



The Testament of Jessie Lamb

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Millions of pregnant women in the not-too-distant future are dying from a rogue virus released in an act of biological terrorism. Nothing less than the survival of the human race is at stake.

Jessie Lamb is just an ordinary sixteen-year-old girl living in extraordinary times, who begins to question her parents' attitudes and behavior in her struggle to become independent. As the world collapses and the certainties of childhood are ripped away, her idealism and courage drive her toward the ultimate act of heroism. But is she being heroic, or innocent and impressionable as her father fears, incapable of understanding where her actions will lead? The riveting vision of a dystopic future fraught with difficult moral choices will make *The Testament of Jessie Lamb* an instant favorite for fans of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, and Brian K. Vaughan's *Y: The Last Man*.

The Testament of Jessie Lamb Details

Date : Published 2011 by Sandstone Press

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Author : Jane Rogers

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From Reader Review The Testament of Jessie Lamb for online ebook

Tudor Ciocarlie says

A very strong Booker longlist novel. The only reason that I've gave it 4 stars is because I've read it after the brilliant Random Acts of Senseless Violence. No other young female voice living the beginning of an apocalypse and the disintegration of the society can be as good as Lola in the Jack Womack's book. But Jesse story, of a girl fighting herself, her parents, her friends in order to save the world, is very well written and full with interesting, thought provoking ideas.

Nikki says

I don't know what to think about this. The more I think about it, the less sure about it I become: I actually read it more or less in one go, and didn't want to put it down while reading it, but on reflection I'm not sure how convincing I found it or what I really thought of Jessie's decisions. I found her convincing -- she really did seem like a typical teenager, full of the desire to change the world, contemptuous of the adults who got it all wrong. I found the world convincing, too: the idea of such an illness spreading all over the world, the idea of how society would change and fragment in response.

But the feeling was sort of lacking. I didn't feel enraged by the situations presented, or that frightened. It somehow didn't seem emotionally real: Jessie seems to take so much for granted, and her decision process didn't work for me -- didn't convince me, didn't make me fully understand her decision.

Still, it's a worthwhile read, I think: the ideas and issues raised are interesting, and it's well written and pretty well paced. Like I said, I read it straight through, in one go, and before I tried to put my feelings down in review-form, I think I'd have said I liked it a lot.

Petra Eggs says

A dystopian tale of ultimate misogyny gone wrong.

It is the appalling end-tale to all those Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese people and others who abort female fetuses or commit infanticide on their girl babies. The disgustingly low place we occupy in the minds of those men who run society and invent religions and the women who lacking power, status and the economic means to challenge these vile and murderous authorities and must therefore, in order to survive themselves, back the status quo.

If female fetuses are such a disappointment, such a blow and a burden to the family that they should be destroyed, why not take it one step further and just destroy women altogether? So there we have it, an engineered virus that gives pregnant women something like Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease so they all die painfully with holes in their brain.

Unfortunately this virus works too well. It not only destroys the women, but the babies die in the womb. What

is to become of the human race?

While scientists work on a solution to this problem, they propose an interim workaround with great PR. Girls, young women (no 30+ please, it is explicitly stated that these women are past it) would be artificially-inseminated and put into a terminal coma and later be delivered by Caesarian section of their live babies.

Who would choose to be such a suicidal incubator? None. Who would choose to be a Sleeping Beauty, to help continue the human race? Such a thing does appeal to the sensibilities of the ever-romantic, idealistic teenage girl, yes?

So the story revolves around Jessie Lamb - Jesus Lamb of God - who volunteers despite her family and boyfriend, to do this, to have a Virgin birth and be the Saviour of all the peoples on Earth. Please....

All the usual dystopian suspects (yawn) also get a mention - marauding gangs, authoritarian males, rapists, the religious nutters of the 'this is all punishment' variety and the bolthole-in-the-countryside where we can grow our own food types.

To sum up, it was an interesting idea that might have lifted yet another dystopian novel into something less hackneyed than most of them, but only 'might have'. It needed either a philosophical explanation as to why the status quo would remain or else a solution to the situation.

Without either of those, it was just another dystopian novel with nothing to distinguish it.

