

## Sade: queer theorist

**Series:**

SVEC

**Volume:**

2013:03

**Author:**

William F. Edmiston

**Publication Date:**

2013

**ISBN:**

978-0-7294-1064-9

In an era when both Church and State assigned gender roles and defined sexual practices in terms of male/female, lawful/illicit, Sade's extensive accounts of sexual activity were categorized as deviant, prurient or provocative. William F. Edmiston explores how Sade's unique challenge to sexual, moral and social taboos anticipates the discourses of queer theory.

Following an overview of queer theory, Edmiston examines the categories of sex, gender and sexuality as treated in some of Sade's best- and lesser-known works. He demonstrates the extent to which Sade erodes the boundaries of sexual opposition through discourses justifying rather than illegitimizing 'unlawful' sex. The author reveals the coexistence of two competing discourses on sexuality: a proclivity that cannot be eradicated, and a habit that one can choose to adopt. This pioneering re-reading culminates with an examination of how recent biographies attempt to force Sade into a normal/abnormal dichotomy, manipulating police reports, personal correspondence or narratorial interventions to establish (or not) the author's homosexuality.

Through revealing Sade's attempts to undermine prevailing gender roles and sexual identities, Edmiston uncovers a 'queer' discourse that challenges the still common assumption that heterosexuality is exclusively natural and normative, and that nature has always prompted humans to reproduce, rather than to seek pleasure.

Introduction

Sade, a queer theorist?

What is queer theory?

'Sodomie' and 'antiphysique' in the writings of Sade

Corpus and other details

1. Sade's erotic novels: can we read them as queer?

Sex (anatomy): female/male

Gender (behavior): masculine/feminine

Sexuality: (object-choice of sexual pleasure) homosexual/heterosexual

2. Nature, sodomy, semantics and queer discourse

Nature

Sodomy: queer discourse

Semantics

Practice or proclivity?

3. Atrocities of a quite different kind: non-normative eroticism in *Aline et Valcour*

Incest in the frame narrative

Homosexuality and incest in the embedded narratives

4. Queering the Marquis

Conclusion

Bibliography

Index

**Pages:**

254

**Price Sterling (£):**

65

New Perspectives on the eighteenth century

Edmiston's articulate argument [leaves] the reader [...] not so much with the perception or label of Sade as an 'eighteenth-century queer theorist' (p.228-29), but rather with the impression of the man's brilliance and audacity as a depicter of the complex nature of human sexuality

The modern language review

It responds to the double exigency of a history shaped by present concerns, and does so in a conscientious, scholarly manner.

Studi francesi

‘C’est une analyse détaillée et profonde de l’influence mutuelle entre le contexte général des Lumières et la philosophie de Sade [...] L’analyse d’Edminston, bien documentée, est absolument en ligne avec les tendances générales de la recherche queer’.

---