

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
EROTIC LITERATURE

The Cambridge Companion To Erotic Literature offers an introduction to key debates in the study of erotic literature from antiquity to the present. It addresses one of the longest standing controversies in literary history: the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable treatments of human sexuality. Whether scurrilous Roman satire, irreverent Restoration drama, or bold Modernist novel, erotic literature pushes the boundaries of the acceptable and challenges the conventions of more mainstream literatures. In fifteen chapters that range from ancient Greece and Rome to twentieth-century American, English, French, and Dutch literature, experts in the field confront a variety of related topics, such as the definition and scope of erotic literature, the nature of textual pleasure, historical shifts in the understanding of the normal and the perverse, the relationship between gender and genre, sexual violence, homosexuality, sadomasochism, necrophilia, satire, pornography, etc. Students new to the scholarship are provided a clear and useful introduction; those already familiar with the field are given an exciting glimpse into the most recent work.

Bradford K. Mudge is the author of *Sara Coleridge* (1989) and *The Whore's Story: Women, Pornography, and the British Novel* (2000); and the editor of *British Romantic Novelists* (1992) and *When Flesh Becomes Word: An Anthology of Libertine Literature* (2004). In addition, he has published numerous essays on eighteenth-century English art and literature.

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.

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Edited by Bradford K. Mudge
Frontmatter
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CONTENTS

	<i>List of Figures</i>	page ix
	<i>List of Contributors</i>	x
	<i>Preface</i>	xi
	<i>Chronology</i>	xv
1	Eros and Literature BRADFORD K. MUDGE	I
2	Classical Antiquity and Modern Erotic Literature DANIEL ORRELLS	17
3	Performances of Suffering: Secular and Devotional Eros in Late Medieval Writing SARAH SALIH	34
4	Can a Woman Rape a Man? Rape and the Erotic in Shakespeare's 'The Rape of Lucrece' and 'Venus and Adonis' ELIZABETH ROBERTSON	47
5	The Manuscript Circulation of Erotic Poetry in Early Modern England IAN FREDERICK MOULTON	64
6	The Erotic Renaissance JAMES GRANTHAM TURNER	85
7	Pornography, Procreation and Pleasure in Early Modern England SARAH TOULALAN	105

CONTENTS

8	Novel Pleasure BRADFORD K. MUDGE	123
9	Erotic for Whom? When Particular Bodies Matter to Romantic Sexuality RICHARD C. SHA	139
10	Emily Dickinson in Love (With Death) MARIANNE NOBLE	155
11	Erotic Bonds Among Women in Victorian Literature DEBORAH LUTZ	175
12	The Making of the Enfer Bibliography: Guillaume Apollinaire, Eroto-Bibliography and the Enfer Collection COLETTE COLLIGAN	193
13	Sade, Réage and Transcending the Obscene AMY S. WYNGAARD	210
14	“Nothing could stop it now!” Tennessee Williams, <i>Suddenly Last Summer</i> , and the Intersections of Desire DAVID GREVEN	224
15	Dutch Gay Novels of the 1950s and 1960s GERT HEKMA	238
	<i>Further Reading</i>	255
	<i>Index</i>	259

FIGURES

- | | | |
|------|--|----------------|
| 6.1 | Unknown artist after copy of Marcantonio Raimondi's <i>I Modi</i> , 'Toscanini volume', f. B 4 v (T 1 4). Woodcut. Milan, private collection. | <i>page 87</i> |
| 6.2 | René Boyvin after Rosso Fiorentino or Léonard Thiry, detail of pepper holder from a design for a salt-and-pepper set. Engraving. London, The British Museum. | 100 |
| 11.1 | Unknown photographer, c.1850–1855. Stereo daguerreotype. France. Indiana University Kinsey Institute. | 180 |
| 11.2 | Title page, <i>Goblin Market and Other Poems</i> , Christina Rossetti. 1864. Illustration, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1862. London, The British Museum. | 183 |
| 13.1 | Illustration from <i>La Nouvelle Justine</i> . Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University. FC7.SA152.B797N v. 2. | 213 |

