



Circa 2000: Lesbian Fiction at the Millennium

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An excerpt by Emma Donoghue

The Fox on the Line

Any other June, we would be in Hengwrt by now. I would be waking up with the white-topped mountains ringed around me. Cader Idris, where the giant once sat, would raise its shoulder between me and all harm. Sitting under the snowy cherry tree, I would keep one ear cocked for the brook that sounds so much like a woman singing, you have to lay down your book and go and see.

But we are trapped in London, waiting to make history.

Keeping a diary is a monstrous waste of time. But I cannot seem to help it. Without words, we move through life as mute as the animals. Of course, I burn these jottings at the end of each year. What I should keep instead is a daily memorandum of F and all her works. Posterity will not interest itself in me; I am only her Mary.

On the first of June 1876, then, our Society held its first General Meeting at the Westminster Palace Hotel, Lord Shaftesbury presiding. Cardinal Manning defied the Pope and spoke in our favour. Resolutions in support of our Bill were passed with the utmost enthusiasm.

I break off here to remark that it cannot go on: the evil, I mean. We spill their blood like water. There is so much we could learn from them--devotion, patience, the fidelity that asks no questions. The men of science say they pick only the useless ones, but who is to decide that? And what are we to think, we old maids who have so often heard ourselves called surplus?

It stands to reason that those who assault nature will suffer at her hands in the end. I read these stories every other day in the Times. A boy was beating a plough horse with the stock of his gun. It backfired and took his arm off.

Do I sound uncharitable?

It has been a long year.

Every week our Bill creeps a little further through the House, progressing like a pilgrim under the flag of Lord Carnarvon. I try to steady my heart. I work a little every morning in my sculpture studio at the bottom of the garden. My hopes shoot up and down like a barometer. But we walk by the Thames when the sky has begun to cool, and F ends each evening by convincing me all over again. The great sacrifice she made last year, when she laid down all her other cau

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