



# Stir-Fry

*Emma Donoghue*

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**Stir-Fry** Emma Donoghue

"Exhilarating...irreverent, and extremely funny," - *Ms.*

Seventeen and sure of nothing, Maria has left her parents' small-town grocery for university life in Dublin. An ad in the Student Union - "2 ? seek flatmate. No bigots." - leads Maria to a home with warm Ruth and wickedly funny Jael, students who are older and more fascinating than she'd expected.

A poignant, funny, and sharply insightful coming-of-age story, *Stir-Fry* is a lesbian novel that explores the conundrum of desire arising in the midst of friendship and probes feminist ideas of sisterhood and non-possessiveness.

Emma Donoghue is the author of *Room*, *Slammerkin*, *Hood*, and *Kissing the Witch*. Born in Dublin, she now lives in Ontario, Canada. *Stir-Fry* is her first novel.

## Stir-Fry Details

Date : Published December 29th 2006 by Alyson Books (first published 1994)

ISBN : 9781555837235

Author : Emma Donoghue

Format : Paperback 240 pages

Genre : Fiction, Lgbt, Glbt, Queer, Lesbian, Cultural, Ireland, Young Adult

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# From Reader Review Stir-Fry for online ebook

## Karen says

I love this one!! Someone once called it a "comfort book", which I thought was a good description. Real, likeable characters. I sympathize with Maria's awkwardness but am impressed by how self-assured she is. The ending is a nice surprise, but feels right. Sometimes I re-read just the last two pages 'cuz they make me smile :)

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## Pixie says

i liked the writing, but didn't like how for a long while it sounds like the pov person is a straight gawping at her lesbian flatmates. it's not that in the end, but it still got on my nerves a bit. also would have given a higher rating if it wasn't for some biphobia and "asexual, like a plant" (an actual quote).

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## Nisa says

It's such a happy book, filled almost entirely with witty conversations and interesting, unique characters. The relationships between the characters ring true, and lots of the quotes (expounded below) hit rather close to my heart. And there were a lot of feminist/women's issues raised, which makes me think and rethink. Mostly with a laughter though. The author can laugh at herself sometimes, and it is very refreshing. Reminds me that sometimes people just don't know what they want until the very last moment. And reading a book on the Mac iBook is definitely a good experience that I will repeat. Gonna find other Donoghue books since I love the way she thinks. Hood, probably?

Interesting quotes that stuck out to me:

"It's just that I've had enough of pretending to be equally nice."

"So long as you're awake, does it matter how you were woken?"

"I hate authority figures who keep calling you by your first name and pronouncing it wrong."

"How honest we are until we reach the age of reason."

"What she should be doing was anything except watching the rain, the least original form of melancholy."

"Of course every friendship had a certain element of what you had to call attraction."

"I don't like many people, and certainly not half the human race. Let's say I'm open-minded."

"Even if she were happily married in five years' time, she thought, she still wouldn't feel a hundred percent normal."

"No, not to tell her. Just to find her."

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## Chez Hilroy says

Two stars might be a little harsh; maybe three would be more fair. But the fact is, I didn't like reading Stir-fry. It's not for the characters or the plot or the theme, which I'll get into in a moment, but just the writing style. Stir-fry exists in the same world as beginner's fanfic where the characters sullenly fling peas across the

table, dodge kicks between dialogue, and sail into anime pratfalls in response to every lame verbal "barb".

In short, the style blows. And more than anything, that wore away my goodwill.

Now, that's just the style, let's talk content. The characters are fine-- not deep, not complex, but consistent and effective at their purposes. They're not always likeable (not often likeable, actually), but they're never so unlikeable or unrelatable that it interferes with Donoghue's intentions.

Similarly, the plot isn't bad. It's basic, maybe unremarkable, but not poorly done. Consistent, a little predictable, but never any kind of real slog. The book isn't very dense so--outside of the style--there's not any point that feels like it's dragging.

