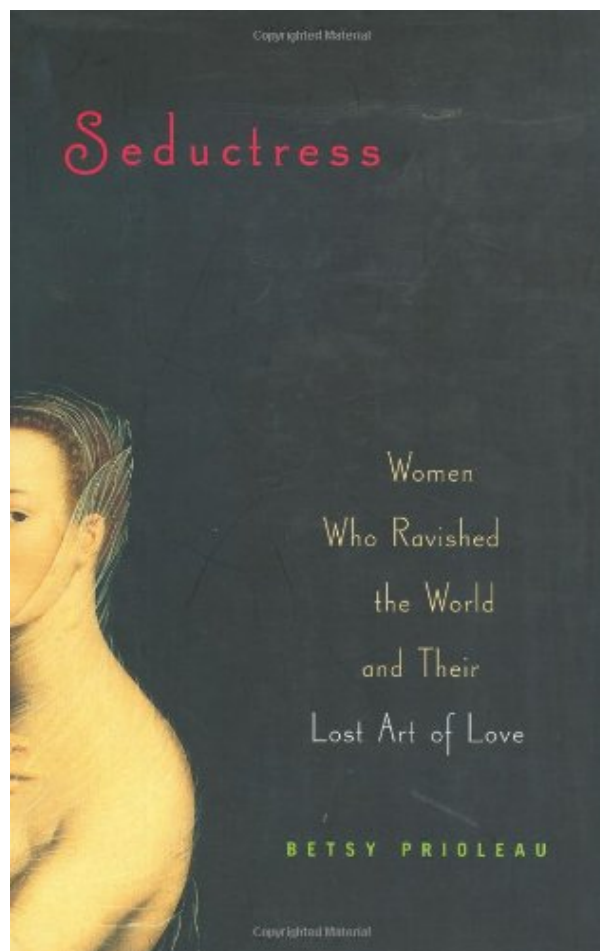
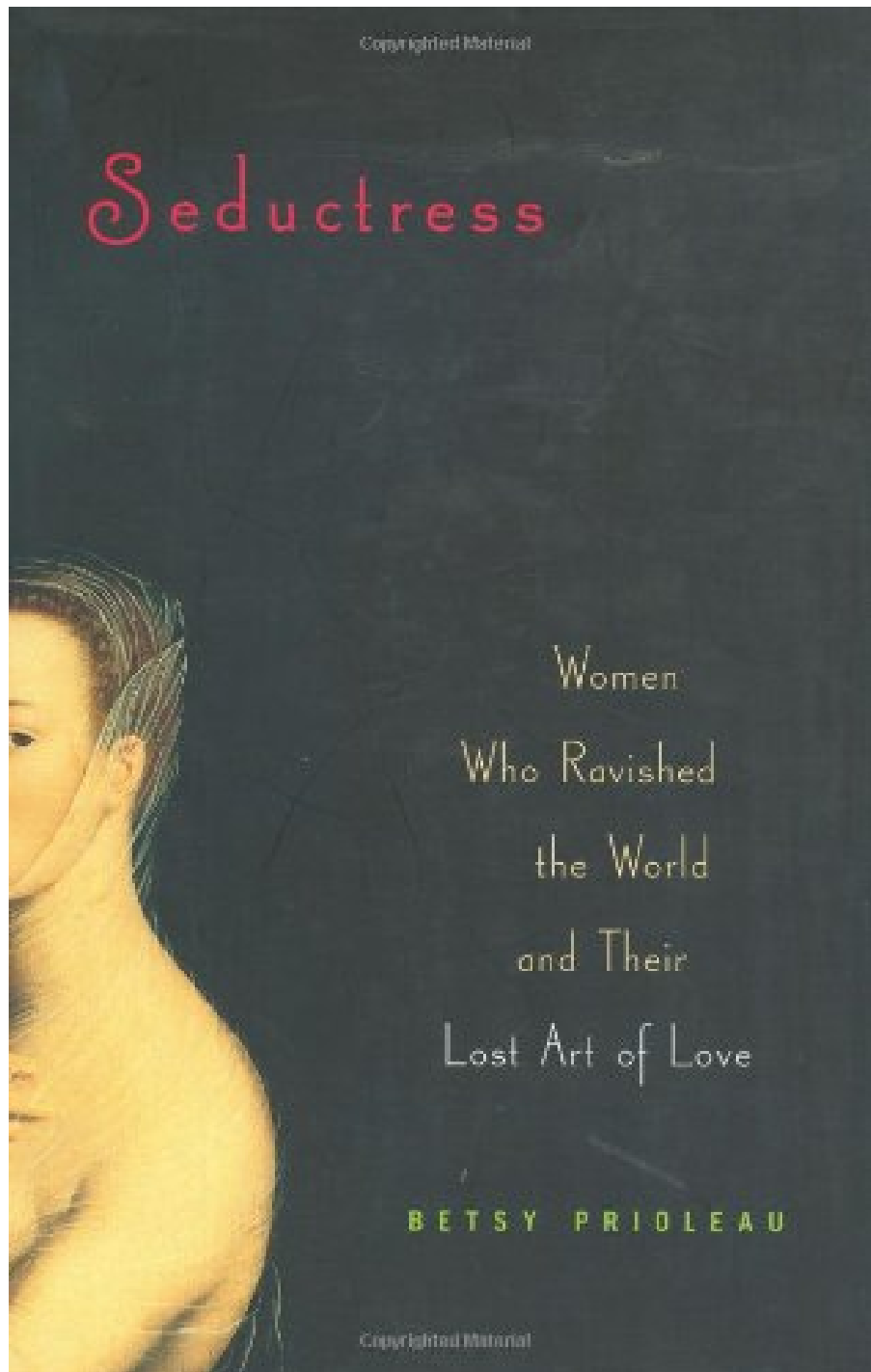


