



Wormwood: A Drama of Paris

Marie Corelli , Kirsten MacLeod

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Wormwood: A Drama of Paris Details

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From Reader Review Wormwood: A Drama of Paris for online ebook

Jesse says

Wormwood (1890)

Sandra says

Dark tale of a dangerous absinthe addict roaming the streets of Paris seeking revenge for his broken heart.

Muriel Schwenck says

Thoroughly enjoyable melodrama of the first water. It never stops. Fun read, if a bit purply and florid.

Laurie Rizzolo says

Interesting story about Absinthe use in Paris in the 1890s. Obsession, love, hate self destruction. The ending left me flat though.

Nancy Oakes says

This is one of those books that works on several different levels, but mainly it reads like the *Reefer Madness* of its day, a cautionary tale that centers on the evils of Absinthe and its degenerating effects on those who become addicted to it. It is also, as the cover blurb on my edition reveals,

"a lurid tale of unrequited love, betrayal, vengeance, murder, suicide, and addiction"

which just about covers the plot in its entirety, but it is also the author's look at some of the more decadent aspects of French society of the time. In her preface to the book, Corelli asks her readers to consider that the spread of "French drug-drinking" might just become as "à la mode" as French fashions, habits, books and pictures that have become "particularly favoured by the English."

The story is revealed retrospectively by the narrator, a young man who had it all up until the day before his wedding, when he finds out that the woman he loves is not in love with him. In Paris, he bumps into an acquaintance who introduces him to Absinthe, "the fairy with the green eyes" and "the cure for all human ills" that quickly takes him down into the depths of the *absintheurs*, "the degradation of Paris, -- the canker of the city -- the slaves of mean insatiable madness which nothing but death can cure."

I loved this book, melodramatic as it can often become, and couldn't get enough of it. If I'd read it in 1890, I probably would have joined the ranks of her readers waiting impatiently for her next novel to be published.

Wormwood is neither stodgy nor dry, it has all the hallmarks of the best, most scandalous sensation fiction, and fits in nicely with Decadent tradition, despite the fact that Corelli implies it as an attack on *fin-de-siècle* French society.

Anyone who has it in his or her mind that Victorian fiction is positively dull really needs to read this book. Trust me, it is anything but.

<http://www.britishreading.com/2018/02...>

David says

Another book featuring an overzealous absintheur.

Samuel says

Read this years ago. A book written at a time when the Green Fairy was Green Death and a real problem (and not due to Grande Artemisia either, if ever :)

Dave says

In 1890 Marie Corelli published her fifth novel, “Wormwood: A Drama of Paris”. After moving considerably closer to Fantasy in “Ardath”, Marie returns to her gothic/occult romance style with this book. The subject of the book is the degradation of society through the vice of drinking, and specifically drinking Absinthe (a.k.a. grande wormwood or la fée verte (the Green Fairy), a spirit which was thought to be addictive and a psychoactive drug and to cause madness over time. As a result, it was attacked by conservatives and prohibitionists and was eventually banned for a time in many countries. The person addicted, or the ‘absintheur’ in this story is Gaston Beauvais, the narrator of the story.

I have read that this novel is broken into three parts, but the copy of it which I read did not do so. The narrative of the story is told by Gaston from a point after he has destroyed his life and the lives of those around him, looking back on the road which brought him to this point. Gaston starts the novel as a young man who has everything going for him. He is successful in business, working for his father for a bank. His father’s close friend is the Comte de Charmilles, and Gaston courts the Comte’s daughter Pauline. Gaston is completely taken in by Pauline’s beauty, and barely notices Pauline’s closest friend and relation Héloïse, who is her cousin. Gaston takes his time in courting Pauline, even after he is resolved to marry her. It is at the same time as he intends to propose that Silvion Guidél, the nephew of the Curé comes to live with the Curé’s house. In a rather forced piece of foreshadowing, Gaston takes a dislike to Silvion at the instant he first hears the name. Gaston proposes and his proposal is accepted, and as time passes and the wedding grows closer, there are more and more signs that there is an issue arising between Pauline and Silvion, but in typical Corelli fashion Gaston fails to notice anything wrong despite a narrative which could only be told by someone who was incredibly observant. At last, Pauline confesses to Gaston and pleads that he will do nothing to Silvion for honor’s sake. Gaston struggles with what to do and after finally deciding to step aside he is convinced by an artist friend, André Gessonex to try absinthe, an event which completely changes Gaston’s mind and he decides that he must have revenge and destroy the lives of Silvion and Pauline. One can easily see how this would be the end of the first section of the book.

