



In and Out: Eccentricity in Britain

Sophie Aymes-Stokes

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The aim of the book is twofold: first, to provide an overview of the critical history of eccentricity; and secondly to conceptualise a notion that is often presented as a defining feature of the English character. It addresses the key issues raised by eccentricity and brings out interdisciplinary links between science, politics, literature and the arts: the sources and dissemination of the concept of eccentricity; its relationship with the English national character as historical and ideological construct; the structural need for variation and divergence within accepted social norms; the paradoxical status of the eccentric as outsider - when eccentricity is transgressive and alienating - and as insider - eccentricity as socially acceptable deviation. Fundamentally eccentricity is a normative notion: being ex-centred enables eccentrics to delineate and negotiate boundaries between the margins and the centre, the canon and the norm. The contributors question the links between eccentricity and diversity and originality, the value of individual experience and character, and as a corollary, the struggle to retain individuality against increasing standardization, commoditisation and channelling within the normative discourse of normality. Eccentricity as display and performance is also tackled in several chapters, which focus on reception, image and (self)-representation, exhibition and voyeurism.

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