



The Crimson Portrait

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Set in England during World War I, this haunting love story by the author of the bestselling "The Fig Eater" makes unforgettably real the ravages of love and war.

The Crimson Portrait Details

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Author : Jody Shields

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From Reader Review The Crimson Portrait for online ebook

Iris says

This story never really went anywhere. At the abrupt ending I was left feeling like I could've just read the synopsis on the book jacket and been done with it. The story was told from the perspectives of several different characters, none of which were very interesting or well-developed. Aside from knowing that Catherine was a widow and that she was sad I never got to know her and couldn't identify with her much at all. It would've been nice to hear Julian's perspective. In summary, the premise of this book could've made for a great story, but overall it was quite disappointing.

Diane says

Ugh, this book was awful. I thought the premise was really interesting. This woman's husband dies and, according to the jacket cover, she has to decide if she wants to remake another man in her husband's image. Well, the jacket cover was probably the best part of the whole book. The characters were mind-numbingly boring and underexplored, the story didn't go anywhere, and I didn't really sympathize with anyone except McCleary, who was not developed to my satisfaction. I have never read anything by Jody Shields and I don't intend to pick up any of her books in the future.

Linda says

Set in England during World War I at a country estate turned into an army hospital, this novel explores some potentially riveting issues including the terrors of warfare, loss of identity and true love. Although the book is well-written, I did not care for the author's narrative style. I was not drawn into the story and found none of the characters particularly appealing.

LRCA14 says

Didn't finish, barely started,

Cari says

Pre-finished review below. Only thing I have to add now that I'm done is that it didn't get any better. At the end, she is so artistic in her writing that it is actually unclear what happened to all the main characters. A disaster of a novel. I strongly recommend NOT reading this book, and I hope that Shields' other novel(s) were at least remotely less self-consciously "literary".

I haven't finished this book yet, but want to record my current impression so I don't forget it - the prose is posed. That is to say, I feel as if Shields is trying incredibly hard to make me FEEL the art of this story and in the process all I feel is that she's trying to push me into emotion and interest rather than carrying me into them effortlessly. The book is in art about a woman who is making portraits of wounded men, in part about a widow, in part about doctors attempting to excel at their craft of repairing the unrepairable - all set during the first world war. It all sounds a recipe for an epic story. If only the author wasn't also so convinced that she's forcing it into a stylized "portrait" that feels very contrived to me. I'm going to finish it, but my verdict is 2 stars at this point.

Megan says

This book was so boring I didn't even finish it. The characters were poorly developed and I never quite understood the heroine's motivation for her actions.

Beverly says

It's 1915 and Catherine finds herself like one of many women, a young widow. Heartbroken and lost, she decides to honor her late husband's wishes to allow the troops to use their beautiful, sprawling mansion as a make-shift hospital. Little does she know how much her decision will change the rest of her life.

As she watches her home become an absence of her former life, she slowly finds herself grasping for comfort in the dream of her dead husband. As she begins to take part in helping at the hospital that was formerly her home, she sees a chance at literally being able to recreate her dead husband's image in a soldier who must undergo surgeries to restore his face.

She finds herself torn between making the choice that will forever change not only her life, but the life of Julian, a young soldier who is having his face reconstructed after losing it in battle. Will she make the right choice? And will she be able to live with the choice she's made?

Deep and intricate webs of deception begin to be woven as not only Catherine deals with her decision to betray the young man his right to recreating his own face again but as Anna, the artist who creates drawings of the soldiers, feels a sense of loneliness as her own husband is off in battle. Will Anna allow her feelings for a foreign doctor take her over or will she continue to try to ignore her feelings?

Secrets kept amongst themselves, the doctors all seem to have something to hide that creates an inner turmoil within each of them. As they triumph in huge leaps in the area of reconstructive surgery, an area formerly left untouched by 'modern medicine', they suffer huge setbacks as their minds are dealt with images of horror every day as they repair young soldiers from the front.

