



# The Sheik

*E.M. Hull*

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## **The Sheik** E.M. Hull

Diana Mayo is young, beautiful, wealthy, and independent. Bored by the eligible bachelors and endless parties of the English aristocrats, she arranges for a trek through the Algerian desert.

Two days into the her adventure, she is kidnapped by the powerful Sheik Ahmed Ben-Hassan, who forces her into submission. Diana tries desperately to resist but finds herself falling in love with the dark and handsome stranger. What follows is a tale of mystery, power, and forbidden love fulfilled.

## **The Sheik Details**

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## From Reader Review The Sheik for online ebook

### 10lees says

Full disclosure: I only read this because it was referenced as the first official novel of the romance genre in an article. It was very interesting, but I can't in good conscious recommend it because it is precisely what I hate in a novel – the author tells you, constantly and incessantly, exactly what the main protagonist is thinking and why it makes sense in the context of her life. Part of the writing style is probably due to the time period, the book originally being published in the 1920s (1919 to be precise), but I will always argue that authorial laziness is partly to blame when 'telling' instead of 'showing'.

I also couldn't help but re-write it as I read it in order to visualize how it would read differently in a modern romance. For example: Diana wouldn't have been 'ravished', instead she would have been a slave to her desires, but in this novel the most proper word to describe the Sheik's actions is rape. The outdated mores are true to the time period and mildly amusing as long as you can stomach them (and there is no actual descriptions as there would be in a novel today). It's hard to root for the couple to end up together, she is, after all, being raped repeatedly, and she is giving up her whole life to continue living in the desert with her abuser, but the sudden ending is mildly satisfying.

One final thought: does everybody else think she lets her brother continue to believe she is dead? I can't imagine how she would introduce her new husband to anybody.

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### Mayra says

Stockholm Syndrome much?

Wow, I have finally found a character as contemptible as Bella Swan. Diana Mayo is an insult to women everywhere. How could anyone, on principle, love a rapist?

I couldn't find one single attribute in her I could relate to. Honestly, if it were me, I would have killed him as soon as he gave her that gun and said he trusted her.

How can a woman, in her right mind, see the bruises on her arm and think: "It's not his fault, he doesn't know his own strength. If he killed me I'd still love him." How entirely disgusting. Where is your sense of dignity, Diana? Where?

Still, I have to admit the book was a page turner, and even shocked and disgusted by their character and actions, I really was curious to know how Ahmed and Diana's "love" story would end. It kept me entertained.

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### **Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says**

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? I read this for the Unapologetic Romance Readers' **New Years 2018 Reading Challenge**, for the category of: *Classic (Literature) Romance*. For more info on this challenge, click here. ?

In my review of *THE FLAME AND THE FLOWER*, I said that Woodiwiss is often credited with writing the first bodice ripper. While she was certainly one of the first mainstream authors to publish a widely read romance with an open bedroom door \*wink\*, *THE SHEIK* has a shockingly similar formula to the "modern" bodice ripper, and it was published in 1919. The only difference is a deliberate omission of sex scenes, but it's clear that they're happening (and it's equally clear that they're nonconsensual).

**\*\*\*WARNING: SPOILERS\*\*\***

Diana Mayo (that last name kills me, by the way - I kept picturing her as a pasty white jar of mayonnaise rolling through the desert) is a tomboyish, independent woman of noble birth who enjoys gallivanting through exotic locales with her rather unwilling and prissy brother, who thinks that she ought to be more submissive and demure. She turns down a marriage proposal from a desperate admirer (perhaps the first recorded incident of someone being placed in the "friend zone" - and like most guys in the "friend zone", he doesn't get the rules), so you know she's independent, and then rejects her brother's suggestion that she perhaps oughtn't to ride through the desert alone, except for a caravan escort of "natives," because, again, *independent*.

Unfortunately for Diana, her escort has sold her out and she's ridden down and then captured by the eponymous sheik himself, Ahmed Ben Hassan. Who then rapes her. Many times.

While reading this book, I kept thinking to myself that this probably would have not just been banned but probably also set on fire if it had been published in the late 70s, when all those absolutely insane bodice rippers were being published and everyone was trying to out-WTF each other. This book desperately wants to be dirty, and since sex is off the table, it compensates with violence and racism. Horses are beaten bloody, a servant is whipped, Ahmed shoots Diana's horse to punish her - twice (once to wound, once to kill), a woman is killed by having a knife driven through her heart, and a man's hand is shattered when his rifle explodes while he was holding it. It was as if the author was like, "By God! If they won't let me write about the *one* bodily fluid, I'll just write about the other!" More disturbing still is that all that horse-breaking serves as an allegory for the hero and the heroine's unconventional relationship: by the end of the book she is utterly broken, a shell of her former self. She admits that she no longer has any pride where he is concerned, that she would die for him... and when she finds out that he intends to send her away (out of love for her), she decides to do just that by taking his revolver and attempting to shoot herself in the head. He misdirects the bullet just in time by whacking her hand. (That must be the slowest-moving bullet ever.)

But as disturbing as the violence is, it was the racism that I found most shocking. Granted, this was written in the 1910s, so it's not going to be imbued with the PC-friendly content we expect from the romances of today, but it was still quite a shock to see just how *acceptable* it was to write such casual racism in mainstream publications. The n-word is used several times (both kinds); the Algerians are repeatedly referred to as Arabs; phrases like "Oriental beast" and "primitive" and "uncivilized" and "savage" are casually thrown

around every other page; and the biggest kicker was this - it turns out that Ahmed isn't actually Algerian at all! He's half Spanish, half English, and was adopted by a sheik who fell in love with his mother, and out of love for her, bequeathed to him his name and title.

