



Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801

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Where previous historians have concluded that a combination of censorship and ignorance excluded lesbian experience from written history before our era, Emma Donoghue has decisively proved otherwise. She dispels the myth that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century lesbian culture was rarely registered in language and that lesbians of this period had no words with which to describe themselves. Far from being invisible, the figure of the woman who felt passion for women was a subject of confusion and contradiction: she could be put in a freak show as a "hermaphrodite," revered as a "romantic friend," or jailed as a "female husband." By examining a wealth of new medical, legal, and erotic source material, and rereading the classics of English literature, Emma Donoghue has uncovered narratives of an astonishing range of lesbian and bisexual identities in Britain between 1668 and 1801. Female pirates and spiritual mentors, chambermaids and queens, poets and prostitutes, country idylls and whipping clubs all take their place in her intriguing panorama of lesbian lives and loves.

Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801 Details

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Author : Emma Donoghue

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From Reader Review Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801 for online ebook

Simona Vesela says

This is the first book on queer history I have ever read. Some of the sources presented were truly bizarre. The various real or fictitious setting described were fascinating. I cannot imagine how the "female husband" trick would work today, IDK maybe some couples could pull it off (of course ignoring IDs and birth certificates) :D

Every time I wished to pause reading this I had to find some account which either ended well or at least wasn't depressing and/or tragic...which sometimes took a good half an hour :(. Why am I surprised.

I have a critique of the author's writing style. You can recognize which part is a quote and which is not, but lot of times it happens that author adopts the style from the quoted texts into her commentaries. A lot of times I was surprised at the ease with which she uses slang and derogatory language. I don't know if this is common in texts like this.

I also became suspicious when she disregards all previous analyses of certain texts as completely wrong. It felt like though she had a good reason

Liked it and would recommend it

luscious says

... And enter the protagonists of Donoghue's "Life Mask" on pp.145-148.

Alice says

Three stars not really for faults of Emma Donoghue, I guess. I enjoyed it, but not nearly as much as Faderman's book (although Donoghue's, which was published 12 years later, makes some interesting corrections). I mean, when you're looking at lesbian history, a lot of what you have is condemnatory texts by men, which are at least valuable in terms of knowing that lesbianism *existed,* but they're still kind of a bummer. Faderman's text talked much more about woman-sourced writing and thereby had a much more positive tone.

Teddy Elizabeth says

I read about 2/3 of this book for a research paper. I found it very useful, especially since it had extensive footnotes that allowed me to use this as a springboard for other sources. Enjoyable and rather easy to read, even if it is academic. I didn't agree with all that the author wrote, but she provided interesting thoughts to dwell upon.

Jen Grogan says

An interesting and rigorous look into a subject that's far too often disregarded or flat out dismissed by historians, but I'd hoped this would be much more of a historical read and less literary analysis. On the whole I think I would more happily have read another of Donoghue's brilliant historical novels, but since I think I've already burned through almost all of those, I'll take what I can get of her clever writing.

Elaine Burnes says

Blurb: In the tradition of Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* and John Boswell's *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*--a groundbreaking work of lesbian scholarship that presents a revisionist and frankly sexual look at 18th-century lesbian culture.

Ironic that she debunks many of Faderman's conclusions about the visibility of lesbianism before the late 1800s. She also debunks the still-used myth that the words lesbian and sapphic were not used to describe homosexual women until the late 1800s. Both were used much earlier and in context. This was fascinating and I learned a lot about how our history, including hermaphrodites, female husbands, romantic friendships. Oh, and that Sappho was bisexual, not a lesbian. What does that mean for the word?

Kathleen says

I do love Emma Donoghue's fiction. I think her short stories are well-crafted and her novels intelligent and warm, and she tends to include queer characters who are just queer without centering the story on their queerness, a thing I always love. So naturally when I saw that she'd written a book on queer women's literature in seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain, I was *there*.

It did not disappoint.

Donoghue covers a broad range of topics, from sex between women to romantic friendship, from women passing as men to communities of queer women. The book is very well-researched, and though it drags a bit at the beginning, it picks up pretty quickly. Donoghue even mentioned a pair of women that she wrote a book about, Anne Damer and Eliza Farren from *Life Mask* (which I really need to get back to!). She locates a community of women who desired women in the past and expands on it until it seems unnatural that we should have believed that women never wanted other women until recently.

My only complaint is with some of the terms she used. It's true that the book is on the older side, but for people who might be hurt by this: she uses the term hermaphrodite frequently, and also uses "lesbian" as a catch-all for all women desiring women, which it very much is not. That said, I did love the book and I look forward to reading her other academic works.