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PREFACE

Not too terribly long ago, scholarship that concerned itself either directly or indirectly with erotic literature was generally assumed to partake of the prurience attributed to its subject. This was the case because that scholarship was recognized – quite rightly – as having descended in part from a small group of amateur book collectors, bibliographers, and historians who were passionate about ‘curious books’. That phrase, ‘curious books,’ often just meant books that were ‘rare’ or ‘interesting,’ but it also meant books that were especially rare or especially interesting because they were in some fashion erotic, obscene, or pornographic. Attracted as they were to things that were more rather than less difficult to collect, nineteenth-century English book collectors, for example, recognized that erotic books provided a significant challenge for even the most seasoned of bibliomaniacs. Not only did these ‘curiosities’ comprise a small and difficult-to-acquire portion of the market, but they were also prone to deception: they routinely faked publisher, date, or place of publication, in addition to author or title. They often pretended to be translations from nonexistent originals, and they had no reason to disclose when they were pirated or borrowed piecemeal from another source. Occasionally, too, they offered themselves as works of science or medicine or history when in fact their allegiances were quite different. Often, for example, they began as biography or travelogue or trial proceeding, only to fantasize their way into sensational fiction. As a group, then, they were rather devious; they disrespected generic boundaries, infiltrated fine, upstanding disciplines, and moved easily from language to language across time periods and over national borders. Collectible they most certainly were, and, as a result, they were afforded respect by both bookseller and auctioneer. But there was no disguising the fact that the collectors themselves – no matter how well educated, wealthy, or scholarly – were able to enjoy this material sexually as well as aesthetically.

The case in point here is Henry Spencer Ashbee. He was a wealthy London textile trader who devoted himself to collecting and documenting

PREFACE

erotic literature. He published three substantial bibliographies in the 1870s and 1880s and bequeathed his book collection after his death in 1900 to the British Museum. He also continues to be a prime candidate for the authorship of *My Secret Life* (1888–1895), an anonymous eleven-volume sexual autobiography that makes Casanova look like an amateur. Ashbee's claims to respectability – socially, culturally, and scholarly – were undermined from the outset by the suspicion that his achievements were tainted by perversion. His gift to the British Museum, for example, was accepted only because officials there wanted his collection of Cervantes, and Ashbee had been smart enough to make them take the erotica as well. Famously, the latter collection became the 'Private Case,' for decades and decades completely invisible in the Museum's catalogue and even today subject to bizarre, now comical, restrictions. Ashbee's legacy, in other words, was one that perpetuated the idea that any scholarly attention shown to erotica must be to some degree unseemly. That changed in 1966, when Stephen Marcus published his groundbreaking study *The Other Victorians*. Marcus was a scholar, not a collector, and he was interested in what erotica and pornography actually signified about the nineteenth-century cultural imagination. He considered Ashbee and *My Secret Life* and concluded that literary history was best served by inclusive inquiry – by thinking about 'literature' as potentially all-encompassing – rather than by exclusionary presuppositions.

The world does not change overnight, least of all the scholarly world, but after Marcus's efforts Ashbee proved much less powerful a specter. Gone was everyone's creepy uncle, and in his place there seemed a new and genuine curiosity about the role of sex and sexuality in literary culture. According to a logic all their own, scholars of different periods and different nations began asking similar questions about gender and genre, pleasure and aesthetics, desire and decadence.

When, ten years after Marcus, Michel Foucault published the first volume of his *Histoire de la sexualité* and feminist scholars in Britain, France, and the United States offered their significant and far-reaching challenges to status quo scholarship, the way was finally clear to understand the connections between somatic and textual pleasure within the context of different disciplinary mandates. In literary studies, for example, feminist pressure on the canon and canon-making made it much easier to understand the historicity of the idea of the 'literary' and the degree to which critical practice continued to be driven by Victorian assumptions about the sanctity of art. Aided by pioneering work in history and philosophy – Thomas Laqueur, Robert Darnton, Lynn Hunt, Walter Kendrick, and Judith Butler come immediately to mind – literary scholars moved forward into more versatile ideas about

PREFACE

sex, gender, and performance and into cultural contexts that were no longer exclusively Eurocentric. Ashbee's ghost now appears rather quaint in the cultural scheme of things, although looking at one of his books at the British Library still requires that you sit at a special desk under the watchful eyes of the librarians.

