



Skye O'Malley

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There has never been a woman like luscious, raven-haired, hot-tempered Skye O'Malley. She is the courageous seafaring captain of her own mighty fleet, and intelligent enough to win a battle of wits with Queen Elizabeth herself. Follow along as Skye O'Malley is swept up in a journey filled with romance and passion that takes her from glittering Ireland, to lush Algeria, to the heart of London in pursuit of a unique and eternal love.....

From the Paperback edition.

Skye O'Malley Details

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From Reader Review Skye O'Malley for online ebook

Eh?Eh! says

Rbrs #3

This was supposed to be the "good" romance, the one that has some popular acclaim and merit. Hah!

The book itself is a no-star wonder. I hate it, with the same passion all the characters seemed to have for endless and immediate boffing. I skimmed a bit then went back to the beginning with a non-drinking drinking game-type system, of marking certain types of passages with colored tabs:

Yellow = dumb, eye-rolling, wtf, you're kidding, now you're making sh-t up

Pink = well that wasn't too bad because at least she was willing

Green = hold on while I swallow back the vomit...nope it's coming out - bucket!

Blue = how beautiful is she? soooooooooo purty!

Orange = food glorious food

At about 70 pages I gave up yellow because too much of it was dumb. At about 100 pages I gave up all but orange. At the 1/3rd point I went back to skimming. Here's a visual of the carnage (just 1/3rd of the book, I would've run out of sticky tabs if I'd tried to mark the whole book):

This book...rape (of every hole!!!), globular breasts and cupped buttocks, having the heroine act idiotically but then having everyone admire her intelligence, stating something and then having a character repeat with the exact words within the same page, despicable men (every one of them), emphasizing again and again how beautiful she was and how everyone desired her for her beauty and how wonderful her beauty made her and my god she's beautiful...I don't know where to begin...maybe with the words of those who actually read the whole book, the brave, the masochistic, the wild-eyed with anger, the adept at making fairytale analogies, I applaud their determination.

The one aspect I want to cover - the ess-ee-ex. Hoooooooo boy. The last romance had a cheery leer when it came (heh) to the sex. I mean, there was a sequence that was followed for "start-up" and the "finish line" and for the most part it didn't sound "bad." This one, the descriptions were almost perfunctory. Except for when it was abusive. Which was most of the time. Oh man, the abuse. To quote Elizabeth, ICKICKICKICKICKICKICKICKICKICK! Ick.

I wonder, would I have hated this book so much if I'd stumbled upon and read it on my own? How much have I been influenced by the reviews of those whose opinions I respect? I keep mentioning, my reading habits have changed like crazy since I started spending too much time on this site. I used to read casually, a swish and spit; now it's become practice to carefully examine, sniff, masticate thoughtfully, absorb and digest. I can't seem to forget I might have an audience, all of whose mental dexterity is like Cirque du Soliel (they're in town right now!) where I can't even touch my toes...the pressure! I try to read more critically now. I'm not very good at it because I still boil down to "like it," "don't like it," "'cause." Does that suck some of the mindless enjoyment I used to have for junk like this? I'm not sure.

This enormously long book (not as enormously long as many of the men our heroine encountered) highlighted how slow I read. I'd always thought I was sort of a fast reader. Nope. Slug. Sloth. The formation of stalactites and stalagmites. Governmental reform.

The enjoyment, though, came from reading this with other goodreaders who made the experience fun. Fun! It was making me flip-flop on my opinion of this book, just like our heroine switched from loving to hating to loving to forgetting to ignoring to hating to loving the same man. The idea that reading is a solitary act has been pointed out to me before, by a very neat person on this site (you seem to have found offline life because you're rarely on here anymore, yay! but also sad to me). We all think at different speeds and in different ways, so silent reading locks us away in ourselves. But having this group who discusses, comments, mocks, jokes, and tears apart this awful book made this a social event. I was engaged to the point of wanting to read this in order to participate.

In the months I've been more active on this site, I've seen waves of activity and read of past waves; much lamentation for the past and it seems not allowing that grieving to fade hinders from allowing the now to be enjoyed. Some waves have been bad; lets focus on the good. I've read of and observed the most touching friendships that had developed through mutual love of books and sense of humor. We get great recommendations, assistance in picking out books that are more likely to appeal from the oceans of titles. I've laughed myself to tears. I've found stimulation that had been melting to nearly nothing since all my peers began coupling up and away to staid conservatism. For all this, I can't quite fully hate this book. I love this site. I love you guys. I'm not drunk.

Tonya says

I loved this book! Very fast paced, exciting tale. I laughed and cried, loved and hated right along with Skye. Great escape reading. The author pulls you right into Skye's world and keeps you wanting more.

Kerrie says

After nearly 25 years, it was time to pick this Bad Girl up again and see if it was as awesome as I remembered. The very first bodice ripper my tender eyes absorbed, it titillated this 12-year-old and burned into my memory, and I quickly re-read it in high school. But it's been a long road since 15 and I wondered, "Would it hold up?"

Well, **yes and no.**

First, Skye is the Biggest MarySue that ever MarySued. I didn't hate her, but she wasn't the awesome alpha wench character that I remembered. She's *absolutely fucking perfect* at absolutely everything she does, and the only men who aren't intimidated by a woman of such amazing superior intellect and learning are secure in their own masculinity. Her perfectly perfectness wasn't enough to induce rage, but only mild annoyance. The scenes of her tossing her midnight-blue tresses, flashing green eyes (and don't forget her fucking *heart-shaped face*), and so on only made me eyeroll with some lulzy chuckles. Because I'm ready to give this book plenty of latitude since...

...it's my "first" and you never forget your "first" - it ~~warp~~forms your future loves and expectations of the

genre...

...and the batshitery is crazy as fuck. Bertrice threw everything into this book. **Everything.**

Forced marriage. Sodomy. Incest. Amnesia. Lecherous pervs. Epic feud with royalty. *Attempted* bestiality (some reviewers seem to think it actually happened - not so!)...

