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Tryst Tropique: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities

Leonelle Wallace

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The University of Auckland, 1996
Abstract

*Tryst Tropique* questions some of the assumptions that have been made about the heterosexual trajectory described by European desire as it has informed literary, artistic and anthropological representation of the South Pacific. It reads a series of contact encounters and Pacific residencies for their unfolding of European sexual inscription and discovers their inevitable entanglement with problematics of homosexual definition.

This thesis arcs between two readings wherein the sexual conduct of Polynesian men both requires and escapes European definition. The first, which settles on the documents of Cook’s third voyage, uses British indifference to Hawaiian sodomitical desire to help measure a representational space from whence the European homosexual will emerge (Chapter Two). The next reading considers the erotics of male visibility legible across a number of Marquesan contact texts including Herman Melville’s *Typee* (Chapter Three). Chapter Four discovers that the suspicion of sodomitical misconduct which clouded the career of William Yate, an early nineteenth-century New Zealand missionary, continues to involve twentieth-century commentators in the interpretative dynamics of sexual entrapment. Chapter Five turns to Gauguin’s Tahitian writings and paintings to engage with the place of ambivalence in contemporary analyses of colonial discourse. Chapter Six extends the parameters of the thesis in terms of gender and of geography, taking up the controversy generated by Derek Freeman around the early Samoan fieldwork of Margaret Mead. It argues that in the example of Mead’s career, we can observe the way in which female sexuality acts as the cipher by which culture multiplies and maintains ignorances and knowledges across the discursive field of sex in both cosmopolitan and primitive locations. The final chapter, which analyses a contemporary documentary representation of Samoan fa'afafine, finds the pertinence or applicability of European sexual description to Polynesian behaviour again at stake, though now we find that the liberal gesture of cultural relativism is co-optable to a homophobia already drilled and proficient in erecting a difference without to forestall a difference within.

Reading against the grain of much postcolonial work on the South Pacific, *Tryst Tropique* finds that it is the male body—whether native or European—not the female, which provides the sexual vanishing point which structures many of these narratives. In each of these Pacific moments a privileged figuration occurs: the body which stands as a placemaker for erotic capacities—both indulged and forsworn—is indicatively male. These inscriptions of masculinity betray a certain amplifying anxiety; the discrepant sexual availabilities recorded in each text break with increasing urgency on the shore of heterosexual and homosexual definition. Even as these Pacific journal keepers, these writers and artists, map identity more and more ferociously onto the known grid of gender, it seems as if the horizon of sexual certainty further and further recedes.
This thesis was written under the sway of Alex Calder, of the English Department at The University of Auckland. My debt to him, as to other members of that department and, increasingly, to the staff of the Women's Studies Programme among whom I now so happily find myself, can only be offset by my continued gratitude. For the administering of a final deadline I thank Professor Maureen Molloy and the Dean of Arts, Warren Moran who, in their different ways, were indispensable to the submission of this thesis.

Acknowledgment is also due the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee for the scholarship by which this thesis was initially enabled. The University of Auckland's generous provision of an Assistant Lectureship in English allowed the continuation of my study in the years after that scholarship ceased. Supplementary funding from The University of Auckland Graduate Research Fund and the English Department Graduate/Research Committee further eased its belated completion.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures  
Chapter One  
Introduction: South Pacific  
Chapter Two  
Too Darn Hot: Sexual Encounter in Hawaii on Cook’s Third Voyage  
Chapter Three  
Sightlines: Marquesan Contact Erotics and Male Visibility  
Chapter Four  
Sexual Entrapment: William Yate and the National Geographic  
Chapter Five  
Tropical Rearwindow: Gauguin’s *Manao Tupapau* and Primitivist Ambivalence  
Chapter Six  
Academic Recognition: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and Sexual Secrecy  
Chapter Seven  
Queens of Samoa: *Fa’aafine* and the Closeting of Homosexuality  
Works Cited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Darn Hot: Sexual Encounter in Hawaii on Cook’s Third Voyage</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tropical Rearwindow: Gauguin’s <em>Manao Tupapau</em> and Primitivist Ambivalence</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>William Minchin, <em>Governor Bligh under the Bed</em></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>An Inhabitant of the Island of Nukahiwa</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Several of the Principal Figures Used in Tattooing</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Rear View of Young Inhabitant of Nukahiwa</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Portrait of Jean Baptiste Cabris</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Pierre and Gilles, <em>Saint Pierre Marie Chanel</em></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Paul Gauguin, <em>Lovers</em>; fragment of <em>Manao Tupapau</em></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Édouard Manet, <em>Olympia</em></td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Paul Gauguin, <em>Copy of Manet’s Olympia</em></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Édouard Manet, <em>Olympia</em>; Paul Gauguin, <em>Copy of Manet’s Olympia</em></td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Paul Gauguin, <em>Manao Tupapau</em></td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Paul Gauguin, <em>Reclining Nude</em></td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Paul Gauguin, <em>Self-Portrait with Hat</em>; Portrait of William Molard</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>“Telling Tales,” <em>Samoans</em></td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Title Frame from <em>Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa</em></td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Traditional Dance from <em>Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa</em></td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Karangahape Rd from <em>Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa</em></td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Karl Pulotu-Endemann from <em>Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa</em></td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Aiono Dr Fanafi Le Tagaloa from <em>Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa</em></td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Alex Futu from <em>Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa</em></td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>Benji from <em>Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa</em></td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Image Description</td>
<td>Page Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>Boy in Doorway from “Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa”</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>Direct Gaze from “Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa”</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>Maternal Figure from “Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa”</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>Living Alone from “Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa”</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>Miss W[estern] S[amoa] Drag Queen from “Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa”</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>Niko Uili and Flatmates from “Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa”</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>Netball Training Session from “Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa”</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One

Introduction: South Pacific

For "to read" a country is first of all

to perceive it in terms of the body and of memory,
in terms of the body's memory.

Roland Barthes, *Incidents*

Since Bougainville, to describe a Pacific culture is to describe its sexual practices; so we have learnt and learnt to lament. Edward Said's *Orientalism* has observed "the intimate connection between the language and forms of knowledge developed for the study of cultures and the history of colonialism and imperialism."¹ By this rule, we can assume that Western ethnographic discourse about the Pacific has given the object of its scientific study, the cultures of the Pacific basin, an ideological shape, but we should not thereby suppose, though I think we often do, that we know in advance the forms this discursive production has taken. This thesis questions some of the assumptions that have been made about the heterosexual trajectory described by European desire as it has informed literary, artistic and anthropological representations of the South Pacific. It reads a series of contact encounters and Pacific residencies for their unfolding of European sexual inscription and discovers their inevitable

entanglement with problematics of homosexual definition. Furthermore, it finds that it is the male body—whether native or European—not the female, which provides the sexual vanishing point which structures many of these narratives. In each of these Pacific moments a privileged figuration occurs: the body which stands as placemaker for erotic capacities—both indulged and forsworn—is indicatively male. These inscriptions of masculinity betray a certain amplifying anxiety; the discrepant sexual availabilities recorded in each text break with increasing urgency on the shore of heterosexual and homosexual definition. Even as these Pacific journal keepers, these writers and artists, map identity more and more ferociously onto the known grid of gender, it seems as if the horizon of sexual certainty further and further recedes.

**Foreign Agency**

The Pacific novels of Herman Melville seem marked less by a concern with the conquest of territory and the colonisation of peoples than by an errancy. For the Yankee narrators of *Typee* and *Omoo*, the strangeness of their residencies in the Marquesas and Tahiti articulates a more perpetual displacement. They record "a wandering, an errance, a kind of permanent exile if you wish, but it is not really an exile, for there is . . . nothing from which one has been exiled." The experience of the South Seas thus produces a counter-intelligence which erases the certainty of American self-knowledge. In these narratives, all the hesitancy and vulnerability of encounter is garnered to the European male subject who is a reluctant, though nonetheless efficient, agent of capitalist expansion. Tommo, the hapless, limping narrator of *Typee*, in particular, enters the contact zone wearing his heart on his sleeve. Discursively, he

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3 Thus, Paul de Man describes the relation between translated and original texts in a discussion of Walter Benjamin’s "The Task of the Translator." Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 92.
conforms to Mary Louise Pratt’s description of the sentimental subject on the imperial frontier who represents himself as “the non-hero of the anti-conquest.” Comparing this palpitating figure with his cold-blooded scientific counterpart, Pratt writes:

Though he is positioned at the centre of a discursive field rather than on the periphery, and though he is composed of a whole body rather than a disembodied eye, the sentimental protagonist, too, is constructed as a non-interventionist European presence. Things happen to him and he endures and survives. As a textual construct, his innocence lies less in self-effacement than in submissiveness and vulnerability, or the display of self-effacement.5

Pratt’s Imperial Eyes reads a number of travel narratives for their registering of cultural difference and imperial presence, drawing our attention to the way in which the apparently aleatory desires of the writing subject continue to operate within the ideological limits of enlightenment discourses.6 Devoid of active desire, Tommo, like Pratt’s Mungo Park, “writes himself as a receptor, not an initiator” of the advances of culture.7

Palimpsest

This narrative of masculine poignancy is repeated though reversed in E. H. McCormick’s Omai: Pacific Envoy which tells the history of Omai—the first Polynesian to accompany European voyagers home—as that of a Raiatean youth captive

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4 Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturatiom (London: Routledge, 1992), 78.

5 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, 78.


7 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, 78.
to and estranged by metropolitan ways.\(^8\) To his English hosts, the tattooed surface of Omai's skin makes him an ornate exotic object, a chinoiserie vase or some other fragile oriental piece, an empty vessel into which the improving liquors of their own civilisation can carefully be poured, so, like Tommo, he is the receptacle for, not agent of, cultural change.\(^9\) In McCormack's account, the polishing of Omai in the finishing school in London from 1774 to 1777 will finally render him incapable of an innocent return to Huahine. Like Melville's sailors, Omai is a displaced man and, as Harriet Guest has argued, some of that dislocation and effacement is registered in his manhood itself.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) E. H. McCormack, *Omai: Pacific Envoy* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1977). The name of the islander was Mai, but most eighteenth-century accounts call him Omai. The colonialist form of his name continues to mark, therefore, the place he holds in European representation.

\(^9\) John Barrell writes of this strange though slick manoeuvring between fascination and erasure as indicative of the psychopathology of imperialism:

> The East entered the Western European imagination as an unknown, empty space—empty of everything, that is, except its appropriate resources, imaginative as well as material. Of all those resources, the abundantly decorated surfaces of the artefacts of Turkey, Egypt, Persia, India and China, intricately abstract or flamboyantly figurative, were perhaps particularly valuable and easy to appropriate. So crowded, to Western eyes, were the surfaces of oriental objects, covered with decoration and imagery not understood and not thought worth understanding, that they could become the very opposite of what they appeared to be—blank screens on which could be projected whatever it was that the inhabitants of Europe, individually or collectively, wanted to displace, and represent as other to themselves.


Projection

As this century narrativises earlier male sensibility, something undercover is going on. McCormack writes the story of Mai; Frank Sargeson stages a fictional dialogue between Samuel Butler and William Yate; Bill Pearson speaks eloquently of stranded men whose island existence “involves an ambivalence or watchfulness” and marks the very limits of their culture. All three New Zealand writers use colonial history as the screen upon which their own flamboyance or disavowal can be quietly projected, so that the closeted sensitivities of the present are quietly writ large against a changing backdrop, like so many television adaptations of Jane Austen in which the sexiness of today is merely costumed in the past.

By this interpretative model, the Pacific archive secretly records its homosexual content as a hidden subtext, which is nonetheless available to those members of Proust’s freemasonry who slip in and out of history as easily as Dorothy slipping on and off the red shoes. But what this thesis discovers is that the projection of homosexual presence or meaning onto the documents of colonial history is often performed by interpreters who wear, not the shoes of the benevolent witch, but the clunky orthopaedics which are all that remain of the Wicked Witch of the North. D. A.


12 Writing of the “ambiguous knowing” involved in gay cruising which “facilitates the extraordinary democratisation of sex,” Leo Bersani quotes Proust’s evocation of a freemasonry far more extensive, more effective and less suspected than that of the Lodges, for it rests upon an identity of tastes, needs, habits, dangers, apprenticeship, knowledge, traffic, vocabulary, and one in which even members who do not wish to know one another recognise one another immediately by natural or conventional, involuntary or deliberate signs . . .


13 See, in particular, chapters two and four.
Miller captures the epistemological dilemma involved here, and also the difficulty of escaping its compass:

In a culture that without ever ceasing to proliferate homosexual meaning knows how to confine it to a kind of false unconscious, as well in collectivities as in individuals, there is hardly a procedure for bringing out this meaning that doesn’t itself look or feel like just more police entrapment (Unless such perhaps were a folie à deux—where “two” stands for the possibility of community—that would bring it out in as subtle and flattering a fashion as, say, the colour of a garment is said to bring out a complexion.)

Perhaps gayness is an imaginary state, a Technicolor departure from the black and whiteness of that other state, not Kansas but heterosexuality. Imaginariness notwithstanding—or perhaps precisely because the distinction between our east and our west, homosexuality and heterosexuality, operates in the order of fantasy—we should not ignore the heavy policing of that border.

**Stranglehold**

Simply put, the argument of this thesis is that homosexuality, as we understand it today, is not hidden but emergent in these Pacific texts. Under specific discursive pressures a sexuality takes shape and is given a particular form and necessity. The series of readings that comprise *Tryst Tropique* map the increasing definitional force by which the charged opposition between the heterosexual and the homosexual comes to function as the pre- eminent classificatory distinction through which European culture specifies its Pacific sexual subjects. Jonathan Goldberg’s *Sodometries* analyses the plurality of hermeneutic effects generated around the incoherence of the sodomitical

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body in the colonial discourse of Puritan New England and this thesis likewise concentrates on the elasticity and efficiency of sodomy as a means of policing relations among men. Once again, it is the sphincter-like tightening and loosening of the definitional exactness of the prohibition which is revealed in the readings this thesis undertakes under the travelogue banners of Hawaii, the Marquesas, New Zealand, Tahiti and Samoa. If Melville can be trusted—and, in these matters, I think he can—then suspicions of unspeakable acts are never far from mind when thinking of men at sea. The figure of the Handsome Sailor works like that of the Pretty Policeman—soliciting affection, threatening entrapment, inviting men to walk the perilous gangplank of sexual interdiction. This perennial double bind and its representational effects are "undoubtedly heightened by the close cribbing and confinement of so many mortals in one oaken box on the sea." As this passage from *White-Jacket* continues

Like pears closely packed, the crowded crew mutually decay through close contact, and every plague-spot is contagious. Still more, from this close confinement—so far as it affects common soldiers—arise other evils, so directful that they will hardly bear even so much as an allusion. What too many seamen are when ashore is very well known; but what some of them are when completely cut off from shore indulgences can hardly be imagined by landsmen. The sins for which the cities of the plain were overthrown still linger in some of these wooden-walled Gomorrah’s of the deep. More than once complaints were made at the mast in the *Neversink*, from which the deck officer would turn away with loathing, refuse to hear them, and command the complainant out of sight. There are evils in men-of-war, which will neither bear representing, nor reading, and will hardly bear thinking of. . .

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[Let the] landsman guardedly remain in his ignorance... and forever abstain from seeking to draw aside this veil.\textsuperscript{18}

Melville’s veiling of sodomy is at once an unveiling; it enacts, what D. A. Miller calls, the structure of the open secret:

For in the guarding of that Open Secret which is still the mode of producing, transmitting, and receiving most discourse around homosexuality, the knowledge that plays dumb is exactly what permits the abuses of an ignorance that in fact knows full well what it is doing.\textsuperscript{19}

The deck officer, the landsman, the novelist and the reader are all drawn into a complicity about the nature of the contagious evil under the cleanly swabbed decks of the \textit{Neversink}—that it is an evil, that it is contagious. If veiling is the name Melville gives this refusal to do other than allude and then allude some more, we might note that the epistemic effect of that subtlety is to hold, with the strangling force of a double-nelson, acts—said to “neither bear representing, nor reading” nor “hardly... thinking of”—squarely at the forefront of thinking and reading and representation, and to keep them nailed to that masthead as both a knowledge and an ignorance.

\textbf{Mr Bligh’s Bottom}

There, suddenly, was Bligh, bare-arsed, his nightshirt caught in the ropes that bound his wrists behind.\textsuperscript{20}

Though never charged with sodomy, Mr Bligh’s bottom has nonetheless had its day in court. In the court martial proceedings executed after the \textit{Bounty}’s mutiny, reference was made to the half-dressed disarray in which William Bligh was dragged from his

\textsuperscript{18} Melville, \textit{White-Jacket}, 375-6.

\textsuperscript{19} D. A. Miller, \textit{Bringing Out Roland Barthes}, 16-7.

cabin in the early hours of 28 April 1789, his shirt lifted high behind him.\textsuperscript{21} Nineteen years later, as Governor of New South Wales, Bligh was again pulled infamously from bed. William Minchin’s satirical cartoon (fig. 1.1), used to blacken Bligh’s character in the Rum Rebellion of 1808, screens his backside from our eyes, safely displacing any invitation it may have made onto the plumpness of the mattress above. Of course, Bligh’s bottom is neither a critical presence nor a structuring absence in this illustration, or in this thesis. It stands, nevertheless, in metonymic relation to the male body across which the distinctions between authority and disgrace are erratically ciphered. The regimental men who arrest Bligh might very well be arrested in their turn by the incoherence of that disciplinary order. The long arm of that law reaches beyond this bed, these barracks, and finds its man in other Pacific locations:

For a man to be a man’s man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being “interested in men.” Those terms, those congruences are by now endemic and perhaps ineradicable in our culture. The question of who is to be free to define, manipulate, and profit from the resultant double bind is no less a site of struggle today than in the eighteenth century, however.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} Dening, \textit{Mr Bligh’s Bad Language}, 38.

\textsuperscript{22} Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, \textit{Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire} (New York: Columbia University, 1985), 89-90.
Figure 1.1. William Minchin, *Sketch of Bligh's Arrest, or Governor Bligh under the Bed*, c. 1808. Watercolour. Postcard from Mitchell Library Collection, State Library of New South Wales.
Too Darn Hot: Sexual Encounter in Hawaii on Cook's Third Voyage

About that title—perhaps you sense some Lévi-Strauss in the background, something about "hot" and "cold" culture and historical change. Structural anthropology notwithstanding, what I want you to hear is the popular standard:

According to the Kinsey Report
Ev'ry average man you know
Much prefers his lovey-dovey to court
When the temperature is low,
But when the thermometer goes 'way up
And the weather is sizzling hot,
Mr Pants
For romance,
Is not, 'Cause it's too darn hot...

I can't speak for Cole Porter, but market research tells us Levi-Strauss are the jeans 90% of American homosexuals prefer, and this, after all, is a chapter about Mr Pants.

Desire

Marshall Sahlins, in Islands of History, has provided a reading of the pragmatics of sexual encounter in Hawaii during Captain James Cook's third voyage. He argues that the sexual invitation extended to European seamen by Hawaiian women resulted in transformations within the cultural order that initially engendered such desire. As is widely known, the advent of the British in the islands was interpretable according to the Hawaiian festival calendar. In consecutive years, 1778 and 1779, the comings and goings of the Resolution and Discovery coincided with the time of Makahiki, the annual return of the fertility god Lono, which allowed the Hawaiians to read the sequence of arrival and departure as propitious; further, the cultural logic of 'imi haku ("to search for a lord") determined that common Hawaiian women would clamber aboard these ships intent to seduce their company and thereby capture the strangers' customary mana (power or prestige). But as Sahlins reveals, Hawaiian culture even while figuring

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3 The most compelling discussion of this cross-cultural recognition, and its fatal consequence, remains the fourth chapter of Islands, "Captain James Cook; or The Dying God." The misprision of Cook and Lono, the Hawaiian god of fertility, continues to function as snare. That this doubling retains the power to jam interpretation, at least, is apparent in Ganapathi Obeyesekere's essay "'British Cannibals': Contemplation of an Event in the Death and Resurrection of James Cook, Explorer," Critical Inquiry 18 (1992): 630-654. Obeyesekere's "common sense" intervention in this anthropological debate refuses every avenue of thought toward which Sahlins' account gestures. In his review of Obeyesekere's The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Greg Dening describes his political vision as "blinkered." Greg Dening, "Post-colonial Cure," Age (Melbourne),
contact "in its own image," reproducing the strange as the familiar, itself "changed radically and decisively."4

The Europeans, as their journals testify, perceived a spontaneity and disinterestedness in the Hawaiian embrace. In 1782, William Ellis wrote, "There are no people in the world who indulge themselves more in their sexual appetites than these; in fact they carry it to a most scandalous and shameful degree. . . . [F]ar from being . . . mercenary . . . some of their attachments seem purely the effect of affection."5 Unable to recognise themselves as currency in such a sexual exchange, the ordinary seamen rewarded supposed native "surrender" with gifts; gifts turned commodity, became themselves desirable, and the courteous gesture unintentionally reified the women's "favours" as "services."6 What might have been to the Hawaiians a symbolic traffic in white men became a clumsier give and take. As Sahlins writes:

Men brought their sisters, daughters, perhaps even their wives to the ships. Call it hospitality. Or call it spiritual hypergamy. The sailors showed their gratitude by giving the men iron adzes, beside what they gave the women. At the same time, the British trading with Hawaiian men for provisions found these demanding at least part payment in bracelets for their women.7


6 Sahlins, Islands, 6.

7 Sahlins, Islands, 7.
This economic solidarity between common Hawaiian men and women placed them in opposition to the chiefly elite, who were themselves forging a privileged alliance with the European officers and gentlemen, and resulted in scenes marked by subordinate defiance and violent retribution. While relations among the Hawaiians became tense, with stones thrown and goods seized, the shipboard congress between Hawaiian commoners and British seamen relaxed into an expansive sociability. The women’s eating of prohibited foods in the contaminatory vicinity of men contributed to the degeneration of a tabu system that had traditionally defined the interests of men against those of women. As Hawaiian culture improvised contact both traditional class rivalries and identifications across gender lines were felt with a new urgency.\(^8\) Writes Sahlins, “With transactions such as these, the erotic commerce ceased to repeat tradition and began to make history.”\(^9\) The sex, as the structural anthropologists say, was “hot.”

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\(^8\) This argument is advanced in *Islands*, 7-9. A lengthier exposition is carried in the third chapter of *Historical Metaphors*, “Transformation: Structure and Practice,” which also draws attention to those violations of tabu which precede contact. Sahlins argues that the tabu system—the cosmological prism through which traditional social distinctions between men and women, chiefs and commoners, take shape—has always weighed upon its subjects differently. The manner in which common women are marked in the structure of sacred restriction amounts to a negative occupancy: “the tabu as it affected women was rather the negative image of the consecrated status of men and gods: functioning to protect the sanctity of divine beings and things rather than a positive condition, state or attribute of the women themselves.” Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors*, 46-7. This structural asymmetry leaves some slack for pragmatic transgression. We might say that the interdictions that fall across the sacrificial bodies of men tend to miss their mark and fall around or away from the ordinary bodies of women, goading them towards the evasion of tabu perhaps, but not its sacrilege. Thus, the perils and rewards of female transgression:

In historic record, the sanctions of women’s tabu violations were socially imposed; they depended on detection and punishment by men, not the malevolent visitation of a god. It is true that such punishments, even unto death, are attested as late as 1817; on the other hand, women had also been escaping the effects of their tabu violations since the time of Cook.

Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors*, 47. The degeneration of this tabu system escalates under the historical stress of contact and trade until it is abolished “under chiefly aegis in 1819, before the first Christian missionary had set foot on the Islands.” Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors*, 37.

Refusal

I would like to look at the British journal accounts of Cook’s third voyage to see what they might tell us about any possible transformation of the European sexual ordinance in these moments of erotic contact. Having come to second guess sexual imperialism in the Pacific’s New Cythera as the fantasy of heterosexual abandon, we might now ask ourselves whether the phantasmic tryst *tropique* occurs between men.\(^\text{10}\) It would seem that events in the Sandwich Islands exceed even Europe’s heated imaginings and that they turn on the sexual availability of, not the native woman, but the European man. David Samwell, surgeon’s mate on the *Resolution* and sometime poet, writes of the time at Kealakekua Bay: “We live now in the greatest luxury, and as to the Choice & number of fine women there is hardly one among us that may not vie with the grand Turk himself.”\(^\text{11}\) But there was the less than amorous Cook, and the Captain’s sexual refusal, like his subaltern’s avowed frenzy, reveals much about sexuality, visibility and power, as they define the slippery lovefield that was Hawaii in 1778 and 1779.

In the penultimate paragraph of his biography of Cook, J. C. Beaglehole, having spent pages in subtle and precise speculation about the kernel of his subject’s genius, finally addresses the man’s sexual career, saying only this:

He did not devote imagination, or emotion, or time to the other sex, apart from his Elizabeth, and from proposing, it is


said, on Saturday nights at sea, the toast of all beautiful women. Any reputation he earned in the matter in the Pacific was, however, not so much for an habitual iron disdain as for obvious age and impotence. The passionately professional man was an idea rather beyond Polynesian conception.\(^\text{12}\)

In what must have passed as an urbane piece of writing just twenty years ago, Beaglehole here manages to deflect the accusation of inadequacy away from the European toward the Polynesian; but caged in negatives as it is, his roundabout analysis of the Captain’s sexual reluctance as professional sublimation already strikes me as quaint. There is also something a little too quirky about Sahlins’ joking—at Cook’s expense—that if the Hawaiian women wanted to sleep with him because they thought he was a god, he declined, for much the same reason.\(^\text{13}\) Divine to the


\[^\text{13}\] Perhaps it is a pitfall of style but, even as he lays to rest one of the myths that has congealed around Cook’s memory, Sahlins comes close to founding another:

There is no empirical substance to the later Hawaiian tradition that Captain Cook slept with the sacred . . . daughter of the ranking chiefess of the Island. On the other hand, there is considerable cultural substance to the allegation, insofar as Cook was taken for the annual god of fertility Lono who—as several legendary chiefs also so identified—returns to seek his lost wife (= inseminate the land . . .). Hawaiian tradition itself offers such explanation for presenting the native princess to Cook. The dignity which Cook gave himself as a British naval commander rather accords with Hawaiian conceptions of his status, only that it would lead him to a different response to the offer of a chiefly woman. . . . Cook was not much one for divine services and rarely conducted them aboard ship, yet neither would he tolerate any cleric on his vessels. Nor was he about to yield to the temptations of the flesh, though quite prepared to allow the lesser ranks to thus make display of their mortal weakness. Evidently, there could be only one Authority on board a vessel of His Majesty’s Navy. Hence if the Hawaiians really did present their sacred woman to Captain Cook because he was a god, we can be sure he refused her—for something like the same reason.

Sahlins, Islands, 3, n. 4. Less amusing is the imperialist hagiography to which, in some ways at least, Beaglehole remains heir. As Bernard Smith reminds us, the apotheoses of Cook are several, and they include his incarnation as the spirit of the marketplace, of commercial expansion: it was as Adam Smith’s “global agent” that Cook became “the first European to practise successfully on a global scale the use of tolerance for the purpose of domination, an administrative technique that came to play a vital role in the European colonisation of the world during the nineteenth century.” Bernard Smith, Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of Cook’s Voyages (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1992), 236. For an introduction to some of Cook’s literary avatars, see Bill Pearson’s Rifled
Hawaiians, infallible to himself, how are we to read Cook’s apparent celibacy? Amidst all that sweaty fornication was he the less sexual for being physically circumspect? Or is his erotic refusal, however diplomatic, better read as denial, as disavowal, and thus as signal to his entanglement in those modern technologies of vicariousness and substitution which have come to describe what we mean by the sexual? Precisely because we know ourselves as sexual subjects through such impediments to satisfaction, which are also always the very intensifiers of desire, we should hesitate before ascribing such a pathology to another time. However fascinating we find our sexualities, and the tremulous or stubborn shapes they take, to call them emergent at such moments would merely compound that problem. As the maps to eros we possess are dubious guides to earlier configurations of desire, let us relinquish the charms of psychology and think instead of Cook’s cultural body, a body whose erotic profile and sexual cut might be determined by its investiture in a social space weird to our own.

**Detour**

As a generation of scholars has eloquently testified, wherever you venture in Pacific research, sooner or later, in frustration or wonder, you realise J. C. Beaglehole has passed your way before. Pacific sex is no exception and, thinking of Cook’s, I find myself on the same cultural loop as Beaglehole in the biography: the secret heart of that very British figure is best approached through sly deviation, via a singular Polynesian detour.

In *Islands*, Sahlins also wants to get away from the history of sex and closer to sex as history. He traces the modalities of Hawaiian desire as they are in play at the time of Cook’s voyage. “Le’a,” he explains is the Hawaiian word for desire, joy and pleasure, for sexual gratification and orgasm, for pleasing and, in a sense, for pleasing.

one’s self. “Aloha” suggests sympathy and “kinship . . . and a giving without thought of immediate returns,” but

le’a is passion rather than compassion: a relation between beings who are complementary in nature and who—as in a certain famous paradigm of good socialism as good sex—gratify themselves in gratifying each other. . . . Which is what Hawaiian women were doing on Cook’s ships.

Related to a volatile land-claim system where successive chiefs redistributed title, a system in which lines of alliance were constantly redrawn and collateral kinship spelled rivalry, sexual desirability became a means of capturing selective descent. Sexual and social mobility were indexed to each other, thus the insistence of Hawaiian sexual politics: “The corollary of the land custom is an aristocratic obsession with conspiracy and intrigue, in which sexual intrigue is a means of choice.” Likewise, the common people had “an interest in the erotic exploits of the nobility and ambitions to become the objects of their affections. Not merely aloha but sexual attachment, which for the people was an important avenue of the upward mobility called ‘imi haku, ‘to search for a lord’.” Under the rubric “Ethnography of Love,” Sahlins observes that within the context of traditional Hawaiian society, the erotic interest knew no . . . limitations of class or sex. It engaged men as well as women, chiefs as well as commoners. There was wife-capture as well as husband-capture, hypogamy as well as hypergamy, homosexuality as well as heterosexuality. Famous ruling chiefs were bisexual, but the preoccupation with sex was expressed as much in the virginity enjoined on certain young persons as in the liberties granted to others. . . .

14 Sahlins, Islands, 3-4.

15 Sahlins, Islands, 21.

16 Sahlins, Islands, 24.
[Love] was a favoured means of access to power and property.
Rank and tabu might be gained or lost by it.\textsuperscript{17}

That impressive sexual repertoire is rhapsodised only to disappear. In an abstract
passage such as this, sexual variance is flashed as anthropological credential. The sex
that counts, the one that garners all the analysis, is unfailingly heterosexual. Despite
the subtlety of Sahlins' approach, his scrupulous attention to the social valence of
desire, he has a disappointing tendency to think of the sexual exclusively through the
regime of gender.

\section*{Capture}

Other anthropologists, considering the same archive, have achieved some
erotic capture of their own. Robert J. Morris' recent work is on aikane, the young men
attached to the train of the chiefs, and whose functions were sexual, social and
political.\textsuperscript{18} Their role differed from that inscribed in Tahitian and other Polynesian
sodomitical practices—practices with which the European voyagers were familiar—in
the emphasis given political influence; neither did it involve gender inversion
(transvestism or social effeminacy) or distribute its agents across an active-passive
sexual divide. Aikane are unquestionably men, and men to be reckoned with. The British
knew them as privileged intermediaries to the chiefs whose lovers they were; and most
commentators agree that it was the part played by Palea, aikane to Kalani’opu’u, in the
theft of the Discovery's cutter, that precipitated the fatal events of 14 February.

The recovery of oceanic homosexualities (to appropriate the title of the
collection in which Morris's essay appears) increasingly takes its place in a gay

\textsuperscript{17} Sahlins, \textit{Islands}, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{18} Robert J. Morris, "Aikane: Accounts of Hawaiian Same-Sex Relationships in the Journals of Captain
Cook's Third Voyage (1776-80)," \textit{Journal of Homosexuality} 19 (1990): 21-54, and "Same-Sex
sociological project that refuses to rest content with easy gestures of cultural relativism. In the wake of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, gay criticism and analysis has turned cultural and historical difference back on itself in an attempt to render opaque what seems transparent in contemporary sexual discourse. This is rather more than the rote invocation of a paradigmatic nineteenth-century shift from sexual acts to sexual identities, although I think this is the formulation with which most of us are familiar; as commonplace as this reduction of Foucault’s thesis is, I think it has become even more common to backdate it. It is by now hard to think of a historical period that doesn’t advertise such a shift. What is most depressing about this is how it reveals, as David M. Halperin has argued, that theory’s innovations are readily co-optable to prior epistemologies. This cod-Foucault allows one to identify ruptures in historical categories rather than historical subjects and to continue thus to speak of sexualities; it leaves us still writing the history of the representation of sexuality rather than the history of the emergence of sexualities through representation.

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20 I am recalling preliminary remarks made by David M. Halperin in a lecture on sexual preferences and erotic identities in the pseudo-Lucianic *Erotes*, “Historicising the Subject of Desire,” given at Victoria University of Wellington, 15 March 1993. Elsewhere, he spells out this distinction:

To discover and write the history of sexuality has long seemed to many a sufficiently radical undertaking in itself, inasmuch as its effect (if not always the intention behind it) is to call into question the very naturalness of what we currently take to be essential to our individual natures. But in the course of implementing that ostensibly radical project many historians of sexuality seem to have reversed—perhaps unwittingly—its radical design; by preserving “sexuality” as a stable category of historical analysis not only have they not denaturalised it but, on the contrary, they have newly idealised it. To the extent, in fact, that histories of “sexuality” succeed in concentrating their focus on sexuality, to just that extent are they doomed to fail as histories (Foucault himself taught us that much), unless they also include as an integral part of their proper enterprise the task of demonstrating the historicity, conditions of emergence, modes of construction, and ideological contingencies of the very categories of analysis that undergird their own practice. Instead of concentrating our attention specifically on the history of sexuality, then, we need to define and refine a new, and radical, historical sociology of psychology—an intellectual discipline designed to analyse the cultural poetics of desire, by which I mean the processes whereby sexual desires are constructed, mass-produced, and distributed among the various members of human living groups. We must acknowledge that “sexuality” is a cultural production . . . and we must struggle to discern
The banal gesture, then, would be to contrast what we know of Hawaiian aikane with eighteenth-century English sexual stylistics. For instance, we could, if we were so inclined, nudge together Captains Whiffle and Cook, and reflect that the British journal keepers record the social prestige and manliness of the Hawaiian aikane, where thirty years earlier Tobias Smollett in *Roderick Random* ridicules the garish effeminacy and social vapidity of an emergent homosexual subclass.21 In Whiffle, it has been said, Smollett sets loose representation’s inaugural queen, and with all Smollett’s talk of nerves and his status as a surgeon, the medicalisation of the homosexual, has begun.22 Samwell’s journal, with its literary pretensions, proves a rich repository for such a reading:

Another Sett of Servants of whom he [Kalani’opu’u] has a great many are called Ikany [aikane] and are of superior Rank. . . . Of this Class are Parea [Palea] and Cani-coah [Kanekoa] and their business is to commit the Sin of Onan upon the old King. This, however strange it may appear, is fact, as we learnt from frequent Enquiries about this curious Custom, and it is an office that is esteemed honourable among them & they have

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22 The formulation is G. S. Rousseau’s:

The ensuing portrait of Whiffle-the-sodomite, powdered, perfumed, and dressed in clothing so stereotypic that it must have been archetypal in the 1740s, is well worth deciphering since it may represent the first authentic description of the enduring male homosexual in modern culture.

frequently asked us on seeing a handsome young fellow if he was not an Ikany to some of us.\textsuperscript{23} 

The reference to the "Sin of Onan" and a later invocation of the love that dare not speak its name, "that Unnatural Crime which ought never to be mentioned," are gift to an analysis that thinks in terms of sexual taxonomies.\textsuperscript{24} One of the things that strikes me about such readings is that while they are themselves often very arch, signalling sexual \textit{au fait}-ness this way and that, they generally deny any possibility that their subject, Samwell or Smollett before him, might have been just as arch, just as \textit{au fait}. These gay readings tend to box their subjects into a straight man role.

\textbf{Inquiry}

An alternative gay reading must, I think, proceed with less diagnostic confidence. I want to consider those moments the journals record where something is going on that, to us, looks strangely like homosexual recruitment, but does not so much as raise a blush to the eighteenth-century cheek. Samwell’s journal entry for the 5 March, 1779 reads

Karana-toa [Kalanikoa] ... being on board the Resolution to day and seeing a handsome young fellow whose appearance he liked much, offered six large Hogs to the Captain [now Clerke] if he would let him stand his Ikany for a little while, such is the strange depravity of these Indians.\textsuperscript{25}

As Morris dryly notes, "Samwell does not report whether the offer was accepted."\textsuperscript{26} That apparent indifference is remarkable when contrasted to Smollett’s denigrating description of, and his heroes’ recoiling from, both the appearance and behaviour of

\textsuperscript{23} Samwell, \textit{Account of a Voyage}, 3:1171-2. 

\textsuperscript{24} Samwell, \textit{Account of a Voyage}, 3:1184. 

\textsuperscript{25} Samwell, \textit{Account of a Voyage}, 3:1226. 

