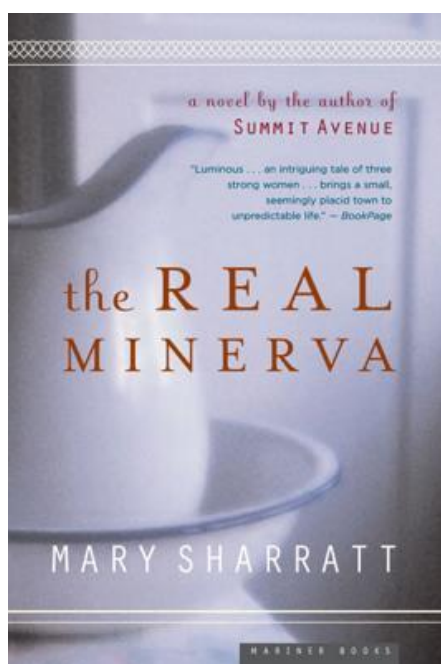




The Real Minerva

Mary Sharratt

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Minerva, Minnesota, in 1923 is the picture of Willa Cather-like gentility: the Northern Pacific Railway runs through a town center dominated by church steeples and the Hamilton Creamery and Pop Factory. But Minerva is also a small town of limited opportunity, a place where the status quo is firmly entrenched and rigidly enforced. Against this tableau of midwestern placidity and calm, three Minerva women assert their dignity and independence against all odds.

The troubled relationship between young Penny and her mother, Barbara, is getting worse. Disturbed by her mother's affair with the man they clean house for, Penny answers an ad to work for Cora Egan, a Chicago society woman who has fled a bad marriage and intends to raise her child alone on her grandfather's farm. Cora's situation shocks the town, but over time her presence opens a door in Penny's and Barbara's lives. Through these women, Mary Sharratt considers what it takes to reinvent the self, to claim one's true identity. Mary Sharratt's first novel, *Summit Avenue*, was hailed as a "remarkable debut . . . [that] weaves dark, evocative fairy tales and passionate longings into an incandescent coming-of-age story" (Publishers Weekly, starred review). Readers interested in feminine archetypes and women in myth will be similarly drawn to Sharratt's newest novel. Exquisite historical detail and emotional resonance infuse *The Real Minerva*, an old-fashioned story with a modern spirit.

The Real Minerva Details

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Author : Mary Sharratt

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From Reader Review The Real Minerva for online ebook

Jelan says

I don't very often read an entire book in a day, but I started the new year by reading the entire The Real Minerva. I was completely drawn in by the flawed, heroic, tragic figures of the three women who are the centerpiece of this book. The writing was wonderful in the way that good writing often is... it carried me along with the story, painted pictures, provided glimpses into the different perspectives, and didn't get in the way. If you're looking for a great read this new year, try it!

Gaile says

it is 1923. In Minerva, Minn, the owner if the factory, Mr. Hamilton has had to put his wife away. She contacted sleeping sickness. Thereafter he begins an affair with his live in hired woman, Barbara Niebeck. Her daughter, Penny suspected and after a flight, Penny flees and finds herself twenty three miles of town where Cora Viney has tried to have her baby by herself. Penny stays on to help Cora while back on the Hamilton place her mother continues her affair with her boss. Mr. Hamilton's oldest daughter Irene once back from camp begins to suspect and spy. Although her mother is in a hospital, she is still alive and Irene views all this as a betray of her mother.

Cora Viney is trying to hide from an abusive husband never dreaming he has hired a private detective to find her.

With this setting in place and two young unsettled girls involved, events unfold in this small town in rural Minnesota which will soon scandalize the town and settle the fates of both Irene and Penny.

Read on to find out!

Personally when I set out to read this, I was not sure if I would like it but Mary Sharratt never disappoints, not even in her earlier novels of which this is one. It is a story that will stay with you for a long time.