SEDUCTRESS: WOMEN WHO RAVISHED THE WORLD AND THEIR LOST ART OF LOVE BY BETSY PRIOLEAU



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How did the seductresses of western history love-addle men and keep them in their pockets for life? The surprising answers explode all the myths. Instead of dim blondes or shark-hearted vamps, the top fascinators were nonbeauties, older women, and swanky artists, intellectuals, politicians, and adventurers. Each chapter in Prioleau's bold, inspiring book recounts the sexy stories of these love maestras-some familiar like Cleopatra, Lola Montez, and Wallis Simpson; others less so, like the infamous Violet Gordon Woodhouse, who lived in a ménage with four men. With their alpha personhood and their joint mastery of love and work, these seductresses practiced an ancient, long-forgotten erotic art that is 99 percent mental sorcery-a cocktail of wit, eloquence, and joie de vivre.

Prioleau's thrilling, thorough, and engaging analysis of these women supplies all the voltage necessary to upend every regressive how-to primer and shows the women of today-mired in an epic crisis of confidence-how to recoup their sexual birthright and achieve combine romantic and personal success.

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Most helpful customer reviews

71 of 76 people found the following review helpful.

Great read, but keep a few things in mind.

By Catherine Power

Betsy Prioleau's "Seductress: Women who Ravished the World and Their Lost Art of Love" has been described as a self-help book masquerading as a well-researched history book, but this is misleading. It's actually a feminist tract -- disguised as a history book disguised as a self-help book -- with all the attendant weaknesses and strengths.

The meat of the book is an anthology of mini-biographies of "true seductresses." You won't find Marilyn Monroe or Madonna here, but you will find Mae West and Catherine the Great, plus some names you might not know as well, such as journalist Martha Gellhorn or "homely siren" Pauline Viardot. All are women who shattered the stereotypes of desirability. Most were neither beautiful nor submissive, and Prioleau categorizes them by type: scholars, artists, adventurers, political leaders.

Many of these women are inspirations. But in her rush to prove this, Prioleau makes some missteps. She holds up as "self-actualized" women who cheated on their husbands, kept multiple lovers, and left callous trails of broken hearts. (Having your pick of men is admirable, but the most intuitive conclusion is that you might eventually actually pick one.)

In choosing this view, Prioleau slips into the trap of many modern feminists: that a woman finds liberation by behaving just as terribly as the worst male cad. Indeed, Prioleau makes some uncomfortable generalizations about men: They cheat, fear women's sexuality, and "binge out on casual infidelity, wife trade-ins, and hit-and-run sex." This hardly seems fair, and the book is best read while sharply aware of this bias.

But darn if it isn't an interesting read. The women's lives are fascinating, if not always admirable, and Prioleau's writing sparkles with unexpected word choices: She describes Marilyn Monroe as "eaten and colonized" and states that "compliant, eager-to-please yes girls not only give off the BO of need, they fail men at a gut level."

Taken holistically, Prioleau's message is revitalizing and deeply gratifying. Women don't have to swallow themselves to succeed at love; every unhappy woman who has let others make her feel too unattractive, too

fat, too nerdy or too weird to find a man would do well to heed her advice: "Heterosexual love isn't supposed to be the stuff of confiscated egos, stunted careers, 4:00 a.m. panic attacks, tears, and ice cream binges. We're meant to prevail in sexual relations and cash in on our full gender payoff: erotic primacy and combined success in love, work, and life."

38 of 41 people found the following review helpful.

Educational entertainment in the realm of female entitlement

By Bookreporter

In *SEDUCTRESS* author Betsy Prioleau attempts to restore feminine sexual power to modern women. She examines the wiles of historical seductresses in a meticulous treatment of their histories. Intense research is a hallmark of her authoritative guide to sexual sovereignty.