\textsuperscript{26} Morris, "Aikane," 41.
foppish sodomites in not only *Roderick Random* but also his 1751 novel, *Peregrine Pickle*. Following Lee Edelman’s discussion of the later novel, we might also recall that, on seeing an Italian count and German baron engaged in amorous nocturnal activities, Peregrine Pickle’s reply to the threat of homosexual pick-up is disabling panic. But Smollett is a poor guide to the tropical cruise; as Sterne might have guessed, Smelfungus does not travel well. The British in Hawaii, we remember, had no doubt what card Kalanikoa was playing; how, then, did they react to the sexual call? We can say that the Hawaiian sexual inquiry is recorded at least twice in Samwell’s journal, so perhaps despite themselves, perhaps not, the Europeans kept signalling this particular sexual availability.

The journal of Lieutenant James King blandly notes that, as the British prepared to depart in February 1779, “Terreeoboo [Kalan’opu’u] & Koa asked Captn Cook very seriously to leave me behind: I had proposals by our friends to elope, & they promised to hide me in the hills till the ships were gone, & to make me a great man.” We know that Koa was aikāne to Kalani’opu’u; we also know that both “Cook and King exchanged names with Kalani’opu’u and [another of] his aikāne Palea, respectively, in the Tahitian manner,” though what that might have meant to the Hawaiians—who do not have such name exchange—defies analysis. We have only King’s subsequent


29 Morris, “Aikane,” 39. Sahlins footnotes another instance when this cross-cultural masquerade was coupled with transvestism:

Mr. Thomas Edgar, master of the *Discovery*, credits reports he heard of how at Kaua’i the sailors [in defiance of Cook’s order] managed to smuggle women aboard, despite the officers’ surveillance: they dressed the Hawaiian women as men and called them their “Tios.” If true, the men succeeded by employing a kaleidoscopic display of cultural impressions: the English seamen would have deceived their officers by using a Tahitian concept of ‘bond friend’ (*tio*), unknown however to their Hawaiian paramours.
redaction of these lines when the voyage record was prepared for publication, which adds that the chiefs took him for Cook’s son, and concludes that the “Captain, to avoid giving a positive refusal, to an offer so kindly intended, told them, that he could not part with me, at that time, but that he should return to the island next year, and would then endeavour to settle the matter to their satisfaction.”

Is King’s Cook being diplomatic or debonair? In both versions the British seem unembarrassed by the request. We might hazard by way of commentary that, if these journals record the visibility of the European male—if in them we can trace the male body visible to Hawaiian male desire—that does not seem to be a scrutiny under which these Englishmen squirm.

What I want to venture is that while cross-cultural relations between Hawaiian and European men escape definition, registering neither pleasure or menace, the same cannot be said of relations between British men.

When Beaglehole, as editor and biographer, reflects on the character of the men who accompany Cook, it is “the intellectual of the voyage,” Lieutenant King, who is most tellingly described:

In 1776 in his mid-twenties . . . [King] had both naval and political connections. . . . [H]e had read all the books; he could think for himself. . . . [H]is technical duties kept him from wandering as widely as some of his colleagues. This was made up for not merely by his quickness and literacy in recording what he did see, but also by the sympathetic attractiveness of his character, which more than once made him an invaluable delegate for Cook—so that in Hawaii he was even to be taken for Cook’s son. There must have been an almost youthful charm about King, a certain refinement of mind and of body, a humanity, a kindness, a generosity and sensitivity of spirit

Sahlins, Islands, 2, n. 2.

30 Cook, Journals 3:519, n. 1.

without touch of the effeminate, unusual among seamen or amongst men: the combination of qualities that led the ardent young midshipman Trevenen to write of him (we must allow for the idiom of the age), "In short, as one of the best, he is one of the politest, genteelst, & best-bred men in the world."\(^\text{32}\)

But whose is the idiom that begs allowance? Paternalism and pedagogy, as old as the ancients—these are, to us, familiar alibis; and familiar too, from King's own journal. When Beaglehole so lovingly wafts them, are we looking at smoke screen or smoke signal? What of affection between men?

**Sentiment and Suspicion**

When scholars of the third voyage speak of the death of the captain, they mean Cook, who, by that name or another, *Lono*, died on the beach in Hawaii a baffled man.\(^\text{33}\) Interpretation, it sometimes seems, must fell him over and over again, as though it could not bear he die confused. In the calendar of that voyage, there is another captain's death, enacted not this time on shifting sand but at sea, in the cloying confines of a deathbed. If Cook played two roles at once and stumbled in Kealakekua Bay over superimposed lines, we might at least note, that his understudy, Charles Clerke, did not bungle his final scene. Promoted commander of the voyage on the death of Cook, the tubercular Clerke, five months later and 50 degrees further north, expired with scripted poise. Readying himself for death, the weakened man took time to dictate a final letter to his patron, Joseph Banks. Unsurprisingly the role of amanuensis was taken by King. Such a formal tableau—the dying Clerke recommending the transcribing King to a second, absent, friend—is not lost on Beaglehole. The letter so written is, confides Beaglehole, "the document that carries most pathos in all the records of these voyages;"

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33 For a simple introduction to the doubling of Cook and *Lono*, the Hawaiian fertility god, see Beaglehole, *Life*, 657-60. See also, note 3 above.
Clerke, he tells us, a tear misting his biographer’s eye, gathers his last strength to print “a firm signature.”34 The subscription Clerke signed reads, “your devoted affectionate and departing Servant.”35 As King will write, “Never was a decay, so melancholy & gradual.”36 When a lachrymose gaze falls across the bedridden body of the fading Clerke, the scene starts to swim; the chilly search for the North-West Passage takes on the lambent warmth of a sentimental journey.

Whether or not we grow into its scholars, we are all the schoolchildren of imperialism. As all will recognise, the Resolution’s muster includes more than one household name: on this third voyage, as in a jumbled lesson, Captain Cook sails with Captain Bligh. Master Bligh then, although Beaglehole, at least, can tell the kind of captain he would become: “Of undoubted capacity and goodwill and a first-rate sailor, but hasty and violent both in speech and manner, vain, and too self-confident and self-righteous to deal successfully with opposition or with difficult human problems.”37 Consider Beaglehole’s account of relations between Bligh and King; here, the Lieutenant prefigures not just Fletcher Christian but those other handsome men, Clark Gable, Marlon Brando and, sad declension, Mel Gibson:

Not even this admired person [King], however, could be universally admired. It is not clear whether the master, William Bligh, detested him or merely held him in contempt: to Bligh, anyhow, he seems to have been, at best, a hypocritical and pretentious poseur. Why Bligh should feel so strongly in this way one can but guess: perhaps King was simply too small-bodied, too well-bred, too genteel, for a young man who even then, it seems, affected brusqueness, who may have considered himself a tar; who never, so far as we know, earned hostility by being polite; whose vanity may

34 Beaglehole, Life, 682.
35 Cook, Journals 3:1542-44.
36 Cook, Journals 3:700, n. 1.
37 Cook, Journals 3:1465.
have been affronted by the very modesty of the other. We find no counter feeling in any words of King.

There may have been “something about” Bligh.\(^3\)

If Beaglehole’s King smoulders with more than a seaman’s felicity, his Bligh burns with “something” beyond professional resentment. Just what that special something might be is not anyone’s guess: it is everyone’s guess. What Beaglehole doesn’t quite insinuate, at the same time, can’t be insinuated enough. If there is a creepy shadow cast across these lines, it is not homosexuality but its suspicion. It is not that Beaglehole can’t say what he thinks—that Bligh might have been queer—but that through such obscure accusation homosexuality emerges. Suspicion makes a place, in discourse, for the homosexual; it is the vapour through which he appears.\(^3\)

**Policing**

That is the “something” about, not Bligh, but *Bounty* interpretation (including those filmic representations) that is so remarkable: if they can’t quite say that what ties Bligh and Christian is thwarted homoeroticism, they can’t quite say that it isn’t. Or they have to say it over and over again. *Bounty* historians have successfully refuted the accusation that Bligh was a vicious tyrant, but they are unable to shuck of

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\(^3\) Cook, *Journals* 3:lxvii-viii. The fascination with Bligh’s special “something” has, unsurprisingly, left its mark on the cinema. In the original Hollywood production of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Clark Gable plays Christian to Charles Laughton’s Bligh. Nearly thirty years later, in the Technicolor remake, Trevor Howard’s abusive Bligh makes an Englishman of Marlon Brando’s foppish Christian. Finally, in 1984, the ratchet-focus of Roger Donaldson’s *The Bounty* admits an interest in that unvoiced suspicion which has animated its antecedents and, to a certain extent, this chapter. In this latest—but surely not the last—celluloid retelling of the *Bounty* story, Bligh is thoroughly pathologised as a wet-lipped Anthony Hopkins putting the make on the ghastly spectacle of a blue-eyed, pony-tailed Mel Gibson.

\(^3\) Readers will recognise how indebted these thoughts are to the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. My understanding of the discursive work achieved by sexual suspicion proceeds from her discussion of the “blackmailability” of homosocial relations in Between Men: *English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 88-9. I would also like to acknowledge their metaphorical dependence on Christopher Craft’s essay, “‘Kiss Me with Those Red Lips’: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula,*” *Representations* 8 (Fall 1984): 107-34.
that other suspicion; that, if ever Bligh whipped his men, it was because he loved them not too little, but too much.  

When under scrutiny, relations among men have a disturbing way of turning into their others; the lines of rivalry and attraction turn out to be the same, both bind men. That is what Beaglehole serves to imply; not that Bligh was homosexual, but that these things, identifications between men, can always be read either way. While this might seem a peculiar way of reading male relations, it is the one that comes to us, as to Beaglehole, insidiously, like second nature. We could do worse than call it a homophobic hermeneutic; it is a regime which describes all of us, though differently. As a form of discursive policing, it regulates all relations between men.

Consider the Articles of War. As everyone knows, though I think we must have learnt this outside the classroom, sodomy is a hanging offence. The Articles say as much, and Cook had cause to read them to his assembled men on his return to the Sandwich Islands in November 1778. At least as far as I know, no seaman or officer who

40 Bounty criticism, even at its best, can still snag on the reversibility of William Bligh. Greg Dening’s Mr Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) is as troubling in this respect as Beaglehole’s biography; homosexuality, in Dening’s otherwise exhaustive analysis, remains the thing that goes without saying:

That debate on why there was a mutiny on the Bounty has been long. Who can—who would want to—end it? Not I. I am a coward for causes but a professor of parables. Bligh, some of his contemporaries would have said, was no gentleman... Now, late in the twentieth century, when the battlefields of life seem about not about power and authority or about discipline but about gender and sexuality, there are those who know the true cause of the mutiny on the Bounty to be in the secret recesses of Bligh’s and Christian’s psyches. And I? How can I not be product of my times? Look to Mr Bligh’s bad language, I say, and all that may mean. Our lives are a double helix of past and present. We are the language of our representations. We are caught in our webs of significance.


41 Cook, Journals 3:496. At this moment Cook supplements the Articles with regulations pertaining to trade with the Hawaiians and observes:

Whereas there are Venereal complaints remaining onboard the Ships, and in order to prevent as much as possible the communicating of this fatal disease to a set of innocent
sailed with Cook on any Pacific voyage, was ever the subject of official sodomitical inquiry; of discursive sodomitical inquiry, every last man of them was. However prohibitive, the Articles of War are not a disciplinary system; they rely on detection for enforcement, not subjection. Whenever it analyses sodomy trials, many of which were naval courts martial, gay criticism which thinks in terms of the oppression of a homosexual subclass, however emergent, always has difficulty accounting for the relative infrequency of prosecution and conviction. Do we really need reminding that, while power is systematic, its raids are not? They are terroristic; that is their efficiency. When male homosociality is structured through suspicion, then, at any moment, any relation between men can be invaded by the accusation of excess. Lieutenant King, for instance, has been wrenched by interpretation from a sentimental alliance with Clerke to be made vulnerable before a sinister—less small-bodied, less well-bred—Bligh. This is how the eighteenth century begins to structure the doubledness of male relation, as always suspect, secretly corrupt, in both the declension and intensification of the homosocial; between the gothic and the sentimental a place is marked from whence, some hundred years later, the modern homosexual will emerge.

people, it is hereby ordered that no Woman on any pretence whatever be admitted onboard the Resolution without my permission, nor onboard the Discovery but by permission of Captain Clerke. And whoever brings a woman into the Ships, or suffers her to come in of her own accord contrary to this Order shall be punished; and if any person having, or suspected of having the Venereal disease or any Symptoms thereof, shall lie with any Woman, he shall also be severely punished, and no such suspected persons, (of whom a List is to be kept on the Quarter Deck) shall be suffered to go onshore on any pretence whatever.

Cook, Journals 3:1534-5.


43 For the way in which histories of the emergence of homosexual subclasses rely on functionalist accounts of power, see Sedgwick’s discussion of Alan Bray’s Homosexuality in Renaissance England (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1982) in Between Men, 83-96.
Lure

The story of the handsome sailor as sexual lure is not just the stuff of Samwell’s irony or *Bounty* legend. It remains a high-culture classic; in nineteenth-century novella and twentieth-century opera the fated man is Billy Budd. Our primers for reading the homosocial ship are, I think, found in Melville, not Smollett. Beyond *Typee* there is the erotic clasp of Ishmael and Queequeg, the doubled racial space of *Benito Cereno*, and ultimately *Billy Budd, Sailor*. If we allow that Bligh’s eye for King, or later for Christian, might resemble Claggart’s for Billy, then the captains we might read together are not Whipple and Cook, but Cook and Starry Vere.

In work on sexual exchange in the Pacific, the male body has tended to be eclipsed by the female, the gay by the straight. A Pacific canon that would yield an alternate emphasis would include James Cook and Joseph Banks, Herman Melville and Paul Gauguin, Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead: it would be, after all, the same canon. I do not mean that we might find a homosexual subtext or content in each of these writings, for if we come at these Pacific texts with a forensic imagination, demanding that the male bodies they host be one thing or the other, we repeat the homophobic hermeneutic I have been attempting to describe.
Chapter Three

Sightlines:
Marquesan Contact Erotics
and Male Visibility

In a characteristically deft manoeuvre Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, yokes together two nineteenth-century novellas and instructs that the “conventionally obvious differences between them of style, literary positioning, national origin, class ethos, structure, and thematics must cease to be taken for granted and must instead become newly salient in the context of their startling erotic congruence.” The conflation of the two texts, one English, one American, each canonical, is a remarkably precise one:

The book of the beautiful male English body foregrounded on an international canvas; the book of its inscription and evocation through a trio of male figures—the lovely boy, the tormented desirer, the deft master of the rules of their

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discourse; the story in which the lover is murdered by the boy and the boy is himself sacrificed: the deftly magisterial recounting that finally frames, preserves, exploits, and desublimates the male bodily image: *Dorian Gray* and *Billy Budd* are both that book.²

Under Sedgwick’s able hand *Billy Budd*, as well *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, reveals the male body as the contested site around which revolve relations of (sexual) knowledge and ignorance, innocence and initiation, public and private, wholeness and decadence.³ As Sedgwick reminds us, Melville’s novella was written in 1891, the year Wilde published *Dorian Gray*, and her deconstructive reading of both texts is concerned with the crystallisation of a homosexual problematic at the end of the nineteenth century that continues to determine our understanding of all social relations in this “sexualised century.”⁴ In Sedgwick’s argument, that peculiarly modern legacy is characterised as the strange tension or overlap that exists between the differing understandings of homosexuality that were newly available to Melville and Wilde one hundred years ago and in which our contemporary understandings of sexuality are still embedded. She maintains that the unremarked coincidence of these contradictory definitions of what it means to be homo or heterosexual continues to generate fracturing effects which remain legible across “many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture,” and the rupturing force of that “incoherence” is such that we might speak of “a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male” which dates, specifically, from the

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early 1890s. Sedgwick offers a convenient schematicisation of this tangled inheritance: at this century’s end, as at the last’s, our delineations of sexual identity, from the most casual to the most exact, continue to involve the indelible crossings of alternate conceptualisations of sexual difference:

The first is the contradiction between seeing homo/heterosexual definition on the one hand as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority ( ... a minoritising view), and seeing it on the other hand as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities ( ... a universalising view). The second is the contradiction between seeing same-sex object choice on the one hand as a matter of liminality or transitivity between genders, and seeing it on the other hand as reflecting an impulse of separatism ... within each gender.

Sedgwick underlines that her “purpose ... is not to adjudicate between the two poles of either of these contradictions, for, if [the] argument is right, no epistemological grounding now exists from which to do so.” Rather she identifies herself as “trying to make the strongest possible introductory case for a hypothesis about the centrality of this nominally marginal, conceptually intractable set of definitional issues to the

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5 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 1. In a much-quoted passage from The History of Sexuality, Foucault assigns the birthdate of the homosexual as “a species” to 1870, the year that saw the publication of Carl Westphal’s article on “contrary sexual sensation.” Foucault, History of Sexuality, 43. However, as other historians of sexuality have pointed out, the term “heterosexual” does not come into usage for another twenty years. “Heterosexuality” post-dates the coinage “homosexuality” and, in the sense that we understand “heterosexual” to mean anything at all, it is in an oddly imitative and differential relation to that prior term. Thus Sedgwick dates the commencement of the modern compulsion to draw contradistinction between the hetero and the homo to the final decade of last century. For more on the chronological succession and conceptual entanglement of the two terms, see Jonathan Ned Katz, Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary (New York: Harper and Row, 1983) and David M. Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality And Other Essays on Greek Love (New York: Routledge, 1989).


7 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 2.
important knowledges and understandings of twentieth-century Western culture as a whole."8

The distinction being drawn here informs Sedgwick’s reading of Melville’s *Billy Budd*. Her lesson is easily grasped if put this way: it is not enough to ask of Melville’s text that it yield evidence of the presence of both minoritising and universalising accounts of homosexuality for it will, of course, do both. As she demonstrates, its pages host the secretive master-at-arms John Claggart, the pathologised homosexual whose every move on Billy marks his essential difference from the other men on board the *Bellipotent* who equally adore the handsome boy; those pages also display the faultless Captain Vere upon whom Billy’s charms and qualities make extravagant and open purchase. It is Billy’s striking refusal of the oblique advances of Claggart that fatally delivers him unto the protection of Vere’s transparent admiration and respect. It is the untouched captain’s magisterial orchestration of the shipboard court-martial and execution that suggests that naval discipline draws all men, masters and subalterns alike, into an identificatory system wherein gestures of love and

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8 Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2. The argument of her introductory chapter suggests that the current impasse within gay theory between ‘constructivist’ and ‘essentialist’ understandings of homosexuality is the most recent link in a more enduring chain of conceptual impasses, a deadlock between what [we can call] more generally *universalising* and *minoritising* accounts of the relation of homosexual desires or persons to the wider field of all desires or persons.

Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 91. As in the opening pages, she repeats

that not the correctness or prevalence of one or the other side of this enduring deadlock but, rather, the persistence of the deadlock itself has been the single most powerful feature of the important twentieth-century understandings of sexuality whether hetero or homo, and a determining feature too of all the social relations routed . . . through understandings of sexuality. This deadlock has by now been too deeply constitutive of our very resources for asking questions about sexuality for us to have any realistic hope of adjudicating it in the future. What we can do is to understand better the structuring, the mechanisms, and the immense consequences of the incoherent dispensation under which we now live.

denial are one and the same, which is to say that the difference between the enactments of a repressed homosexuality and those of an institutionalised homosociality are perhaps worth looking at again so that our breath might be taken away by their startling resemblance as well as their assumed departure from each other. Through such a lens, questions of homosexual desire are not confined to the tortured psychological profile of the master-at-arms but can be seen to bleed over all who sail the man-o’-war Bellipotent.9

If we can say that Sedgwick reads naval authority as a homosocial disciplinary system that depends on the incitement of desires that might also corrupt it, then we need also recall that rather than simply sheltering her discussion of the novel beneath the arching poles of that contradiction, she belts tight that observation in order to ask the following hard questions of Melville’s novel:

If Billy Budd won’t tell us whether it is of the essence of male homosexual desire to wash across whole cultures or to constitute a distinct minority of individuals, neither will it answer the crucial question of a potentially utopic politics that, again, it all but forces us to ask. Is men’s desire for other men the great preservative of the masculinist hierarchies of Western culture, or is it among the most potent of the threats against them. Billy Budd seems to pose the question frontally. The male body lovely to male eyes: is this figure “the fighting peacemaker” precious to a ship’s captain, the “cynosure” of male loves whose magnetism for his fellows (“they took to him like hornets to treacle”) can turn the forecastle that had been a “rat-pit of quarrels” into “the happy family” of commercial or warlike solidarity? Or to the contrary, does his focusing of male same-sex desire render him the exact, catalytic image of revolution—of that threat or promise of armed insurrection . . . under the urgency of whose incessant evocation the narrative proceeds? Billy Budd is unequivocal about the hierarchical-respecting inclinations of its hero. But these notwithstanding, it remains for the very last moments of the novella to show whether his ultimate effect on the

9 See Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 91-130.
personnel of the man-o'-war *Bellipotent* will be to trigger violent revolt or, in the actual denouement that is reclaimed from mutiny by a seeming hair's breadth, to reconsolidate the more inescapably the hierarchies of discipline and national defense.

If, again, ... the expressive constraints on mutiny make it analogous to the excess of male-male desire, its "final suppression" nonetheless is also said to depend upon an arbitrary surplus of male attachment, "the unswerving loyalty of the marine corps and a voluntary resumption of loyalty among influential sections of the crews." The relation of the health of the male-male disciplinary system when it is "healthy" to its insubordinate virulence when it is "diseased" is oddly insusceptible of explanation. ... The only barely not aleatory closeness of the shave by which, at the end of *Billy Budd*, the command of the *Bellipotent* averts mutiny should warn us again: this is a dangerous book to come to with questions about the *essential nature* of men's desire for men. A book about the placement and re-placement of the barest of thresholds, it continues to mobilise desires that could go either way. A better way of asking the question might then be, What are the operations necessary to deploy male-male desire as the glue rather than as the solvent of a hierarchical male disciplinary order?¹⁰

Bearing in mind the questions that Sedgwick poses of Melville's text, I would like to consider in this chapter how male subjectivity was articulated at an earlier moment in time and in a different location though one still bounded by the strange restrictions and dispensations governing men at sea. If we have learnt—as I think we have—to think of eighteenth-century European culture as placing the burden of civil society, the task of mediating and refining competitive (and desirous) relations among men, upon femininity, then perhaps it is time to ask how masculinity redefined itself when it sailed into the Pacific in a series of extended voyages marked by violent and sexually promiscuous landfalls.

Officer and Gentleman

The figures of James Cook and Joseph Banks have routinely been used as placemarkers for opposing poles of masculine definition with regard to British adventure in the South Seas. The self-disciplined naval officer and the pleasured aristocratic dilettante who ships with him at his own expense are perhaps flip-sides of the same coin: as even the casual reader in Pacific history knows, the minstrel-like Banks stripped down to join in Tahitian ceremonies while Cook’s Hawaiian venture into cross-cultural mimicry was of deadlier consequence. Likewise Pacific scholarship has repeatedly wrung from the resolutely secular Cook the sign of the self-made man, if only so the historical contours of an emergent meritocracy can then be thrown into relief by the vestigial privileges granted or assumed by the youthful Banks, the amateur (and seasick) gentleman among career naval officers. The ever versatile Banks is also

11 For an account of Banks’ Tahitian make-over, see The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks, 1768-1771, ed. J. C. Beaglehole, 2 vols. (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales in association with Angus and Robertson, 1962), 1:41 and n. 1. Banks’ celebrated willingness to engage in Polynesian festivals and to offer his skin to the blemishings of tattoo might be recalled when we consider Tommo’s shuddering apprehension at the thought of the needle’s stain.

12 If, by other of these accounts, Cook is the apotheosis of British imperial collectedness, Banks seems in danger of losing his nationality altogether. In several of the more populist texts Banks looks decidedly French, at least in those that circulate rumours of his secreting a cross-dressed female companion in Madeira to accompany him on his proposed second voyage with Cook. Gender disguise and the scandal of its detection has been part of the peculiar dynamics of Pacific discovery since Bougainville’s belated arrival in Tahiti in 1768 when, so it is said, the islanders disclosed the female identity of one of the French officers. In a number of the biographies of Banks he takes on the cultural insignia of the girl’s blouse even if he stops short of wearing one. Hector Charles Cameron, in Sir Joseph Banks: The Autocrat of the Philosophers (London: Batchworth Press, 1952), recounts Banks’ conviction that his lifelong devotion to botany and natural science was inspired by his boyish discovery of Gerard’s Herball in his mother’s dressing-room and a second event which likewise condenses the young boy’s initiation into private pleasures with his turning away from manly, sociable pursuits and immersing himself in a specifically feminine domain:

It was in his fifteenth year . . . that there took place his sudden conversion from a boy interested only in sports and games to a worshipper of Nature and thereafter her devotee. One summer evening, after bathing in the river with his friends, he had lingered till all were gone and found himself wandering home through lanes on whose banks masses of wild flowers were growing, lit by the rays of the setting sun so that each stood revealed in its perfection. In the silence, as he lingered, an overwhelming sense of their beauty and their mystery possessed him and in that moment he set himself to become a botanist.
pegged as both the descendant of the tradition of the Grand Tour, in which errancy and improvement have always gone hand in hand, and signal to its eclipse. As well as foregoing that well-worn geographical route through France, Germany and Italy, Banks abandoned the cultural itinerary that spanned classical museum and bordello alike, inaugurating instead the ethnographic tour which took as its destination culture itself.13

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When, at length, he began to make his way home along the lane, the student encountered his first teachers. He found himself confronted by a group of women, cullers of simples to be sold to the druggists of the town, garrulous, ignorant old creatures yet possessed of just what he wanted, a knowledge of the names, at least, of the flowers they sought and of the places and seasons where and when they might be found. A bargain was quickly struck between the women and the boy. For sixpence a time they contracted to teach him, on these summer evenings, all they knew themselves.

Cameron, Sir Joseph Banks, 2. This reads like an allegory of the precocious recruitment of a common knowledge to the service of an emergent science, a process that will ultimately see garrulous female ignorance replaced by that elite institution of male clubbability, the Royal Society. In both Patrick O’Brien’s readable biography, Joseph Banks: A Life (London: Collins Harvill, 1987) and Harold B. Carter’s Sir Joseph Banks, 1743-1820 (London: British Museum, 1988), the gendered narrative of Banks’ life from the cradle to the grave is a crossed one; both writers are unable to let go of the fact that as an adult the public recognitions afforded Banks by the Royal Society were underwritten by his domestic engulfment in a household of women and fat. O’Brien goes so far as to include in stones and pounds the—admittedly considerable—weight gains experienced by Banks, his wife and sister, once they took a house together following his marriage. For a more serious discussion of Banks’ imbrication in the gendered discourses of nationhood, see Harriet Guest, “Curiously Marked: Tattooing, Masculinity, and Nationality in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific,” in Painting and Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art, ed. John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 101-34 and “The Great Distinction: Figures of the Exotic in the Work of William Hodges,” in New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), 296-341 and Bridget Orr “‘Southern passions mix with northern art’: Miscegenation and the Endeavour Voyage,” in The South Pacific in the Eighteenth Century: Narratives and Myths, selected and introduced by Jonathan Lamb, a special issue of Eighteenth-Century Life 18 (1994): 212-31. For a more specific inquiry into questions of nationalism and custom, see John Barrell’s essay “Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English Art,” in Nation and Narration, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) 154-76, where he discusses how, at the end of the eighteenth century, the discourse of “custom” developed in England as a means of forestalling the demands of universal citizenship.

13 The literature on the Grand Tour and its masculine rituals of cultural induction is extensive. For a compelling account of the historical relation of the discourses of improvement to the practices of empire see Peter Womack’s brilliant study of the British invention of the “Highlands,” Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands (London: Macmillan, 1989). Banks’ own reply to those that advised he stick to tradition’s course compresses some of the same imperial ambitions even as it redescribes the path it will take: “Every blockhead does that, my Grand Tour shall be one round the whole globe.” Quoted in Bernard Smith, European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768-1850 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 14. Whatever it is that Banks thinks he is knocking on the head, complacency perhaps, seems to make an odd and exaggerated return in this statement.
Masculine Erasure

Cook and Banks provide the proscenium arch under which appear all subsequent stagings of European masculinity in the Pacific theatre, including the antics of those beachcomber figures, from the next phase of contact, who maintained a fugitive existence on the margins of Marquesan island culture around 1800. It was these “double m[e]n,” tattooed white culture queens plying the overlap of the beach who increasingly displaced the islanders as the object of European scrutiny and distrust. However this cultural impersonation was experienced, joyously or anxiously, it was written upon the corporeality of the male: it was the exemplary male body that was made to disport its pleasures and fears and make itself available for weird translation. This trade in

14 In a discussion of Marquesan beachcombers—“those who crossed beaches alone” to become “strangers in their new societies and scandals to their old”—Greg Dening represents Joseph Cabris as a “double man.” Dening, Islands and Beaches. Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980), 129, 139. The ranks of cross-culturalists are well catalogued in H. E. Maude’s Of Islands and Men: Studies in Pacific History (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1968) and Bill Pearson’s Rifled Sanctuaries: Some Views of the Pacific Islands in Western Literature to 1900 (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1984). The attraction of the figure persists as can be seen in the character of Baines in Jane Campion’s The Piano (Chapman/Ciby 2000, 1993) and, more interestingly, in Heberley from Ian Wedde’s Symmes’ Hole (Auckland: Penguin, 1986). For an analysis of Wedde’s novel and the sentimental dream of settlement without colony, see Linda Hardy’s “‘Natural Occupancy,’” Meridian 14, no. 2 (1995): 213-27. Hardy’s essay critiques as well Ross Gibson’s “Ocean Settlement,” Meanjin, 4 (1994): 665-78, for its idealisation of those ordinary European men, typically seamen, whose vocational immersion in “boundless systems: the ocean, the weather, time, crime, nature” marked them as peculiarly adaptive to the indigenous cultures with whom they came in unbridled contact. Gibson, quoted in Hardy, “‘Natural Occupancy,’” 225. In Gibson’s poetic, these life narratives mysteriously unfold outside the governmentality of colonisation. As Hardy wryly points out, Gibson’s invoking of a modernist aesthetic in which the grand narratives of the Enlightenment are blocked on entry into the oceanic is scarcely less ubiquitous than it is canonical.

15 Alex Calder’s recent paper “The Temptations of William Pascoe Crook,” Journal of Pacific History (forthcoming), takes the “Account” of Crook, a hapless missionary briefly resident in the Marquesas from June 1797 to January 1799, and reads it as recording both the isolated European’s assumption of the power of translation, his confidence in his ability to find things strange nonetheless interpretable, and his awkward induction into his own translatability. T. Walter Herbert, Jr.’s Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilisation (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980) contains a discussion of the experience of the missionary Harris who was put down at Tahuata alongside Crook but who abandoned his calling after one traumatic night where he woke to find his penis the object of Marquesan debate. Uncovered and undone, “Harris becomes vehemently convinced that the Marquesans are ‘savage,’ because this ascription helps him to restore himself to order.” Herbert, Marquesan Encounters, 134. Herbert reflects more generally that when
promiscuous surface inspires Pacific narratives of pleasured errancy which are also replete with anxious defence. Whatever the manifest attractions of crossing over, it is a trade that at least has Tommo, the narrator of Typee, Melville’s novel of 1846, putting up resistance. Melville’s novel cannot allay the fear, and seems not to want to, that what you see is what you get, that when the white body has inscribed on its surface the tattooed symbols of another culture then perhaps self-knowledge simultaneously disappears as though the opacities and nostalgias of character and personal history might be rubbed out and replaced by more superficial branding. In Typee, tattoo is merely the final and most literal invasion of a subjectivity whose boundaries have already proven alarmingly permeable, dangerously susceptible to erasure and reinscription. This makes Tommo’s narrative an exemplary one: his entrapment in the cross-cultural dynamics of identification and desire prefigures the puncturing of identity recorded by Gauguin and Malinowski in their Pacific residencies. These are masculinist narratives fuelled by the animations of a desire which must be defended against. It seems to me that the erotics of European interest in the Pacific have always been thought and critiqued in terms of desires biddable to heterosexual mapping whereby sexual power is located in a masculinity to which femininity is presumed vulnerable, enabling the assumed if lamented hierarchies of gender to be bought quickly

the interpretative process that is innate to the self goes to work on materials it cannot render intelligible, the result is an anxiety in which the possibility of an order per se seems threatened. As Clifford Geertz points out, we may be able to tolerate the loss of a given interpretation of things, but cannot tolerate the loss of our confidence that things are interpretable. Yet the proximate consternation ignites the ultimate dread, as our visitors to the Marquesans come to the boundaries of those provinces of discourse in which their inward and outward experience made sense and which defined for them not provinces, but reality itself.

Herbert, Marquesan Encounters, 134-35. A less than sympathetic account of Harris’ disrupted sleep is to be found in James Wilson, A Missionary Voyage to the South Pacific Ocean . . . in the Ship Duff (London: n.p., 1799), 140.

and unprotestingly into line with those of racial or cultural difference. Nevertheless, these Pacific narratives might rather suggest that relations of dominance and submission are negotiated anew in these fields particularly under the erotic pressure of encounters between men. Let me put it like this: when Tommo swoons before Mow-Mow’s ferocity (as on a further island Ishmael is clasped in Queequeg’s savage embrace), when in *Noa Noa* Gauguin’s thoughts turn to sodomy, when Malinowski, in this century, dreams himself his own lover, when in all these rapturous moments sexual difference is held in curious abeyance, might not that be the dream of islands?

**Arrival and Return**

In August 1803, the first Russian ships to circumnavigate the globe, the *Nadeshda* and the *Neva*, left Cronstadt for the South Seas on a diplomatic mission

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18 The phrasing is a recasting of the title of Gavin Daws’ book *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-Discovery in the South Seas* (Milton, Queensland: Jacaranda Press, 1980). It seems to me purposeful to restage the inquiry in this manner not simply as an exercise in the application of the lessons of queer theory to the South Pacific, though that alone might help expose some of the muffled thinking about sexual representation that dogs writing about encounter, but because many of our modern understandings of sexuality were conceived through Pacific ethnography. Ishmael and Queequeg roll together in a “matrimonial sort of style” under the counterpane at Nantucket’s Spouter Inn. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick,* vol. 6 of *The Writings of Herman Melville,* ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1988), 27. Gauguin’s sodomitical imaginings will be discussed in my fifth chapter. Malinowski records his dream of self-sufficiency in his diary:

*Today, Monday, 9.20.14, I had a strange dream; homosex., with my own double as partner. Strangely autoerotic feelings; the impression that I’d like to have a mouth just like mine to kiss, a neck that curves just like mine, a forehead just like mine (seen from the side). I got up tired and collected myself slowly.*

intended to negotiate trading privileges with Japan. The Emperor Alexander’s expedition, as its leaders were only too aware, came late in the day to a Pacific already inscribed as an object of European knowledge and interest. The accounts of the voyage published by its commander Adam J. Krusenstern and the naturalist George H. Langsdorff suggest that the Russians entered a Pacific sufficiently mapped and inventoried by their eighteenth-century English and French precursors that it held few surprises; its peculiar terrors were less those of witness than of philosophical reflection, cannibalism if not only, then at least occasion for, erudite surmise.

Lying ten days at anchor off Nukuhiva in May 1804 the Russians proved strangely jaded observers of the Marquesans. At home away from home in his Forster, his Fleurieu, with this archive as his guide, Krusenstern shared something of the budget traveller’s obsession with efficiency and economy, with not being taken for a ride. An

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19 Already, by 1804, this Old World dominion was being challenged by American presumption in the region and this contributed to the sense of expansionist possibility under which the Russian ships sailed. In this respect the Russian expedition was both belated and opportune, the imperial ambitions fuelling it were less important than the capitalist itinerary it set. The Russian mission is discussed in the final volume of O. H. K. Spate’s The Pacific since Magellan, III: Paradise Found and Lost (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1988). Melville remains a superior guide to the Pacific thematics of free trade; for a compelling reading of whaling’s phantasmatic relation to a capitalist economy, see Harold Beaver’s editorial commentary in Moby Dick; or, The Whale by Herman Melville (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972). Wedde’s Symmes’ Hole, with its assault on the arrival of American franchise capitalism in Courtenay Place, Wellington, New Zealand, thus could be said to be a departure from—as well as a revisiting of—Melville.

20 Observation and fascinated speculation seem always to tussle for precedence in the matter of anthropophagy. Closer to home, Alex Calder discusses Augustus Earle’s desire for “ocular proof” of Maori cannibalism in an unpublished paper, “Augustus Earle and the European Representation of Tapu.” Less specifically, Stephen Greenblatt, considering the documents of New World encounter, observes how reports of wondrous or savage difference, with their repeated appeal to eyewitness, are doomed to assimilate the alien to the same; inevitably they can only gesture toward the “absolutely other [which] cannot be conveyed at all, cannot perhaps be even perceived,” in representations that are themselves “marked with the signs of fantasy, unreality, enchantment.” Stephen Greenblatt, Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 133.

