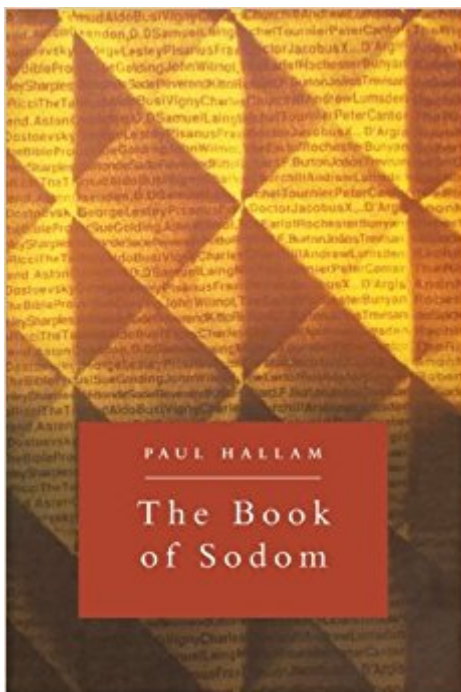


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# The Book Of Sodom



## Synopsis

The biblical story of the destruction of Sodom has inspired countless literary visions. The city has elicited writing from Milton, Sade, Proust, Dostoevsky and Tournier, among others. This work contains an anthology of Sodom texts spanning several centuries. Paul Hallam has also provided his own reading of these languages of prejudice, obsession and desire in an extensive essay.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Hallam, a London screenwriter and producer, here offers an autobiographical essay and guidebook of the biblical city of Sodom. Since the age of 16, Hallam has searched for gay places and literary images of Sodom. Here he compiles his findings from court cases, magazine articles, and the literary writings of such diverse authors as Marcel Proust, John Cleland, Marquis de Sade, and John Bunyan. The autobiographical essay, which details Hallam's obsessive search and his musing over his findings, explores topics such as a Sodom family tree, AIDS and Sodom, and the fact that Sodom exists in every time and place. The reader is then taken on a journey into the world of lascivious Sodomites through the anthology of writings. An inspired, thought-provoking collection of barbaric eroticism.- L. Kriz, Sioux City P.L., Ia.Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
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"[A] delight from start to finish ... Paul Hallam's enthusiasm for buggery is infectious. •Rouge" "A clever selection and a playful one ... Hallam delivers a surprising line-up of luscious lovelies ... a serious and a sad book. Let it be a seductive one

too. *Weekend Telegraph* "A masterwork. Paul Hallam deepens the argument while retaining the mysteries of human interaction outside the cave of reason. *Hilton Als* "A stunning guided tour through the real and imaginary landscapes of Sodom. A source- and thought-book. *Jenny Diski* "An inspired, thought-provoking collection of barbaric eroticism. *Library Journal* "Fact and fantasy merge in this innovative and abstract expression of homosexuality in the guise of Sodom ... inventive, exciting and recommended. *Pink Paper* "Hallam's superb introductory essay details his search for Sodom in literature and in his own life, ... has all the buzz of the most ardent erotic quest. *Modern Review* "Not only a fascinating account of how one incident in scripture came to be excessively used and abused, but also a moving memoir with a sharp political edge. *Times Literary Supplement* "Sodom was a real place which beame abstracted into a psychosexual knot: Sex, Punishment, Death. Paul Hallam unravels that knot by making a psychogeographical journey around his adopted London, and reclaims Sodom for the people against whm it has been, and is still used." *Jon Savage*

The stunning cover photo by Humphrey Spender, 1938's "Newcastle United Football Changing Room," sums up this anthology: a naked, buff athlete is puffing a cigarette lit up by a demonic, shadowed black clad figure behind whom hang white jerseys, as if the latter figure's detached wings, lurking in the otherwise Stygian gloom. Paul Hallam, in his early forties when he compiled this grab-bag of material relating to Sodom, explains in his opening essay "A Circuit-Walk" his fascination not so much with the supposed sin of sodomy attributed falsely but powerfully to the inhabitants who lusted after "strange flesh," but the place of the sin. Hallam's lengthy introduction surveys the acceptance of his own marginal identity as a youth in Nottinghamshire, blended into his own secondhand searches for theological tracts, socialist harangues, and literary forays into the Cities of the Plain. Out of these random encounters in text he has amassed his own collection to commemorate the place that haunts so many denizens of the urban fringes today. As Hallam notes, "the anthology rests with a Sodom rumor." What the actual sin is-- it's left up to us. Along with the expected entries from Proust, the gleefully depraved celebrations from court transcripts, louche lotharios, and the infamous libertine Lord Rochester, Sade (the selection I found rather limp, if from *120 Days of Sodom*), Apollinaire, and 18c London trials of the torture of accused "sodomites," there are a few unexpected and fresher entries. The bulk of the selections concern what we moderns term homosexual activity. But, an evocative few pages from Michel Tournier's novel "The Four Wise

Men" show the heterosexual side to the survivors of Sodom driven underground, while John Milton gets a brief entry for his preface of a drama on the cities' fate; Voltaire opines on asphalt and the Dead Seas, while Jonathan Spence's book on the Jesuit missionary to China Matteo Ricci is employed to astute use to emphasize the Catholic fear of non-normative sex in the Middle Kingdom. Joao Trevisan's Brazilian forays play off Sir Richard Burton's earlier speculations on the "Sotadic Zone," while John Cleland in an often-deleted homosexual chapter from "Fanny Hill" and the medieval theologian "Peter the Cantor" gets his early digs in against the sins of Gomorrah. Most of the entries, as I mentioned, concern same-sex relations or the accusation of such, but once in a while, Hallam remembers to include the wider applications of Michel Foucault's memorable mention of "sodomy, that utterly confused category." I would have liked more substantial inclusion of not only theological or literary, but historical, travel, and critical texts. Not to mention more and more eclectic erotica! The forlorn place itself gains but a desultory visit, if too brief an excursion in a snippet from Andrew Lumsden for a gay newspaper. It leaves you wanting much more from the actual site, or the supposed one--nobody's quite too sure at least as of the 1993 copyright date; perhaps Charles Pellegrino's controversial 1994 "Return to Sodom & Gomorrah" could update us? The best entry for me, alongside Tournier's dreamlike and rather sexy, if austere, scenario, is the symbolist tale from 1883, "The Grape-Gatherers of Sodom" by "Rachilde" (Marguerite Eymery), which powerfully and vividly captures the decadence and the debauchery that led to the calumny given this blasted terrain of sulphur and bitumen, boiling pitch and burning desire.

This is an absorbing, well-written book that should appeal to anyone who wants a full understanding of Sodom in all of its manifestations, from antiquity to the present. Organized into three sections, the first section, "Sodom: A Circuit-Walk," is autobiographical and deserves the highest praise for the frankness and thoughtfulness of its expression. The anthology section, which follows, is of generally high interest, covering as it does incidents, accounts, and attitudes of many different historical eras. All of the excerpts are instructive in one way or another and always interesting. Some are appalling, some quite moving, others hysterical in tone and occasionally horrifying, as in the Marquis de Sade excerpt from "The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom." The last section, "Sodom: Looking Back," was too brief and left me begging for more. Let us hope the author will take up where he left off in a sequel to this book, which I consider a landmark effort in understanding Sodom and its affects on social mores and sexual attitudes down through the centuries.

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