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THE LIFE OF ANNE DAMER

Portrait of a Regency Artist

JONATHAN DAVID GROSS



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BY JONATHAN DAVID GROSS

“Jonathan Gross has written the first full biography of a little known but important figure on the gothic/romantic cusp: Anne Damer, niece of Horace Walpole and talented artist in her own right. Based on archival research, letters and journals which have never been seen before, and extensive forays into Scotland, Gross has managed to reconstruct the life and times of this fascinating woman. Scholars of the Gothic and women's artistic production will particularly find this book an essential addition to their research.”—**Diane Hoeveler, Marquette University**

“This biography for the first time uncovers the hidden career and life of Anne Damer, the superb sculptor and lesbian hostess of the British Regency period. Jonathan Gross pays full and arresting attention to Damer's artistic and literary works (including her novel *Belmour*), her notable relationship with the historian Mary Berry, the houses she lived in, the places she visited, and her impact on the other women writers of her day. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the bluestocking world of Romantic-era Britain.”—**Anne Mellor, University of California, Los Angeles**

ABOUT THE BOOK

The first biography of Anne Damer since 1908, *The Life of Anne Damer: Portrait of a Regency Artist*, by Jonathan Gross, draws on Damer's notebooks and previously unpublished letters to explore the life and legacy of England's first significant female sculptor. Best known for her portraits of dogs and other animals, Damer also created busts of England's most important political heroes, sometimes within days or hours of their historical accomplishments. This in-depth biography traces her life during the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Peace of Amiens and the Hundred Days. Damer was convinced that art could have significant political influence, sending her bust of Nelson to the King of Tanjore to encourage trade with India. Her art stands at the transition between neoclassicism and romanticism and provides a wealth of insight into 19th century British sculpture. In the last twenty years, there has been a strong revival of interest in Damer's life, particularly in gay and lesbian studies due to her famous relationship with author Mary Berry. This text serves as a deeper investigation of this fascinating and important figure of British art history.

The emotional ménage a trois of Anne Damer, Mary Berry, and Horace Walpole forms the heart of this new biography. Gross contends that all three individuals, had they led more conventional lives, would never have given the world the literary and artistic gifts they bestowed in the form of Strawberry Hill, *Belmour*, and *Fashionable Friends*. The struggles they faced will encourage modern readers to appreciate anew the fluidity of sexual identity and passionate friendship, as well as the restraints put in place by society to control them. Anne Damer's life has much to teach a new generation concerned with the complex relationship between love, art, and politics. *The Life of Anne Damer* will interest historians of Georgian England, and readers in the fine arts, literature, and history.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Gross is professor of English at DePaul University.

Hardback: 978-0-7391-6765-6 August 2013 Regular Price: ~~\$85.00~~ After discount: \$68.00

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