



Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick , Nancy K. Miller (Editor) , Carolyn G. Heilbrun (Editor)

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Hailed by the *New York Times* as "one of the most influential texts in gender studies, men's studies and gay studies," this book uncovers the homosocial desire between men, from Restoration comedies to Tennyson's *Princess*.

Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire Details

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From Reader Review *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* for online ebook

Matt says

I think what most people find offensive about Sedgwick's theory is that women exchanged as objects of economic exchange (Patriarchy) is rooted in the desire to strengthen homosocial bonds between men. I find many heterosexual readers of Sedgwick's work are appalled by this because they assume Sedgwick is calling them gay (spoiler alert, she isn't). Sedgwick's theory is a counter argument to your conventional homophobic discourse; that homosexuality is deviant or derivative from heterosexuality. Sedgwick's theory repositions the homosocial as an essential cultural brick to a very layered wall. I think that what most readers find shocking while reading *Between Men* is this refocusing on the emphasis of non genital male-to-male relationships (not that these relations never become genital, she notes they have the potential to do so).

Overall, this is an incredible work of genius that's well communicated through extensive literary analysis and historical citing.

yoli says

I shouldn't pretend like I read the whole thing--but this is where the central pivotal idea of my thesis was discovered: triangular structures of power. She says that women are fungible (great word!) and that only the men matter with lots of examples that are less useful if you haven't read the source books. Since I hadn't there was a lot of skimming.

But of the 50% I *did* read, I would say it's pretty good. Start with the introduction and proceed as you feel necessary. Sedgwick has an annoying habit of bringing up points and then leaving us to make connections and figure out their significance. Just a heads up, friends.

Patrik says

This book was obviously written with a real passion, genuine enthusiasm, and good intentions. Also, it was one of the first of its kind, so kudos, I'll give Kosofsky that.

However, the writing style is simply atrocious. As for your possible reaction to the argumentation in the book: it can go either way--you will either accept Kosofsky's interpretation and like the book, or you will see many of her concepts as farfetched, and remain skeptical.

Seph Roofbeams says

can't stop thinking abt this book literally life changing

Dylan Rowen says

A comprehensive study, not only of homosexuality in literature, but "homosocial" desire articulated through love triangles which include the female subject within non-canonical texts. I think I've found some inspiration for my thesis ;-)

Madeline says

1. I was drawn to this book mostly because I knew there was a chapter on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and that novel *needs* a good analysis of the race-sex-class dynamics Dickens used. More generally, it's an interesting book. What I didn't expect, but was pleased to find, was how much time Sedgwick spends writing about the role of women in the texts she chooses. I thought that enriched her analysis, although I do think the book would have benefited from a clearer discussion of the role misogyny plays in these texts.
 2. Sadly, I've only read a couple of the texts she uses (although I know a bit about some of the others, and nothing at all about one or two). However, this didn't impede my understanding and I never felt like I should run to Wikipedia to look up a synopsis. Sedgwick lays out the information very clearly. Her actual analysis is something of a vocabulary lesson - but it is always *interesting*. And, hey, new words are good for you.
 3. But was it necessary to bring in Freud?
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Emma Sea says

My patience for this kind of needlessly convoluted academic writing has worn thin over the years.

Valorie says

I read this and Sedgwick's other book *Epistemology of the Closet*. Of the two, *Epistemology* is better. It is a newer book, and it's clear that Sedgwick's ideas are more developed, more considered, and a little more "modern." There are times in *Epistemology* that Sedgwick refers to *Between Men* for further reading, but never is it completely necessary to understand the book. While this book is a fine academic work, you're better off reading just *Epistemology*.

Nikki says

Need to read this again to let it sink in properly, but a couple of my tutors have very much subscribed to Sedgwick's line of thought, in part if not in whole, and it all made a lot of sense to me. It's easy to apply it to the Arthurian legends, or to the 'Sagas of Warrior-Poets' in Norse studies...

