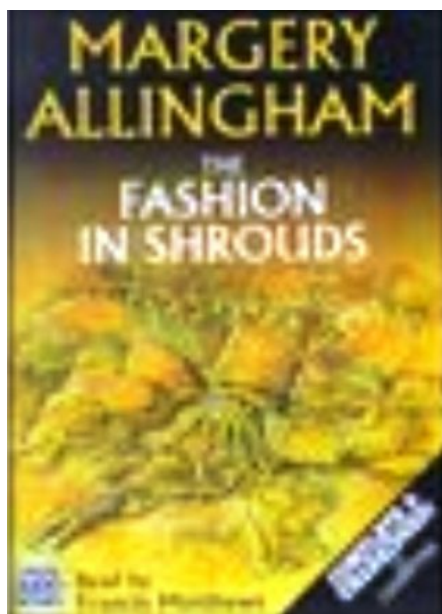




The Fashion in Shrouds

Margery Allingham

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The Fashion in Shrouds Margery Allingham

Detective Albert Campion has a talented dress designer sister with celebrated clients. Georgia Wells is a glamorous actress who exemplifies the 1930s *femme fatale*. Vain, stupid, and selfish, she attracts men like moths to a flame. When these men die, Albert suspects Georgia is more deliberately *fatale* than alluring.

All the books from Albert Campion series are standalone titles and can be read in any order.

The Fashion in Shrouds Details

Date : Published July 1st 1978 by Ulverscroft (first published 1938)

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Author : Margery Allingham

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From Reader Review The Fashion in Shrouds for online ebook

Nooilforpacifists says

Better than average 1930s English drawing-room mystery that mostly takes place outside the drawing room. Several strong female characters are paraded before the reader, but are they good/bad/ugly, or a murderer? Or none of the above?

Lilly says

The sexism in this book was utterly appalling to me. It ruined a decent detective story. It's easy to say "oh, it was written in 1938, it's just of it's time", but that's a terrible argument considering that three years earlier Dorothy L. Sayers had written the intelligent, feminist detective story *Gaudy Night*.

Katherine says

This book isn't going to change one's way of thinking, but it's a well-plotted mystery with some excellent characters. Margery Allingham was a good writer and this novel is far better-written than most detective/mystery novels; one of her strengths is that she does not write as if she were in awe of her main character. And then of course, there is her treatment of female characters. How many novels are there where the female engineer gets the man?

Maribeth says

Wow, it is hard to know where to start with this. Have the previous books I've read by Margery Allingham been edited for racial slurs, homophobic remarks, and other offensive language? And don't tell me it was just normal for the 1930s because Dorothy L. Sayers was writing earlier with a far more enlightened mind and refined language. I really found a lot of things about this book appalling.

And then we have the most anti-feminist (and completely stupid) marriage proposal EVER; this man proposing has spent most of the book completely unable to take care of himself or his business, he has been weak and stupid and really annoying... but he shows up and asks a brilliant successful independent woman: "Will you marry me and give up to me your independence, the enthusiasm which you give your career, your time and your thought? ... I would like to feel that I might discuss anything with you if I wanted to; but only because I wanted to, mind you; not as your right."

Seriously?

Here again: Dorothy L. Sayers talking about equality of the sexes and equally valued work in 1935, and Margery Allingham setting women back decades in 1938.

The story wasn't terrible, and not every single character was throwing around ugly racial slurs... and maybe not all the successful/interesting women are willing to give up their lives to unworthy men.

shudder

Karen Rye says

I did not like this book. Things I did not like:

The writing style

The characters

The plot

The datedness (couldn't forgive the racism and misogyny no matter how contemporaneous they are)

The beginning

The end

The middle

No.

Charlene Vickers says

This is a dreadful book with no redeeming qualities. Campion is a sneering, contemptuous jerk; his sister is unbalanced, and not in an entertaining fashion; Lugg is cringeworthy; the secondary characters are as unlike real people as you'll ever see. It's horrendously badly written - good luck figuring out what's going on in the first three chapters - and there is no mystery.

Reviewers who think that the astonishing racism and misogyny that permeates this book is somehow historical need to think again. Allingham was decades behind the times. When Christie looks progressive in comparison...

If this were sent to a publisher today, they'd use it for toilet paper. Deservedly.

Miriam says

Somehow I've gotten onto a string of misogynistic women authors. Compared to this the last one, Christie's *Blue Train*, seems quite mild. At least its sexism is of a more paternal tone -- oh, you women are so silly and unable to control your feelings --rather than truly hateful. The women here are not just irrational, but also vicious, selfish, dishonest, and amoral. And this despite the fact that the male characters do all the murdering and most of the other crimes. When women commit their sordid little crimes it is at the behest of men, but that still makes them worse than men because they are stupider as well.

