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ELIZABETH INCHBALD
A SIMPLE STORY



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When Miss Milner announces her passion for her guardian, a Catholic priest, she breaks through the double barrier of his religious vocation and 18th-century British society's standards of proper womanly behavior. Like other women writers of her time, Elizabeth Inchbald concentrates on the question of a woman's "proper education," and her sureness of touch and subtlety of characterization prefigure Jane Austen's work.

A Simple Story Details

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Emily says

This book quite surprised me! The plot isn't anything to write home about and is, in fact, kind of infuriating - not so much so that it ruined my enjoyment of the book, but it's just filled with that typical late 18th century bullshit. That bullshit makes it interesting because it does a really good job at exposing the issues of the era but it did have me rolling my eyes more than a few times. The thing that really stands out in the novel is the writing. The prose itself is quite simple and not anything outstanding, but the crafting of this book is so well done. The pacing is skillfully done and the shifts between points of view is masterful. It really made it a joy to read. Again, the story and the characters aren't anything extraordinary, but it is a good study of the period and you do feel connected to them. It's a really easy read and I'd recommend it to someone studying the period.

Giedre says

Inchbald's *A Simple Story* is quite aptly titled—the story at its core is indeed simple. While it doesn't shine plotwise, Inchbald's real strength is her characters. In a time ripe with virtuous characters, Inchbald's Dorriforth and particularly Miss Milner must have felt like a breath of fresh air. Her characters have both admirable qualities and flaws. I imagine the readers of Inchbald's time were quite intrigued, even when they were scandalized by her heroine's less stellar qualities.

I found the first two volumes of this book to be delightful if not without flaws. At that time it took guts to write a not-so-virtuous heroine like Miss Milner and give her a happy ending.

BUT. BUT. BUT.

It's only for a short while. Because volumes three and four reestablished the status quo with a vengeance. Perhaps it was Inchbald's way of not going too far. It's understandable, as society wasn't exactly forgiving when it came to women, and I imagine unmarried (widowed in Inchbald's case) female novelists were among the first in line for societal derision. Woman gotta toe that line, I suppose. Still, volumes three and four made me want to get stabby. Really fucking stabby, if I'm honest.

Two stars is as high as I can go. Though I'm still kind of fascinated by Inchbald herself.

Moriartyandherbooks says

Oh my gosh I LOVED THIS! ABSOLUTELY LOVED THIS! It didn't change my life, but this was SUCH an unexpected piece of work! The back does not even begin to tell you the full plot of this story, which is good because I ended up being pleasantly surprised! I expected the usual "she confesses her love, and then they marry" which either takes forever or happens quickly and then the rest of the book it just talks about how their marriage is doomed. BUT NO, this book had a great pace, and I dare say it was really sweet! Like the last part, I just loved that eeee! Don't want to give spoilers, but this was just such a great read!

Carm9n says

You can read my impressions here...

<http://carmenyamigos.blogspot.com.es/...>

Kate Blundel says

3.5

Mary says

Loved this book!

The back gave nothing away , a well paced story with a few twists.

Gothic in parts.

Loved the last volume where all ends happily.

Esther says

This was such a surprise! It's well-written, engaging, and scandalous. I felt the characters were depicted quite realistically; their flaws were explored in detail, the changes of their dispositions over a lifetime made sense, and their interactions with each other were nuanced and intriguing. One character's persistent self-sabotage was hard to read, but realistic. Another character's implacability and resentment called to mind Mr Darcy, whose "good opinion, once lost, is lost forever" - yet this character trait was really taken to the extreme.

A few warnings: the entire story (in four volumes) takes place over many years, so don't expect a neat little happy ending in one volume to carry over to the next! I found the dramatic twists really threw me, especially as they were at times so sudden.

Also, this book expresses equally the flaws of men and women, yet at the end no badly-behaving man has excused himself, been punished, or even really changed - while the women are subjected to a moral about which one received the more "proper education" to guide their behaviour. (I can't take for granted the improvement in Mr Darcy's mind and character now that I've read this!)

Andrea says

Simple premise, confusing delivery. Miss Milner is in love with her guardian Mr. Dorriforth. She marries Lord Elmwood, but flirts around while he is away and as a result is banished from his presence. Their daughter suffers the punishment of banishment, until a near tragedy forces her father to finally acknowledge

her.

Margaret says

Elizabeth Inchbald was a late 18th-century actress and playwright who also wrote two books, of which this one is the better known; the other, *Nature and Art*, is hard to find nowadays, though you can read it at Project Gutenberg.

A Simple Story is a penetrating character study, of the passionate Miss Milner and her love for the stern Dorriforth, her guardian, who is also a Catholic priest. The plot becomes a little didactic, but Inchbald's gift for characterization is evident on every page: Miss Milner, Dorriforth, the loyal Miss Woodley, the volatile Sandford...all are memorable characters, subtly and sharply drawn through dialogue and actions.

Scarleffish says

This is an amazing novel. It's very different from most 18th-century novels. It's way more naturalistic, in that it's not as mannered and self-consciously 'literary' as a lot of the other novels of the time. Which is not to say that they are bad, it's just that this is just so different. It's amazingly realistic. And astonishingly sexual. The latter half of the novel, which deals with the heroine of the first half's daughter, is very different, but the force of sexuality from the first half of the novel is still there. This is an amazingly thoughtful and intriguing novel, and it deserves to be amongst the canon of great classics, because this is simply one of the greatest novels I've ever read.

Laura says

Over the centuries, there have been many shades of meaning for the word “simple”: e.g., uncomplicated, modest, foolish. I’m going to go with that last definition where this novel is concerned.

Another “s” word that could have been applied would have been “shallow.” No matter how intense a character’s emotion may appear on a given page, no matter how passionately he or she vows never to waiver, chances are that by the time the page is turned, so will be the emotional tide. Jealousy, outrage, remorse, terror, religious devotion—no feeling is ever so strong that it can’t be changed as easily as a pair of kid gloves. And emotion without motivation makes for a tedious read indeed.

Aleks Schoen says

3.5 stars. This novel is split into two parts: the first is the story of a mother, the second the story of her daughter. The novel started off rather delightfully, but after 100 pages or so I wearied of the no-plot-but-love-plot. The man/woman dynamic was interesting, if inherently--and purposefully--problematic. Some of the main themes I pick up on: what makes a good man, who decides who is a good woman, should love be tested, and what is the nature of forgiveness?

Annie says

This was an effective and enjoyable novel. I preferred the last two volumes compared to the first two, but I think the structure and plot of this novel were my favourite parts, the dual timeline worked really well, and was used in a way that emphasised the differences between the various characters. Other than that, the characters felt flat, and the story wasn't my favourite. I'd recommend it if you're looking for 18th Century novels to read though.

Catherine says

I'm giving this novel four stars because it explores that unusual and electrifying topic: female desire and the will to power.

The novel begins with Miss Milner (who dominates and powers the entire book despite being absent for the latter half of the novel) as a young coquette who falls in love with her guardian, Lord Dorriforth. "Miss Milner and Dorriforth are opposites in conflict, like Richardson's Lovelace and Clarissa with the sexual roles reversed. It is Miss Milner who, Lovelace-like, is attracted by the very quality which debars the fulfillment of desire, the beloved's purity...Miss Milner's wit, her sexuality, her will to dominate, threaten the masculine rule represented by her guardian." (taken from the excellent Introduction by Jane Spencer)

Miss Milner's ending is strangely gratifying rather than upsetting: she owns it all.

Ange says

*3.5 stars
