

BOOK REVIEW

by
**Jonathan
Ned Katz**

Review by
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The DARING LIFE and DANGEROUS TIMES of EVE ADAMS



Although February is the officially designated UK LGBT+ History Month, June is recognised worldwide as the month of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) Pride. The date is significant: June 28 marks the anniversary of the 1969 uprising at the Stonewall Inn, and of the first Christopher Street Liberation Day March that commemorated it the following year.

Those events, half a century ago, were forthright assertions of trans and queer rights; of our community's humanity and refusal to be surveilled and brutalised by the state and society. Similar struggles continue today, all over the world. Meanwhile, a commodified, corporatized and de-politicised sense of Pride has meant that police forces and immigration agencies now sport rainbow-covered logos for one month each summer, even as they continue to harass LGBTQ people year-round.

The Daring Life and Dangerous Times of Eve Adams is a welcome intervention into this scene and delivers a potent reminder that queer liberation has always been intertwined with other struggles: for the rights of immigrants, women, ethnic and racial minorities, workers, all marginalised peoples. In focusing attentively on an individual who has largely been overlooked in the history books to date, the author Jonathan Ned Katz also underscores how all of the aforementioned struggles have been propelled forward by countless unrecognised and under-appreciated figures, whose lives undoubtedly merit attention. His book marks an important corrective to a common recurrence.

Finding Eve

Born in Russian Empire-controlled Poland in 1891, Chawa Zloczewer (a.k.a. Eve Adams, among variations of both names) was a working-class, single Jewish woman who emigrated to the United States in 1912. After a few years of factory work, Eve joined up with the socialists, anarchists and bohemians of Greenwich Village and became a saleswoman of radical publications, before later running tea rooms in Chicago and New York.

Her friends and associates, including Emma Goldman and Ben Reitman, were at the forefront of a "sex-love" revolution that, despite naturalising heterosexuality, challenged dominant ideas about monogamy, procreation, and desire. Against this backdrop, Eve's own daring counter-cultural

sustain an effective balance of reverence and foreboding throughout.

Elsewhere, his nuanced and sometimes elaborate portraits of the supporting cast flesh out the bones of a story that is pieced together from a fragmented archive. By getting to know the many and varied people who left indelible marks on Eve – whether they crossed paths for fleeting moments or remained intertwined for decades – Katz constructs an affectionate, and ultimately affecting, image of a potential everyday icon.

The author's skill and experience as a historian comes to the fore in his scene-setting passages and in his asides, which are almost always relevant. His deep knowledge of LGBTQ history and culture is further highlighted by astute readings between the lines

As Katz notes in his convincing and layered analysis of Adams' "groundbreaking" and "troublemaking" work, *Lesbian Love* "paved the way" towards greater acceptance of gay and lesbian lives.

ideas and activities had the scope to flourish – placing her firmly on the radar of US authorities who were out to quash "deviants" and dissidents of any stripe.

Katz weaves a complex picture of a complex woman, set against a richly textured canvas of the multiple and overlapping 'dangerous times' in which Eve lived. While the threats that she encountered are clearly discussed, Katz manages to

and dissections of the euphemisms, slurs, encodings and selective omissions found buried in the varied set of correspondences, courtroom transcripts and newspaper clippings he cites.

It is, however, impossible to disguise the obvious difficulty Katz has faced in amassing sources, and his need to draw upon unreliable narrators (Eve included) is keenly felt. It is a challenge

Katz manoeuvres ably by carefully noting his own and others' speculations and alternative possibilities, and his refusal to attribute particular qualities to relationships without supporting evidence.

The cumulative effect is to highlight how histories of people who were marginalised or persecuted in their own times are frequently omitted, erased or distorted in the archive – and therefore demand judicious review. Katz's own painstaking work has, over five decades, helped us to (re)construct and expand that archive, and this book is another welcome addition to it, not least because it includes the full text of Adam's own publication, *Lesbian Love*.

Given Eve's intersecting subjectivities – most keenly her class, religion, politics, and immigrant status – is it also painfully clear why her work has been so unfairly overlooked. In namechecking Adams' celebrated near-contemporaries Gale Wilhelm, Radclyffe Hall and Lillian Helman, Katz underscores the classed, racialised and otherwise uneven ways in which some people become icons while others fade from view.

