



## Sedition

*Katharine Grant*

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**Sedition** Katharine Grant

**A deliciously twisted and seductive historical tale of piano playing, passions, and female power**

The setting of *Sedition* by Katharine Grant: London, 1794.

The problem: Four nouveau riche fathers with five marriageable daughters.

The plan: The young women will learn to play the piano, give a concert for young Englishmen who have titles but no fortunes, and will marry very well indeed.

The complications: The lascivious (and French) piano teacher; the piano maker's jealous (and musically gifted) daughter; the one of these marriageable daughters with a mating plan of her own.

While it might be a truth universally acknowledged that a man in possession of a title and no money must be in want of a fortune, what does a sexually awakened young woman want? In her wickedly alluring romp through the late-Georgian London, Italian piano making, and tightly-fitted Polonaise gowns, Katharine Grant has written a startling and provocative debut.

## Sedition Details

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Author : Katharine Grant

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## From Reader Review Sedition for online ebook

### Renita D'Silva says

Loved this wonderful, funny yet poignant and above all very entertaining book. A delightful read.

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### Becky says

A rather silly, but enjoyable enough bit of historic erotica here... this book is trying to channel all the bawdy goodness of great classics like Fanny Hill, Dangerous Liaisons and Vanity Fair with a dash of The Crimson Petal thrown in for good measure. I don't think it manages the brilliance of any of these works, but it does create a story that is worth a few hours reading.

The story follows a group of girls out to catch themselves titled husbands; money is not an issue, but breeding will be so a plot is hatched to train the girls up on the newly fashionable pianoforte and get them all to perform for prospective husbands. This concert will demonstrate their desirability and culture as well as their other attractive qualities. Unfortunately a resentful piano-maker has a plot of his own to ruin the chances of each one of these girls, in comes a dashing music teacher and the story unfolds from there. For a modern piece the sex scenes (which are frequent) are oddly coy; this is despite there being instances of rape, incest and a brutal sexual mutilation. I'm not sure if this is done to ensure that Sedition isn't lumped into the proper erotica section, but to be honest it might well have worked better if the sexual writing had been a bit more obvious; as it is I feel this book will be too vanilla for one audience and far too graphic for most other people. An odd book.

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### Althea Ann says

Well, this is a ... weird... book.

I can't really think of anything else I've read that I would compare it to. It's internally consistent, but the tone is a strange mix of humor, tragedy, and prurience.

Five young women - all the daughters of social climbers. Their parents concoct a scheme to have the girls present a musical concert, playing the newfangled pianoforte, in order to lure titled husbands.

To this end, a piano is acquired and a music master hired. However, due to the piano-seller's offense at how the sale went down, he concocts a scheme to have the piano teacher seduce and deflower all five girls, and thus ruin the families' grand plans.

As it turns out, however, not all five of the girls actually need deflowering, and this scheme is not the only one that comes into play - the tables may be turned. And they may turn at unexpected angles.

This summary makes the story sound more lighthearted than it is, however. There's a lot of darkness here: rape, incest, abuse, violence, mutilation and more. Some of it is presented quite disturbingly. But then there's still that weird humor to it. And it's not quite pornographic - there's also an odd restraint to the book.

However, it is undeniably quite perverse...

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## **Barb says**

The promotional blurbs make this sound like a fabulous book, one of them compares Sedition to Sarah Water's Fingersmith. When I hear a book being compared to Fingersmith I think that means the writing is excellent and the story is amazing and I get all happy and excited thinking about the potential greatness of what I'm about to read. It's always after I read the book that was compared to Fingersmith that I remember what they really mean when they compare something to Fingersmith (the story has lesbian lovers).

This novel is saucy and sexy, I will give it that but I didn't find much substance or depth beyond that and perhaps substance was never the intention. I found the story somewhat shocking, disturbing and weird, unfortunately not in a satisfying way.

The story is about five young girls, their fathers are nouveau riche and want them to marry titled men. The fathers agree on a plan; they'll purchase a pianoforte, hire a music instructor who will teach the girls to master the pianoforte, at the end of the year they will invite potential suitors to a concert that will dazzle and amaze and marriage proposals will be won for all. Or maybe not.

