



# The Inverted Gaze: Queering the French Literary Classics in America

*FranCois Cusset*

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## The Inverted Gaze: Queering the French Literary Classics in America FranCois Cusset

François Cusset, author of the acclaimed book *French Theory*, investigates the queering of the French literary canon by American writers and scholars in this thought-provoking and free-minded journey across six centuries of literary classics and sexual polemics.

Cusset presents the foundations and rationale for American queer theory, the field of study established in the 1990s and promulgated by writers and scholars such as Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Michael Warner (in the wake of Michel Foucault), which challenges a supposed "heteronormative" ideology in our culture. He provides an overview of their reinterpretation of the French literary canon from a queer perspective, then deliberately goes further, confronting that same canon with a lively form of general suspicion—seeking gender trouble and sexual ambiguities in the most unexpected corners of French literary classics, in which macho heroes turn out to be homosocial melancholics and the most seemingly submissive housewives are great vanguards of lesbian liberation.

Cusset's survey includes medieval and Renaissance literature, works from the Age of Enlightenment, nineteenth-century avant-gardists such as Charles Baudelaire and Honoré de Balzac, and twentieth-century modernists such as Marcel Proust and Jean Genet.

Bold in its themes and propositions, *The Inverted Gaze* (a translation of the book *Queer Critics*) is an extraordinary work about French literature and American queer politics by one of France's biggest intellectual stars.

**François Cusset** is a professor of American studies at the University of Paris. He is the author of numerous books including *French Theory* (2008).

**David Homel** is an award-winning translator and writer who lives in Montreal, Quebec.

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