



Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities

Lee Wallace

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European literary, artistic, and anthropological representation has long viewed the Pacific as the site of heterosexual pleasures. The received wisdom of these accounts is based on the idea of female bodies unrestrained by civilization. In a revisionist history of the Pacific zone and some of its preeminent Western imaginists, Lee Wallace suggests that the fantasy of the male body, rather than of the free-loving female, provides the underlying libidinal structure for many of the classic "encounter" narratives from Cook to Melville. The subject of Sexual Encounters is sexual fantasy, particularly male homoerotic fantasy found in the literature and art of South Sea exploration, colonization, and settlement. Working at the boundaries of a number of disciplines such as queer theory, anthropology, postcolonial studies, and history, Wallace engages in subversive readings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Pacific voyage journals (Cook in Hawaii and a Russian expedition to the Marquesas), an argument concerning Gauguin's treatment of female figures, and a discussion of homosexuality and Samoan male-to-female transgenderism. These phenomena, Wallace asserts, demonstrate the continuity and dissonance between Western and Pacific sexual categories. She reconstructs Pacific history through the inevitable entanglement of metropolitan and indigenous sexual regimes and ultimately argues for the importance of the Pacific in defining modern sexual categories.



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