One of the "conflicts" of the book is Ahmed's blistering hatred of English people, and his refusal to speak in anything but French or Arabic. It turns out that his father was abusive to his mother, and that's why he hates English people. When he found out about his English heritage, he threw a major temper tantrum, refused his title, ran off to the desert, and never spoke English again (even though apparently he can speak it and understand it). Part of the reason he was so cruel to Diana is because it made him feel like he was getting back at his father and his father's people, which is all kinds of messed up. Seriously, dude?

Also, Diana is kidnapped by a rival sheik named Ibraheim and *of course* he's ugly and dirty and fat and has blackened teeth and really dark skin (although not so dark, the book says, that you can't see the dirt all over him). I've never seen an author use so many adjectives to make a character as unappealing as possible. He even "speaks French villainously" and I'm not sure how one speaks a language villainously, but there you go. At this point, I was giving the book the stink-eye, and when I found out Ahmed wasn't even Algerian, I got even angrier, because it felt like the message was, "Oh, he's white after all, so it's not *bad*, and that's why he's *better*." This is why I tend to avoid reading bodice rippers about sheiks and Native Americans - *they always do this*. The alleged hero of color is always a "half-breed" (and yes, they do describe them that way in the blurbs sometimes), and while there is absolutely nothing wrong with being biracial or multiracial, there *is* something wrong with making a character part white for the purpose of suggesting that this "whiteness" makes them better.

This book was popular enough that a movie was created by the same name, starring Rudolph Valentino. The movie is supposed to be a lot better (no rape, I believe), and Rudolph Valentino is a babe and a half, so if you're interested in this story that seems to be the way to go (although if you're feeling masochistic, you can grab it for free on Kindle). I noticed that there is a sequel available called THE SONS OF THE SHEIK. It isn't available for Kindle in English, but I *did* find a Spanish version, so if I ever feel like I want to work for my masochism, I'll buy that and let loose.

Interestingly, the plot of this story is very similar to Johanna Lindsey's CAPTIVE BRIDE, from the escape attempts, to the rival sheik, to the fact that the sheik is half-white. I'm sure Lindsey was probably inspired by THE SHEIK, but wanted to write a modern, sexier version (now with 80% less racial stereotypes!). She succeeded - I vastly preferred CAPTIVE BRIDE to this. I'm giving THE SHEIK two stars instead of the one it probably deserved because the constant melodrama could sometimes lead to unintentional hilarity, rather like Louisa May Alcott's rather bodice-rippy and decidedly lesser-known book, A LONG FATAL LOVE CHASE. Yes, the Louisa May Alcott of LITTLE WOMEN fame. Talk about another book that also desperately wanted to be dirty...

P.S. Another way you can really feel the 1910s is the fact that *everybody* in this book chain-smokes, often at hilariously inopportune times. When Diana escapes the sheik, she stops under a palm tree and lights up.  
#SmokingBreak

2 stars

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## MaryReadsRomance says

### 5 ++ Stars Original 1919 Landmark Historical Romance

*The Arrogant and Mesmerizing Blue Eyed Sheik*

This is the original and first Sheik story and still the best! I encourage you to download and read this Classic for FREE from Amazon or Guttenberg.

Given the time of publication in 1919, almost 100 years ago during the shocking destruction and loss of life of The Great War (WWI) and the renewed interest in the Arab World due to the British fighting the Ottoman Empire there in Arab lands, and in the context of the repressed Victorian times of the novel's setting, *The Sheik* was an extraordinary book.

I have a personal fondness for an exotic romance adventure tale and this tale is a bit reminiscent of the sweeping epic of *Lawrence of Arabia*. It too is set in the same time frame of The Great War. The difference in the Arabic tribal culture and Western culture was so significant in *Lawrence of Arabia* that it was hard for me to wrap my mind around their way of life and thinking as depicted.

So too, Ahmed Ben Hassan's behavior and the Sheik needs to be viewed and evaluated in that foreign and somewhat alien context. I initially strongly disliked some aspects of *The Sheik*, beyond the forced sex, including such things as the racial slurs and smoking but with reflection also recognize that the characters were products of the historic time frame being written about and in the historic time frame of the books development and publication. In that light, *The Sheik* may have been considered progressive!

I loved *The Sheik* as a historical romance and am not surprised as it also reminds me of two other landmark historical romance fiction books: *Gone with the Wind* and *Sweet Savage Love*. *The Sheik* predates both of these by almost 20 and 50 years respectively. The only pre-existing similar popular romance fiction that I can think of that this novel could be derivative of would be Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. The Sheik's sensual descriptions and the crossing of racial lines made the book considered pornography by many of the day!

For good or bad, *The Sheik* does NOT have explicit sex scenes but could be considered to be dark and edgy as it does have kidnapping, rape, deadly violence, and animal cruelty. And in some ways, *The Sheik* is even more extreme than any contemporary bodice ripper I have read – which must have made it VERY shocking for the time. No wonder it was banned!!

It is important to note that the animal cruelty is not intended as such given the context and timeframe - any more than the Native American would be thought cruel for deploying such methods for breaking a horse.

Ironically I also think the shooting of the horse was critical in the story as it was intended to display both Diana's and Hassan's stubborn natures. Ahmed was willing to sacrifice a trained and valued horse to capture her - a great sacrifice indeed for a mere woman. That he is even willing to kill or injure her in the process of bringing the horse down for her disobedience, is also a definite statement on how far he will go if challenged with anyone – as was Diana's attempt to shoot him in the face.

