



London in Chains: An English Civil War Novel

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An English Civil War novel from a highly-acclaimed author - London, 1647. Lucy Wentor, a young lady who was attacked by soldiers during the civil war, and then rejected by her sweetheart, hopes to start her life afresh in the capital with her uncle and aunt. London, however, is in chaos and her once well-to-do uncle is now almost bankrupt. Unwilling to go home, Lucy finds a job in publishing and excitement, love and independence soon follow.

London in Chains: An English Civil War Novel Details

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From Reader Review London in Chains: An English Civil War Novel for online ebook

D.w. says

While this is a romance, that is not its strength. The romantic elements are not really developed as opposed to the historical context and background that Ms. Bradshaw provides us in what becomes an excellent glimpse into a time that perhaps most know little about.

London, after the victory of Parliament over Charles I was not all celebration and happiness, but was in turmoil, the victors fighting over the spoils of war as happens frequently when the victors are not led by one mind. We see this as our heroine comes to London for the first time and has to deal with allies who were oppressors, family that loves and hates her, and a city that is tightly held in an inflationary spiral which happens when a country has been beset by a war that has ravished it.

Add the religious pressures that Parliament was suffering as well to this mix where all those who know the truth of their vision of god tried to wrest control of the nation, and London is indeed in Chains as Ms Bradshaw names the book. What we see also is the rise of printing in this era and a comment that is made, about how no General would dare go to war without their own press, (which reminds me a great deal of Douglas Macarthur) and we see that our Heroine is poised to show us a glimpse of this period that I had no idea of. Before this work, I thought Parliament won, Charles was incarcerated and eventually Parliament voted to behead him, and then Cromwell was made supreme. Yet much was to be done before that happened as I now know. (I am a product of the US education system)

Though there is a romance for our Heroine, and some little time is devoted to it, it does not seem fully fledged as the hero of this action is taken away off stage. That there is some interaction and words between hero and heroine to put the building blocks for a relationship and that they view each other philosophically similarly might breed true, but still, if romance be ones first inclination, more should take place. If History is what you would like to delve into in a period piece, than look no further for the period of 1647 and 1648 one can do little better. At every turn of the page Ms Bradshaw is able to add depth to her world, painting with words details that little occurred to me, but that I think all would find enriching. I recommend this to those who find history of an interest in their reading.

Megan says

This isn't a period I know much about, so I did get confused about some of the historical background, especially since this was a time of shifting loyalties and betrayals. I liked all the details about printing and propaganda of the times. I liked the heroine and her determination, but I felt some of her friends were a little ahead of the times in their feminism. Maybe not -- it was indeed a time of changes.

CLM says

Attacked and raped by soldiers when she went to milk the cows in the barn of her father's freehold, then rejected by her fiance as a fallen woman, Lucy takes refuge with a kindly uncle and his bitter wife in London

in this 17th century historical novel. She is hurt to find she is being welcomed to help the maid rather than as a family member so jumps at the chance at paid employment by a local printer. Soon, she realizes she is assisting with the production of seditious pamphlets, attacking the new Parliament goverment. Although she recognizes this activity could put her in grave danger, Lucy becomes convinced the skills she is acquiring will help her achieve independence. The process also results in her political awareness and new acquaintances who will help her recover from her painful experience. A very satisfying read although I wondered how Lucy had learned to read and write so well, given her dour father.

Catherine says

Interesting book. Not her usual period, it sounds like, but I enjoyed the book. Liked the main character, a strong and independent woman. Must have been difficult back then. Also enjoyed reading about the politics of the times and the birth of the newspaper. Ironic, now that we're living through what might be the death of the newspaper. It's like it's going back to its beginnings.

Jaclyn says

Fun historical read

Great mix of history and fictional drama. I am embarrassed to say that I never knew England had civil wars! Great information and brought me curious enough to do some research on my own.

Margaret says

A milkmaid from Leicestershire, Lucy Wentnor is sent to her uncle and aunt in London after being attacked by Civil War soldiers and rejected by her betrothed. Wishing to contribute her share to her uncle's household, she takes a dangerous position at a radical printing press and is soon caught up in political and personal turmoil.

Bradshaw is out of her usual period here, and it shows. She's obviously done her usual meticulous research, but the way she weaves in the historical details is oddly clunky, drawing attention away from the story rather than adding depth to it. The characterization is also rather thin, and although I liked hotheaded Lucy, I was never really convinced of her too-quick radicalization. I liked the romance, but I wanted more time for it to develop. I think it's time for me to lower my expectations of Bradshaw; I still find her books reasonably good, but she hasn't written one in years that I think is even close to the Byzantine trilogy or The Sand-Reckoner.

Joanne says

Bradshaw's best book since she started getting published by Severn House. It's not her period, but she does a tremendous job of writing an exciting story, and evoking society and politics during the English Civil War.

There's no cliches here either, thank God, so there's no ebil repressed Puritans or dashing royalist highwaymen. Now if only she could have mentioned stays...

Jane says

Time travel is easy with Gillian Bradshaw, who gives a first-class ride through history in this engrossing story set during England's Civil Wars. A fascinating look at the printing business nad the birth of newspapers here.

Stacey says

I never really read about the English Civil Wars, so this was an educational change of time period. Lots of historical detail, and my favorite, LOTS of historical printing press/print culture details.

I particularly liked how determined the main character was to do what she wanted and live her own life outside the more constricting social restraints.

