SPECTRUM

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THE BLACK TRIANGLE

Pornography and erotica

by Tristis Bhaird

In practically any collection of lesbian books a browser is likely to find erotica. Aside from the books of erotic lesbian poetry, fiction and non- (ha!)-fiction, there may be stacks of videos both professionally produced and homemade! Someone, like myself a few years ago, coming out of a vaguely feminist heterosexual background, might find themselves wondering just what these women are doing with this stuff.

The answer I usually got when I asked was "Why the hell shouldn't we? There's nothing wrong with lesbian love." Nothing indeed, when it's love you're talking about.

Part of what this statement conveys is a rebellion against the hetero belief that lesbian relationships are "icky". How many of us have listened to the reactions of straight women when the topic of lesbianism was brought up. From the reaction you could almost believe someone was proposing live slug-eating right there in front of them. I often wondered where some of them got their nerve, having heard them discuss the intimacies of *their* varied sex acts. Somehow two women kissing topped all their acrobatics.

Reactionary or not, the act of celebrating the very stuff others have condemned you for has some positive effects on the human spirit. Unfortunately, it is easier to duplicate heterosexual pornography and incorporate all the revulsion we have been fed, into our own works. The result is lesbian pornography. Its one redeeming quality is that it is an in- your-face comment on the hetero world. It's only healthy in small doses.

There is a huge difference between pornography and erotica, though. The term is misused often by pornography peddlers, but there is plenty of legitimate erotic art to compare them to. Erotica is much more a celebration of the sensual, not the sexual. It is non-exploitive (no one is treated as a collection of sexual parts for someone else's use), the people depicted are given the artist's respect, and something more than flesh lust is occurring in the act.

The first erotic film I saw was heterosexual, but it was made by a woman. I had been subjected to enough pornography at that point in my life to be completely amazed by her treatment of intimacy. Her characters had depth, they shared something more than the physical act, and it showed in every move they made. What was depicted seemed a necessary completion of their bond. It wasn't particularly romantic, it was merely realistic.

All this may be waxing a little poetic, but for the most part the matter is pretty grey anyway. If you want a more simple comparison: pornography gives a person a "no" feeling, erotica does not.

The problem with boiling anything down to this simple a level is that some people get a "no" feeling from anything gay. Perfectly healthy homosexual books and films are stopped at the border by Canada Customs on a regular basis because someone is offended by the very idea. It is interesting to note that a lot more lesbian material gets through than gay male. The only explanation is that heterosexual pornography, which is allowed through by the truck load, itself depicts women having sex with other women as a voyeuristic stimulant for men.

I will never advocate censorship as a method of cleaning up our society because of these double standards. I don't want to risk losing the affirming erotic works I have seen in an attempt to cut out the sickness that our society is growing on its underside. And I am certain that homosexual expression would be the first to go. Already our bookstores are being raided by cops in the name of their war against pornography. They start with us because so many of the tax payers will support the attack. I doubt they will ever hit at the heart of the sex trade, because too many of the politicians, judges and businessmen use it.

I myself, simply choose carefully the books I read, and the films I see (I can't be anything but careful, since there are so few places in this town that supply them, and I end up buying when I am out of the province.) If reading the story makes me feel good about myself then I consider it worthwhile having. If it makes me uncomfortable I simply put it back on the shelf.

HETEROSEXUAL PORNOGRAPHY/ *It is allowed in Canada by the truckload, and depicts women having sex with other women as a voyeuristic stimulant for men.*



METANOIA

Whose grand illusion?

CHRISTIANITY/ *It has installed a hope and trust which is not some "pie in the sky" dream.*

by John Valk

Seldom is one so fortunate as to have a critic prove one's point. A.J. Carisse appears, inadvertently, I'm sure, to have done just that, in a response (Letters, Feb. 26) to my "Religion and the Perils of Individualism". I'm not sure what mixture of Eastern thinking is being advocated, but allow me a few responses to that letter.

No doubt, individual freedom is to be highly valued. But rampant individualism, enamoured with unfettered freedoms, shapes its own god (s). Its only limitation is the self, whose penchant for unimaginable evil is seldom tempered by its desire to do good. Community can serve to keep the former in check, and encourage the latter. But, from whence does any community seek its norms and principles? Surely not solely from the individual?