E.M. Hull made the hero and heroine mirror images of each other to break down ethnic and cultural barriers and to make their love more inevitable and plausible. They share similar childhoods; interests and hobbies, and character flaws; and foils or opposites in body via ethnicity, physical appearance, and sex.

Both are wealthy and are used to an odd mix of Spartan and opulent life styles. Both are also well educated and read and speak multiple languages. They are also both very proud and arrogant and are used to free reign and getting their way. Yet both have had harsh upbringings and were oddly deprived of love and tenderness in their youth.

Both are also incredibly physically attractive with one being dark and the other fair. Both are also used to using the power of their good looks and strong wills on the opposite sex - she with her feminine manipulation and aloofness and coldness and he with male manipulation through physical domination and control and passion.

There is an ongoing analogy and comparison of Diana to the wild and proud yet fragile Arabian horses Ahmed so loves and Ahmed to the fierce and powerful predatory Arabian Tiger, which in Diana's mind, arouses both fear and fascinated admiration.

Diana and Ahmed also share a deep and abiding love of the outdoors and the beauty of the desert.

One cannot miss that she shares Ahmed affection for his closet and most dear Best Friends - his valet, his French friend the writer, and his huge and lumbering beast of a dog. And all his friends return her affections and are fiercely protective of her!

But most of all they share an absolute passion and love of horses and horse-back riding.

They can no more resist loving these beautiful Arabian horses than they can resist loving each other. (view spoiler).

At the root of it all, Ahmed and Diana evolve through the course of the story with each other being the catalyst for this change. They do not fall instantly fall in love - just the opposite. Instead they come to respect and admire each other and - despite their initial ingrained prejudices about each other's ethnic background, culture, and sex - grow to love each other.

I initially strongly disliked some aspects of the book beyond the forced sex including such things as the racial slurs and smoking but with reflection also recognize that the characters were products of the historic time frame being written about and in the historic time frame of the books development and publication, and given that frame work the book is actually progressive.

Given the Victorian context, and the lack of actual sex scene descriptions, Diana's ongoing "rape" may not be as extreme or as forced as some may perceive in that context as well.

In Victorian times, women were not openly encouraged to enjoy sex. For a lady, sex was generally perceived as a painful and degrading duty, done in the dark and partially clothed, with the sole purpose to produce heirs. Sex was dirty, bestial, and base. Only a mistress or prostitute would enjoy sex for the sake of sex. Thus for many women, who felt morally suppressed or dirty for wanting sex, forced sex was a fantasy way of eliminating that guilt.

In the context of her times, Diana would have normally been forced to submit to a man in more ways than one via marriage. For the titled and wealthy, a woman's marriage was often arranged based upon status and wealth more than mutual interests and attraction.

Diana is an extreme aberration from the average Victorian woman. Parentless, no one has arranged or forced her to marry and her Brother to whom such responsibility should have fallen has been negligent and instead allowed her to behave as a man. She has now reached her majority and has come into her own wealth and independence. She has no intention of marrying ever and is on her own solo, typically male or Honeymoon taken, Grand Tour of Europe and the Exotic East.

While fiercely independent, Diana has an even greater aversion to sex and marriage than most Victorian woman as she has been deprived of any physical love and dislikes even to be touched. Undoubtedly she perceives sex as an act of domination and control. Given her extreme aversion to marriage and sex, and her spurning of earlier marriage offers, Diana appears destined to be a virginal eccentric spinster as she is already "on the shelf" and has decided to go, as a Lady, unescorted on a trip with wild men! Absolutely shocking!

In the beginning, it is obvious that Ahmed forces her submission to him through intimidation and physical might but how much he actually seduces her in the bedroom after her initial submission remains up to the reader's imagination. There are no explicit sex scenes.

That she is physically attracted to him, and he to her, is obvious throughout the book.

As Ahmed brags about his prowess with other females, he is "Oriental" with much experience, and he is very physically attractive and fit, the reader could surmise that he is very likely talented indeed - in stark contrast to the repressed and indolent Victorian male.

How much Diana's self-loathing and hate of Ahmed is due to his awakening her passions and making her in fact a slave to him in spirit and mind, as well as body, is up to speculation.



I prefer to think that behind the scenes, he does indeed seduce her and thus her growing love of him beyond that explained by Stockholm syndrome.

I am not alone in this interpretation. For an excellent and detailed review with book excerpts hinting at this complex physical and emotional relationship, please see review: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

Besides the conflict in the relationship between Diana and Ahmed, there is plenty of other action and conflict in this adventure tale. Numerous times throughout the story the hero and heroine are almost killed. One of the many close calls was Diana's capture by the opposing tribe and the subsequent fight scenes. As Diana is almost killed at least 3 times in total, if one includes the horse shooting, the melodrama and violence was a bit over the top. As it was not always predictable, I did enjoy it as a change!

As with any bodice ripper, the male lead needs to evolve from anti-hero to hero and some excuse must be made for his unacceptable earlier behavior and amends must be made. Because, despite any repressed female's rape fantasy, actual rape is reprehensible and an act of violence not love.

In the case of the Sheik, a child hood tragedy back story is used to make Sheik Hassan's initial behavior, i.e. Dina's kidnap and rape, and his earlier rage more palatable. A similar explanation is used to explain Diana's spurning of men, her repressed nature, her traveling alone, etc.. Both of their dysfunctional pasts and early childhood traumas and deprivations are revealed to the reader and to each other through the course of the story (view spoiler).

While this backstory does seem a bit contrived, even today early child trauma is frequently used as a plot device in many contemporary romance books as a justification hero or heroine bad behavior. Given that this book is almost 100 years old, and that psychology was in its infancy as a field, the author may have been actually innovative in using this particular plot device...