21 George Forster, A Voyage round the World, In His Britannic Majesty’s Sloop, Resolution, Commanded by Capt. James Cook, during the Years, 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775, 2 vols. (London: n.p., 1777), John [Johann] Reinhold Forster, Observations Made during a Voyage round the World, on Physical Geography, Natural History, and Ethic Philosophy (London: n.p., 1778), and C. P. Claret Fleurieu, A Voyage round the World Performed during the Years 1790, 1791, and 1792 by Etienne
utterly canny tourist, forearmed with the handy phrase, he moved through the islands beating down the price of hogs and curiosities, as alive to the frustrations of foreign travel as to its pleasures. As far as he was able, Krusenstern scripted his encounters with the native population, improvised an answer to the demands of the present, bearing in mind those local knowledges that Cook through Hawkesworth provided him. His actions the day after first casting anchor off Nukahiva were typically facile:

As I had determined to go on shore . . . and did not choose to have the ship filled with visitors during my absence, I fired off some cannon, and hoisted a red flag, when the ship was declared tahbu, and all trade immediately ceased. This had certainly the effect of preventing any person from going on board.

Located in a footnote is the rider, "I conceive it unnecessary to explain the word tahbu, which is sufficiently known by Captain Cook's voyages." The nuances of "tahbu," elucidated in his next chapter, are thus subordinated to questions of efficacy, questions of command. At that moment, in those enabled hands, ethnography meets contingency and is redeployed as the knack of the place. In the time it takes to run up a red flag the Russian demarcates not just a spatial trespass, a no-go area, but a whole field of operation in which anything goes, where power is not only prohibitive but insouciant, soliciting recognitions, installing complicities, tracking across cultural borders to which it becomes increasingly indifferent. Krusenstern's mild-mannered intervention in the local, his returning "tahbu" to its home as a twice-translated thing,


24 Krusenstern, Voyage, 117.
marks that place as sophisticated, compromised, and alerts us to the guise of savoir faire.

At six that morning the well-briefed commander had been visited by the chief "Kettenowee" and his suite of relatives. Despite the early hour Krusenstern diplomatically received on board "the whole royal family" and ushered them to his cabin where their attention was caught by an oil portrait of his wife and, "no less an object of their astonishment," a looking glass. Krusenstern's account registers as well his own surprise at finding the dumbshow of savage and mirror played out in the crowded confinement of his own quarters, "It was not improbable that some of them had already seen such a thing, yet they all looked behind the glass to discover the cause of this wonderful appearance." This was not, after all, first contact and so Krusenstern was aware of at least the possibility that these islanders might be as well rehearsed as he in the staging of encounter. Perhaps he was faintly suspicious of this native fascination with the furnishings and accessories of a European exoticism: might not some of these islanders be merely simulating their wonderment? Disconcerted, if not outright sceptical, the commander's representation of these events seems to guard against the danger of being taken in; all his observations are caged and made to bear the impress of that "yet." The Marquesans are said to display "every symptom of pleasure and surprise" as though the very transparency of their response is voucher to its insincerity, an insincerity of more or less sinister intent. In the over-crowded space of the cabin the most casual of gestures is significant, announces itself as a sign, and demands to be read for what it might and might not mean. Hypertuned to the mechanics of dissimulation, Krusenstern has an eye peeled for the involuntary tic that would give the game away.

25 Krusenstern, Voyage, 117.

26 Krusenstern, in this reading, begins to resemble or foreshadow a figure from Melville: Amasa Delano, a captain kept safe by his inability to interpret signs correctly even as he good-naturedly sets himself to that task. Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces: 1839-1860, vol. 9 of The Writings of Herman Melville, ed. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDouglall and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1987), 46-117. As Philip Fisher reads "Benito Cereno," when the naïve Captain Delano boards a slave ship
The account of this visit goes on to describe how the chief’s amazement at the artefacts of European culture is readily subsumed in the monotonous display of a native narcissism:

A large mirror, in which they were able to view their whole persons, must have been something new to them; and the king was so particularly delighted with it, that, either from vanity or curiosity, upon every visit, he immediately went into my cabin to this glass, standing before it for whole hours to my great annoyance.\(^{27}\)

The implied complaint is that Marquesan “curiosity” never matured into enlightened inquiry: over and over it returned its subject to the cul de sac of cultural “vanity.” The “cause” behind the mirror was of no consequence to the islander who was content to site himself before its shiny surface; his interest remained unmortgaged to the how and the why of it all and his not seeing everything, but nevertheless liking what he did see—himself and, perhaps, the stranger’s “annoyance”—tends to place the foreign commander outside the specular circuit of flattery. Or so the Russian assumed. But it seems to me that whatever “Kettenowee”’s repeated posturing suggests—to Krusenstern’s myopic eye, a spellbound preening; to an alternate view, a more

adrift at sea it is his “innocence of just what is going on within the ship [that] allows him to survive”; it is his failure to penetrate the dissimulation of the black slaves, who—unbeknownst to him—have taken control of the ship in a violent insurrection and hold hostage its captain and crew, which finally “permits the ship to be recaptured.” Melville’s fiction, writes Fisher, represents the “double and damaged social space” created by slavery, which defeats or belies the democratic dream of social transparency, being the “story of a superimposed space, a layered space of what, in military terms, we call occupation.” The riddle-like structure of Melville’s narrative is commensurate with the meaningful opacity of such a social space, which marks its members differentially as master, as slave, insider and outsider, member and observer, and thus necessitates constant interpretation. Philip Fisher “Democratic Social Space: Whitman, Melville, and the Promise of American Transparency,” *Representations* 24 (1988): 77. Like Delano, Krusenstern is compulsively suspicious. He cannot trust the gestures of the islanders whose bodies crowd around him, though the unintelligible doubling of this cabin is cosier and less fraught than that of the murderous slave ship where all turns on the edge of a razor held in black hands against a white throat. Melville, “Benito Cereno” in *The Piazza Tales*, 84-7. Captain Krusenstern’s memoir is marked by impatience and annoyance not by any sensation of physical vulnerability which is why he can seem less of an adventurer than an irritable tourist.

\(^{27}\) Krusenstern, *Voyage*, 117.
deliberate irking—what is clear is how the representation of that action, now as then, can be tailored to fit a European fancy. Through the fog of his own suspicion Krusenstern glimpsed in the Marquesan an infantile self-regard which could then be elaborated as a native truth and implied point of comparison between cultures. By the end of the passage the Commander is blithe and bored, affecting an exaggerated impatience with native foible; no longer the paranoid semiotician, he has eased himself into the comfortable marginality of the interpreter, off to one side, disengaged but thoroughly in the know.

**Sexual Space**

Krusenstern assumes this same unruffled manner when describing the sexual semaphore the Marquesans waved in the direction of his ship:

At sunset all the [native] men without exception went on shore; but about 100 of the females still remained near the ship, round which they had been swimming during five hours. In this time they had made use of every art in their power to declare the object of their visit, nor could they doubt that their wishes were understood, since neither their pantomime nor their attitudes could be mistaken. I would not allow the work on board the ship to be neglected, and this was the reason why no particular attention was paid to them; and I had issued express orders, that no person of either sex, with the exception of the royal family, should be received on board without my permission. It scarcely began to grow dark when these poor creatures begged in so pitiful a manner to be taken on board, that at last I gave my consent. I had the less need for caution on this head, as I had not a single venereal patient on board... I nevertheless set bounds to this favour, and, after the second day, no females were admitted into the ship, during all the time that we remained here, although every evening there were seldom less than fifty swimming about the ship, who would not go away until a few shots were fired over their heads.28

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28 Krusenstern, *Voyage*, 115-6.
Not once, but twice, the commander changes his mind about the gender quarantine enfolding his ship. With a mind to discipline, he first proscribes the presence on board his vessel of Marquesans “of either sex.” Then he wavers on hearing the siren call of the amphibious females circling beneath him and grants them a dispensation. Extending a gentlemanly reach from the deck to the sea, he gives his “consent” to their boarding, only to indulge a morning-after regret. On “the second day” the interdiction returns, reversed and patrolled, targeting women, exempting men.

It is unclear what sort of a sexual space this rather incoherent door policy makes for; bouncing now this gender, now that, off the naval premises, lifting the colour bar but installing a new vigilance around the commingling of the sexes, the final order reinscribes the social site of the ship as a boys only club. Zoned exclusively for men it is none the less defined, through heterosexual presumption, by the women it does not include. By that unremarked rule that has all sex as gender, Krusenstern’s confusion over native women seems to suggest that the only proclivity that threatens naval discipline is straight. Heterosexuality, presumed rampant as impulse, in the Marquesan woman if not the Russian man, is checked as a practice; it is the only “venereal” activity that warrants policing. Other desires, at this moment at least, fall outside the commander’s arrested purview; with the law turning a blind eye, relations between Marquesan and European men escape sexual definition, neither pleasure nor menace, they are, as yet, unnamed.

The commander has more to add on the relation between sex and gender:

I think myself not incorrect in stating, that this debasement of the female sex is less occasioned by levity or ungovernable passion in them, than by their duty to the unnatural and tyrannical orders of their husbands and fathers, who sent off their wives and daughters to procure small pieces of iron and other trifles, and in the morning were seen swimming out to meet them and take possession of the treasures which they had obtained. I have myself seen a man with a girl of ten or twelve
years of age, probably his daughter, swimming round the ship making an offer of her.\(^{29}\)

Just when we think prostitution the only game in town, and that a seedy family affair with “husbands and fathers” pimps to their “wives and daughters,” Krusenstern goes on to describe a sex play that is not reducible to the economics of solicitation:

But what excited in me no less astonishment in a physical sense, than horror in a moral point of view, was a child not more than eight years of age, who shewed as little moderation in granting her favours as her sisters of eighteen or twenty. I considered this unfortunate object for some time with a

\(^{29}\)Krusenstern, *Voyage*, 116. In a third account of the expedition, Urey Lisiansky, captain of the *Neva*, presents what he has learnt of the Marquesans from a run-away English sailor, Robarts, who has married into the King’s family. Lisiansky’s informant provides him with several observations on the marital arrangements of the islands which refute what former voyagers have asserted about their promiscuity. In particular he reveals that in “rich families, every woman has two husbands; of whom one may be called the assistant husband. This last, when the other is at home, is nothing more than the head servant of the house; but, in case of absence, exercises all the rights of matrimony, and is also obliged to attend his lady wherever she goes. It happens sometimes, that the subordinate partner is chosen after marriage; but in general two men present themselves to the same woman, who, if she approves their addresses, appoints one for the real husband, and the other as his auxiliary: the auxiliary is generally poor, but handsome and well-made.” Urey Lisiansky, *Voyage Round the World in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806* (London, 1814; facsimile edition, Bibliotheca Australiana, no. 42, Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1968), 83. The cohabitation of adult males is presumed to be in the service of a sexual desire that winds its way between genders and the two husbands are invited to present themselves in sexual series to the woman.

It is worth noting that Western anthropology’s persistent attempts to find the polyandrous household return us again and again to the Marquesas. Twice in this century the polyandrous Marquesan Islanders have captured the imagination of anthropologists and sexual psychologists. Ten years after it was undertaken, E. C. S. Handy’s early 1920s Marquesan fieldwork, *The Native Culture in the Marquesas* (Honolulu: The Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1923) and *Marquesan Legends* (Honolulu: The Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1930) played a crucial role in the Kardiner-Linton seminars at Columbia in which debates inspired by Freud were shaping anthropology. Handy’s fieldwork was again revisited in the 1960s by Robert C. Suggs in *Marquesan Sexual Behaviour* (New York: Harcourt, 1966). Suggs’ concentration on Marquesan sexual technique both resembles and continues that earlier psychocultural analysis but marks a departure from it in its post-Kinsey profile. Suggs’ work has a double address: its intended readers are anthropologists but, as sexology, it also speaks in more therapeutic tones to a general American audience for whom the subject of sex is no longer prohibited, especially when encased in a science that considers the sexual essentially quantifiable. Suggs’ account runs counter to Lisiansky’s in so far as the burden of sexual labour in such a ménage falls on the wife. What should concern us is why it might be that the study of a polyandrous social arrangement in which women, in order to sate the sexual needs of multiple husbands, develop erotic technique and attractiveness to the detriment of their maternal role, should generate renewed interest at these different twentieth-century moments?
mixture of pity and disgust. In every respect a perfect child, laughing and playing with the feelings so natural to that state, she appeared not to have the least sense of her melancholy situation.\(^3\)

Krusenstern records that he lingered over this scene “for some time,” taking in at his leisure the significance of this display of precocious sexual knowledge. His representation of the Marquesan girl shuttles between the conventions of a hard and a soft primitivism; she is either slave to abuse or subject of unashamed rapture, and these alternatives fit the requirements of a hard and a soft pornography. Zooming in to focus on the “physical,” catching the prepubescent body in frenzied embrace, then pulling back to accentuate the babbling delight of the “perfect child,” the commander’s vacillation leaves the native female the “unfortunate object” of his “pity and disgust.” But perhaps we can look at this “melancholy situation” another way and ask how it is that this Russian can be so indifferent to the lure of nympholepsy; how it is he can be so sure that the “excitation” he felt, the “horror” and the “astonishment,” were in keeping with “a moral point of view?”\(^3\) A self-proclaimed voyeur, Krusenstern stands to one side of this carnality and his concentration on the girl advertises the position of her sexual partner as a permanent structural vacancy. We cannot read, from his account, who the Marquesan girl coupled with, just that she did so and in abandon. But the commander’s scrutiny does not seem scopophilic, least of all to him. His commentary maintains the avuncular tone of the voice-over, and, as a bedside manner, it is its own alibi; he cannot be guilty of an accessory arousal not because he was not at the scene of the outrage, but because he was and—in all innocence—he told us so.

\(^3\)Krusenstern, \textit{Voyage}, 116.

\(^3\)I am thinking of Vladimir Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert who would, one imagines, be inflamed by such precocious display and throbbingly confess it. See \textit{Lolita} (Paris: Olympia Press, 1955; reprint, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), 7.
Visibility

The achieved placidity of this account, the sexual quiescence it seems to register, is garnered through an intertextual affiliation. This eccentric moment is ghosted by other similar moments in the South Sea archive. Krusenstern’s *Voyage Round the World* echoes an event that occurred thirty-five years earlier during Cook’s first landfall in the Pacific. In Tahiti on a Sunday in May 1769, Cook and his officers and crew celebrated their Christian sabbath with a “divine service” inside the fort they had built to record the transit of Venus. As Hawkesworth retells it, compiling an account of events from several sources but collapsing them all into a single narrative point of view which asks to be taken as proceeding from Cook, on this day the Roman goddess was also observed:

Such were our Matins; our Indians thought fit to perform Vespers of a very different kind. A young man, near six feet high, performed the rites of Venus with a little girl about eleven or twelve years of age, before several of our people, and a great number of the natives, without the least sense of its being indecent or improper, but, as it appeared, in perfect conformity to the custom of the place. Among the spectators were several women of superior rank, particularly Oberea, who may properly be said to have assisted at the ceremony; for they gave instructions to the girl how to perform her part, which, young as she was, she did not seem much to stand in need of.  

32 John Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages*, 1:469. Cook’s original journal record of the events of Sunday 14 May, 1769, reads:

This day we perform’d divine Service in one of the Tents in the Fort where several of the Natives attended and behaved with great decency the whole time: this day closed with an odd Scene at the Gate of the Fort where a young fellow above 6 feet high lay with a little Girl about 10 or 12 years of age publicly [sic] before several of our people and a number of the Natives. What makes me mention this, is because, it appear’d to be done more from Custom than Lewdness, for there were several women present particularly Obarea [sic] and several others of the better sort and these were so far from shewing the least disapprobation that they instucted the girl how she should act her part, who young as she was, did not seem to want it.
The repetition is too obvious to pass as an uncanny doubling; diminished as it is, Krusenstern's scene is a genre convention. The representation of the Tahitian encounter exceeds the Marquesan with the inclusion of the tall native man in the elliptical spot. For Hawkesworth's Cook, sex is a spectator sport; the narrating persona stays safely on the sideline, unlike the enthusiastic Oberea whose coaching interference becomes part of the sexplay. It is this textual doubling that provides the


This is the kind of detail that Hawkesworth's Account became notorious for, though what strikes me as interesting here is the way in which vacating that space, editing out the native male, serves either European taste or European fantasy. For an analysis of the representational consequences of Hawkesworth's deployment of the particular detail in his redaction of the multiple journals of the first voyage to a first-person singular narration, see Jonathan Lamb, "Minute Particulars and the Representation of South Pacific Discovery," Eighteenth-Century Studies 28, no. 3 (1995): 281-94. Lamb is working against the argument of Mary Louise Pratt's Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London: Routledge, 1992), which holds that in imperialist writings that rely on or record the European's sentimental encounter with the native or the strange "the minute particular stands alibi for an enterprise whose violence is disguised or diverted by susceptibility to contingent sensations." Lamb contends that the rhetoric of Hawkesworth's narration, replete with emotional detail as it is, is not "as generically stable and as imperially purposive" as Pratt supposes such sentimental discourse to be; he goes on to argue that "minute particulars can erupt as indices of desires and actions too volatile and excessive to preserve the illusion of civil susceptibility on the side of the discovering ego, [or] to locate savagery always on the side of the exotic other," and offers a reading of Hawkesworth's Account in which "minute particulars cease to serve a definite narrative end," blowing the alibi that masks the oppression and violence of exploration. With no generic or rhetorical means of binding savagery to the limit defined by the new trade routes, it has entree to the feeling heart and to the metropolitan spaces in which the imperial subject mediates and launches his quest; it can even contaminate the sympathetic relation of the first person narrator to the reader and redefine that surest of sentimental transactions as a species of warfare. . . . [If] the first person's sudden shift from sympathy to barbarism explodes a sentimental convention in order to commit a violence upon readerly expectations, thus bringing the contact zone home as it were, one might find a reason for the vituperation heaped upon John Hawkesworth by readers who find his enumeration of the minute particulars of South Pacific discovery offensive to every principle of civil society.

frisson to Krusenstern's account. His sexual presentation is structured as a capsule repetition; its exquisite pleasures and trials are those of identification and denial, an identification with an apotheosed Cook over the supine body of the native female. Removing the native male and attendant females, Krusenstern, I am tempted to say, contracts a homosocial alliance with an absent, but fellow, European. With this narrating Cook, Krusenstern enjoys the captain's prerogative, to look upon native women without avowing desire. Seemingly untouched by ecstasy or anxiety, the commander has all the confidence his culturally sanctioned disavowal can provide. He is propped in an imperial posture: cool, disaffected, anything but amorous. But Cook, more rightly, is the name that stands for a structural position, the vantage or point from which the view is taken: the proper name for proper perspective. The peculiar dynamics of visibility and invisibility inscribed in these scenes work to evacuate the position of the viewing subject; if our two captains elide with each other in these scenes, it is even more significant that they both disappear into the technology of vision itself.34

Perhaps this reading of Krusenstern recalls Marshall Sahlins' line on Cook—that if the Hawaiian women want to sleep with him because they think he is a god, he declines, for much the same reason—though I restate it here only to suggest that a masculinity vouchsafed by its denials, a masculinity marked by the refusal of desire and of visibility, might be less of a joke than a loaded gun. Indeed the Russian accounts

34 While these captains were considered beyond suspicion, Hawkesworth was not. His first person Account of Cook's first voyage of exploration was condemned by a metropolitan public who, as Jonathan Lamb has argued, found in its particular mode of literary representation a window to the brutality of orientalist desire. See previous note. This reading runs counter to my own in so far as I am suggesting that the relations of visibility and invisibility inscribed in these scenes work less to corral the captain into the sentimental precinct of the first-person narrative than to win him the unimpeachable jurisdiction of omniscience. This idea is owed to D. A. Miller's two essays on Balzac, "Balzac's Illusions Lost and Found," Yale French Studies 67 (1984): 164-81, and "Body Bildung and Textual Liberation," in A New History of French Literature, ed. Denis Hollier, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 681-7. He continues to develop this idea of masculine investment in invisibility as one of the prices exacted for heterosexual privilege in Bringing Out Roland Barthes (Berkeley: University of California Press), 28-33.
of their Marquesan stay also yield incidents where male bodies become the object of visual interest and these work to expose the precariousness of a male self-possession guaranteed by its going unseen. The complacency that I think I hear in the Russian account comes from the way certain events sound through the archive and announce themselves as repetitions, as just what was expected in these islands, but this voyage also casts up an unknown, something the Russians hadn’t counted on, someone they fail to recognise.

35 The refusals of desire are not always what they seem. Sedgwick shakes our assumptions about the bodily pathways gratification must take in her reading of Captain Vere:

The desires of Captain Vere are desires of the eye. . . . The casting of sky-eyed Billy in the generic role of the “Handsome Sailor” has suggested from the beginning of the story his ocular consumability as a figure lofted high in the field of vision. . . . Captain Vere. . . desires not to hold Billy but to behold him, for while Claggart “could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban,” to Vere the “stripling” whom his instinctive fantasy is to (denude and) turn to marble must remain a mere “specimen” of “the right stuff.” In contrast to Claggart’s toilsome enmeshments, Vere’s eye sees in Billy a clean-cut stimulus to his executive aptitudes, the catalyst of a personnel-management project to get the magnificent torso hoisted up to “a place that would more frequently bring him under his own observation.” If there are frustrations entailed in Vere’s system of supplying his eye with sustenance, those have to do only with the contingency and mutability of particular, embodied flesh: unlike marble or the platonic abstraction genus homo, particular lads grow “not so young” and become “partly for that reason” unfitted to the prominent “watch.”

Impossible not to admire the deftness with which Captain Vere succeeds in obviating his frustrations and ensuring the fulfilment of his desire. Billy displayed, Billy aloft, in “a place . . . under his own observation,” Billy platonised, Billy the “pendant pearl,” Billy who won’t grow old. The last third of the novella, the shockingly quick forced-march of Billy to the mainyard gallows and his apotheosis there: wholly and purely the work of Captain Vere, these represent the perfect answer to a very particular hunger.

Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 108-9. She reflects some pages later:

Why assume that a genital sexuality would be, in Vere, the mark of the private rather than of the public? The opposite assumption might be more plausible: if Vere gets off at all, it seems to be on display, whether of himself or another. The text is insistent, too . . . in locating its masculine genital intensities not in the solitary or coupled enjoyment or dissipation of erections but in the less messy economics of their visible circulation.”

Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 118.
As the Russian expeditionists are well aware, since the publication of the Forsters' comparative descriptive accounts of the islanders encountered on Cook's second voyage to the Pacific, the Marquesans have been celebrated for two things: the beauty of their physical form and, less wholeheartedly, their excellence in the art of tattoo (fig. 3.1). In the former, they are said to be rivalled only by the Tatritians; in the latter, only by the New Zealanders.36 Unable to adjudicate such trans-Pacific comparisons Langsdorff offers some of his own; noting that “women of distinction” had “kept aloof,” he reveals himself to be an inter-racial connoisseur:

It is highly probable that we saw a very few only of the really fine and handsome women, and that most of those who fell under our observation were the ladies of pleasure of the island. I must, however, confess that in my opinion both the form and countenance of a well-made negress are more pleasing and interesting, according to our European ideas of beauty, than those of the women in these islands. We certainly found in Nukahiwa an Apollo of Belvedere; but it may as certainly be made a question, whether a nice observer would not sooner find the original of the Medicen Venus upon the coast of Africa than in the South-Sea.37

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37 George H. Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World, during the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806 and 1807 (London, 1813; facsimile edition, Bibliotheca Australiana, no. 41, Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1968), 1:112-3. Krusenstern, on the other hand, has no hesitation in passing judgement without observation: “Although of all the inhabitants of this vast ocean, I have only seen those of the Sandwich and Washington [Marquesan] islands, still I think I may say, with some degree of certainty, that the latter are not exceeded by any of them in personal beauty; and from the description in Cook’s different voyages of the other islands of this part of the globe, their inhabitants will be found to bear no comparison with those of the latter group.” Krusenstern, Voyage, 151. Once again Krusenstern strives not to be original but to imitate or repeat; the self-congratulatory Russian doggedly follows a known channel through the Pacific as if this trip were guided by the spirit of not James Cook but his namesake, Thomas.
Figure 3.1. *An Inhabitant of the Island of Nukahiwa.* Engraving from an original drawing, reprinted from Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, facing 117.
The “lower classes” of Marquesan female are derided as “puny creatures, with bodies debilitated by premature licentiousness,” the more to marvel at how such degenerate specimens, with their disproportionately large bellies and slow, trailing gaits, “could ever have brought forth such gigantic and finely formed men...”38 It is the male fruit of these lapsed wombs that Langsdorff finds so entrancing, the native male anatomy which so draws his discerning gaze:

The men are almost all tall, robust, and well made... [They exhibit] such general beauty and regularity of form, that it greatly excited our astonishment. Many of them might very well have been placed by the side of the most celebrated chef-d’œuvres of antiquity, and they would have lost nothing by the comparison.39

The Marquesan men occasion aesthetic respect as the primitive models for classical archetypes; with a Greek love for arithmetic Langsdorff relays twenty-three measurements taken “with the utmost exactness” from one “perfectly proportioned” islander, “Mufau,” who had “particularly attracted... attention from his extraordinary height, the vast strength of his body, and the admirable proportion of his limbs and muscles.” On the return to Europe experts in the “natural history of man” calculate that the Marquesan’s vital statistics correspond exactly with those of “the Apollo of Belvedere... that master-piece of the finest ages of Grecian art, in which is combined every possible integer in the composition of manly beauty...”40 The abstraction of an ideal “manly beauty” from the savage male suggests the neutrality of formalism, but in the field it has the effect of transforming native men into totemic objects of an idolatrous European regard:

38 Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, 112.
39 Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, 108.
At our first arrival we were very desirous of stroking our hands over the heads of some of the handsomest men; on which they betrayed symptoms of great uneasiness and distress...41

According to Langsdorff what is singular about the appearance of the male inhabitants of the Marquesas, where they depart from that Greek identikit, is their “manner... of ornamenting their naked bodies... in punctuation, or, as they call it, tattooing.” Langsdorff is so hypnotised by the effect of this art that he records his surprise that the “acuteness of a Forster has passed over the subject with so much indifference.”42 The Marquesan male with his skin-deep tattoo becomes the subject of the naturalist’s analysis; the Russian scans this stigmatised body for symbolic significance, jigsawing it into constituent parts or “Principal Figures” which are then dealt as units of interpretation (fig. 3.2):

Every figure has its distinctive name, and most of them are appropriated to a particular part of the body... .

Figures 3, 4, 5, 12, 13, 14, are called Enata, that is to say, men. These figures are, perhaps, principally made when an enemy has been killed or eaten. Figures 5 and 13, by the assistance of a little imagination, may be made into men with their arms stretched out...

Figure 8. Tewehine-nau. This is a sign of wishing to be loved.

... Figure 9. Matta-Comoë.— Matta, the eye. As this figure seems to represent a man’s head, and is often combined with the

41 Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, 134-5.

42 Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, 116. George Forster records a description of Marquesan tattoo:

the [fully tattooed] men appeared to be infinitely blacker, on account of the punctures which covered their whole body, from head to foot. These punctures were disposed with the utmost regularity; so that the marks on each leg, arm, and cheek, and on the corresponding muscles, were exactly similar. They never assumed the determinate form of an animal or plant, but consisted of a variety of blotches, spirals, bars, chequers, and lines, which had a most motley appearance.

Forster, A Voyage round the World, 14-5.
Figure 3.2. Representation of several of the Principal Figures used in tattooing, some of them their natural Size. Engraving from an original drawing, reprinted from Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, facing 122.
*Enata,* I presume that both may be a favourite distinction of the hero.43

If these punctured marks can be read as insignia, badges of merit or tokens of commemoration, then this catalogue of figures attains the status of the appended vocabulary; it is the key to a foreign grammar. But Marquesan tattoo speaks a forked tongue; behind the alien babble, the language requiring translation, the Russian can make out another language: the familiar esperanto of the body.

Tattoo not only signposts the native body as exotic cultural site, but falls upon it as a flattering chiaroscuro; an enhancer of the flesh, it accentuates the contours of the male form, further defining its musculature, torsion and symmetry:

The figures with which the body is tattooed are chosen with great care, and appropriate ornaments are selected for the different parts. . . . The most perfect symmetry is observed over the whole body . . . on the arms and thighs are stripes, sometimes broader, sometimes narrower, in such directions that these people might very well be assumed to have studied anatomy, and to be acquainted with the course and dimensions of the muscles. . . . On each side of the calf of the leg is an oval figure, which produces a very good effect. The whole, in short, displays much taste and discrimination.44

Langsdorff's preference is for the partially adorned young man, who wears his tattoo like a full-length cosmetic sheath (fig. 3.3). "In later years," he explains, "one figure is made over another, till the whole becomes confused, and the body assumes a Negro-like appearance. . . ."45 For the European to exercise his taste in these matters seems not to avow erotic interest. Langsdorff, we have seen, renounces the attractions of the native female body and this seems tangled up with its being sexually available; the

43 Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, xv.


45 Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, xiv.
Figure 3.3. Back View of a younger Inhabitant of Nukahiwa, not yet completely tattooed. Engraving from an original drawing, facing 119.
native male body, on the other hand, is neither priced nor barred sexually, and becomes the object of his neutral though admiring address. The naturalist’s gaze can loiter over this body without betraying intent; his interest in men, like Krusenstern’s interest in girls, is untainted by the scandal of desire.

This is not a pipe

Beside the denigrated native female and fetishised native male we can place a third body, a body the Russians hold in a more ambivalent regard: that of the tattooed white man. In the course of their stay in the Marquesas, the Russians were introduced to two resident Europeans: an Englishman, Edward Robarts, and the figure captured in a portrait by Alexander Orloffsky, a young Frenchman, Jean Baptiste Cabris (fig. 3.4). The two beachcombers, vicious rivals in the islands’ tribal politics, both saw the arrival of the Nadeshda and Neva at Nukahiva as an event to be worked to advantage. Each maligned the other to the Russians, offering himself as the more reliable informant and trustworthy interpreter. On appraising their distinct qualifications, Langsdorff favoured Cabris as his guide:

I must confess that I placed more dependence upon the testimony of the Frenchman than of the Englishman; because the former had lived much longer in the country, and had so much lost the manners and habits of civilised life, that little difference was to be discerned between him and the natives, with regard to his habits and mode of living; I might also add, with regard to his modes of thinking. He had almost forgotten his mother-tongue, and, at first, a repetition of parlez français was the only proof he gave of his nationality. His whole figure, not excepting his face, was tattooed: he swam as well as any of the islanders, had married a daughter of one of the inferior chiefs of the island, and lived with the family of his wife, and the rest of the inhabitants, upon the most friendly and confidential footing.46

46 Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, 98. He prefaced this statement with another: “I sought as much as possible to draw information separately from them, and only considered a fact fully established, when I found it in this way confirmed by the testimony of two men who were in their hearts such decided
Figure 3.4. Portrait of Jean Baptiste Cabris, a Frenchman, found on the Island of Nukahiwa, and there become half savage. He is represented as a Slinger. Engraving from an original drawing by Alexander Orloffsky, reprinted from Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, facing 97.
For the Russians the extent of Cabris's cross-culturation, his saturation in the Marquesan everyday, is marked by the loss of his "mother-tongue" and the acquisition of indelible tattoo. But these twin credentials, while safeguarding his insider status, also fuel the scandal of the "French Boy." Desperate for witness, for a truth untouched by hearsay, these ethnographic tourists desire him as an initiate: as such, Cabris can tell his audience what it wants to know, the secret of Marquesan cultural practice, its specific secret: the taking of victims for human sacrifice and the ritual of anthropophagy. Despite his attesting the contrary, Russian conjecture would have him, as good as, cannibal:

The Frenchman Cabri [sic], . . . who indeed had lost all appearance of an European education, asserted that he had never eaten the enemies whom he had taken, only exchanged them for swine; and Roberts [sic] supported his assertion. Notwithstanding this, I am disposed to think that a man, who had in other respects incorporated himself so entirely with the natives, who might be said to be both morally and physically transformed into a savage, who himself confessed that he went out hunting on purpose to catch men, and exchange them for swine, and thought this an excellent pastime,—I cannot help, I say, being much disposed to think that such a man was very capable, when he had caught his prey, of eating it in company with his new brethren.}


48 The practice of anthropophagy has long served to demarcate the savage from the civil. Peter Hulme traces the discursive history of cannibalism, from its first appearance in the log-book and letters of Christopher Columbus' trans-Atlantic voyage of 1492 through three centuries of colonial expansion in which it remains the defining trope via which Europe mediates its understanding of the natives of the Caribbean. Peter Hulme, Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797 (Methuen: London, 1986).

49 Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, 148.
Cabras is considered “morally and physically”—the one implying the other—“a savage.” This judging by appearance reveals the stained white man as the object of a peculiar projection; in him, Europe confronts the spectre of its own decline.

Langsdorff describes Cabris as being “slightly and irregularly tattooed all over his body” and, like Krusenstern, draws attention to the symbol of the eye that encircles his natural one. Referring to it as his “black, or rather blue eye,” the naturalist takes it to indicate his membership of an elite native society. But Cabris’s incorporation in the Marquesan cultural order is also belied by his tattoo; although neither of the Russians mentions it, he carries on his midriff a figure resembling a pipe. Coded into customary Marquesan tattoo is the sign of European habit: the trademark pipe that isn’t. This crossover body is imprinted with the cute trace of its difference; a “perverse palimpsest,” Cabris, as figure, gently mocks the rule of cultural identity.

50 Langsdorff, Voyages and Travels, 121-2. Krusenstern similarly takes this “tattooed eye” to signify Cabris’ affiliation to a “club.” Krusenstern, Voyage, 160.

51 In his foreword to Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks, Homi K. Bhabha argues that it is psychoanalysis which can best account for the perverse welts that colonialism makes rise on the surface of European humanism:

The representative figure of such a perversion . . . is the image of post-Enlightenment man tethered to, not confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonised man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his actions at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being. This ambivalent identification of the racist world . . . turns on the idea of Man as his alienated image, not Self and Other but the “Otherness” of the self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity. And it is that bizarre figure of desire, which splits along the axis on which it turns, that compels Fanon to put the psychoanalytic question of the desire of the subject to the historic condition of colonial man.

Visual Capture

In both Langsdorff’s and Krusenstern’s accounts the native and the beachcomber are subjected to an enlightened scrutiny that brooks no response. I want to consider briefly a text that suggests at least the possibility of a returned look. In Melville’s Typee a white male body is made available to native sight, a European is initiated into what D. A. Miller calls the “pleasures and dangers of visibility.” Tommo’s Narrative of a Four Months’ Residence among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands is the record of a trial by pleasure. Lodged with the perhaps cannibal Typee, Tommo, captive and captivated, is surrounded by luxurious half-naked women and monumental tattooed men, and his narrative confides both the shiverings of delight and the shudderings of fear. Prefiguring that other hypochondriac in the Pacific, Malinowski, Tommo in his time among the islanders, is debilitated by an engorged member—his leg—which swells and wastes, much to his consternation if not that of countless vulgar readers of the novel. What I would emphasise is not this manic seesawing between states of physical aggravation and lassitude but the way in which Tommo’s prolonged detention on “Nukuheva”—again like Malinowski’s in the Trobriand—is experienced as “a psychological emptying.”


53 Several Freudian readings of the novel rely on the tumescence of Tommo’s leg to hot wire their interpretation of the novel. We might say with Paul Witherington, that “the leg cannot carry the burden of the symbolism any more than it can carry the narrator.” Paul Witherington, “The Art of Melville’s Typee,” Arizona Quarterly 26 (1970), 142.

54 Christopher Herbert, Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 154. Herbert, writing of missionary experience, glosses this psychological emptying as “a voluntary creation of a vacuum into which the ideas and affective forces of a foreign people can rush.” Herbert, Culture and Anomie, 154.

Readers of Malinowski’s Diary will recall the many days on which the anthropologist’s commitment to work had to be maintained against pleasures forsworn, namely those of the nineteenth-century English
When the lame Tommo and his able-bodied companion, Toby, first enter
the Typee valley they are “intimidated” by the “inquiring looks” of the residents. Confined in a dim bamboo dwelling, they can “just discern the savage countenances” that encircle them because each face appears against the blackness of the interior “gleaming with wild curiosity and wonder.” Tommo and Toby have difficulty holding their composure as objects of that wonderment and their stoutness drains completely away when they find themselves displayed before “some eight or ten noble-looking chiefs” who, squatting close upon them, “regarded [them] with a fixed and stern attention.” Recalling this moment as forcing his descent into absolute nervousness, the narrator continues:

One of them in particular, who appeared to be the highest in rank, placed himself directly facing me; looking at me with a rigidity of aspect under which I absolutely quailed. He never once opened his lips, but maintained his severe expression of countenance, without turning his face aside for a single moment. Never before had I been subjected to so strange and steady a glance; it revealed nothing of the mind of the savage, but it appeared to be reading my own.

The chief’s penetrating stare betrays nothing of its own desire or intent; as D. A. Miller writes of another male look, it proceeds from a “body whose power and

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Melville, **Typee**, 70.

Melville, **Typee**, 70.

Melville, **Typee**, 70-1.

Melville, **Typee**, 71.
prestige depend on its vanishing into a gaze that cannot effectively be returned." Subjected to such a blank scrutiny, Tommo can only hope to deflect or appease it. Before its silence and rigidity, he falls suppliant; anticipating its malignity, he makes abject gestures of conciliation.

In the course of the narrative this "strange gaze" is eclipsed by the "pensive gaze" of Fayaway, the young native woman whose company Tommo keeps. When Tommo is beheld by Fayaway he sees in her eyes not inscrutable power but recognition and affective sympathy:

Of all the natives she alone seemed to appreciate the effect which the peculiarity of the circumstances in which we were placed had produced upon the minds of my companion and myself. In addressing me . . . there was a tenderness in her manner which it was impossible to misunderstand or resist. Whenever she entered the house, the expression of her face indicated the liveliest sympathy for me; and moving towards the place where I lay, with one arm slightly elevated in a gesture of pity, and her large glistening eyes gazing intently into mine, she would murmur plaintively, "Awha! awha! Tommo," and seat herself mournfully beside me.