Willow Brooks says

Wasted my time reading all this just to get to the end and learn *nothing!* I didn't like this story enough to continue with the second book. Too much babbling for me. I also don't like going down memory lane when it don't add to the story. Jessie was kind of a brat, therefore, this is where we part ways.

Bettie? says

Part of the Dangerous Visions series

The Testament of Jessie Lamb

BBC BLURB: Jane Rogers dramatises her award winning novel. Society is splintering, apocalyptic sects with fundamentalist, ecological or anti-scientific beliefs are springing up. Panic, chaos and fear reign. When Jessie's own world begins to fall apart and her best friend Sal experiences a shocking act of violence, Jessie realises it is time to take action.

Directed by Nadia Molinari

1: Jane Rogers dramatises her award winning dystopian novel about a teenage girl who decides to save humanity. Starring Holliday Grainger as Jessie Lamb.

- 2: When Jessie's own world begins to fall apart, she realises it is time to take action.
- 3: Jessie's act of heroism could save the human race, but will those closest to her help?
- 4: Jessie's father is adamant that she should not volunteer to be a Sleeping Beauty.
- 5: Jessie's plan to volunteer to become a Sleeping Beauty hits an obstacle.

Minty says

I was intrigued by the premise of the book and felt the author raised some very intriguing issues, none of which was covered in any depth.

The first half of the book was quite gripping as the author set up a vivid world which could have gone in any number of challenging and meaningful directions. None of these progressed anywhere as the first person structure of the book led Jessie to turn her attentions back on herself. I wonder if the clever title of the book has in fact limited the author. The intelligent premise here could have resulted in a much longer and more gripping story. I felt that many issues were glossed over or quickly dropped, and was left with the impression that this dystopia was far too 'neat' and almost trite.

I was more interested in the history of the virus and the greater social and political reactions to the situation, and not convinced of Jessie's plight. At the halfway point I felt fed up with the book, which pretty much coincided with Jessie becoming more strong in her resolve. Her character had a sudden about face and was suddenly taken to repetitious preaching and self-righteousness. She basically had a personality transplant.

It felt like a chore to finish the book.

William Clemens says

I was hoping for a lot from this book, and was interested after the whole controversy about the Arthur C Clarke award, and it just didn't deliver.

Imagine a world where there is a virus, triggered during pregnancy, which destroys the brain of the mother, killing both her and her child. Imagine that young girls are being implanted with pre-disease embryos in order to save the human race and religious and social group are rising up in violent protest. Imagine reading about all of this from the perspective of one very long winded teenage girl.

This is one of those books where I feel like part of the problem is how believable the teenager's voice is. Switching from the 'present' where Jessie is being held captive by her father, to the days before, explaining how Jessie arrived at her decision to volunteer as a 'sleeping beauty', giving her life to create a disease free child, the narrative is just long winded and flat feeling. I can believe the logic of a teenage girl, but I can't really care about it.

The world that serves as a backdrop, with families broken from the loss of mothers, houses abandoned, gangs of youth on the street, and increasingly violent protests/terrorism, should have been very gripping, but Jessie is so absorbed in her own thoughts that none of this feels that pressing or moving.

I think the real problem here though, is the length. The concept is great, the writing is good, but the arguments

are so repetitive that I lost interest and just kept wishing this had been a short story.

Jessica says

This was in some ways a difficult book to read. The book is supposed to be about the maturity and struggle of a teenage girl trying to find her own voice and make her own choices separate from her parents in a post-bio-warfare world and yet the choice she ultimately makes and her reasoning for it remain firmly adolescent. I wanted to cheer for this heroine and yet I found myself not only disagreeing with her choice but disagreeing with her entire thought process. By the end of the book I did not feel that she asserted her independence, but rather that she made a terrible decision through very adolescent reasoning; and I closed the book with an overwhelming sense of sadness for the character--which was not the feeling I was expecting.

Despite the conflicting emotions that I had I would still say this is a book worth reading, the prose is good, though falls short of the soaring praise on the back of the book, and it is thought provoking. This would make a very good book to study with a group of young women with regard to the way that women are viewed, making choices and their dreams.

