examines the writings of Dr. William Acton, who may be said to represent the "official views" of sexuality held by Victorian society, and of Henry Spencer Ashbee, the first and most important bibliographer-scholar of pornography. He then turns to the most significant work of its kind from the period, the eleven-volume anonymous autobiography *My Secret Life*. There follows an analysis of four pornographic Victorian novels--an analysis that throws an oblique but fascinating light on the classics of Victorian literature--and a review of the odd flood of Victorian publications devoted to flagellation. The book concludes with a chapter propounding a general theory of pornography as a sociological phenomenon.

With the publication of *The Other Victorians*, understanding of this period took a giant stride forward. Most of the writers and writings discussed by Marcus belong to Victorian sub-literature rather than to literature proper; in this way the work remains connected to a consideration of the exotic sub-literature. A brilliantly written book in its own right, this work transformed the study of the Victorian period as did no other.

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