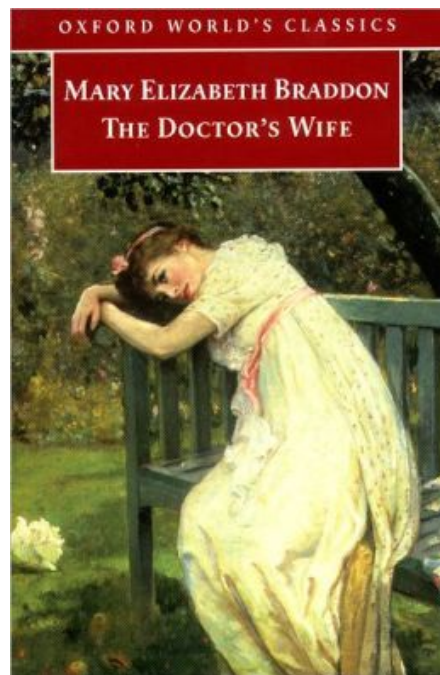




The Doctor's Wife

Mary Elizabeth Braddon , Lyn Pykett (Editor)

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When *The Doctor's Wife* was first published in 1864, Mary Elizabeth Braddon was well known for her scandalous bestseller, *Lady Audley's Secret*. Adultery, death, and the spectacle of female recrimination and suffering are the elements that combine to make *The Doctor's Wife* a classic women's 'sensation' novel. Yet it is also Braddon's most self-consciously literary work and her rewriting of *Madame Bovary*. Like Emma Bovary, Braddon's heroine, Isabel Gilbert, is trapped in a marriage to a man incapable of understanding her imaginative life. But Braddon's novel differs vastly from Flaubert's in the nature and consequences of Isabel's 'affair'.

The Doctor's Wife Details

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Author : Mary Elizabeth Braddon , Lyn Pykett (Editor)

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From Reader Review The Doctor's Wife for online ebook

Alejandra Flores says

A disappointing reading compare with how much I enjoyed Lady Audley's Secret, but I think the main reason I haven't enjoyed this book is because I hated the main character, Isabel, from the beginning. To be completely honest, I think she is an idiot. A character totally unaware of her actions, she accepts Gilbert's proposal without realising she was accepting, then she gets married but doesn't understand the responsibilities of a wives and dreams with heroes and princesses and love stories and, the worst of it, is that she is cheating her husband (for me it's cheating) but still she doesn't know that is cheating!!!!!! and the funny thing is when she gets scared when her lover proposed her to run away and she says "ohhh no it's all platonic". Really?? And the we come to the end of the story which couldn't be worse...

Together with all this, I consider that the author makes this book longer that it should be. Too may descriptions, too many thoughts, too many unnecessary writings that makes it reading to slow. As I say very disappointing.

T. says

Considering that this is a 19th century serialized novel, which means it is a bit preachy and very verbose, it was not a bad read!

Bree (AnotherLookBook) says

I'm marking this book down as Duly Forgotten.

This is an interesting book as an intersection of literature and feminism...but it doesn't go much beyond that. I read it as a digital copy that for some reason was split into two volumes/files. I didn't realize this when I started, so as I neared the end of the first ebook I was like, hm, that's interesting, I wonder how the story is going to resolve in time. Turns out, it didn't! That's because it was just volume 1. So I started volume 2...and quickly lost interest. I gave it a good solid go, again and again, but it wasn't compelling enough.

Maybe this was because I've read and loved Madame Bovary. I've heard that Braddon wrote this to provide the perspective of a Emma Bovary-type woman; evidently she felt Flaubert missed something in his portrayal. Braddon certainly did get more inside the head of her female protagonist, Isabel Gilbert, but I still wasn't much impressed by what I found there. I found myself rolling my eyes at her affair of the heart as well as the object of her affections, Roland Lansdell. And, just as in Madame Bovary, I sympathized most with the doctor husband. That might have been Flaubert's intention, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't Braddon's.

Also, the style wasn't as masterful as Flaubert, but who are we kidding? Flaubert is a hard act to follow.