...And **The Longest Separation EVER of a Hero and Heroine.** (Almost the entire fucking book!) That's ballsy, Bertrice. I approve.

This was one of the funnest re-reads I've ever had - despite the 20 year gap, as stuff happened, I remembered it. Events. Singular quotes:

"I cannot help it, pet, you're the most damnably tempting piece, and I want to bury myself deep in you."

XD Oh Geoffrey, you sweet-talker.

The only thing that really got on my nerves was the constant costume porn, and now that I'm aware of the Huff-Wilde tendency, those obligatory and insanely boring passages caused some eye-glazing. Also the food porn. Every meal was described, every course. I find that I have no patience for such obvious filler, but when it's balanced with Spanish noblewoman nymphos working as prostitutes, assassination plots in harems, and Skye improbably rising to the surface of every catastrophe like an immaculately dressed turd, it's **all worth it.**

Misfit says

On the verge of marrying a man she loathes (the betrothal had been made when they were children), Skye O'Malley meets Niall Burke and it's love at first sight - but the betrothal can't be broken and Niall must make a better match than Skye. On her wedding night, Niall claims the right of droit du seigneur and gets first shot at the young virgin, enraging her husband Dom. Skye suffers mightily at the hands of her abusive husband, but by the time she's free Niall is married (unhappily) and what then follows are plentiful ups and downs from capture by pirates on the high seas, being sold into slavery (don't you worry, our heroine can charm anyone even the "whoremaster of Algiers"), and eventually ending in England in a marriage that brings her to the court of Elizabeth Tudor, but a twist in fate makes the two women enemies in the end. Can Skye win her this battle of wits with the formidable Queen of England? Will she and Niall ever have a happy ending?

Somehow I missed reading Small's books back in the 80s and when I spotted this at a free-book sale I decided to give her a whirl. Yes, I was warned that the purple prose was plentiful, rapes abounded and that the sex was OTT and I was prepared for it, but still -

"As his seed thundered into her hidden valley he shook fiercely with the intensity of his passion."

"Ahh...Skye, your little honey-oven is made for me."

Remember that honey-oven bit. Three (count 'em) three different men use this very same term when referring

to Skye.

"Let me play the great desert stallion tonight, my Skye. Roll over, and be my little wild mare."

Forgot to mention, Small seems to have a horse fixation...

"A moment before his climax, he touched one hand beneath her to tweak at the little button of her sensuality and they shuddered their satisfaction in union."

rolls eyes

"Your little honey-oven burns my lance with the fiery flow of the passion you would like to deny me, but can't."

There's that honey-oven again. Add all this up, toss in some very abrupt POV switches from one paragraph to the next, mix with some annoying info dumps containing waaaaay more background information on secondary characters than necessary (I really didn't need to know about Geoffrey's family history all the way back to the Norman Conquest) and what is left was just not the book for me. As for the rapes? Yes, they are pretty much standard for these older books and I can live with a forced seduction or two, but what I can't live with is when the heroine is raped by the meanest, baddest, most irredeemable man on earth and we get this,

"And though she hated him, her body treacherously yielded itself."

I won't spoil, but the reader should also be warned that there is a scene towards the end involving a twelve-year-old girl and an aroused dog. If you're a die-hard fan of the old school bodice rippers with a strong stomach this might be the book for you - and it's a series so you can keep on readin' more. Any one else, I'd recommend steering clear - this is my first and last Bertrice Small book.

Christy says

This book is really several books in one. This could easily have been a whole series of novels about Skye O'Malley—and it may have benefited by such a treatment. In light of the book's multiplicity, then, my review will also be several reviews in one.

I. Bertrice Small is known for her purple prose; overblown descriptions of sex, clothes, and food are one of the reasons for reading her. I was looking forward to being entertained by this element of the book and I was not let down. She sets the bar high for herself from the beginning of the book, both in the physical description of Skye O'Malley (including incredible details about her appearance like this: "when she laughed she revealed small, perfect white teeth" (11)—when even something so ordinary as teeth are so precisely detailed, you know you're really in for something) and in the description of her initial connection with Niall Burke, the hero: "They were suspended in time, their souls flowing back and forth between their bodies, twining into one perfect being" (17). I had to read that several times just to fully take in its ridiculousness.

Even better than the high-flown romantic language and extreme detail regarding characters' appearance, though, are the constant descriptions of outfits (very thorough, including all the colors, accessories, and multiple layers) and meals (these people eat and drink far more than I thought possible; they even have ale or

wine for breakfast). And then there's the sex scenes. Here are some favorites of mine:

*"As his seed thundered into her hidden valley he shook fiercely with the intensity of his passion" (113).

*"...your little honey-oven was made for me!" (115)—interestingly, "honey oven" is used three different times throughout the book to refer to Skye's, well, woman parts. By three different men. It was weird enough the first time, but it is beyond ridiculous to have a Spanish Algerian, an Englishman, and an Irishman who don't even really know each other all use the same idiosyncratic name.

*"Her golden orbs grew hard as his mouth drank first from one and then from the other" (152).

*"He drove his root into her warm and fertile body" (152).

*"...the coral-red flower of womanhood wet and pouting with desire" (221).

*"Her small, full breasts, wet and warm, pushed demandingly at his chest" (233). This way of describing body parts as having some sort of intention or will both disturbs me and cracks me up.

*"She breathed deeply of his warm male scent, like a kitten licking lovingly at a kindly hand. She loved his great manroot with her tongue" (318).

Some of these are hilarious, and some of them are cringe-inducing; actually, most of them are both. In addition to these choice bits, there are multiple occasions (at least five, it seems, but I didn't actually keep a count) upon which getting sexed up causes the woman to faint, which is usually seen as a good thing, representative of how good at sexing the gentleman in question is.

For sheer descriptive silliness, this book gets five stars.