This book is about a young woman, sent from her country home to London during the English Civil Wars (before Cromwell becomes the Big Cheese in England; before Charles I gets beheaded, but after the establishment of the Parliamentary government). She moves in with her uncle and his shrewish wife, and begins paid work at an illegal (unlicensed by the Stationers' Guild) press, printing seditious but fascinating (to her) political pamphlets and small books. The secondary characters are well drawn, and interesting in and of themselves, though the protagonist's struggle to survive and thrive in dangerous London drives the plot.

Gregory House says

Excellent story

The English Civil War is an evocative period in English history, it possesses all the high drama rancorous politics and family divisions beloved by writers and filmmakers for plot and characters. Due to this we've had a truck loads of the usual romances where in a dashing cavalier rescues a threatened (beautiful) heiress from a menacing and dour roundhead. Ho hum tedious predictable and boring. But not so with this novel Gillian Bradshaw has opted for the more interesting a realistic portrayal of a common English girl who suffers from the dread deeds and degradations of war and isn't dashingly rescued. However Lucy does take her life and future in her own hands and forges her own unique position in the ferment of Parliamentary London. I was extremely impressed with this story as it concentrates on the actions of common people after the First Civil War to gain a government in Parliament that will serve them and not its own interests. Lucy is an excellent witness to the tumult and division as she is caught up in the push to free John Lilburne arrested by Parliament for advocating suffrage for the common man. I commend this story to anyone looking for a good historical novel or who wants to gain an exceptional view of an exciting period. I can't wait to reading the second in this series.

Regards Gregory House

The Liberties of London

Misfit says

It's 1647 and the "first" Civil War between King and Parliament is over - and London is seething with politics and seditious printers. After an attack on the family farm by soldiers Lucy Wentnor has lost both her dowry and her innocence, and her father brings her to London to live with her uncle Thomas and his parsimonious wife Agnes. Agnes intends to use Lucy as an unpaid servant in the household, but our independent miss manages to find herself a job assisting a printer - and when he is thrown in jail she takes over the operation herself along with the inherent dangers that come with operating an illegal press. Soon caught up in the political agendas of the varying factions (King, Parliament, Covenanters, Cromwell) as well as torn between the two men who love her, Lucy dances a fine line to keep herself out of prison and independence intact.

While certainly not the be-all to end-all novels that deal with this period, I did like the fact that it focused on a very narrow window (between the two major phases of the wars) as well as how the author used Lucy's involvement in the printing business to make some of the various political parties easier to understand. This is a very short novel at just over 200 pages and doesn't get as in-depth with the characters as I would normally prefer in a book. I enjoyed Lucy's story, but I didn't find myself sitting on the edge of my seat wanting to know what happened next either. If you are interested in this period and already have some knowledge going in I would recommend this but for those new to the period I'd recommend starting elsewhere, either Pamela Belle's Wintercombe series or the The Moon in the Water trilogy.

Stephanie says

Smart, fierce, and wounded country girl Lucy Wentnor travels to big, bad London in the middle of the UK Civil War...and discovers independence, politics, an exciting career and a really wonderful, understated romance. I loved this book, and I can't wait to read the sequel!

Perfect for anyone who loves the historical parts of Susanna Kearsley's novels.

Libby Ames says

As usual, I love Gillian Bradshaw. This book is an interesting one, because it is written in a much later time period than most of her historical fiction. Her story is set in London during Oliver Cromwell and the English Civil wars. Much of the book deals with the politics of the time period and the struggle for the common people to gain more power. With all the politics, the storyline was a little slower than some of Bradshaw's other books. However, I felt the balance was just right. Right enough to keep me interested in the politics (and that is saying a lot for me). It is nice to read a fun story and feel I'm being educated at the same time.

Sara says

In her latest historical fiction novel, Gillian Bradshaw explores the English Civil War through the eyes of a

young farmgirl named Lucy Wentor. Having been assaulted by soldiers and tired of being a constant reminder to her family of their failure to protect her, Lucy travels to London where she hopes to take shelter with her wealthy uncle and aunt. However, her uncle's finances have been strained and destroyed by the war, and her aunt makes it clear that the household has no room for charity. In an attempt to earn her keep, Lucy finds herself stitching pamphlets for an underground printer, and soon becomes engrossed in the printing process and the ideas they print.

Bradshaw is well known for her meticulously researched and descriptive historical fiction, and this is a prime example. The opening chapter paints a bleak, gritty, gloomy picture of the London which greets Lucy, yet she still finds it new and exhilarating. Bradshaw's characters provoke emotion, especially Lucy's aunt Agnes, a bitter and angry woman mourning the loss of her children. My personal ignorance of the English Civil War made it a bit of a challenge to understand the various historical players and events in the novel, but this is no fault of the author or her writing.

Farah Mendlesohn says

I am currently reading through every novel of the English Civil War I can get my hands on (from Defoe onwards) and this is a fine contribution to the field. I think I spotted a mere two anachronisms which is bloody good going, and tho Lucy perhaps learns the printing trade a little faster than is plausible, this is war-time. What I particularly like about this novel (tho your toleration for this may vary) is the very thorough exploration of the nuances of radical politics of the period. It's this that makes the war so very exciting. (If you like this book try Lindsey Davis, Rebels and Traitors, and Jack Lindsey's 1649: A Novel of a Year).