It is highly imprudent, therefore, for one to so readily dismiss the Christian church as a forum for enlightened discussion. My sense is that those who do are quite unfamiliar with Christianity and the church, and tend to stand on the fringe. Hence, theirs is a failure to understand that it is not openmindedness but closedmindedness that is anathema within Christianity. Theirs is also the failure to grasp the difference between the two.

That does not mean, however, that there has not been, nor continues to be, pronouncements, notions and dictates from churches that appear stifling, odd and even silly. But such hardly emerges only of church leaders. One need simply look at the "wisdom" spouted by politicians, business leaders, music moguls, movie idols, New Age gurus, even academicians. Do these offer more hope in helping us find "enlightenment", a way through our myopia, arrogance, greed and self-centredness. Ask yourself if validity by exclusion is practiced only by the Christian church?

But more to the point. It was John Locke, great advocator of individual rights and freedoms, who argued at the same time that these rights and freedoms *had* to be balanced with individual responsibilities not solely to the self. We today see responsibilities towards others as infringements, individualists and self-centrists that we are. Few realize, Easterners and Westerners alike, that our freedom lies not in being self-focused, but other-focused. That is largely alien to our current thinking. Our greatest surprise, and enlightenment, comes the moment we become aware that "the greatest and least of all reality" is *not* merely contained within the individual.

Does that mean a search deep into "one's soul amounts to deception"? Does that mean we ought to belittle ourselves and cast off the very fundamentality of our existence? Even a basic familiarity with Christianity will reveal that this is *not* the case. But in asserting our individual*ism* we indeed *do* belittle ourselves, fail to understand our fundamental humanness and subvert our true selves.

Submission is a Muslim *not* a Christian principle. The Judeo-Christian Scriptures proclaim that humans are not only image bearers *of* God, but also co-creators *with* God. There lies our freedom, individually *and* collectively. In co-operation with God, we are challenged to make life on *this* earth most inhabitable, peaceful, prosperous and joyful — for everyone. That is our mandate *as* humans, and it leaves little room for passivity or inaction.

Does the human potential for greatness exist solely with the self? Unfortunately, when *we* become the measure and arbitrator of all things we easily submit to lifestyles and ways of thinking which subvert our humanness. We want to be cosmic Lone Rangers. We hoard rather than share our resources. We pollute rather than respect the environment as part of us. We neglect our elders, abuse our children, cheat on our spouses and sexually deceive those who come to trust us. We frequently fail to prepare our students for life. We even delude ourselves into thinking drunkenness, revelry and sexual escapades are recreation.

Yes, the denial of *real* enjoyment of "this world" *is* self-abusive. Our tragedy is our failure to understand what real enjoyment is. We deny a limit to our freedom. Then pain, evil and distortion become our lot, and much of it our own making.

To be a human means to be an "earthling", not a cosmic adventurer. But is the present age "as good as it gets"? Christianity has installed in "our sphere of consciousness" a hope, and a trust, that our present world of pain and distortion is not the end of the matter. This is not some "pie in the sky" dream, nor an aspiration to lose our individuality to some great collective ocean of "Pure Consciousness". That may be the thinking of other religions (old or new), but it is *not* of Christianity, at least in its true sense.

It is one thing to *believe*, as many do, that "reality is a self-contained phenomena." It is quite another to assert, as you do, that it is "the *one* constant and inalienable truth." Who, may I now ask, is making dogmatic pronouncements?

May I challenge you, A.J. Carisse, to begin to see if there is not more to Christianity that the view *you* hold. Embark on a Christian spiritual journey. If your search simply confirms your present notions, nothing is lost. But, perhaps, if you allow yourself an extensive journey, you may discover that the Christian community, at its most profound depth, is much more enlightened than you suspect. It will, at minimum, point you toward a God who is more than of your own making, and more than One who resides *only* within yourself. And that God, who is personal rather than impersonal, may reveal to you a freedom and fulfillment you never dreamed possible.