Persuaded by her manner that "she deeply compassionated" his situation, Tommo spends his time imagining that she spends hers giving fantastic shape and specificity to the cruel contours of his dislocation:

she appeared to be conscious there were ties rudely severed, which had once bound us to our homes; that there were sisters and brothers anxiously looking forward to our return, who were, perhaps, never more to behold us.

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60 Melville, Typee, 78 and 134.
61 Melville, Typee, 108.
62 Melville, Typee, 108.
Tommo submits to the chief’s arresting optic, matching the ocular self-effacement of the native with strategic abasement, but with Fayaway such evacuation is not called for. Tommo can reassuringly project onto this native woman a reciprocating interiority, a vibrancy that can countersign his sense of his own sadness, his own loss. Tommo’s desire for this mirroring regard becomes especially urgent after Toby leaves the valley. It is as if identity can only be maintained through technologies of interlocution, through an introspection circuited outside itself.63

Style Queen

The more erotic scopic encounter occurs with neither the steely male chief or insipid Fayaway, but a third figure, Marnoo, a tabooed outsider who enters the valley a privileged stranger:

His unclad limbs were beautifully formed. . . . [His hair] was a rich curling brown, and twined about his temples and neck in

63 The thin-skinnedness of Tommo’s resilience to Marquesan hospitality, and in particular his fear of being tattooed, might profitably be placed in conjunction with Alfred Gell’s analysis of the “paradoxical double skin” provided by Polynesian tattoo:

Where the European observers were wrong was in assuming that feelings of modesty provided the motive for being tattooed, rather than a need to be protected, sealed off, defended from external threats, i.e. armoured. This fundamental idea, so far as Polynesian tattooing is concerned, is perhaps most pithily encapsulated in the Marquesan expression designating the whole-body tattooing “suit” worn by Marquesan men: pahu tiki (“wrappings in images”). . . . It remains . . . important not to lose sight of the fact that the skin and the tattoo are integrally one and indivisible. Tattooing can only be seen when the wearer is naked, and it would be truer to say that it draws attention to nakedness, than that it functions to conceal it. And what tattooing reveals, beyond the revelation of nudity itself, is an inside which comes from the outside, which has been applied externally prior to being absorbed into the interior. The basic schema of tattooing is thus definable as the exteriorisation of the interior which is simultaneously the interiorisation of the exterior.

One can understand this as a process of involution, the creation of an extra layer by folding the skin over upon itself, making an inside of an outside and an outside of an inside.

Alfred Gell, Wrapping In Images: Tattooing in Polynesia, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 38-9. For Tommo, then, the double invagination of subjectivity effected by tattoo might have been poison and remedy both.
little close curling ringlets, which danced up and down continually when he was animated in conversation. His cheek was of a feminine softness, and his face was free from the least blemish of tattooing, although the rest of his body was drawn all over with fanciful figures.  

Tommo steals a host of rear and sidewise views of this entrancing figure:

Struck by his demeanour . . . I involuntarily rose as he entered the house, and proffered him a seat on the mats beside me. But without deigning to notice the civility, or even the more incontrovertible fact of my existence, the stranger passed on, utterly regardless of me, and flung himself upon the further end of the long couch. . . .

Had the belle of the season, in the pride of her beauty and power, been cut in a place of public resort by some supercilious exquisite, she could not have felt greater indignation than I did at this unexpected slight. I was thrown into utter astonishment. The conduct of the savages had prepared me to anticipate from every new comer the same extravagant expressions of curiosity and regard. The singularity of his conduct, however, only roused my desire to discover who this remarkable personage might be, who now engrossed the attention of every one.

The magnetic charms of this “all-attractive personage” are such that Tommo discovers his own weakened by proximity; he observes his native admirers adjust their conduct under Marnoo’s sway, and finds himself put out by the infidelity of their affection:

When I observed the striking devotion of the natives to him, and their temporary withdrawal of all attention from myself, I felt not a little piqued.  

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66 Melville, *Typee*, 137.
This extended and exaggerated scene of rivalrous identification and imagined slight is dedicated not to the dissipation of desire but the continued posing of erotic invitation. Tommo's spellbound eyes must slyly chase Marnoo's manifest charms through five pages of coyness before they are rewarded with the sweet delivery of a downcast approach:

At length, from certain indications, I suspected that he was making me the subject of his remarks, although he appeared cautiously to avoid either pronouncing my name, or looking in the direction where I lay. All at once he rose from the mats where he had been reclining, and, still conversing, moved towards me, his eye purposely evading mine, and seated himself within less than a yard of me. I had hardly recovered from my surprise, when he suddenly turned round, and, with a most benignant countenance, extended his right hand gracefully towards me. Of course I accepted the courteous challenge, and, as soon as our palms met, he bent towards me, and murmured in musical accents,—"How you do?"67

Escape

Against this mutual, if subtle, come-hithering we can place a last parting glance. On attempting to escape the valley, Tommo enters the visual field of Mow-Mow, a ferocious Cyclops with a mutilated face. Mow-Mow's one-eyed obsession with Tommo baffles him with its vehemence. When Tommo's rescuers fail to buy his freedom with generous gifts, Tommo recognises the extent of his objectification in the cultural order of Typee:

When I remembered the extravagant value placed by these people upon the articles which were offered to them in exchange for me, and which were so indignantly rejected, I saw a new proof of the same fixed determination of purpose they had all along manifested with regard to me.68

67 Melville, Typee, 139.

68 Melville, Typee, 250.
Knowing himself to be alienated in some system of value of which he cannot take the measure, marked as eminently desirable, the sum effect of a power beyond his comprehension, Tommo’s only response is panic:

in despair, and reckless of consequences, I exerted all my strength, and shaking myself free from the grasp of those who held me, I sprang upon my feet and rushed towards Karakoe.69

The shape Tommo’s panic takes is a forceful lurch from the hold of native men towards the safety promised by another. From the side of a retreating boat he lashes out at Mow-Mow with a metal boat-hook, striking his pursuer “just below the throat” and forcing him down, beneath the water only to watch him “surface in the wake of the boat.”70 Even in violence Tommo’s body is tremulous; overtaken by emotion, swoon follows blow, and he falls back into a final, accommodating, native embrace:

the next minute we were past them all, and in safety. The strong excitement which had thus far kept me up, now left me, and I fell back fainting into the arms of Karakoe.71

Tommo’s *Narrative*, in which he is repeatedly pinioned by another’s obscure desire, is the record of a profound disorientation. If Tommo can be said to have a sexual life among savages the organising poles of that life have less to do with the obligations of gender than the dubious and alternating attractions of passivity and aggression.72 Melville’s Polynesian romance comprises a series of surrenders and belated retrievals, easy gratifications and more or less violent renunciations, a backsliding progress that

69 Melville, *Typee*, 250.

70 Melville, *Typee*, 252.

71 Melville, *Typee*, 252.

72 In the fifth chapter, passivity and aggression provide the axes between which Gauguin’s desires are likewise located.
stands testimony to, not the security of gender orientation, but the fracturing of identity in disavowal.

**Coda**

That earlier cloven man, Jean Baptiste Cabris became a more thoroughly expropriated body on his return to Europe. In the fluster of departure, the Russians inadvertently carried him off the island:

Cabris was by accident obliged to leave the island. He was afterwards left by us at Kamschatka, whence he travelled over land to St. Petersburg. The extraordinary fate of this man, and the novel appearance of his tattooed body, attracted the attention of every one. Both at Moscow and at St. Petersburg he exhibited upon the stage the dances of the savages, and was considered by all the great people of the country as a real curiosity. Although he has by degrees become reconciled to European customs, he still thinks with delight of the men whom he formerly killed and exchanged for swine, or perhaps eat [sic]. His dexterity in swimming, in which he is scarcely excelled by the natives of Nukahiwa themselves, has procured him the appointment of teacher of swimming to the corps of marine cadets at Cronstadt, where he now lives. He has almost forgotten the language of Nukahiwa, and made an incredibly rapid progress in the recovery of his native tongue. The story of his marriage with a princess of Nukahiwa, and the detail of his exploits on that island, are now so intermixed with the new ideas he has acquired in Europe, that any one who heard him relate them would be disposed to think himself listening to a second Munchausen.  

Before being nudged into a line of imaginary voyagers, Cabris proves an utterly co-optable figure. Spectacular freak or military adviser, he is toy to the institutions of empire; his disparate knowledges, even as they bolster metropolitan modernity, fade into fictions. Unable to persuade anyone to sponsor his return to the Marquesas he

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73 Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, xiiv-iv.
washed up, in 1817, in the sideshows of the Bordeaux carnival, his cultural difference now mere transvestism. His lousy career in the skin trade had a post-mortem supplement. He died in a hospital in Valenciennes; and as "there had been some talk of preserving his unique skin . . . the authorities had him buried between two other corpses, one above, one below, to deter body-snatchers." But Cabris is snatchable body still: in most contemporary accounts he is elegised, his trauma and loss bespoken. In cruel exile from the Pacific, we find him trailing a ragged poignancy through the salons, fairs and mortuaries of Europe. Rubbed between two cultures, his black and blue tattoo becomes tender bruise, sign of a tropical sadness.

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74 For a reading of transvestism and the erotics of cultural appropriation, see Marjorie Garber’s *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 304-52.


76 Those accounts include Terrell’s, cited in the previous note, and Pearson’s which keeps returning to a slightly melancholic account of Cabris’ fate even as it keeps a critical distance from Cabris’ own attempts “to present his plight in sentimental and heroic terms that might appeal to his European listeners.” Pearson, *Rifled Sanctuaries*, 59-60.
I want to begin this chapter elsewhere, a long way from the South Pacific. I want to begin in Worcester, Massachusetts on the 5th of February, 1918, in the light and warmth of a room held against the gathering dark of a winter afternoon. The date and location belong to Elizabeth Bishop, more strictly to a poem "In the Waiting Room" that recalls a child, also an Elizabeth, not quite seven, waiting among grown-ups for her Aunt Consuelo to emerge from under the hand of a dentist:

My aunt was inside
what seemed like a long time
and while I waited I read
the National Geographic
(I could read) and carefully studied the photographs:
the inside of a volcano,
black, and full of ashes;
then it was spilling over
in rivulets of fire.
Osa and Martin Johnson
dressed in riding breeches,
laced boots, and pith helmets.
A dead man slung on a pole
—"Long Pig," the caption said.
Babies with pointed heads
wound round and round with string;
black, naked women with necks
wound round and round with wire like the necks of light bulbs.
Their breasts were horrifying.
I read it straight through.
I was too shy to stop.¹

The poem’s recovery of a scene of infantine reading has been most compellingly interpreted by Lee Edelman. He writes that “the ‘Elizabeth’ whose memory constitutes the poem offers off-handedly, in a parenthetical aside, the assertion that governs the whole of the passage preceding the cry: ‘(I could read).’”² The child’s authority, he argues, “derives from her mastery of the mystery of written language and from her concomitant access to the documents of culture, the inscriptions of society.”³ However, as Bishop’s poem goes on, the transparent “readability of texts” becomes doubtful.⁴ For Edelman the “critical moment in the poem is precipitated at just the point when this model of reading as mastery comes undone, when the division between inside and outside breaks down and, as a result, the determinacy of textual relationships is called into question.”⁵

And then I looked at the cover:
the yellow margins, the date.

⁵ Edelman, “Geography of Gender,” 188.
Suddenly, from inside came an *oh*! of pain—Aunt Consuelo’s voice—
not very loud or long. I wasn’t at all surprised; even then I knew she was a foolish, timid woman. I might have been embarrassed, but wasn’t. What took me completely by surprise was that it was *me*:
my voice, in my mouth. Without thinking at all I was my foolish aunt, I—we—were falling, falling, our eyes glued to the cover of the *National Geographic*, February, 1918.\(^6\)

Bishop’s poem reverses and discredits the commonsensical distinction between reader and text, disturbing first “Elizabeth”’s then our own confidence in the containment and control promised by the materiality of print. Bishop’s “Elizabeth” tilts vertiginously forward over the pages of the *National Geographic*, she falls—and we fall with her—into the organ of culture, to emerge, like Alice, on the other side, on the verge of a new geography that takes shape as the questioning of knowledge, the questioning of place.

Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins—like Elizabeth Bishop, like myself—have also as children read *National Geographic*:

Our parents and grade-school teachers led us to *National Geographic* magazine, and there we found immense pleasure in the views of fantastically decorated forest people, vivid tropical fish and flowers, and the expansive sense of a world large, diverse, and somehow knowable. . . . In our childhood, this multitude of photographs suggested an enticing world

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\(^6\) Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 159-60.
beyond the relatively homogenous, suburban American one we knew. They posed the possibility of an alternative to cultural sameness and of places where—as Gregory Bateson would say—people did things in ways that were marvellously different.7

Perhaps it is a childish wish but still as a grown-up, now beyond the careful guidance of my teachers, I find myself wanting to discover in the documents of culture a difference returned, some “alternative to cultural sameness.” In the not quite space of a New England waiting room, Bishop’s poem stages such a return and suggests its difficulty:

Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?
What similarities—
boots, hands, the family voice
I felt in my throat, or even the *National Geographic*
and those awful hanging breasts—
held us all together
or made us all just one?
How—I didn’t know any
word for it—how “unlikely” . . .
How had I come to be here,
like them, and overhear
a cry of pain that could have
got loud and worse but hadn’t?8

The photographs of *National Geographic*, as Bishop’s now older “Elizabeth” recalls them, are icons of difference. They articulate her own ambiguities, “those that don’t easily surface into speech, and that only stammer into audibility” when she sees them mirrored elsewhere.9 Under the pressure of imagined alterity and similitude, a rift

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8 Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 161.

9 This phrasing belongs not to Bishop but to Wayne Koestenbaum who is writing of the iconicity of Jackie Kennedy. Wayne Koestenbaum, *Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon* (New York:
opens inside the reader and inside the national culture that makes sense of her. But what this chapter discovers—in its discussion of the less beguiling fall of the Reverend William Yate in the not quite space that was New Zealand in the 1820s and 30s—is that reading, by and large, is not the dizzying experience it was when we were seven, and that colonial culture readily closes over the rupturings of difference.

Surmise

In 1970 Reed published a facsimile of the second edition of William Yate’s An Account of New Zealand and of the Formation and Progress of the Church Missionary Society’s Mission in the Northern Island. The reprint edition included among other supplements a biographical introduction by the historian Judith Binney. This chapter is entirely dependent on the findings of Judith Binney’s comprehensive historical research, a fact I have no wish to disguise. Binney’s published work will no doubt remain the point of dissemination for the widest understanding of the significance of Yate’s work with the Church Missionary Society. I have not consulted any of the primary documents concerning Yate’s career in New Zealand and Australia, nor any pertaining to his later years in England. The subject of this chapter is not, in fact, the historical figure, William Yate, rather, it is the meanings which have circulated in his name in the 170 years since he disembarked in New Zealand. What catches my interest is the changing cultural legibility of an historical figure, how they are read differently from one moment to the next. The distinction we might make here is between historical and literary studies, between the truth of a person, and the truth-effects

Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995), 158. As far as I know, National Geographic remains one of the few magazines not to have featured Mrs. Kennedy on its cover.


generated across his name. William Yate, then, is a placemarker; so, too, is Judith Binney.

Reading Binney’s introduction, we learn that Yate composed his *Account of New Zealand* in 1834 on his homeward voyage to England, drawing on the journals he had kept since taking up his ministry with the mission community at Paihia in the Bay of Islands, six and a half years earlier, in 1828. Quick calculations make Yate around twenty-six years old when he took up his work with the New Zealand mission, in his early thirties before his first spell home, which he took without leave of his superiors. According to Binney this makes his text, which appeared during that first sabbatical year of 1835, the “only published missionary account of this period which was not written from the retrospective viewpoint of old age,” although the singularity of Yate’s *Account* is not pressed by the historian whose introduction moves on to acquaint us with the scandal that flared on his return to Sydney in June 1836, a scandal which sabotaged his planned return to the Bay of Islands and resulted in his dismissal from the Society’s service.12 It is this scandal, the accusations and revelations which congeal around the character of William Yate, which Kendrick Smithyman deems tediously familiar, not news to those that know their missionary fathers and the catalogued holdings of the Church Missionary Society, Hocken and Turnbull libraries. Smithyman’s comments occur in the context of a review of the Reed publication for the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* but the target of his bored cynicism is not Binney—who also thinks these events have been exaggerated and overexposed—but Frank Sargeson who, in his *Landfall* review of the same book, had once again dragged the same old skeletons from the closet of colonial history.13 Twice then, first in the 1830s in the fraught circles of the

12 Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xii.

Church Missionary Society and 140 years later in the strained debate between Binney, the trained historian, and Sargeson, the autodidactic writer, the significance of Yate’s published *Account* is eclipsed by the notoriety that subsequently and repeatedly surrounds his person.

The general reader learns from Binney’s introduction that after two years in England touring and lecturing for the Church Missionary Society, Yate sailed for New Zealand in the company of his sister, intending to resume his activities with the Bay of Islands mission. As Binney tells it,

In June 1836, his ship, the *Prince Regent*, reached Sydney, where Yate agreed to act temporarily as chaplain at the fashionable St James’ Church, vacant upon the sudden death of its incumbent. While serving in this capacity, rumours were circulated about him which prevented his return to missionary work and led to his dismissal from the CMS.

Yate was “warned” of gossip to the effect that he had had homosexual relations with the third officer of the *Prince Regent*, [Edwin] Denison, by two of his fellow passengers, the Reverend Richard Taylor and John Armitstead, a Sydney lawyer. Later, it was argued that “a mass of information” could be produced of similar relations in New Zealand, “of sufficient weight to crush a host.”

In the weeks and months following Yate’s return to Sydney, stories continued to surface which placed him in disturbing proximity to native youths as well as English officers so that his conduct in the mission schools of northern New Zealand came under as much anxious scrutiny as the relations said to have arisen aboard the *Prince Regent*.

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14 Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xvi.

15 Binney’s later investigations also turn up “notes” which suggest accusations were made which connected Yate with another of the *Prince Regent’s crew*, an ordinary seaman “improbably called Dick Deck.” The name, at least, has an allegorical appeal and seems to offer itself as a convenient placemaker of some midpoint on imperialism’s tired erotic ladder, some level between the officer and
On the advice of Bishop Broughton, Yate returned to England, hoping to have the rumours properly investigated, only to find that on the basis of information forwarded from Australia the Church Missionary Society had, in February 1837, already dissolved its connection with him. All Yate's attempts to have the case reopened and his character cleared were refused by the Society. According to Binney's reconstruction of events, "the only concession the Society made to the numerous objections received, was, from July 1837, to allow its members to read in confidence such documents as they held." It appears that most of this material pertained to Yate's conduct as observed on his passage out since "Samuel Marsden had failed to forward the papers collected together respecting Yate's behaviour in New Zealand and New South Wales," although Richard Taylor, one of the original shipboard telltales, apparently "prepared copies of depositions to be sent to England." Binney reveals that she cannot locate these statements in the Church Missionary Society Archives and makes final reference to other statements which remain unseen, namely "four of the affidavits made by Maori youths under cross-examination by the missionaries" which the Crown Prosecutor in New South Wales did not consider "to contain substantial evidence."

According to Binney, over the next six years Yate "made three attempts by pamphlet to have his case investigated"; the final pamphlet published in 1843 "contained a massive amount of evidence on his behalf, including a signed retraction of the original 'scandalous' reports taken from the first mate of the Prince Regent by [the lawyer] Armitstead, for the price of a 'bucket of ale.'" None of this lobbying impressed the Church Missionary Society or the Bishop of London who brought down a

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16 Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xvii-xviii.
17 Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xviii.
18 Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xviii.
19 Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xviii.
prohibition around the ex-missionary that prevented him holding a living in the British Isles. Yate maintained throughout his life "that the whole affair had been an 'unprincipled conspiracy' against him, to deprive him of the attractive position at St James, in favour of Taylor, and to take revenge for his rejection of both Taylor and Armitstead socially, when he reached the colony and his friends."\(^2\) With the forensic reconstruction complete, Binney weighs up the accusations, revelations and outcomes which hedged around Yate. She cites Taylor's defeated recognition that though to his mind Yate "was 'guilty of the grossest indecency of character,' he was not guilty of any 'actual crime'" before adding a seemingly meditative conclusion of her own, "the most probable verdict seems to be that although Yate was emotionally inclined to homosexuality, he was innocent of the physical act."\(^2\)

**Evidence**

It is perhaps not surprising that it is this summation and the "probable verdict" that Binney draws from it to which Sargeson takes exception. In his review of the Reed publication, he describes Binney as an unreliable informant in the matter of Yate's downfall:

She says, "Yate was 'warned' of gossip to the effect that he had had homosexual relations with the third officer of the *Prince Regent* . . . [but] the use of 'homosexual' is very questionable: the word was not invented until the late nineteenth century. . . . It would be interesting to know the exact terms used by Taylor and Armitstead, but Dr Binney is apparently unable to inform us."\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xix.

\(^2\) Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xix.

\(^2\) Sargeson, review of *An Account of New Zealand*, 302-3.
Binney appears to answer Sargeson’s point in a letter printed in the next issue of *Landfall.* She regards Sargeson’s taking exception to the anachronistic use of the term homosexual as a “pedantic” objection, as though it were just the kind of obtuse point that an amateur historian would make:

For a gentleman who is patently anti-academic in his bias, Mr Sargeson is curiously pedantic in his search for flaws in my introduction to William Yate’s *Account of New Zealand* . . . . One may be impressed by the information that the word ‘homosexual’ was not in use until the later nineteenth century . . . but need I use the Latin-derived term “sodomy,” for all its biblical authority, for the “most serious charges” which were “preferred” against Yate? These “charges” were specifically about his relationship with Mr [Edwin] Denison and subsequently, about earlier relationships with a number of Maori youths.

Binney suggests that she had been scrupulously avoiding the historically accurate term “sodomy” because of its moral weighting and implies that she favoured “homosexual” as a less judgmental term. Perhaps she’s annoyed that the liberal impulse that fuels the obfuscation is lost on or goes unthanked by the gay Sargeson but it seems to me she doesn’t answer his objection as he spells it out in full. Sargeson’s review argues that the interpretative consequences that follow the anachronistic deployment of the modern term confuse our recovery of those earlier relations. “It is surely as well for us to be clear on this matter if any clarity is possible” writes Sargeson, before going on to suggest that

nobody in the first half of last century thought in terms of “homosexuality.” There was of course, according to the law, “the abominable crime,” punishable by death; but this seriously-viewed felony was not, I think, particularly thought of as an affair of males since it could involve a male and a female, even a husband and wife (and in any case since the

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invention of the new word homosexuality, the abominable crime is seen not to be, strictly speaking, a homosexual act). But warm expressions of affection between people of the same sex, provided there was discretion, no public indecency, and no side-issues such as children or violence, were ignored by the law, and (as we know from our literature as well as our historians), did not excite the public interest nowadays so familiar to us.25

He then cites Binney’s post-dated judgement that while Yate was physically innocent of certain acts he was emotionally guilty of a homosexual inclination before restating that "the nub of the matter is, surely, that no charge could ever be brought against Yate, because nobody had unequivocally alleged him to be guilty of the abominable crime."26

Sargeson’s objection is interesting not least because it seems to prefigure the lesson of the first volume of Foucault’s History of Sexuality.27 The substitution of homosexual for sodomite captures Yate for a modern understanding of sexuality composed less of signature acts than conceived as an holistic identity marked by internal divisions and denials, by disavowed impulse and the thwarted expression of an interior disposition. As Sargeson parenthetically points out, under this incoherent order it takes more—or less—than a certain sexual act to secure a sexuality; sodomy within the conjugal embrace fails to make either husband or wife a homosexual whereas crediting Yate with an emotional inclination unblunted by physicality nails the missionary to a now familiar sexual cross: repression. Sargeson, in his own assessment of Yate’s career, avoids anything resembling the kind of conclusive diagnostic summary that Binney

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25 Sargeson, review of An Account of New Zealand, 303.
26 Sargeson, review of An Account of New Zealand, 303.
provides, restoring him to the ambiguous dispensations which sheltered him during his time among the Maori:

So Dr Binney's physical act and Mr Taylor's grossest indecency of character boil down to the endearing fondlings which Mr Yate without much doubt bestowed upon the Maoris whom he much loved, and by whom (as is clear from their letters), he was himself much loved. He writes in his book of their ready affection, tears of farewell and smothering kisses. "A New Zealander's love is all outside: it is in his eyes and his mouth," as he says they told him.28

Sargeson maintains rather than dispels the definitional opacity which clouds Yate's conduct from the contemporary gaze.29 If Binney confuses the modern and the

28 Sargeson, review of An Account of New Zealand, 303.

29 Smithyman expresses an irritation with Sargeson's obfuscation of these matters in both the Landfall engagement with Binney and his earlier fictional dialogue between Yate and Samuel Butler, another colonial identity around whom suspicions of unspeakable relations with men unfailingly congeal. Smithyman, review of An Account of New Zealand, 436 and Sargeson, "An Imaginary Conversation," Landfall 20, no. 4 (1966): 349-57. Smithyman identifies how Sargeson, while seeming impatient with sexual euphemism, himself veils the missionary's actions in affective metaphor in the confessional he imagines unfolding over teacups passed between Yate and Butler:

As the dialogue develops we have the case put to us that Yate, when a collegian, had "longings" which were "disciplined," and that later, as the direct outcome of his frustrated infatuation, he found solace in Polynesia:

I was indiscreet. There are times for every one of us, it is something known to us all, when there is no answer to what we must endure in this world . . . there is no answer, no remedy—except the comfort, the protection we may find in a pair of enclosing arms.

How much are we to supposed to attach to that "I was indiscreet?" And later, in the Conversation, when Yate talks of failing to discern a sense of sin it is still uncertain whether we are to understand that Sargeson's Yate did pass from longing to action. At the end of Yate's penultimate speech the indication is that he committed no overt act. We conclude that while there may have been "smothering kisses" or "enclosing arms," there was no more than these.

Smithyman, review of An Account of New Zealand, 436. Sargeson's writing works hard to secure a space for the revelation of male-male erotics protected from charges of sexual criminality. Historically, the epistemological and social space through which the difficult relation between the avowal and denial of homosexuality has been written and lived has gone by the name of the closet. It should not surprise us that Sargeson, whose own homosexuality remains the open secret of New Zealand letters, is
historical, Sargeson confounds or blurs the border between the man and his text, setting up house at the crowded intersection of European and native avowal. Such overlaps, and the interpretative effects which are generated through them, are endemic to the discourses that cohere around discussion of Yate’s “downfall,” as though a male body, once pinioned by sexual suspicion, needs be meaningful.

Revision and Repetition

The question of Yate’s ruin was taken up again by Binney who, some years after her tangle with Sargeson, published “Whatever Happened to Poor Mr Yate?” an essay carrying the odd subtitle “An Exercise in Voyeurism.” In the 1975 article, Binney revises her diagnostic assessment of Yate in the light of her own further investigations in historical archives. Her belated discussion of the depositions and findings gathered as the case against him in New Zealand leads to some startling retractions and reversals. Her previous meditations on Yate’s thwarted emotionality are swept aside by her new confidence that physical acts did occur between the missionary and his “Native Boys.”

This is Binney, in 1975:

What appalled the New Zealand missionaries was the discovery that with many of these young men [the writers of the letters included in the Account], Yate had experienced sexual intimacies. . . . Piripi was to swear before the missionaries Richard Davis, William Williams and George Clark that he had practised mutual masturbation [for which Binney provides the Maori] (ka titoitoi maua) with Yate. The other three affidavits are of the same content, Samuel Kohe

entangled in these problematics of sexual knowledge; nor should his critics think it easy to escape them. Sargeson was still being caught out by them as late as 1977 when, in an attempt to make his contribution to New Zealand’s debating of homosexual law reform, he tried to persuade Radio New Zealand to broadcast the Yate-Butler dialogue only to have it referred to the religious programmer. See Michael King’s Frank Sargeson: A Life (Auckland: Viking, 1995), 407-8. On the persistence and inescapability of homosexual closets, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

30 Yate’s charges were those youths that lived as part of the mission population, taking lessons at the “Native Boys’ School” until they themselves would take charge of mission schools for Maori. For Yate’s description of the several mission schools, see An Account of New Zealand, 182-3.
adding that Yate had told him that before marriage all Europeans acted thus. In the deposition given by Pehi, he stated that, as well as masturbation, Yate had practised oral sex on him, placing his penis in Pehi’s mouth [strangely Binney provides the Latin] (*peni in ore imposito*), for which pleasure he paid a pound of tobacco. . . . The missionaries, who had originally rejected earlier gossip in circulation since at least 1832, came to the reluctant conclusion, after their investigations in 1836, that he had been ‘habitually’ guilty “to an awful extent” of the crime, alluded to in Romans 1, 27, of lusting after men; a body of evidence had come forward so circumstantial and so uniformly consistent, they said, “as to leave no room for a shadow of a doubt.”

The biblical text was familiar to all the mission residents—Yate himself had overseen the translation of this particular scripture and its printing in Maori sometime in 1832 or 1833—however Paul’s lesson was lost on at least one of the native converts who “thought something much more terrible must be being alluded to when [in the aftermath of the inquiry] St Paul’s epistle to the Romans was cited to them as dreadful warning.” The missionary response to the witness of these young men was generally Old Testament in its hermeneutic cast: the shadow of ignorance once lifted revealed the workings of divine retribution. William Williams retrospectively interpreted the rise in Maori mortality evidenced in the history of the mission as disclosing the wrath of God:

There has been much sickness among the Natives for some years past, and we wondered at the cause. I believe that numbers have been cut off on this very account, and not less from 200 to 400 persons have perished in the plague.


32 Binney, “An Exercise in Voyeurism,” 115. For Yate’s summary of his involvement with the translation and publication of scripture into Maori, see *An Account of New Zealand*, 230-3.

“In an attempt to avoid continuing divine retribution,” Binney informs us, “the New Zealand missionaries held a solemn day of fast, consigned to fire all Yate’s property, and shot his horse.” Though God’s wrath was said to have fallen among the native population and Yate’s belongings unto his very horse had been made available for disciplinary spectacle, the sinful man, as the members of the Church Missionary Society recognised, proved beyond the reach of human law. As Binney now admits:

The dilemma was this, however: there was no evidence that Yate had practised sodomy, that is (pace Frank Sargeson) “connexion per anum.” William Williams specifically stated that “This was not so,” or as Busby put it, with his usual infelicity, “There is one remarkable point which you ought to be made acquainted with . . . the unhappy man . . . was not rising to the full extent of the Crime which human laws have made penal, or which called down in times of old the divine wrath—It is this—that it did not take place per anum but it would appear merely by the instrumentality of the thighs.”

The ambiguities about Yate have stemmed from the fact that no legal case against him was possible. It was decided, after examinations of the four affidavits sent from New Zealand, together with the circumstantial testimonies on his behaviour on the return voyage to New Zealand in 1836, that no charges could be proven according to law. This was the difficulty in which the Church Missionary Society found itself.

Binney’s rifling through the archives seems to return us to and confirm Sargeson’s point that in the early part of the nineteenth century accusations of misconduct between males stand or fall on the disputation of sodomy. But we should not hurry that conclusion. It is almost the least interesting thing uncovered here. Binney might be said to be beating a retreat in the face of the new revelations; sodomy starts to look like a safe place, a legal loophole or point of law that offers containment where those

other more mobile activities or pleasures seem always to require translation—into Maori, into Latin—or prompt still more exegetical departure and doubling. We might put it this way: in the 1970s, no less than in the 1830s, effects are generated around an imagined sexual connection between men and, further, that the stumbling self-correcting entry into historical scholarship seems doomed to repeat the foreclosure of the initial inquiry. The moment at which the Church Missionary society hierarchy abandoned the inquiry into Yate’s behaviour was when they recognised that the relations described within the affidavits were not forensically sodomitical. Inevitably Binney finds herself in a related interpretative cul-de-sac as she is forced to conclude that Yate’s sustained attempt to have the allegations against him heard in court indicates that he too knew his invulnerability to the letter of this law.36

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36 Binney seems to attribute a cynicism, if not agency, to Yate in these matters. It is probably worth noting that in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, accusations of sodomitical behaviour tended to circulate inside courtrooms in the context of defamation suits. That is, it was not generally the case that courts were convened to try men for sodomy but that men so slandered called courts to try their accusers. That is the situation Oscar Wilde found himself in some sixty years after Yate’s repeated request to have his case heard were constantly refused. Christopher Craft provides a brilliant double reading of Wilde’s trial and his work:

It is one of the bleaker ironies of English literary history that even as [The Importance of Being Earnest] was brashly entertaining audiences at the St. James Theatre, where it had opened on 14 February 1895, its author was subjected to a fierce and dogged institutional chastisement, the prosecution and persecution of the famous trials of 1895. From 5 April, when Wilde was arrested for “acts of gross indecency with another male person” until late in the same month, when George Alexander was compelled by public opinion to remove Earnest from the boards, the two spectacles ran concurrently: the one all gay insouciance, the other pure bourgeois retribution; the one a triumph of evanescent, if not quite indeterminate, signification, the other a brutal travesty in which the author would be nailed to the specificity of his “acts.” Thus juxtaposed, these two spectacles compose an almost too ready diptych of crime and punishment, as in Auden’s “nightmare Pantomime Transformation Scene in which . . . the country house in never-never Hertfordshire turns into the Old Bailey, the features of Lady Bracknell into those of Mr. Justice Wills.” The very facility of these transpositions—Auden’s and my own—indicates the volatile reversibility of the sexual and verbal inversions that Wilde delighted in practising and perfecting. Predicated upon adroit manipulation of a sodomitical “pose,” Wildean pleasure had always flirted with its own susceptibility to disciplinary relapse, a danger that first honed the edge of Wilde’s enjoyment and later incited his disastrous prosecution of the libel charge against Queensberry. The advent of the trials marked an implacable shift to an institutional context in which the slip and slide of serious Bunburyism would be frozen by the cold face of Gradgrindian fact.
This repetition seems to me unsatisfactory; there has to be a way of rethinking what is at stake in the abuse of William Yate. Consider this. Given that Binney and the Church Missionary Society members before her accept the evidence against Yate amassed in New Zealand and judge that the couplings described in the affidavits did occur, they all seem singularly uninterested in those embraces. They spend no time in imagining them, in giving them any social or erotic profile—in that respect Binney has abandoned the psychologising impulse of the introduction to the facsimile edition of the Account—whereas I want to suggest it might be more helpful to suspend the impulse to convict or acquit Yate and spend more time elaborating the shape those pleasures might have taken in the minds of Yate's contemporaries whether or not they did transpire.

**Conversion**

Consider this as well. As Binney informs us, in the process of investigating Yate's conduct and of securing the affidavits from Pehi, Piripi and the others, the New Zealand missionaries are convinced

that these practices of Yate's, together with the habit bordering on prostitution, of paying for them with gifts, had been a common occurrence with a number of young men. James

Christopher Craft, *Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850 -1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 138-9. When courts were called to try sodomy, they were often courts martial and, as the work of recent historians has shown in the example of the Royal Navy, such courts retreated behind the exactness of the legal prohibition, which required evidence of seminal emission *in anum*, in their reluctance to convict men of this capital offence. Exceptions to this rule tended to occur in times of war or mutiny when the ban on sodomy became the most convenient way of policing other, treasonable, acts. See Arthur N. Gilbert, "The Africaine Courts Martial: A Study of Buggery and the Royal Navy," *Journal of Homosexuality* 1 (1974): 111-22 and "Buggery and the British Navy, 1700-1861," *Journal of Homosexuality* 10 (1976): 72-98. Likewise, it occurs to me that the sodomitical suspicions falling on Yate turn out to be an effective means for the Church Missionary Society to discipline him for other professional misdemeanours less easy to police: his leaving for England in 1894 without permission, his publishing *An Account of New Zealand* without the knowledge or consent of his peers, his raising of English funds for the church at Waimate against the will of both the missionary society and the settlers. For information about Yate's unpopularity, see Judith Binney, "William Yate," in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin for the Department of Internal Affairs, 1990) 1:611-2.
Busby, citing their enquiries, talked of sixty or more—but added, hesitantly, that being rather deaf and apt to mishear numbers, he must surely be incorrect. But he may not have been, as, according to William Williams' reckoning sent to Marsden in November 1836, 'no less than 50 Natives... have been with him, and I doubt not but there are not fewer than 100.'