The second section would likely be the period in which Gaston keeps his new found obsession secret while he gets his revenge. He intends to immediately challenge Silvion, but finds that Silvion has run away back to his parents home away from Paris and that he has also decided to immediately become a priest. He keeps this information from Pauline and tells her that they should keep the situation secret for now and proceed as if they still intend to be married. Pauline trusts him but as the time passes and the wedding gets closer she becomes more and more distressed. Because of the dishonor it would bring on her, she has even kept the secret from Héloïse, though Héloïse is certain that something has gone wrong. The night before the wedding, Pauline confronts Gaston and tells him that though it appears they will get married, she will never love him, and Gaston reminds her that they are not married “yet”. On the day of the wedding, in front of all the guests, Gaston declares that he will not marry Pauline, and reveals the reason in front of all. His father is furious for the way Gaston has purposely embarrassed his friend and been as cruel as possible and tells Gaston to leave Paris for a while. This would likely be the end of the second section.

The third section deals with Gaston destroying his life and all those who surround him. Everyone he knew is touched in a negative way by him. He commits horrendous crimes and shows little or no remorse, though at other times he seems aware of the monster he has become. I thought the writing in this section was well done, because it shifts from the narration glorifying the deeds to being ashamed of them over and over, as one would expect from someone suffering from the addition to this drug of madness.

Overall I enjoyed this book, though not quite as much as “Ardath”. It has some issues with the writing in that Corelli seems to want to put an exclamation point at the end of every piece of dialog and even in much of the narration. I don’t recall her doing this to such an extent in her previous books, but perhaps I should go back and take another look. I also miss the well done fantasy section of “Ardath” as this book is much more straight forward story, though I suppose one does get a feel for the fantastic with some of the hallucinations which haunt Gaston in the final section. Still, despite those problems this is easily my second favorite of Corelli’s novels up to this point.

Sara says

What a strange, disturbing novel this turned out to be. Very gothic in nature and reminiscent of Anne Radcliff at times. I had serious doubts at the outset, but after about 75 pages it began to develop into what was a captivating story of a love gone wrong. Gaston Beauvais is a well-placed banker’s son, engaged to marry Pauline de Charmilles, the only daughter of a Count, and about to embark upon a life of wealth and honor. Into this idyllic scenario comes a novice priest, Silvion Guidel, the nephew of the local rector. It is immediately obvious that this man and Pauline are drawn to each other and that betrayal is in the air.

The story built momentum and I was quite torn between feeling pity for our wronged Gaston and horror at his overwhelming need for revenge on the two people by whom he feels so betrayed. Then the story went on far too long and became a treatise on the evils of absinthe. Whether lives were actually destroyed by absinthe, people went mad drinking absinthe due to the rotten wormwood used to make the drink, or actually suffered from hallucinations because of it, is disputed. That it was popular in the late 1800s and banned in 1915 is not. By the end of the book, I knew I had been hoodwinked by a clever member of the Paris temperance movement.

Even with its obvious political agenda, this could have been an interesting read had Corelli kept it to half the pages. She felt obligated to describe in great detail and more than once the travails of the addiction. As well, she turned her character from someone who could be understood as an injured man to someone who was far too callous and unfeeling toward even those who were blameless in his misfortune to be realistic. I’m sure

addiction to any harmful substance alters personality and sometimes brings out all the worst in an individual, but I would not expect that it does so as quickly or as thoroughly as is pictured here. I wonder if Corelli was able to convince anyone to steer clear of the “green fairy” with this tale.

Diana Apperley says

Brilliant novel about the darker side of life as experienced by a Parisian fin de siecle absintheur. Questioning of morality, respectability, God etc. Well written, exciting narrative that questions and argues the human condition, everything I would want from a novel, Brill!