II. This book has no shortage of plot. There are pirates, court intrigues, harems, panthers, snarky nuns, kidnappings, and—as has already been mentioned—lots of sex. As an (erotic) adventure novel, there's a lot to like. The first two sections of the book are pretty entertaining and I mostly enjoyed reading them. In Part I, in particular, I was really enjoying seeing Skye rebel against her father, get the better of her abusive husband, take charge of her family's seafaring business, and fight pirates, all in addition to eventually getting her man. Part II, in Algiers, seems like it should have been really interesting because of the exotic setting and the harems and the fact that Skye and Husband #2 have pet panthers that they walk on leashes, but because Skye suffers from amnesia here, she becomes a lot less interesting for a while, just a blank beauty to be molded and moved around as the plot demanded. Part III, with all its court intrigue, fancy parties, and pirates, is shockingly dull, however. It takes some kind of special skill to make piracy boring, but Small manages it here.

(Adventure + Court Intrigue + Sex) – (Boring Pirates + Pacing Problems + Number of Pages) = 2 stars.

III. Romance novels are tricky ground for feminist readings. On the one hand, they are books written by women and for women and so there's all this space for woman-centered fantasy and for narratives that counter patriarchal ideas about gender roles and sex/romance. However, most romance novels (at least, most I've read) do not provide this counternarrative (see my reviews of *The Reluctant Viking* and *My Fair Viking* for more on this). I'm actually not entirely sure what to do with *Skye O'Malley* in these terms. It's far less anti-feminist than *The Reluctant Viking* and it regularly includes ideas that almost seem to belong to a certain kind of feminism; at the same time, though, it also treads familiar and nonfeminist ground.

One element of *Skye O'Malley* that really struck me was actually something that some other reviewers have complained about quite heartily: the rape scenes. There are three rape scenes that really stand out for me. Skye's first husband, Dom, commits incest with his sister and, when Skye walks in on them having sex, the two of them join forces to rape her; Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, rapes Skye much later in the book and she does not have any recourse because he has far more political power than her and could hurt her family;

and—here's the one that really seemed to disturb people—Dudley on another occasion comes to Skye's home while she is out, throws a party in which he brings local virgins in and rapes them. Furthermore, when Skye comes back and tries to stop the goings-on, she walks in on the scene of a twelve-year-old girl on all fours on a table, with an aroused dog behind her about to be used to rape her and then, when she tries to kick Dudley out of her home, he rapes her on the spot, in front of everyone. These scenes are all horrifying and unpleasant to read. But I actually find this heartening.

I have read far too many romance novels in which rape is presented as seduction and the rapist is not only excused but romanticized. The message in those books is clearly that women who say no really mean yes and that it is the man's job to show her that she really does mean yes. Bertrice Small challenges that by showing rape as traumatic and rapists as bad people. After being raped by her first husband and his sister, Skye is traumatized and takes a good long time to recover enough to be willing to be touched even by the man she loves. The aftereffects of this rape follow her even to Algiers, even though she cannot remember exactly what has happened to her. Even better, her rapist is punished within the narrative. He is injured and disempowered and dies not long afterward; the sister is disgraced and also disempowered. The later rape scenes are similar in that they are representations of how despicable the rapist is and they motivate Skye to seek and gain revenge on the Queen, who has allowed this to go on. The attempted rape of a child with a dog has gotten a lot of attention in recent conversations, but I think that the fact that this is framed as horrific within the text and that it does not actually occur and isn't actually described is significant. It would be far more troubling if the rape actually took place in part because the description of the event could be its own perverse titillation for the reader. Refusing to go through with it, refusing to represent the actual deed, refuses the reader this Marquis de Sade-type entertainment.

The other major thread of this narrative has to do with Skye's independence. From the very beginning of the novel, she is strong-willed and feisty, willing to fight for what she wants and mostly successful. She proves herself to be intelligent and capable over and over throughout the novel—she is a good businesswoman (in Ireland, Algiers, and England), she masters political maneuvering, she bests the Queen at her own game (with some help from her friends), and she manages to build and maintain quite a fortune for herself and her children. Even with all this, though, it is apparently too much to let her take care of herself. In the end, she must be rescued and married off and then told to calm down. Niall, her fourth husband, tells her that her adventuring days are over: "I will give you your head in many things, but not in all matters, Skye. You are too headstrong for your own good" (457). And so, tamed, she goes back home with her husband. After all the work she has put into building her own life throughout the book—without this man telling her what to do or not do—to see her back down and be mastered in this way rankles.

Last thought on this topic (though there's much, much more that could be said about it, I'm sure): I know that other reviewers have argued that all of the sex in this book is problematic (Ceridwen's review is a great example of this), but I am going to have to disagree. Sort of. All the sex in the book is problematic. But not all of the sex in the book is rape. Skye O'Malley lives in a world that does not allow her—or any woman—to direct her own life. (Even the Queen of England can't direct her own life.) In this world, therefore, Skye can never make a choice that is not truly and absolutely hers because it can always be overridden by someone else—her husband, her uncle, her father, the Queen, or just any man who is stronger than her. This is definitely a problem and it informs all of her relationships with other people, sexual or not. But I maintain that there are pockets of resistance to this in the relationships she develops with some men. Just because others have the power to disregard her choices doesn't make her consent (when it occurs) irrelevant. When Niall Burke comes to her on her wedding night to Dom and sleeps with her, he does so not just because he wants her but because she wants him (and she has made that desire clear). When she gets involved with Khalid, he would have had her anyway, but he didn't have to force her to do anything at all because she wanted him. Before she fell in love with Geoffrey Southwood, she slept with him because she was attracted

to him and because she could benefit from their liaison. And when she and Niall were finally married, what brought them together was her invitation to him to come to her bed. I would not call any of these instances rape. They are wrapped up in troubling power relations because the whole of the world was wrapped up in these power relations. They were inescapable. Skye knows this; she understands the facts of her life and, though she may wish things were otherwise, she can either choose to work within that system and, as she does so, find love and fulfillment and pleasure or she can choose to remove herself from it—become a nun, like her sister, or take her chances protecting herself. Bertrice Small, in this way, recognizes and even critiques the bind that a sexist and patriarchal society places women in while also complicating the idea promoted by some second-wave feminists (e.g., Andrea Dworkin) that all sex is rape. Even in a truly fucked-up world, she says, there is room for love and desire.

