



The Darling Strumpet

Gillian Bagwell

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From Reader Review The Darling Strumpet for online ebook

Kate L says

Full disclosure: I am a huge fan of Nell Gwynn, so basically any book with her at the center is alright by me. I think that Nell is such a rich and fascinating historical figure and The Darling Strumpet definitely did her justice. The most important thing for me, when I read a book focusing on Nell, is if the author properly catches the sense of humor, generosity and caring personality she was famous for. I think Ms. Bagwell has done so in spades. This book was just all around solid. The characters were rich and complex, the plot was paced well and the period language felt natural... You saw Nell for what she was: unashamed to do what she needed to do to support herself and her family (because let's face it, being born into poverty at that time left a woman with very few options other than the road Nell took). She was flawed, she was funny, she was faithful, she was generous, and last but not least, she was absolutely outrageous as gorgeously captured in this book...

To see the full review over on The Book Buff, click here: <http://thebookbuff.blogspot.com/2011/...>

-Kate the Book Buff

Orsolya says

I should warn you that Nell is my favorite historical figure and therefore I judge works on her quite harshly. With that being said, I still gave Gillian Bagwell's "The Darling Strumpet" a fair shot and didn't stop reading even when my eyes started rolling.

The harsh onslaught of graphic sexual encounters within the immediate first few pages is a bit hard to digest, even being aware of Nell's lifestyle. This sort of introduction to those readers who may not familiar with Nell can cause distance which may not be lapsed. Nell is likable enough, however, she lacks the usual spunk and wit displayed in other historical fiction novels about her life. It is difficult to decide whether to root for her or be disgusted in "The Darling Strumpet" because the lack of character development prevents a detailed feel and look into her psyche.

"The Darling Strumpet" took until page 60 to become a bit more bearable (meaning: less about sex); and emphasized the foreshadowing and introductions of Nell's theatrical career. However, speaking of foreshadowing, Bagwell exhausts the references to Lady Castlemaine and Nell's desire to be like her and command her position with the King. Even a reader unfamiliar with Nell could decipher that she would become on-par (and sometimes above) Barbara in the mistress world.

Not only is historical accuracy not 100% but also much of the historical backdrop is lacking in terms of imagery and actually "living" the era. Oftentimes, it felt like a story with Nell simply in it versus her actual life story. I suppose "The Darling Strumpet" is more fiction than history. This is also weakened by the plot which is choppy and at times and too rushed. Plus, in order to explain the historical elements and lay the foundation for future events; Bagwell uses the method of having characters "gossip". Again, the events aren't "lived" and are instead merely discussed. This is supplemented by odd storylines such as fictional murders and mysteries. These simply don't fit into the story, don't add any essence, and are only briefly mentioned but then never explored. The characters involved are usually abruptly cut-off.

The effort to make Nell witty falls short. Other characters in “The Darling Strumpet” comment on her spunk but it doesn’t make sense because she is not feisty in the novel. Basically, something is missing from Nell’s usual personality.

Issues also arise with the writing style which is too modern and contains literary style which is one-dimensional and more YA than adult-oriented and thus, lacks a certain depth. Consistency is a problem as the enjoyment factor is up-and-down. For instance, the theater descriptions are always more hearty which exposes Bagwell’s own possible extensive interest in the topic and less in others.

As mentioned earlier, the sex scenes (which include threesomes) are a bit much to handle if you possess some lady-like qualities. Despite Nell’s “whore” background, it is a degrading portrayal and I’ve read better. If this was my first Nell book, I wouldn’t be as attracted to her. In terms of other characters, Charles Hart is a “good guy” in “The Darling Strumpet” with Nell leaving him broken-hearted. Usually, Hart is a promiscuous character and thus this alternate view can either upset or entice readers. Also skewed is the missing elements of relationships (whether positive or negative) between Nell and other female actresses like Moll Davis and Beck Marshall.

Wondering about the King and Nell? Charles and Nell lack chemistry and (AGAIN) the witty Nell we know and love is lost. These interactions between Nell and Charles should have been the meat and potatoes in “The Darling Strumpet” but they fall flat and Nell is child-like and under-developed.

