



The Invention of Heterosexual Culture (MIT Press)

By Louis-Georges Tin

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Heterosexuality is celebrated--in film and television, in pop songs and opera, in literature and on greeting cards--and at the same time taken for granted. It is the cultural and sexual norm by default. And yet, as Louis-Georges Tin shows in *The Invention of Heterosexual Culture*, in premodern Europe heterosexuality was perceived as an alternative culture. The practice of heterosexuality may have been standard, but the symbolic primacy of the heterosexual couple was not. Tin maps the emergence of heterosexual culture in Western Europe and the significant resistance to it from feudal lords, church fathers, and the medical profession. Tin writes that before the phenomenon of "courtly love" in the early twelfth century, the man-woman pairing had not been deemed a subject worthy of more than passing interest. As heterosexuality became a recurrent theme in art and literature, the nobility came to view it as a disruption of the feudal chivalric ethos of virility and male bonding. If feudal lords objected to the "hetero" in heterosexuality and what they saw as the associated dangers of weakness and effeminacy, the church took issue with the "sexuality," which threatened the Christian ethos of renunciation and divine love. Finally, the medical profession cast heterosexuality as pathology, warning of an epidemic of "lovesickness."

Noting that the discourse of heterosexuality does not belong to heterosexuals alone, Tin offers a groundbreaking history that reasserts the cultural identity of heterosexuality.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This book's ambition concerns nothing less than the birth of our modern social order. While the 'unnaturalness' of heterosexuality is by now a cardinal rule in sexuality studies, this book makes the enormous contribution of tracing the lineaments of that transition; it is in essence an account of how heterosexuality became, as the book rightly terms it, a 'cult object.' Studded with stunning insights, this book masks its erudition with fluid and often beautiful writing, and manages to cover an enormous swath of Western culture without ever seeming either superficial or rushed. Destined to be debated, adored, and doubtless critiqued, this is one of the few books published in the last decade that can accurately be said to have opened up a new field of study" -- **Jonathan David Katz**, Director, Doctoral Program in Visual Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo

"Louis-Georges Tin's breathtaking sprint through French literary history calls into question many of our laziest assumptions about our sexual past. By retrospectively inserting the term 'heterosexual' into the narrative of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, he highlights how troublesome male-female love was considered to be by contrast with (platonic) male love, and identifies the moment when the balance of approval shifted across to the heterosexual couple. As much a polemic as a work of scholarship, *The Invention of Heterosexual Culture* provides copious material with which to dismantle homophobic myths about the nature and origins of Western Christian culture." -- **Gregory Woods**, Professor of Gay and Lesbian Studies, Nottingham Trent University

"Louis-Georges Tin's *The Invention of Heterosexual Culture* achieves with remarkable efficacy its stated ambition: to prompt heterosexual culture to become more self-conscious of its historical construction. The lucid and jargon-free prose makes for a pleasurable reading that grips and delights; the solid argument lays down the foundation for studies that are sure to follow through with the historical examination of heterosexual culture." -- **Rodolphe el-Khoury**, University of Toronto

"The author writes lucidly and engagingly, and succeeds in making heterosexual culture visible across a longue durée. In a final lively chapter, he demonstrates how, in the 20th century, even educationalists got in on the act, participating in the progressive "heterosexualization" of French culture by, among other things, promoting eco-education over single-sex schooling... This ability to synthesise and to range widely sets Tin's book apart from previous studies aimed at divesting heterosexuality of its magic and claims to universality." *Times Higher Education*

About the Author

Louis-Georges Tin, born in Martinique and now living in Paris, lectures in the arts faculty at the University of Orléans. He is the editor of *The Dictionary of Homophobia*, the founder of the Paris-based IDAHO Committee, which coordinates International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, and cofounder and spokesman for the Representative Council of Black Associations (CRAN).

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