I was looking forward to the complications promised by the lascivious piano teacher, the jealous piano maker's daughter and the one daughter who has a plan of her own. What I found disappointing was the believability of these character's motivations and certain key events that require the reader's suspension of disbelief.

I'm not big on the suspension of disbelief and this story requires a lot of suspension in order to be believed. There's one daughter who's more sophisticated than the others, she does a variety of things that make this novel interesting. Unfortunately for me I like my characters to do things that make sense in the context of their lives or at least seem like something they might actually do.

The other problem I had was the motivation of the characters working against the marriage of the daughters. They aren't explored to the point of understanding, they're stated almost as a given but the better part of the story completely revolves around them. Again, I just didn't find them to be very believable. There's also an element of cooperation with several characters that doesn't make any sense, except to make the story interesting.

This story was a titillating bit of fluffy sauciness with an edge of warped and depressing, but one that doesn't hold together under scrutiny or leave the reader with any feeling of satisfaction.

Thank you to the Amazon Vine program and the publisher, Henry Holt and Company, for making this copy available to me in exchange for an honest review

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## **Sarah u says**

[incest, grooming, one (off the page)]

### **Kristen McDermott says**

Cleverly written but darkish satire on English social manners, in which a French music master is bribed into attempting to seduce five young pupils before the concert at which they are to be presented to their future husbands. Wicked humor alternates with pathos and a gothic intensity of emotion. Very hard to categorize, but intriguing and original.

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### **Roman Clodia says**

This is a wonderfully sly and mischievous book which takes the bare bones of a nineteenth-century novel and gives them an audacious makeover. A group of mercantile families in 1794 London are keen to marry off their five daughters and so decide to have them give a musical concert to put them on public display and catch husbands. But with various plots afoot, the plan goes outrageously wrong...

Grant writes wonderfully but this is a darker, in places, read than some of the reviews indicate. At the same time, she takes the central conceit of nineteenth-century fiction - the marriage of girls - and boldly overturns it. The social and literary commentary is subtle but unmistakably there, and the book is imbued with a spirit of transgression from the background of the French Revolution to the ultimate fate of the girls.

So this book takes its cue more from *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* than Jane Austen but with a postmodern consciousness and a deliciously wayward ending: it starts off as a romp but soon develops into something far more boldly and gloriously seditious.

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### **Lawrence Hogue says**

I loved this book, right up until the end, when I didn't (which means I wish I could give it 4.5 stars). The plot involving four bourgeois families in late 18th-century London out to marry their five daughters into the nobility is a brilliant skewering of economic marriage and the type of romance novel that celebrates it. "Jane Austen on crack," as one reviewer put it, is a good description, although LSD might have been a better drug of choice.

Grant's writing is crisp, the narrative economical, and the situation hilarious, despite its darker elements, which include incest and rape. The characters are deftly drawn, if not all fully developed. It's more of a farce than realistic fiction, so I was willing to forgive its characters for acting in not quite realistic ways. Once I accepted that a piano builder could be so offended by a customer's philistinism and social climbing that he would send a piano tutor to deflower the five daughters, ruining their chances of a good marriage, the rest seemed quite plausible. Right up to the ending, that is, when it seems that Grant set her thumb too heavily on the scales of plausibility in order to get the ending she wanted.

Despite my disappointment with the ending, it's well worth the read. And to cure my dissatisfaction, I wrote a fanfictional alternate ending. If you were equally disappointed, you'll find it over on [Archive of Our Own](#).

More thoughts on the ending in the spoiler section:

(view spoiler)

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## **OLT says**

This is a tongue-in-cheek, droll but dark tale set in 1794 London. If you like comedies of manners set in historical times, this would be like their dark and somewhat depressing but witty cousin. It's well written, has well-developed and varied characters, supplies some very funny and entertaining moments, and manages to be unpredictable and unexpected in its development. I found myself liking and not liking the book all at the same time. When I read a comedy of manners, which I originally thought this would be, I'm looking to be entertained and to laugh at the characters' foibles and follies, but I don't expect such a dark, rather depressing outlook as this one turned out to have.