IV. Here's where things get weird. As I was reading, I became sort of obsessed with the descriptions of characters' eyes. Skye herself has blue eyes, but they don't stay the same blue. In fact, they can change color quite rapidly, as her moods change: "...her eyes, which had been a deep purple-blue, lightened to a clear blue-green" (81). Niall has silver eyes, Constanza has purple eyes ("pansy-purple," to be specific), Geoffrey has lime-green eyes, Willow (Skye's first daughter) has "golden lion eyes" (307), Adam has "sensuous smokey blue" eyes (373), and Queen Elizabeth has "jet-black eyes" (365). (Very few characters have brown eyes and, interestingly, the ones who do are mostly either kind of uninteresting, mean, or stupid. For instance, one peasant girl is described as having "bovine brown eyes" (232) and Dudley (who is, seriously, the worst person in the book) has brown eyes. I started to wonder if Bertrice Small has something against people with brown eyes.) Clearly, there is something going on with the eyes in this book. People's eyes simply do not change color and I have never seen anyone with either lime-green, silver, jet-black, or pansy-purple eyes.

What if, I began to wonder, this could be read as taking place in a sort of alternate universe where human evolution took a different track, where people evolved these strange eye colors and color-changing abilities? That would explain the eye weirdness. What else might it explain?

Skye's ability to be gorgeous and thin with perky breasts after having five or six children (it's hard to keep track since they're pretty much never around) might be explained by this hypothesis. Perhaps humans evolved for greater physical resilience and unnatural beauty.

Another thing that could potentially have evolved alongside these traits is the ability to change the size of specific body parts. Sexy body parts, in particular. On at least one occasion, Skye's breasts seem to change size over the course of just a couple of pages. Although they are usually "small impudent breasts" (292), for special occasions she may inflate them to "very full breasts" (294). Similarly, while early in the book it is made clear (thanks to Skye's opportunities to compare the two) that Dom's penis is much larger than Niall's ("Niall had been a big man, but Skye's husband [Dom:] was unnaturally large, enormous" [49:]), later, when Claire (Dom's sister, who also had a chance to compare) sleeps with Niall, she reports that his penis is much larger than Dom's ("He was even bigger than Dom had been" [289:]). Clearly, these men are able to adjust their penis sizes as they go through life or perhaps just on a whim. And given the number of giant penises Skye encounters throughout the book and their increasing size, one begins to suspect that all men are involved in a kind of Cold War of one-upmanship regarding penis-size.

And once I began reading the book with this science fictional reading in my mind, it became difficult to avoid. Reading science fiction requires a different set of reading protocols, primary among these protocols the necessity of reading metaphor literally (Samuel Delany famously writes that the phrase "Then her world exploded" in SF "must retain the margin to read these words as meaning that a planet, belonging to a woman, blew up"). Applying that technique to a romance novel filled with the purplest of pansy-purple prose is its

own form of entertainment. Suddenly this—“his lips devoured her throat, setting her pulse to racing” (258)—is sinister instead of sexy; this—“...his aching manhood burst and flooded her with his burning tribute” (330)—is horrific instead of hot; and this—“He raised her carefully and then lowered her, slowly impaling her inch by sweet inch onto his lance” (458)—is, well, it’s still icky, but perhaps in a different way.

Unfortunately, reading Skye O’Malley as science fiction doesn’t really get you very far, but it’s an interesting trip while it lasts.

V. Overall, I actually enjoyed reading parts of this book but grew terribly bored in other parts. Some scenes were unpleasant, but they didn't truly horrify me. And the writing is neither terrible nor great; in fact, sometimes it's quite entertaining. Basically, it all averages out for me. If the third section were less drawn out or as thrilling as it seems like it should be, I could easily give this three stars. As it is, though, I'm leaning toward two stars.

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

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Bertrice Small has a very distinctive style. So distinct, in fact, that you could probably make a drinking game of it, although I would advise against this, as the end result would inevitably be alcohol poisoning. When you pick up a Bertrice Small book, you *know* that the hero and heroine are going to play a game of musical beds, until the end of the book where they're magically reunited with their 5+ children from various marriages in which their spouses were kind enough to politely off themselves in order to prevent inconvenience. You *know* that there are going to be bad guys, identifiable by their nymphomania/frigidity and outlandish sexual fetishes if they're women or their penchant for doing it in the butt if they are men. You *know* that the sex scenes are going to be outlandishly bad, with phrases like "honey oven," "love grotto," and "manroot" being used so liberally that you begin to feel like Regina from *Mean Girls* as you think to yourself, "Oh my God, Bertrice, stop trying to make manroot happen. It's *not* going to happen!"

****WARNING: SPOILERY SPOILERS BEYOND THIS POINT****

Skye O'Malley takes place in the 16th century. Our eponymous heroine is the youngest daughter of an Irish ship merchant/pirate, Dubhdara O'Malley. She's the prettiest of his plain daughters, so naturally she's his favorite, even though he desperately wants a son. Even though all the doctors advise against it, Dubhdara has sex with Skye's mom once more, unable to control his passions, gets her pregnant, and ends up killing her. That's okay, because adolescent back-up mom is ready and waiting in the wings. She's pretty cool for a stepmother, though, but Dubhdara O'Malley can go to hell.

