



Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties

Gay Wachman

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A critical reading of sexually radical fiction by British women in the years during and after World War I. Gay Wachman examines work by Sylvia Townsend Warner, Virginia Woolf and Radclyffe Hall, along with the less well known Clemence Dane, Rose Allatini and Evadne Price. These writers, she states, created a modernist literary tradition -one that functioned both within and against the repressive ideology of the British Empire. Wachman places at the centre of this alternative tradition Sylvia Warner's achievement in undermining the inhibitions that faced women writing about forbidden lesbian love. She discusses Warner's use of crosswriting - the transposing of "unrepresentable" lesbian lives into narratives about gay men - as a means of transgressing borders of race, class and gender. She then connects Warner's oppositional feminist politics and literary practice to the work of other writers who struggled against imperialist sexual ideology. Whether following Dane's reflection of this compulsory repression in "Regiment of Women" through to its subversion in Warner's "The True Heart", or in discussing explorations of the closet by Allatini, Woolf and Warner, Wachman demonstrates how these women challenged the codes of expression on which imperialist patriarchy and capitalism depended.

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