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Margaret says

Braddon was the queen of Victorian sensation novels, like *Lady Audley's Secret*; although the heroine falls in love with a man who's not her husband, *The Doctor's Wife* isn't really a sensation novel. Braddon was clearly trying to transcend her genre (and rewrite *Madame Bovary*) in this story of Isabel Gilbert, the eponymous heroine, and her love for Roland Lansdell; their affair is pointedly not consummated, and Isabel's emotional and mental growth is really the main point of the story.

S. L. says

So many people complain that books from this era are long. I think books today are short and leave out the most interesting bits. Compared to this, *Madame Bovary* comes out as the equivalent of 'They married, and then they were run over by a truck.' This is an imitation of that work, by someone who loves novels and had a different take on what an imaginative wife who loves novels would do when faced by a seducer.

Pgchuis says

2.5* rounded down. George, "the Doctor", visits his friend Sigismund at his lodgings and falls in love with the landlord's daughter, Isabel. Isabel is addicted to novels and seeks to live as a fictional heroine, but nevertheless agrees to marry the prosaic George. Then she meets a rich neighbour, the idle Roland, and begins a very romantic dalliance with him.

Initially I quite enjoyed this story, and all the scenes featuring Sigismund and his endless plotting of his trashy instalment novels were entertaining. I also perked up every time the wise and straight-talking Mr Raymond appeared. However, the plot moved very slowly and repetitiously, and then at the end went a little berserk, admittedly with a couple of twists I hadn't anticipated. There was a fair amount of sentimentality and death bed repentance etc - I was skimming to an extreme extent for the last 10%. The very frequent references to the novels Isabel had read and to the characters in them and the ways said characters suffered or loved etc became extremely tiring and was a much overdone device.

Apart from the slow pace and the Victorian mawkishness, my main problem was that Isabel was so completely stupid, helpless, passive and naive, and that I did not believe for a moment that Roland would have felt anything more than a passing attraction to her. She would have driven him mad after 5 minutes. Also, why did Isabel and George not have a baby, or at least express concern that they had not?

Ruth says

I know it's detrimental to my character to read these sentimental novels, but I can't help it- they're just so good!

Wendy says

This book was really uniquely done. The beginning was pretty slow as you meet different characters and the story is set up. It starts with a young doctor but after he is married the point of view is switched to his young beautiful and childlike wife whose obsession with literary figures keeps her in a fantasy world and causes pain and disappointment to others. Reading the book using the notes at the end is a must unless you know every Dickens and Thackeray character and know English poetry by heart! This author is interesting.

Perry Whitford says

Isabel Sleaford is a pretty girl with a head full of the idealized dreams culled from literature and the grandest models of romance, personified in Edith Dombey and Lord Byron: 'She wanted her life to be like her books; she wanted to be a heroine,—unhappy perhaps, and dying early'.

George Gilbert is a 'candid, honest, country-bred young man' who 'could sit in the little parlour next the surgery reading Byron's fiercest poems, sympathizing in his own way with Giaours and Corsairs; but with no passionate yearning stirring up in his breast, with no thought of revolt against the dull quiet of his life.'

An ill-matched pair then if ever there was one, yet George is so taken with her prettiness, Isabel's circumstances become so reduced, that a marriage results all the same. And then, inevitably, the problems begin.

Enter Roland Lansdell, an idle and dissipated aristocrat and sometime poet, the living image of all Isabel's fancies. However, his first impressions of her are not complimentary: "'A beautiful piece of animated waxwork, with a little machinery inside, just enough to make her say, 'Yes, if you please,' and 'No, thank you.'" That said, he too can see how pretty she is, and starts to warm to her.

Braddon writes as all the very best Victorian writers did, as though she only has to pick up a pen for ten chapters of energetic, elegant prose to pop out onto the page.

But Braddon is no Thomas Hardy; she's not the writer to wring every last drop out of this unhappy union, though she does shake it dry. Her forte is wit, not wretchedness.

She does handle the tragedy in an affecting manor in the second half, but the real success of the novel is those fevered fancies of Isabels, as well as some grisly and highly amusing plot outlines dreamt up by a friend of the unhappy couple, a writer of 'penny numbers' named Sigismund Smith.

rachel says

miss gilbert is very unsympathetic as a main character, though some of the secondary characters (such as the author sigismund smith) are interesting. underwhelming, especially from the author of [lady audley's secret](#).

