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## Donoghue, Emma. *Life Mask*

Spanning the years between 1787 and 1797, this fictionalized account of a real-life scandal follows three figures in London's *beau monde* society: common-born actress Eliza Farren, who has spent her life striving to reach the pinnacle of high society; famously ugly Lord Derby, who has spent years pursuing Eliza's affections but must wait until his ill and estranged wife passes away before Eliza can be his; and Derby's friend, the widowed sculptress Anne Damer, who strikes up a close friendship with young Eliza. Politics are complicated in this time—the American Revolution has only recently ended, the French Revolution is about to begin, and liberal and conservative factions are going head-to-head for control of British government—but no more so than romantic and social relationships. Casual (and often shocking to chase Eliza) multiple-partner relationships seem to be the norm among the indolent gentry, and Anne Damer has been fighting rumors of lesbianism which now threaten the reputations of all those close to her as well.

Deliberately paced, with much tension simmering beneath the surface, *Life Mask* is a compelling portrait of a fascinating time and three appealingly flawed characters. The fast-paced thrills of Donoghue's bestselling *Room* are not on offer here, but for a reader of novels of manners, there is much to enjoy.

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