Claudia says

I can't remember ever having been as mad at a book and a character as this one.

In the none-too-distant future, an engineered virus that has infected everyone kills all women during their pregnancy. While scientists are working hard on a cure, a medical program takes saving the future of humankind in another direction: implanting embryos who've been frozen since the days before the virus into healthy 16-year-old volunteers ("Sleeping Beauties"), condemning them to death but resulting in healthy, uninfected babies. Jessie Lamb is one of those volunteers, and in Jane Rogers' novel, she tells her story.

Honestly, Jessie is a horrible character. Yes, sixteen-year-olds are generally not known to be the most rational, emotionally stable and empathic people, but from the first page, she displays a sense of superiority and judgmentalness ('this happens because my parents' generation are awful people, and my generation is so much better') I found hard to bear. At times, she seems perfectly aware of the selfishness of her decision – the pain she's causing her parents, her boyfriend, her friends – but all the while she's insisting on her right to make her own choices, she makes it clear that the choices and feelings of her parents and friends are inconsequential.

Even outside of my dislike for the protagonist, I couldn't at all bring myself to understand what the buzz was all about. This is not your run-of-the-mill apocalypse where humankind faces extinction through a sudden death – it would be a slow, almost natural process. Even if there's not going to be a cure, people get old and die and no new generation will follow. It doesn't really affect the lives of anyone alive at the moment – not for decades to come, anyway. Why would the world go in a turmoil about it? And: is it really something that needs to be stopped, at all costs?

Worse yet, if there's a new, healthy generation made up from the artificially inseminated babies of the Sleeping Beauties, it's gonna be a rather small population. So to repopulate the world, they need to have quite a lot of kids of their own. I can't help wondering what kind of society this sort of situation would create? Maybe that's cynical thinking, but I imagine it's most likely going to be one where women are forced

to bear children regardless of their own wishes, and I honestly believe it would have been kinder to let humanity die out.

Liviu says

INTRODUCTION: As noted in the recent post discussing novels by Alison Pick, Julian Barnes and Patrick McGuiness, the annual Booker longlist is one the most important sources of books I would probably not hear about otherwise.

So when *The Testament of Jessie Lamb* appeared on the 2011 list, I became very intrigued by the novel and I decided to read it as soon as possible. The blurb below while generally accurate, is a little misleading in that the novel is a very personal one where Jessie Lamb's tale is more gripping than the world's reaction to the devastating maternal death syndrome aka MDS.

"Women are dying in their millions. Some blame scientists, some see the hand of God, some see human arrogance reaping the punishment it deserves. Jessie Lamb is an ordinary girl living in extraordinary times: as her world collapses, her idealism and courage drive her towards the ultimate act of heroism. If the human race is to survive, it's up to her. But is Jessie heroic? Or is she, as her father fears, impressionable, innocent, incapable of understanding where her actions will lead? Set just a month or two in the future, in a world irreparably altered by an act of biological terrorism, *The Testament of Jessie Lamb* explores a young woman's determination to make her life count for something, as the certainties of her childhood are ripped apart."

OVERVIEW/ANALYSIS: *The Testament of Jessie Lamb* is a novel advertised as literary dystopia though first and foremost it is a voice novel which kept me hooked me from the first to the last page with its poignant and emotional style.

Looking at the science fictional aspect of the novel, I had several quibbles with the ideas presented in the book - I believe that the whole setup of the MDS does not really hold water since humanity is way too diverse for something of this finesse to work, but I was fine with it as a thought experiment.

The more serious issue for me was the societal reaction to the MDS, which seemed way too rational and moderate; yes there is panic and hardship in the book, but society still stands and science still gets done, while personally I have doubts that a singularity event like MDS would not cause the total collapse of civilization.

Similarly the way science deals with MDS seemed quite simplistic if you accept the original sophistication of the virus that induced it, so basically these three issues made *The Testament of Jessie Lamb* more of a "scary tale" for adults rather than "serious sf".

These being said though, the novel is really compelling and its narrator Jessie Lamb of the title comes out as very plausible; a determined girl which is set on making a difference - whether her choices are stupid, courageous, right, wrong, etc is for the reader to determine and I thought her father's arguments quite grounded, so I inclined more towards his position, but not that strongly so to speak.