The thematic content I found mostly non-existent. That's not a knock against it, though. In this kind of experience-based, coming-of-age/coming-into-one's-sexuality (maybe that's redundant) story you don't necessarily need a bunch of thick subtext to have a good time. Donoghue's building of a conservative young woman in a time of much more stringent homophobia (and sexism) into a liberal adult with some measure of agency is done fairly well. Perhaps in the 90s--or maybe in Ireland, as a Canadian I'm inequipped to judge this story's relevance with regard to Irish/European culture--this had more punch. But I'd venture that modern audiences will have a hard time identifying with the challenges of the protagonist with regard to her blossoming acceptance/understanding of homosexuality.

So maybe two stars was a little harsh. I didn't hate reading this, but I did speed through the last third. I could not read one more amateurish line of exposition. I don't want to sandbag Donoghue as it was her first book and she has a lot of critical acclaim to her name now, so, for my own part, I would consider picking up one of her later novels to judge how far she's come. What's more, as a straight guy, maybe the themes or subject matter of the book just don't hit me as hard as they might a woman, a gay woman, or whomever.

At the end of the day, though, there's no excuse for the style. Maybe the substance rises higher above it than I give it credit for, but that style is still way down in the mud.

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## **Hannah says**

When I was a baby lesbian, I really really wanted to make a movie of this book.

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## **Alsha says**

It's that time of year for a reread while tucked into the couch with a pot of tea. Bliss.

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Such a perfect book to read on a cosy autumn day! Love this book to bits, going on literally.

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## **Joanna says**

A slow start, but a fantastic, heart-warming finish. The book was published in 2005, but the view on LGB matters - including Maria's own feelings on this - was archaic & really shocked & depressed me. It felt more like it was set in the mid-80s, not ten years later. Maybe because it's set in Ireland?

Things really picked up for me in the last third of the book. At one happy moment, I thought Maria, Ruth & Jael were gonna form a happy, extended lesbian threesome. I'd definitely be keen to read an alternative version of this that made this happen! As it was, I was pretty satisfied with the ending after all.

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## **Yvensong says**

Donoghue's first novel is a sensitive coming-of-age story of a young girl who has moved to the big city to start college.

The characters are believable, even when they are not particularly likable. Maria, the MC, is attempting to learn who she really is, and how she fits into college life and the world, after having spent her entire life in a small village. She explores the confusing world of relationships through her new flatmates and new college friends, including a couple of young men that she crushes on.

I admit, I'm not really proficient at reviewing this type of novel, as I rarely read in this genre, yet I found myself eager to pick this up to read every night to find out what else would happen in her journey.

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## **Rachael Eyre says**

Geez, this is tough. I'm a seasoned fan of Emma Donoghue, fic and non fic, and thought I'd love everything she's written. Alas, I can find little to admire and even less to like in this.

The ingredients for Stir Fry sound promising enough: naive girl goes to uni, has lesbian flatmates, has her whole life turned around. Unfortunately the blurb is the most exciting thing about it. Maria (pretentiously pronounced to rhyme with "pariah," which oh so wittily becomes her nickname) is an extremely irritating protagonist, fancying random guys on her course because it's "expected," hanging out with a girl she has nothing but contempt for and blind to the fact she fancies Ruth. Somehow the enormous hint that she creeps inside her flatmates' wardrobe and masturbates amongst Ruth's clothes passes her by. (Sorry to be crude; I was equally incredulous when reading said scene).

Ruth's nice, if somewhat stereotypical - she's a bit of an earth mother and selflessly cooks and looks after the ménage. Jael, her motormouthed girlfriend, is a very different kettle of fish; I get the impression that Donoghue intended her to be some kind of bisexual rake, a loveable rogue, but instead she behaves like a brutish boyfriend, slobbering around and running Ruth down at every opportunity. She's so confident in her desirability she plays a play for Maria, never once considering Maria might actually like the flatmate who isn't an egocentric tool. Perhaps it's good that she aggravated me so much - it's a sign I was engaging with the characters, which wouldn't have happened if they had been flat or dull.

Some of these issues can be forgiven by remembering its era - it was published in 1994 and set in a

notoriously homophobic country - but my chief issue with the book is a lack of direction. The first year of uni might be a confusing mess of a time, when you're trying to work out who you want to be, but I read for a satisfying journey and sense of narrative, and the novel has neither. No sooner had Maria realised she loved Ruth than it finished - almost as though Donoghue had chickened out on a happy ending.