The basic story revolves around four newly-rich families. The fathers are City businessmen, lower middle-class men who've worked their way up to having a lot of money but still don't "get no respect" because of their class standing. What to do? Marry off their daughters to peers as high up the social ladder as possible: young men with titles but little fortune.

The plan: Have the girls learn to play that newfangled pianoforte (not the been-there, done-that harpsichord that every other girl can play). To that end they buy one piano for all five girls to practice on, a piano purchased from expert piano maker Vittorio Cantabile, who also supplies them with a master piano instructor, Monsieur Belladroit, a French emigre in London fleeing his country's revolution. Once the girls have mastered the pianoforte, they will give a concert to which upper-class families with marriageable men will be invited, men who will be struck dumb with the girls' talent and wish to marry them.

Well, there will be bumps along the way. Cantabile hates these newly-rich men and has sent instructor Belladroit with the intention to seduce and deflower all five girls before concert time comes around. And there are even more bumps: 1) Most of the girls have little talent. How will Belladroit get their playing ability up to exhibition quality? 2) Cantabile's daughter Annie, born with a disfiguring harelip, has an unfortunate crush on Belladroit and a deep resentment and jealousy of the girls he is teaching. 3) Alatheia, the only motherless girl of the group of daughters, has a dark secret which manifests itself in her independent behavior and sexual awareness and which possibly keeps her from being marriage material.

The culmination of all this is the concert, which, suffice it to say, goes all out of control, both in the girls' interpretation of the chosen musical piece and in the behavior of the girls themselves. Things definitely do not go as the fathers had planned. It's funny and dark and even sad and I'm glad that I read it but I was hoping for a happier ending for at least a few of the characters in the book. This entertained but ultimately depressed me.

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## **Sarah says**

This has got to be one of the strangest and most unsettling books I've ever read. In the edgy, offbeat historical fiction genre that I so love, I would compare it most to *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters, but this one is far more disquieting and not near as satisfying. This is hard to rate; I loved aspects of it, and the writing is

sharp and wonderful, but at the same time it's left a bit of a bad taste in my mouth. I think with a less jarring final section I would have really loved this.

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### **Alice O'neill says**

This book is not about sex, though there's plenty of it, often hilarious, occasionally not. Sex is the pepper and salt atop the meat pie. This book is about power. It's uses and abuses and the many shades inbetween; keeping it, loosing it, aspiring to it, wielding it. Brought down and sent up by it (the denouement, a poke in the ribs at 'Big Brother' type celebrity), a masterpiece and one of the funniest descriptions I've ever read, I'm still laughing. The power of love and the power of tyranny. The subtle changes in the balance of it and their devastating effects, some seen some unseen. And the power possessions have over us, tangible or intangible. Power in the hands of the wise and the silly, the weak and the strong, the loved and the loving. Beautifully written, not a word too much or badly chosen, some of the descriptions pure poetry. A good 'book club' read, there's much to discuss. Katharine Grant

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### **Katy Noyes says**

Delightfully amoral, a wicked tale of seduction that channels both *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and *The Piano*.

Several 'new money' families decide to showcase their daughters in the marriage market by purchasing a top-notch pianoforte and training up their girls to perform for nobility. Instrument-maker Cantabile is affronted by the idea of untrained and clumsy girls touching his handmade piece of art. He sends Monsiuer Belladroit to the families, ostensibly as their instructor. But really to seduce them all and foil the marriage schemes.

Unexpected turns come from his own daughter, talented musician Annie, born with a disfiguring hare lip, and one of the girls - Alathea, cunning and scheming plans of her own.

Like *Dangerous Liasons*, the period and theme of seduction fill the story. It's light in places, dark in others. The girls are well-enough differentiated to be identifiable. Alathea is admirable (and yet pitiable at times, as is Annie, who I wanted to see more of). Alathea drives the plot, and takes it in turns unforeseen.

There are some sex scenes but beautifully written to be completely implied, not explicit whatsoever.

The concert scene itself. So long anticipated. It is a delight. I soooooo wanted to hear that music. To see those dresses.

Thoroughly enjoyed this, great period feel and hope it gets made into a film - some wonderful parts here for actors. And great humour, with Belladroit eventually having to service several curious teenagers consecutively, will transfer brilliantly to the screen. Indulge.

