

Night in French libertine fiction

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Author:

Marine Ganofsky

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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*.

Introduction

- i. Libertine fiction: a nocturnal genre?
- ii. Libertine nocturnes
- iii. The 'Nocturnal Order' of libertine nights
- iv. The eroticisation of the nocturnal
- v. The nocturnalisation of eroticism
- vi. Chapter outline

1. Enlightening the night: a cultural and historical perspective on eighteenth-century nights

- i. Intellectual enlightenment

- ii. Material enlightenment
 - 2. The nocturnal aesthetics of libertine fiction
 - i. Libertine writing, pornography and obscurity
 - ii. The embellishing obscurity of Crébillon's oriental tales
 - iii. The eroticism of *demi-jours* in *Le Souper des petits-maîtres* and *Les Soupers de Daphné*
 - iv. Voluptuous shadows in *Thémidore*
 - v. *Félicia* and sublime obscurity
 - 3. Night as a hiding space
 - i. Night as a private space within communal living in *Le Portier des chartreux* and *Mémoires de Suzon*
 - ii. Night as an indulgent architectural space in *La Petite Maison*
 - iii. Night as an intimate body part in *La Nuit merveilleuse*
 - 4. Nocturnal illusions: dreams of sylph-like lovers
 - i. The dream: the sleep of reason produces sylphs in *Le Sylphe*
 - ii. The mistake: the genie Makis, or the mistaken lover in *Angola*
 - iii. The lie: Clitandre, or a sylph of no consequence in *La Nuit et le moment*
 - iv. The illusion: Mirbelle, or the fleshless sylph in *Les Malheurs de l'inconstance*
 - 5. Nocturnal revelations
 - i. Damon's Nyctelian initiation in *Point de lendemain*
 - ii. Laure's nocturnal education in *Le Rideau levé*
 - iii. Cécile's nightly enlightenment in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*
 - 6. Queens of the night: women and their nocturnal mystery in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*
 - i. The marquise de Merteuil's nights, or the masquerade of femininity
 - ii. The présidente de Tourvel's shadow, or the female mystery
 - 7. The end of libertine nights: *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*
 - i. Sade's Gothic and sublime nocturnes: within the dark night of the soul
 - ii. The Sadean nocturnal fortress
 - iii. Sade versus the libertine *clair-obscur*
- Epilogue: beyond libertine nights – mornings and morrows
- i. Mornings
 - ii. Morrows
- Bibliography
Index

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292

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65