In the end, out of all the trauma, and near death encounters, Diana and Hassan do ultimately find forgiveness - Diana of Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan's treatment of her and he of himself for having harmed her.

To give them a more perfect and acceptable HEA, E.M. Hull uses another frequently used plot device deployed in formulaic romances: The HEA made possible, despite the original barriers of race, class etc., by (view spoiler) This device is an overused trick and one we see regularly in simple children's fairy tales and Greek tales.

In this case, I was VERY disappointed (view spoiler) Though I do recognize that the change does make their union more equitable and makes his strict non-adherence to Moslem Law and his attraction to and eventual love and admiration of Diana's spirited independence more believable.

I suspect the real reason was this to make their union more palatable to the general English public's sensibilities of the time. A public who was then even more prejudiced than today.

Overall, I thought The Sheik interesting and fascinating as a romance adventure novel and was delighted to read it for FREE.

I just watched the silent movie classic The Sheik with Valentino and loved it. It is in some ways better than the book as it softens or eliminates some of the more shocking aspects.

Valentino and the movie made the Sheik so much more lovable by portraying him as almost childlike. He is almost innocent of the severity of his crime.

He is used to the Arab culture where women are a cheap commodity to be bought and sold. He, as a powerful sheik, is used to woman fawning on him and falling at his feet.

He looks so wounded when she turns away his kisses, aw. He closes his eyes and looks so guilt ridden and conflicted when he realizes how deeply he has hurt her.

All three, the movie, the original Sheik, and the Sheik Retold were new for me and all three have a different take on the same basic story line.

While, I have enjoyed them all, the original The Sheik is my favorite.

Given the time of publication of approx. 100 years ago, and in the context of the times, this was an EXTRAORDINARY book and will remain as a timeless classic of historical romance for every generation.

I encourage you to download and read it as a bit of cultural literary history.

You will undoubtedly experience a love hate relationship with this book at times – but you may find that despite your initial distaste, you come away with a new perspective and potentially a new found love.

The Sheik has worked its way both into my heart and mind, and onto my Classics and Favorites list ...

For an excellent and detailed review of what to love in the book, a different interpretation please see review: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

(Update log: revised from original Sept 5, 2013 to fix image error.)

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**alexis says**

The Sheik is garbage in the form of a novel that was published back in 1919 when people still used slurs to refer to people of color. It has everything you don't want: racism, rape, every man ever falling in love with the heroine, and the heroine almost killing herself because the Sheik wants to send her away. Also, I'm pretty sure all the characters have lung cancer from smoking so much.

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### **Sarah Mac says**

So, I never reviewed this back when I read it. Oops.

This is THE original bodice ripper.

Despite being (correctly) labeled as jazz age chick-lit, it's very well-written...which amuses me, given the level of repetitive trash that passes for 'independent publishing' these days.\*\* This was the 1920s version of 50 Shades -- but unlike Ana & Christian, Diana & her Sheik really grabbed my attention & kept me eager for a HEA. Hull imprints a good depth of character in the leads, which more people might appreciate if they could stop sniveling over the 1920s-inherent content like rape, colonialism, etc. This wasn't a politically correct era, yet Hull dared to have a white girl fall in love with a Sheik, & vice versa. How brave of her! Accordingly, negative traits on both sides define the MCs' initial prejudice, which is why they need to grow & change. FFS. Not every protagonist has to share the reader's POV on everything from page 1, right?

\*crickets chirping\*

Anyway. I digress. Apologies for that mini-rant.

Yes, there's arguable Stockholm Syndrome. But where does SS end & character development begin? The line isn't clearly defined, nor should it be -- that's what makes a gripping story. ;) So to anyone who shares a love of 70s-style romance novels: if you haven't read this yet, give it a try. The prose is old-fashioned but not so much that it's difficult to comprehend. Then imagine yourself with bobbed hair & a flapper dress, cramming chapters between your boring typewriter job & cigarette breaks. :D

\*\*I'm not saying that *everything* in self-pub'd romance is poorly edited with no relevant content beyond a sparkly abdominal cover. Just most of it. >\_\_\_\_>

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### **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

[that begins with rape can really lead to lasting love. (hide spoiler)]

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### **Sandi \*~The Pirate Wench~\* says**

Where to begin? Well first off this book drew me right in from the beginning to the end! When I first started it I was expecting it to be hard to get into considering the date/time it was written in by this author. But not at all! It was very modern, and very easy to follow and connect with all the characters. So let's get to the characters. Diana: What an independent, obstinate, spirited, plain spoken woman. Raised as boy, with no affection from her guardian brother, no genteel upbringing, she knew little of what affection was and least of all love. She was a person unto herself and answered only to herself, made her own rules. So it's not a wonder when she is kidnapped by Ahmed her body and mind recoiled and went into shock. Alas..hate and fear are born. Until she learns what it is like to surrender and give of herself (in more ways than one) Ahmed Ben Hassen: Powerful Sheik of the desert. He sees Diana one time in Briska and has to have her! A man who takes what he wants with no thought to anything but what he wants and needs. He kidnaps her and forces her into submission..night after night.

Ahmed is a totally arrogant "alpha-male" with a very complex personality, Diana tries to resist and defy him at all times but finds she cannot..and eventually falls for her dark and handsome captor, fearing at the same time he will get bored with her and send her away as others before her. I was really on the fence with Ahmed at times seeing him threw Diana's eyes, yet at the same time being as captivated myself by this mysterious man. If you're expecting "sizzling love scenes" in this book you won't find it here, what you have instead is a "lights-off" and the rest is left up to your own imagination, which personally I found more fun. So..was there any "eye-rolling" "head-shaking" parts?

