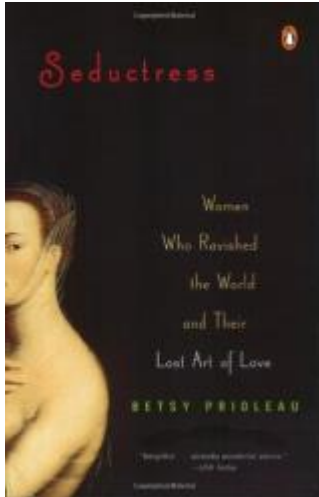


Seductress: Women Who Ravished the World and Their Lost Art of Love

by Betsy Prioleau



About the Book

Seductress: Women Who Ravished the World and Their Lost Art of Love studies and celebrates a feminist heroine we haven't heard about—one of the most misunderstood women in history. The great enchantresses of the Western world explode all the stereotypes. Instead of dim babes and shark-hearted vamps, they were strong exemplars who got and kept the best men and combined erotic conquest with personal and professional success.

Each chapter demolishes a different myth and tells the colorful stories of six kinds of seductress: nonbeauties, seniors, intellectuals, artists (not muses), and two commanda types—governmental leaders and high-octane adventurers. In every case, they share surprising consistencies which defy accepted beliefs. Seductresses were such love queens because they were big, accomplished women who practiced a long-forgotten erotic art that emphasizes brains, joy, achievement, and psychological charms.

Amid the present "plague years" in women's love lives, seductresses provide a fire-powered role model for today. Through their example and inspiration, they can show women how to recover the female edge in love and get their dance on. **Seductress** is a celebration, a manifesto, and a thinking woman's how-to—a master plan for full female entitlement in the twenty-first century: women in charge erotically and professionally, holistic happiness, and the best men under their spell.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think ancient patriarchal cultures like Sumer and Athenian Greece tolerated such unruly sex goddesses?
2. Why do you think ancient patriarchal cultures like Sumer and Athenian Greece tolerated such unruly sex goddesses?
3. Pick two seductresses at random—Lola Montez and Minette Helvetius, for example—and analyze how they did it, using the Art of Love precepts in chapter one. What did they leave out? Contrast the two approaches.
4. Many of the seductresses in the book were androgynous—unfeminine types with male interests and qualities. Discuss this paradox. What makes "masculine" women seductive and why?

5. The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard thought seduction necessary for all worldly enterprises. "A man who cannot seduce men," he said, "cannot save them either." How useful is this for women in the workplace? Can women deploy some of these erotic strategies nonsexually as Elizabeth I and Catherine the Great did to lead more effectively? Where does this shade into sexual harassment?
6. From the beginning, mainstream Feminism has been antagonistic to sexually successful women. Examine this phenomenon. Explore the puritan roots in the movement and the issue of sexual rivalry.
7. Some civilizations are more receptive to the seductress than others. For example, a disproportionate number of seductresses in the book are French, a culture steeped in sexism. How is America either good or bad for seductresses? Why?
8. Conversation is one of the most consistent and powerful aphrodisiacs used by the great seductresses. What were the components of their conversational magic? Can we retrieve them today? How?
9. Based on the stories of history's top enchantresses, construct a twenty-first-century master plan to recoup female romantic primacy in an age of online dating, hook-up/break-up relationships, beautymania, and the banalization of sex and love.
10. Who are the seductresses today? What are their chief allures and strengths as contrasted with those of the past? What are the barriers now preventing women from being seductresses?
11. If seductresses are such exemplary women, why were they demonized through the ages? If men loved them so much, why did they persecute them, and why did women join them?
12. Compare and contrast two opposite seductresses, such as Lou Andreas Salomé who wore no makeup and discussed philosophy and Cora Pearl who overdressed and traded in jokes and small talk. What qualities do they share in common?
13. Seductresses are known by their ability to get and keep the best men. Define this "best" man. What do women really want in a mate? Once we have sexual choice, do we choose well or poorly like Wallis Simpson?
14. Many of the seductresses suffered persecution and/or social exclusion. What are the qualities necessary to survive as a seductress, faced with prejudice, envy, and the spite of lesser men?
15. Discuss the role of media, popular culture, compulsory education, and religious or moral indoctrination today with respect to female sexual autonomy and power.
16. Men for all of recorded history have been perceived as the stronger, sexier sex. Examine the truth of this belief in the light of the stories of the seductresses.
17. Can you track any changes in seductresses over the centuries? If so, can you spot any constants in the personalities and strategies of these mancharmers? Are women as seductive now as in the past?

Author Bio

Betsy Prioleau was born and grew up in Richmond, Virginia. Her father was portrait artist Hugo Stevens, and her home life, full of books, art, and talkfests. She attended Sweet Briar College and received both a B.S. and M.A. from the University of Virginia. At one point, she spent a year on a hippie enclave in Vermont.

After a Ph.D. in American literature at Duke University, she taught English and World Literature at Manhattan College, where she was a tenured associate professor. She was a scholar in residence for three semesters at New York University, and most recently, taught cultural history at New York University Liberal Studies Program.

She lives in a lively apartment in New York City with her husband, Philip, and a madcap poodle, Poubelle.

Critical Praise

"[Prioleau] is to be applauded, as modern women need to believe that we can excel intellectually and materially and still have men falling at our feet."

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