Shields creates characters of such depth that you realize you may never complete unpeeling their layers as you find more and more out about them throughout the novel. As your heart aches for all involved, you will find yourself questioning how strong you could be in a situation similar and learn to love each and every one of the characters, despite their flaws.

An excellent story line that reads so easily you will find you've finished reading long before you're ready to

close the book. With characters of such depth and reality you will continue to wonder where they went with their lives even after you close the pages. Absolutely awesome! You will want more!

Sara Madden says

WWI, as in any war, has many layers and facets that history has written down somewhere, and forgotten where they placed them. This story is one part of the War that many probably didn't know existed and the author intricately paints a picture of one place and time during the War that was overlooked.

The book was part educational, part research and the rest was a canvas of beautiful colors painted onto a sepia portrait.

I loved the question in the book that delves deep into our souls that asks "... if we cannot express our emotions because we have no facial features, do we in fact feel those emotions..." If our faces are taken from us, how do we identify with the world and how do we identify within ourselves?

It was haunting, beautiful, painful and informative of a time forgotten that should be remembered and learned from.

cynthia says

a book club selection disliked by all.

Kw says

An outstanding novel set in early WWI, with detailed attention to the early days of craniofacial reconstructive surgery. A fascinating look at the attempts by the surgeons, artists, and craftsmen to reconstruct faces shattered by war.

Carla Nayland says

Billed as a literary thriller in the jacket copy, this may be literary but I did not find it thrilling. Disappointing narrative with no discernible plot, set in a military hospital in the First World War.
Review: <http://www.carlanayland.org/reviews/c...>

Laura says

Simply put, I was just bored by this book. The characters weren't interesting enough. The story progressed

painfully slowly, and it ultimately fell flat. I kept hoping it would get more colorful and I would feel some emotion for these people...but that moment never came. Don't waste your time on this one.

Trogyllium says

This book was a good summer read. Amazing character development and details about facial muscles and other medical stuff. I really like this author. The end kind of bugged me though. It wasn't conclusive enough for me. Also, some of the characters' interactions with each other were so awkward!! Over all, I thought it was a fun read, especially if you like romance, or war-time eras.

Annette says

Based on a true story, Catherine transforms her house into a military hospital per her late husband's wish during WWI. It is 1915 outside London, as her house changes its status. Her servants leave her but two people, young boy and an old gardener. Once the house fills with suffering men she has a hard time coping with this. But unexpectedly she finds solace in the company of one wounded soldier.

I do not like the style of writing of this author. The story is boring. The descriptions are boring and drawn out. For example, when Dr. McCleary comes out of retirement to tend wounded soldiers at Catherine's estate, he lacks experience in maxillofacial surgery. Then she goes on and on with her boring explanation of maxillofacial surgery or lack of experience of it. Or details of interior are quite tedious: "Stone walls and glass had cracked; steams had clouded with silt." Her creative prose is rather annoying: "The mirrors were the lakes in the landscape of this house. (...) The mirrors (...) age (...) evidence of time's poisonous breath. (...) Shattering noise, crisp as china breaking."

You can as well read an encyclopedia. This is such a dreadful read.

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Marisa says

3.5/5 stars

I understand why people call this book boring and say nothing happens in it, but the writing is so beautifully lyrical that I can't be mad at it. The characters didn't particularly get me to care about them, but the book is poetry, and I had trouble finding it in myself to be mad at the characters when the writing was just so lovely.

As for why I didn't give it a higher rating...the story is slow. It's not boring, but it's slow burn at its purest. Reading it feels like getting caught in a foggy summer haze that's filtered to where you can only see it in a certain color scheme. Whether or not that simile makes sense, I felt that way throughout the entire book. Also, I had trouble excusing Catherine's strange actions beyond a certain point. To some degree, I sympathized with her and wanted her plan to succeed, but when she actually went through with it, I was disgusted by her selfishness and her inability to see Julian as anything but a replacement for her husband.

Overall, it's a good read, and I'm sad that the reviews here are so harsh on it. It's poetry in slow motion, and it covers a fascinating subtopic of WWI.