Anyhoo, Skye O'Malley is a very familiar type of heroine for those of you who are into the whole bodice-ripper. She's independent and her traitorous-bodied person will not be controlled by any man - except for the crotch-hoisting alpha d-bags on parade, that is. They're the *only* exception. We see this in how she staunchly rebels against her father's chosen husband for her, Dom, who is a d-bag. She thinks her father's right hand dude, Niall Burke, is pretty cute, though, and the two of them have some sensuous make out sessions and pledge their mutual adoration of one another. Niall wants to marry her but his father is titled and snobby and thinks a ship captain's daughter isn't a good enough catch for his son (a decision he rues in earnest once he lays eyes on her for the first time and sees how perfect her breasts are). Niall watches in despair as Skye is wedded to another man before his eyes, with her perfect breasts on display in an indecent wedding gown, and that's when he announces his intent to take *droit du seignur*. Or as he puts it to Dom, "*Your life, or the wench's maidenhead*" (6%).

They have a magical night together, but then Clan O'Malley conspires to tie him up and bandy him away because this marriage is important politically, and Niall's father has a wife chosen for Niall already (an almost-nun spirited away from the convent just before she took her vows). Skye is sent off to live with Dom who becomes increasingly abusive, and in keeping with true Small fashion, we know that he's the bad guy because he likes to do it up the butt. Also, he's having sex with his sister, Claire, because *why not* pull a Jamie and Cersei Lannister for the fun of it? Why the hell not?

Niall weds Darragh and Skye gets fed up with Dom and ends up attacking him back, paralyzing him for life. She announces her intent to leave, saying that if they attempt to make demands on her, she'll announce their shame to all. Claire swears revenge. Honey Skye don't care. Darragh ends up going away for some reason...to become a nun again, I think, because she hates sex (and you can tell that she's the bad character because she's frigid and hates having sex with the hot studly muffin that is the alpha d-bag hero). Conveniently freed up, he and Skye become betrothed, but Skye tells him that she's going to be in control of her ships & they go on one of the charters...only to get wrecked!

I could make a joke about sinking ships here, but I won't. I'm above that. I'm a mature ad -

"I WILL GO DOWN WITH THIS SHIP. OTP OTP OTP OTP -"

Skye winds up in Algiers, with amnesia, where she is sold into a harem run by an attractive Spaniard-turned-Muslim, Khalid El Bey (or as I like to call him, Khalid El Bae, because he is the most likable male character in this book). Khalid initially intends to turn Skye into a courtesan but she doesn't like being touched by his right-hand-woman, Yasmin, or the training eunuch, consenting to physical acts only with him. He decides that the harem life is wrong for the beautiful Skye, and instead decides to marry her, which angers Yasmin, who has been contriving to become one of his wives for years - and now that this becoming is a one-woman show, Yasmin has absolutely no intention of exiting stage left. After Skye becomes pregnant, Yasmin conspires with this captain dude named Jamil who wants to have Skye for himself. She wants him to help her kill Skye, thus freeing up Khalid for her. He agrees...but with a twist - he's going to drug Khalid, so that he will be in Skye's bed. So instead of killing Skye, the love-maddened Yasmin will kill Khalid, thus freeing up Skye for *him*. My bae dies, and Yasmin is so distraught she kills herself after confessing all, and Skye is forced to escape from Algiers with the help of her friend Robert Small, but not before drugging Jamil in revenge with a powder that turns him impotent. I thought for sure that Jamil would appear again later on in the story, but nope, that's curtains for him. After this sequence, *we never see him again*.

Meanwhile, Niall is in Majorca for some reason and meets this count whose wife was held hostage by pirates. He considers this a taint on the family honor and has never allowed his daughter to marry because of this, scaring off potential suitors by insinuating that she's the offspring of a gang-banged whore. Niall is enchanted by the barely-adolescent Constanza and after having sex with her in a field, announces to her father that her virtue is compromised before offering for her hand.

Skye lies low for a while with Robert for a while, who helps create a backstory for Skye with amnesia. He has the feeling that "Wife of the Whoremaster of Algiers" is not a title that will impress the Elizabethan court. So he comes up with a tragic story for her before they go to England, and with her riches she buys up property next to Geoffrey Southwood, who is entranced by her perfect bosoms and her utter disdain for him. He enters a bet with his friend that he can make her his mistress before the year is out, made more tempting because he has a feeling he knows who Skye really is and can blackmail her by threatening to ruin her young daughter's prospects by exposing her secrets.

But Geoffrey falls prone to the beauty of Skye and after having sex with her many, many times in many, many places, ends up marrying her. Niall comes to the wedding with his new bride and is horrified to see the ghost of his presumed-dead wife marrying another man. He wonders if it's her, or if it's one of her father's bastards. His preoccupation ends up isolating him from his wife, who begins to take up lovers. It turns out that Constanza is a nymphomaniac, and her mother was as well - yes, the countess wasn't actually a victim, she voluntarily had sex with all of her pirate captors because she didn't think her husband did a good enough job, and Constanza is cast in the same mold. She actually goes to work in a brothel under the pseudonym "Book Lady", acting out scenes from the Kama Sutra, and the brothel is run by none other than the Incesty Claire, who is thrilled at this chance at revenge!

There's a duel, and Niall kills one of the men who slept with his wife before taking a wound to the chest. Skye gets all her memories back and is devastated to learn that she was married to Niall and has two other

children she totally forgot about. Geoffrey is jealous. There's a disease that kills off two of her children and her husband, but not before we're treated to the picturesque scene of Skye's servant hooking her fingers into Geoffrey's mouth to pull out the mucous clogging up his throat. Ew. With Geoffrey out of the picture, Robert Dudley starts sniffing around her skirts, before blackmailing her into sex. We know he's the bad guy, because he enjoys doing it up the butt and also because he makes Skye call him "Papa" during sex. Ew. Skye goes running to Queen Elizabeth and finds out that Elizabeth not only knows about this, but condones it, and then swears revenge. There's a scene with a giant, rapey orgy, involving a twelve-year-old girl and a dog. I'd say that this was a shock to me, but in one of Small's other books, *BIANCA*, there's a very similar scene involving a donkey. The book rapidly ends with piracy, imprisonment in the Tower, and a happily-ever after.

