

Night in French libertine fiction

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In the age of Enlightenment the concept of night evolved from being a time of dread to a time for pleasure. Between the start of the Régence (1715-1723) and the French Revolution the nocturnal and the erotic became intrinsically connected: shadows and darkness were reconfigured as the object of the *philosophes'* fascination, while night was increasingly experienced as the realm of the self. Nowhere is this paradigmatic shift better recorded than in French libertine literature of the long eighteenth century.

Marine Ganofsky delves into the night scenes of libertine fiction to analyse how the idea of night was reimagined and represented by writers ranging from Crébillon to Sade. Her original analysis of erotic encounters in pornographic novels, gallant stories and sensual fairy tales reveals how they capture the period's emancipation from superstitions and traditions. The nocturnal settings of these libertine narratives were the primary means of staging men and women's hitherto hidden sexual encounters and innermost fantasies, and ultimately illustrate the conquest of night-time terrors in favour of social encounters and amorous intimacy. Libertine nocturnal scenes reflect above all the Enlightenment's re-invention of shadows less as an obstacle than an incentive to discover the mysteries they harbour. Through her innovative research Marine Ganofsky presents the erotic nights of libertine fiction as a sign that the *siècle des Lumières*, free to enjoy the charms to be found in, or under, the cover of darkness, was also the *siècle de la nuit*.

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