The ending of “The Darling Strumpet” was rushed and without much substance. Every other page consisted of a character dying off, clearly to prep for Nell’s own death. It felt like Bagwell ran out of a plot.

Overall, “The Darling Strumpet” is not the best portrayal/glimpse into Nell or historically worthy. I wouldn’t necessarily want a first-time Nell reader to be acquainted with her in this light.

Stephanie Dray says

From the lovely cover to the vibrant characters inside, this book was delightful. I’ve read other books about Nell Gwynn, but this one was more personal and charming in every way. Bagwell creates (or recreates) a girl of enormous spirit who isn’t sentimental about using her assets to get ahead in a world where the deck is stacked against her. I appreciated Nell’s matter-of-factness about many of the deeds she performs and, really, about who she was. Well-written, imaginative and fun! This was a surprisingly quick read.

Caz says

This is one of the very few books I had to leave unfinished. The detailed descriptions of TEN-year-old Nell selling herself so she could buy herself some ribbons for her hair and something to eat just squicked me out. And then, she basically suffers a gang-rape at the hands of a group of boys who offered her money and then refused to pay.

Nell losing her virginity at such a young age may well be historically accurate. I know that girls were married young and that life was tough. But surely the author could have found a way to convey the

information in a less graphic manner.

Perhaps having daughters around this age skewers my viewpoint, but I felt physically sick and couldn't read any more.

Misfit says

This is not for me. Prostitute or no, I do not need that much detail to grasp what she had to do. Less is more.

Amy Bruno says

When I first saw mention of the upcoming release of *The Darling Strumpet*, a novel on Nell Gwynn, I knew immediately I had to read it. You see, she's my favorite royal mistress and I try to read everything I can on her. Being a debut novel I wasn't sure what to expect, but I need not have worried because author Gillian Bagwell blew me away!!

The Darling Strumpet recounts Nell's impressive rise from the streets of London to the most coveted position in the land, that of mistress to King Charles II, the Merry Monarch and tells it in such an entertaining way that the reader is kept in absolute rapture from start to finish! Nell's spirit was captured perfectly by Bagwell and this book just reminded me why I adore Nell so much. Her tenacity, keen wit and charm, big heart and refusal to make amends or feel ashamed of her role as royal mistress make her so likable, you can easily see why she was a favorite of Charles II.

Being that the novel is just as juicy as the orange on the cover and with knowing that there are many YA readers that visit this blog, I feel I would be remiss in not disclaiming that there are some pretty racy scenes. They didn't bother me so much and I didn't feel they overwhelmed the story but they are pretty detailed, so I just thought I would mention it.

I enthusiastically recommend *The Darling Strumpet* and if her debut novel is any indication of the fabulousness we can look forward to in future books by Gillian Bagwell then consider me hooked!!

Amber says

Nell Gwynn was a poverty-stricken seventeenth century Londoner who began her whirlwind of a life as first a prostitute, then as an orange-girl-turned-comedic-actress, before becoming the mistress of King Charles II of England. She became well-known throughout her acting career by the common people and the nobility. It was her more affluent contacts that led her to the king's bed. She was witty, charming, and pretty. Nell was well-loved by the common people because she was one of them and her dislike for politics along with her lack of desire for power endeared her to the king and the nobles closest to him. They all found Nell to be a genuinely kind-hearted person. Out of the other three mistresses Charles had during Nell's lifetime, she is usually made out to be the only one who truly loved him. I have only read books from Nell's point-of-view, and historical fiction at that, so I cannot outright say this is historical fact, but it seems like there is truth in it. There is one thing for sure: King Charles was not lacking in virility or charisma.

Read the full review [here](#).

Barb says

Two and a half stars.

I love this cover, I think it's gorgeous, the title is perfect and Gillian Bagwell is obviously well versed in the history of this period.

But I have to be honest, I wanted to love Nell and see the way all of England loved her. But I didn't feel England's love or anyone else's love.