SKYE O'MALLEY is definitely not for the faint of heart. A lot of the male characters are unpleasant, even the alleged heroes. What Geoffrey did to his ex-wife and daughters was despicable. Niall was cruel to his other wives as well, and at several points comes pretty dang close to raping Skye. The only reason she isn't treated like human garbage is because she's beautiful. If you're not gorgeous, with heart-shaped face, sapphire-blue eyes, and perfect breasts, you're not worth the air you breathe, is that it? That's the status quo for most bodice rippers though, so Small can't really be faulted for keeping with the popular tropes of the time. The adolescent (or in some cases, even child) sex/rape is more troubling and difficult to stomach, but again, that happens in a lot of older romance novels - especially the medieval ones. That doesn't make it fun to read about, though. That dog scene, especially, was entirely unnecessary, and seemed done only to underscore what an utterly despicable person Robert Dudely was (as if we didn't know that already from his butt-happy ways). Also, Bertrice Small proves that she's too good for walking off into the sunset hand-in-hand; her happily reuniting couple indulge in a bit of lactation porn instead - because why not? Why the hell not?

My favorite parts of the book were actually the scenes that most people seemed to like least - the food and costume porn. Say what you like about the dubious content (and consent) in Small's books, the woman clearly had a passion for history, even if she wasn't always quite sure what she wanted to do with it. I think I'd have liked to peruse her home library and see what works of fiction and nonfiction inspired her to come up with some of the stories she did. There's beautiful descriptions of clothes and food in here that made me itch to go shopping. It's pretty hilarious, though, combing through the reviews. About half the people who read this book seemed to love it and the other half seem to loathe it entirely for the reasons I mentioned in the previous paragraph. Understandably so, I'd say.

I read this book for the Halloween 2016 Reading Challenge I'm doing with the Unapologetic Romance Readers group. One of the categories was "a romance written by an author who is dead" and sadly, Bertrice Small died last year. What a loss. I mean that, too. I have a love-hate relationship with her romances, but I do think it's cool that she had a style that was so distinctly her own. Few authors are capable of achieving that, and as much as I make fun of Small's style, I'm envious of it, as well. When her book went on sale for \$1.99, I snagged it, because I knew immediately that she was the author I wanted to pay homage to in my challenge. If SKYE O'MALLEY was just 200 pages shorter and a bit better edited, I think I would have liked it a lot more, but it's still a worthy addition to the cringeworthy bodice ripper cannon. Read at your own risk!

2 to 2.5 stars.

Karen says

If you're going to read this book comparing it to another genre, say classical literature, then of course you are going to hate it! But if you see it for what it is, a total escapist fantasy, then it is quite possible that like me, you will love the fictional heroine Skye O'Malley. It is Skye I named my email address for because I like to identify with her strength, her courage, her indomitable spirit, her independence, her imagination, and intelligence. There is no woman living or dead who can compare to Skye because she is a work of fiction! I personally think Beatrice Small has never created another heroine to compare to Skye. If you only read one of her books, then this would be it.

Meredith Holley says

This review contains spoilers, but don't let that turn you away. Really, I'm doing you a favor.

I've generally thought of myself as a fan of drunk writing, but *Skye O'Malley* is solid proof that even the best ideas can go horribly wrong. What I'm saying is that there is no way most of this book wasn't written in a creepy, drunk, sadistic binge. Until now, I have been reluctant to label the shelf of books I hate just "burn pile" because it seems so wrong to burn any books. This book has convinced me that burning books isn't always so bad, so time to rename the ol' shelf.

I'll admit that part of my problem with this book is that I read the wrong sections. It was obvious from the start that I wasn't going to read all of the pages of the book because no book this silly, I thought, should also be this long. I had two options: either read the dialog and rape scenes, which I believed made up the essence of the "story," or read the detailed descriptions of every stick of furniture in every house, every stitch of clothing everyone wore, and the recipes to every item of food that everyone ate in this entire book. In retrospect, I'm not positive why reading the dialogue and rape scenes sounded like a good choice. We've got this whole fun, silly MST3K for books thing going on here, though, (Mystery Science GoodReads 3000?) and I thought if my only contribution was that the harshness of everyone's black velvet bodices was softened by fragments of lace, it would take the fun out of the game. That was a major tactical blunder on my part. What I didn't realize was that if you only read the dry clothes/furniture/food descriptions, this book would just be a fashion porno, like reading *Vogue* without pictures or Sophia Copella's notes from the movie *Marie Antoinette*. Boring, maybe, but not rage-inducing offensive. The other road leads you to a child-rape scene that I HATE SO MUCH I can't even find words to describe this total nausea I feel from it.

People say, you know, it doesn't matter if authors put scenes in books that so violate the reader's brain that the readers find it necessary to reach for bleach and a syringe. I might be paraphrasing, but I think that's the idea. The argument goes something like, authors don't necessarily want all the stuff they fantasize about to actually happen. I have two responses to that:

1. DUH! and
2. I don't care if they want it to happen, I care that they want me to read about it happening. (okay, I also have a third thing:

3. I'm not talking about censorship, like there should be laws about what you can and can't write, even though there are laws about that, and I'm basically in support of those laws. I'm a big fan of the First Amendment so far. I, too, am exercising my freedom of speech by just getting really, really angry by what I see as an author's choice to create a totally sadistic fantasy world where she could torture women and children and then her choice to release it to the public so I would one day read it. You'd think there'd be some idiot things people wouldn't do just because they didn't want to do them, without even needing them to be against the law.)

There are some circumstances where I can see how it is necessary to write about really horrible things – to warn about holocausts, to show the danger of blind fear, things like that. The thing that really kills me about EVERYTHING in this book is that there is NOTHING redemptive or cautionary about the violence and disregard for humanity written in to it.

