



Fashioning Sapphism

Laura Doan

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The highly publicized obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) is generally recognized as the crystallizing moment in the construction of a visible modern English lesbian culture, marking a great divide between innocence and deviance, private and public, New Woman and Modern Lesbian. Yet despite unreserved agreement on the importance of this cultural moment, previous studies often reductively distort our reading of the formation of early twentieth-century lesbian identity, either by neglecting to examine in detail the developments leading up to the ban or by framing events in too broad a context against other cultural phenomena.

Fashioning Sapphism locates the novelist Radclyffe Hall and other prominent lesbians—including the pioneer in women's policing, Mary Allen, the artist Gluck, and the writer Bryher—within English modernity through the multiple sites of law, sexology, fashion, and literary and visual representation, thus tracing the emergence of a modern English lesbian subculture in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Drawing on extensive new archival research, the book interrogates anew a range of myths long accepted without question (and still in circulation) concerning, to cite only a few, the extent of homophobia in the 1920s, the strategic deployment of sexology against sexual minorities, and the rigidity of certain cultural codes to denote lesbianism in public culture.

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