



Impossible Women: Lesbian Figures and American Literature

Valerie Rohy

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Impossible Women fills a critical gap in queer theory by spotlighting representations of lesbian sexuality in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature. Reading through the lens of feminist and psychoanalytic theory, Valerie Rohy considers texts by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kate Chopin, Henry James, Zora Neale Hurston, Ernest Hemingway, and Elizabeth Bishop. Addressing American ideologies of reproduction and representation, Impossible Women suggests that lesbian figures are made to symbolize both the unrepresentable and the failures of meaning inherent in language. Rohy traces the ways lesbian sexuality?relegated to the domain of the ineffable, yet endlessly subject to inscription?appears in tropes of transference and displacement, the disembodied voice, repetition-compulsion, and the uncanny. Impossible Women also asks what cultural work such figures perform, locating lesbian desire in American literary history and engaging issues of genre and narrative, social formations such as the rhetoric of the "New Woman," and intersections of racism, sexism, and homophobia.

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