Early in the book she puts down myths about the sexuality of the historical seductress with voluminous facts that substantiate her theories. She categorizes the seductresses into six prototypes. The first insidious falsehood is that seductresses must be young and beautiful, but she dispels the myth with stories of very ugly enchantresses of the past. Age is a second misnomer, with celebrated allure of "old dames." The third myth centers on the intellectuality of a real seductress, with intelligence winning out over stupidity. Inspiration and artistic endeavor allowed women to build careers, tearing away the vapid housewife myth. Real seductresses were "movers and shakers," playing heavy parts in the world of government. Lastly, she explores the seductress as wildly adventurous and rakishly professional.

Prioleau next explains the art of seduction: physical art, dress and ornamentation, hygiene and cosmetic usage, artful detail of setting, body language and music, lustful experience with sex, psychological affectation, intimacy and ego enhancement for the male, along with comedy as an aphrodisiac, festivity and dramatic impact. Seduction is now, according to Prioleau, with a look at the past. The learning curve is open to every woman. "Ladies choice," she proposes.

SEDUCTRESS sets forth an archetype for the sex goddesses in ancient history, with a chapter moving from goddess mythology, through the divinity of Inanna to the Greek love goddess Aphrodite. She is described as a "lioness on the loose in the Olympian firmament." History treats her with scorn but she survives in mysticism and fairy tales. Her decline is followed by the demonic Lillith, the two-faced vision of beauty and fiery serpentine demonism.

The author writes in the meat of *SEDUCTRESS* with passion about Belles Laidés, her so-called homely sirens. Isabella Stewart Gardiner, known as Belle, stated, "Never ever behave with pride, self-confidence, and self-conceit." Wallis Simpson, the divorced siren who caused David Windsor to abdicate the British throne, is another less than beautiful personality described. A chapter titled "Silver Foxes" is a word picture of the elder seductress such as Diane de Poitiers, George Sand of the nineteenth century, and Colette, the modern aging siren. Mae West takes a big bite of this chapter, adding the categories of money and status to adulation reserved for sexual prowess.

Siren-scholars, artists, political divas and adventurers unfold in the bulk of the book. Their lives are a checklist for the women of today, to develop a new seductress prototype in the fast-paced twenty-first century world that paints sex as an act rather than an art. Prioleau suggests that women can become happier, sexier and more vital. Generous lists of notes, suggested readings and an index substantiate the author's research on her educational and stimulating topic. Difficult to categorize as a self-help book, *SEDUCTRESS* offers enlightenment and entertainment in the realm of female entitlement.

--- Reviewed by Judy Gigstad

38 of 42 people found the following review helpful.

Awesome and empowering!

By Erica N. Herron

I think what many of the previous reviewers found offensive was that the author turned the sexual double standard on its head; the old "promiscuous men are studs and pimps, promiscuous women are slut and whores" axiom. In this book, promiscuous women who enjoyed sex and didn't allow men to objectify them are the real and ultimate pimps, the studs. These women took on the male role of sexual conquerer and they are seen in a positive light for it. Although I personally can't imagine this being a satisfying lifestyle, I think it's awesome that some women have really put on the boys' shoes, dodged marriage and commitment, had successful careers, pursued attractive men, and toyed with lovers.

Women's sexuality is so often used against them, so often seen as their weakness that it is disturbing to the popular mind to see women using their sexuality, which society says is their mortal Achilles heel to be exploited by men, to their advantage. The notion that women would use the very weapon that's brandished against them to conquer the world is terrifying. It's okay to see women on the front of magazines displaying themselves for men's pleasure, but it's **not** okay when they use that display for their own personal gain, their own pleasure. They become dangerous.

And this wonderful book is about dangerous women. It's delightfully readable. It shows how many very accomplished women have been mistreated by historians (Did you know Cleopatra was **also** a great ruler, besides just being the mistress of Mark Antony? Did you know she was ugly?) It also shows how many women, notorious and famous and incredibly influential on the course of history, have been deliberately and systematically ignored in the history books, their names and faces lost to time immediately after their deaths. The author resurrects these powerful forgotten figures. Also fantastic was her classifications for these women -- ugly seductresses, old seductresses, musicians, politicians, artists, ect. The point is that these women didn't just have great sex -- which is what we usually think of when we envision a seductress. No, they seduced **the minds** of the public, of powerful figures, they used charisma to get what they wanted. And it's important to note that this is **not** unlike what men do to succeed in their careers! Men too use charm, charisma, their looks and body language to overcome objection and succeed in life. When this author uses the term "seductress", she really doesn't mean a woman who can get lots of people to sleep with her; that's not much of a talent at all. To this author, seductresses inspired devotion, respect, love, lust, envy, professional admiration, and shifted the social politics of their time.

Besides that, the writer is exciting and dynamic. Her style is action oriented and packs a real punch.

I have one gripe. The goddess theme was soooooo irritating. Soooooo irritating. Every woman had to be compared to Innana or some other goddess. It's easy, though, to skip over these paragraphs because they are sort of clearly marked in the text, so you can easily hop over them and get to the good parts. Don't let it keep you from buying this very pleasurable, empowering, beautiful book.

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