Well there was one for me: Diana finally makes her escape after waiting so long for the right moment..after riding so long she must stop at the next Oasis to rest herself and the horse. Ok..what of 2 things if I were in her shoes would I have thought of if I was making my escape into the hot and dry desert..water..check..some food..check, dang-it! all she thought of to bring was her cigarettes! Oh well she needed them to calm herself she thought after all she had been through \*\*eyes roll here\*\*

And sometimes through some of Diana's "meltdowns" (they are quite dramatic at times) I somehow found the silent film playing in my head LOL! But all and all this is a story told in a prose that was totally enthralling and gripping! A real classic romance and the reason I give it a 5 star is because most romantic stories today leave nothing to the imagination, where as this romantic Captor/Captive tale let me do that. I couldn't put it down and tried to slow down my reading as I didn't want to see the end. And the end? Worth the wait! and that's all I give on that..if you can borrow from your library it's worth every moment of read time! Luckily for me I found the sequel

and can't wait to find out what happens further in the lives of Diana and her Sheik!

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## **Dorothea says**

### **Serious trigger warning for sexual violence, abusive relationship, animal harm.**

There are all kinds of observations I could make about this book. Diana's perceptions of Arab women were especially interesting to me. I didn't even mention the godawful racism below, but that could be another post just as long. This post is about rape. Discussing other things in the comments is fine and welcomed, though.

Setting aside the issue of assigning a potentially triggering text, I would totally assign *The Sheik* in an advanced feminist rhetoric class. (I took one of those once, so that makes me competent to design my own, right folks?) It would be perfect for examining the question of why women write and read romances in which the hero stalks, harasses, insults, kidnaps, and/or rapes the heroine prior to their declaring their mutual love.

The classic answer to this question is that rape fantasies are actually empowering to women because the fictional rapist is actually under the control of the writer, reader, or fantasizer. In the only feminist criticism

of the novel I could find on JSTOR, Karen Chow (in a 1999 *Feminist Review* article) sums up an earlier critique (by Patricia Raub in 1992):

In hindsight, the initial 'rape' scenes participate in a rape *fantasy* that is a common trope in romance novels -- the typically stunning, always desirable hero forces the heroine into sex, an event that, while hardly empowering, allows her to lose her inhibitions without taking moral responsibility for doing so; consequently, the heroine is able to express herself sexually.

Chow complicates this argument by pointing out that Diana is completely passive throughout, never taking any actions to win the Sheik's love or sexual attention; rather

it is not Diana the character but the woman *reader, writer and filmgoer* in the material world who is liberated by reading these steamy passages ... Diana may not be active or liberated, but Hull-as-author might be; in giving Diana power over Ahmed at the end of the book ... Hull offers women the chance to identify with Diana's passions and share them vicariously ... In choosing to buy books like *The Sheik*, through which they could treat themselves to an erotic and emotional fantasy, women readers became active participants in a woman-made market of desire.

I think these ideas can be useful, but I don't think that they are adequate to explain *The Sheik*.

I think *The Sheik* is about survival.

Diana is trapped by the Sheik. She cannot escape, even through suicide. She has given up hope of being rescued. He has absolute power over her and has systematically taken away everything from her: her bodily autonomy, her ability to dress to please only herself, her privacy, her pride in her independence, her obedience. No one, no matter how kind, who has access to her has the ability or inclination to free her. Even as she attempts to escape she knows:

The effects would remain with her always, nothing would ever be the same again, but the daily dread, the daily contamination would be gone, the helpless tortured feeling, the shame of submission that had filled her with an acute self-loathing that was as intense as her passionate hatred of the man who had forced her to endure his will. The memory of it would live with her for ever. He had made her a vile thing. ... She had been down into the depths and she would carry the scars all her life.

Then he captures her again, shooting her horse from under her.

The Sheik leaped to the ground and ran towards her. He caught her wrist and flung her out of his way, and she lay where she had fallen, every nerve in her body quivering. She was beaten and with the extinguishing of her last hope all her courage failed her. She gave way to sheer, overwhelming terror, utterly cowed. Every faculty was suspended, swallowed up in the one dominating force, the dread of his voice and the dread of the touch of his hands.

The Sheik questions her about her escape, then pulls her up to sit before him on his horse as they return to his camp. "She made no kind of resistance, a complete apathy seemed to have come over her." This ride is the turning point of the story. Diana has reached the nadir of her captivity, all of her hopes finally crushed.

It was useless to try and struggle against him any more. Her brain was a confused medley of thoughts that she was too tired to unravel, strange, conflicting ideas chasing wildly through her mind. She did not understand them, she did not try. The effort of thinking made her head ache

agonisingly. She was conscious of a great unrest, a dull aching in her heart and a terrible depression that was altogether apart from the fear she felt of the Sheik. She gave up trying to think; she was concerned only with trying to keep her balance.

It is on this ride that Diana begins to think of herself as in love with the Sheik. First, through a fog of misery and confusion, she begins to think of him with ambivalence instead of hatred.

His nearness had ceased to revolt her; she thought of it with a dull feeling of wonder. She had even a sense of relief at the thought of the strength so close to her. Her eyes rested on his hands, showing brown and muscular under the folds of his white robes. She knew the power of the long, lean fingers that could, when he liked, be gentle enough. Her eyes filled with sudden tears, but she blinked them back before they fell. She wanted desperately to cry.

And then, her conflicted emotions and thoughts resolve themselves into love:

Quite suddenly she knew—knew that she loved him, that she had loved him for a long time, even when she thought she hated him and when she had fled from him. She knew now why his face had haunted her in the little oasis at midday—that it was love calling to her subconsciously. All the confusion of mind that had assailed her when they started on the homeward journey, the conflicting thoughts and contrary emotions, were explained. But she knew herself at last and knew the love that filled her, an overwhelming, passionate love that almost frightened her with its immensity and with the sudden hold it had laid upon her.

