

Craze Book Review

Henrietta “Henri” Adams is no stranger to sapphism, having spent the last few years in Paris salons amongst the likes of Gertrude Stein and Natalie Barney. However, ever since arriving in New York, she has realized that being queer in America is a far cry from what she expected. Tasked with juggling her career as a “straight” art journalist with her true identity, Henri sets out to make a name for herself amongst prohibition-era gays.

However, what she finds is unlike anything she had expected before. And once her best friend/mentor Crystal introduces her to the ways of New York lesbians Henri knows that she can never go back to the life she once led. Despite her family’s insistence that she move back to Utah and marry a respectable man, Henri is determined to succeed. However, she soon finds everything she thinks about her gender, sexuality, and self may not be as black and white as she has presumed. All the gay panic, sapphic yearning, and more in, *Craze*.

I was blown away by how much I enjoyed this book! I had no idea what to expect going into it and what a treat it was. Although it is mainly a character-driven story the setting truly stood out. It may have been influenced by the fact I read this book while on a trip to New York but I could truly feel the glitz and glamour of the city. It was as though the author had managed to capture the once-in-a-lifetime world of the queer underground in the roaring 20s. Not to mention being told in second-person POV, which is challenging to do well. If you like intersectional history and flowery prose, you are in the right place!

Henri’s experiences and loves while living in New York were a treat to read and resonate with me even today. She often discusses how she never truly felt at home with her family and has used the distance between them to cope with their disapproval of her. She also frequently feels that she does not know her true self, and questions the strict social guidelines in place. Her initial attraction to only femme lesbians or “violets”, is an experience I think a lot of lesbians can relate to. However, once she began to venture outside her “type” the confusion and dissatisfaction blossomed into experiencing her true self and desires. And by the end of the book Henri Adams was not the same naive sapphist that stepped off that boat in the best of ways.

The setting of this story though truly sets this book apart. As she is an art writer it was thrilling to hear of Van Gogh and Georgia O’Keefe as if they were alive. This timeframe is also unique because of the prohibition, so people who otherwise would be strict law-abiding citizens were forced to “slum” with those who were already operating on the outskirts of society. The queer underground sparkled and came alive off the page as Henri experienced it. And the story takes place over many years, which allows the reader to grow alongside her. Although it was heartbreaking to watch Henri be fully integrated into the queer New York scene just for everything to fall apart as the Great Depression set in. I can admit that a few tears welled up in my eyes as I read the last few pages.

The writing style was phenomenal and made this book stand out. I am not normally one for long chapters but the way each one felt like their own story and brought me through a different aspect of Henri’s life was refreshing. The use of second-person POV worked so well with Henri’s storytelling. It almost felt like the reader was interviewing Henri about her life in

New York, which gave such a personal touch. I also really enjoyed how each chapter came to a close, with Henri again acknowledging the reader as one would at the end of a long story. She somehow managed to summarize what had happened and give context to why it was happening without taking the reader out of the book. Although it did take me two chapters to realize it, once I found the groove it was impossible not to appreciate this stylistically.

All in all this dazzling account of 1920s queer life is an absolute must-read. From the queer found family to grand questions regarding the rules of society you will be left in deep thought and appreciation. Not to mention wishing you could invent a time machine to watch a drag show at Frankie's. If you like stunning personal prose and character studies you are in the right place. Happy reading!

TW: Anxiety, homophobia, lesbiphobia, misogyny, misgendering, racism, police brutality, transphobia.

Thanks so much to Margaret Vandenburg for sending me this ARC. All thoughts and opinions are my own.

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