This book contains the most repulsive proposal I have read, to date:

Will you marry me and give up to me your independence, the enthusiasm which you give your career, your time and your thought? ...In return, mind you (I consider it an obligation), I should assume full responsibility for you. I would pay your bills to any amount which my income might afford. I would make all the decisions which were not directly your province, although on the other hand I would like to feel I might discuss everything with you if I wanted to; but only because I wanted to, mind you; not as your right. ...You would be my care, my mate... my possession... It means the other half of my life to me, but the whole of yours.

This is totally serious. It is not meant as a satire. Also, it comes right after the guy has had a very public affair with a married women, and there hasn't been a big talk or reconciliation scene or anything of that

nature. But I guess poor Val has low standards. After all, earlier in the story when she was admitting how upset she was about Alan's betrayal, she was told, "*This is damned silly introspective rot. What you need, my girl, is a good cry or a nice rape.*" And that's from her brother! The protagonist/detective/hero of the story! This is book ten in Campion's series. I really thought I had read an earlier installment and not hated it or him, but I sure did here. In fact, I found most of the characters pretty repellent. The only person I found sympathetic was Amanda, the young aircraft engineer. Well, and the kid Sinclair, but he only existed as a plot device and disappeared as soon as he had conveyed the crucial information.

Allingham's writing is decent and often clever. It's a pity her characters ruin it.

[Added after a reread 02/26/14, which was unfortunately necessitated by starting [book:Traitor's Purse|383181] and realizing that I couldn't remember what had happened with the Campion/Amanda plot arc.

I think what bothered me so much about the misogyny was both how universal it was -- **every** female character conforms to stereotypes of women as irrational, emotional, catty, and focused on men (except for to some degree Amanda, who is always described as "innocent," "childlike," "trusting" and also is unfeminine and a mechanic) -- and how ultimately unnecessary to the plot. Which sucks because the plot is actually reasonably strong in terms of the mystery, but I couldn't enjoy it because this nasty, insulting bile about women kept coming up over and over, even when it had nothing to do with what else was going on.]

Gabi Coatsworth says

A period piece, written in 1938, featuring detective Albert Campion - subsequently a TV series in Britain. So that's why I read it, and in some ways it's a good solid mystery, marred only by the use of the 'n' word in casual dialogue, and its attitude to women. Though I will say that one of the main women characters runs a successful fashion business and another works for an aircraft engineering firm, which is pretty advanced for the period. Trouble is, they end up preferring marriage...

If only the publishers had been allowed to edit out the unnecessary language. It wasn't necessary to the plot or for character definition. It was simply OK at the time. God knows, when I was at school in England in the mid 60s, our dark brown uniform cardigan was described as 'n' brown, subsequently changed to Congo brown, so you can see it took a while. PS I didn't guess who the murderer was, which was a plus.

Christine Cody says

I love this series. In Campion, Allingham created such a wonderfully strange and beautiful character. In this book, we meet his sister Val, a brilliant and talented fashion designer and we also learn a bit more about his family's history. In 1938, *The New Yorker* called this book "One of the finest murder books ever written." With that said, I need not add my own review. But I do have some comments I must make:

If you love Golden Age mysteries, please ignore the Goodreads reviewers who are damning this book for misogyny. It's a ridiculous way to read something from 1938. But beyond that, they are selecting quotations from the book to augment their arguments, while they are ignoring just as many sections of the book that describe the talent, ingenuity, self-made wealth, independence, success, and other incredible qualities of the same women. I'm not sure why it has become misogynistic to describe a woman's problems with men. My God. I've been a feminist for nearly 50 years. It hasn't changed the fact that I have often fallen in love with

the "wrong men" and made ridiculous choices. I would hate to read a book in which none of the women had any less-than-ideal qualities or weaknesses or in fact in which none of the men held ridiculously old-fashioned male viewpoints. If we were reading for a university class called, for example, "Treatment of Women in Early 20th-Century Mysteries," then yes, let's write a full argument about the way the author treats her characters. But if you're reading for enjoyment, and can handle the way people behaved in the 1930s and 1940s, then read this incredible book for its characters, its plot, and its shocking and surprising climax.

Jill Hutchinson says

I am usually an Albert Campion fan but this book just irritated me. The characters were so damn affected, hysterical, and just plain ridiculous that I had trouble getting through it. I hoped that every one of the group of suspects was guilty since I disliked them so much. Even Campion came across as a vacuous fool. Another complaint I have is that if you have not read *Dancers in Mourning* (which I have) you have no idea to what some of the characters are referring when they bring up, for no particular reason, names and incidents from that story.