Julia says

Love Mary Elizabeth Braddon's books! I am on a quest to listen to every one I can find on LibriVox.org.

Annie Rosewood says

I'm not quite sure how to evaluate this novel because my thoughts on it are all over the place. When I started to read it, I really enjoyed Braddon's style of writing. However, it quickly become repetitive. I'm not only referring to the Victorian tropes that she uses, as well as the flat, uninteresting characters, but the writing itself. I soon felt like I was reading the same thing - *Isabel's naive fancies and her romantic views of life and death* - over and over and over again. Braddon likes to repeat the same ideas and the *same sentences*, which made for a tedious read. Although I did come to like and sympathize with Isabel for her sentimental fantasies and always having her head in a book, and although the ending was better than I expected, it was overall a disappointing read.

Peter says

This novel by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, written in 1864, is an interesting novel, or actually an interesting group of novels. One of its foundations and sources is Madame Bovary, and yet the depth of passion in The Doctor's Wife is not as interesting or intense. Another foundation is Sensation literature, but again, this novel does not nearly match the level and interest of Lady Audley's Secret. In other ways the novel has more than a winking relationship with Braddon's own life as a writer of Sensation novels and those more lurid penny numbers that she wrote throughout her life. I couldn't help but think that the writer Sigismund Smith in The Doctor's Wife was, in part, clipped from her own life as a writer on the cusp of, but never quite the summit of prolonged respect in the Victorian Era.

Our heroine Isabel Sleaford, marries a kind, gentle and somewhat obtuse doctor named George Gilbert. While he works away in a provincial backwater, his wife, an avid reader and hopeless romantic, creates an imaginary world in the form of the three-volume romance novel with added dashes of Romantic poetry and Shakespearian tragedies. If for no other reason than the thrill of the hunt, the reader of The Doctor's Wife can have a field day finding and enjoying the constant references to literature, writers, artists and social conventions of the time. Lovers of Dickens will especially enjoy the constant barrage of references to Dombey and Son.

Isobel meets a dashing, rich and available writer and poet by the name of Roland Lawsdel, and this event launches the novel into an improbable but rather amusing and enjoyable series of meetings, fantasies and shared platonic encounters. It is only when Lawsdel proposes they run away together that Isobel snaps back into the role of semi-dutiful wife. Alas, she has only been searching for a romantic love not a sexual encounter. The novel then spins its way through Isobel and Roland helplessly attempting to sort out their lives as the good husband-doctor remains completely oblivious to circumstances.

Why ruin the ending?

The novel gives us a good look at the Victorian social world and its morals and expectations. No doubt Braddon's personal life gave her much fodder to draw from and no doubt the reading public lapped up the novel.

The Doctor's Wife is a good read if approached in the right frame of mind. Expect flabby writing in need of a good edit, and expect a novel that is neither sensational or sensual. Don't expect a book as good as Lady Audley's Secret. By all means, however, be prepared for an entire novel full of literary and artistic

references. If nothing else, your read will be much like an episode of literary Jeopardy!

Academama says

This is a bit purple in [a lot of] places, and the "sensation novel" aspect feels tacked-on; it comes in near the end as though to check that box in the publisher's list of criteria. Nonetheless, I enjoyed it. Braddon makes incisive comment on the inadequate education of women.

Helen says

Isabel Sleaford lives in a dream world filled with characters from novels by Dickens, Scott and Thackeray. She longs to break away from her boring existence as a children's governess and live the exciting life of one of the heroines in her favourite books. When parish doctor George Gilbert proposes to her, she accepts but quickly finds that her marriage isn't providing the drama and adventure she's been dreaming of. George is a good man, but he's practical, down to earth – and boring, at least in Isabel's opinion. After meeting Roland Lansdell, the squire of Mordred Priory, she becomes even more discontented. Roland is romantic, poetic and imaginative – in other words, he's everything that George isn't...

This is the second Mary Elizabeth Braddon book I've read – the first was the book that she's best known for today, the sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret*. Apparently *The Doctor's Wife* was Braddon's attempt at writing a more serious, literary novel, with a plot inspired by Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The *Doctor's Wife* is not very 'sensational' – apart from maybe the final few chapters – and although it's interesting and compelling in a different way, if you're expecting something similar to *Lady Audley* you might be slightly disappointed. At one point in the book, Braddon even tells us "this is not a sensation novel!"

