
Sherry Velasco's *Lesbians in Early Modern Spain* is the first monograph to attempt a comprehensive analysis of Spanish women's same-sex eroticism for the period of 1500–1800. Velasco manages to address numerous theoretical and methodological concerns while also covering substantial ground with regard to sources, approaches, and interpretations. This admirable groundbreaking work extends the current understanding of early modern Spanish women's lives into the realm of same-sex eroticism. Situating her work within the scholarship of important scholars of female homoeroticism such as Valerie Traub, Judith M. Bennett, Emma Donoghue, Amanda Powell, Alison Weber, and others, Velasco examines convent writing, Inquisition cases, staged comedies, visual arts, and moral and theological texts to argue that “frequent representations of eroticism between women . . . were visible to all types of cultural consumers” in the period (5). Her chapter on “Legal, Medical, and Religious Approaches to Lesbians in Early Modern Spain” provides a sound overview of current scholarship and would be a useful chapter for anyone interested in teaching about early modern female homoeroticism today. The chapter on “Criminal Lesbians” analyzes legal and Inquisitional cases to probe the reactions by authorities to female homoeroticism. Many of the cases discussed here have been studied in previously published work, but the chapter’s value lies in examining
such cases side by side to glean a better understanding of the presence of homoeroticism in cases primarily concerned with other heresies, including witchcraft, sorcery, and prostitution. Similarly, for those who have not read Velasco’s and others’ work on Eléno/a de Céspedes, Catalina de Erauso, and Christina of Sweden, Velasco offers a succinct discussion of all three “Transgender Lesbian Celebrities,” the title of chapter four. Velasco’s consideration of “Special Friendships in the Convent” (called “amistades particulares” by authors of the period) builds on Alison Weber’s and others’ work on this important topic. The notion of dangerous friendships had political as well as affective implications for convent life as evidenced by the numerous male and female authors who addressed the topic in great detail. The last two chapters focus on the early modern stage and visual representations of lesbians.

Overall this is a satisfying book insofar as it covers important ground and advances the scholarship on Spanish women’s eroticism. The title and book jacket might mislead readers. This is not a book about lesbians per se; it is a book about deciphering women’s affective and sexual relationships, preferences, and desires. Similarly, the depiction of two nuns holding hands on the book cover may lead readers to assume incorrectly that all same-sex convent relationships involved homoeroticism. These factors point to the risk a scholar takes when boldly placing “lesbian” in the title of such a monograph; it is difficult to avoid over-stating one’s case and oversimplifying arguments when arguing for a more expansive view of same-sex eroticism. In some cases, such as those of María de San José and Teresa de Jesús, I wonder whether the texts argue as clearly for a condemnation of same-sex eroticism as Velasco suggests. Research on patronage, political influence, and even family politics has shown repeatedly that women’s nonsexual affective relationships posed significant challenges to male power in the early modern landscape. These questions, however, provide a compelling reminder of the significance of Velasco’s contribution. Lesbians in Early Modern Spain will be a touchstone for the next generation of scholars as we continue to expand the fields of women’s literary and cultural history to include increasingly nuanced explorations of same-sex relations. Sherry Velasco should be applauded for pushing all of us to ask new questions.
and seek new ways to approach women’s friendships, sexuality, and gender identity.

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