My perennial problem with literary theory is that people make it sound far too complicated when they write books like this, but this isn't too bad, at least.

Vanessa says

This book was a great place to start reading about gender and queer theory for me. It was at a level that was easily accessible, but did not stay away from definite terms. Her theory of the erotic triangle is very well applied to all the case studies she found throughout the periods. In my opinion, one will even be able to spot the described dynamics in today's gender interaction to a certain extent. Well worth the read!

Taneli Viitahuhta says

Sedgwick's theory of paranoid cognitive model evolves from here to "Touching Feeling". Once you get the grips of her argument, it's hard not to see homosocial desire as shaping the world. This model of relationship leads to paranoid cognition, as lapsing to oscillation between homophobia and homosexual desire is the shunned, or abject, side of this desire. Her way of demonstration is crucial, because for the bourgeois era literature has been the best way to give shape to inner dialogue and consciousness of self and the social.

Theoretically this book is nearly groundbreaking, rhetorically it is robust. My poor knowledge of 17th and 18th century English literature made it slow read for me. Book to come back to.

Jonathan says

This is one of the first books that opened the new theoretical school of queer theory. As such, it made a lot of people mad back in the day and it is still pissing people off today. Sedgwick claims that the patriarchy has been using women to get closer to men. This is where she loses many people. This is where she lost several people in my grad class (you would think a bunch of English majors would read and pay attention). If people would read on they would see that she goes on to say that using women to do that does not make a man gay. It is of making new bonds or strengthening existing ones. It does not mean you do not love the woman you married, but there is still a "bros before ho's" connotation to it. And it is not true of all men, but good grief! If you look around you can see that a lot has not changed since the Middle Ages and that women can still be used as bargaining chips. This makes the patriarchy uncomfortable because homosocial bonding (aka, bros) is all fine and dandy. But the second the homosocial becomes homosexual, everything goes to hell in a hand basket before the offender even knows what happened. This is a very watered-down and condensed summary of Sedgwick's work, and does not do her brilliance justice.

ralowe says

for me this is like part 2 in my quest to read around the canonical. one day i may actually read epistemology of the closet, but for now it's fun to read sedgwick's other work. i guess technically this would be part 3 or 2 1/2 since i've just finished the sylvan tomkins book she co-edited. i'm kind of strung out on affect because it's such a mesmerizing way to describe unsystematically how objects relate to other objects relate to subjects.

that fuzzy gloopy metaphoricity that lurks behind the world is so addictive. her ideas are handy with talking about what always felt so campy about twilight, how edward and jacob really want to bone each other and bella just becomes their arena of homophobic hostility due to the prohibition of them ever really getting down. that subjective sense of camp or something i always think as having some connection to the tacit tones that lurk between and behind and saturates everything that people now seem to call affect. but i don't know. as i was reading this book i kept thinking about how i wanted to say that sedgwick really wants to talk about gay misogyny when she's writing this. the english literature thing is just a euphemistic diversion for the gyneophobic networks that exist between gay men. why do i think that? i also think that her essay in performatives also served as a platform for her to tangentially rant against the institution of marriage. between men was written way before gay men had the kind of institutional power where they're openly out and her attention to dickens, tennyson, Sterne and so on all functions as a queer feminist cautionary tale.

Luke Widlund says

Its responsibility and accountability is still incredibly relevant. In fact, I would never go as far to think that Sedgwick's typology of homosociality will ever go out of vogue. However, this text does not lend itself to the widest array of usage considering that the author does use incredibly specific (and interesting) examples to explore her concept.

The current and future LIT educator in me will totally consider photocopying the intro and some portions of the text to offer students as necessary reading for queer lit theory. The "meat" of this text may not be for the casual reader, especially if they are disinterested in Classical or Victorian white male writing.

Holly Interlandi says

The theories presented in this book have affected me so much that I can't help applying them to everything I see and/or read. Highly intriguing, and TRUE.