This is how Diana will survive when all hope and possibility have been taken away from her. If the Sheik controls everything about her, the only choice left to her--the only thing that even seems like a choice--is how she can feel in the secrecy of her heart. She can continue as before, with her desires being, exhaustingly, the *only* unambiguous vote against what the Sheik is doing to her. Or she can align herself with every facet of her environment that supports him. I imagine her as an iron filing struggling to resist a giant magnet, and finally giving in. No wonder it's a relief. No wonder it feels good.

I read *The Sheik* as a survival manual for women, a guide to living with your rapist when no one will ever question his right to your body, your attention, your work. How do you do this? You fall in love with him. You notice and cherish his every gentle action (even his omission to rape you sometimes). You explain away his cruelty to yourself. Your goal is to be certain that he loves you back, because if he does then everything was worth it. Diana does all of these things in the second half of the novel, and they work for her.

The "marital rape exemption" (the legal idea that one cannot be raped by one's spouse) was formally abolished in England 72 years after the publication of *The Sheik*. Twenty years after that, clients of the rape crisis center I volunteer at (in a state which abolished the exemption two years later than England) are still battling against the notion that people have the right to their sexual partner's consent. Films made during that 72-year period have treated the corporal punishment of a wife by her husband as ordinary, sexy, or funny. Before and after 1919 I have found numerous uses of the word "seduction," whether by nineteenth-century feminist reformers or twentieth-century film critics, that display not a shred of interest in whether the seduction was welcomed by both parties or perpetrated by only one.

I have some idea of how bad things are now for women who are sexually, physically, and emotionally abused by their partners. It is their stories that I recognized in *The Sheik*. But it gives me the horrors to think about what things were like before the rape crisis movement. I would bet anything that a very significant part of what made *The Sheik* a bestseller was its value as a survival manual. The validation in what would have been for many women an accurate portrayal of their psychological journey. The balancing of anger and

hatred against a man who hurts, with love and wanting of the same man who is the entire world and can give what no one else can give. This book says, "Yes. I know what it feels like. It hurts. You can't think clearly about it. But you know, and I know, that that's the way the world is. That's what men are like and that's what women are for. Once you understand that you can redirect your pain so that it's not useless, so that sometimes there will be happiness. And if your happiness is not enough, then you can share Diana's."

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I need to give some credit for helping me to process these ideas to Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984), which introduced me to both the empowerment theory and the idea that women who lack resources and cultural narratives for escaping unsatisfying relationships can use romance novels to reinforce in themselves the idea that their relationships can be satisfying.

I have refrained from discussing Stockholm Syndrome because I don't know enough psychology to make authoritative statements about it, but I found this essay useful in confirming that Stockholm Syndrome does have something to do with what I'm writing about. (One of the Google ads I'm seeing on that page says "Make Him Addicted To You: Say These 'Secret' Words To Make Him Fall Madly In Love With You.")

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## **Maddie (Heart Full Of Books) says**

4/17 Guilty Pleasures module

If you think 'Beauty and the Beast' has Stockholm Syndrome, this takes it to a whole new level.

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## **LuvGirl says**

EDITED: 7/20/13

I decided that this book deserves a 5 star after never leaving my mind since I read it in 2011.

Whew, Ahmed Monseigneur! I have never feared a couple not ending up together as I did with Diane and Ahmed! Up until the last page you are left in agonizing suspense. When Diane loves or hate it is with such a passion that defies all reasoning. In the beginning I was amazed by the hatred she had for the hero and couldn't see the way out of such blatant malevolence. The animosity she had towards him was so great at times that I despaired of her ever falling in love with him. My agony was unwarranted as she fell in love with him with such compelling passion that u are blown away by its intensity! You feel everything the poor girl was feeling straight to the heart! The transition from hate to love was non existent. The author does not coddle the reader . There were no softening of her feelings until the moment she fell. Ahmad the cruel brute was also a wonderful complex character, seeing him brought to his knees by Diane was beautiful to watch. Their story was told in a prose that was enthralling . To say the least this book was gripping. The last chapter was something to behold! The author flipped the script in the end with something that you never see in romance these days. I read the chapter twice just to feel the passion again. I'm sure I'll read this one again in the near future!

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## Phair says

My last recorded reading of this all-time-favorite was in 2003 but the first time was when I was a pre-teen sneaking the book out of my grandmother's bookcase to sample "forbidden fruit" (well over 50 years ago!). I was so taken by the romance and thrill of the story that I have never forgotten the feelings and this is my go-to book when I need mental comfort food or to recapture the sense of being young and embarking on an adventure.