Authors are the gods of their own universes. No book represents complete reality, obviously, and so I hold authors responsible for the ways they create an altered reality. Regardless of Ms. Small's intent, I'm going to proceed with the assumption that she'd like me to believe her characters and approach her story with a certain amount of credulousness. I'm trying to convey the thing that really gets me about this book. The woman created this little girl in order to display her in this totally inhuman way, and it served absolutely no narrative purpose other than sadistic voyeurism. As a reader, suspending my disbelief, this little girl existed to me on some level. And I contend that the worst part is that Small knew what she was doing. In this scene, as in the other scenes that she intends to be rape, she describes the victims with a cold accuracy that makes my skin crawl. Then, suddenly, back to fashion porn.

So that you don't ever feel the need to read this book, I'm going to give you a summary of its major plot-points and overall message, and highlight a couple of moments that lived up to my MSGR3K hopes. I'll go ahead and gloss over the more ABOMINABLE parts of the story.

This is a historical account of a legendary Irish witch who had a catfight with Queen Elizabeth I over a boy that neither of them wanted to have sex with, while Elizabeth was PMSing. The moral of the story is that the more husbands and children a woman has, the happier she will be, but the more political influence a woman has the more *the entire world* will suffer.

The witch carries her power in two small globes. Through these globes, she manages to destroy all men who come in contact with her. Her male counterpart is a sort of Goldilocks character, always finding women too sexy or not sexy enough, until he ultimately consolidates his power with the witch. The witch is educated in Ireland in incest and fancy clothes. She sends her first husband to an early grave by breaking his back. Then, she is able to focus her energies on the family piracy business.

Unfortunately for the witch, in a moment of plot-twisting, she is taken captive by other pirates, and winds up in Algiers with a tidy case of the amnesia. Luckily for her, the local Whoremaster falls under the spell of the small globes. After the narrator tells him that intelligent women are really rare and the witch is an intelligent woman, the Whoremaster marries her and makes her his business partner. She realizes how terrific it is to own brothels, and they walk around with some panthers on leashes. (There are so many reasons why the panthers on leashes thing is awesome, and not just because of what it says about strict liability for abnormally dangerous activities in pre-Elizabethan Algiers.) The Whoremaster, too, dies from the curse of the small globes, stabbed in the night by a catty whore who thinks he's the witch. Oops.

The witch hightails it back to England, where the small globes bewitch her a third husband, a man with Shreck-green eyes and a phenomenally long tongue. They have some odd make-out sessions, one where they

fence with their tongues (p. 203), and another where “[h:]is mouth closed over hers, his tongue exploring the roof of her mouth, then flicking downward to tease at her sensitive breasts” (p. 291). Even this lizard man can’t escape the curse of the small globes, however. He contracts an *X-Files* type of illness, where they have to pull grey, alien mucus membranes out of his throat. His species could not survive on Earth for long. (Okay, I added the alien part, but only because it makes the story better.)

Then, there’s the consolidation of power with the Goldilocks dude, the catfight with Elizabeth, and an It’s-a-Wonderful-Life ending, where the witch tells us that having a bunch of men, who are totally your BFFs, is better than a bag of emeralds.

I haven’t touched on the swooning, matted chest hair, or the tear-away clothes everyone seems to be wearing throughout the book. It’s probably enough that you just know that they’re there, creating atmosphere. There’s really nothing left to say that hasn’t already been said by my esteemed MSGR3K colleagues. I’m only glad that I gave Pleasuring the Pirate two stars, so that I can show that I like this book LESS. Oh, also, Historical Fiction, you and I have had a rocky past, but I didn’t expect this, even from you. Don’t try sending your spies later to talk me out of this pure hatred. You and I are through.

Manny says

Bad Book Is Bad, Scientists Say

A team of top researchers from the prestigious Goodreads Institute of Bodice-Ripping Studies have recently published a report concluding that a bad book is bad.

"We were very surprised when we analysed the data," said the Institute's charismatic director at yesterday's press conference.

The rest of this review is available elsewhere (the location cannot be given for Goodreads policy reasons)

Julie says

Skye O'Malley by Bertrice Small is a 1981 publication. I checked this book out from my Overdrive library account.

I recently read a novel by this author in which Skye's granddaughter was featured, which prompted me to go back and check out the original O'Malley saga.

Written way back in 1981, I was sure this book would be quite different and I was right. Not only that Bertrice Small wrote historical romance novels that were way ahead of their time and not at all like anything else being published in the early 80's and certainly not like anything being published today.

Skye O'Malley's reputation preceded her and I was geared up for adventure, a torrid saga, intrigue, heartbreak and triumph. And that is exactly what is portrayed here. But, the story was uneven, with Skye

bouncing around from man to man, some cruel, some erotic, and one who really does love her.

Love at first sight is now out of fashion, but back in the time period this book was written in, it was not unheard of for two people to instantly lock eyes and have their libidos take over, meaning a marriage would have to take place. Sadly, for Skye when she meets the love of her life she is betrothed to another man, one she despises. So, she is initially denied her happy ever after and will go through all sorts of adventures and trials, marriages, births, and drama and will even trigger the wrath of Bess Tudor.

The saga will continue on through several more books, and I have the second one checked out already. However, I do hope the series gets better, because while I knew what to expect before I dove in with this one, I thought it was just a little too much in the drama department.

Skye was a strong heroine, especially for the time frame in which the book was written. She was smart, had a good head for business, did her best to fight male domination in her life and find her way back to the love of her life.

The realistic portrayal of how women were treated in the 1600's makes for some uncomfortable reading at times, so if you are not a person who grew up reading bodice rippers, and you don't know what to expect from them, this book is probably not for you.

It can be harsh, but I think it was probably right on track with how things were really were. However, the modern reader may not be able to understand that, and most seem to prefer reality be left out of the equation these days.

While this first book was not as strong an outing as I had hoped, I will at least read the second book and see if things improve.

3 stars

Ruby says

this has been one of my all-time favorites for years. fun, romantic, hot, sad, shocking, all of the above in one story.

i love Bertrice's version of Elizabeth too (well except for a certain VERY horrid thing Elizabeth does to Skye that pisses her off and fires Skye's need for revenge...no spoilers here!). and having enjoyed the movie Elizabeth with Cate Blanchett, when i see the scenes in my head, i see Cate across from Skye. and Sir Richard Attenborough as Cecil, who really wasn't done justice in that movie. (but that's another subject ;)

my recommendation: just read it.

