



The Wayward Muse

Elizabeth Hickey

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"I apologize again for my boldness, but I must tell you that you're the most beautiful girl in Oxford. Maybe in all of England. I have to put you in my painting." With these words, the scandalous, wildly talented painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti changes seventeen-year-old Jane Burden's life forever. Jane's gaunt, awkward figure and grave expression have cemented her reputation as the ugliest girl in Oxford. Raised by a stableman on Holywell Street -- the town's most sordid and despicable slum -- Jane is nearly resigned to marry in-kind. But when she meets Rossetti at the theater, he sees beyond her worn, ill-fitting dress and unruly hair and is stirred by her unconventional beauty. The charismatic painter whisks Jane into Oxford's exclusive art scene as his muse, and during the long and intimate hours of modeling -- draping and tilting, gazing and posing -- Jane finds herself falling in love.

When Rossetti abruptly leaves Oxford with no plans to return, brokenhearted Jane settles for a stable, if passionless, marriage to his soft-spoken prot - g -, William Morris -- the man who would go on to become the father of the British Arts and Crafts Movement. Jane resigns herself to life as a respectable wife and mother, exchanging the slop bucket for intricate needlepoint, willing away the memories of Rossetti and what could have been.

But Rossetti and Jane are inextricably bound together by tragedy, art, and desire, and no amount of time or distance can separate them. Ultimately this complicated arrangement with which Jane, Morris, and Rossetti must learn to live threatens to undo them all. Richly textured and deftly portrayed, Elizabeth Hickey's latest is a compelling portrait of the ever-changing notions of both love and beauty.

The Wayward Muse Details

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From Reader Review The Wayward Muse for online ebook

Charles Stephen says

Perfect little confection for all those--like me--who are totally absorbed by the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, especially the triangular love relationships centered around the "stunner," Jane Morris, wife of William Morris and muse/lover to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Mostly believable dialogue and situations created around sound biographical research.

Mary says

I learned part way through this book that it is actually based on real historical figures prominent in the Pre-Raphaelite art movement. Figuring this out didn't help the transparent plot, or the weak and pathetic characters.

The book centers on the love affair between Jane Burden (later Morris) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti is a talented painter who retains Jane as his model and muse.

The writing is pedestrian, imagery is lacking, tension between characters is laughable, the plot is thin and don't blink or you'll miss the climax of the novel.

It's an easy and mindless read if you have absolutely nothing better to do and aren't particularly interested in enjoying a good story.

Jane says

It is fun to read this book and imagine yourself as Jane. She entranced the Pre-Raphaelite artist, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and became the model for many of his paintings and she also served as his muse when he wrote poetry.

The author portrays the passion between the characters in a way that feels authentic and real.

How could I resist a tale of fiction that encompasses romance and art history? The answer is that I could not.

Telyn says

Well-researched but uninspired novelization of the life of Jane Burden, who was William Morris' wife and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's model and lover. Unfortunately, while the Pre Raphaelites are fascinating, this book often reads like a soppy romance novel, and the dialogue is banal.

Carla says

The Wayward Muse é um livro sobre artistas e musas. Jane Burden é uma jovem pobre, com uma família que pouco se importa com os seus desejos, e é considerada, pela própria mãe, como uma das mulheres mais feias de Oxford. Um dia, numa ida ao teatro, Jane conhece Rossetti, um artista famoso de Londres. Rossetti apaixona-se pela beleza de Jane e pede-a para posar para ele. É assim que Jane Burden vê a sua vida virada do avesso. De a mulher mais feia de Oxford, torna-se a mulher mais bela de Inglaterra. Rossetti fá-la a sua musa e apresenta-a ao Movimento Pré-Rafaelista, do qual faz parte. Jane começa a passar muito tempo com Rossetti e ambos acabam por se apaixonar.

Mas é então que, do dia para a noite, o jovem artista desaparece de Oxford deixando Jane para trás. Sem não saber bem o que fazer, esta acaba por se aproximar de Morris, um aprendiz de Rossetti, que tinha um fraquinho pela musa do mestre, e os dois casam-se. Não gostando verdadeiramente dele como gostava de Rossetti, Jane vai aprendendo a amar o marido e a ser a esposa de um artista. Tudo parece começar a encaixar-se até que Rossetti reaparece na vida do jovem casal. Jane vê-se invadida por vários sentimentos: os sentimentos que ainda tem por Rossetti e os sentimentos que tem pelo marido. Rossetti dá-lhe a impressão de ainda a amar e querer que ela traia o marido. Jane fica sem saber o que fazer: será que conseguirá fugir à tentação?