The novel starts out strong enough when Nell, a poor oyster monger, decides to leave the home of her bitter and unloving mother for the whorehouse where her sister sells herself. Nell is a clever plucky girl with a sharp wit and soon is selling oranges in the Theater Royal.

I enjoyed the details of Nell's life when she worked selling oranges and when she worked as an actress but I didn't feel that any of the characters came to life, not even Nell.

There was a vast breadth of history incorporated into this novel, but in my opinion, very little depth. There was a fair amount of graphic sex, which I think was sometimes appropriate given the period and the subject of the novel. However, there were times when it felt like the sex was too much and a bit on the gratuitous side.

There were two scenes that in my opinion were way over the top and had me rolling my eyes a bit. One has to do with Nell's skill at love making and the other has to do with the way a particular revenge was taken. I didn't care for the story-line involving Jack, the evil tough, from Mrs. Ross's brothel. The drama created by him felt overblown and incongruous with the rest of the story.

If the character development and the emotional depth of the characters had been greater I would have enjoyed this story much more. It often felt like the author was telling rather than showing the reader. A variety of people told Nell how much she was loved by everyone and by all of England, but again I didn't feel the love.

It seemed like the author was having a bit of fun writing this novel and I can appreciate that. Nell Gwynn is obviously a historical figure near and dear to her heart. Perhaps if I had a greater familiarity to the politics and the players during the reign of Charles II I would have appreciated this novel more. Though I did enjoy the story more when the characters grew older and had diminished libidos.

Marissa says

I cannot praise this book enough. Bagwell took on quite a challenge. It is very difficult, in my estimation, to write a novel that covers an entire lifetime, albeit a short one like Nell Gwynn's. It's strange because I didn't perceive that I was becoming attached to the characters within the story until something happened to them

and there I was, blubbering hysterically as if I knew them myself. I highly recommend this novel to not only lovers of historical novels but to anyone and everyone who will read it. It is the perfect historical novel about one of the most lovable characters in history.

Kristy says

Well, this one was definitely different from most of the other historical-english time-piece fiction books I've read.....

The HOW so, you ask?!?!?!?

Nell was not raised in court or raised to be a mistress, she literally grew up on the streets selling oysters.

She landed in the prostitution business to get out of her home life, and the King still willingly bedded her.

She was not whiney or mean, not the Anne Boelyn type.

She did, in fact, become a mistress, but had no aspirations to become the Kings'.

She actually Loved the King and did not expect much in return. She was not a gold digger.

She worked as an actress... gasp.

She had MANY other lovers before the King and this did not result in having her beheaded or killed in any fashion.

All she really wanted was to be loved and have somewhere to live and money enough to provide for her children. She rarely asked the King for anything.

There is not a ton of jealousy going on (or atleast not as much as others) between the mistresses of the King.

I <3 King Charles.... he might be the nicest King to his women I've read yet!!! I do hate that they can never be Faithful to just one woman.....

Blah, this was not bad. It was not spectacular either. I'd say id you're a fan of Allison Weir, you'd probably like this one.

I'm not sure how historically accurate this one is... something tells me it's a bit of a stretch though.....

Sidenote: From the cover and the title, you'd think this is a raging sex fest... and in the beginning, you'd be correct, but if you give it about halfway through it calms WAYYYYYYY down! But, needless to say this one is not for the kiddos!

Gillian Bagwell says

Since I wrote it, I must give it a good review! But in all fairness, others who have read it agree with me!

Heather C says

I kept putting off reading this book for awhile because I had heard some mixed reviews about it and I wanted to make sure I was in the right mindset to read this one as I knew it had some scandalous scenes. Let me say, if you are one easily turned off by sex scenes in novels, you may not want to read this one – as they are aplenty.

The sex scenes are basically the first thing that you encounter in this book – from about page 4 right through the first half of the book – and they can be pretty descriptive. While there is a lot of sex in the novel – it did make sense as Bagwell takes us through Nell’s life from her childhood through her death. She was a prostitute and eventually a king’s mistress – those details alone make it required somewhere in the text.