In these accounts the numbers keep multiplying; it seems the easiest thing in the world for these men of God to imagine that Yate had shared sexual intimacies with each and every mission boy. Binney also cites Samuel Marsden's blunt declaration, "I had no doubt of his Guilt from the first moment I was informed of his Conduct—and no one could Change my mind," though she neglects to mention that despite, or perhaps because, he had no doubt as to the truth of the accusations Marsden dragged himself in his infirmity from his home in New South Wales to the Bay of Islands where he could investigate matters first hand. Marsden, like Williams, had no difficulty in assuming that Yate had enjoyed such connection with all his Maori charges. Both men believed that the private scenes of persuasion that Yate shared with young Maori men in preparation for their conversion to the Christian faith were by rule, not exception, marked by such pleasures. Conversion by Yate in these contemporaneous accounts is always a double seduction and the success of Yate's method—to which the letters in the Account are said to bear eloquent witness—smuggles in the suggestion that sexual congress slickened his recruitment drive; who better to further an evangelical dream conceived as the initiation of the heathen subject into the knowledge of sin? Binney's discussion of these letters tends to repeat this peculiar interpretative effect. In her account, the evangelist's "emotionalism" converts others to its cause precisely


38 Quoted in Binney, "An Exercise in Voyeurism," 111. Marsden's twisted investment in the Yate affair and his obsessive desire to uncover corruption at first hand can be gleaned from the very differing accounts of the scandal contained in Eric Ramsden's Marsden and the Missions: Prelude to Waitangi (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1936), 20-44 and Bill Wannan's Very Strange Tales: The Turbulent Times of Samuel Marsden (Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1962), 163-9.
because it maps onto a native difference; the Christian magnification of sin and depravity finds itself at home in a culture “without inhibition.” Once suspicion falls on Yate’s conduct, it seems his methods are infallible.

This duality plagues the representation of Yate’s vocation. William Williams was distressed precisely “because the young men involved were credible witnesses, being of ‘good character,’ many of them now baptised members of the new church who ‘were seduced into this vice in the days of their ignorance.’” Yate, with his knowledge of Maori and Latin, ka titoitoi maua and fellatio, operated under several

39 Binney, “An Exercise in Voyeurism,” 113. This is what Binney has to say about the letters composed by Yate’s candidates:

Among Yate’s papers there is a unique body of letters written to him from young Maori converts; all expose the concentration of his teachings on sin. They also reveal the particular attachment of his pupils for him. These letters, more than Yate’s own writings, reveal the dilemma of the missionary vulnerable to sensuality. Yate transferred to his pupils the idea of the need first to awaken to the perils of the unregenerate soul and the carnal energies of man. He instigated among them a practice of writing zealous letters to himself . . . all of which are emotionally very highly charged.

Binney, “An Exercise in Voyeurism,” 113. The letters written to Yate by his Maori converts and published by him as part of An Account of New Zealand are certainly unique, freighted as they are with a kind of doubled awkwardness, that of Christian catechism certainly but also of the epistolary posture itself:

God will teach us; but we want you to tell us every day about it; and to let us ask you, as we formerly did, the meaning of this and the meaning of that. This is all my saying to you.—How do you do, how do you do? and how do all your friends do?

Henare Piripi Unahanga, in An Account of New Zealand by William Yate, 279. While Yate includes these letters in his book to testify to the wonders of native conversion and Binney sees in them evidence of Yate’s correspondents “highly charged” emotional regard for him, I cannot help but read them as energised by nothing so much as a frenzied joy in being letter-writers at last, as more fascinated by the processes than the effects of writing:

This is all my book to you—this is all my writing, mine, the son of TEMORENGA, sitting in the verandah of his house at Manawenua. Perhaps you can read this book—perhaps not. Bad are my fingers for writing, mine.

The son of Temorenga, in An Account of New Zealand by William Yate, 262.

incoherent dispensations; he was less a disobedient missionary than an exemplary one. As Foucault reminds us, we should not be surprised at this:

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of manoeuvres and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.  

Christian pedagogy has it both ways, being fuelled by impulses which it can simultaneously deny, stigmatise or reject. The intensity of the language of the *Account of New Zealand* and of that employed by the Maori candidates in their letters to Yate derives from scripture and insistently invokes broadly erotic possibilities that would be violently repudiated in other contexts.  

That contradiction is unleashed when the four converted speak of Yate’s love and their love for him in forms of legal testimony.

**Community**

One of the critical or hermeneutic effects of the refusal to consider the nature of the transactions described in the sworn depositions of the Maori youths is the continued sequestering of the mission residents into separate populations: European and Maori. Binney cites the missionary Richard Davis as one who, when reflecting on Yate’s conduct, “recognise[d] that such acts were not unknown in Maori society” but the

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41 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 103.

recognition seemed of no consequence to Yate’s brethren. To them the grapplings of Yate and the Maori boys were strangely transient; they did not outlast their moment, or his presence in the colony. The missionaries did not pursue the alleged sins as they may have reverberated among the native population. The young men involved—for four, sixty or one hundred of them—were not considered marked by that crime which was itself erased with the burning of Yate’s belongings and the shooting of his horse. There is, perhaps, something in the exemption of the Maori from blame and in the spectacular eradication won by the firing of Yate’s possessions which suggests the peculiar contours of the missionary understanding of his fall. Yate’s sexual sins were not figured as crimes against the Maori but as crimes against his own community.

According to the journal of the Reverend Richard Taylor—one of the two men who first drew official scrutiny to Yate—the New Zealand missionaries, having unveiled the deeds perpetrated in their midst, deemed Waimate, the site of Yate’s residence, “the Vale of Achan.” When they thought of Yate, when they had to give his unspeakable crimes a communicable form, the Old Testament example the New Zealand missionaries invoked was the fate of Achan whose story is told in the Book of Joshua. Achan, in defiance of a command from Joshua, took of the spoil from Jericho and hid in his tent that which had been reserved exclusively for God. Achan did not confess his


44 The reference to Taylor’s journal entry of 13 December 1836 is given in Binney, introduction to An Account of New Zealand, xvii, n. 41. The account of this day that Ramsden provides likewise privileges this understanding of Yate’s sin, and the scene of its unfolding, through the invocation of biblical precedent:

When Marsden visited New Zealand . . . he discovered instance after instance of Yate’s misconduct. Taylor declared that the former had the confessions of six of Yate’s “deluded victims.” The missionaries said they could send at least one hundred more. To “avert the wrath of an offended God” they kept a day of solemn fast and humiliation. Yate’s property was burnt by his former colleagues: they even shot his inoffensive horse. Then, before returning to their homes they conferred upon the scene of William Yate’s labours the title of “Vale of Achan.”

Ramsden, Marsden and the Missions, 36.
theft until Joshua, having cast lots, confronted him. His admission of guilt gained him a place in the world to come though his sin cost him his life as he and all his extended family were stoned, their possessions and the devoted goods from the fallen city burned alongside them, such punishment being exacted in the Valley of Achor. As most commentary on these verses underlines, Achan’s crime was the first Israelite act of disobedience after the tribes of Israel crossed the Jordan; his death the first divinely commanded punishment in the new land and the story stands as evidence of the Israelite conception of the solidarity of the community and its perilous collectivity. Until the thief was detected the Israelites were unfavoured by God, being defeated at Ai; the sin of one was imputed to the entire community and by the same rule Achan’s family and his goods had to perish together with him at the appointed place, which then took his name, Achor.\footnote{It seems to me the book of Joshua might tell us something about what was going on in Waimate after the disclosure of Yate’s covetous acts. Joshua, by divine sleuthing, detected the sinner among the tribes of Israel. This discovery led to an act of extreme social consolidation in the new land which was not an act against an alien people, the sacking of Jericho, but the violent sacrifice of the alien within—the eradication of all trace of Achan and his kind. The wide cast of the purge confirms that Achan’s sin was against his community as much as it was against his God. This is a chilling text through which to read the actions of the New Zealand missionaries. Yate was not the first sinner among the Church Missionary Society in the Bay of Islands—some ten years earlier Thomas Kendall had fallen into adultery with a Maori girl of seventeen, Kendall’s successor had lapses into drunkenness—but while these failings caused the mission more than a little embarrassment they did not occasion the vehement repudiation that was given over to Yate’s sin, the day dedicated to erasing what was going on in Waimate.}

remained of him among them. It is as though Yate’s sinning with other men is the crime the mission had been waiting to detect, the crime involving a Christian man which required that a spectacle of expulsion and eradication be staged. It is a depressing thought that suggests that the consolidation of the Christian collectivity in the new land waits on this sin. The repudiation of Yate, unlike that of Kendall say, marks the community’s arrival in this place; it was the necessary expulsion that symbolically enacted their occupation of this space as their own. The detection of this particular sin at Waimate cleansed the ranks of the Church Missionary Society and made of its members proto-New Zealanders.

Commentary on Joshua 7 also offers an etiological explanation of Achor’s name. Joshua declared that Achan had troubled Israel and that God would trouble him;

46 Binney’s biography of Kendall enacts further peculiar logics of colonial repudiation and retrieval. In The Legacy of Guilt: A Life of Thomas Kendall (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1968) the adulterous missionary is captured for liberal appropriation: his fall is read as a descent into self-knowledge and the complications of colonial history; his sin as sign of an empathetic crossing over to the Maori. Binney’s romanticism, however, makes no purchase on Yate’s errancy. If her first essay respects only the latency of the emotional homosexual, bestowing a morality on Yate’s celibacy, her second, composed in the light of the affidavits, abandons him to a sad, lonely, ultimately degrading lifestyle. Poor Mr Yate, indeed:

In the end, Yate remains an enigmatic figure. The intense emotionalism which characterised the Evangelicals and constituted the basis of their faith was closer to the surface in Yate than in many of his brethren. . . . In his letters, he reveals the characteristic self-righteousness of the Evangelicals. His conviction of his own innocence seems never to have wavered through the long drawn-out controversy over Denison . . . But in the problem that primarily concerns us, the degree to which he responded personally, and against his religious convictions, to empathies within Maori society, he still remains obscure. Nor, with the evidence available, can we do more than speculate on how he reconciled his protestations of innocence with the sexual relationships he undoubtedly pursued with “his boys,” pupils in Christ. If we can finally end the whole sad tale of William Yate, it is to say that he was not the victim of a false scandal and colonial gossip-mongering. If it is still true that, as he observed, when dealing with the arbiter of missionary fortunes, the Reverend Samuel Marden, “to be accused was always to be found guilty,” it should also be said that Yate’s tragedy lies, not so much in his persecution, as a man who was technically innocent yet morally guilty, but in the torment of mind he must have undergone in reconciling his desires with his Christian morality.

the site of his execution was known therefore as "trouble" (in Hebrew "akor") and the word play is developed in Chronicles where Achan's name is rendered "Achar."\textsuperscript{47} The Reverend Taylor's compression "the Vale of Achan" serves the same metonymy; the man of trouble bestows his name on the place of trouble with which he, in Taylor's phrase, is indistinguishable. Waimate is thus the troubled place, Yate's sin one of location. As in Joshua the sin is eclipsed by its detection and punishment, which double motion enacts its placement and secures the arrival of the community in the new land, the inflamed place is now marked as theirs.

This logic of metonymic contagion, the way the crimes alleged of Yate cast a shadow on the place in which they were said to occur, enables a rethinking of the significance of sodomy as the sin of location. As Michael Warner has noted, in an essay on the figurations of Sodom mobilised in New English discourses of Puritanism, sodomy like the much later coinage lesbianism . . . implies [in both Puritan and modern usages], at however fantasmatic a level, a map of sexual knowledges and exotic origins. No other terms in the language of sexuality have a comparable etymology, as though unlike all other sexual acts—if they even are acts—these two were practised not by individuals but by cities, islands, or nations. This hidden fantasy about the geography of sex continues to exert some influence, primarily in the assumption that sodomitical and lesbian sex are more germane to public politics than other kinds of sex. . . . [There is] a long tradition of defining sodomy as a uniquely public concern, a tradition in which fantasy geographies have often been invested with apocalyptic vehemence. The public imagination of sex brought about in Puritanism continues to mark national discourse.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{47} See the entry for Achor in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, 56.

There is then a tradition that invests sexual relations between men with significance to the social body; the policing of these acts and their revilement is part of defining the community, and further the nation, by imagining everything it is not.

It seems to me that the way in which Marsden, Taylor, Williams and the mission brethren availed themselves of the pleasures Yate was alleged to have taken with Maori men—his masturbation of four, or sixty, even one hundred of them and they of him, his putting his penis in one mouth, then another and another beyond count—partakes of this kind of fantasy. Its frenzy is spent to effect an exemplary disciplining of the collective though its violence is only and always directed at specific bodies, at men like Yate—in his absence, his horse—or, in this century, at men like Frank Sargeson. If the missionary imagination detects and punishes the sexual sin between men to ensure the survival of the community in its new home then the legacy of the Church Missionary Society may be that our godliness and then our nationhood are made dependent on the erasure of this difference within, perhaps especially as that difference tends to map onto a native similitude—it is as Taylor said “a sin not unknown to the Maori.”

The crimes alleged of Yate might be available to alternative imaginings, replayed as often in our minds as in, say, Marsden’s and thus recovered for other symbolic projects. Those acts—furtive or sweet, with whatever degree of mutuality, coercion, or shared vulnerability we bestow upon them—can be made to speak the possibilities of encounter as well as its abuses or, as is promised in Hosea 1:15, the valley of Achor will be made a door of hope. The missionaries secure the solidarity of their ministry with the expulsion of sodomitical dissonance but the discursive technologies of detection and expulsion are not foolproof. The fall of William Yate, the strange thought of sexual connection between men at a mission station, might also open

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49 For a discussion of New World texts that suggests that the colonial imaginary is particularly prone to a desire to other its own desires, see Jonathan Goldberg, Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).
a rift that reveals the instabilities that mine the imagined community, calling into doubt the boundaries and exclusions the community assumes.⁵⁰

**Bust**

Sargeson had more reason than most to distrust notions of commonality based on the denial of difference and to be concerned by the fate of William Yate. Born Norris Davey, he was as a young man the churchy type, still an active member of Hamilton’s Methodist Young Men’s Bible class into his twenties. In Wellington, in September 1929, when he was twenty-seven years old he met an older man in a public place and was invited to return to his rented room. He went and “later in the evening, when the two . . . were masturbating each other . . . detectives forced their way into the room and arrested them both for indecent assault [on a male].”⁵¹ Though found guilty, Norris Davey escaped the fury of the law by deflecting it toward his sexual partner; under the direction of his counsel he posed as the victim of the other man’s persuasion and testified against him. Sargeson’s biographer Michael King provides one way of reading the entrapment of Norris Davey. He writes of a man who “after accepting privately for at least three years that he was homosexual . . . had been forced to deny this aspect of his nature and identity, to act as if it was the abomination society believed it to be, to give evidence against a fellow homosexual who had wished him no harm, and to

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⁵⁰ In the wake of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) and George Mosse’s *Nationalism and Sexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) much has been written about the denials enforced in the name of an imagined community. The anthology *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992) conveniently gathers together a selection of essays on this subject, two of which are of interest here. The first is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “Nationalisms and Sexualities in the Age of Wilde” which reminds us that we cannot know in advance how those two terms, nationalism and sexuality, might destabilise each other; the second is Lee Edelman’s “Tearooms and Sympathy, or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet” with its reading of the tearoom arrest of Walter Jenkins, Lyndon Johnson’s chief of staff, three weeks before America’s 1964 Presidential election, which provides a suggestive bridge to the affairs of Frank Sargeson and his role in founding a canon of national literature. A longer version of Edelman’s essay appears in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁵¹ King, *Frank Sargeson*, 93.
testify that he would never again participate in such activities." In the courtroom Norris Davey repudiated the sexuality abhorrent to the state. It would be nice to think that outside it, on the hospitable ground that was his Uncle’s farm, he reinvented himself as the sexually dissident writer, Frank Sargeson, whose prototype New Zealand fictions inscribe—in strangely graphic ways—multiple pathways of male identification. Yet this version of things, while it has its consolations, is in danger of neglecting to address the way in which the space of writing is continuous with the juridical space of the courtroom. Both are adept at staging elaborate rituals of erasure through which a homosexuality known and enjoyed can be readily denied.  

52 King, Frank Sargeson, 95.

53 The most ambitious interpretative analysis of Sargeson’s fiction remains Simon During’s discussion of “The Hole That Jack Dug.” Simon During, “Toward a Revision of Local Critical Habits,” And 1 (1983): 79-85. Kai Jensen’s recent “Frank at Last” seems to me to mark a regression in Sargeson criticism not an advance. Kai Jensen, “Frank at Last,” in Opening the Book: New Essays on New Zealand Writers, ed. Mark Williams and Michele Leggott (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995): 68-82. Jensen rescues Sargeson from the critical closet only to smother his gayness all the more effectively in hermeneutic banality; he reads the male relations represented in Sargeson’s fictions in terms of a homosexual subtext that is no longer possible so much as ubiquitous. King’s biography Frank Sargeson is sabotaged by a similar liberal impulse; in his rush to accept Sargeson’s sexual involvement with men, King refuses to think through the consequences and complications of the compulsory closeting of homosexuality. A more suggestive approach to thinking about Sargeson’s literary strategies and alibis and those of his critics might be found in Bill Pearson’s autobiographical piece, “Beginnings and Endings,” in which he considers the evolution of his own novel Coal Flat:

It was to be about a sensitive young teacher . . . faced with a problem child in an unsympathetic mining town, a man who has hardly admitted to himself that he is a homosexual. He is falsely accused of a sexual offence against the boy and goes to gaol. Later I changed the outcome: he is cleared of the charge but in the course of his defence he has revealed enough about himself to make his return to the community more difficult than before. It was to be a very subjective novel full of anxiety and guilt.

. . . . I was now planning an optimistic ending. The undeclared deviant hero was to be won to honest normality, but during a severe revision . . . I dropped the homosexual theme entirely. It was something I couldn’t handle without trying to write a kind of novel I didn’t want to write.

From a footnote in Binney’s second article, we learn that “For a period after Yate’s return to England, he, his sister, Sarah, and Denison [the third officer of the Prince Regent on whom his immoral attentions were said to have focused] lived together” though how happy that domestic arrangement may have been Binney does not surmise.\(^5^4\) Thwarted by the refusal of the Church Missionary Society to investigate his case despite his pamphlets and the intervention of gentleman on his behalf, Yate was banned from taking any permanent position as a clergyman.\(^5^5\) I remain dependent on Binney for a description of the falling arc of Yate’s clerical career: it was not until 1846, under powerful patronage, that Yate was able to take up employment as a chaplain to an abandoned chapel for seamen in Dover where he “continued to work among sailors for the remainder of his life,” some thirty years.\(^5^6\) The felicity of Yate’s final appointment to the Mission for Seamen would not have been lost on Sargeson, many of his own fictions transpiring in similarly, admittedly seedier, homosocial locations: doss houses; shearing sheds; cheap boarding rooms. The Sailor’s Home at Dover might have seemed to him another of those male institutions through which puritan culture regulates relations between men, thereby seeming to sanction the recognitions and initiations—the avuncular devotions—that it simultaneously disavows.

Coda

The juxtaposition of the missionary and the native, the clerical cloth and the *pareu*, by now constitute a vernacular shorthand for a recognisable sexuality, even a cliché of eroticism. Pierre and Gilles’ pink hibiscus-framed *Saint Pierre Marie Chanel* (fig. 4.1) has Chanel giving the last rites to a young native man dying from a beautiful

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\(^5^5\) Two of those patrons were Sir W. Edward Parry and General Cosmo Gordon, both of whom had a Maori namesake among Yate’s favoured converts in New Zealand. See Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xv, n. 35 and n. 36.

\(^5^6\) Binney, introduction to *An Account of New Zealand*, xx.
Figure 4.1. Pierre and Gilles, *Saint Pierre Marie Chanel*, 1990. Painted photograph, 84.7 x 59.5 cm. Postcard from Pierre et Gilles exhibition, Wellington City Gallery, New Zealand.
wound on some B-grade beach. Decoratively excessive in the style of Pierre and Gilles, *Saint Pierre Marie Chanel* does not distinguish itself from their signature representations of hyper-iconic moments of romance and mortality. If there is no longer any whiff of scandal surrounding such a pose, it is nevertheless a reminder of how closely, under the rubric of the Pacific, run the tropes of seduction and conversion, pastoral and sexual attentions.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{57} If this image hung entirely innocuously in the Wellington City Gallery—all the scandal attaching itself to *Glory Hole*, an image which the city council thought best displayed inside a private viewing booth and in which a tattooed young leather-man, his face dripping ecstatically with semen, grips a still erect penis—then it can yet raise a gasp in anthropological circles, all the outrage centring on that complacent white hand resting on a tapu Polynesian head. *Pierre et Gilles*, exhibition catalogue with an introduction by Jonathan Turner (Sydney: Bloxham and Chambers, 1995).
Chapter Five

Tropical Rearwindow:
Gauguin’s *Manao Tupapau* and
Primitivist Ambivalence

"I'm not much on rearwindow ethics"
Grace Kelly, responding to Jimmy Stewart's
belated ethical/optical crisis,
in Hitchcock's *Rearwindow*

This chapter articulates an anxiety or hesitation I have about the way in which the term “ambivalence” has become a mainstay of analyses of colonial discourse. The readings which make up this thesis themselves rely on ambivalence to designate a space of incoherence which might be found in each of the South Pacific texts under discussion: Cook’s voyage, Melville’s narrative and Yates’ career. Furthermore, in the discussion of each, the term ambivalence gathers to itself not one but two privileged adjectives: colonial and sexual. This discussion of Gauguin’s painting of 1892, *Manao Tupapau*, is an inquiry into the way those two phrases, colonial ambivalence and sexual ambivalence, overlap in some recent critical writing about European primitivism.

**Sadistic Gaze**

Two recent and influential feminist discussions of Gauguin’s Pacific *oeuvre*
have no time for ambivalence when it comes to analysing Gauguin’s imbrication in the
aesthetic practices and ruses of imperialism. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, in "Going Native," argues that Gauguin's primitivist representation of Polynesian women reveals a "gendered discourse" which is continuous with a colonialist "dynamic of knowledge/power relations which admits of no reciprocity," and which dates to the "expeditionary literature generated by Captain Cook, Wallis, Bougainville and the countless successive voyagers to the South Seas, [in which] the colonial encounter is first and foremost the encounter with the body of the Other." Griselda Pollock's Avant-Garde Gambits, 1888-1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History, likewise cites the work of Paul Gauguin as supplying "the fantasy scenarios and the exotic mise-en-scène for not only masculinist but also imperialist narratives." A fin de siècle preoccupation with the exotic female body and its availability for visualisation fuels both of these analyses of Gauguin's primitivism, but it seems to me that the invocation of this "gendered discourse," founded as it is on a gaze that is both male—or phallic—and colonialist, obscures a more unsettling recognition. The body that compels interpretation in the Pacific, the body that incites hermeneutic anxiety, is not that of the native woman, but of the European male. To have it otherwise is, perhaps, to miss the peculiar vulnerabilities and denials staged in those paintings and writings and to foreclose, in the name of gender, questions of sexuality.

When Solomon-Godeau, in particular, invokes the male gaze what is she referring to? In a review article on the troubled if ubiquitous importation of psychoanalytic theory into film and media studies, Craig Saper reminds us that the concept of the gaze, now indispensable to film theory and, we might add, also making

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1 Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native," Art in America, 77, no. 7 (July 1989): 123-4. This statement is preliminary to a predictable—though problematic—conflation of the imagined and the real: "On one level, what is enacted is a violent history of colonial possession and cultural dispossession—real power over real bodies. On another level, this encounter will be endlessly elaborated within a shadow world of representations—a question of imaginary power over imaginary bodies." Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native," 124. Peter Brooks both endorses Solomon-Godeau's analysis and objects to it on the grounds that "such a claim does not do justice to the disruptive, interrogative force of Tahitian sexuality in Western discourse." Peter Brooks, "Gauguin's Tahitian Body," Yale Journal of Criticism 3, no. 2 (1990): 64.

inways into art criticism, was initially borrowed from psychoanalysis. Saper notes that as the concept has passed between those disciplines, it has retained some familiar modifiers and picked up a few more; the gaze more often than not is designated, or thought, phallic, patriarchal, male. His point is that such understandings of the visual and psychic dynamics of the gaze owe little to the Lacanian analysis from which they are said to derive. At worst, this gendering of the gaze has reduced its analytic power to the formulaic “men gaze at women” or, more clunkily, “men as desiring subjects gaze at women as objects.” These phrases, and the understandings of the gaze which they map, tend to be embedded in analyses of film or art that ascribe sadistic mastery to the agent that views and thereby collapse the operation of the gaze into that of vision. Such is the unacknowledged manoeuvre animating Solomon-Godeau’s article on Gauguin which bestows on him a capacity for violence, both imaginary and real:

There is, in short, a darker side to primitivist desire, one implicated in fantasies of imaginary knowledge, power and rape; and these fantasies, moreover, are sometimes underpinned by real power, by real rape. When Gauguin writes in the margin of the *Noa Noa* manuscript, “I saw plenty of calm-eyed women. I wanted them to be willing to be taken without a word, brutally. In a way [it was a] longing to rape,” we are on the border between the acceptable myth of the primitivist artist as sexual outlaw, and the relations of violence and domination that provide its historic and its psychic armature.

At a certain moment feminist film theory, in particular, assumed that the way to overturn the power relation implicit in this demonised male gaze was to attend to the women’s gaze, then later still, the lesbian’s. Kaja Silverman suggests the hopelessness and wrongheadedness of this wish:

We have at times assumed that [the] dominant scopic regime could be overturned by “giving” women the gaze, rather than by exposing the impossibility of anyone ever owning that

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4 Solomon-Godeau, “Going Native,” 125, original parentheses.
visual agency, or of him or herself escaping specularity. What must be demonstrated over and over again is that all subjects, male or female, rely for their identity upon the repertoire of culturally available images, and upon a gaze which, radically exceeding the libidinally vulnerable look, is not theirs to deploy.5

In art criticism this tendency to collapse the gaze into vision is exacerbated by the fact that its traditional theoretical lexicon has never quite escaped the anthropomorphic phalacy; even in its more formalist moments art criticism appeals to the "eye," so viewpoint implies viewer and perspective usually belongs to, or outrages, someone. In what follows I will reserve the term "look" for the kind of view that naturalises itself, that asks that we accept it as sight, as proceeding from an individual's position. The look, then, is associated with the function of the eyes, and we have come to think of those eyes as lodged within the pleasured body of a spectator, the usual suspect being the male voyeur. This allows me to keep "gaze" in hand for when I come to map the articulation of a scopic field which exceeds or disrupts vision. The gaze, as we will see, is an altogether more discontinuous notion, and has a disconcerting way of framing, or checking, that look.6 Both terms will be used in the analysis of Manao Tupapau, a painting in which the subject who looks is entangled in a gaze that exceeds the visual.

Retreat

Here is one version of Gauguin's Pacific career. In 1901, ten years after his first arrival in Tahiti and in a final attempt to elude civilisation, a jaded Paul Gauguin moved to the rumouredly cannibal Marquesas. There he built a studio which was a transposed and belated version of Te Faruru, the "Studio of the South Seas," he had

5 Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (New York: Routledge, 1992), 152.

6 In effect I wish to subvert the scopic paradigm that Solomon-Godeau and Pollock rely on, suggesting instead the inability of the look to reach or subjugate its object. As Kaja Silverman writes, "since the gaze always emerges for us within the field of vision, and since we ourselves are always being watched by it as we look, all binarisations of spectator and spectacle mystify the scopic relations in which we are held." Silverman, Male Subjectivity, 151.
created in Paris toward the end of 1893 on his return from Tahiti. The olive green and chrome yellow walls of Gauguin's metropolitan atelier had been hung with his unsold Tahitian paintings, and the light-flooded space also accommodated his sculpture, current work and the ethnographic collection of his Uncle Zizi. There, among those artefacts and other "flea-market exotica," he held weekly soirées, where he lectured about method, told stories from his travels, and played music to his assembled guests. Created eight years later, the Marquesan atelier, already a faded repetition, advertised primitivism and savagery in louder tones. This is Gavin Daws' description of Gauguin's final residence:

This time he identified his home in big characters carved into a wood panel over his lintel: "Maison du Jouir," House of Pleasure, meaning sexual pleasure, perhaps a reference to the traditional sexual meeting houses of the old Polynesian culture, certainly a statement of personal appetite. On the walls were forty-five pornographic photographs bought at Port Said between France and the South Seas. . . . [Gauguin] went about the house naked, leaning on his walking sticks, the heads of which were carved to represent a phallus and a couple in sexual embrace. He acquired a dog and named it Pego, a version of the abbreviated signature he sometimes used on his paintings, "PGo," which when said aloud sounded like sailor's slang for "penis." Every time Gauguin called his dog he was being outrageous, and he knew it.

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8 Brettell, "The Return to France," 301.

9 Gavan Daws, A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-discovery in the South Seas (Milton, Queensland: The Jacaranda Press, 1980), 261. Gavan Daws argues that "Gauguin's filthy Port Said pictures were displayed at Maison du Jouir specifically to ward off respectability" and succeeded in offending his compatriots, the priests and sisters of the French Catholic mission, while being received with indifference by his Marquesan neighbours. Daws, A Dream of Islands, 263. In a letter home, Gauguin writes of their Marquesan reception:

Men, women and children, almost everyone laughed at them. The only people who did not come to my house were the self-styled respectables, and they were the only ones who thought about them all year long. . . . Meditate on that and nail an indecency prominently over your door; from that time on you will be untroubled by respectable folk, the most insupportable people that God ever made.
We could say that Gauguin’s career was often reduced to the serial indignity of the repeated restart, but the multiple arrivals and departures required by the primitivist agenda are such that it becomes hard to keep relations of priority and precedence stable. In this chronology, the relation between original and copy seems finally replaced by a series of simulations, like so many smutty postcards carried between metropolitan centre and colonial margin, in which all productions are restagings, marked by a sense of their belatedness and inauthenticity.10

Christopher Bongie’s Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism and the Fin de Siècle, suggests that all exotic travellers find themselves, like Gauguin, in strained relation to time and space, their expectations of arrival forestalled by the spread of imperialism, so that their savage or exotic destinations keep receding even as they approach.11 Peter Brooks also notes that from the moment Tahiti appears in Western representation “the voyage out to the South Pacific ... is also a voyage back, to a time before,” to a “version of the erotic” which is “both spatially and temporally removed from contemporary Europe.”12 Once this ambition is thwarted by the global reach of capitalism, that voyage out, which was to have been a voyage back, is more frequently figured as a voyage in, to the remote regions of the self. Brooks’ analysis of Gauguin’s

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Quoted in Daws, Dream of Islands, 263.

10 As is well known, Gauguin’s interest in Polynesia was inspired by the artificial villages and huts displayed at the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris. The aching nostalgia at the heart of the primitivist enterprise maps seamlessly with capitalism’s touristic trajectory.

11 Christopher Bongie, Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism and the Fin de Siècle (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). Pollock makes a similar point when she writes:

The pre-modern or the non-modern cannot be conserved in the midst of the modern. That is the tourist fantasy of the trip to the South Pacific. The reality is that anything the Europeans have touched is contaminated by their money and disciplined by their gaze, imprinted with their power, and shaped by their desire. At this point, where tourism rides on colonialism, and art circulates on the latter’s ships, we can see the over-determined conjuncture of cultural and sexual difference, and their mutual interface: sex and race at the heart of capitalism’s imperial process.

Pollock, Avant-Garde Gambits, 72.

work, "Gauguin's Tahitian Body" and Hal Foster's more recent essay, "Primitive Scenes," both take as their subject this primitivist trajectory which directs itself toward racial and sexual, or erotic, territory thought beyond the reach of repression or civilised restraint. In both essays, the ambivalence of the artist's interest in the native and the perverse returns as a kind of psychic come-uppance, installing an insufficiency at the heart of the primitivist enterprise. These analyses, doubling and departing from each other as they do, might be said to share and rehearse the lesson of colonial and sexual ambivalence: in the encounter with otherness nobody goes unscathed and thus Gauguin's house of pleasure stands on shaky ground.

**Jungle Rites**

In turning their discussions to Gauguin's Tahitian paintings, both Brooks and Foster dwell on an episode that appears as the fourth chapter of *Noa Noa*, the primitivist document which narrativises the time of Gauguin's first stay in Tahiti and which he composed on his return to Paris in 1893. As literary artefact *Noa Noa* remains less than pleasing, although in facsimile with its watercolours and woodcuts dispersed enigmatically through the text, it has a certain luminescence. Figure 5.1 is a


14 Gauguin's document was modelled after Eugène Delacroix's North African journal. Eugène Delacroix, *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. Walter Pach (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1980). Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa: Gauguin's Tahiti*, ed. Nicholas Wadley, trans. Jonathan Griffin (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985). Wadley's edition is the source of the facsimile reproduction from the so-called Louvre manuscript of 1893/7 which appears as figure 5.1 in this chapter. The Louvre manuscript is "an enlarged version of the original text as redrafted by Gauguin's collaborator, the poet Charles Morice. . . Gauguin's illustrations were partly made when he first copied out the text, but some were added some time later, back in Tahiti." Nicholas Wadley, introduction to *Noa Noa*, by Paul Gauguin (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), 7. Brettell suggests the importance of Paris in engendering Gauguin's interest in illustrated texts and disputes the routine dating of the production of other of his manuscripts to his Tahitian period:

there is no evidence that Gauguin wanted to create illustrated books or manuscripts before his Paris period. That his circle of friends was almost exclusively a literary one makes it easier for us to assume that the texts were produced with and for these friends. . . Collectively, these form the largest and most important body of texts, illustrated and otherwise, produced by any great artist in France since Gauguin's hero, Delacroix, whose *Journals* Gauguin devoured.

reproduction of a page from the beginning of the wood-cutting episode as it appears in the Louvre manuscript version of *Noa Noa* which Gauguin produced in collaboration with the poet Charles Morice. The illustrations, a watercolour and woodcut, interrupt the end of the first paragraph of chapter four. This chapter, to which both Brooks and Foster turn, involves an erotic rite of passage, though not, perhaps, of the kind the upper image—a male and a female figure balled together, belly to belly, with only elbows, knees and feet breaking the perimeter of the two-toned embrace—might lead the reader to anticipate. 

The fourth chapter commences with Gauguin claiming that, living as he does among the Tahitians,


every day gets better ... my neighbours ... regard me as almost one of themselves; my naked feet, from daily contact with the rock, have got used to the ground, my body, almost always naked, no longer fears the sun; civilisation leaves me bit by bit and I begin to think simply, to have only a little hatred for my neighbour, and I function in an animal way, freely ... I become carefree and calm and loving.  

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15 When thinking about the relevance of this image to its narrative framing, Wadley considers

the upper image of a lovemaking couple ... unusual because figures in Gauguin's paintings seldom touch each other, let alone embrace. It is an image of great charm, both in its guilt-free simplicity and in the translucent bloom of its colour. The lower image ... in its enclosure and self-concealment ... poses a complete contrast to the image above, in form, mood and meaning.

He concludes:

The upper image is one of innocence, the lower of a grown woman in a foetal position. ... The radiant combination of eroticism and innocence in the lovemaking image and its contrast with the opaque gloom and inertia of the other also anticipate the confusion of feelings that Gauguin tries to express later in the incident, involving shades of innocence, love, lust and shame. Finally, the placing of the couple inside the heraldic leaf, as if they were the flower, may be related to the story's theme of primitive man's oneness with nature, as well as to the theme of fragrance, *Noa Noa*.

Wadley, introduction to *Noa Noa*, 145.

Gauguin then introduces a young man, his "natural friend," who visits him daily to watch him work and talk with him.\(^\text{17}\) Gauguin recalls that the youth, "sometimes in the evening, when I was resting from my day's work, ... would ask me the questions of a young savage who wants to know a lot of things about love in Europe, questions which often embarrassed me."\(^\text{18}\) As Nicholas Wadley writes, the innocent intuitions of the youth and the grown man's awkwardness serve an "ever-present contrast between [a] sort of naïve clarity and the soiled condition of civilised thought."\(^\text{19}\) The chapter then goes on to recount an expedition the artist and the "faultlessly handsome" boy undertake to fell a rosewood tree from which to make a carving.\(^\text{20}\) Gauguin follows his young male guide as they climb single file through the dense vegetation of the Tahitian interior:

> We went naked, both of us, except for the loincloth. ... And two we certainly were, two friends, he a quite young man and I almost an old man in body and soul, in civilised vices: in lost illusions. His lithe animal body had graceful contours, he walked in front of me sexless. ...\(^\text{21}\)

Gauguin's marginal notes at this moment underscore what he calls "the androgynous side of the savage."\(^\text{22}\) Trailing after this unspecific sexual figure, Gauguin becomes disoriented with desire:

\(^{17}\) Gauguin, Noa Noa, 25.

\(^{18}\) Gauguin, Noa Noa, 25.

\(^{19}\) Wadley, introduction to Noa Noa, 145.

\(^{20}\) Gauguin, Noa Noa, 25.

\(^{21}\) Gauguin, Noa Noa, 25, second ellipsis in original.

\(^{22}\) Alongside this passage in the manuscript, Gauguin made the following notes:

1 The androgynous aspect of the savage, the slight difference of sex among animals—
2 The purity of thought associated with the sight of naked bodies and the relaxed behaviour between the two sexes—
Vice unknown among the savages—
Desire to be for a moment weak, a woman . . .

Gauguin, Noa Noa, 74, n. 42.
I had a sort of presentiment of crime, the desire for the unknown, the awakening of evil—Then weariness of the male role, having always to be strong, protective; shoulders that are a heavy load. To be for a moment the weak being who loves and obeys.