Bookworm Ava says

One of the most enjoyable books I have read this year - but then so far everything I have read by this author has been great! Fabulous storyline!

Jill says

Probably a 4.5.

While the narrator, partly due to age, didn't break new ground, I thought that the parts of the book from her mother's point of view were fresher, if difficult to read sometimes.

The stereotypes of small town life, particularly Minnesota small town, were well-drawn. I found the desire for self-sufficiency matched with the desire for love and connection and interesting juxtaposition.

The characterization is strong too. Every character is written in such a way that you care about him or her, even if you disagree with their decisions. Also, the editing is well done in the sense that there is so much

going on in so few pages.

Becca says

I chose this because one of my Etsy friend's name is Minerva and she's awesome. :)

So it's set in the 1920s for most of the story. But little is said or done that couldn't have made it set today, which is a little sad...I'll explain in a minute. It takes place in Minerva Minnesota and tells the story of a mother and daughter, a mother and daughter, and mother and daughter: Barbara and Penny, Cora and Phoebe, and to a lesser but no less tragic degree, Hazel and Irene. Barbara and Penny live with Irene and her family as hired help.

Cora is staying at her grandfather's farm on the edge of town. Hazel is locked away in a mental institution, suffering from a malady that doesn't allow her to fully wake up or fully sleep. Their paths further intersect when Penny runs away from her mother, angry that she, Barbara, and Irene's father, their employer, are having an affair. She ends up 21 miles away, at the Maagdenbergh farm just after Cora has given birth to her baby girl. Penny stays on as a hired hand, helping Cora care for the baby and the house. She vows in her heart to protect them as she learns, first secretly and then more openly, of Cora's past. On the other side of town, Barbara's story continues with her falling in love with Mr. Hamilton and Irene seeing that as the ultimate affront to her sick mother memory so she...well, I won't give away the ending.

The part that saddens me is the way the town looks down on Barbara and Cora is pretty much the same as it would be now, only people may be less vocal about it. Progress, where art thou? I'm sure someone could give this a more political literary analysis. I chose to take it as it is, not looking for hidden meanings or inferences. It's beautiful and a little haunting. I enjoyed it.

Julie says

I loved Mary Sharratt's 'The Vanishing Point' so much so that I went searching for other books by this author. While not nearly as gripping as 'The Vanishing Point', 'The Real Minerva' was still a good read. This book took us back to an earlier time when women were challenged by far more issues that today are no longer accepted as 'the way it is.' Sharratt's 'Minerva' is a story of strong women overcoming various real events and challenges.

Ellen says

This was a pretty good story. Two grown women and two 15 year old girls each make choices that are, in the least, not in line with the norms of the day in rural Minnesota in the early 1920's and, at most, extremely desperate. The most interesting aspect for me was thinking about a "justified" murder. If you murder one person to save another, you have still killed someone. And if someone takes the blame to save the murderer, the one who killed may escape jail time and social stigma but still lives with the burden of their action for the rest of their life.

Wendopolis says

Absorbing read about three women and the choices they make.

Audrey Terry says

I'd like to say that not very many books have made me cry...but I'd be lying. This is a case where all the little injustices pile up until they overflow. Luckily they're countered with a happy ending :)I'm a sap, I freely admit that now, haha. In any case, I loved watching Penny grow up into a woman that was able to understand her mother's sacrifices, and then seeing Phoebe grow in the same vein. This is just a beautifully written story that I don't feel is told often enough.

Beth says

Not quite as compelling as *Summit Avenue*, this book was still beautifully written. Sharrat is a master of characterization and getting historical details right. The plot parallels that of *Summit Avenue*, with its exploration of women trying to break away from limited gender roles, living on their own in defiance of society's expectations, etc. This book has a slightly darker viewpoint than her earlier novel--more violence, more focus on women's vulnerabilities in a society that forces them to be dependent on men. Still, the major female characters' inner strength wins out in the end, so the message is still hopeful and inspiring. Not that Sharrat, I think, tries for a specific moral--she's too good of a writer for that--but her stories do carry the weight of a complex ethical perspective and a concern for human moral values and how they might hold up against forces like poverty and prejudice.

