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Marine Ganofsky, *Night in French Libertine Fiction*. Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2018. viii + 285 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. £65.00 (pb). ISBN 978-0-7294-1215-5.

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What can literary representations of the night tell us about its broader history? Marine Ganofsky's detailed study focuses on the night in French libertine fiction of the eighteenth century, revealing the importance of nocturnal darkness as setting, symbol, or site across a range of clandestine erotic or pornographic works. Ganofsky argues convincingly that French libertine literature—from its fairy tales to the *Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*—relies upon the night for its narrative elements and defining themes. These texts all reference the night, whether through their “obscurity of language,” through events set in the shadows or while others sleep, or in “the dark side of the self” (p. 4). But the consistent reliance on the night and darkness in French libertine fiction is not static: Ganofsky lays out a rich history of changing representations of the night in eighteenth-century France, showing readers its varied manifestations and developments.

The authors examined here, from Crébillon and Nerciat in chapter two through Laclos and Sade in chapters five, six, and seven, imagined a night that “conceals mysteries one longs to reveal” (p. 253). In all these works, darkness and revelation are inseparable; but what do these authors and their characters long to reveal? Fantasies and sexual encounters, dreams, the secrets of pleasure and the body, and the knowledge of one's self are all on offer. But Ganofsky shows that these revelations share a common engagement with the question of the limit. They all consider, more or less directly, what can be taught, or learned, in nocturnal encounters outside the moral limits of society. And by carefully distinguishing between modern pornography and early modern libertine writing, Ganofsky shows that (until Sade) it is the *acceptance* of the limit that actually unites these libertine authors. She first presents this insight in her third chapter, “Night as a hiding space.” The freedom found through concealment links libertine erotic fiction with the clandestine philosophers of the seventeenth century (after all, “Caute” was the motto of Benedict Spinoza). But concealed and cautious, this hidden libertinage does not challenge the order of the family, the convent, or the kingdom. “Pour vivre heureux vivons caché”: this advice from a 1788 fable by Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian is cited by Ganofsky to summarize the self-limitation of her authors. She argues that in the year before the start of the Revolution, happiness (or even mere gratification) was still sought not by rebelling against the social order, but by hiding from it, conceding its primacy over the day in exchange for hidden nocturnal pleasures (pp. 93-94).

Ganofsky situates her study in the metaphorical and literal double nature of the Enlightenment. She reviews recent work on nocturnalization, a development encompassing expanding public and domestic lighting, as well as the increased use of the night for legitimate forms of labor and leisure. Alongside this “literal” Enlightenment, she reminds us of the demystifying assault on ghosts, witches, and other nocturnal dangers presented by the Enlightenment of the *philosophes*. In eighteenth-century Europe the lived experience of the night intersected with the intellectual history of darkness and light in surprising new ways; but Ganofsky’s study quickly moves away from this intersection to focus sharply on fictional representations of the night. These fictive nights show an informative range of associations and affiliations. In the second chapter, on nocturnal aesthetics, we see the night represented as dusky rather than pitch-black, with authors such as Crébillon and Nerciat cultivating the erotic power of darkness or some other obstacle to sight, rather than attempting to turn night into day. Here Ganofsky makes a key contrast between the threatening night seen in works such as *Manon Lescaut* and the amusing tricks darkness can play, seen in Claude Godard d’Aucour’s *Thémidore* (pp. 65-66). Chapter three examines the night as concealment. Leaving aside the 1% for whom domestic architecture provided more privacy (or even a separate *petite maison*), Ganofsky’s authors describe a night which offers privacy within communal living spaces such as convents. This is the night of the pornographic bestseller *Le Portier des Chartreux* (1741), and Ganofsky shows the novel’s powerful influence on libertine authors and characters through its frequent intertextual citation in later libertine writings (pp. 88-89). The fourth chapter examines dreams and nocturnal illusions and includes a detailed reading of La Morlière’s *Angola, histoire indienne* (1746). Both the “Arabian nights” setting of *Angola* and its reliance on the bed trick raise questions about darkness, mistaken identity, and black-white opposition in the aesthetics of the Old Regime, which have been discussed in recent work by James A. Steintrager and Anne Lafont. [1]

The last three chapters of *Night in French Libertine Fiction* examine new emphases in representations of the night in the last third of the eighteenth century. Ganofsky argues that Denon and Laclos, as well as the author of *Le Rideau levé*, present a night of sexual revelation or education, defying the limits to sexual knowledge set by the Church. She then shows how Laclos aligns night, interiority, and womanhood in his depiction of the nocturnal lives of the women of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, both *libertines* and *dévotés*. The nocturnal desires and actions of Mme de Merteuil and Mme de Tourvel show a libertine woman given over to her nocturnal “dark side” and a “prude [who] has yet to discover and acknowledge that ‘dark’ side of herself” (p. 208). Laclos presents these two extremes as limits within which his characters can be “neither solely libertines nor purely prudes” (p. 227). The women imagined by Laclos “can be both and, crucially, much more,” Ganofsky argues, through their nocturnal deceptions and self-deceptions (p. 227). The potential to exceed the limits of Laclos’ moralizing brings Ganofsky to Sade (chapter seven). In all the works examined to this point, the night has allowed authors and characters to transgress social limits while affirming their own values. Presented as the culmination and the “end of libertine nights,” Sade’s *Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* opens a new era in the history of the conceptualization of the night (p. 19). Gallant, amusing, and pleasurable encounters are replaced with the brutality of the Castle of Silling. Readers are no longer seduced by pastoral nocturnal settings; instead, they are assaulted with “desires and pleasures... as boundless and dark as the night itself” (p. 232). With an engaging narrative arc, *Night in French Libertine Fiction* shows how the playful dichotomy between celebrating the limits imposed by the night and using the night to transgress social or moral limits (as detailed in chapters two through six) is destroyed by the Sadean extension of the logic of libertinism. At

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the end of the Old Regime, new representations of the night associate the dark hours of the day with power, brutality, surveillance, and transparency.

## NOTES

[1] Anne Lafont, "How Skin Color Became a Racial Marker: Art Historical Perspectives on Race," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, 1 (2017): 89-113, and James A. Steintrager, *The Autonomy of Pleasure: Libertines, License, and Sexual Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

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