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### **Snoakes says**

I would never have read *Sedition* if it weren't on the Desmond Elliott longlist - it just didn't sound my kind of thing. And now I've read it, I'm not sure what sort of a thing it is. It's not a satire, or a farce as it's just not

funny and it's definitely not sexy. I'm the last person who would say that a novel should be instantly classifiable, and I usually enjoy something a bit different, but this is just decidedly odd. There are too many similar characters - with five sets of businessmen, wives and daughters, the main characters aside I found it impossible to keep track of who was who. Then there is the plot which is nothing short of ludicrous. In summary, I didn't dislike it as much as I expected to, but I didn't think it was anything special either. At least I am vindicated in that if I think a book isn't for me, I'm probably right.

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## Girl From the North Country says

\*\* This Advanced Reader Copy was provided to me, free, by the publisher. It has in no way impacted the content of this review.\*\*

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I had so much hope for this book- it had been compared to the work of Sarah Waters, with the temperate of Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal*. The Scotsman called it " Jane Austen on crack or Dickens sating himself at an orgy", and the words drummed up for it's editorials were "rowdy, wicked, lust, violence, lasciviousness"- these are strong descriptions, and if true, would have put this right up my alley.

Unfortunately, it was, like the novel, all talk.

While there is way too much going on in this book to really compress it, the overall gist is that there are several girls, all daughters of the nouveau riche, and of marriageable age. English society looked down on mixing old money with new money, so their options are limited; the fathers concoct a plan to lure impoverished but titled men to propose, by hook of a concert, in which the girls will woo the crowd by playing the pianoforte. The pianoforte, at the time, was an expensive and newly introduced instrument that the fathers hope can give the girls an edge on the competition, by demonstrating their daughter's suitability as brides, and by showing that their parents, however nouveau riche, are people of discerning taste and fortune. This alone is enough fodder for two plot lines, but Grant introduces dozens of others.

I've always been able to tell if i'll like a book by the first page- sometimes I get ones that take longer to impress, but the intro is always a big part of winning me over. Grant rushes us into the dreadfully dull and fully confusing lives of these 5 (or was it 6? I can't keep track) women without really convincing anyone that the book has promise. This was a bad start, for me.

Part of the problem is that this book is meant to be an ensemble cast- with daughters enough to keep track of, let alone the endless stream of parents, bar owners, executioners, ghosts, french victims of the guillotine, suicidal strangers, piano men, neighbors, and outside love interests. Writing about multiple characters is an ambitious and difficult task, because the writer has to make each character interesting enough to the reader to make them memorable- but it felt like none of Grant's characters held her own attention, let alone ours- with the exception of Alatheia. And that is the crux of the thing: Alatheia is clearly Grant's muse and inspiration, b/c she is the only person Grant tries to flesh out, (save Annie, the piano seller's daughter, who, consequently, is Althea's love interest. So again, we return to Althea). The whole story is Alatheia's setting, and it's characters really just bit players in her orchestra- but Alatheia is only dealt out in spurts, nestled between the inane going-ons of the other five women no one really has much interest in. And while this method initially served the purpose by making Alatheia seem mysterious, by the time I finished the book, I thought she was as predictable and boring as the "friends" she so obviously looks down on.

There is a lot thrown in that I suspect was meant to shock- but fell short. Alatheia and Annie's love affair, for starters- which I suppose is where the Sarah Waters comparisons came from. But that is a very broad, generic comparison, b/c outside of the fact that they're lesbians in an age when it's tantamount to treason, little else rings alike. Waters cornered the market because she has never made homosexuality her plot- it's only a central theme. Grant, on the other hand, uses Annie and Alatheia's love affair as the locomotion of her story. She tries to make it even more subversive by giving Annie a harelip- but it all felt vaguely familiar. I eventually realized that it was because it reminded me of another book about that time period- *The Dress Lodger*, by Sheri Holman.

