



## Epistemology of the Closet

By Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

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Since the late 1980s, queer studies and theory have become vital to the intellectual and political life of the United States. This has been due, in no small degree, to the influence of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's critically acclaimed *Epistemology of the Closet*. Working from classic texts of European and American writers—including Melville, James, Nietzsche, Proust, and Wilde—Sedgwick analyzes a turn-of-the-century historical moment in which sexual orientation became as important a demarcation of personhood as gender had been for centuries. In her preface to this updated edition Sedgwick places the book both personally and historically, looking specifically at the horror of the first wave of the AIDS epidemic and its influence on the text.

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## Epistemology of the Closet By Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Since the late 1980s, queer studies and theory have become vital to the intellectual life of the U.S. This has been, to no small degree, due to the popularity of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's critically acclaimed *Epistemology of the Closet*. Working from classic texts of European and American writers--including Herman Melville, Henry James, Marcel Proust, and Oscar Wilde--Sedgwick delineates a historical moment in which sexual identity became as important a demarcation of personhood as gender had been for centuries.

Sedgwick's literary analysis, while provocative and often startling (you will never read *Billy Budd* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the same way again), is simply the basis for a larger project of examining and analyzing how the categories of "homosexual" and "heterosexual" continue to shape almost all aspects of contemporary thought. *Epistemology of the Closet* is a sometimes-dense work, but one filled with wit and empathy. Sedgwick writes with great intelligence and an eye for irony, but always makes clear that her theories and critical acumen are in the service of a politic that seeks to make the world a better and more humane place for everyone. An extraordinary book that reshapes how we think about literature, sexuality, and everyday life. --*Michael Bronski*

#### From Publishers Weekly

The homosexual closet, by Sedgwick's yardstick, is "the defining structure for gay oppression in this century." She disagrees strongly with those who separate gays and straights as "distinct kinds of persons," with no common humanity. Her close readings of Melville's *Billy Budd*, Wilde's *Dorian Gray* and of Proust, Nietzsche, Henry James and Thackeray bristle with keen observations relating entrenched fears of same-sex relationships to contemporary gay-bashing and obvious displays of heterosexual or "macho" attitudes. But Sedgwick ( *Between Men* ) does not prove her overstated thesis that homo/hetero distinction obtains with gender, class and race in determining "all modern Western identity and social organization." Obtuse, cumbersome, academic prose limits the appeal of this treatise.

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#### Review

No book I have recently read is as successful as Sedgwick's in making provocative connections between literary acts and social dynamics. . . . A remarkable work of mind and spirit. -- *The Nation*

Sedgwick's brilliant *Epistemology of the Closet* will have many lives: as a work of literary criticism, a cultural study, a political analysis; as a text for gay and straight, academic and non-academic readers, and potentially as a landmark in the development of lesbian and gay studies. -- *Womens Review of Books*

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#### Joyce Jacobs:

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