Foi nesta parte da história que eu fiquei. Tal como eu disse anteriormente, eu não tinha expectativas mas, no mínimo, esperava que a história fosse cativante. A autora começa bem a obra, contando-nos como é o dia-a-dia de Jane, a miséria em que vive, as aspirações que tem, o tipo de família que tem, etc. E é com prazer que vemos essa vida mudar para algo mais interessante: o núcleo do Movimento Pré-Rafaelista. Do nada, Jane vê-se rodeada de artistas com características diferentes, com vidas mais emocionantes do que a sua. E, claro, o amor entra em acção e brinda-nos com a sua presença. Então porque motivo eu não achei a história cativante? Porque o livro começa de forma agitada, interessante e, no momento em que Rossetti desaparece de Oxford, a acção vai com ele e passamos a ler uma história aborrecida, parada no tempo e prolongada por capítulos e capítulos.

Dei várias oportunidades à obra, até que cansei-me por completo e fui obrigada a dizer a mim mesma "Esta história já deu o que tinha a dar!". Acabei por ficar a meio da obra e senti um grande alívio quando a coloquei na prateleira.

No entanto, há algo que achei extremamente interessante e, de certa forma, creepy. Por diversão, fiz uma pesquisa no Google com os nomes dos personagens do livro e acabei por descobrir que todas estas "personagens" existiram mesmo. A sensação que me deu, foi que a autora decidiu pegar em pessoas reais, em factos reais e criar uma história com elas. Confesso que, em certos momentos, senti que estava a ler uma biografia misturada com fantasia. Não é possível dizer onde a fantasia termina e a realidade começa! Enfim, The Wayward Muse foi uma perda de tempo (a não ser pelo facto de ter servido para treinar o inglês) e estou contente por tê-lo arrumado.

Alayna-Renee says

This was a charming book about the pre-Raphaelites, an era where both men and women were given to excess of emotion and willing to over-romanticize situations to death. Given to me as a gift (I recently published a book called "Ophelia's Wayward Muse"), I found the theme of the "wayward muse" explored in my poetry was explored in historical fiction in a very similar fashion. The obvious thought behind the "Madonna/whore" phenomenon in which women have been often typecast, even in eras that idealised

women is echoed in the eternal legend of Camelot---where idealism fights against the inherent flaws in human nature that make it impossible.

Earlier in the year, another friend had sent me a book called "The Lives Of The Muses", which explored a number of interesting characters. Among others, there was a chapter on Lizzie Siddal, who only appears briefly in this novel but is still omnipresent.

I think you have to understand this a book about Rossetti and his circle of pre-Raphaelites to see that it is not simply a romance with a bunch of flawed heroes and heroines. In that era, much like the "Lost Generation" of the 20's and 30's, those were the characters that dominated the scene...and melodrama, idealism, abundance of alcohol, drugs, affairs, and even suicides were 'de rigueur'. I appreciated the opportunity to read this author, and would check out more of her works in future.

Elena Rico pedraza says

Una biografia novelada de Jane Burden/Jane Morris. Muy recomendable si se está interesado en el circulo de los prerrafaelitas. Parece bastante fiable.

Jill says

I enjoyed this book more than I care to admit... though it be a fictional accounting of what happened with Jane and Rossetti, it felt quite probable. They couldn't seem to resist each other. The longing that Elizabeth Hickey conveyed was beautiful. I have to keep reading about these two people... their love fascinates me.

Grace says

This book gets 3 stars because of the subject matter. The author's actual writing ability? Awful. It read like a cheesy romance novel. The ridiculous way the author paints William "Topsy" Morris is deplorable. Yes, he was teased by friends, but he was a great name in philosophy, arts, politics, poetry, and other topics. Show the man some respect!

In summary, the only person I would recommend this book to would be either someone who loves trite romance novels and knows nothing of the Pre-Raphaelites, or someone who adores the Pre-Raphaelites and is willing to ignore trite romance to imagine what it may have been like to be part of the group of artists.

Really....the love triangle between Jane Burden-Morris, William Morris, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti is exciting enough without having to add the cheesy romance tone. It's too bad.

Belinda Kroll says

Excellent writing. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, despite Jane's character, which makes me respect Hickey even more. Once I realized the plot, I almost put the book away, except Hickey's writing and depiction of the characters stayed my hand. This book is one of the best fiction depictions of a real Victorian marriage that I have read yet; the main characters are real people, and while the story may not be entirely factual, the plot seems to follow the real time-line faithfully. The writing style is simple yet lush, the scenery vivid, the characters organic and sympathetic. Anyone working on making their characters flawed, especially the main character, should read this book as an example of how to maintain your reader's interest.

