This book charts the flows of colonial desire in the works of British writers in India. Arguing that the Indo-British colonial encounter is based on an ideological opposition between masculinity and effeminacy, rather than on a more conventional distinction between masculinity and femininity, the book investigates masculinity as an overdetermined site on which the multiple axes of domination and subordination are simultaneously constituted and contested. Uncovering an intricate nexus among race, caste, class, gender, sexuality, nation, moral legitimacy, and economic/political power—a nexus designated by the term effeminism—the study establishes the homosocial dynamics of colonial desire.

Working on the assumption that desire is intensely political, historically constituted, and materially determined, the study shows how the inscriptions of masculinity in the fictions of Flora Annie Steel, Rudyard Kipling, and E. M. Forster are deeply implicated in the politics of colonial rule and anticolonial resistance. At the same time, the study refrains from representing colonialism as a coherent set of public events, policies, and practices whose social, political, and cultural meanings are self-evident. Instead, by tracing the resistant and unassailable modes of masculine desire in colonial fiction, the study insists on an explosive revolutionary potential that makes desire often intractable. And by restoring the political in the unconscious and the unconscious in the political, the book proposes to understand colonialism in terms of historical failure, ideological inadequacy, and political contention.

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