I collect copies of this book. I still have my grandmother's copy, a 1921 American first printing which is now falling to pieces. It still has Gram's maiden name faintly visible on the flyleaf so she must have gotten it shortly before marrying my grandfather. I have since bought 4 more copies of the Small, Maynard & Co hardcover edition: one was loaned to an acquaintance & never seen again but I still have a July 1921- 12th printing, a Nov '21 -38th printing, and a December '21 -53rd printing (!). It was a wild best-seller in its day and at least half of the re-printings were before the release of the Valentino film. I also own a 1963 mass market paperback version [on the cover: "he's pop, op, and camp" with photos from the film]; and a 2001 trade paperback reprint ed with a still from the movie on the cover (pub by Pine Street Books of the Univ. of Pennsylvania Press). I passed on acquiring the Barbara Cartland Library of Love edition as it is an abridgement. [I don't do online purchasing for these books as it's too easy- I like to rely on serendipity to find copies:]

As to the story itself- it does not really pass muster for modern sensibilities. A little (a LOT) politically incorrect both racially and socially but I would still like to see a modern remake of a film version although it would have to remain a period setting. In high school and later my college dorm room a large framed poster of Valentino in full sheik regalia graced my wall (it's still hanging in my parent's rec room). For a fun look at the Valentino/Sheik hysteria watch Gene Wilder's movie "The World's Greatest Lover"

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## Kristen says

### 1 ½ Melodramatic and Very Disturbing Stars

I don't know where to start with this very disturbing, highly repetitive, and very melodramatic book. Oh, the melodrama! A previous reviewer stated that she kept thinking of a silent movie while reading the reactions and internal dialogue of the heroine. I couldn't agree more! All I kept seeing in my mind's eye was this picture.

The Sheik, written in 1919, both horrified and intrigued me at the same time. I truly **HATED** the storyline—**the racism, animal cruelty, perpetual smoking, and repeated rape of the heroine at the hands of the hero were appalling** (the rapes took place behind closed doors). Nonetheless, I couldn't seem to pull myself away from it either. It was akin to watching a train wreck. I wouldn't be surprised if this book was the genesis for the Bodice Ripper, and it screamed Stockholm syndrome and the mental affects of an abusive relationship. Still, I read the book from start to finish and I have no doubt that I will be thinking about it for some time to come.



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## Karla says

Ah yes, the book that launched a million Harlequins. Imagine, there'd have been no The Playboy Sheikh's Virgin Stable-Girl if not for Edith Maude Hull's 1918 bodice ripper, which turned sheiks into literary catnip forever, for all time, and - I'm pretty confident - into infinity and beyond.

This is the original "virgin ravished by sheik" romance, with all the required alpha male swagger and conceit, as well as the shamed heroine's vows of eternal hatred eventually blossoming into consuming love. It's a great story, and I was pretty amazed at just how "modern" it read. Really, in so many parts it would be difficult to decide whether it was written in the age of World War I or disco. (Which leaves me to wonder if some of those 1970s authors remembered the steamy sheik book they sneaked peeks at when visiting Grandma back in the day.)

The only thing it's missing is more explicit descriptions of sex, although Hull leaves no doubt just what Diana Mayo has endured night after night at Ahmed Ben Hassan's brutally sensual hands:

Her pride was dying hard. Her mind travelled back slowly over the days and nights of anguished revolt, the perpetual clash of will against will, the enforced obedience that had made up this month of horror. A month of experience of such bitterness that she wondered dully how she still had the courage to rebel. For the first time in her life she had had to obey. For the first time in her life she was of no account. For the first time she had been made conscious of the inferiority of her sex.

(I bet her body betrayed her. I betcha.)

While I don't mind the more explicit stuff (though I tend to skim it more often than not), it was awesome to read a novel where the author was unable to come right out and say it, so she had to be more circumspect with just a hint of salacious description (and the book still got banned). It takes skill, and Hull succeeded superbly. I do wonder how readers filled in those blanks back then, in those long-ago days when porn was much harder to come by (and would most likely get you arrested if caught with it). They had to let their imaginations run riot! I sort of envy them, not having romance/porn right on hand that leaves nothing to the imagination. The reader gets a workout when they have to imagine those scenes, and I enjoyed the opportunity to do that.

Like this Rudolph Valentino fangirl found it to be a burden. Tchah! *As if!*

Not surprisingly, since this sold like hotcakes from its first appearance in print, Hollywood sniffed an opportunity and cranked out a version in 1921 with Valentino as Ahmed Ben Hassan. We all know that this role made Valentino a superstar (and utterly typecast him for the rest of his short career). I watched the movie in conjunction with reading the book and Hollywood *really* toned down Hassan's character to make him more romantic and palatable. In the book, he out and out rapes her, while in the movie the moment is delayed until her tears make him back away completely and feel like an utter heel for wanting to ravish her. There is no indication that he has done the dirty deed on her quivering British virgin flesh before the end of the movie, where he vows his love and she melts with joy.

So the book is **far** more bodice-ripping than the movie. And more violent, too. This book is plenty violent, with a high horse body count (one instance pure cruelty on Ahmed's part), and a wanton murder by the villain, Ibraheim Omair. There are numerous descriptions of blood and wounds, as well as a horse stumbling over a body, the sound of its hoof striking the skull. Little details like that which made a scene seem all the more vivid, whether it was during an action scene or something more quiet and domestic:

The Frenchman came back with coffee and cigarettes. He held a match for her, coaxing the reluctant flame with patience that denoted long experience with inferior sulphur.

The only carp I have about it is that Diana discovers she's in love with Ahmed too suddenly. It really ends up sounding like a case of Stockholm Syndrome. But I thought about it some more, and Ahmed's rape and possession of her is the only "love" she's known, and she clings to it so possessively in the end that she's driven to desperate measures at the thought of it being taken away from her. I don't think she intends it to provoke Ahmed into groveling for forgiveness, but it does and seals up the HEA quite tidily.

Diana's a pretty interesting character, not the normal uptight unmarried high society gal one sees in romances. Her mother died in childbirth, her father committed suicide shortly afterward, and so she was handed off to her 19-year old brother Aubrey to raise. Aubrey hates girls, likes to hunt and travel in luxury, and he didn't want to be put out by anybody (while expecting to have everyone inconvenience themselves on his account), so he raised her to be someone he wanted around him - sporting and sexless and utterly at his beck and call. Thus Diana was raised in an emotional void when it came to real love and affection. She appreciates beauty in songs and a desert sunset, but she honestly doesn't understand romantic notions or emotions. That's why when Ahmed rapes her, she feels totally and utterly crushed, because her beliefs didn't see her through that awful AWFUL night! And since it is her first experience with sexuality, it's all she has to work from.