I drew close, without fear of laws, my temples throbbing.23

But the writer’s arousal dissipates as soon as the pursued figure presents frontally:

[M]y companion turned . . . so that his chest was towards me. The hermaphrodite had vanished; it was a young man, after all; his innocent eyes resembled the limpidity of the water. Calm suddenly came back into my soul . . . 24

Peter Brooks remarks that the recollection is noteworthy “perhaps especially for the ambivalences of passivity and aggressivity it displays and the confused conception of the homoerotic temptation as alternately domination and submission.”25 We can conclude from this that “Gauguin is attracted to androgyny . . . [as] it appears to liberate him from European categories of difference. Yet,” as Brooks goes on to note,

that attraction leads [Gauguin] to an interior experience of his own body as bisexual, to a homoerotic temptation that places him in the role of woman and thus must be repudiated. There is a slide away from androgyny which resolves itself in a feeling of guilt dispersed and innocence achieved.26

The woodland scene ends not with seduction or rape but with the violence of self-discipline; Gauguin expends himself attacking the sought after tree, “hack[ing] away with the pleasure of sating one’s brutality and of destroying something” until his soft hands are bloodied and raw; the renunciation is complete when, pacing behind that naked back on the return journey, Gauguin can “again admire, in front of me, the


24 Gauguin, Noa Noa, 28.


graceful curves of my young friend—and calmly: curves robust like the tree we were carrying.”27 We might reflect here that civilised man, in turning his desire toward a native object, locates an ambivalence which can be restored to, and mastered by, himself—the viewer. This peculiar relay of identification and desire strikes me as all too familiar, another of those decadent loops through the exotic that replenishes the metropolitan subject via the diminishment of a racially, or sexually, marked other. This is what Brooks has to say about this sexual detour:

The incident might have given Gauguin an occasion to cast doubt on his unproblematic opposition of civilisation and the primitive and to reflect on his need for a tropology of Tahitian bodies in order to rework critically a European tradition. But he doesn’t in Noa Noa achieve this kind of self-reflexiveness, resolving the incident instead in a moment of male bonding with his Tahitian friend and the claim that he has recovered radical innocence. Gauguin is interested in a polymorphous bodiliness, but when it comes to foregrounding, touching, and representing a body, it must be clearly gendered as female, albeit a female body that breaks from the traditional Western sense of female gracefulness, that is more powerful and compact, less distinct from the male. . . The passage from Noa Noa becomes virtually an allegory of a large cultural need to centre discourse of the body exclusively on the female body, as if the male body and the temptation of androgyny were too dangerous to handle. This cultural movement may in some sense justify the slippage in my own discussion of the Tahitian body toward exclusively female objects.28

Since Gauguin’s interest in framing the polymorphous body confines itself to female subjects, which is itself a culturally determined manoeuvre, Brooks will also decline the dubious invitation the male body extends and restrict his own discussion to Gauguin’s representation of women. In both the passage from Noa Noa, and the commentary on it, the male body, as an object available to a pleased look, shimmers

27 Gauguin, Noa Noa, 28.
briefly on the visual (and sexual) horizon, only to fade from view as our writers avert their eyes.

**Blind**

If we consider what is here too blinding to look upon, we discover another way in which Brooks’ passage might be said to repeat Gauguin’s “slippage.” Both text and commentary seem to be teasingly structured around “homoerotic temptation.” Brooks’ entire discussion of this passage is caged in negatives and casual qualifiers; it appears as the discussion he will not provide. “One could no doubt analyse this passage at some length, perhaps especially for the ambivalences . . . it displays,” he writes, as if that would be a somehow tedious or predictable interpretative byway down which to travel.²⁹ But, strangely, his testimony that the male body as trope is culturally too hot to handle is belied by the analysis he does engage in; indeed, Brooks is rather eloquent, almost loquacious about the male body and its engendering of sexual ambivalence and disavowal. He pretends not to know, or not to be interested in, a subject about which, all the same, he has quite a lot to say. Why the critical ruse? It strikes me that the “homoerotic temptation” functions in both the Gauguin and the Brooks as a kind of erotic or critical lever but that where in Gauguin it triggered a well-rehearsed errancy, that tired shuffle toward and swerve away from the perverse, it is under a different sort of pressure in Brooks’ writing. He refuses to substitute “homosexual” for “homoerotic,” ringing in an “interior . . . bisexuality” before arriving at the palliative “temptation to androgyny,” but he neglects to say anything about that refusal. Written one hundred years apart both text and commentary seem to share the same open secret: it goes without saying that homosexuality is the repudiated act in *Noa Noa*, and the repudiated term in Brooks’ analysis.

Brooks is content to follow Gauguin’s lead and maintain androgyny as the trope through which this arousal must be thought. But androgyny as sexual trope has a way of obscuring as much as it reveals, it tends to reconfigure patterns of sexual

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difference onto a strictly gendered grid. It is probably worth recalling that Gauguin, after all, is in no doubt as to the gender of the native figure he follows through the fragrant jungle, and nor are we as readers. Furthermore, if, as he pants up that lurid hillside, he is subject to a sexual swoon the poles he sways between are not male and female but domination and submission—which is what Brooks began by saying although he never returns to this. Initially subtle, Brooks’ analysis finally refuses to follow what we might call the sodomitical figurings in Gauguin’s writing as they suggest the troublesome penetrability of bodies, male as well as female.30 Brooks assumes that refocussing his analysis on the female body might allow him to continue to sidestep any inquiry into the relation between (sexual) power and visibility, whereas what we will find when we turn to Mana'o Tupapau is that once again the abandoning of the security of frontality implicates the viewer in the posture of perversion, and furthermore, that the primitivist invitation to sodomy can only safely be extended across the availability of women, thus guarding or preserving the imagined impenetrability of the male.

**BehindSight**

Perhaps then we should return to the passage from Noa Noa and take the time to state the obvious: the thing that sets in train this display of, in Brooks’ term, “ambivalences” is the mere apprehension of a figure viewed—as Freud might say—*a tergo*, from behind. Hal Foster’s analysis of the woodcutting episode latches onto this

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30 My adjectival usage of “sodimitical” follows Lee Edelman’s who analyses “the disturbance of positionality” generated around male-male sodomitical scenes. Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 183. The panicky confusion that Edelman argues assails the witness to such scenes does not proceed only from the literal positions taken up by sodomites but more fundamentally from the fact that these poses are figural condensations of a whole raft of consequently disordered relations between front and back, before and after, male and female, homosexual and heterosexual. The scandalous possibility of the (male) anus as a site of sexual pleasure disrupts that psychoanalytic narrative which secures heterosexuality through a positing of masculinity and femininity as the temporal consequences of the gendered resolution of the little boy and little girl’s oedipal crises, differently rendered as each is in the promise of phallicism and the threat of castration. As Edelman argues, what is legible in the sodomitical scene is “its repudiation of the binary logic implicit in male heterosexuality” and “its all too visible dismissal of the threat on which the terrorist empire of male heterosexuality has so effectively been erected.” Edelman, *Homographesis*, 185, original emphasis.
tropical rearview and finds in it a primitivist sexual genesis, or "primal scene." Citing Freud's "association of tribal peoples with pregenital orders of the drives, especially oral and anal stages, an association in which genitality is often correlated with civilisation as achievements beyond 'the primitive,'" Foster draws our attention to the way primitivism and psychoanalysis, emerging in the same historical moment, share certain narratives of cultural and sexual arrest: they both figure the tribal, the feminine, the homosexual, as caught in early phases of psychic development. The primitivist aesthetic then privileges these sites as kinds of regressive destinations, which, once visited, can evidence the shucking off of the repressions of civilisation. But, as Foster's analysis unfolds, we recognise that the primitivist psychic agenda is not without trauma. In his article, which proposes "to use Freud and critique him at the same time," Foster suggests we:

hold to his conception of stages but not to its association with tribal peoples. Or, rather, I will reverse the flow of this association: for example, to see anality not as the property of "the primitive" but as the projection of a particular modern subjectivity onto "the primitive." The question then becomes not what is "primitive anality" but why is it projected as such—out of what desires and fears?

Reading through the lens of Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man, Foster argues that the "ambivalence" foregrounded in the encounter recalled by Gauguin in Noa Noa is related to the doubled phantasmatics of anality whereby the traumatic recognition that sexual difference is founded through castration is disavowed by a dual identification with agents of penetration and receptivity. The Wolf Man provides the model of a "primitive" subject who "when faced with a castrative threat or genital crisis" regresses "to a pregenital order, in which the subject oscillates between an anal

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31 Foster, "'Primitivist' Scenes," 71.
32 Foster, "'Primitivist' Scenes," 71-2.
33 Foster, "'Primitivist' Scenes," 72.
34 Foster, "'Primitivist' Scenes," 76-90.
eroticism, a passive masochistic mode (associated, as usual in Freud, with the feminine and the homosexual), and its active complement, an anal sadism—an oscillation expressive of a great ambivalence of psychosexual position. Thus for Foster the primitivist project, while working a kind of imperialist renewal, at the same time bears witness to the “crisis of white heterosexual masculinity” at the core of the primitivist encounter; consequently, in his unravelling of the skeins of identification and desire that tangle across scenes such as the woodcutting episode he repeatedly reminds us not to “mistake the desire for mastery for the real thing.” The ambivalences he locates in scenes from Gauguin and Picasso are both performative or staged and somehow real or spontaneous:

In these scenes, then, artists like Gauguin and Picasso tease out identity in terms that are both psychical and artistic, and they do so at a time when bodies and psyches were transformed by imperialist encounters and industrialist techniques alike. Again and again they map racial onto sexual difference and vice versa in a conundrum of oppositions of black and white, female and male, nature and culture, passive and active, homosexual and heterosexual. However, since ambivalence governs these mappings—since “the primitive” both attracts and repels these artists, since they both desire and identify with it—such oppositions are pressured to the point where they begin to falter, where the white heterosexual masculinity founded on them begins to crack.

But just as these fissures in the psychic foundations of “white heterosexual masculinity” appear, Foster, in a move familiar to us from Solomon-Godeau, stresses

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35 Foster, “‘Primitive’ Scenes,” 78.
36 Foster, “‘Primitive’ Scenes,” 102, 80.
37 Foster, “‘Primitive’ Scenes,” 75-6. According to Foster, these scenes of primitivist encounter, and the insecurities or anxieties they map, have historical precedents in the exoticist tradition. Often in Orientalist art . . . racial others, male and female, are presented as passive, available to the masculinist viewer. A colonialist gaze seems to double a sexual gaze in a vision of masculinist mastery. But here too the viewer may not be so secure; would it require such representation if it were?

Foster, “‘Primitive’ Scenes,” 81.
the soundness of their historical support: "However," he writes, "to underscore the fragility of primitivist mastery, its basis in desire and fantasy, is not to diminish its actuality, the reality of power relations and domination effects in the imperialist encounter." What then, we have to ask ourselves, is the relation of primitivist ambivalence to colonial power?

Foster seems aware that his analysis has reached some dead-end at this point, though a few pages later we find him putting the question a little differently. The simpler version goes like this: "How does one specify ambivalence in the work of art? Is it somehow immanent in the image or only activated in its address?" As Foster reflects, the difficulty lies in trying to answer that question without either pathologising the artist or psychologising the art. In an attempt to wrestle with that question I would like to look at a particular painting of Gauguin's from late 1892, Manao Tupapau, but like Brooks and Foster before me, I want to loop that discussion through an episode recounted in Noa Noa.

Copy

Given that contemporary art criticism has paid such attention to the European and Oriental sources from which Gauguin's Polynesian studies can be seen to derive—those flat Japanese prints and scrolling Greek friezes—it is probably worth noting that, according to the artist himself, the reproductions cluttering his Tahitian studio were, in 1891, already the subject of an intense, though less academic, scrutiny. Early in Noa Noa, Gauguin relates an incident wherein he watches, and surreptitiously sketches, an unnamed native woman as she browses through his eclectic collection. Putting aside "some religious paintings by the Italian primitives," the woman's surveying curiosity eventually snags on a more secular subject, Manet's Olympia (fig. 5.2):

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38 Foster, "'Primitive' Scenes," 76.

39 Foster, "'Primitive' Scenes," 79.

40 Foster, "'Primitive' Scenes," 79.
She looked with particular interest at a photograph of Manet’s Olympia. With the words I had already learned in that language . . . I questioned her. She told me this Olympia was truly beautiful: I smiled at that opinion and was moved by it. She had the sense of the beautiful. . . . She added, all of a sudden, breaking the silence that presides over a thought: “It’s your wife.”

“Yes,” I lied. Me, the *tane* of Olympia!41

Immediately and urgently he presses his visitor to model for him; outraged at the suggestion she storms out leaving Gauguin to sulk in the cold draught of her departure. But the depression induced by this refusal is short-lived, “An hour later she came back in a beautiful dress” and, the story goes, sits for a portrait. That his feint—he the lover of Olympia!—be answered by hers, that his request be met with outright denial then unspoken consent, seems to be what pleases Gauguin in this transaction; it yields an encounter between Polynesian and European replete with thwarted desire, cross-identification, and flickering jealousy, on both sides. Without making too much of this, perhaps we might pause and ask ourselves why this little scene of caprice and arousal should be played out over this particular cultural icon?

The year of his departure to the South Seas, Gauguin spent eight days before Manet’s painting in the Musée du Luxembourg in an untypical act of reverence, producing a copy which would eventually find its way into Degas’ private collection (fig. 5.3). The scandal that erupted at the first public showing of *Olympia* is well-known to anyone who has read T. J. Clark’s *The Painting of Modern Life*.42 I mention Clark’s book to recall his thesis about the contradictory nature of capitalism’s investment in female sexuality and the slippery aesthetics such contradiction implies, and, more particularly, his discussion of Manet’s “disarticulated” rendering of the model’s body.43


The features of *Olympia* which Clark draws to our attention are those that Gauguin's copy exaggerates, from the broad—say the way the formal curves of the reclining figure are contorted, "its knees dislocated and arms broken," such that "Olympia's whole body is matter of smooth hard edges and deliberate intersections" caught in abrupt shifts from light to dark—to the specific—say the way the sharp line of the shoulders and the far nipple breaking the bounding line of that arm are both incommensurate with the lack of definition of the model's right breast (fig. 5.4). When combined with the idiosyncratic facial features of the model, these compositional effects, attribute to her a subjectivity unlike the embodied vacancy of the traditional nude, a subjectivity which is further pressed upon the viewer by the formulaic handling of the black female servant.

In Clark's argument the construal of Olympia as naked rather than nude turns on this disarticulation of the female form:

There is a lack of articulation here. On its own it is not too disconcerting, and in a sense it tallies well with the conventions of the nude, where the body is offered ... as just this kind of infinite territory, uncorseted and full, on which the spectator is free to impose his imaginary definitions. But the odd thing in Olympia's case is the way this uncertainty is bounded, or interrupted, by the hard edges and the cursive grey. The body is in part *tied down* by drawing, held in place quite harshly—by the hand, the black bootlace round the neck, the lines of charcoal shadow. ...

It is as if the painter welcomes disparity and makes a system of it; as if the picture proposes inconsistencies, of a curiously unrelieved kind—left without excuse or mediation—as the best sort of truth when the subject is nakedness.

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45 Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 134-5. Consider as well Clark's summary statement of his thesis:

Reduced to its most simple form, this ... argument amounts to saying that the sign of class in *Olympia* was nakedness. That may still seem a cryptic formula, so I shall redefine its terms ... Class is a name, I take it, for that complex and determinate place we are given in the social body; it is the name for everything which signifies that a certain history lives us, lends us our individuality. By nakedness I mean those signs—
Figure 5.4. Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863 (above); Paul Gauguin, *Copy of Manet's Olympia*, 1891 (below).
Manet's aesthetic, Clark argues, emerges as modernity writes itself across the sexual body. When the social relations of mass culture mark women with the signature of class, Olympia is, and is seen to be, a working girl: she is prostitute not courtesan. The self-evident femininity of the nude has been compromised, dismantled and replaced by a cold circuit of signs, all of which contributes to the incoherence of the viewing position that the work, historically, implies. When the look of the viewer meets this recalcitrant female object, one capable of a stare saturated with its own desires and demands, the terms of consensuality that the nude mystifies become open to cynical wrangling:

Olympia . . . looks out at the viewer in a way which obliges him to imagine a whole fabric of sociality in which this look might make sense and include him—a fabric of offers, places, payments, particular powers, and status which is still open to negotiation. If all of that is held in mind, the viewer might have access to Olympia; but clearly it would no longer be access to a nude. 46

Once the viewer's look is returned in this way the scopic field of the painting is defined as that charged zone across which gazes may lock and challenge the immunity of vision. The imaginary plenitude of the nude has been eclipsed by an insufficiency which touches both object and viewer; the sovereignty of sight is no longer unassailable. The critical hysteria that greeted the unveiling of Olympia is symptom of

that broken, interminable circuit—which say we are nowhere but in a body, constructed by it, by the way it incorporates the signs of other people. (Nudity, on the contrary, is a set of signs for the belief that our body is ours, a great generality that we make our own, or leave in art in the abstract.)

It follows that nakedness is a strong sign of class, a dangerous instance of it. And thus the critics' reaction in 1865 becomes more comprehensible. They were perplexed by the fact that Olympia's class was nowhere but in her body: the cat, the Negress, the orchid, the bunch of flowers, the slippers, the pearl earrings, the choker, the screen, the shawl—they were all lures, they meant nothing, or nothing in particular. The naked body did without them in the end and did its own narrating.

Clark, The Painting of Modern Life, 146.

46 Clark, The Painting of Modern Life, 133.
this radical incoherence—the ways of seeing she assigns her audience are deeply fraught: to the Parisian public she is cadaver, insult, whore.47

Clark’s analysis traces the enunciative address of Manet’s painting as it functions in its historical moment; we hardly need reminding—or do we?—that the incoherence assigned Olympia’s contemporaneous viewer is no longer assigned us. Signs of that incoherence might remain coded in the formal innovations and radical iconographies of the work but as viewers, here and now, we are adequate to the canvas differently. I want to suggest that, as an interpreter of Manet, Paul Gauguin comes near to Clark. In Mana’o Tupapau, Gauguin’s Tahitian rephrasing of Olympia, the position of the viewing subject is also a stigmatised one, with its incoherence marked out in a specifically primitivist register.

Roll

Produced in 1892, a world away from the original but with that photograph somewhere to hand, much of the disposition of Mana’o Tupapau (fig. 5.5) is citation of the Manet. We might think of those hands as deriving directly from the 1865 canvas, but more than that we recognise the way the curves of the body are deliberately broken—legs cross, elbows bend; its outlines against the pale sheet are also the same, heavily scored, where those of the face are slub; similarly the fall of the back seems vaguely defined—the spine and left shoulder blade won’t compose readily and the play of light on the cleft of the buttocks and the right hip and shoulder seem to throw the small of the back out as though the torso were awkwardly twisted; then there is the way the body tilts or slides off the plane of the bed into a different vertical as though there is a slightly shonky perspective at work here that is capable of altering the spatial depth of the painting.

Where this presentation of the reclining female most obviously departs from Manet’s is that Gauguin’s native model, Teha’amana, is splayed belly down; it is as

Figure 5.5. Paul Gauguin, Manao Tupapau, 1892. Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm. Richard Brettell, et al., The Art of Paul Gauguin, National Gallery of Art: Washington, 1988, p. 280.
though the Parisian original has been brazenly rotated and turned onto its flipside. Gauguin’s account of the inception of this painting has—as he intended—been overly useful in unravelling its Polynesian symbolics, but his comments might rather be read as giving clues to a European imaginary. In a letter to his Danish wife, Mette, in which he instructs her in the promotion of his Tahitian work, Gauguin writes:

I am going to give you an explanation of the most difficult [canvas], which, in fact, is the one I want to keep—or sell for a very good price; the *Manao Tupapau*. I did a nude of a young girl. In that position a mere hint and it is indecent. Yet that is the way I want it, the lines and the movement interest me. So when I do the head I put in a little fear. For this fear I have to give a pretext, if not an explanation, and it has to be in keeping with the character of the person, a Maori girl. The Maoris have a very great, traditional fear of the spirit of the dead. A girl from our own part of the world would be afraid of being caught in that position (women here not at all).  

And again, in the notebook he dedicated to his daughter Aline, he returns to the “indecency” of the painting:

In this rather daring position, quite naked on a bed, what might a young Kanaka girl be doing? Preparing for love? This is indeed in her character, but it is indecent and I do not want that. Sleeping, after the act of love? But that is still indecent. The only possible thing is fear. What kind of fear? Certainly not the fear of Susannah surprised by the Elders. That does not happen in Oceania. The *tupapau* [spirit of the dead] is just the thing. . . . According to Tahitian beliefs, the title *Manao Tupapau* has a double meaning . . . either she thinks of the ghost or the ghost thinks of her. To recapitulate: Musical part—undulating horizontal lines—harmonies in orange and blue linked by yellows and violets, from which they derive. The light and the greenish sparks. Literary part—the spirit of a living girl linked with the spirit of Death. Night and day.

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49 Passage from *Cahier pour Aline,* quoted in Claire Fréches-Thory, catalogue note 154, “*Manao Tupapau,*” 281.
He then adds the sneering coda, "This genesis is written for those who always have to know the whys and wherefores. Otherwise the picture is simply a study of a Polynesian nude." In both accounts the carefully laid signifier of indigenous meaning, the spectre of the dead, is a blind, a false trail or literary device leading away from where Gauguin locates the perversity of this painting—in the posture of the girl. It is as though the scandal of the pose for the European requires a cultural alibi, hence the iconographic resort to native fear. What happens then if we refuse the lure of that false lead and wrench discussion of *Manao Tupapau* away from speculation about the nocturnal imaginings of the native girl toward those of her viewer?

**Rearvision**

If we return to *Manao Tupapau* and consider both the position of the girl on the bed, and the positionality of the viewer then we can say that if this painting configures a peculiar erotics it is an erotics from the back not of the back: the figure on the bed—like the young man moving through the jungle in *Noa Noa*—is viewed by someone standing behind her. This becomes clearer if we consider the different vantage provided by a later reworking of the same pose in a small pastel Gauguin produced in Paris in 1895 of his Javanese mistress, Annah (fig. 5.6). Here the viewer is situated on the same parallel as the head and shoulders of the sleeping model; our glance moves across the slant of the body until the faded dissolve of the feet returns us to the calm locus of the head. The viewer is unimplicated in this scene; the self-containment of the sleeper is inviolate, our looking as free from reproach as the figure herself. Furthermore the way the sway of the back accents the wasp waist of the female model which is then rounded out by the soft belly underside and the depth of the buttocks, is in contrast to

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50 Quoted in Claire Fréches-Thory, catalogue note 154, "*Manao Tupapau,*" 281.

51 Pollock reads the model's posture as discomforting the artist but, scarcely before she has been able to credit that anxiety to Gauguin, she comes to inhabit it herself. For Pollock, the prospect of *a tergo* sex becomes the very index of a masculinist European depravity that brooks no possibility of a Tahitian feminine subjectivity. If, in her argument, the scandal of the painting initially resides with Gauguin, it quickly makes an odd shift to the scandal of *a tergo* sex itself. Whose scandal is that?
the stolidity, the chunky heft, of the Tahitian figure in *Manao Tupapau*, whose gender is less distinctly marked.\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{quote}
Gauguin’s choice of posture for his model... evidently caused the artist anxiety. What else is the letter to Mette Gauguin than a worried attempt to pre-empt criticism, already registering the shock of that display of a vulnerable body, its invitation to a tergo sex? The artist Gauguin so admired, Degas, at least never exhibited his comparable fantasies.

Any possible sensibility on the part of the Tahitian woman is sacrificed to that urgency, the aesthetic gambits of the European male avant-garde.

Her body is appropriated to signify his desire as white man and artist. Any thought about Teha’amana the Tahitian woman as subject—as a historically constituted and culturally specific feminine subjectivity—falls under his erasure. Like Fanon’s experience of being seen, and thus seeing himself, in the mirror of white perception, she is re-presented to herself as object, her Tahitian and female body spattered with his coloration, his fantasy, his historical practice of “sexuality.”

The moment of production of this painting, the condition of its possibility, are those of the modernity of the West. It is a European man looking. Under that gaze and the desire it writes upon the body of the woman bought to service the artist in bed and on it, Tahiti is but a dead phantom evoked by Gauguin to muddle and confuse, an alibi which does not wash.
\end{quote}

*Pollock, Avant-Garde Gambits*, 70-1.

\textsuperscript{52} Richard Brettell finds gender differently distributed across these two works. Comparing the pastel to *Manao Tupapau*, he writes:

\begin{quote}
Again, the differences between the pastel of Annah... and the painting of the reclining Tehamana are striking. In the earlier work, the model has just been awakened, and looks, startled, at the viewer; in the pastel, her eyes are closed and we watch her sleep. The Tahitian woman is sturdily proportioned, with broad legs and strong arms; Annah is thin, her visible arm almost withered, her legs unaccustomed to exercise. Even the hands and feet contrast, with the Tahitian’s almost dominating the body and Annah’s either hidden or summarily rendered. Gauguin’s representation of Annah in the pose of Tehamana presupposes no spirits of the dead; rather, it is a gentle evocation of sleep, recalling in a distant way Gauguin’s own early painting of a sleeping child.

It is perhaps worth noting the androgynous quality of the figure [Annah]. Without the wisp of hair, the nearly invisible earring, and the gentle swelling of the chest, one could almost imagine that the model was male. Even Tehamana, who could scarcely be called archetypically feminine, projects her sexual identity more strongly in the painting *Manao Tupapau*. The very inaccessibility of Annah is part of the mystery of this haunting drawing. She is utterly vulnerable, yet, unlike Tehamana, unaware of her viewer. She is alone, her thoughts encased in dreams.
\end{quote}


Gauguin had much to say on the androgynous aspect of Polynesian bodies:
The viewer of the bedded figure in *Manaot Tupapau* is situated otherwise. The figure in the smaller pastel lies stable on a near horizontal, but the angled legs of the earlier nude accentuate a diagonal rise which the viewer's look must follow, encroaching upwards along the prone body towards that strangely obscured face and irresolute stare. This positions the watcher at the foot of the bed, precisely aligned with the watcher in painted space—the spectre of the dead. Once this connection has been made, once we recognise that our viewpoint aligns with the totemic head's, it is as though the scene is also transected on another axis across the foot of the bed. The effect the drawing of this imaginary line has is to further swivel the girl on the bed; it presents her more from behind than from the side, exaggerating the awkwardness of that pose. She is presented *a tergo* or penetrable from behind. It is as though none of the coordinates in the picture plane are reliable and, in Peter Brooks' phrase, the girl on the bed starts "slipping forward toward the frontal plane of the canvas in a way that challenges the traditional space—and posture of dominance—of the spectator," as she has been threatening to do all along.\(^53\)

The immunity of the viewing position is further weakened once that alignment between the position of the watcher and that of the death's head has been drawn. If we look closer at that figure, we see, locked in its profiled head, a frontal eye. That frontal eye, floating in the confusing depths of the virtual background but also level on the flat of the picture plane, watches over the viewer as much as, the French title tells us, the spectre watches over her. The viewer, we might say, has become locked in a gaze across the scopic field. The spectator's vision is crossed by that weird gaze; the visual

What distinguishes the Maori women from all other women, and often makes one mistake her for a man, is the proportion of the body. A Diana of the chase, with large shoulders and narrow hips. However thin one of these women's arms may be, the bony structure is unobtrusive; it is supple and pretty in its lines. . . . In the Oriental and especially the Maori woman, the leg from the hip to foot offers a pretty, straight line. The thigh is very heavy but not wide, which makes it round and avoids that spreading which gives to so many women in our country the appearance of a pair of tongs.


\(^{53}\) Brooks, "Gauguin's Tahitian Body," 70. Brooks' very different interpretation of this swivelling posture will be discussed shortly.
pleasure taken in the girl on the bed and her “perverse” posture is placed under surveillance, its intention subject to a kind of censorship, or crossing.

**Hesitation**

I find myself hesitating here; I realise I am on the brink of taking the terms Gauguin has offered me in going on to describe that surveillance as “native,” which would suggest that the “Tahitian belief” and “traditional fear” so arrogantly invoked in the letter to Mette—the “pretext” that would be “just the thing” to up the value of the painting—has returned to haunt the viewer. If so, Maori superstition exceeds European gallery economics and reaches outside the frame of the painting to contaminate and disrupt the impunity of the colonial viewing position. The false hermeneutic, the one Gauguin cynically dangles before his European buyers, might then speak the truth, and make an unexpected return so that the “double meaning” of the Tahitian title be rendered: either he thinks of the ghost or the ghost thinks of him.

What stays me from doing that is that I know it is a set up: Gauguin has plotted that crossing. In another passage from *Noa Noa*, Gauguin recalls the genesis of this particular painting:

One day I had to go to Papeete. I had promised to come back that same evening. On the way back the carriage broke down half way: I had to do the rest on foot. It was one in the morning when I got home. Having at that moment very little oil in the house . . . the lamp had gone out, and the room was in darkness when I went in. I felt afraid and, more still, mistrustful. Surely the bird has flown. I struck matches and saw on the bed motionless, naked, lying face down on the bed, her eyes immeasurably larger from fear, [Tehamana] looked at me and seemed not to know me. I too was caught for several moments by a strange feeling of uncertainty. [Tehamana]’s terror was contagious. I had the illusion that a phosphorescent light was streaming from her staring eyes. Never had I seen her so beautiful, so frighteningly beautiful.54

In narrativising the undoing of the male voyeur in the cross-cultural contact zone, in entangling him instead in primitivist perversion, Gauguin sketches a rudimentary theory of colonial contagion. The certainty of Western technological know-how is undermined in the native locale, washed over by other ghostly illuminations, and it is this contaminatory logic that the painting formally inscribes. We might pause to consider that Gauguin’s painting records what Foster would call “primitivist ambivalence” with all the efficiency of a stereoscope—it is technically able to present two images as one.\(^{55}\)  

\(^{55}\) I refer here to the effect of what are frequently called 3-D images which, when moved before the viewer, alter and recompose themselves according to the separate images whose superimposition makes up the whole. The ones I have in mind most clearly have religious themes; encoded in kitsch postcards, they might depict a sacred-hearted Christ crucified, but shift the card, or your eye, and Our Lord’s head rises beatifically.

\(^{56}\) The installation and evasion of prohibition thus enter an interminably mirrored relation. Tapu is the correct name for the systems of restrictive ban that fall across Tahitian bodies and their social practices. For a recent critique of European understandings of tapu which focus on the clean and the unclean, see F. Allan Hanson, “Female Pollution in Polynesia?,” Journal of the Polynesian Society 91 (1982): 335-81.

However, what Gauguin seems to be installing in his painting more accurately recalls the notion of an evil eye which, in the Western tradition, has always been the figure which oversees borders and the placement of the thresholds of sexuality and mortality. Freud’s reading of the Medusa’s head and the stiffening effect of the threat and disavowal of castration comes to mind, of course, but I think Jean-Pierre Verlant’s discussion of the Gorgon is even more suggestive. Verlant’s reading of Gorgo allows us to consider that Gauguin’s painting arrests its viewer before the threat of frontality as well as its remission:

This is the context in which to examine the frontality of Gorgo. The monstrousness of which we speak is characterised by the fact that it can only be approached frontally, in a direct confrontation with the Power that demands that, in order to see it, one enter into the field of its fascination and risk losing oneself in it. To see the Gorgon is to look her in the eyes and, in the exchange of gazes, to cease to be oneself, a living being, and to become, like her, a Power of death. To stare at Gorgo is to lose one’s sight in her eyes and to be transformed into stone, an unseeing, opaque object.

In this face-to-face encounter with frontality, man puts himself in a position of symmetry with respect to the god, always remaining centred on his own axis . . . .
menace of this painting. If, in its representation of a primitivist scopic field, it revises the space of observation and structures a gaze that invades the seamlessness of looking, if it unsettles vision—and hermeneutics—with hesitations and anxieties, with ambivalent doublings, it also suggests the impossibility of ever falling outside that scene. In so far as *Manao Tupapau* deploys the blank enunciative address of modernism, it installs the position of the viewing subject as permanently recruitable to a primitivist thematics. It can replay, and replay, and replay again, the ambivalent falterings of colonial discourse within the privileged space of the artwork’s frame. In this way Gauguin’s rearwindow draws blinds against the intrusive gaze of the historical viewer.

Brooks attaches a very specific interpretation to Gauguin’s representation of the reclining figure in *Manao Tupapau*. He suggests that ever more rear presentation of the woman, and the “animality” Gauguin wants it to suggest, erases the conventional dominance of the viewer in relation to the female subject by implicating him in an economy of gift:

Like the body of *Olympia*, that in *Manao Tupapau* is offered to the spectator’s gaze, though not frontally this time, rather in a pose that refuses to be a pose, refuses the sense of self-display that one finds in *Olympia* and the distinct impression given by Manet’s girl that she is available, for a price. Gauguin’s nude is also available, but in a more

In Gorgo’s face a kind of doubling process is at work. Through the effect of fascination, the onlooker is wrenched away from himself, robbed of his own gaze, invested as if invaded by that of the figure facing him, who seizes and possesses him through the terror its eye and its features inspire. Possession: to wear a mask means to cease being oneself and for the duration of the masquerade to embody the Power from the beyond who has seized on you and whose face, gestures, and voice you mimic. The act of doubling the face with a mask, superimposing the latter on the former so as to make it unrecognisable, presupposes a self-alienation, a takeover by the god who puts bridle and reins on you, and drags you along in his gallop. As a result, man and god share a contiguity, an exchange of status that can even turn into confusion and identification. But in this very closeness, a violent separation from the self is also initiated, a projection into radical alterity, a distancing of the furthest degree, an utter disorientation in the midst of intimacy and contact.

unselfconscious way and without connotations of venality. As an *Olympia* turned over, the nude of *Manao Tupapau* may suggest a comment on the problematics of penetrability and impenetrability posed by Gauguin—may suggest, to use his term, a greater “animality” than that evoked by the classic poses of the nude.

The naked female form . . . is offered to our gaze in such a way that its nakedness, conceived as natural to the woman herself, is made a natural, right object of vision, without overtones of sin or commerce. . . . In contrast to the attributes of *Olympia* that betoken the women’s exchange value . . . those of *Manao Tupapau* suggest an economy of the gift, as it would be defined by Marcel Mauss: the free and generous offering which must be responded to by a corresponding gift—which may here be the painting itself. And the gift of the *potlatch*, as Georges Bataille points out, is related to the creation of sacred objects: objects that have no use value, that belong, not to an economy of exchange and accumulation, but to an economy of waste, glorious expenditure. Gauguin, one might say, is attempting to reach back beyond the economy of exchange to that of the gift—as it were, denying Wallis’s version of Tahiti in order to resurrect Bougainville’s vision.\(^57\)

Brooks’ interpretation seems to me raise several questions. It endorses the primitivist project but only as it avails itself of the mechanism of the female body. The relation between the exaggeration of the *a tergo* posture and an economy of waste allows “animality” to stand in this reading were “anality” does in Foster’s.\(^58\) The sodomitical invitation that was refused in the scene from *Noa Noa* thus stages a return in *Manao Tupapau*, only now the rear penetrability of the native figure is extravagantly indulged, leaving as it does the “sacred” impenetrability of the male intact. Sodomitical imaginings are thus rendered safe as they play across the several availabilities, genital and anal, of the female body.\(^59\)

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\(^57\) Brooks, “Gauguin’s Tahitian Body,” 70-1.

\(^58\) The Freudian connotations of “gift” and its association via waste with anality can surely not be lost on Brooks.

\(^59\) Foster reads the *Manao Tupapau* pose, after the Wolf Man, as “bestial,” as representing an anal sadism which is one of the poles to which primitivist ambivalence swings in order to disavow any pull
Coda

Before I leave Gauguin I would like to reference a final painting. Presented here as a diptych, the two images that comprise figure 5.7 are reverse sides of a single canvas. On the recto appears a self-portrait of the artist in a hat, in which *Manao Tupapau*, reversed, in a squared yellow frame, takes up the high right background; on the verso, a full-face portrait of Gauguin’s friend, William Molard, who lived in the apartment above *Te Faruru*, the artist’s studio at 6 rue Vercingétroix, and with whose teenage step-daughter, Judith, Gauguin established a sexual liaison even as he lived with his Javanese mistress below. Françoise Cachin tells us that Gauguin “gave Molard this two-sided canvas as a sign of his friendship and gratitude.”60 Perhaps, then, this is the structure of the painting as gift: it figures as part of an affectional exchange between men which, even as it avails itself of tropes of perversion and reversal, must guard against the confusion with homosexuality and thus revives that strained though necessary alibi, the rearwardly prone body of a girl.61

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towards that other pole, an anal eroticism assumed in oneself through pleasures thought passive or masochistic. Foster writes:

> To cast these racial, sexual, and social others in anal modes and bestial poses is indeed to reduce women to nature in a pictorial act of gender subjugation, as decried by feminist critics. . . . But is an image like [*Manao Tupapau*] a pure expression of masculinist mastery, or is it not also a compensatory fantasy that bespeaks a feared lack of mastery? Does a masterly subject make such anxiously aggressive moves, or is there not performed in these images a fraught ambivalence—performed to be managed, perhaps, but never completely so?

Foster, “‘Primitive’ Scenes,” 79.