Originally posted at <http://worderella.com/2007/08/book-th...>

Sara Pauff says

For a novel about art and beauty, the writing seemed rather bland. The story is about Jane Burden, one of the frequent models for the Pre-Raphaelite artists William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The most interesting character was Rossetti and I liked how Hickey portrayed his tendency to confuse art with reality. He falls in love with Jane after she acts as a model for his painting of Lancelot and Guinevere. He frequently calls her Guinevere and seems to like her best when she is sitting for him. However, beyond a couple mentions of the paintings and poetry Jane inspired, there is very little real connection between the art and the story. At times it felt like the author was just listing events that happened. I finished it, but struggled through the beginning and ending.

Donna Nguyen says

I am lost between categorizing this read as a tragic love story or a hopeless romance. I loved how Jane's character slowly molded and changed through the progression of the novel. I was also torn between feeling sympathy for Jane's fate or disgusted by her decisions. The struggle between love and obligation. Is one moment of fulfilled desire worth a lifetime of culpability? An amazing read. I would highly recommend people read *The Wayward Muse*!

Lisa says

Jane Burden is seventeen years old, the daughter of an abusive and uncaring mother and distant father, facing marriage to an cruel boy and a life of continued poverty in the slums. This all changes when painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti "discovers" her and declares her the "most beautiful girl in all of Oxford". This, however, is not the typical Cinderella story. The real Rossetti, Jane Burden (later Morris) and the rest of the Pre-Raphaelite movement lived far too elaborate lives to fit in that box. Cinderella, after all, didn't marry another man (William Morris) and then have an affair with Prince Charming. Nor did Prince Charming have a substance abuse problem and another woman (Lizzie Siddal) as his wife.

The Wayward Muse is an incredibly frustrating read. The bones for a great story are there, but author Elizabeth Hickey never gives it that extra push to make the book anything more than an enjoyable, but fairly

insubstantial read. There's so much potential and *The Wayward Muse* never really comes close to fulfilling it.

As a note to historical accuracy – I'm largely unfamiliar with the details. My knowledge of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood comes from watching *Desperate Romantics* and reading a few blog posts that briefly covered what liberties with the truth were taken in the show. On whole, *The Wayward Muse* seems to work well with what I know, but then I'm like Jon Snow: I know nothing.

Except Rossetti liked wombats. Which, as an Australian, makes me feel all warm and gooey inside. \o/

Hickey's writing style is fairly simple and straightforward, though not horrifically bad for the most part. It did need at least one more revision to remove awkward phrases, add depth and otherwise tighten things up. However, there are traces of depth to be found, but they are few and far between. I really liked Hickey's description of Rossetti, though:

He carried himself like someone who had been thought beautiful from a very young; his grace was slightly studied, as if he was used to being looked at, and his confidence seemed unerring, though he was no longer slender and his hairline was beginning to recede.

The dialogue, at times, seemed jarring. In one instance, Jane tells one of her young daughters to put on a sweater. In my experience, "sweater" is an American term referring to the clothing that the British (and Australia) call a jumper or a jersey. Given that the book is almost entirely set in the United Kingdom and *none* of the characters are American, the use of "sweater" felt inappropriate. Having a doctor tell Jane "Mr. Rossetti has had a complete psychotic break" also didn't work for me as I associate the phrase "complete psychotic break" with more modern times. That said, *I am not a language expert* and can only comment on what I felt was jarring.

Now I need to talk about the biggest flaw in the book: Jane.

She's not unlikeable, but she's not terribly anything at all. The title describes her as "wayward", but if anything, she just sits in the middle and lets herself be pulled one way, then another and then another, as events unfold around her. She hardly makes any decisions for herself. In lively dinner scenes with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and associates, she's just an observer. She marries William Morris because her mother threatens to disown if she doesn't and it's Morris who does the pursuing.

Similarly, her affair with Rossetti is almost entirely motivated by Rossetti's pursuit and interest in her – while Jane is clearly infatuated with him, she always waits for him to make the first move. I enjoyed the suggestion of closeness between the two of them – the idea that at a party, they would sit in a dark corner and just talk. But I needed more of Jane being more active in their relationship and less of Rossetti being the only one actively engaged in their relationship.

