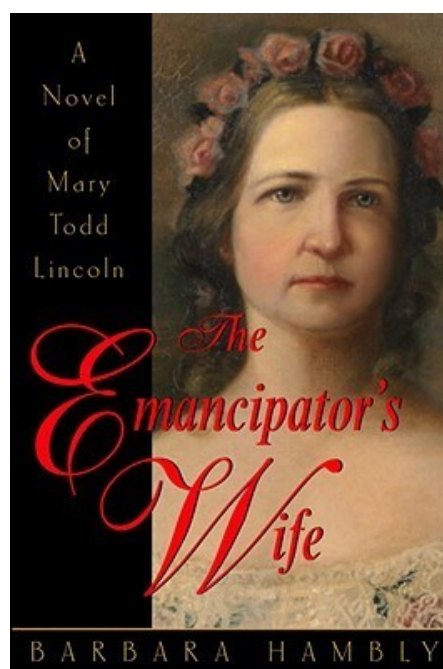




The Emancipator's Wife

Barbara Hambly

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As a girl growing up in Kentucky, she lived a sheltered, privileged life filled with picnics and plantation balls. Vivacious, impulsive, and intoxicated by politics, she is a Todd of Lexington, an aristocratic family whose ancestors defeated the British. But no one knows her secret fears and anxieties. Although she is courted by the most eligible suitors in the land, including future senator Stephen Douglas, it is a gangly lawyer from Illinois who captures her heart. After a stormy courtship and a broken engagement, Abraham Lincoln will marry twenty-four-year-old Mary Todd and give her a ring inscribed with the words "Love Is Eternal."

But their happiness won't last nearly so long. Their first child will be born under the gathering clouds of a civil war, and three more follow. As Lincoln's star rises, the pleasure-loving Mary learns, often the hard way, the rules of being a politician's wife. But by the time the fiery storm of war passes, tragedy will have claimed two sons, scandal will shadow her days as First Lady, and an assassin's bullet will take Lincoln himself, leaving Mary alone and all but forgotten by the nation that owed her husband its survival.

Yet it is in the years to come that Mary Todd Lincoln will truly come into her own. In public, she will fight to preserve Lincoln's memory even as she battles a bitterly contested insanity trial. In private, she will struggle with depression and addiction as she endures the betrayals—both real and imagined—of family and friends.

With a gifted novelist's imagination and a historian's eye for detail, Barbara Hambly tells a story of astonishing scope, richly peopled with real-life characters and their fictional counterparts, a tour-de-force tale of power, politics, and the role of women in nineteenth-century America. The result is a Mary Todd Lincoln few have seen and none will forget—the fascinating, controversial woman of whom her husband could say: "My wife is as handsome as when she was a girl and I fell in love with her; and what is more, I have never fallen out"—Mary Todd, the woman who loved Abraham Lincoln.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Emancipator's Wife Details

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From Reader Review The Emancipator's Wife for online ebook

Kc says

I know this is historical fiction but I found it had an interesting spin.

Mary Todd Lincoln is an example of an adult that was never disciplined as a child. Could this be what the future of our society holds?

Angie Fehl says

I read so many reviews about this book being a "challenging, long-winded" read that many gave up on, that I was almost hesitant to start it but was curious about the story around Mary Todd Lincoln's insanity trial (or what was called a trial!). I LOVED this book! Yes, it does take some time to get through because it covers all the history between MTL as a little girl all the way up to her death. It is historical fiction but Hambly's note at the end points out that the novel is her working out the "what if" 's from what IS known and factual and how she tried to avoid contradicting what was a proven fact but instead took the facts and built the story into the gray areas of MTL's life. This book really had me thinking of what the Lincolns might have been like as an actual, everyday married couple rather than just the figures out of the history books. Everyone, real or imagined, FELT like real people I could actually know. Definitely worth a read for hardcore history buffs!

Trudy Brasure says

This was the book that reignited my love of reading and admiration for Lincoln.
A great romp through history in the imagined perspective of a much misunderstood and maligned First Lady.

Gloria says

I finally finished the book, The Emancipator's Wife by Barbara Hambly. At 600 pages I had a difficult time wading through to finish it. The book wasn't a feel good read. Mary Todd Lincoln was a difficult person to be around. Yes she experienced lots of tragedy throughout her life but her ability to endure and overcome her circumstances were certainly altered by her negative attitude toward others. At one point when I read about her belief in spiritualism I thought if it made her feel better in a positive way why not allow her to continue since we all have beliefs which may or may not be real. Arguing pushed her further and further into her insanity which is perhaps why Lincoln would just get away from her troublesome outbursts to be around others he could commune with.

