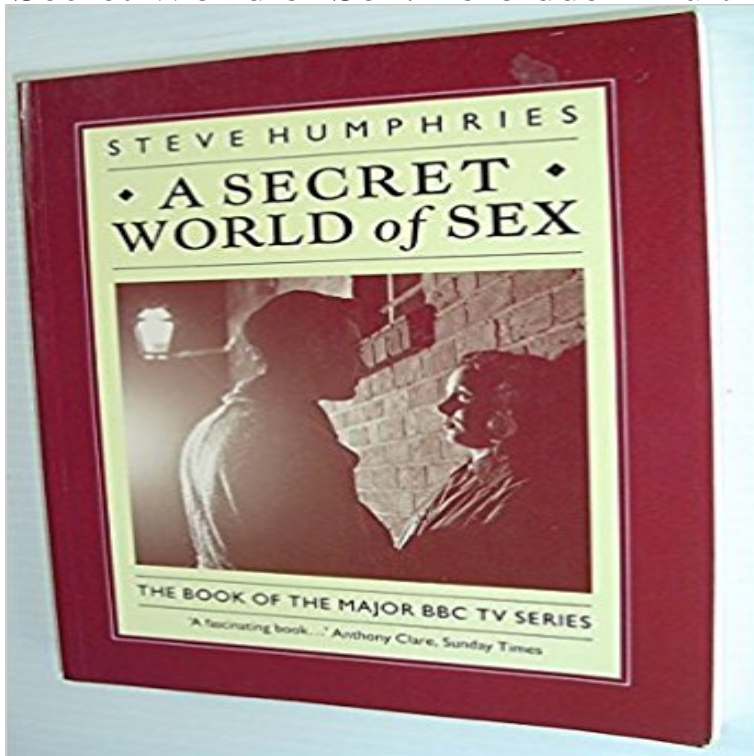


Secret World of Sex: Forbidden Fruit - The British Experience, 1900-50



This investigation into the sexual experiences before marriage of young lovers in Britain during the first half of this century is based on many frank interviews with old people, with extracts from their life stories. The author reveals that when couples did make love, it was in defiance of strong taboos and conventions which forbade fornication and promiscuity. Parents issued dire warnings to their daughters and threatened them with the workhouse if they brought home trouble. Books offering sexual advice tried to persuade the young that masturbation was bad for their health and that persistent self abuse could lead to insanity. Sex education was banned in most schools. Many chemists and clinics refused to provide contraception for the young. Early womens police patrols arrested young people who became too amorous in public places. The author says that only those at the top and bottom of the social scale, like fashionable young aristocrats or rebellious street gangs, managed regularly to escape from this kind of control. Perhaps the greatest tragedy was the fate of the unmarried mother. Beckoned by the workhouse, not the welfare state as today, some even served life sentences in mental hospitals for their sins. The author rescues the stories of victims like these from obscurity and shows how there was a high price to pay for sexual respectability in the past - and part of the sacrifice was these womens lives.

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