After a prologue which gives a hint of the future direction of the book and to which we will return in due time, the first paragraph of the novel introduces the heroine:

"I used to be as aimless as a feather in the wind. I thought stuff on the news and in the papers was for grownups. It was part of their stupid miserable complicated world, it didn't touch me."

Compare the above with Jessie of the future as seen in the prologue:

"The logical thing is to do as he's asked; to think about it. Indeed. Write it down. Remember it, re-imagine it, gather it together. Because it'll be proof – won't it? – proof that you really are doing what you want. Proof that I, Jessie Lamb, being of sound mind and good health, take full responsibility for my decision, and intend to pursue it to its rightful end."

So in a sense the huge change in the world that MDS induces - a real and much more plausible singularity if you want rather than the tech nirvana of the geeks that usually comes under that heading - radically transforms our heroine and you can read the novel as her personal odyssey, though of course there is much more.

The supporting characters - especially her father and her school friends Baz and Sal are also superbly drawn and the world building is excellent assuming you accept the assumptions above.

The combination of normality and madness in the MDS world is finely balanced in the novel and while a lot of the ideology of the book is the expected one, I was surprised a little by the nuanced portrait of science which is the usual culprit with/or religion in such dystopias; sure enough the religious fanatics are there, but there are fanatic environmentalists too, ready to bomb left and right, while Jessie ultimately renounces her "activism" as pointless.

All in all, *The Testament of Jessie Lamb* (A+) is a worthy Booker addition and a very well written book I would wholly recommend and which I hope will make the shortlist to show that science fiction - however not that original as sf per se - has a place on any literary prize list if the writing style is there.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

When I saw the Booker Longlist for 2011, I was most excited about this book. It took a while to track it down since not many libraries in the states had purchased it yet!

I love a good dystopian novel, but I think this one is a little less than good. The premise is interesting - every human has been infected with MDS, a disease which lies dormant in the body until a woman becomes pregnant, and she dies soon after. Humanity is having to face the idea of becoming extinct, and it doesn't take long for one solution to present itself - 15-16 year olds who sacrifice their lives to become Sleeping Beauties, basically zombie-incubators for embryos that are still experimental within the time of the narration. (Zombies because the women still end up dying from the disease, not **actual** zombies).

The entire novel is somewhat of a journal written by Jessie Lamb, interspersed with accounts of her being held hostage in a room.

The story is compelling. *The Handmaid's Tale* meets *Never Let Me Go* meets, I don't know, *Uglies*? It does have an underlying YA feel to it, because of the emphasis on the teenage characters and their continuing interpersonal dramas, while the adults fade into the background. The way the parents are characterized is confusing, as the mother in particular seems unresponsive and untraumatized by events.

My biggest issue with the novel is how preachy it is. In the beginning you find 15 year olds waxing eloquently about how the earth will thrive after humans have died off, and mourning the devastation and pollution, which of course is unrealistic, and of course is just used for the author to make us understand how Truly Terrible this disease is. Just not necessary! A little more subtlety would have been greatly appreciated.

It happens again when the Sleeping Beauties come up, the comparison that the author draws between these young women entering into this arrangement knowing they will die and (mostly) men who do the same in entering a war. It is her argument, I'm not going to weigh in on it, but was another moment where I was taken completely out of the story because of how heavy-handed it was.

Joanne says

Originally posted on Once Upon a Bookcase.

I had no idea what to expect when I first picked this book up. The description above gives a vague but intriguing glimpse into what is actually a really strong, thought-provoking story, and once I started reading, I was swept away.

Jessie is living in a world where terrorist have created and released an airborne virus which every single person in the world contracts. This virus is Maternal Death Syndrome (MDS), which is only triggered in women once they fall pregnant - which leads to their death and that of the foetus. Women are dying. There are no new babies. Once everyone alive has grown old and died, there will be no-one left. No-one.