Michelegg says

This was a really good story about Mary Todd Lincoln. She suffered horribly from mental illness and

migraines. She lost all of her children but one. Her husband was shot while sitting next to her. Her only child had her committed for being insane. And I think my life's bad!

ShareStories says

The Emancipator's Wife is a fictionalized biography of Mary Todd Lincoln. Rather than paint her as someone whose mental illness encompasses her entire personality, the book portrays Mrs. Lincoln as someone who is witty and intelligent and truly struggles with the way her mental illness impacts her life.

Author Barbara Hambly takes into account the many other factors that could have come into play to explain Mary Lincoln's unstable behavior, not the least of which were the drugs that were rampant in unregulated "women's cordials" that Mrs. Lincoln was known to have taken. Nineteenth century mental health care was as unscientific as much of the medical care of the time, for those who were well to do enough to afford any at all.

The privileged life led by Mary Todd Lincoln is juxtaposed with the life of another woman similarly affected by mental illness--a fictional black woman whose son's first hand experience in dealing with the behavior brought on by her mental illness leads him to work in Bellevue, the sanitarium that Mary is placed in after Robert Lincoln asks the court to declare her insane.

Hambly ends the book by pointing to sexism as a key reason for society's lack of tolerance of "eccentric" behavior in women, when men's place of power in the community protects them from similar isolating treatment.

In the Epilogue Hambly explains her research and authorship decisions in a broad but satisfying way.

Excellent book!

Heidi says

At 600 pages and quite complicated at times, this book definately is not a fast read. After reading it, I don't doubt that Mary Todd Lincoln was crazy. I would be too if I had to live in a time where women were so oppressed. She suffered through the loss of three of her children and witnessed her husband getting shot to death--who wouldn't be crazy after that? She also lived a sad life; being rejected by her stepmother and being very lonely secondary to her husband's politcal aspirations. I learned a lot about slavery (How did our country ever treat human beings that way?), the civil war and how difficult Lincoln's entire presidency must have been. It was a great book that I would definately recommend.

Nancy says

The fascinating story of Mary Todd Lincoln encompassing her girlhood to her death. She grew up in Kentucky on a small plantation. Her father was a state politician who was away from home much of the time. Her mother died in childbirth when she was young. She and her stepmother did not get along well. From the

time she was very young she had difficulty with her emotions and her temper. At the age of 24 (in danger of becoming an old maid) she married Abraham Lincoln, the one man she truly loved and respected. Their marriage was fraught with financial difficulties, wild tantrums and outbursts by Mary, and the deaths of 2 of their 4 sons. Later after Lincoln was assassinated another of their sons also died. Eccentric Mary was then declared insane by her remaining son and placed in a sanitarium. After many years of emotional and physical hardships, and addiction to a large variety of "female elixers" it is difficult to see how Mary could change her life for the better.

Rebecca Huston says

With this novel, I found all of my preconceived notions about Abraham and Mary Lincoln turned squarely on their heads and forcing me into thinking about them in a very different way. Once again Barbara Hambly is able to recreate a world that we think we know, and instead one that we really don't. Along the way, there are plenty of controversies about slavery, racism, the Civil War, women's rights, and mental illness. I found Mary's story is a tragic one and one that I found very absorbing all the way to the end. Very well researched and written. Four stars overall and a recommendation.

For the longer review, please go here:

<http://www.bubblews.com/news/3672931-...>

Ballinger Ballinger-Cole says

I live in Springfield, Illinois. So, I hear a LOT about Lincoln. However, you don't hear so much about Mary Todd Lincoln (and what you do hear is all very negative). I understand this book is historical fiction (as pointed out to me several times by my neighbor James Patton who the author of this book thanks for help with her research). Yet reading this book was the first time I have ever been able to imagine Lincoln and his wife as real people. As I've walked around downtown Springfield since reading this book (past the many statues, near the Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library), I now think of Mary Todd Lincoln with a sad heart. The tragedies this woman endured in one lifetime are more than any one person should have to bear. It is a wonder that she was able to survive at all. Historical fiction or not, this book helped me to think about the lives of the Lincolns in a way I wouldn't have otherwise. I really enjoyed it!