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## **Marthese Formosa says**

“In what day in what month of this queue of years would she find that she had become a rootless stranger, a speck in the urban sprawl?”

– Stir-fry page 13

If there was one book that I read and I thought ‘this book is me’, this book is it. It is a book that stayed with me and even if I someday forget what the story was about, I will never forget how much I enjoyed reading it and relating to the story.

Stir-fry was Donoghue’s debut novel and is set in Dublin, Ireland. It is about Maria, a university student, who goes to live with Ruth and Jael who at first she does not realize they are a couple. Maria is very innocent and always tries to help but you see her develop and mature, in a way, this novel is also a coming-of-age novel.

It is interesting to see how Maria interacts differently with Ruth who is really sweet and just needs someone to talk to and Jael who has a more rebellious streak and usually tries to rope Maria into fun activities and how she interacts with them as a couple. To an extent, they become so familiar with one another that they become a trio.

Maria stays with the couple and she grows up in a short period of time. We see her force herself to have relationships with people but in the end, in a plot twist that you realize made sense at the end, she ends up with someone really lightly and in a relationship I imagine full of respect.

I like how the book is divided. Ruth likes cooking and cooking brings all three together so the chapters are divided in the steps required to make a stir-fry and it makes sense! Especially because a stir-fry is the first meal that Ruth cooks for them when Maria goes to see the flat. The story is set in the past so not contemporary and the physical space is both cozy in the flat but also big in the city and you see her attitude change more even how she feels about returning to her small home, so in a way there is psychological distance to who she used to be.

I definitely would have liked a sentence or two about what happened to characters after Maria stopped interacting with them. The book also has a bit of an open ending, but I definitely recommend this book to people that like psychological elements in books, to people that love Ireland and coming of age stories. Emma Donoghue is probably one of my favourite authors for the reason that she writes so brilliantly but also relatable.

cross-posted at the lesbrary: <http://lesbrary.com/2014/12/21/marthe...>

Also reviewed on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1csPB...>

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## **Mary says**

Stir-Fry was a delightful romp, and I believe my first foray into queer chick lit (except for maybe *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, which is significantly less fluffy).

Though I greatly enjoyed my reading experience, I wasn't left feeling fulfilled. The whole thing felt very much like a first novel: the characters and conversations were fun, if not super memorable or interesting, scene changes were semi-awkwardly managed, the plot was rather predictable, and there was some stereotyping of the queer experience/relationships in general.

This is sounding too negative. I really did like it! I love Irish jokes! Plus this was VERY different from *Room* from what I can remember of that. Huzzah for variety! I will definitely be reading more of Donoghue's novels.

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## **Joanne says**

I like this coming to yourself story. I wish I had found Emma Donoghue's books when I was struggling with the same things back at college in Dublin. But over 10 years later I enjoyed being transported back to the that time through the character of this book.

While this isn't the best book you'll read by the author, it is her first and you can catch glimpses of the better writer she has become in some of the pages here.

It's a simple story of youth finding itself and a quick and enjoyable read.

After all of Donoghue's books I feel like Maria when she says "The flat's strangeness had rubbed off on her. She was branded." Donoghue always leaves me feeling a little something after turning the last page of one of her books.

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## **Tatiana says**

i am such a sucker for a good lesbian story, and i think this is one of the best. i remember finishing it over some depressing stint at home and walking around for the rest of the day with a doofy grin on my face. it did however, make me really nervous 3/4ths of the way through because i realized that the way she had set things up, the ending was going to be really important to the story. it wasn't just going to end the story, it was going to completely make or break the story. and fortunately, i think she has an eye for endings.

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## **DebsD says**

3.5\* A gently-written coming-of-age story, with a bit more depth than appears at first glance, and a bit of a reminder just how short a time ago that Dublin (along with so many other places) was such a hostile place for anyone of "unconventional" sexual preferences. It doesn't demonstrate the skill that Donoghue acquired by her later books, but I still enjoyed it.

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**Ali says**

I normally avoid anything that could be described as a 'coming of age' story, but this was charming, if not always comfortable to read. The main characters were not always likeable, but were interesting and flawed. I loved the focus on female friendships, relationships, and sexuality.

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