There are sections of the book that do make Jane seem less sympathetic. After beginning the affair with Rossetti, Jane is "sick with guilt" over the matter and then:

This is how Rossetti felt when Lizzie died, she thought to herself. No wonder he drank himself to sleep.

So, the unfortunate impression I get here is that Jane believes her guilt over having an affair is on a par with Rossetti's guilt and grief over his wife's suicide. Is this supposed to make me feel sorry for Jane, or empathise with her emotional turmoil? It only makes me think less of her.

Then there's the scene where Jane is meant to be weaning Rossetti off drugs, but decides to "let him have as much [of the drug] as he wanted" because she's too scared of losing him, because he found a way around her restrictions and because he's like his old-self when he's on the drug. *Yikes*. Hickey is constrained by historical events, sure, but it happens in the space of one paragraph, suggesting that Jane didn't try very hard to get Rossetti off the drugs in the first place. It also felt like Jane was more concerned with getting back the charming, energetic Rossetti she fell in love with instead of making sure the person she loved was healthy and safe. If more time had been spent on this sequence of events, I think such negative impressions could have been mostly avoided.

This is a complaint that is appropriate to much of the book. The pace of *The Wayward Muse* is just too brisk. Things seem to happen in this book at great speed and little reflection. We get a whirlwind tour of Jane Burden's life but rarely do we ever get the time to breathe it in. Everything just happens so fast and it's easy to miss details – Jane gives birth for the first time in the space of a paragraph, her second pregnancy is mentioned as an aside. Now, I'm not fussed on baby subplots but I felt that such scenes needed to have more impact in the story.

I found the decision to refer to Rossetti and Morris by their surnames somewhat odd as the novel is written from Jane's perspective and to her, they were Gabriel and William.

Rossetti and Jane's husband, Morris, are more vividly drawn than Jane, but again, I wanted more depth in their characterisation. I was never quite clear on whether Rossetti's grand claims in regards to his feelings to Jane were real. I did appreciate that all the main players in the love triangle/square (Rossetti, Lizzie, Morris and Jane) were drawn sympathetically, though I thought Lizzie was underused and wanted to understand her and Morris' motivations more. Hickey seems to suggest that Lizzie exaggerated her poor health to manipulate Rossetti and that Morris is willing to accept Jane's affair with Rossetti if the facade of his marriage is maintained. It's fascinating, but it's only implied and too brief in execution. I wanted to see more of it.

Which really sums up my reaction to this book. There's so much there that I want to see more of and there are scenes and sequences that desperately need expansion to become more than a basic recital of facts. Despite the great list of flaws I've documented, I did find the book highly enjoyable. This, I think, is down to the bare bones of the story – it has all the right ingredients to be something truly special, but it always falls short.

I wanted to love this. I *could* have loved this. But *The Wayward Muse* was just disappointing on almost all accounts.

Phair says

While I enjoyed reading about the Pre-Raphaelite circle this book felt rather pedestrian. It was very matter-of-fact in its presentation with no beauty in the writing and no real emotion coming out of these supposed great and tragic loves. I was happy to have a number of books in my collection with illustrations of the art and homes of the P-R's as I really needed outside sources to be able to fully visualize the paintings and settings in the book. I also hated the cover which, to me, did not appear at all to be in the style of the book's subjects. I found it jarring and far too modern looking.

Lani says

I've been fascinated by the Pre-Raphaelite movement ever since the Clark Art Museum in Williamstown, MA, hosted a special exhibit on Dante Gabriel Rossetti (and colleagues) in 2001 and everyone in town kept telling me, "Go see it! The paintings all look like you!" While that is arguable, the show sparked my own interest in the Pre-Raphaelites.

"The Wayward Muse" is a well-researched work of historical fiction that traces Jane Burden's rise from the slums of Oxford to her work as Rossetti's model, muse, inspiration, and passion. It gives depth to Rossetti's artist guild -- which included William Morris, the father of the Arts and Crafts Movement -- and provides background for the real figures of the time, as well as some insight to how they developed their artistic visions.

The heart of the story is the the love affair between Rossetti and Jane Burden Morris, and -- particularly interesting -- the love triangle between Rossetti, Jane Morris, and William Morris, as well as Rossetti's descent into addiction and madness.

While Elizabeth Hickey undoubtedly takes liberties in fleshing out these characters, their conversations, and their intimate thoughts, she does a fine job of making the artists (and their muses) well-rounded, believable characters with extraordinary talents and very human passions and vulnerabilities.

My main complaint: I would have been interested in more information about William Morris, who lingers on the sidelines of the romantic plot. I suppose I'll have to seek out a biography on him.