Scientists are constantly working on finding a cure, or of finding a different way for babies to be born. Different groups form. Youth activist groups, who blame the adults for their way of living that has destroyed the world, with pollution and greed. Teenagers decide to break away from adults, and try living on their own, self-sufficiently. A religious group is formed which say the virus is God's punishment for the way people have been living. They call themselves the Noahs, believing this virus to be today's version of the flood. A Feminist activist group forms, Feminist Link Against Men, to stop scientists experimenting on women, when they're already dying. The Animal Liberation Front forms to stop scientists experimenting on animals. And then there is a scientific breakthrough. One that could change everything, and save the human race. One that Jessie believes in, and would give her life for.

As you would guess, The Testament of Jessie Lamb is quite political, but heavily so. Those who aren't interested in politics shouldn't let this side of things put you off; the politics in the book is less about being political, and more about showing how the world reacts to this apocalypse. At times, it's quite amusing and astonishing to see what fear for the world, fear for self, can bring out in people; the opinions, the ideas. Their commonality? The urge to act, to fight, to cling on to life and to try and survive. Apart from the Noahs, who I found to be quite cult-ish, I could understand and agree with the points of each group that formed. Yet, I kept thinking, when the existence of the human race is in the balance, shouldn't ALL avenues be explored?

What I found really scary about this book is that it isn't set a silly amount of years into the future. This story could happen tomorrow. It's the creation and release of a virus. That's it. And BOOM, we're screwed. It really makes you think about the world we live in. Are scientific advances really a good thing? Sure, it's scientific advances that are helping to solve the problem in this book, but it was also scientific advances that caused the problem in the first place. Jessie also thinks about the future; if the developments work, and the human race can continue, what world are we giving them? A world with global warming due to pollution, a

world that is running out of oil, food and water. Things that should have been dealt with years ago, but now may be too late. The issues politics and science and conservation overlap, and lead to an extremely thought provoking novel. So thought provoking, I don't know what I think, because good points are made for each.

But more than all this, the story is about Jessie's decision over whether to act. I don't want to spoil it for you, but wow. I'm not even sure I can discuss it without telling you what it is. But it makes you ask the question, if this was your world, what would you do, how far would you go, to save the human race? If there was something massive that needed to be done that you could do, would you do it, no matter the personal consequences? The thing Jessie has to decide whether she wants to do is the most selfless, bravest and awe-inspiring things I have ever read. Seriously, the whole idea brings tears to my eyes. I sincerely hope, if I was in her position, if our world ended up like Jessie's, I would make the choice to act.

If this book has a negative, it's that I didn't really care much about the characters. I just didn't warm to any of them. I cared about the what was happening, how things would pan out and what decision Jessie would make, but I didn't care that much about Jessie, her parents, her relatives, or her friends. There was just something missing for me, and I couldn't connect or relate, even though they were just normal, ordinary people. But the story itself does make up for this, and is still a really good read.

A powerful, thought-provoking, mind-blowing novel. This is one of those stories that will stay with you long after you've closed the book. I highly recommend it!

Amy says

I am an English teacher, so if there is one thing in which I am well-versed, it is literary symbolism. Teach it, love it, know it. When done well, it's subtle enough to present a challenge but not so obvious that a third grader can spot it.

In the case of *The Testament of Jessie Lamb*, the symbolism is IN YOUR FACE. You can't avoid it, even if you prefer your books simple and approachable. It permeates this book like stink from a skunk.

Let's start with the first obvious symbol: Jessie Lamb. The name? Like, duh? Jessie, which could be a feminized version of Jesus, who is the Lamb of God. Add in the rest of the title, and OH MY GOD. Could it be more apparent?

Add to that some nifty water symbolism (Jesus was baptized! In water!) and a virgin birth (FOR REAL, people), and you have yourself a hot mess of symbolism. At one point, I found myself praying (no pun intended) for relief.

But let's say you're not like me (and I really hope you aren't, because one of me is enough punishment for the world). Let's say you read your books straight up, no analysis necessary. What, then, to make of this one?

Well ... the verdict is not good. Not bad, certainly, but not good, either.

