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## Sappho Goes to Law School

*Ruthann Robson*

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#2736233 in Books 1998-04-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.04 x .74 x 6.041, 1.01 #File Name: 0231105614320 pages | File size: 54.Mb

**Ruthann Robson : Sappho Goes to Law School** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sappho Goes to Law School:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A unique look at lesbians in the law By A Customer Robson is an openly lesbian, politically progressive law professor. (In later articles, she has come out as a cancer victim as well.) This is a collection of her essays on lesbians, homosexuality and the law. This book has a great introduction. Robson is a complex thinker, so do not assume this book will just say, "Aren't lesbian lawyers cool!?" Robson's analysis of legal

issues can be overly pessimistic at times: as if one domestic partner law or pro-gay legal decision can be criticized for not removing all oppressions throughout the world! Still, this was an interesting read. It differs from many gay legal texts.

In *Sappho Goes to Law School* Ruthann Robson weaves together concepts taken from traditional legal theory, postmodernism, feminist theory, and queer theory, as well as her own personal experience in the courtroom and classroom, to take stock of the complexities of lesbian identity and the often detrimental ways in which legal scholarship approaches lesbianism.

.com Ruthann Robson's canny, well-written essays on lesbian legal theory and pedagogy, rooted in her experience as a lesbian professor at a progressive law school, offer a sparkling application of poststructural analysis, queer theory, and cautious, common-sense feminism to a wide range of legal problems and possibilities. She begins by imagining Sappho as a modern-day law student, with the hope of uncovering Sapphic rather than Socratic methodologies in legal theory: "How could [invoking Sappho] change the ways in which we understand, practice, and apply law? What if we adopted the Sapphic lyric as a mode of communication and understanding rather than Socratic argumentation?" Included are essays on lesbians and criminal justice, same-sex marriage, child custody cases, and the role of personal experience in postmodern theorizing. In her provocative closing essay, "Lesbian Sex in a Law School Classroom," Robson describes the difficulties of teaching a course entitled "Sexuality and the Law" to a diverse group of students, some of whom object to the word "sex" appearing on their law school transcript, while others cannot help but unburden their private lives to her during her office hours. With its multitude of stories and its playful ambivalence toward personal narrative, even the theory-weary will find *Sappho Goes to Law School* stimulating and unusual. -- Regina Marler  
From *Library Journal*  
The legal status of lesbians and gay men in contemporary America continues to be controversial, as illustrated by these two very different titles, both by professors of law. Richards aims to combine "interpretive history, political philosophy, and constitutional argument to make sense of the background, development and growing impact of two of the most important movements of human rights currently on the American constitutional scene: feminism and gay rights" and ends by claiming to have explored "the interpretive fertility of antebellum abolition feminism in both the understanding and criticism of contemporary interpretive developments in the areas of gender and sexual preference." His analysis, however cogent, is undermined by a downplaying of lesbians in the title and elsewhere, a problematic conceptualization of "moral slavery," and Richards's often nearly impenetrable prose. In contrast, the rhetorical proposition in the title of Robson's exploration of lesbians and the legal machine is pointedly provocative and witty as well. This challenging collection of 13 essays can be read as a continuation of her previous book, *Lesbian (Out)Law: Survival Under the Rule of Law* (LJ 6/1/92). Applying queer theory to her examination of the legal system and legal theory to the concept of lesbianism, Robson confronts the complexities of such issues as lesbian identity, class, violence, marriage, and parenting. The writing, a heady mix of pedagogy, lesbian sex, and jurisprudence, is dense and iconoclastic but always intellectually stimulating, ultimately rewarding the reader who perseveres: "But in addition to their danger, both essentialism (modernism) and constructionism (postmodernism) present possibilities for an emancipatory enterprise such as a lesbian legal theory." If 70 pages of endnotes seems excessive, it only reinforces the notion that these titles are intended for subject collections.?  
Jim Van Buskirk, San Francisco P.L.  
Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. Pointedly provocative and witty. . . . Applying queer theory to her examination of the legal system and legal theory to the concept of lesbianism, Robson confronts the complexity of such issues as lesbian identity, class, violence, marriage, and parenting. The writing, a heady mix of pedagogy, lesbian sex, and jurisprudence, is . . . iconoclastic but always intellectually stimulating.