Algernon says

This is my first 1 star rating in 2012, but I have to confess I knew what to expect and still picked up the book

for a summer read. The impulse came from a couple of very funny reviews (Ceridwen's in particular) and general fun some members seem to have had recently with sexually charged books (Fifty Shades, The Virgin Proxy). Or I might as well admit I was feeling randy and needed an excuse to check out a bodice-ripper.

I was actually going to give Skye three stars after the first couple of hundred pages, as the reviews are correct: the book is so poorly written it's actually funny to read, like a bad horror movie that wants to be scary but turns out into a parody of itself. I can't absorb with a straight face a passage like this:

Shyly she raised her blue eyes to his silvery gray ones, and for a moment Skye felt as if she were drowning. She realized he felt it too! Neither could tear their gaze away. They were suspended in time, their souls flowing back and forth between their bodies, twining into one perfect being.

It helps to know that the above passage refers to our heroine doing the horizontal dance, something she is engaged in from start to finish on the principle "not one chapter without rapture", preferably multiple raptures with multiple partners. I would have enjoyed the steaming scenes more if they were written with a funny, tongue-in-cheek intent, but that's not the case. Too many of them involve actual rape and brutality, and the supposedly independent minded and strong willed heroine meekly submitting to the male dominance. The 'bodice-ripper' is actually the most correct description of this kind of book, along with Elizabethan "soap-opera". Even these scenes wouldn't have turned me off so badly if it weren't for the bloated, endless descriptions of clothes, jewelry, foodstuffs, furniture that make up more than a third of the text. Add to this the bad habit of telling the same plot point two or three times with almost exactly the same words, as if the reader was too thick headed to get it the first time it was presented.

Skye O'Malley is the perfect example of a Mary Sue character, a serious contender for the top position against Rhapsody by Elizabeth Haydon. She is so beautiful she is simply irresistible to all the males she encounters, she speaks several languages, wields a sword when fighting pirates, controls her business empire, has perfect taste in clothes, jewelry and cuisine. Her breasts remain flawless even after several childbirth, her skin tone impeccably smooth and pale, her hair glossy and full, her silhouette slim without dieting for a single page. The only thing she seems incapable of is saying no when assaulted by sultry men with gigantic "manroots".

The plot would be interesting and adventurous if you could trim the bloated descriptions : An Irish maid at the start of the Elizabethan Age, gets into an unfortunate arranged marriage, then inherits her father fleet, gets kidnapped by pirates and lands in an Algiers brothel, later comes to London and to an English country manor. In her journey he gathers four husbands, and being a good Catholic girl has six children and not one divorce. Getting rid of unwanted husbands was one the most convenient plot devices the author abused in this here book. Too bad that for me the plot was stolen almost word for word from a French series that I actually enjoyed : Angelique.

I don't actually hate the genre, like I said : the book had its funny, if unintended, moments. Nevertheless, I don't think I will continue to read the other Skye O'Malley books, and I would recommend instead the above mentioned **Angelique - Marquise des Anges books. And for some really wicked sense of humor and steamy scenes, my own guilty pleasure: Jilly Cooper**

Anna says

This started out as a fun trashy romp with wild plots and hilariously bad sex scenes, but somewhere along the way it crossed the line into repetitive tedium - just how many taut little nipples, pulsating manroots, orgasmic

faints and obligingly dead husbands can you get? Shame, as I would have rated the original trashiness an amused 4 stars, particularly for those manroots; I've read a lot of tat in my time and they have to be the best/worst ever. Genius.

Naksed says

Skye O'Malley is perhaps the most famous of Bertrice Small's novels and as she is the Grand Dame of the old timey, non p.c., bodice-rippers, you will find here all the elements you expect, from the purple prose to the over the top swashbuckling adventures and a required trip to a harem. What will make some readers cringe however was an absolute hoot to me. I just adore Bertrice Small's style and spirit. *Skye*, though based on a real life Irish female pirate who lived in the Tudor era, is a Small creation through and through. What I love about her, and the majority of Small heroines, is the decidedly modern woman stuck in a restrictive historical era, who does not meekly sit by and let life happen to her but takes a great, big, bite out of it without apologies. Apart from a loltastic string of lovers and husbands (Bertrice Small very rarely does the "one and only" type of romance), the funnest part of the book for me was Skye's confrontation with Queen Elizabeth, another bombastic woman who would defy her era's conventions to rule as she saw fit, without cowtowing to any men, especially not her lovers. Simply delicious.

Karla says

Re-reading this with my sis and Rachel.

Original review:

Oh that sneaky summer of 1988 when I would pull Bertrice Small off Mom's shelf as soon as the door shut behind her in the morning! Hours of frantic reading, only to pop it back on the shelf just as she walked through the door. As far as I can recollect, this was the first romance I ever read and it is probably my favorite book of Small's (as well as being the best of the O'Malley saga that followed).

Skye's adventures begin on her wedding night when she meets her soulmate Niall Burke, who exercises *droit du seigneur* to spare her from her abusive boor of a new husband. OK, so there's no evidence that such a thing *ever* existed. Who cares? It's instant true love! Niall is one of Small's tragic heroes, whose storyline in the sequel ripped my teenage heart out.

In the grand bodice ripper tradition, Skye gets put through the wringer, but nothing stops her from being the awesome alpha wench she is. She's abducted by pirates and becomes the beloved consort of "The Whoremaster of Algiers" (chalk up Khalid el Bey as another of Small's sympathetic male characters), and when she finally gets home she becomes a thorn in Queen Bess's side, all the while fending off lecherous lords and enduring more heartbreak.

Epic and so lush in detail, you can almost taste the braised lettuce and roasted capon. (Was there ever anything else on a Bertrice Small banquet table? Darned if I can remember if there was!)
