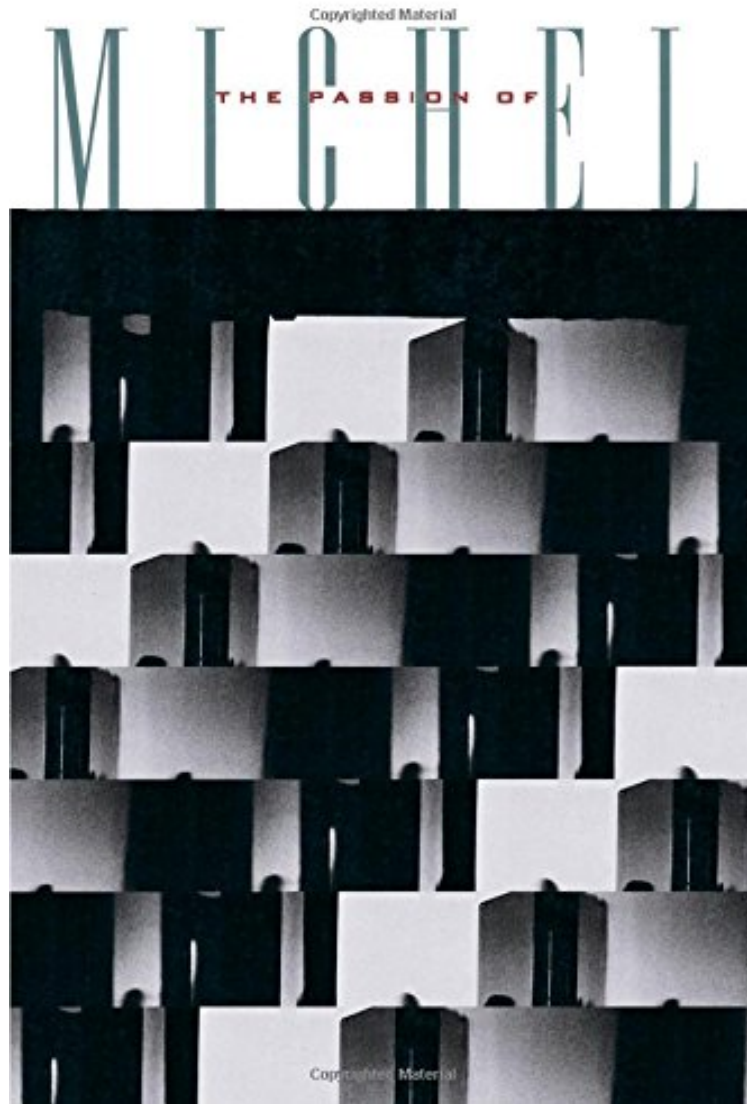


[Download] The Passion of Michel Foucault

The Passion of Michel Foucault

James Miller

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James Miller : The Passion of Michel Foucault before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Passion of Michel Foucault:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A PearlBy tamiii James Miller, apparently familiar with homosexuality, drugs, and sadomasochism, undertakes a project which he acknowledges Foucault would have disdained--a biography. Rigorously disciplined, Miller excellently, and commendably, correlates Foucault's ideas with the man's moment in history. Puzzlingly, Miller's approach becomes a fetish--he remains focused on the finger of the

prophet, rather than seeing that Foucault unconsciously points to an answer to Nietzsche's questions: how did I become what I am and why do I suffer so for it? The Foucault that emerges from the biography clearly understood what it meant to be a commodity, cultivating himself as a work of art (with its attendant commercial value.)