The premise is strong: At some point in the not too distant future (Facebook is still around), a virus, supposedly triggered by bio terrorists, infects all human beings, killing women who get pregnant. In other words, the human population will vanish, because women die once they get pregnant. Sixteen-year-old Jessie Lamb at first merely observes the catastrophe, but when a boy she likes gets involved with a protest group,

she joins him. And she begins to think about what this virus means.

Jessie's father is a research scientist trying to find a cure. He tells Jessie about the "Sleeping Beauties" - young girls Jessie's age who elect to get pregnant. Upon conception, they are put into a coma, which allows them to bear a child. Once the baby is born, the girl is literally put to sleep more permanently. The disease, called Maternal Death Syndrome (MDS - kind of the same acronym for doctors, isn't it?) causes the pregnant women to lose their minds, eventually killing them.

As Jessie's activism progresses, she comes to discover what her role could be. She believes she realizes what she should do to help with MDS, but when she shares her idea with her parents and would-be boyfriend, they are horrified. She is determined that she make a difference, even if her loved ones beg her not to do so.

There is nothing - and I do mean, NOTHING - uplifting about this book. I'm all for unhappy endings (paging *Gone Girl*), but Jane Rogers seems nothing less than militantly intent on depressing the hell out of us. One of Jessie's parents might be having an affair. Her best friend is subjected to a horrific act of violence. Her boyfriend apparently rejects her. Her aunt suffers heartbreak and descends into an abyss of despair. Jessie herself is subjected to poor treatment by friends and family.

Even the bleakness of the book could be excused if we accepted Jessie's reasons for doing what she does. She tries to justify it by saying that she wants to do something that she decides and controls, something her father would be proud to see her do:

To do something straightforward, where there would be no tangled argument and no compromise. Something that would make a difference to the world. Something that was within my power to do without having to rely on anyone else. Something that would make Dad proud. I pulled my pillow and duvet off the bed and wrapped myself up on the floor, so I could go on and on staring at the beech, letting that freedom unroll. The freedom to act. The freedom to do something I had decided for myself.

A somewhat precocious manner of thinking for a sixteen-year-old, non?

Ultimately, I did not buy Jessie's rationale. She even considers another option, one that leaves her some control and the potential to have an impact, but she shrugs it off and goes with her plan. The harder she pursues it, the less sensible she becomes. What's almost worse, I stopped caring about her. In a book like this, with such a heavy premise, you must care about the characters. Too often, I found myself not liking her or her decision.

Like I said, the premise is very good. But when it comes to books about viruses that cause harm to reproduction, I recommend you go with Megan McCafferty's *Bumped* and *Thumped*, which at the very least give you characters to like.

Published on cupcake's book cupboard. @VivaAmaRisata

Thanks to NetGalley for the preview.

Jeremy Preacher says

The setup is interesting - an engineered virus triggers mad cow disease in all pregnant women - and the book is an exploration of a young woman's right to self-determination in these apocalyptic circumstances, which I do appreciate.

For whatever reason, though, it just didn't really click for me. I am inclined to suspect that it's the worldbuilding problem - I just didn't really find the larger-scale reaction to such a world-changing event convincing, and that undercut the careful character work. This is a chronic problem I have with mainstream fiction that covers sci-fi subjects. I have even less patience with protagonists in the throes of adolescent narcissism, which Jessie Lamb very much is - even while I agree with the general theory that she should have the right to make her own decisions, I just didn't particularly enjoy spending time in her head.

I can totally see why this is an important book, and one that's being taken seriously, and I approve in theory, but it's still not really the book for me.

Kristen says

Is this what teenagers are really like? I don't remember being such a brat when I was 16. I remember being frustrated with the state of the world/environment but these kids are hideous. The whole "all adults deserve to die" mindset of everyone in her teen activism group is really obnoxious. I am about halfway through this book and I find Jessie (and frankly all the other teens) to be so immature and unlikeable that I don't really want to finish it.

ETA: I finished it and found her slightly less annoying at the end. But I feel like Jessie was trying to convince herself that she was doing a noble and selfless thing but underneath she was just looking for an easy way out of life's challenges. She kept talking about looking forward to the peace of becoming a Sleeping Beauty. I think she liked the idea of doing something important but she also wanted to sleep through the rest of her life.
