



Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism

Deborah Lutz

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A smart, provocative account of the erotic current running just beneath the surface of a stuffy and stifling Victorian London.

At the height of the Victorian era, a daring group of artists and thinkers defied the reigning obsession with propriety, testing the boundaries of sexual decorum in their lives and in their work. Dante Gabriel Rossetti exhumed his dead wife to pry his only copy of a manuscript of his poems from her coffin. Legendary explorer Richard Burton wrote how-to manuals on sex positions and livened up the drawing room with stories of eroticism in the Middle East. Algernon Charles Swinburne visited flagellation brothels and wrote pornography amid his poetry. By embracing and exploring the taboo, these iconoclasts produced some of the most captivating art, literature, and ideas of their day.

As thought-provoking as it is electric, *Pleasure Bound* unearths the desires of the men and women who challenged buttoned-up Victorian mores to promote erotic freedom. These bohemians formed two loosely overlapping societies—the Cannibal Club and the Aesthetes—to explore their fascinations with sexual taboo, from homosexuality to the eroticization of death. Known as much for their flamboyant personal lives as for their controversial masterpieces, they created a scandal-provoking counterculture that paved the way for such later figures as Gustav Klimt, Virginia Woolf, and Jean Genet.

In this stunning exposé of the Victorian London we thought we knew, Deborah Lutz takes us beyond the eyebrow-raising practices of these sex rebels, revealing how they uncovered troubles that ran beneath the surface of the larger social fabric: the struggle for women's emancipation, the dissolution of formal religions, and the pressing need for new forms of sexual expression.

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