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
 By Ye LI
 Uno3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A GRAPHIC, SOMETIMES SHOCKING, YET QUITE ENLIGHTENING BIOGRAPHY
 By Steven H Propp
 James Miller (born 1947) is Chair of Liberal Studies and Professor of Politics at The New School. He has written other books such as *Examined Lives: From Socrates to Nietzsche*, *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947-1977*, etc. He wrote in the Preface to this 1993 book, "This book is not a biography... rather, it is a narrative account of one man's lifelong struggle to honor Nietzsche's gnomic injunction, 'to become what one is.' ... I have approached Foucault's writing as if it expressed a powerful desire to realize a certain form of life; and his life as if it embodied a sustained and partially successful effort to turn this desire into a reality... I have gathered information about various aspects of Foucault's life that have been hitherto undocumented and, therefore, largely unexamined... the crux of what is most original and challenging about Foucault's way of thinking ... is his unrelenting, deeply ambiguous and profoundly problematic preoccupation with death, which he explored not only in the exoteric form of his writing, but also, and I believe critically, in the esoteric form of sado-masochistic eroticism... To make matters worse, AIDS entered the story... The fact that my book was written ... in the shadow of a plague, makes it all too easy to discount the possibility that Foucault, in his radical approach to the body and its pleasures, was in fact a kind of visionary... I have gone ahead, and tried to tell the whole truth, as best I could." He notes in the first chapter, "the circumstances of Foucault's death are still not entirely clear... Exactly when the doctors made their diagnosis is unknown; Foucault's death came relatively early in the epidemic, before a blood test for the presence of antibodies to the virus was widely available... by the fall of 1983, if not earlier, he had begun to worry that he might have AIDS. Still, it seems that a definite diagnosis was made only belatedly, probably at the end of 1983 or the beginning of 1984... Foucault's death put [his long-time partner] Daniel Defert in a difficult position... But now, he realized, no one---neither the doctor, nor Foucault, if he knew---had told him the truth. In private... Defert was furious. After all, his longtime lover had perhaps deceived him." (Pg. 23) He explains, "But perhaps there was a still deeper and much darker reason for Foucault's silence... about AIDS. Over the summer of 1983, the philosopher had developed a scratchy dry cough, doubtless raising fears that he might have contracted the disorder... Defert thinks that 'it is quite possible' Foucault in these months 'had a real knowledge' that he was 'near death.' ... within the North American gay community... efforts were underway to change sexual behaviors. In the previous months, some of Foucault's closest friends... had urged him ... to watch what he was doing. But Foucault had ignored their entreaties. Keeping a check on himself---particularly when he was in San Francisco---was not his style." (Pg. 26) He goes on, "the possibility of what Foucault elsewhere called a 'suicide-orgy' exerted an unusual fascination over him... That fall... he returned to the bathhouses of San Francisco. Accepting the new level of risk, he joined again in the orgies of torture... But why was Foucault there? If he already had the virus, as he perhaps suspected, then he might be endangering one of his partners.... [or else] he might be wagering his own life... What exactly Foucault did in San Francisco in the fall of 1983---and why---may never be known... Still, there seems little doubt that Foucault on his last visit to San Francisco was preoccupied by AIDS, and by his own possible death from it... 'He took AIDS very seriously,' says Defert. 'When he went to San Francisco for the last time, he took it as a "limit-experience.'" (Pg. 28-29) In the Postscript to the book, Miller reveals, "My research began with a rumor---one that I now believe to be essentially false. One evening in the spring of 1987, an old friend ... relayed a shocking piece of gossip: knowing that he was dying of AIDS, Michel Foucault in 1983 had gone to gay bathhouses in America, and deliberately tried to infect other people with the disease." (Pg. 375) He continues, "I had become convinced that the rumor ... was false. For one thing... all my informants were straight. Furthermore, I had already gathered a great deal of evidence indicating that Foucault himself was never told that he in fact had AIDS. If this was true, then the notion that he had been some kind of 'AIDS guerilla,' intent on killing others, seemed farfetched." (Pg. 380) But after interviewing Defert [including his comment about the "limit-experience"], "Given the circumstances in San Francisco in the fall of 1983... to have taken AIDS as a 'limit-experience'... would have involved engaging in potentially suicidal acts of passion with consenting partners, most of them likely to be infected already... Foucault and these men were wagering their lives together..." (Pg. 381) In-between these quotations, lies an excellent, and very informative semi-biography of Foucault. But the "esoteric" sources Miller also consults (e.g., gay S/M periodicals) make this book---while at times shocking, and controversial---"must reading" for anyone who wants to know more about Foucault.

A startling look at one of this century's most influential philosophers, the book chronicles every stage of Foucault's personal and professional odyssey, from his early interest in dreams to his final preoccupation with sexuality and the nature of personal identity.

From Publishers Weekly
 A brilliant, sensational study of the life and thought of the French historian/philosopher/social activist. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.
 From Library Journal
 Foucault has been acclaimed as one of

France's most influential and certainly controversial 20th-century philosophers. Miller has thoroughly researched and presented Foucault's intellectual journey, from his early (and lifelong) fascination with Nietzsche, through his studies in psychiatry in Sweden, attempts to remove his personality when presenting a history of science, and radical leftist political activism, to his delving into the world of sensation, the "limit-experience," and the will to know. Miller details Foucault's quest to understand himself, which included an exploration of homosexuality and sadomasochism, experimentation with drugs, and a fascination with death. He also recounts Foucault's death from AIDS. This important and readable study is recommended for academic and large public libraries.- Ann Irvine, Montgomery Cty. P.L., Md. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. Miller gives us the portrait of a vibrant, incandescent, fearless, and luminous mind--yes, perhaps self-destructive and all too human, but one that can never be accused of banality, mediocrity, pettiness, or naivet. (New York Times Book) [A] bold and brilliant reconstruction of Foucault's life and thought... Miller's argument is persuasive. (Newsweek) Probably the best general introduction to Foucault's later thinking. (Washington Post Book World) Miller's controversial book is the product of prodigious research... [H]e discusses madness, death, and homosexuality, and particularly sadomasochism in great, graphic, almost sensational detail. (New Republic) James Miller's impressively documented study of Foucault's life in philosophy is an electric, disturbing, and brilliantly provocative work, truly worthy of its subject, and essential companion to a reading of late twentieth century Western culture. (Edward W. Said, author of Culture and Imperialism and Orientalism) James Miller may shock some readers with his way of talking about both sex and philosophy, Nietzsche and AIDS, theories of knowledge and sadomasochism, but out of these contrasting elements he constructs a heroic life, one that illustrates the very notion Foucault developed late in his career, the idea that a philosopher's life should be exemplary and that he himself should be a lover of wisdom, a seeker of truth. (Edmund White, author of A Boy's Own Story)