(And I still think that pesky little body betrayed her. Her shame and self-loathing is really dwelled upon *sooooo* much.)

I'm going on at length here, but I really enjoyed this book way above and beyond what I expected!

As for Ahmed, is he ever a bossy, alpha bastard in love with his own awesomeness. Needless to say, I fell hard.

"Because I wanted you. Because one day in Biskra, four weeks ago, I saw you for a few moments, long enough to know that I wanted you. And what I want I take."

and

For a moment an ugly look crossed his face, and then he laughed again. "Hate me by all means, *ma belle*, but let your hatred be thorough. I detest mediocrity," he said lightly, as he passed on into the other room.

and

"You didn't suppose you were the first, did you?" he asked with brutal candour. "Don't look at me like that. They were not like you, they came to me willingly enough--too willingly. Allah!

How they bored me! I tired of them before they tired of me."

and

"The life of an Arab woman would hardly be to your taste. We teach our women obedience with a whip."

and

His hand reached out suddenly and he dragged her down into his arms again with a laugh. "And if I have, are you jealous? What if the nights I spent away from you were passed in my harem--what then?"

"Then may Allah put it into the heart of one of your wives to poison you so that you never come back," she said fiercely.

"Allah! So beautiful and so bloodthirsty," he said in bantering reproof. Then he turned her face up to his, smiling into her angry eyes with amusement. "I have no harem and, thanks be to Allah, no wives, *cherie*. Does that please you?"

"Why should I care? It is nothing to me," she replied sharply, with a vivid blush.

He held her closer, looking deeply into her eyes, holding them as he could when he liked, in spite of her efforts to turn them away--a mesmerism she could not resist.

"Shall I make you care? Shall I make you love me? I can make women love me when I choose."

He's a dictatorial asshole with skilled fingers (his hands are a real focus for poor Diana) and a soft, lethal voice in command of a tribe that would gladly die for him. I pretty much adored him.

I also really enjoyed the character of Raoul de Saint Hubert, Ahmed's French novelist friend who has an unrequited passion for Diana, but who gallantly sets aside his own desires when he knows his own cause is hopelessly lost. Even though he serves as the catalyst for Ahmed to re-examine his attitude towards Diana, he was a grand character in his own right.

So all in all, yeah, it's "quaint" and "mildly titillating" according to today's jaded readers, but it really is a rocking read. The action is intense, the description of the desert and Ahmed's tent-castle is really evocative and, while long-winded at times (the paragraphs really do go on forever in spots), it is still tightly-written. I got a real sense of the characters and setting and, most importantly, I understood Ahmed's hold over the emotionally crippled Diana. Can't ask for more from a romance than that.

To be honest, it really isn't all that different from later bodice rippers. All it requires is a bit of imagination for the dirty stuff.

The book can be downloaded for free [here](#).

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## Sellaphane says

Stephen King, Clive Barker--hell, even H.P. Lovecraft have all been dethroned by E.M. Hull. Seriously, in addition to being one of the most disgusting "romance novels" ever published, it's also downright horrifying and offensive as hell.

There's not a whole lot to the plot. Diana Mayo is a headstrong, fiercely independent young woman who pretty much gives societal conventions of the female gender the middle finger. In short, she's a boss-ass bitch (bitch bitch bitch...) and for the first 20 pages or so I really enjoyed her. Anyway, Diana wants to go on a little adventure into the desert before going to America with her jackass of a brother, who plans on getting married there and living the easy life. Big bro thinks the trip is a totally bad idea, Diana tells him to stuff it, and after her brother tells her how he hopes one day she'll find a man who can tame her (that should be the first indicator that things are about to go to some very dark places), Diana rides off with a guide and a few other people.

They're soon attacked by a group of Arabs and Diana is captured by one of them. She is taken back to their main camp, where she learns two things:

- 1) She's just been kidnapped by the sheik--the ruler of the men in his camp--and he wants her, consent or no.
- 2) Her rapist is kinda hot (you see where this is going?)

So the Sheik pretty much rapes Diana every night for a whole month. We're never shown any of this, since this book was written back in the days where all sex scenes faded to black before the main event. However, we are shown how traumatized Diana is by the whole ordeal. She experiences typical rape victim traits: she has flashbacks of the assaults, she hates herself and views herself as unclean, and she blames herself and her own weakness for being unable to stop the Sheik from raping her. It's pretty upsetting.

I'd heard about this book and the Rudolph Valentino movie before. I knew Diana was going to end up with her asshole rapist--I mean, her brooding and ~exotic~ Prince Charming. It still felt like a punch in the stomach and a kick to the head when it actually happened, though, mainly because it came out of fucking nowhere, and also because at that point Diana was running away from him and the Sheik had shot her horse (which was actually one of his horses she stole to run away from HER RAPIST) to cut her escape short. Aw, he loves her so much he's willing to unnecessarily kill animals to be with her.

So the moral of the story is essentially this: rape=love and is therefore okay. But later on in the book, Diana is about to be raped by ANOTHER sheik, but this one is all fat and gross and ew. So really I guess the moral is rape is only okay if your attacker is good-looking.

I could go on and on about how sick this book made me, but then this would probably end up being the longest review of any book on GR, so I hope I was able to give you the gist of my hatred for this toxic waste of a novel. The fact that so many people have given it 3, 4, even 5 star reviews honestly makes me want to cry.

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