The story here revolves around the fashion industry in which Campion's sister is a major player. Mix in drugs, suicide, murder, money, and silly asses and there you have it. I was very disappointed in this entry in the Campion series.....but I'll get over it.

Leah says

A deceptively bad, unbearably anti-woman book, this one sneaks up on you just as you settle in to enjoy a good deep psychological detective story. A poor imitator of both Christie and Sayers, Allingham had a bare-faced crush on her cripplingly boring detective that apparently blinded her to his utter uninterestingness for everyone else.

To begin with, I liked the analytical nature of the conversations that were going on. It was interesting to see each sentence, each movement, each facial expression, pulled apart and put neatly into its own descriptive box ('feminine', 'hysteric', 'fallible and human') by the completely infallible, extremely masculine, utterly un-hysterical Campion, he of the blank-slate mind that can coldly analyse each person who comes into his sphere, including his own sister, and draw a wise and disengaged conclusion. As you may be able to tell, my enjoyment of this conversational habit did not linger.

After a few chapters of this describe-everything-in-great-psychological-import-detail style of storytelling, I started to wonder when the story would actually get going. Campion had admirably proved himself to be both smarter and more emotionally stable than everyone else around him (ever) and the only death had been one that happened some years earlier, apparently unsuspecting.

Furthermore, it was becoming uncomfortably apparent that Allingham was oddly preoccupied with the state of the modern woman. For a little while I hoped she might land on the side of 'difficult but worth pursuing', ie. that women were learning how to be professionals and managers and in charge in a world that was still uncomfortable with that role, but alas. As we chased the rabbit further and further down the rabbit hole, even the professional and intelligent women faltered and stumbled, and of course this was because of their sex. 'This is what happens when you breed a creature for captivity for a thousand years and then set it free,' thought Campion, not verbatim, somewhere in this hot mess of ugly internalised misogyny.

The problem with this ridiculous attitude became twofold: not only was it strangely insistent and quite at odds with what the modern reader wants to hear (not her fault, admittedly), but it completely overtook the actual story. Allingham clearly admired Sayers, and I think she tried to emulate her cerebral style of writing here, but she missed the truth of Sayers' brilliance: kindness, and balance. This book is neither kind nor balanced. In fact it starts to read as slightly hysterically fixated on this subject, which I suppose is because the author is a woman and therefore cannot ever hope to achieve the true enlightenment of mind that is the sole lot of a man in the world.

The actual whodunnit got entirely lost in the wordy, obsessive psychology of the characters, and besides which the reader was never given a proper opportunity to solve the mystery. As we discover, a drug administered to the murdered man was easily accessible by Our Murderer, but for a Very Specific Medical Reason that was not revealed until we learned his identity and his dastardly plan. Poirot would have been very disappointed.

And so Allingham fails here on both fronts: inferior to Sayers in human understanding and subtlety, and sub-Christie because she forgot plotting in favour of proselytising, red herrings in favour of ranting, and clues in favour of clunky commentary. This is a bad detective novel and a bad novel in general.

Andrea says

This book could essentially be renamed "A Tale of Four Career Women". Written 'between the wars', you can almost see the author wrestling with old and new conceptions of what it is to be male and female - sometimes using statements which are teeth-grindingly appalling. Some of these statements come out of Campion's mouth (including the memorable suggestion that what his sister wanted to cheer her up was a "good cry or a nice rape" - there's a word used in a way we don't usually use it!).

The first woman is Georgia, an accomplished and completely self-absorbed actress. Furtherance of her career is one of the pivots this story turns upon, but it is more Georgia's self-indulgence rather than her career which drives her to go through husbands (and painfully neglect her sadly-situated child Sinclair).

The second woman is Val - Campion's sister - an extremely successful couturier discovering love rather later than usual and suffering for it.

The third is Amanda Fitton - aircraft mechanic, inventor, brilliant, valiant, cheerfully playing partner to Campion's detective endeavours.

The fourth hovers in the background, the devoted, unattractive secretary.

The mystery itself is intriguing and complex, but it is the way these women deal with romantic possibility which is what the book appears to be about.

(view spoiler)

Along with the embedded sexism of a bygone age, there's also a sour dash of racism to stumble over. But, numerous wincing aside, it's a clever story and Amanda Fitton makes up for the rest.

Bev says

The Fashion in Shrouds (1938) is another entry in the annals of Margery Allingham's detective, Albert Campion. This time, as the back of the book tells us, we have homicide with style. Fashion is the by-word of the circle where murder strikes. Among these people, the suicide of Richard Portland-Smith [not George Wells as he is identified in the blurb] is old news. But Campion has refused to accept it as passe...and, in fact, has been asked by the man's father to get to the bottom of it. As Campion begins to follow the trail among politicians and the theatre, plane designers and fashion designers, he discovers secrets that may affect his own sister. More deaths follow and soon it becomes a question of which secrets have led to these bizarre murders. Is it adultery? Drugs? Blackmail? Espionage? Or a nice little recipe requiring all those ingredients? Campion takes a bold step in the finale to bring the perpetrator out into the open.