Contributors to this volume have expertise in a variety of literatures – Greek and Roman, American, English, French, Italian, and Dutch – and range predictably over a variety of time periods – including ancient, medieval, Renaissance, eighteenth-century, Romantic, Victorian, and modern. Even so, the volume itself could never claim to do anything more than gesture towards inclusivity. Given the scope of the subject matter (where, after all, doesn't eros flourish?) and the many authors and nations and periods that it cannot directly examine, this volume can only be considered an introduction to the wealth of materials that exist beyond its boundaries. In the chapters that follow, the experts take up a variety of topics and pursue a variety of approaches. Some consider questions of influence (Daniel Orrells, James Grantham Turner), while others explore the archives (Ian Frederick Moulton, Colette Colligan), and still others contemplate alternative sexualities (Amy S. Wyngaard, Deborah Lutz, David Greven) or alternative discursive influences (Sarah Salih, Sarah Toulalan). Some chapters focus on close readings of key texts (Elizabeth Robertson, Marianne Noble), while others range more widely over genre or period (Bradford K. Mudge, Richard C. Sha, Gert Hekma). Some of the topics discussed include textual pleasure; venereal disease; religious ecstasy; sadomasochism; necrophilia; reproduction; rape; homosexuality; bibliomania; obscenity; satire; and pornography, among others. Regardless, however, of their widely different interests and varying approaches, the contributors are in agreement about the centrality of eros to literary studies and the importance of continuing a free and frank discussion. To that discussion, all interested parties are welcome.

CHRONOLOGY

c. 570 BCE	d. Sappho
458 BCE	Aeschylus, <i>Oresteia</i>
442 BCE	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
411 BCE	Aristophanes, <i>Lysistrata</i>
c. 365 BCE	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>
c. 340 BCE	Philaenis, <i>Sex Manual fragments</i>
c. 56 BCE	Lucretius, <i>De Rerum Natura</i>
29–19 BCE	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>
c. 15 BCE	Ovid, <i>Amores</i>
c. 1 BCE	Ovid, <i>Ars Amatoria</i>
c. 40 BCE–15 CE	<i>Priapeia</i>
90 CE	Martial, <i>Epigrams</i>
95–127 CE	Juvenal, <i>Satires</i>
400 CE	Saint Augustine, <i>Confessions</i>
426 CE	Saint Augustine, <i>City of God</i>
c. 1130	Chretien de Troyes, <i>Le Chevalier de la Charette</i>
c. 1170	Marie de France, <i>Lais</i>
1190	Capellanus, <i>De Amore</i>
c. 1225–1250	Wooing Group Prayers

CHRONOLOGY

- c.1308–1320 Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*
- c.1340 Richard Rolle, *Incendium amoris*
- c.1353 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*
- c.1383 Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*
- 1386 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Miller's Tale*
- c.1438 Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*
- 1470 Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*
- c.1524–1527 *I Modi*, engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi with sonnets by Pietro Aretino
- 1534–1536 Pietro Aretino, *Ragionamenti*
- 1593 William Shakespeare, “Venus and Adonis”
- 1594 William Shakespeare, “The Rape of Lucrece”
- c.1595 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*
- 1604–1611 *King James Bible*
- 1609 William Shakespeare, *Sonnets*
- 1633 John Donne, *Songs and Sonnets*, posthumous
- 1654 John Donne, *Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed*, posthumous
- 1655 (?) Michel Millot, *L'Ecole des filles*
- c.1668 Nicolas Chorier, *Satyra sotadica*
- 1673 John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *Signior Dildo*, attributed
- 1675 William Wycherly, *The Country Wife*
- 1677 Aphra Behn, *The Rover*
- 1680 Michel Millot *The School of Vénus*
 John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *Poems*, posthumous
- 1683 Jean Barrin, *Vénus dans le cloître*
- 1684 Charles Cotton, *Erotopolis: The Present State of Bettyland*

