

# Beebo brinker and its influence on society

People



The society in which the Beebo Brinker series found its home during the late 1950's and early 1960's was an inhospitable one. While homosexuality was nothing new in the world at large, it had almost completely been repressed, especially in a Western cultured world that was not only steeped in Christian tradition, but also notably patriarchal.

A masculine woman was called a tomboy, and she was expected to curb her tomboyish attitudes in time for marriage and child-rearing. Societal expectations consigned her to petticoats, which in the sixties had been downgraded to dresses and stockings.

However, the desires of the woman to dress as comfortably as a man and perform the roles that were traditionally given to men were repressed during that time. While the desires of the woman to have more freedom were repressed, any homosexual tendency was crushed violently. While the violence of lesbian repression might not have been overtly performed, all the women (lesbian or not) were aware of the intense pressure put on anyone who held those feelings or performed those actions.

Ann Bannon describes her own wretched experience during that time and the suicidal feelings that necessarily accompanied the tendency toward lesbianism in the 1960's. She writes that while being in a gay bar in the evenings, she would have extreme fear of it being raided and of herself being taken to jail. She continues: " I had been extremely low profile, very proper, very Victorian wife... I thought, ' Well, that would do it. I'd have to go jump off the Brooklyn Bridge. ' As easy as it might be if you were a young woman in today's generation to think that was exaggerating, it wasn't.

It was terrifying” (Lootens, 1983, p. 12). The fear that society inspired in the lives of lesbians drove them to underground haunts and secret lifestyles that marginalized their existence in American society. This marginalization drove lesbians to the cities where people were much less concerned with the business of others as compared with small towns. In the Beebo Brinker chronicles, the big city referenced is Greenwich Village, and the life that Beebo leads after she finds the courage to “come out” to her gay roommate is possible only in that city.

She uses the facilities that the relative anonymity of the city grants to lesbians—gay and lesbian bars and apartment life, and this facilitates the unleashing of her hidden desire for other women. The promiscuity that is possible even to heterosexuals under the blanket of city life is also granted to Beebo, and she becomes a butch character playing the role of the male in many short lesbian affairs. This butch/femme role is highlighted in the novels written by Ann Bannon, and Beebo falls staunchly into the butch role.

She is described as being one who sits at the bar and lights up a cigarette, holding out the match to another woman expecting her to blow it out. This overpoweringly masculine role goes beyond the level of mere self-discovery into an assuredly male persona. Beebo (and others like her) are shown to have performed the search that many lesbian women must do, and have found and realized her deepest desire to act in that domineering manner toward women. In fact, this emphasizes the desire that these women have to for the feminine body—not to be feminine but to command the sexual love of the feminine woman.

This concept of the butch/femme role is, however, a stereotypical one, as many homosexual women find elements of both types within their characters and personalities. This fact highlights the stereotypes that have been propagated concerning lesbianism. Beebo Brinker does serve to facilitate some stereotypes that were cast concerning lesbians. The butch/femme stereotype is one of the major ones upheld in the series. The re-release of the books highlights this stereotype, as Beebo is portrayed as a beautiful yet muscular and domineering woman even on the cover.

The cartoon-like nature of the picture (which enables the caricature) further serves the purpose of the stereotype. Yet, the book also depicts the nature of the woman who was confined to living a closeted lifestyle. The fears, frustrations and anxieties Bannon depicts transcends the stereotypical evil and satanic creatures that homosexuals were taken for in that society. It depicted them as human beings who suffered on account of the feelings they had, and the feelings that society had toward them.

In this way, the novels attacked some of the negative stereotypes that society had of lesbians. The literary form of the novels falls into the category of popular fiction. These have been compared to the Harlequin and Mills & Boon romances that many consider trite and sentimental. However, the feelings and problems dealt with (however tersely) in Bannon's books were never as tidy as those in novels expressing heterosexual love. The characters in Bannon books were often forced to relinquish the loves that they desired and return to the oppression of traditional life.

Even in the Beebo Brinker tales (where lesbianism was more embraced by the title character), lesbians were never able to rid themselves of a social

stigma that would oppress them regardless of their success in finding happiness in love. These complexities of life are revealed in the Beebo Brinker novels, and this allows them to transcend the level of the trash novel and to become a historical artifact. Works Cited Bannon, Ann. Beebo Brinker. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2001. Lootens, Tricia. " Ann Bannon: A Writer of Lost Lesbian Fiction Finds Herself and Her Public. " Off Our Backs. Vol. 13, Iss. 11, 1983.