

Charlotte Square Gardens, Edinburgh

10 - 26 August 2019

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**“It is incontrovertible that men who loved men were persecuted by the British state,”
Author Naomi Wolf at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.**

“It is incontrovertible that men who loved men were persecuted by the British state, in jails by the British state, sentenced to hard labour by the British state and transported by the British state for loving each other, in many many cases. So, I am on the right side of history with my book and with these interpretations,” said American Author Naomi Wolf while discussing the controversies surrounding her new book *Outrages: Sex, Censorship and The Criminalisation of Love* at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

The book centres around the topic of same sex relationships and the criminal persecutions that followed them during the Victorian era in Britain. While the topic has been discussed by other authors before, Wolf maintains that “what I did, other people have not done in the same way. Though other people have done incredible things, like I’m standing on the shoulders of giants and they’re all in the bibliography and citations. I mapped the law against the literature.”

It was the process of mapping the law and literature that drew controversy to Wolf and *Outrages*, following a misinterpretation of the term ‘death recorded’ which came to light in an interview with historian Dr. Matthew Sweet. Speaking about this, she said, “I think it’s fair game. You know, I wrote the book, I made the errors and interpretations entitle a challenge. What is really interesting, is a kind of a tweet about the interview which said something like, you know, Wolf gets dozens of executions wrong and the central premise of her book collapses. Watch, you know, feminist humiliated on the air, again paraphrasing it’s not exactly that, but that tweet went viral and it was stunning. It was like seventy major news articles a day for weeks and weeks.

“That is not an accurate description of either the nature of my error, my errors, or what my book’s about.

“But what’s really important is that fifty five men were executed for sodomy offenses in Britain before 1835. That is uncontestedly true. The premier scholars in the field, H.G Cocks, Charles Upchurch and Graham Robb all confirm this. Parliamentary papers which Dr. Cocks sent me from the nineteenth century confirm this, and about two hundred were also sentenced to death under this death recorded thing but not in fact executed.”

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Wolf went on to say that by highlighting the two cases she got wrong, Dr. Sweet had “inadvertently or for whatever reason, was whitewash those deaths and say you’ll find that those didn’t happen.

“Another mistake Dr. Sweet made was, he suggested that I would find that most of the people executed or arrested were child molesters and sex predators and you really can’t say that. And if you look at the records, that is actually one of the roots of homophobia, is that in this time the law was written to conflate adult men having voluntary intimacies with one another with child molesters and people engaged in sexual assault.”

While Wolf clarified that there will be corrections to the misunderstanding in the second edition of the British edition of her book, she added, “But I’m proud of being on the right side of history shining a light on these persecutions.”