The focus of *The Doctor's Wife* is the development of Isabel Gilbert from a sentimental girl with her head permanently in the clouds into a sensible and mature woman. I didn't like Isabel much at all, though I'm not really sure if I was supposed to. Throughout most of the book she was just so silly and immature – wishing that she would catch a terrible illness or some other tragedy would befall her, just so she could have some excitement in her life – although as several of the other characters pointed out, she wasn't a bad person, just childish and foolish. It was sad that her own romantic notions and ideals were preventing her from having any chance of happiness.

I thought some of the minor characters were much more interesting and I would have liked them to have played a bigger part in the story. I particularly loved Sigismund Smith, who was a friend of both George and Isabel, and a 'sensation author' – probably a parody of Mary Elizabeth Braddon herself. Sigismund (whose real name is Sam) is a writer of 'penny numbers' – cheap, serialised adventure stories. His enthusiasm for his work and his unusual methods of researching his novels provide most of the humour in the book.

Due to Isabel's reading, almost every page contains allusions to characters and events from various novels, plays and poems – most of which I haven't read - so I found myself constantly having to turn to the notes at the back of the book (until I decided I could follow the story well enough without understanding all the references to Edith Dombey and Ernest Maltravers).

Overall, this was another great book from Mary Elizabeth Braddon, although not quite what I was expecting.

Kristin says

Another Braddon that we read for Jennifer's class. Genius. I actually loved this book. I can see so much of my younger self in Isabel - living in books, wanting to be a heroine, being misunderstood and misunderstanding the nature of the world. Not really a page-turner like Braddon's other books, but just a lovely, interesting read.

veronica says

One of my favorite things about Victorian literature is that it shows the variance between social mores from that time and today's. The level of scandalosity that arises from a young woman being seen speaking with or taking a stroll with a man who is not her husband is hilarious.

In "The Doctor's Wife," a young woman named Isabel gets married to a young man named George. They are both nice enough people, but they are terribly suited for each other. To use a food analogy, George would like nothing better than to eat bologna and fruit cake for the rest of his days, while Isabel, who has only ever eaten gristle and prunes, dreams of foie gras and beignets.

The trouble arises mostly from this inconsistency in their respective expectations from life. It deepens when along comes a fine piece of prosciutto who parades himself in front of Isabel. And it culminates because, damn it, those Victorians sure were some prudish, judgy bunch of busy-bodies! Spying, gossiping, judging, and snubbing are the primary vehicles for how plot moves along in this novel.

This book, I think, wants to be taken seriously as a moral story. But more than that, I think it wants to make us want to gossip about all the characters and be very snarky and throw side-eyes. Overall, it succeeds in the latter, and fares significantly worse in the former).

Oh, and it also has a very strong message for young women everywhere: Put down your poems and your novels, ladies!

Ian says

I'm a big fan of Victorian Sensation fiction of which Elizabeth Braddon is one of the leading lights. Sadly (for me) this was her one attempt at writing a literary novel. It's a sympathetic portrait of an ill-conceived marriage (EB deliberately borrows the initial premise from Mme Bovary but takes her novel in a different direction). However, although well-written, it was not the page turner had been hoping for,

Wolf says

This is an excellent book and the wife of a doctor and her struggles with doctoring life at the finest and most precise level. Blood, gore, honor, courage under fire and more - current themes of a mind-bogglingly

intercontinental, and fundamentally confounding journey through the secret life of a wife of a doctor -who actually learns more than the doctor and is able to do his work better than him, but due to the time and location of this piece, she is totally powerless to assert her expertise on the level that she should. The result is many dead people that she COULD HAVE saved in a less misogynistic world. That's an unfortunate reality of her extraordinary vision and passion that she was taught to repress.

Marjolein says

I cannot help but think that this novel would have greatly benefited if the author had reduced the number of pages by half. The novel starts of incredibly slow; it is only in the last 100 pages that it actually picks up steam. Moreover, one gets rather weary of the amount of repetition of certain phrases which are related to the sentiments of the protagonists. All in all, this was not the worst novel I have ever read, but definitely not the best either.