61 There is another Gauguin image in which we might find the vulnerability of the European man. It is a watercolour, not often reproduced, from one of his Tahitian workbooks, a self-portrait from behind. Gauguin stands, in oddly stockinged feet, on the swollen syphilitic legs that gave him such pain, before his easel, shorn head so bent over it that his face is completely obscured. His strangely wide hips are wrapped in a *pareu*: the artist *a tergo*. See Henri Perruchot, *Gauguin*, ed Jean Eilsmore, trans. Humphrey Hare (London: Macmillan, 1961), plate 57, “Gauguin at Work: self-portrait.”
Figure 5.7. Paul Gauguin, Self-Portrait with Hat (recto); Portrait of William Molard (verso), 1893-94. Oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm. Richard Brettell, et al., The Art of Paul Gauguin, National Gallery of Art: Washington, 1988, p. 312.
This chapter commenced as an inquiry into anthropology's investment in Samoan sexual conduct but as I kept reading I found it opening onto another field of sexual definition, one which was for me, though further from the Pacific, much closer to home. Unlike Margaret Mead, or her critic Derek Freeman, I don’t have anything to say about the sexual activities of Samoans and the sleep crawling they may or may not have engaged in, but I do want to try and think about the persistence of the way in which the withholding or disclosing of the secret of sex continues to charge our understanding of social identity and the truth of individual identity.¹ In what has become known as the

¹ The term “sleep crawling” is taken from Margaret Mead’s anthropological classic of 1928, Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies (1928; reprint, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969). In her study of the sexual behaviour of young Samoan girls and youths, she observes that the clandestine nocturnal assignations of lovers are open to “abuse” by the male “moetotolo or sleep crawler” who, under cover of night, is mistaken for another and so achieves the “surreptitious rape” of one whose favours would otherwise elude him. Mead, Coming of Age, 79. Derek Freeman’s iconoclastic revisiting of Mead’s early Samoan fieldwork, Margaret Mead and...
Mead/Freeman controversy, questions of sexual innocence and sexual initiation continue to be mobilised as questions of culture, which conflation then legitimates the discursive enforcement of sexual relations that are effected beneath that veil. Freeman’s avowal of the ubiquity of heterosexual rape and violent sexual assault in Samoan culture, in answer to Mead’s depiction of aleatory stages of erotic experimentation involving socially unremarked switches between homosexual and heterosexual contexts, reveals the epistemological density, the perennial meaningfulness, of a female body supposed, or doubted, sexually ignorant.

The early postcard reproduced as figure 6.1 compresses some of these discursive effects.² The sepia image pulls its viewers into projective, protective or punitive relation to its staging of a scene of female indiscretion. The two Samoan girls telling tales in each other’s arms, like the female dormitory Mead makes her residence in Coming of Age, suggests the warm and lazy incubation of bodily relaxations and their entanglement with the pleasures of telling and being told. The truth or falsity of such representations is not in question here for to pursue that finality would be to respond to the unspoken demand that makes the proximities of same-sex bodies a problem, a question that must be resolved. The disciplining of same-sex relations as one thing or another requires that such bodies speak or keep a sexual secret and Mead’s career, as it

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² The cultural work enabled by the colonial postcard, its literalising of the trajectory from there to here, has often been the focus of postcolonial studies. See, for example, Malek Alloula, The Colonial Harem, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986) and Raymond Corbey, “Alterity: The Colonial Nude,” Critique of Anthropology 8, no. 3 (1988): 75-92.
Figure 6.1. "Telling Tales," Samoans, undated. J. W. Waters, Suva, Fiji. Postcard from Post Cards of Samoa series, Commercial Printers Ltd., Western Samoa.
unfolds over a lifetime in locations primitive and cosmopolitan, arrangements domestic and professional, makes legible her own constant entanglement in the strangled acquisition of sexual recognition. Consequently, the sexual bodies around which this chapter revolves are those of North American academics rather than the sixty-eight Samoan girls who were Mead’s intimates on the island of Ta’u in the Manu’a Archipelago in 1925, and the secrets it deals in those that have tended to circulate in university culture as gossip, hearsay, intrigue.

**Sexual Knowledge**

"‘Gender criticism’ sounds like a euphemism for something."\(^3\) So begins Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s essay on the innovations offered literary criticism by the advent of theoretically inflected gay and lesbian critiques which take as their “distinctive task . . . not gender analysis” but the interrogation of all that resists it; such critiques undertake “not criticism through the categories of gender analysis but criticism of them,” as a means of gaining “adequate purchase on how relations, identities and oppressions are constituted, as in the exemplary gay instance, within genders” not exclusively between them.\(^4\) "In this defining instance,” writes Sedgwick, “the first other of gender would seem to be . . . sexuality.”\(^5\)

Much of “Gender Criticism” involves Sedgwick in a critical engagement with the first volume of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*.\(^6\) Foucault’s deft reversal of the functionality of power is as a catechism to most gay and lesbian critics. We no longer

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assume that power is repressive, that it weighs on our tongues as a gag. Foucault teaches that, contrary to this repressive hypothesis, power is productive: it compels us toward expression and never more so than in the sexual arena. Indeed, he describes modern culture as having directed itself to “the task of passing everything having to do with sex through the endless mill of speech.” Of course the repressive hypothesis has its consolations. Under its aegis, the claim can be made that stigmatised sexual identities, namely homosexualities, have been silenced or marginalised by prohibition. Once that prohibition is overthrown, those other sexualities might proudly enter the foreground of representation and speak their truth. Foucault’s conceptualisation of the productivity of power disallows the utopic avowal of the truth of sex, drawing attention instead to the way in which the discourses of medicine, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis have compulsorily produced sexuality as the truth of subjectivity. As Sedgwick writes,

By refusing to distinguish between sexuality “itself” and the discourses that structure, delimit, . . . produce and reproduce it . . . [Foucault] argues that modern sexuality is so intimately entangled with the historically distinctive contexts and structures now called “knowledge” that such knowledge can scarcely be a transparent window onto a separate realm of sexuality: rather, it constitutes that sexuality.8

If this characterisation of Foucault’s argument is reassuringly familiar, Sedgwick’s next interpretative manoeuvre, for all its simplicity, is not: “The metonym for sexuality that The History of Sexuality effectively installs is homosexuality.”9 According to Sedgwick, Foucault’s much-quoted passage on the late nineteenth-century emergence of the homosexual as “a personage” presents

the invention of “the homosexual” . . . as an exemplifying instance of a process of specification, of the emergence of

7 Quoted, Sedgwick, “Gender Criticism,” 279.
8 Sedgwick, “Gender Criticism,” 279.
9 Sedgwick, “Gender Criticism,” 281.
identities where previously there had been acts, that also included "all those minor perverts whom nineteenth-century psychiatrists entomologised by giving them strange baptismal names ..." and those other "figures" and "privileged objects of knowledge," the hysterical woman and the masturbati

ing child. The newly reified homosexuality, in short, is but one representative example of "these thousand aberrant sexualities" that came, in their plurality, to define sexuality itself.¹⁰

"Yet," as Sedgwick elaborates, "the discursive context in which Foucault's book does its performative work is not, as it happens, one that prominently features the classification of 'those thousand aberrant sexualities'; rather the telling moment of The History of Sexuality is one which while not "lightening . . . the burden of meaning placed on issues of sexual definition" nonetheless "reflects an astonishing simplification of the fraught identity categories through which sexuality is conceived."¹¹ That is to say, the hermeneutic weight of what is deemed perverse sexuality has been brought to bear on one particular sexuality. Hysterical women, masturbating children and zoophiles no longer excite the taxonomic energies of the psy-professionals, whose interests have refined themselves to the categorisation of individuals chiefly in terms of the correlation or discrepancy between their gender and that of their object choice. As Sedgwick continues,

In the late twentieth century, if I asked you what your sexual orientation or sexual preference is, you will understand me to be asking precisely one thing: whether you are homosexual or heterosexual. And whether or not you find these terms inadequate or even irrelevant to your particular desires and velleities, you will be confident in interpreting "sexual orientation" as a reference to that differential and only that.¹²

¹⁰ Sedgwick, "Gender Criticism," 281-2.

¹¹ Sedgwick, "Gender Criticism," 282.

¹² Sedgwick, "Gender Criticism," 282.
However, as Sedgwick elaborates, “the emergence of homo-hetero as the defining access of modern sexuality” should not obscure the asymmetry of the discursive relations which are distributed across that opposition.\textsuperscript{13} Returning again to Foucault’s historical thesis, she cites his recognition that the specification of perverse sexualities meant that

Efforts to find out [heterosexual monogamy’s] secrets were abandoned; nothing further was demanded of it than it define itself from day to day. The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion. It tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter. . . .\textsuperscript{14}

While homosexuality is asked or volunteers to speak the history of its desire, heterosexuality gains an anonymity which finally makes it virtually indistinguishable from the familial institutions thought to be its rightful home. “Thus,” writes Sedgwick, “since Foucault defines modern sexuality as the most intensive site of the demand for, and detection or discursive production of truth, it seems as though this silent, normative, uninterrogated ‘regular’ heterosexuality may not function as sexuality at all.”\textsuperscript{15}

The consequences of this discursive asymmetry are witnessed in an incident Sedgwick relates in which the tacit naturalness of heterosexuality and its elective relation to concealment and display are denied its defining other:

Last year a friend of mine, being treated for a skin rash, came under pressure from his doctors to agree to an HIV-antibody test he had decided he did not want to take. The male doctor sent the female doctor out of the room, the better to set the stage for man-to-man epistemological heroics: “Don’t you,” the doctor, scalpel-eyed, at last bore down, “want to know?”

\textsuperscript{13} Sedgwick, “Gender Criticism,” 291.

\textsuperscript{14} Foucault, quoted in Sedgwick, “Gender Criticism,” 291.

\textsuperscript{15} Sedgwick, “Gender Criticism,” 292.
"No, I don’t," my friend bravely replied. "I think you’re the one who wants to know."

Just as this consulting room scenario reveals the interrogative scrutiny through which homosexuality becomes known, it also betrays heterosexuality’s continual discretionary privilege. I doubt that this is news to any gay person. It won’t be to Sedgwick’s friend, the resistant patient, though it probably arrives as such to the rebuked doctor, presuming, of course, he gets the message at all. Like most of life’s lessons, this seems one that some of us are destined to learn again and again, just as, again and again, it will be a lesson lost on others. While homosexuality is compelled to bespeak its origins and outcomes, arousals and refusals, heterosexuality goes without saying. Alternatively, and just as ubiquitously, the institutionalisation of normative heterosexuality—as marriage, romance, family—can erase or closet homosexual inscription. Margaret Mead’s career provides a salutary instance of how sexual knowledge, or the knowledge of sexuality, and its disciplinary effects, falls unevenly across bodies both defiant of, and biddable to, homosexual definition.

16 Sedgwick, “Gender Criticism,” 287.

17 The discretionary privilege of heterosexuality is not confined to the discursive work surrounding AIDS. For an understanding of how homosexuality is compulsorily entangled in relations of power which generate knowledge and ignorance effects, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). These relations are conveniently figured in terms of the “closet,” understood not as an elective shelter but as an inescapable double bind from which there is nothing as simple as an exit:

the deadly elasticity of heterosexual presumption means that, like Wendy in Peter Pan, [gay] people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan office, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exacts from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure.

Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 68.

18 It shouldn’t come as any surprise that the disciplinary relations of the closet or the open secret map so readily the contours of the liberal education. Like many others, the university which employs me does not discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation nor, perhaps, does it have to; rather, gay people are disciplined at work, caught most effectively in regimes of tolerance, sheltered and confined by liberal dispensation. D. A. Miller argues that the distinction governing the opposition between liberal
Strange Couplings

James Clifford has observed that, to contemporary eyes, Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* “looks less like science than allegory—a too sharply focused story of Samoa suggests a possible America.” Mead’s 1928 text is merely the first in a career-long series of attempts to remedy the inadequacies of the modern American family through the healing detour of cultural description. In her earliest ethnography, as in thousands of later articles and speeches and national commissions of inquiry into the state of this and that, Mead deploys a beguiling account of an exotic culture in order to secure at home a space wherein those differences and obscure predilections previously stigmatised as delinquent or deviant—as so many regrettable stains in a stretched and torn social fabric—might rather figure forth the very potentialities of cultural change. Writing of the Mead/Freeman controversy, Clifford reduces the scandal of Derek Freeman’s critique of Mead’s Samoan fieldwork to an exercise in stating the obvious:

In 170 pages of empirical overkill, he successfully shows what was already explicit for an alert reader of *Coming of Age in Samoa*: that Mead constructed a foreshortened picture, designed to propose moral, practical lessons for American society.

and carceral discipline is one of effect rather than kind, “the two modes of discipline ... play[ing] off against one another in a single system of social control.” D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 219. He concludes his reading of Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* by asserting that “the fact that the difference between liberal and carceral camps is not substantive, but only effective, has thus the status of a secret—that is to say, inevitably, an open secret.” D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, 220.


Moreover, if in Mead’s work an exemplary Samoa is caught in an allegorical frame, Clifford suggests that Freeman’s critique is equally structured by this allegorical impulse; its furious cataloguing of instances of Samoan anxiety and violence providing—in stark contrast to Mead’s placid vision of an “attractive, sexually liberated, calm Pacific world”—a lurid Samoa of “seething tensions, strict controls and violent outbursts.”

Clifford concludes:

Indeed Mead and Freeman form a kind of diptych, whose opposing panels signify a recurrent Western ambivalence about the “primitive.” One is reminded of Melville’s Typee, a sensuous paradise woven through with dread [and] the threat of violence.

As charming as some of us may find the ethnographer’s nod toward the literary, we might pause to reflect that Clifford’s elegant restatement of Melville effects a kind of closure. There is something disquieting in the way Mead’s description of Samoa already anticipates Freeman’s rejoinder. If the history of contending representations is always underwritten by “ambivalence,” analysis can only ever discover an almost

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22 Clifford, “On Ethnographic Allegory,” 103. Dennis Porter’s discussion of the Mead/Freeman controversy, which consists in part of a reading of the narrative strategies and rhetorical effects deployed in the opening chapter of Coming of Age, arrives at a conclusion not dissimilar to Clifford’s. Porter makes the point that, although

the word hermeneutics does not appear in her book . . . one finds something like that being practised there. One can only conclude that the kind of anthropology of which Coming of Age in Samoa is a classic example is an unsconscious form of hermeneutics masquerading as a hard science. The hesitations and confusions that are apparent in Mead’s discourse, in the heterogeneity of its registers and contradictory discursive practices, derive, then, from a disciplinary blindness. Moreover if Derek Freeman makes no comment on such blindness fifty years later in over three hundred and fifty pages of commentary, it is because he apparently still shares it.


transhistorical Western obsession with the other whereby all cultural description is doomed to repeat the tired figure of orientalism across the globe.\(^2a\)

In an attempt to side-step that inevitability, I think we might start by unbuckling those names, Margaret Mead and Derek Freeman and appropriating, still from Clifford’s essay, a more suggestive coupling. At one point in his discussion of the Samoan controversy, Clifford swerves away from the subject of contemporary debate to capture an earlier moment when anthropological enterprises also interlock:

The ethnographic stories Mead and [Ruth] Benedict told were manifestly linked to the situation of [an American] culture struggling with diverse values, with an apparent breakdown of established traditions, with utopian visions of human malleability and fears of disaggregation. Their ethnographies were “fables of identity.” . . . Their openly allegorical purpose was not a kind of moral or expository frame for empirical descriptions, something added on in prefaces and conclusions. The entire project of inventing and representing “cultures” was, for Mead and Benedict, a pedagogical, ethical undertaking.\(^25\)

Forget Mead and Freeman and consider this alternative hinging: Mead and Benedict. Margaret Mead’s cultural politics are mirrored in those of Ruth Benedict: as Clifford has alerted us, the two women ghost each other in an explicitly pedagogical register.

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Family Secrets

In most circles the discrediting of Margaret Mead dates to 1983—the year the *New York Times* gave front-page headline space to Derek Freeman's exposure of her supposedly shoddy research. I want to propose that the place to commence a reassessment of Mead's contribution to the popularisation of the human sciences is not that year but the next. In 1984, Mary Catherine Bateson—Mead's only child, born of her third and final marriage to anthropologist Gregory Bateson—published *With A Daughter's Eye: A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson.*26 Within the pages of this memoir, Bateson—herself an anthropologist—self-consciously reflects on her parents' marriage and divorce and the endurance of the ties that bound them until their deaths in 1978 and 1980. In composing this intimate family history, the daughter also releases into the public domain the "fact" of Mead's lifelong bisexuality. One way or another our culture has learnt that the sexual precocity of children can always cauterise conversation, stopping dead our assumptions about the transparency of language or speech, but Bateson's words are not against her mother, they are not framed as accusation or testimony, and the consequences of her disclosure are apparent not in the conjecture of the courtroom but in that of the many biographies touching on Mead.

Consider Judith Modell's 1983 biography of Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of a Life,* which predates Bateson's disclosure.27 Modell must veil her speculations about the nature of the relationship between Benedict and Mead behind a discussion of the intensities of female friendship—she considers what can and cannot be said about the emotional entanglement of the two women and finally refuses any designation of that relationship as sexual as being historically inappropriate. But it seems to me that the biography has it both ways—as placemaker for the sexual we have the literary, and


Modell freely cites and labours the ghastly poetry written by Benedict and Mead and linguist Edward Sapir during their time at Columbia spanning the twenties. The circumspect biographer—now literary critic—merely points to the ambiguities of the writing as signal to the ambivalence of the lives, recycling the erotic metaphors of bad poetry as discrete clue to the real nature of passionate friendship. Alternatively, five years after Bateson’s memoir, writing in Stranger in this Land, her biography of Benedict, Margaret Caffrey appears to carry the license of a private investigator—we have times, dates, places. The ghastly poetry is still there but it is overwhelmed by the forensic reconstruction of sexual sequences which rely on the soft evidence of diaries and letters. Thus Caffrey on the events that precede Mead’s departure for Samoa in 1925:

Through their poetry and mutual sympathy Sapir and Benedict had become close in the early 1920’s. Facing his wife’s illness and eventual death, . . . feeling out of touch with his profession in Canada, Sapir needed a friend. Benedict, struggling to find a place in anthropology, facing slow estrangement from her husband, also needed a friend. Benedict was attracted to Sapir. He was in deep trouble which called out her sympathy; he was brilliant and articulate. . . . But they apparently never became involved. As far as men were concerned, Benedict was fixated on her husband and wrote of her dislike of the thought of having an affair. Also, the variety of the published Sapir-Benedict correspondence reveals a friendship based on a passion for poetry, with whatever sexual tension existed between them kept at bay by an impassioned yet impersonalised discussion of poetic form.

Mead, however, did become involved with Sapir after his wife’s death, to the extent that he asked her to divorce [her husband] Luther [Cressman] and marry him. He also tried to persuade her not to go to Samoa and, when that did not work, wrote to Boas recommending he not allow her to go. [Mead]

28 See Modell, Patterns of a Life, 146-57.
29 Margaret M. Caffrey, Ruth Benedict: Stranger in this Land (Austin: University of Austin Press, 1983).
decided to end the affair by getting Sapir to reject her as unworthy of his love. She persuaded him that she could never be faithful to him alone after marriage, and that kind of faithfulness was important to him. He finally ended the relationship by letter toward the end of Mead’s stay in Samoa. It was in discussing this relationship at the Grand Canyon that Mead and Benedict decided they preferred each other to him.30

That this slippery negotiation should take place with Mead on her way west to catch the boat to Samoa and Benedict about to join the Zuni for a summer’s field trip reminds us of the professional nature of these relationship; that the presumed commitment occurs on the rim of the Grand Canyon can only recall the poetry.31 Of the three, Sapir threw off the lyric mantle most convincingly—when his resumed advances were once again declined by Benedict, he countered by writing a scholarly article on frigidity in the American female.32


31 Caffrey, *Stranger in this Land*, 188.

32 The article that offended Benedict was titled “Observations on the Sex Problem in America.” Sapir’s article of the following year, “The Discipline of Sex,” speaks of homosexuality as “unnatural,” and remarks that “the cult of the ‘naturalness’ of homosexuality fools no one but those who need a rationalisation of their personal sex problems.” Presumably the cult of unnaturalness performs the same rationalising function. Quoted in Caffrey, *Stranger in this Land*, 198. Caffrey’s biography of Benedict is quick to celebrate the victories of self-respect:

In changing the definitions of normalcy and abnormality and in trying to gain a new perspective for homosexuality, Ruth Benedict struck a blow for her own self-respect in a time when homosexuality and Lesbianism were on a par with leprosy in American society. In doing so she struck a blow for the self-respect of all gay men and women and helped lay the foundations of the idea of homosexuality an alternative lifestyle rather than a disease. It took a generation more for her ideas in this respect to become commonly accepted, but in 1974 the American Psychological association took homosexuality off its list of pathological conditions.

Caffrey, *Stranger in this Land*, 255. The problem with such progressive narratives is that they cannot account for the persistence of punitive homophobia. For instance, 1974, the year of the much publicised disappearance of “Homosexuality” from the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual (DSM-III) of the American Psychiatric Association, also saw the unremarked addition of a new diagnostic category, “Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood.” Sedgwick argues that a psychiatric profession that thinks of itself as accepting homosexual lifestyles nonetheless deploys the new diagnostic category as a way of intervening in the behaviours of proto-gay children, particularly sissy boys, against their possible
Homosexual Reproduction

At this point I want to distance myself from this kind of forensic reconstruction. I'm always astonished at how little these sorts of accounts yield. What do we think they tell us about the sexual profiles of their subjects? It is not just that the transparency promised by times, dates, places, belies the residual opacity of sexuality but that such investigative rigor disguises its complicity with the cultural order that renders some sex secret. What are we to say about these relationships and our own investment in uncovering their existence? Obviously we need to think about them differently and, for that reason, I want to return to Bateson's memoir.

Bateson writes that she discovered her mother’s affairs with women some time after Mead’s death, while sifting through her papers. The memoir does not ask its readers to imagine that private recovery, neither is Bateson’s public revelation draped in any shade of mourning. This is how she reflects on the significance of her mother’s bisexuality:

It has seemed to me finally that if we are to winnow out what is valuable and freeing in her work, it is necessary to know who she was with whatever honesty we can achieve. Children do not, I believe, belong in their parents’ bedrooms, nor does the public belong in the bedrooms of those it has turned into development into homosexual adults. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Tendencies (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), 154-64.

33 Countering liberatory claims of sexual self-declaration, Judith Butler writes of the necessary opacity of all sexuality but especially that which might misrecognise itself through the tropes of divulgence and exposure:

What or who is it that is “out,” made manifest and fully disclosed, when and if I reveal myself as a lesbian? What is it that is now known, anything? What remains permanently concealed by the very linguistic act that offers up the promise of a transparent revelation of sexuality? Can sexuality even remain sexuality once it submits to a criterion of transparency and disclosure, or does it perhaps cease to be sexuality precisely when the semblance of full explicitness is achieved?

public figures. . . . But Margaret Mead has walked in a thousand bedrooms, has been a touchstone for parents trying to understand the sexuality and sexual orientation of their children, has both helped and hindered women trying to understand themselves and their potential. Those who have attended to her words have, I believe, the right to know something of her experience, even as they realise that no one can fully represent in the single life they lead the full human potential of their vision.34

Perhaps, like Bateson, we would do well to hesitate before crossing the threshold of the parental bedroom. I’m not so much interested in what did or didn’t go on in Margaret Mead’s bed as in the shaping of the daughter’s inquiry. Bateson’s cautious and respectful phrasings recall other, more anxious, scenes of sexual inquiry, those involving “parents trying to understand the sexuality and sexual orientation of their children.” Only some of us have been those children—not all gay adults were gay kids and not all gay kids grow into gay adults—but none of us can ignore the extraordinary premium that is placed on the sexual outcome of children. In the Mead-Bateson family romance, the domestic inquiry into sexuality is put through a generational reversal; it is not the parent reckoning with the possible homosexual outcome of their children but the adult child perplexed by the revelation of homosexual origin. This adjustment of the interrogative optic, shifting the focus from queer child to queer parent—origin rather than outcome—exposes some of our complacency around sexual identity.

I knew little until after her death of the pattern of relationships to male and female lovers that she had developed, so that trying to look back on who she was as a person and as my mother has been complicated by the need to revise my picture of her in important ways and by the need to deal with the fact of concealment. I have been at times angered at the sense of being deliberately deceived and at having been without a doubt a collaborator in my own deception, limiting my perceptions to the images she was willing to have me see. I

34 Bateson, With a Daughter’s Eye, 120.
have sometimes felt myself doubly bereaved as well, having radically to reconsider my convictions about who she was and therefore, in relationship to her, about who I was and am, surprised at last by the sense of continuing recognition.35

Bateson, the daughter of the bisexual Mead, has to recover an understanding of her own family as always having been awash with disavowed lesbian impulse. Bateson’s narrative of sexual recognition thereby reveals something so simple we tend to forget it: gay parents do not gay children make. The home that has always contained homosexual expressivities is not the site of their reproduction. In this, sexuality differs from race or ethnicity, the transmission of which is underpinned by the generational capacities and cultural sway of the family.36 If not in the family, where then does the recognition of homosexuality take place?37 Margaret Mead’s career reveals that the

35 Bateson, With a Daughter’s Eye, 119.

36 When writing an early version of this chapter, I had the depressing experience of seeing Four Weddings and a Funeral, dir. Mike Newell (Working Title Films/PolyGram, 1994). Ostensibly a gay-friendly film, the social register to which it nonetheless confines the inscription of homosexuality is funereal or elegiac. The liberal film interrupts its repeated celebration of heterosexuality—one wedding, then another, then another and yet again another—long enough to memorialise a sexuality that is passing from sight: such a love stops clocks in Auden’s phrase, though that wasn’t how he meant it. W. H. Auden, “Twelve Songs,” Collected Shorter Poems, 1927–57 (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 92. Newell’s film reminds me of D. A. Miller’s explanation of why he always cries at weddings. Not some moist-eyed queen moved to tears at one reverential remove from the altar-rail—the wedding’s good fairy—D. A. Miller points to the brutal symbolic violence of the wedding, the way in which “every wedding, every public exhibition of heterosexual impulse (or compulsion) asents to an entitlement that is secured, and made to signify, precisely through and against its homophobic exclusions.” D. A. Miller, Bringing Out Roland Barthes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 44.

37 Precisely because homosexuality doesn’t reproduce itself along familial lines, there is a general cultural anxiety about where and how it does propagate. Recognising that “the mimetic function of the educational process is precisely what invokes, impels, or institutes desire, . . . that all pedagogy comes under the sign of sexuality,” much of this anxiety congeals about the school or university. Diana Fuss, Identification Papers (New York: Routledge, 1995), 125–6. No surprise then that pedagogical sites are among those most zealously guarded against the fancied encroachment of homosexuality, whether that trespass is imagined with respect to curricula developments or gay teachers, the two very frequently synonymous in the minds of the defenders of heterosexual youth. As Annamarie Jagose elaborates:

The anxiety around the conflation of the homosexual and the pedagogic is not simply the result of the perceived transmissibility of homosexuality; it is also because the educative process is peculiarly vulnerable to homosexuality, insofar as it is also figured as a process of transformation and conversion, of initiation and emulation. For if the fevered
knowledge of homosexuality can never occur outside the institutions that would deny it, instead it is locked inside them as their open secret.

**Academic Recognition**

Something was going on at Columbia, but to understand what it was we have to put aside the heated imaginings of the biographers and look at some cool statistics. Between 1901 and 1920, a period marking the ascendancy of Franz Boas at Columbia, nine men and three women received Ph.Ds in anthropology. From 1921 through 1940, a span reflecting the more tenuous consolidation of Benedict's position within the Department—she arrived as a doctoral student in 1921, became Boas' teaching assistant and administrative right hand a few years later, but had to wait ten years before winning the security of tenure—twenty men and nineteen women received Ph.Ds in anthropology from Columbia, for a total from 1901 through 1940 of twenty-nine male and twenty-two female doctoral graduates. Those statistics talk when placed beside these: Harvard from 1894 through 1939 graduated fifty-three male anthropology Ph.Ds and no women. From 1897 through 1940 the University of Chicago did marginally better, graduating in anthropology twenty-eight men and two women Ph.Ds. It is apparent that something was tipping the balance at Columbia—women were enrolling in and finishing their degrees. But statistics can hide as much as they reveal and we need to question the Columbia results more sceptically. On the surface they suggest a welcome even-handedness, but the numbers are a little deceptive and that

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imaginings of homosexual corruption has innocent youth, removed from the known and protective sphere of their families, bending their backs under the instruction of an attractive adult who rewards and punishes as he or she sees fit and by whose standard the children eventually come to measure themselves, then equally such scenarios are daily enacted in another cultural space, that of the classroom.


38 These figures are taken from Caffrey's chapter "Academic Politics," in *Stranger in this Land*, 270.
is because, by several accounts, the men that graduated from this Department were not your average Joes.

All Benedict's biographers agree that she and Boas created a "familial" atmosphere at Columbia by blurring the boundaries of the professional and the private. Conduct acceptable to them included waiving requirements, editing papers, loaning money, giving it outright, all things done in order to enable students to keep studying. But certain discriminations applied and gossip in the department claimed that Benedict favoured and encouraged female students, Jews and those men who "rejected customary patterns of [masculine] behaviour." Both Boas and Benedict were said to go that extra mile for "the unusual personality, the less conventional student, not only for personal reasons but also for anthropological reasons. [They believed the] discipline depended on a critical distance often the result of 'uncongeniality.'" So, it seems that all those students that deviated from an unspoken norm—women, Jews, homosexuals—were held in orbit by the pull of those two loco-parental figures, Boas and Benedict. In this version of things, it is as though all Boas' theoretical and political arguments against

39 See Caffrey, Stranger in this Land, 264-5.

40 Modell, Patterns of a Life, 165. Caffrey uses the term "misfits" to identify those students towards whom Benedict displayed a bias, "students who were somewhat out of step with the world around them, who grew up like herself as misfits in American culture." Given that so much of Caffrey's biography is devoted to unravelling Benedict's lesbianism, and the necessarily veiled expression it took in her personal and professional life, the reference to students mutely at odds with those around them, invites us to accept "misfit" as a placemaker for "homosexual." See Caffrey, Stranger in this Land, 266. Modell's biography records the abiding professional resentment felt by those former WASP students, men who felt themselves marked as conventional, as lacking in imagination, by Benedict and Boas. Modell, Patterns in a Life, 165-6. These ex-students are eloquent in the tongue of the disenfranchised, complaining of the freemasonry which did not extend its secret handshake to them. Anonymous though these voices are—and they pepper the biographies—each is identified as a prominent anthropologist. These WASPS were obviously not that strapped for slick professional pathways, and predictably the routine removal was to Chicago and the boysy Radcliffe-Brown. It is nothing new to note that what operates as a supportive community for one person is for another a hostile environment—but some forms of clubbability seem always to go unremarked.

41 Modell, Patterns of a Life, 165.
eugenics have shaped this place of greater safety which in turn enacts the thesis of cultural determinism.\footnote{As a check on that fantasy, we need only consider the case of black folklorist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston, who registered at Columbia for a doctorate in cultural anthropology in 1935 but seldom attended classes, and quickly abandoned her degree. The imprimatur of Boas—he wrote the preface to her \textit{Mules and Men}—was not enough in her case. Zora Neale Hurston, \textit{Mules and Men} (1935 with a preface by Franz Boas; reprint, with a foreword by Arnold Rampersad, New York: Perennial Library, 1990). We might recollect that in 1948 Hurston was accused of molesting a ten year old boy and, while the morals charge was dismissed, her life in Harlem became impossible and she was forced to leave New York. She ended on a slide that took her South, away from the receipt of honorary degrees and back to work as a maid and substitute teacher, as she slipped ever further beyond the charmed circle of Columbia.}

Something else to remember about accreditation to the profession of anthropology in the 1920s was the authority that accrued to fieldwork and which eclipsed the doctorate as a means of final registration. This had been one of the stumbling blocks for women in anthropology since the paternalism of the institution kept them from attaining the proficiency and expertise that came with having a tribe of one’s own. Boas was nothing if not paternalistic, his students even called him Papa, but his conception of the discipline required female contribution from the field:

\ldots to the extent that he defined the discipline himself—and he is often said to have invented the role of participant-observer—[Boas] assumed women had access to areas of social life men did not have; he considered women more “intuitive” and skilled in interpersonal relationships and urged them to collect data on the “emotional,” expressive sides of life.\footnote{Caffrey, \textit{Stranger in this Land}, 272.}

Thus, though he worried over their physical vulnerability he nonetheless encouraged their advance beyond the library. But in 1931 certain events occurred which shook that promotion of female activity. In the account that Caffrey’s biography gives, a student named Henrietta Schmerler,
was working with Benedict on her Master's degree and Benedict had arranged her field work that summer with the White Mountain Apaches... Apparently when she arrived at the reservation Schmerler, in a desire to get good results fast, disregarded her instructions to go slow and work with the women alone. In too great a haste to get to know people, she apparently blunders against Apache mores concerning women and seemed "loose," offending people in the white and Indian communities and causing community disapproval... She went riding with a small group of Apache young men who seemingly misread her intentions, and the result was her murder after probable sexual assault in late July 1931.44

It seems to me that if you want ethnographic allegory there it is—a field trip scripted by John Ford along the lines of *The Searchers* (1956) but without that crucial John Wayne figure to finally contain the ambivalence that would otherwise out as murder.45 The sophistication of the Western is not available to Benedict who found herself besieged by, on the one hand, Schmerler's grieving father, threatening a law suit against the Columbia department, and, on the other, an outraged Bureau of Indian Affairs to whom the entire discipline was beholden—American Indian tribes effectively being the subject of American anthropology in 1931.46 We might think of the Schmerler tragedy as revealing how in the contact zone—as in any other—one's sexual legibility is beyond one's control, let alone that of one's teachers. Here, sexual ignorance—or, as it is more frequently figured in women, sexual innocence—plays itself out in tragic dimension.

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45 *The Searchers*, dir. John Ford (Rank/Allied Film Makers, 1956).

46 Modell, *Patterns of a Life*, 181-2. As the scandal was fuelled by the *New York Times*, the Bureau of American Ethnography was seen desperately tightening the requirements for anthropological fieldwork.
Disciplining Sexuality

Margaret Mead has always been a troublesome figure for anthropology, someone at the periphery of its scholarship but central to its public ceremonies and popularist manifestations. Derek Freeman’s scientism is directed against the subjective interpretative sympathy that was anthropology as Mead embodied it. The disgrace of Mead takes on the force and necessity of a ritual sacrifice and, under Freeman’s name, the two corrective ambitions blur: the disciplining of the discipline is indistinguishable from the disciplining of a female sexuality, presumed ignorant. Freeman implies that Mead is “duped” by her Samoan informants because she is, among other things, sexually unknowing. By his logic, the twenty-three year old Mead, confined in Ta’u to the precincts of a girls’ boarding school, doesn’t know much about love because she doesn’t know much about men. Freeman’s exaggeration of statistics of Samoan male violence and criminal rape can start to seem the aggressive administering of a lesson a girl is not likely to forget, testifying to Sedgwick’s hunch that “under this regime [of sexual ignorance], it becomes exciting to be near people who may not know themselves sexually, and the excitement is very specific: it is an excitement to violence, the violence of epistemological enforcement.”

As both Clifford and Porter note, the project of Freeman’s book is an impossible one; its fantasy is that anthropology might be refounded as a cultural science always outside the operations of textuality or representation. It strikes me that, unlike Freeman’s book which seems destined to repeat the epistemic violence necessary to drive a wedge once and for all between a knowledge and an ignorance, Mead’s work is

47 See Freeman, Margaret Mead and Samoa, 65-71, and, 281-93.

48 Sedgwick, Tendencies, 48.

not naïve about the contaminations of sex and text. In her autobiographical *Blackberry Winter*, there is another allegory, this time an allegory of reading relations. Mead gives an account of her 1931 New Guinea fieldwork, and the hours spent in "the mosquito room" working away with two anthropologists, husband Reo Fortune and Gregory Bateson, to whom she initially admits a professional respect. Respect becomes desire and requires the sexual rejection of Fortune with the arrival of a new book in the tropical outpost—the manuscript of Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture*. The discussion her ex-lover’s book generates are the occasion for a swivelling of sexual allegiance. As Mead observes:

There is much to be said for the suggestion that the true oedipal situation is not the primal scene but parent’s talking to each other in words the child does not understand. And by then Gregory and I had established a kind of communication in which Reo did not share.

In this account, the sexual and intellectual exclusion are one and the same—Fortune is barred from the intimacies of an exchange he cannot understand and, cruelly, every time he attempts a contribution he merely sounds his own inadequacy. After their divorce Mead writes *Sex and Temperament*; her ex-husband decries it as her attempt to use theory to exonerate sexual behaviour—as if that were an insufficiency.

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52 Twenty-five years later, when Mead was writing a preface to a new reprint, over 800,000 copies of Benedict’s book had already introduced anthropology to a generation of American students. Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934; reprint with a preface by Margaret Mead, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).


Ruin

Culture is always fast disappearing—ethnography never captures the final truth of a culture but tells its ruin. The culture my nostalgia arc toward is also a fantasy and also under threat. Like those outmoded anthropologists at Columbia, I want to assume that personal and professional lives are continuous—and that why we do the work we do might have something to do with desire. The crossings of desire and knowledge are difficult—a university, for instance, cannot legislate for or against them—but, as Sedgwick cautions, we might “attend with every possible sophistication to the exclusionary and inflictive involvements of our knowledges.” Those athletic knowledges—let’s call them science—are pumped up by the will to know and the power of unknowing. The work we do might be the place to tap more fragile relays of knowledge, to tell other quieter histories. It would be nice if the discipline could provide that continuity, if it could in some way preserve and renew the recognition of homosexuality, if it could bear the traces of those entanglements that our homophobic culture would otherwise erase. Perhaps especially for those of us with subjectivities estranged from the generation of marriage plots, for richer or poorer, the profession remains a location for the recognitions that comprise our sexual selves. Gay inscription within pedagogic relations produces anxieties and denials within institutions that are variously hostile, tolerant, indifferent, to its peculiar presence and each of us, like Mead’s daughter, has to acknowledge our complicity with the ways that presence is rendered secret or unknown. Culture, if we are to survive it, must be made to account for its compulsory silences and vested ignorances.