CHRONOLOGY

- 1684–1687 Aphra Behn, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*
- 1700 William Congreve, *The Way of the World*
- 1701 Anon, *The Pleasures of a Single Life*
- 1706 Anon, *The Fifteen Comforts of Cuckoldom*
- 1707 Anon, *The Fifteen Plagues of a Maidenhead*
- 1709 Delarivier Manley, *The New Atalantis*
 Delarivier Manley arrested for libel
 John Marten, *Gonosologium Novum*
- 1722 Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*
- 1725 Jean Barrin, *Venus in the Cloister*
- 1736 Jean Astruc, *De Morbus Veneris*
- 1738 Rocque Joaquín de Alcubierre begins his excavation of Herculaneum
- 1740 Nicolas Chorier, *A Dialogue Between a Married Lady and a Maid*
 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*
- 1741 Anon, *A New Description of Merryland*
 Henry Fielding, *Shamela*
- 1742 Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*
- 1746 Henry Fielding, *The Female Husband*
- 1748 Discovery of the ruins of Pompeii
 John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*
- 1760 John Wilkes, *An Essay on Woman*
- 1782 Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*
- c.1785 Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom*
- 1786 Richard Payne Knight, *Remains of the Worship of Priapus*
- 1791 Marquis de Sade, *Justine*
- 1795 Marquis de Sade, *La philosophie dans le boudoir*
- 1796 Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*

CHRONOLOGY

- 1797 Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*
- 1798 d. Giacomo Girolamo Casanova
- 1811–1812 Lord Byron, “Thyrza” elegies
- 1813 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*
- 1817 Percy Shelley, “Laon and Cythna”
- 1818 Percy Shelley, *On Love*
- 1818–1823 Lord Byron, *Don Juan*
- 1820 John Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes*
- 1856 Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*
- 1857 Obscene Publications Act passes in London
 Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*
 Gustave Flaubert tried and acquitted for obscenity
- 1860 Walt Whitman, ‘Calamus’ poems
- 1861 Emily Dickinson, ‘Come slowly – Eden!’, ‘Wild nights! – Wild nights!’
- 1866 Charles Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads*
- 1869 Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*
- 1870 Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*
- 1873 Antony Comstock lobbied successfully for the Comstock Law, which used the postal service to suppress the circulation of obscene materials
- 1877 Henry Spencer Ashbee, *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*
- 1879 Henry Spencer Ashbee, *Centuria Librorum Absconditorum*
- 1883 John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (written in 1873)
- 1885 Henry Spencer Ashbee, *Catena Librorum Tacendorum*
- 1886 Richard Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*
- 1888 Charles Swinburne, *The Wippingham Papers*
- 1888–1895 Anon, *My Secret Life*, 11 vols.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1890 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- 1895 Oscar Wilde convicted of ‘gross indecency’
- 1897 John Addington Symonds and Henry Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*
 Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*
- 1899 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*
- 1904 Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom* published in Paris
- 1905 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*
- c.1919 Edith Wharton, ‘Beatrice Palmato’
- 1920 D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*
- 1922 James Joyce, *Ulysses*
- 1928 Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l’œil*
 Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*
 D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*
- 1934 Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*
- 1954 Pauline Réage, *The Story of O*
- 1955 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*
- 1957 George Bataille, *L’Erotisme*
- 1960 Giacomo Girolamo Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 12 vols.,
 posthumous
- 1977 Anaïs Nin, *Delta of Venus*, posthumous
- 1979 Anaïs Nin, *Little Birds*, posthumous
- 1994 “Pauline Réage,” author of *The Story of O*, is identified as
 Dominique Aury