



Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel

Lisa L. Moore

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Refuting commonly held beliefs within women's and lesbian history, feminist theory, and histories of the novel, *Dangerous Intimacies* challenges the idea that sex between women was unimaginable in British culture before the late nineteenth century. Lisa L. Moore argues that literary representations of female sexual agency—and in particular "sapphic" relationships between women—were central to eighteenth-century debates over English national identity. Moore shows how the novel's representation of women's "romantic friendships"—both platonic and sexual—were encoded within wider social concerns regarding race, nation, and colonialist ventures.

Moore demonstrates that intimacy between women was vividly imagined in the British eighteenth century as not only chaste and virtuous, but also insistently and inevitably sexual. She looks at instances of sapphism in such novels as *Millenium Hall*, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, *Belinda*, and *Emma* and analyzes how the new literary form of the novel made the bourgeois heroine's successful negotiation of female friendship central to the establishment of her virtue. Moore also examines representations of sapphism through the sweeping economic and political changes of the period and claims that middle-class readers' identifications with the heroine's virtue helped the novel's bourgeois audience justify the violent bases of their new prosperity, including slavery, colonialism, and bloody national rivalry.

In revealing the struggle over sapphism at the heart of these novels of female friendship—and at the heart of England's national identity—Moore shows how feminine sexual agency emerged as an important cultural force in post-Enlightenment England

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