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55 Sedgwick, Tendencies, 51.
Chapter Seven

Queens of Samoa: the Closetsing of Homosexuality

These attractions, these evasions, these circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but perpetual spirals of power and pleasure

Foucault, History of Sexuality

This thesis arcs between two readings wherein the sexual conduct of Polynesian men both requires and escapes European definition. In the opening study of this thesis, which settles on the documents of Cook’s third voyage, I use the British indifference to Hawaiian sodomitical desire to help measure a representational space from whence the European homosexual will emerge. In this final chapter, which analyses a contemporary documentary representation of Samoan fa’aafafine, the pertinence or applicability of European sexual description to Polynesian behaviour is again at stake, though now we will find that, two hundred years after Cook’s men encountered aikane, gestures of cultural relativism are fully co-optable to a homophobia already drilled and proficient in erecting a difference without to forestall a difference within. Furthermore, the liberal assertion or avowal of cultural and sexual relativism,

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1 Since contact, Western curiosity has been excited by the “intermediate” gender categories of the islands of Polynesia. Fa’aafafine—literally “in the fashion of a woman”—is the Samoan term for those individuals, anatomically male, who adopt attributes associated with the female gender. The Tahitian
working as it does to deny or erase continuities between cultures, has deadly 
consequence in a Pacific location such as this one, Auckland, where young Polynesian 
men who identify across gender and disidentify as gay are the population most at risk to 
HIV infection and most beyond the reach of preventative education programmes.2

Caution

It seems all too easy to condemn ethnographic documentary in advance, to 
cite their framings of other cultures as instances of sexual tourism whatever their 
pedagogic alibis. By this rule we might say that "Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa" is an 
instance of a European culture—bearing in this case the passport of Television New 
Zealand, and the state-funded stamp of New Zealand on Air—arrogating to itself the 
right to represent subjects from another culture in the name of a science upholstered into

and contemporary Hawaiian term for this phenomena is mahu; the Tongan, fakaleiti. As Niko Besnier 
explains:

In all of these languages, these terms can function as nouns to refer to a person, as verbs 
to refer to a demeanour or action and often also as adverbs to specify the manner in 
which an action is being performed: such patterns of linguistic multifunctionality are not 
specific to these terms.

Niko Besnier, "Polynesian Gender Liminality Through Time and Space," in Third Sex, Third Gender: 

2 Given the fraughtness of the field, let me be perfectly clear. It is not that under the urgent imperative 
of AIDS—its discursive no less than its epidemiological effects—we must ride rough-shod over the 
niceties of cultural differentiation in order to install "homosexuality" as a universally legible rubric. 
Rather, it might be held in mind that recently the most efficacious and rigorous distinctions between 
homosexual identities—gay-identified men—and homosexual acts—men who have sex with 
men—have been made in AIDS education and policy work. See, for example, Gary Dowsett, Men Who 
Have Sex with Men: National HIV/AIDS Education (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing 
Service, 1991) and Michael Bartos, et al., Meanings of Sex between Men (Canberra: Australian 

However, what I am interested in here is the ease with which that difficult lesson, with its unsettling of 
widely-held knowledges about gender and sexuality, sexual behaviour and sexual identity, can be not 
only committed to heart but used to shore up some of the very complacencies it might more usefully be 
understood to challenge. As we shall see, the ready disavowal of homosexual continuities, in the name 
of Polynesian difference, serves not to disarticulate the enmeshed fields of gender and sexuality but to 
recuperate the most conservative understandings of family and heterosexuality.
that the persistence of colonial representation, accounts of the ways in which the representational strategies of colonialism extend beyond the abrogation of their governmental term, there is a sense that the analysis is up and running before it even encounters the text.4 It is as though critics come to readings or viewings with the self-fulfilling expectation that any and every colonial text will yield damning evidence of the violent representational mechanisms of racism, sexism, or what Edward Said has taught us to call, orientalism.5 The only check I think we can place on that tendency to uncover what we already suspect to be in place is to remind ourselves


4 Accounts of colonialism’s afterlife are as frequent as sightings of Elvis, though usually far less compelling. Just when you think colonialism dead and buried, it comes back to haunt the representational structures of the new, ostensibly post-colonial, order. As a return this is more in keeping with Elvis in Vegas than Elvis revenant; colonialism’s come-back, sideburned and spangly, no longer cut at the waist but performing full-length in the round, might profitably be thought postmodern. Though perhaps not. See Simon During, “Postmodernism or Postcolonialism?,” Landfall 155 (1985): 366-80.

5 Edward Said, Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient (London: Routledge, 1978). As Meaghan Morris has wryly reflected in the context of cultural studies, you can start to feel that someone, somewhere, is running an interpretative factory line. “Sometimes,” writes Morris, “I get the feeling that somewhere in some English publisher’s vault there is a master-disk from which thousands of versions of the same article . . . are being run off under different names with minor variations.” Meaghan Morris, “Banality in Cultural Studies,” Discourse 10 (1988): 15. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has pointed out, this also makes clear the “tiny number of inconceivably coarse axes of categorisation [which] have been painstakingly inscribed in current critical and political thought [such that] gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation are pretty much the available distinctions.” Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 22.
again and again that we cannot know in advance how the relations between knowledge and power will be articulated in any single cultural text, in any single documentary.

**Voice**

Within the limits of its broadcast hour, “Queens of Samoa” puts together a pointed narrative about colonialism and its corrosive effects on Samoan culture. I want to suggest that this revisionist historical narrative is advanced at the expense of other specifically sexual narratives or plots which nonetheless make themselves heard against the grain of the documentary. The opening sound and image tracks collude in a frenzy of Samoanicity as the documentary cuts rapidly between such iconically weighted images as palm leaves, coconut milk splashing on to a rock, a dancer with traditional head-dress, all the continuity provided by a soon-to-be familiar tropical ukulele and drumbeat. This framing is literalised by tapa-style borders above and below the opening

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6 The relation between colonialism and narrative is far from simple. Benedict Anderson argues for a relation between the novelistic organisation of time and space as simultaneous and the imaginary participation in mass community, linking the development of nineteenth-century forms of nationhood to the specifically colonial experience of creolisation. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). See also, Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation And Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990). If Anderson’s is the watershed text for unravelling the relation of nation and narrative, Peter Brooks’ *Reading for Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984) is the book after which understandings of the relation between desire and narrative can never be the same. For an earlier investigation into the way in which sexuality seems inextricably linked to the compulsion for plot see, D. A. Miller’s *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981). The reliance of sexuality on narrative is doubly apparent in the avowal of homosexuality, as is its retrospective structuration. The necessity or wish to tell the history of gay desire inspires Wayne Koestenbaum’s Barthes-like meditations on queerness and opera:

> When I as a gay person go backward to find or write the story of my sexuality, I am making it up, because sexuality has no absolute origin or motivation, though because sexuality is structured like a narrative, with crux, climax, and denouement, we are always hoping to unknot its beginning.


7 The term “Samoanicity” is derived from Roland Barthes’ coining of Italianicity, which he uses to refer to a kind of fantasy of Italianness, a hyper-representation unanchored by the banal truths of
frames, cut from the same cloth as the backdrop to the title frame (fig. 7.1). The voice-over that inaugurates the documentary and directs our viewing similarly establishes the priority of culture over sex:

"Fa'afafine. It means to be like a woman and Western labels like transvestite, transsexual or gay just don't fit. Genetically and physically, fa'afafine are men. In their hearts, they're women and most want a long-term relationship with a heterosexual man."

Simply it says, don't look here for gayness or homosexuality because you won’t find it. However, the confidence of that voice-over, its easy dismissal of the relevance of terms like “transvestite, transsexual, or gay” to Samoan sexual conduct, mask this documentary’s relation to homosexuality (a word it forbears to use) which is an elaborate and systematic refusal, a disavowal. The documentary wants homosexuality not to be there and every time its scandal seems about to break it will banish it, then banish it, then banish it again, from its frame of understanding.

"Queens of Samoa” starts with an explicit statement about the mobility of gender inscription. However the source of that statement as an utterance is a female voice-over which remains anonymous, unspecified except for its gender assignation, which is unproblematically feminine. The viewer hears that voice, and without giving it a second or even first thought, knows it to be a woman’s voice; it’s not that we judge it to be a woman’s voice, it just is a woman’s voice. This is an important point in a documentary which seems to be foregrounding the slipperiness of gender transitivity.

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8 The cultural location of that voice-over is not without interest, precisely because the documentary avows no interest in it. Narrated by Annabel Lomas, the voice-over—its intonations, its vowels, its straining after but falling short of a BBC neutrality—is recognisably New Zealand. Not unaccented then, that voice is nevertheless speaking its native tongue. (Of course, when your native tongue is English, it means above all else that you’re not native.) The voice-over maps out a home turf on which many of the subsequent voices, with their Samoan accents, their English as a second language, find themselves in the wrong neighbourhood.
Figure 7.1. Title frame. "Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa," dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
The implication of this is that, unlike the Samoan culture that is being represented, the European culture that represents has an uncomplicated relation to gender: Europeans are naturally marked male or female. They are secure in their gender, buffered against liminality’s pull.

We never learn anything more about that voice, we never see who it is that is talking, and “she” never so much as uses a first person pronoun. Within the documentary, that gendered voice-over remains the acoustic trace of an authorial or editorial function. We cannot therefore underestimate the power and omniscience of that voice; it is not just a continuity device or soundbridge but is more like a controlling voice or, more exactly, a controlling narration. Although it is one voice among many, the lone palangi voice among many Samoan voices, it enjoys a privilege. It is this voice the viewer identifies with but only in so far as it is not a voice but a system of knowledge or intelligence. It would be a mistake to personalise that voice, to think of the warm throat from which it resonates before being caught by the audio systems which film makes invisible. Rather, we need to consider the way in which that voice as voice-over conflates with the filmic technology that records both sound and visual images. As we watch, as we listen, it is those technologies, the ones that control visibility—who is seen and how—that we identify with as the intelligence system that determines the

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9 Kaja Silverman argues that the voice-over, the disembodied voice that floats free of the diegesis, marks the point of highest authority within any cinematic economy: “Insofar as the voice-over asserts its independence from the visual track, it presents itself as enunciator. It seems, in other words, to be a metafictional voice, the point of discursive origin.” Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 51.


11 It occasionally performs as soundbridge, knitting together visual sequences, but that is a function it shares with other, Samoan, voices.
documentary's meaningfulness. The voice then is a blind. It works to naturalise or personalise those surveilling technologies in a minimal way because to mark that voice too idiosyncratically would ruin the illusion of the documentary. Distracted by the specificities of that voice—who is she? why is she saying these things about Samoan culture?—the viewer might slide out from under the full weight of those structures of authority which the voice-over puts in place. As it is, that level, respectful, female voice is maintaining a seamlessness between the unseen technologies which control the meanings generated by the editing and sequencing of events and revelations and those other Samoan voices to which it appears always to defer. That is the bridge its sound secures; it neutralises the contract between camera and subject.

**Witness**

Having rejected the "labels" transvestite, transsexual and gay as irrelevant, the documentary efficiently sets up the axes on which *fa'afafine* are to be located via a series of autobiographical statements by Samoans who identify as *fa'afafine*. In less than ten minutes, before we go to the first advertisement break, those indigenous definitional charts are in place and the remaining forty minutes of screentime merely, and at times tediously, refines those co-ordinates though the impression the documentary gives is that its progression is rather haphazard; "Queens of Samoa" makes all kinds of loops and digressions so as an exercise in mapping it feels less like serious cartography than a kid's game of battleship.

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12 Our most ready shorthand for that invisible structuring technology remains "the camera" or "the gaze." The cautionary statements against too glib a polarising of the field of vision made in my earlier discussion of Gauguin are equally relevant here.

13 Perhaps this says more about me than the documentary but the term I keep wanting to apply to that voice and its supposedly deferential manner—the way it appears to defer to the idiosyncrasies of its subjects—is one derived from old-fashioned literary studies. I want to say that the voice-over works in the manner of free indirect discourse. It is a depersonalised narration that is everywhere felt but nowhere seen, a Jane Austen kind of thing.

14 Battleship may well provide the theoretical model for this thesis. It is a commercial children's game involving moulded plastic mock-up of a radar screen—although less indulged kids have been known to
Over visuals which capture them variously in the alternating locations of Apia and Auckland (figs 7.2 and 7.3), the personal statements provided by these fa'a'afafine reinforce that they are to be understood through a gender inversion model of human behaviour whether that be thought solely as an inversion of the soul or mind, or whether it be projected onto the surface of the body and its openings, or onto the clothes that body wears, or indeed any combination of these strategies. Such self-fashioning, we learn, is particular to each fa'a'afafine and there is no reason to assume that an individual feels any necessity to be consistent in these regards over an entire lifetime, nor is there any reason to assume that they don’t. On the other hand, the documentary attests, fa'a'afafine are always to be understood in relation to the family.

The idea of the family is crucial to the story this documentary tells. Karl Pulotu-Endemann, a non-effeminate fa'a'afafine, dressed in a man’s jacket though a bright red one (fig. 7.4), stakes a claim to family when he says, “I’m very proud of who I am and I don’t need to put on dresses to be that person. The most important thing to me is the thinking and your relationship to your family and your culture.” Immediately after this testimony grounded in personal experience, Dr Fanafi Le Tagalao, a Polynesian woman identified as Professor of Samoan Studies (fig. 7.5), draws her analysis:

“I think the palangi view tends to polarise things. It must be very difficult for them to see the outward signs of an effeminate man and accept that this is a different being moving in a completely different world than an effeminate man moving in the Western world.”

These ideas about the Samoan family and Samoan culture seem to come from the informants themselves. The documentary singles out Karl, in particular, as the privileged informant. Of those on screen who identify as fa’a’afafine he is the most draw up their own battleship grids on pieces of paper—that involves lobbing wild guesses at what you hope to be the co-ordinates of your opponent’s out of sight naval fleet. Lucking a hit, you proceed slightly more systematically, finally sinking the smallest of targets in the widest expanse of blankness that represents the Pacific theatre.
Figure 7.2. (above) Fa'afafine entertaining with traditional dance in Apia, Samoa. "Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa," dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.

Figure 7.3 (below) Fa'afafine on Karangahape Rd, Auckland. "Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa," dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.

Figure 7.5 (below) Aiono Dr Fanafi Le Tagaloa, Professor of Samoan Studies. "Fu'afafine: Queens of Samoa," dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
articulate and reflexive—the others can sound more or less stilted as they’re asked to dilate in what is obviously their second language, English—and there is a pattern established whereby Karl will say something that will them be repeated or elaborated by the Professor or by the impersonal palangi voice-over itself, so that whatever it is that he has said tends to gain an authority independent of its status as personal testimony. While most of the statements from the Samoans who think of themselves as fa’afafine remain autobiographical statements and so truthful to themselves, Karl’s utterances accrue a different kind of truthfulness and an authority cut loose or in excess of that of witness.

Family

After the first advertisement break the dislocated, anonymous voice-over immediately reorients the viewer, restating and amplifying what Karl and Dr Le Tagaloa have already told us:

“The heartbeat of Samoan society is the family. Historically fa’afafine always had a special place here.”

The documentary point-of-view is sutured with that ascribed to its privileged informant as the voice-over then becomes Karl’s, though it takes a while for the viewer to realise that it is now him talking since the images reeling past don’t signal any transition. The visual images thus bridge the different vocalisations as though there were no shift at all; the perspective is continuous, both visually and ethnographically. Karl amplifies what the female palangi voice-over has just said:

“I can’t think of any ainga or any extended family in Samoa that does not have a fa’afafine. We have existed in the Pacific for hundreds of years. The Samoan culture nurtured us. We were born fa’afafine and we were nurtured by the culture and our families. That’s what makes us special.”
“Queens of Samoa” effectively lays out a very neat, concise thesis about the Samoan family and its historical evolution. The information voluntarily yielded to the camera by *fa'afafine* is pressed into support of a certain version of colonial history.

This is most evident at the end of a long monologue provided by Alex Futu (fig. 7.6), an Apian resident who, in accord with his Christian faith, would like to submit all *fa'afafine*—including presumably his son, Benji—to leper-like exile on some further island: “We can’t sort of desert them to another island or something like that. I wish we could do that, but having *fa'afafine* around Samoa is a very sad thing to see.” As the father continues speaking, the camera returns to Benji applying his makeup and to the young figure crouched in the doorway as mesmerised by the image of Benji as Benji is himself (figs 7.7 and 7.8). Perhaps this sequence suggests the attraction of gender-liminality and what we are witnessing is a kind of erotic initiation transacted between generations, between Benji at the mirror already skilled in the ways of *fa'afafine* and the proto-*fa'afafine* boy on the floor. If so, maybe Dad’s right and *fa'afafine* are contagious and should be dealt with as if they suffered a kind of leprosy. The documentary camera-work links the figures of Benji and the watching boy, allowing the significance of that connection to emerge in the scene, put into circulation without anywhere being spoken. One of the reasons we are susceptible to such a reading is that what we are braced to resist is not what we are seeing but what we are hearing, what Benji’s father is saying in the name of Christianity: “First, I like a man to do what a man has to do. Get himself a wife, have children like myself and build up the family.”

Having given voice to Benji’s father the documentary restores its alternative reading of *fa'afafine* by returning to Karl. It is Karl who guides our response to this

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15 The logics of metonymic contamination against which the documentary defends itself but which are nevertheless everywhere in evidence are productively crystallised in this scene. Despite Benji’s father’s straight-forward faith in the efficacies of quarantine, lines of distinction prove strangely permeable. If the thought of *fa'afafine* exiled on some island brings to mind the leper—itself a potent figure of the contaminatory reach of European colonialism—then the leper calls to mind another figure equally wrought through tropes of disease, infection and transmissibility, what we might call the apparitional leper or—in all the welter of not saying, it may as well be said—the homosexual.
Figure 7.6 Alex Futu, Benji's father. “Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa,” dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
Figure 7.7 (above) Benji putting on lipstick in mirror. "Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa," dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.

Figure 7.8 (below) Boy watching Benji from doorway. "Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa," dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
quiet revilement and denial of the fa'afafine by his own family; it is, he lets us know, the consequence of the coming of Christianity to the Pacific and the declension of traditional Samoan culture—it is part of the damaging aftermath of contact. Fa'afafine, Karl tells, when neglected or rejected by their ainga, or extended families, suffering isolation and loss of identity, will found constellations of alternative families "in order to survive." His statement is confirmed by the editing of the documentary which then returns us to Auckland and another fa'afafine, Niko Uili, who speaking of his drag queen friends, says, in appropriately broken English, "My family for now, this is my flatmates."

Visual erotics

The most liberal of the documentary’s discourses promotes this version of colonial contamination, and establishes that it is the injustice of history that warps the world in which Benji takes his place. But, if "Queens of Samoa" is content to wear its guilt on its sleeve, it is also content to ignore the way it recruits Benji and the other fa'afafine to a certain visual erotics. Benji before the mirror, with the enraptured boy beyond him, may or may not tell us anything about the visual erotics of being or becoming fa'afafine, but it undeniably reveals something about the visual politics of the documentary. It is the camera’s relation to visibility that is on display in this scene, not Benji’s and not the younger boy’s, although the documentary conflates all three, as if each one were the other. As Judith Butler has argued in a reading of Paris is Burning, a film about the black and Hispanic drag-ball culture of Harlem, the camera is a lure, it lures its subjects to its version of visual confirmation; it holds out the promise of "erotic recognition," even perhaps the ability to confer femininity.16 Butler argues that it is hard to know where that desire for visualisation originates; the camera makes a promise to

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fulfil the desire for visibility that it itself engenders.\textsuperscript{17} Her complaint about \textit{Paris is Burning} might also be put to “Queens of Samoa”: where is there the least sign of some “filmic effort to take stock of the place of the camera in the trajectory of desire that it not only records, but also incites?”\textsuperscript{18} Because we have become so used to describing as phallic the promise that the cinematic apparatus makes when it offers to make the subject desirable, it is worth recalling that if these \textit{fa’afafine} are intent on inciting male heterosexual desire they do so through the conveyance of a camera that is in the hands of a \textit{palangi} women filmmaker.\textsuperscript{19} The viewer is not outside this circuit of lure and fulfilment. When I think about the moments in this documentary that I find pleasurable or luminous they all tend to be of the same kind. Invariably they involve some figure—sometimes \textit{fa’afafine}, sometimes not, often a child, never the rather stern Professor of Samoan Studies—doing something, saying nothing, perhaps moving across the screen and suddenly or slowly they will look straight to camera and a smile will break that seems to take the camera at its word, that asks it to deliver on that promise (fig. 7.9).\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} Karl, we should note, does not have that relation to the camera or to a femininity mortgaged to visibility. As he tells us, he is \textit{fa’afafine} without “the need to put on dresses.”

\textsuperscript{18} Butler, \textit{ Bodies That Matter}, 133. That lack suggests that the documentary insists, ideologically, on the ethnographic conceit of an innocent gaze. This makes even stranger its repeated suggestion that nineteenth-century missionaries, however well-intended, were implicated in those circuits of projection and incitement outside of which it claims to stand.

\textsuperscript{19} This is, of course, to conflate the camera with the director, in this case Caroline Harker. Such conflation is regularly done with narrative film in the name of the auteur whose distinctive signature is discerned everywhere. Auteurship thus underscores the imaginary status of the cinematic apparatus. Documentary film has never quite settled its relation to those conventions though since Robert J. Flaherty’s “eskimo” classic, “Nanook of the North,” appeared in 1922 it has been laying claim to the creative structures of narrative. See Brian Winston \textit{Claiming the Real: the Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations} (London: British Film Institute, 1995). Perhaps tellingly, general commentary on \textit{Moana}, Flaherty’s film of 1926 made in the then Samoan Protectorate of the Dominion of New Zealand, complains about the lack of story.

\textsuperscript{20} And it does. These engaging moments mark what is, in “Queens of Samoa,” a lost opportunity; who, I am left asking, are the girls who can get these boys to smile like that? This question asks the documentary to declare not only its relation to power, but its relation to the pleasure it pursues:

The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpatates, brings to light; and on the other hand the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. The power that lets itself
Figure 7.9 The direct gaze solicits the promise of the camera. "Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa," dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
Sexuality

What is the relation between the gender inversion model of identity formation through which we are instructed to understand fa'afafine as women trapped within the bodies of men, and the Samoan family? To talk about either is not to talk about sexuality. Sexuality is not reducible to the algebra of gender or its inversion. That is worth saying because the tropes of gender are frequently understood to articulate not only sexuality but, more crucially, its secrets. Gender inversion maintains Samoan kinship categories which are essential to the tracings of genealogy just as the prohibitions and dispensations surrounding sexual conduct pertain to fertility and the politics of descent. Whatever the relation of gender inversion to kinship, the family contains both. To raise questions of sexuality on the other hand might perform all kinds of disruptions within that conception of an organic Samoan culture and its mainstay, the ainga or extended family, which is said to be able hold all gender dissonances within its warm embrace (fig. 7.10).

"Queens of Samoa" never allows such questions to emerge. Although at times it flirts with an explicitness about sexual matters it nevertheless holds out on—"whether they dress as women for fun or are serious about it fa'afafine are quite clear about who they’re attracted to"—the documentary returns always to the sexual level of the girly sleepover, never getting beyond the putting on of make-up and worse and worst dresses. In statements by fa’afafine obviously generated in response to an inquiry about whether or not a sex change operation is sought, questions of gratification arise but in the documentary’s ordering of the responses pleasure is quickly eclipsed with talk be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalising, or resisting.


Figure 7.10 Fa'aafine as maternal figure in family. “Fa'aafine: Queens of Samoa,” dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
of the responsibilities of family life and the care of children. It's not about sex, it's about family.  

**Inversion and idealisation**

The apparent inclusiveness of the Samoan family is thrown into relief by the exclusiveness of its church. A Pacific Island Church minister, when describing his New Zealand Samoan congregation’s relation to *fa’afafine*, says, “They understand the niceties of the term but when it comes down to the actual sexual activity I think that is an area some of our people would not want to delve into.” In response to this, an unnamed *fa’afafine* explains that the Samoan church’s prejudice is based on a misunderstanding. They mistake *fa’afafine* as homosexual and thus as violating a biblical ban on relations between people of the same sex, whereas in his own understanding of himself as *fa’afafine*, his gender does not correspond to his sex so his relations with men are with an opposite to himself, thus his desires are heterosexual in so far as they are incited by a difference in sexual ascription. Karl also claims that historically the missionaries misrecognised *fa’afafine* and instead of seeing them as women read them as men and thus their sexual activities as sodomitical. In contradistinction to the missionary impulse which sees sin and sodomy everywhere, the

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22 The documentary’s insistence on family as the interpretative framework for *fa’afafine* takes on a different cast in the light of Butler’s essay on Jennie Livingston’s documentary, *Paris Is Burning*. Butler argues that it is precisely the cultural heft of “family” and its related terms that renders them liable for rearticulation. “Significantly,” she writes

> it is in the elaboration of kinship forged through a resignification of the very terms which effect our exclusion and abjection that such a resignification creates the discursive and social space for community, that we see an appropriation of the terms of domination that turns them toward a more enabling future.

Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 137. However, Leo Bersani is impatient with Butler’s valorisation of the house culture caught on Livingston’s film and its resignification of familial relations. Disagreeing with her conviction that “the resignification of the family . . . is not a vain or useless imitation, but the social and discursive building of community, a community that binds, cares, and teaches, that shelters and enables,” Bersani argues instead that such “resignification is little more than a consolatory community of victims.” Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 137; Leo Bersani, *Hemos* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 52.
gender inversion understanding of fa'afafine that the documentary elaborates preserves the heterosexuality of desire: only opposites attract and difference is the engine of desire. The documentary, which seems to be a relaxed or liberal account of how anything goes gender-wise, mobilises an inversion model of sexual identity ("a woman's soul in a man's body") in, what Butler—writing of drag—calls, "the service of both the denaturalisation and reidealisation of hyperbolic gender norms."23 "Queens of Samoa" denaturalises femininity and masculinity, only to reassert the compulsory heterosexuality of desire, in a gesture of accommodating difference it thus shores up, at a single stroke, both the family and heterosexuality.

The documentary voice-over endorses the idealisation of the heterosexualisation of desire in a statement which runs over a scene shot in Barker and Pollock, a haberdashery on Auckland's Karangahape Road, when it suggests that fa'afafine are not protected by human rights legislation which condemns discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The implication is that fa'afafine is a gender orientation not a sexual one. Furthermore the idealisation of desire as heterosexual seems to have the effect of wishing history and the present otherwise: "I'm not a deadly disease that anyone is avoiding." So says the same unnamed fa'afafine who wishes his identity disguised by the documentary. It is a discomforting statement for many reasons though none of them give the documentary any pause. The statement reels past as if there weren't a deadly disease that everyone is avoiding. The enunciation works not as an acknowledgment of AIDS or of the necessity of safe sex for all populations howsoever they identify but more as the remission of that knowledge. It marks the production of an unknowingness about the realities of HIV transmission.24 That is how

23 Butler, Bodies That Matter, 125.

24 Such determined unknowing seems startling, in large part because of the disavowed train of knowledges they set in motion. Sedgwick reminds us of the operations of what takes us by surprise here when she observes that ignorance, no less than knowledge, is generative of power effects, effects moreover most powerfully registered in the field of sexuality: "That a particular ignorance is a product of, implies, and itself structures and enforces a particular knowledge is easy to show, perhaps easiest of
that statement functions, not in the informant’s mouth, but in the programme, whose power effects override the performative ones available to the speaker.

“Queens of Samoa” refuses to track any of these leads. It won’t pursue any contradiction that isn’t finally retrievable to a version of colonial abuse. In this way it avoids offending any of its imagined audiences, except perhaps the gay one. The story it tells, the privileged narrative it unfolds, remains firstly that of the tragedy of nineteenth-century missionary influence which then dovetails, in this century, with the tragedy of migration, of the Samoan diaspora, the scattering of the population across the metropolitan centres of the Pacific Rim. Because of that scattering—which is why we find these Samoans in Barker and Pollock in the first place—fa’afafine are exposed like other Polynesian migrants to the violence of racism and further to the indignity of an inappropriately directed homophobic discrimination, inappropriate because misdirected.

Kinship

In a later sequence in “Queens of Samoa” the fa’afafine dream of the long-time heterosexual companion is rescinded by the reality of living alone. Returning to the empty bleakness of his Auckland flat (fig. 7.11), a fa’afafine accounts for the proliferation of his family, an expansion that leaves him by himself:

“When we first came here we were all living together, one family, brothers and sisters, but they’ve all gone out and married and have their own houses and that. I prefer living alone and, uh, I had a relationship one time for a couple of years and that’s it, that’s about the only, uh, the longest relationship I had. I rather stay by myself.”

The deliberate shaping of the documentary ending restates and resecures a number of significant meanings: namely, that New Zealand erodes the Samoan family and at best (or worse) puts in the place of that family a drag culture which might or might not all, today, in the realm of sexuality.” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Tendencies (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), 25.
Figure 7.11 *Fu'aafine* living alone in Auckland. "*Fu'aafine: Queens of Samoa,*" dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
open onto a gay scene. The relationships so desired by these fa'afafine do not survive and the failure of those relationships leaves fa'afafine abandoned. They are isolated individuals lost to their families, lost between two worlds. What the documentary offers against this loss is the return to Apia and a culture that claims fa'afafine for kinship. Referring to a beauty pageant staged for fa'afafine at a resort hotel (fig. 7.12), Dr Le Tagaloa says:

“All the family . . . turn up to support not because they are competing as drag queens but because he happens to be my cousin, my son, my brother. Whether we like or support what they are doing. That is the kind of society we have.”

The magnetic pull of that familial culture is presented as strong enough to hold even the alien as its own, thus in Apia the drag ball (a gay-derived event) is a “uniquely Samoan festival.”

In this documentary Samoa is the family. The colonial story “Queens of Samoa” tells is that the family that once nurtured difference has been damaged through contact and now, in the name of Christianity rejects its own. And the remedy for the insufficiencies of the family is more family, the restoration of kinship categories, “our brothers and sons.” What “Queens of Samoa” ends with, via the physically diminutive but symbolically huge Professor of Samoan Studies, is the matriarchal gathering of fa'afafine (the gender inverts) to their unproblematically gendered positions within that kinship system, which, apparently, has never been in question—no-one calls fa'afafine their sister.

Such is the Samoan way, in Apia. But in the Samoan diaspora, family threatens to become dystopic. We might remark that this is one of the representations of Samoaness that circulates so easily in New Zealand editorial culture. Samoa equals

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25 However brief their term, no partners are ever seen in the documentary so the impression we are given is that the longing for a male heterosexual partner is completely wishful, a fantasy indulged against a starker reality.
Figure 7.12 Fa'afafine crowned Miss Western Samoa Drag Queen in Apia drag ball. "Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa." dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
family and under the least pressure that assumed equation will yield a series of metonyms: family can be made contiguous with domestic violence, sexual abuse, welfare fraud. While this documentary doesn’t do that, it does offer this formulation—though it makes it seem as though the analysis proceeds from inside that culture, that it is not an observation made about Samoans but an insider knowledge that those informants have merely let us share—that the Samoan ainga or extended family once transported to New Zealand is replaced by the pretended family. The extended family becomes the pretended family most obviously in the pseudo-family comprised of Niko’s drag queen flatmates (fig. 7.13). Niko, himself a sometime drag artiste, an otherwise moustached ear-ringed man, calls his flatmates his “for now” family. Niko also tells us that he has not told his family in Western Samoa that he is fa’afafine. He is closeted by distance and other opacities. The culmination of this narrative trajectory as the documentary arranges it is a saddened one. We have the vision of the Samoan living alone in a empty flat, no long-time companion, family long gone. This is the tragic narrative of cultural estrangement. The gender in-between is now lost between two worlds, no-one’s son, no-one’s brother, and the deprivation of that state beyond kinship is underlined by the final switch to Dr Le Tagaloa and the festivity of the Apia scene.

No one in “Queens of Samoa” resists the conflation of Samoa and the family; the editing makes it seem not only as if that understanding of Samoan culture proceeds from inside it but that it is our privilege as palangi viewers to learn this thing. Perhaps in the liberal dream of the documentary we will take this knowledge away and change our lives in gentle accord with it, so that maybe the next time we’re beating a path along Karangahape Rd, or standing at the counter in Barker and Pollock, we’ll look at that fa’afafine as he’s buying another three metres of leopardskin print, and think: “The heartbeat of Samoan society is the family.” Somehow, I don’t think so.
Figure 7.13 Niko Uili, third from right, with his flatmates. "Fa'afatine: Queens of Samoa." dir. Caroline Harker, Communicado, 1995.
This is not to say the world is an intolerant place; it is a tolerant place and we are all contained within regimes of tolerance, though differently.\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Fa'afafine}, for instance, will be tolerated in so far as they are not gay, though the only voice brave enough to say that in this documentary belongs to the New Zealand born Pacific Island Church minister. The documentary itself rather serves a liberal alibi; the gesture it makes is a kind of not wanting to know. This could have been an interesting documentary had it been prepared to think about the ways in which that distinction—the distinction between \textit{fa'afafine} and homosexual—is enforced. The cultural locations in which that difference is articulated include gay locations as well as whatever nocturnal encounters take place in the darkened environs of Karangahape Rd outside the trading hours of Barker and Pollock, or wherever else those enigmatic transactions occur. “Queens of Samoa” has an investment in keeping those negotiations mysterious and despite the voice-over trilling that \textit{fa'afafine} have “no doubt about who they are attracted to,” who it might be who finds \textit{fa'afafine} attractive goes without saying.

The effect of that not saying is as powerful as a saying and what it puts in place is the idea that Samoan culture keeps a secret, not the secret of gender inversion, which as we’ve seen is actually an idealised version of heterosexual maintenance and thus no secret at all, but the secret of sex, of who \textit{fa'afafine} are going with. That epistemological manoeuvre is the orientalist one. It projects the compulsory ordering of Western culture on to Samoa, making homosexuality their privileged secret as it is ours. Samoa is made to keep that secret—albeit inadequately—a secret to which the incessant flagging of family can only draw attention. That is the recognition this documentary conveys and it does so by not saying it. In order to avoid that logic, the \textit{palangi} makers

\textsuperscript{26} Despite its often self-congratulatory poise, tolerance can look more heavy-handed than prejudice. Consider, for example, the reactions of Auckland netball administrators to the 1994 decision of the New Zealand Netball Federation “to sex-test players who might be transvestites without breaching privacy and human rights laws.” Jan Cameron, “For Women’s Own Good: Gender Verification of Female Athletes,” \textit{Women’s Studies Journal} 12, vol. 1 (1996), 8. Sensitive to the heavy Pacific Island involvement in the sport—and consequently, the likelihood of \textit{fa'afafine} involvement (fig. 7.14)—Auckland administrators urged netball teams to be self-surveilling and to enrol in mixed (men’s and women’s) competition if there was any doubt as to the gender identity of their members.
of "Queens of Samoa" would have had to do the more difficult thing and find a way of talking about or with fa'afafine that didn't project the structure of sexual secrecy on to Samoa. It would have to stop telling or trading in secrets and think about the ways in which this sexualised culture closets certain knowledges, and how it orchestrates the slippery relations between concealment and disclosure. As it stands, and sadly, all "Queens of Samoa" can do is reveal its unthinking complicity with those mechanisms of sexual representation.

Out

Wittingly or unwittingly, "Queens of Samoa" charts, as effectively as Cook's navigations, the Pacific space we palangi now call home. That occupancy is known differently by each of us and its peculiar epistemic compulsions and distortions warp our lives in discontinuous ways. As Annamarie Jagose reminds us, sexual closets are not easily escaped: "If it can be allowed that the indirect raising of the suspicion of homosexuality might be a more effective means of promulgating that 'knowledge' than an unambiguous nomination, it follows that 'coming out,' the direct self-assertion of one's homosexuality, may not always be as straightforward in effect as in intention."27 In one of her trademark footnotes, overlong and arcing away from the engendering argument to which it refuses to remain subordinate—a folie à deux—is a story that bears repeating, because it is funny and because, uncannily, it condenses what has been the defining preoccupation of this thesis, the fraught relation between a knowingness and an unknowingness about matters we persist in thinking sexual. The New Zealand journey it maps, from school to home then back again, is not often thought a wearying one, though for some its exhaustions are interminable:

A friend of mine when we were both undergraduates—let me call her Vicky for that is her name—made the trip home to come out to her family. A less oblique announcement can

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hardly be imagined than the on-site declaration “I’m a lesbian.” Still, first her sisters, then her parents, gathered around what was to have been a momentous table, laughed and said, “No, you’re not.” It was just the kind of thing Vicky would say, back from the city, always ready for a laugh. When she insisted, her parents became cross with her: “You’re not,” they still said but now as if it were a permission they could refuse, an argument they could win. The next morning they drove her to the train. “Goodbye,” she said, watching them for some acknowledgment, some admission. “Goodbye,” they said as always, the consternation all hers.28

28 Jagose, “Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” 2, n. 5.


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