For a project that intends to restore prominence to a name that had previously been relegated to footnotes, it is therefore jarring that Eve's work is not the centrepiece it could and should have been. The decision to include *Lesbian Love* in the 'Appendix' that follows Katz's biography feels counter-productive, at best. While not solving this politically inconsistent editorial choice, I suggest that readers turn to it between Chapters 8 and 9. Doing so brings Eve, and her

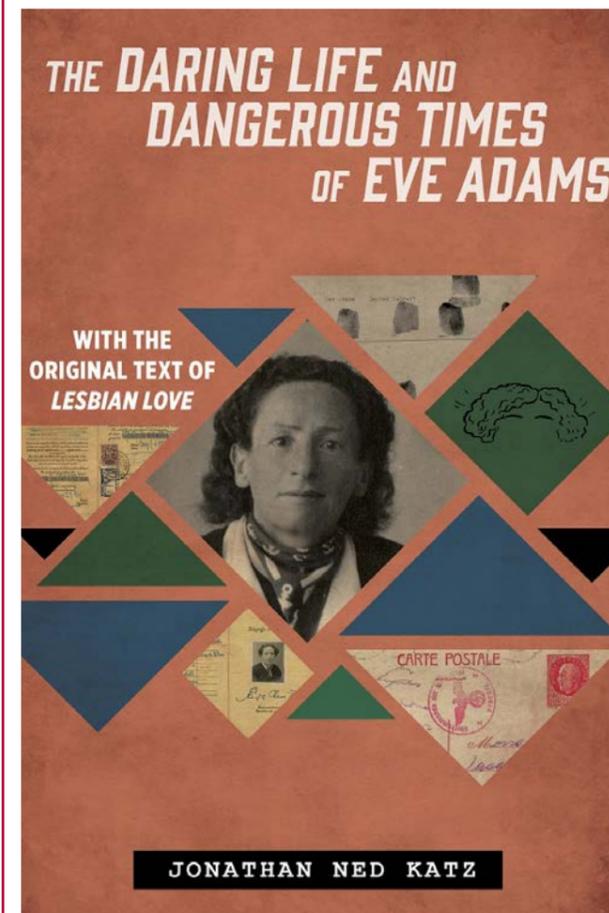
biographer's portrait of her, more fully to life.

The bigger picture

As his title implies, however, Katz has not only focused on Eve. His book is also explicitly concerned with detailing and exposing the knotted ways in which the powerful conspire to maintain and tighten their grip on society. The deportation hearing that opens the book is, for example, carefully exposed as having been prompted and justified by a confluence of dangerous forces: state agencies' crusades against multiple spectral threats; the fragile masculinity and petty jealousies of aspirational men; and the simple greed of real estate brokers.

Later, as fascism spreads across Europe, we find Eve cornered by poverty and xenophobia, while being imperilled by virulent antisemitism. Here, Katz does not hesitate to name the "respectable" high society lesbians whose names are already writ large in the annals – Gertrude Stein, Natalie Barney – and who would have shunned (or worse) a Jewish, working-class, unabashedly sexual woman, like Eve.

As Katz makes clear in his Introduction, his researching and writing of this book was compelled in part by the presence of Donald J. Trump in the White House and the far-right forces that were amassing under the long shadow he cast. While there are, of course, parallels to be drawn between the "dangerous times" of Eve Adams and today, it would, however, be short-sighted to associate the white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, capitalist



norms that have long structured US society with only its latest ideologue.

Thankfully, Katz elaborates on his initial framing in the Epilogue, where he offers readers a forceful and compelling argument for continuing to fight – in Eve's spirit – for a radically more just world. His sense of anger and urgency over the alternative is palpable throughout, with a closing rallying cry that will reverberate among all who continue to fight for an inclusive, anti-capitalist and anti-racist, queer liberation.

Siobhán McGuirk is an anthropologist at Goldsmiths, University of London, and is the co-editor of *Asylum for Sale: Profit and Protest in the Migration Industry* (PM Press, 2020). *The Daring Life and Dangerous Times of Eve Adams* by Jonathan Ned Katz is out now on Chicago Review Press.