

OUTSPOKEN:

OITM's Quote of the Month

"I'm a member as much as I need to be a member. If they need me as their role model, I'm there as their role model. But not because I'm going to placate and pander to the lowest common denominator of sexuality. I'm a role model because I'm a damn good person. And if that's not enough, then they can lick my ass."

Sandra Bernhard, commenting on her "membership" in the lesbian and gay community

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OITM Review: STIR-FRY

Emma Donoghue
HarperCollinsPublishers

Susan Jasmin

My ex-girlfriend and I, in the conceit of a then blissful relationship, used to joke about being the poster children for a successful queer couple based on individuality first and sexuality second. As we have since successfully broken up, I would recommend Emma Donoghue's new book, *Stir-Fry*, as an affirmative, intelligent role model and coming of age story.

Seventeen year old Maria, which rhymes with "pariah", who arrives in Dublin to attend her first year at University and to escape living with an elderly aunt, answers a flyer for a flatmate with the cryptic "2 female" symbol. A brief inquiry to a stranger reveals that it "just means women...but they'd probably be fairly feminist, you know the sort".

Undaunted, Maria arranges to see the flat inhabited by Jael and Ruth, who share a single room with one futon, Maria's first broad hint. She settles herself into their somewhat bohemian lifestyle as well as establishing her own typical first-year-at-University friendships, the party-going best friend, the American boy, and the theatre company.

Jael at twenty-nine is an erstwhile student living off a family allowance and Ruth, although younger than Jael, has already held a government job that pays her a pension to return to school. Since Jael and Ruth, who have lived together for six months, do not come out to Maria right away having lost their previous flatmate to intolerance, the characters are allowed to interact independently of the issue of sexuality. In an early conversation with Ruth outside the library, Maria expresses her concern with Jael's sarcasm:

"Has Jael been giving you a hard time?" Ruth was watching; her voice was suddenly concerned.

"No, no. I'm sure she just takes a while to get used to."

"Listen, if she's ever really--if she makes you feel uncomfortable, tell me."

"And what'll you do?" asked Maria cheekily.

"Oh, probably beat her to death with the shower attachment."

Conversations like this, their realism and personality along with the Euro-intonations, make for a slightly off-balance if not propelling read.

While Ruth provides much of the political awareness for Maria's new world,

Susan McKenzie, M. S.

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