Marie says

I found it sublimely disappointing. I picked it up for free, though, so I can't complain too much.

The author's choices of what to dramatize and what to skim over drove me insane. Intimate domestic scenes were skipped ad hoc, in a woman whose life had to be 90% domestic.

I say, as long as you're dramatizing, you should go for it all the way and give us some characters and interaction.

Sadly, the scenes tended to be drearily repetitive, focusing on long paragraphs of how Mary Tod Lincoln feels, and frequent dream sequences. The author repeats a scene of Mary and Lincoln driving to Ford's theatre over and over, ad nauseum.

The most interesting part was at the very end, where the fictional character John takes center stage, and the author feels, obviously, more free to have a character act.

I think I would have preferred either a straight factual biography or a more fanciful fictional work that only focused on one single event in the woman's life.

Katherine says

Hambly sets out a complicated task for herself at the beginning of this novel. She opens in 1862, jumps to 1875, and then jumps back to 1825. For the rest of the novel she fills in the blanks between 1825 and 1875, a 50-year span that easily explains why this novel extends to 600 pages. I think this was a bit ambitious, since she was forced to simply summarize many pieces of Mary Todd Lincoln's life. When Hambly devotes enough time and space to tell more detailed stories, the novel comes alive, as it does when Mary buys jewelry without her father's approval, taunts her stepmother, is exposed to the abolitionist movement, goes off to school, and falls in love with Abraham Lincoln. But too often, particularly after the two are married, Hambly slips into summary of a season or even several years, and what she skims over in writing, I skimmed over in reading.

Overall, an excellent take on what it might've been like to be Mary Todd Lincoln. Hambly portrays her as a well-rounded character, full of flaws and full of strengths, limited by the societal forces of her time, and struggling to find power over her own life in anyway she can.

Korynn says

An amazing book in which the author attempts to craft reasoning to the madness of Mrs Mary Todd Lincoln and creates an astoundingly balanced and sympathetic portrait of what must have been an infuriating and irrational woman. Using the bare facts of history Ms. Hambly takes artistic license to create a romance for Abraham Lincoln and his wife but still manages to tell a story about a woman with constant illness and counter motivations and intrigues of her own. There is not much truly admirable about Mrs. Lincoln, but it is the realization of this portrait of why she might have been the way she was that entrances the reader into history and understanding.

There is a sub-plot involving an exterior character, a black man named Mr. Wilamot who feels a personal interest in Mrs. Lincoln at the sanitarium, not only for being the emancipator's wife, but because of a incident in which she helped him in his youth (all fictional of course). It's a strange insertion but well placed to show the lives of black men and women in the North after emancipation. Perhaps the author was inspired to give voice because of her other books, the Benjamin January mysteries about a French-trained black doctor in New Orleans.

Karyl says

One really shouldn't confuse this book with actual historical events. Barbara Hambly does a good job of fleshing out the what-might-have-beens in Mary Todd Lincoln's life, but a great deal of this book is fictional in nature. I see nothing wrong with this, but there are those who insist on the greatest of historical accuracy. This book is clearly fiction and marketed as such.

I've always been of the opinion that Mary Todd Lincoln's insanity stemmed from relatively simple mental illness that would be easily treated now. It could have been due to bipolar disorder, but it could also have been simple stress and post-traumatic stress disorder -- or any combination thereof. How sane would any woman remain when three of her four sons die before adulthood, and whose husband is murdered right before her eyes? It's amazing that she didn't go stark raving mad.

This novel goes to great lengths to humanize Lincoln and show him more as a man, and not just the great American hero he became after death. We also develop quite a lot of sympathy for Mary Todd Lincoln, as the author hypothesizes reasons for her supposed madness. The novel itself is quite well-written and very engaging.

Taylor says

This book accomplished what all historical books accomplish, which is to get me interested and researching someone or some point in history I have never explored before. The writing style didn't thrill me, and sometimes it drove me slightly crazy. As though it was almost era-authentic, almost really good...but it felt like it needed just one more edit to really get to where Hambly was taking the story. Close, but not quite.

But the story is indeed compelling - what would it have been like to be President Lincoln's wife? Did she actually have bipolar disorder (it certainly seems like it, according to several sources). The horror that Mary Todd Lincoln lived through - losing 3 of 4 children, the President's assassination, the Chicago Fire... it's no wonder she was somewhat (if not severely) unhinged. It's interesting. Folks who like to imagine history might like to read this book.