It may just be the state I've been in the last couple days (not feeling well)...but this particular Campion mystery seems just a bit more convoluted than most. And I have to say that I detested (yes, detested) Georgia Wells, the actress, from the moment she stepped into the scene. Someone really needed to slap her a good one early on. The mystery did hold my attention....I just barely got it solved before Campion's final scene. And some of the character interactions were very good. Overall, though, not one of Allingham's best. Good solid mystery. Mostly good characters. A decent, solid read for a three star rating.

Les Wilson says

I found nothing offensive in this book. I feel that those who see it are the ones who create it.

Lynsey Dalladay says

I can't praise this book highly enough. Utterly fabulous. My favourite detective in his most fiendish case yet. A perfect example of the golden age of detective fiction.

Leonie says

I do like Allingham's books; even their vices, such as quite a dense style that could be understandably considered awkward at times, and plots that depend on fanciful characters and coincidences, appeal to me. But I've come to realise that I don't actually like her detective, Campion, that much, and that was particularly the case here. Most of all, this is one of those weird misogynistic novels women write sometimes, when you get the sense they would like to believe women weren't inferior, because the thought, and the implication for human life in general, is crashingly depressing when anyone really thinks about it, but can't manage it. Campion thinks weird misogynistic thoughts about his own sister, Valentine, because, I think, if only she wasn't a woman she'd be as good as him, and he kind of likes her and she's his relative so this inferiority depresses him. And then Valentine receives the most chilling proposal I've ever read, in which he informs

her not only that she'd have to give up her business and he'd be making all the decisions, and that she'd be his mate as in plumber's mate, his possession, but that while he'd like to feel he could discuss things with her, that would be just as and when he chose, not as her right. Sometimes you see things that make you suddenly realise fully just how impossibly twisted and cramped and false inequality makes life.

Azar says

The only thing that really hurts this book is that you have to take it in the context of its time. There is blatant racist and sexist content, but it **was** written in 1938, when the world was still ignoring what Hitler was doing in Europe, so that's not really surprising. I'm not saying that should be ignored, but don't throw out the good with the bad because aside from that the book is **very** good (in fact, if not for that I would've given it five stars).

Now, I'll be honest, this is Albert's long-awaited (by me) reunion with Amanda Fitton from Sweet Danger, which is why I read it. But the book is enjoyable for reasons above and beyond the delightfully in-denial nature of their relationship: we meet Campion's sister for the first time and the mystery is tricky enough that, while I called a couple of plot twists, I didn't figure out the whodunnit until Allingham allowed the reader to. Agatha Christie may be the Queen of Crime, but surely Allingham deserves at least a princess tiara? **g**

It's a pity the BBC Campion series didn't go long enough to tackle this one--I would have loved to see how they handled it. :-)

Sharla says

There were many things I liked and enjoyed about this book and almost as many things I found abhorrent. Allingham and Christie both had a nasty habit of throwing out racism and sexism as if they were nothing. Yea, yea, I know, they were "products of their time" but that does not make it any less jarring or irritating to read today. I'm not sure it's even a valid excuse since there were authors, writing during that general time period, who did not have as much propensity for that sort of thing. In spite of all that, this book is an important part of the series. Amanda Fritton (from Sweet Danger) returns. There are three strong, independent female characters, Amanda, Val and Tante Marthe. The climax scene near the end that takes place at Amanda's cottage is one of the most atmospheric and well-written I've come across in ages. Campion develops as a character although at times in this book he fades into the background. These books don't rely completely on each other and can be read as stand-alone but the character of Albert Campion develops more with each book. By this point in the series Campion has become such a human hero. His faults are not hidden, they're part of who he is and perhaps he's more likable for it. Reading this book alone will not give the reader a complete sense of him. I think they are best read in order.

Ashley Abate says

Super fun. I do adore Albert Campion.

Ruth says

Lovely, mysterious, and peaceful (for a murder mystery). That said, anyone whining about the cultural milieu needs to realize that time is linear and novels are pinned to when they are written. You don't like the characters, the language, or what the author says? Fine, stick to reading last week's NYT best sellers--they're obviously for you. Oh, and one more thing: it's FICTION folks-- not the flaming Constitution.

Whew. I didn't realize how annoyed I was at the reviewers with modern axes to grind on a 1938 novel. If you aren't one of them, go read it, it's a wonderfully crafted mystery.