In *The Dress Lodger*, we have an infant with a severe heart deformity, and his mother, Gustine, a prostitute who lacks the resources to help, but loves him unconditionally. In *Sedition*, we have Annie, with her physical deformity, and her mother, who loves her unconditionally, but who is also at a loss to help (she is sick. I don't think it's ever explained why. Consumption, maybe?). In *The Dress Lodger*, Gustine the prostitute and her child live with the Dress owner, who is semi-abusive to his own young child due to her own handicap, and whom he puts to work. In *Sedition*, Annie the harelip lives with her father, who also can't see past her deformity, and whom he keeps home to put to work. In *Sedition*, Alatheia is Annie's salvation; in *The Dress Lodger*, Gustine views a doctor as hers. And on and on it goes.

If Alatheia and Annie's characters are never fully realized, the rest of *Sedition*'s cast are barely born. We have the skeezy French tutor who sets out to deflower the virginal girls he teaches, but he's so over the top, he was more caricature than character. The other daughters, save Alatheia, are present, but practically invisible, and often interchangeable- at times, it seemed like even Grant got them mixed up. The parents were cliches, and the piano maker (also Annie's father) ... What can I say? He's man who has a terminally ill wife, incurring endless medical bills with no end in sight, and a daughter whose deformity makes her marriageability nil in his eyes. Like his wife, she is a financial burden to him, and on top of this, he's so obsessed with his instruments, he cannot stand to sell them- in other words, he's barely keeping afloat financially. Yet, based on a short visit from one of the fathers, his hate grows so substantially that he offers the music teacher twice what the fathers will pay him to teach their daughters, if only he'll deflower the girls and make fools of their families. Where he's finding these piles of money, and why exactly he hates these particular people enough to spend it on them, is anyone's guess.

I kept waiting for the wicked good romp I was promised, but it never came. Even the sex scenes were humdrum- the girls refer to the feelings of sex as "the fizziness"; one says she'll always remember it as giving her to urge to squat in cold mud. Um, what? Two girls, sisters, compete, one is anorexic, and another- the only one who actually stood out a bit, and who had enough moxie to flout convention and her parents, by planning to marry for love- is somehow now Milquetoast enough to succumb the peer pressure of these doddering idiots and sleep with the piano teacher, even though she doesn't want to.

And then there's the music, the lessons, the servants, the incest; lesbians, dandies, eunuchs, bloody shoes, voyeurism, suicide, parricide, castration, window treatments, diamonds, shootings, and lots more sex- yet, none of it was especially shocking or titillating, or even presented in a way that made me want to keep reading. It's like the author tried to stuff in as many taboos and characters as she could, but never committed to the motives or machinations behind any of it (or them).

Grant isn't a bad writer, but this book just wasn't her opus. Or maybe it was- there's far more music theory in it than the average reader would understand, or be able to relate to. Which is, perhaps the real tragedy of *Sedition*: the music is where Grant really shines. She's able to entwine theory with emotion, and through it, she finally gives her characters a voice- but unless the reader has some background in music, and understands the pieces and comparisons Grant uses, it's all lost.

I always feel terrible tearing a book to shreds, but that's not my intention here. Grant is not a bad writer by

any means- she has a way with words, and clearly, lots of ideas- it was the execution that fell short here. A good editor could have helped her turn this into a brilliant collection of short stories- but they didn't, and the result lacked cohesiveness. I really hope Grant finds her niche, and her footing, b/c I think she could really wow us- but until then, Sedition felt a little more like perdition.

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### **Stephen Goldenberg says**

My main reservation about a lot of historical novels is that the writers have often done so much research that the novel becomes so stuffed with period detail that the story gets swamped and I feel I'd be better off reading a non-fiction account. That's not the case with this novel. There's just enough background to give you a sense of London in 1794 -and, in particular, the effects of French Revolution hovering over everything. The beginnings of the industrial revolution and the shift of power from the old aristocratic class to the new money of the middle classes is also ever present without being hammered home in a novel which is about the newly wealthy middle class families trying to marry their daughters into the aristocracy. However, the story is only loosely connected to a naturalistic picture of the period. By the end, it has become increasingly operatic and over-the-top sensational. If it was a film, it would have been directed by Ken Russell (it reminded me most of his 1970s movie *The Devils* in its build up of sexual frenzy). I found it very readable but I had to make a lot of effort at times to suspend disbelief and go with the excessive flow. As a very non-musical person, I also found the detailed descriptions of the musical practice and preparations tedious.

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