The stark contrasts between romance novels and pornography underscore how different female and male erotic fantasies are. These differences reflect human evolutionary history and the disparate selection pressures women and men experienced, say the authors of this thought-provoking book. Catherine Salmon and Donald Symons review the fundamental importance of evolutionary history to human psychology, discuss how male and female sexual psychologies differ, and then demonstrate how sex differences in erotica illustrate this. The authors focus particular attention on slash fiction, an erotic subgenre written by and for women and found on-line and in fan magazines. Slash-so-called for the punctuation mark indicating a romantic pair-depicts sexual relationships between heterosexual male television and film characters such as Starsky and Hutch (S/H) and Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock (K/S). Salmon and Symons argue that-despite some differences-slash fiction has much in common with romance novels. The authors examine the essential ingredients of female sexual fantasy and how slash fiction provides them. Their conclusions are both fascinating and original.

My Personal Review:
Most men have never heard of slash fiction, and when they do meet it they are liable to wonder how anything so bizarre could attract a large following among women readers. Why would anyone want to read stories, often sexually explicit, dealing with romances between well known fictional pairs of men -- Captain Kirk and Mr Spock, for example, or Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson? The creators of these characters may have been silent about their romantic involvement with one another, but the void is being systematically filled.

Catherine Salmon and Donald Symons take this quite seriously as a window into women's minds. Just as typical pornographic books and films
reveal a lot about what men fantasize about, slash fiction, together with the better known romantic fiction, reveal as much about what women fantasize about. They take a fully neo-darwinist view of this, rejecting the standard view of many social scientists that there is no inborn difference at all between men's and women's minds, any difference that we think we see being entirely the result of environment and conditioning. For Salmon and Symons this standard view is nonsense, and for them the differences between men's and women's minds are real and have their origins in the evolutionary history of humanity. As they point out, commercial producers of men-oriented pornography and women-oriented romantic fiction (which at the time of writing was generating an annual income of about 5 billion dollars in the USA) are well aware of what sells and what does not, and, whatever maybe people's motivation for reading high-grade literature, such as the novels of Jane Austen, it can hardly be supposed that people buy pornography or romantic fiction for any reason other than that that is what they like.

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