Kristen says

This is the story of three strong women in 1923 small town Minerva, Minnesota. I loved it.

Mmars says

2.5 rounded up to 3

While reading this book, I questioned much of the plausibility and some of the history, in particular that of the Mexican work crew. Having grown up in the 50s and 60s fairly close to where this book seems to be placed, I did not remember hearing of Mexican work crews in the 20s. Also, to my knowledge there was only one Dutch family anywhere near where I lived, the Dutch having settled further west and south. But it is never wise to trust one's memory of history. A quick search on the Web revealed that such crews were plentiful in the United States in the 20s, including northwest Minnesota's beet fields (also not near where the story took place). That said, it is quite possible there would have been crews that helped with wheat harvesting in south central Minnesota. But in the 30s as jobs became scarce for white Americans, Mexicans both legal and illegal were deported by the thousands. Thus as farming became more mechanized the need

for migrant crews was replaced by mechanized farming. And over time migrants returned to the beet fields but only appeared in towns with canning factories, filling the vacancies made by students returning to school in the fall. Their stay was brief and they lived in barracks or shacks near the factories. For perhaps a month, some of the children attended the local schools in which no one spoke Spanish.

WARNING!!!! SPOILERS AHEAD.

Least plausible for me, however, was the role of murders by women in the book. Not only by the characters, but by the notorious woman mentioned who killed her children. I know this was a story based on women, but why no mention of the men? No murderers? And why were the Nelsons able to continue to terrorize the town while the women were locked up? So many murders by women in a town of 3,000 which in the 20s would have been quite a bit larger than most of the towns around. Even in the 50s and 60s most of the towns in south central Minnesota were under 2,000.

I was also disturbed with how catty all the women were, and how noble most of the men were. With the exception of Mr. H. The doctor and the shopkeeper were kinder than any of the town women to the unfortunate. I didn't buy it.

There was just plain a lot I didn't buy about the book in plot and story. I also felt the reconciliation between mother and daughter was too smooth. Also, the final chapter jumping ahead missed much that would have led to that. For example, how did Bess and her mother survive the Depression years in California? How did Bess track down Cora? Bess would have been 28 and traveling on her own, speaking little Spanish.

On the positive side, the female characters were well drawn, the story kept my interest and moved quickly, and the sense of place was good. I wouldn't hesitate to read of Mary Sharratt's books.

Stephanie says

This book was an interesting historical fiction read, but I think the best part about it was that the characters created by Mary Sharratt were so complex and generally likeable despite their flaws. I was really attached to them by the end!

♥ Marlene♥ says

I really enjoyed reading this book. It was a quick and an interesting read. It is the story about 3 different women who have in common that they are strong even though they might not know it. Some of the plot was a surprise to me and that does not happen that much so that was nice. I am planning on trying to find this author's first book and i hope she will write more. Loved The Vanishing Point.

Beth says

THE REAL MINERVA is powerful and beautifully written novel. Barbara, Cora, Penelope: three women's lives that SHARRATT intertwines in a beautifully choreographed tale. These strong, singular women's stories are about struggling surviving, living and loving fiercely and without compromise. The roles and

societal structure that defined small-town life in the 1930s shape the destinies of Barbara, Cora, and Penelope. Each has a secret to keep. Each must find a way to escape and reestablish their lives. THE REAL MINERVA is historical fiction as well as feminist literature at its best. SHARRATT is a masterful author. I have very much enjoyed her novels that I've read so far: ILLUMINATIONS, THE VANISHING POINT, THE DAUGHTERS OF THE WITCHING HILL and, of course, THE REAL MINERVA. I look forward to reading her first novel, SUMMIT AVENUE, as well as her upcoming novel, THE DARK LADY's MASK.