Bagwell creates a world that feels so real to a reader. Even for someone who is unfamiliar with this time and place they would easily find themselves at home in this vivid world. The descriptions of the people and the places are absolutely gorgeous. The characters are well constructed. No one is purely one thing or another but very three dimensional. Nowhere was that seen more so than in the lead character of Nell. You can feel all of her emotions and really empathize with her plights. I even shed a few tears for her at the end of the novel which really surprised me as I did not realize how much I enjoyed her.

My favorite scenes were those that took place in the theatres or on stage. You could tell how absolutely in love with acting and the stage Nell was. Even when she eventually leaves it she frequently thinks about going back. We get a lot of information about plays that were performed and how they were performed and the atmosphere of the playhouse. Bagwell certainly did her research.

Gillian Bagwell creates a world that literally jumps off the page and envelops you as a reader. No stone is left unturned and no detail is too small to be included. A truly wonderful atmospheric read. I am interested in getting into her second book, *The September Queen*, soon.

This book was received for review from the publisher - I was not compensated for my opinions and the above is my honest review.

Catherine says

How have I not heard of Nell Gwynn before this? I recognized the names of most of her contemporaries, but somehow she has skated under my radar until now. Luckily I was able to snag the copy offered to Fiction Vixen and immerse myself in Nell’s life during the era of King Charles II.

The book opens in 1660 and a young Nell has finally tired of her life as an oyster girl. She’s decided to follow in her sister Rose’s footsteps and go to work at Madam Ross’s. I’m not clear on how old she is exactly, but we find out when she’s interviewing (sort of) with Madam Ross that she has only just started her courses. That very fact makes her life that much harder to read about. She doesn’t come across as a little girl though. Throughout the book she seems much older than her years and I constantly found myself surprised when another birthday was mentioned because I kept forgetting that she was so young.

I felt the writing and characterization in the beginning section was the roughest of the book. Nell’s decision to become a prostitute seemed willy-nilly and the way she jumped into her role of seductress searching for her first customer just seemed off. The lesson in hard knocks given to her by a group of young men on the day of King Charles’s return seemed designed to cast her in a sympathetic light, but it didn’t really work for me. I felt bad, yeah, but I also was frustrated by her attitude and actions.

The next day when she’s at Madam Ross’s waiting to be chosen we’re told that her seemingly nonchalant attitude of the day before had been fueled by hunger and desperation and later by drink. I just felt that if that was really supposed to have been her motivations it was clumsily done. The only reason I knew that was because she thought it to herself.

Luckily, the author hit her stride once Nell had been at Madam Ross's for a while. I found it a little slow at times during this period, but that was just because the nature of Nell's work made her days a bit repetitive. I really liked that along with the benefits like the pretty clothes and freedom from her mother, the downside of Nell's life was shown. At one point after a celebration in honor of the royal marriage of Charles and Catherine the girls were so busy that they didn't even bother to leave the rooms because the line of men waiting their turns outside their rooms was so long! Can you imagine that? Ouch!

My favorite parts were when Nell was acting. I loved seeing the camaraderie between the actors and the competition the King's Company had with the Duke's Company. I also really liked learning little facts about the theater world. I loved hearing about the reopening of the theaters after 18 years and the rise of women playing female parts instead of the traditional male actors.

The theater was also the stomping ground of two of my favorite characters in the book, Charles Hart and the Earl of Rochester. I loved Charles because he was really the nicest character in the whole book. He and Nell actually seemed to have a bond that I was sorry to see eventually break. Rochester was just a wicked, fascinating man who was written as an eventual dear friend to Nell. It was nice seeing him in that role as I usually only see his self destructive, libertine ways cast. I loved one of the scenes he had with Nell early in their relationship soon after they had become lovers.

"You can give a man a quick ride that leaves him happy or a night of play that tires him. But there is more to learn. You can give a man such pleasure, not just in his body but in his mind, his soul, that you become a drug. So that he will crave you. So that his bollocks will ache and give him no peace until his prick is once more master of that smooth warmth. And I can train you, pretty pet. Do you want that?"

Nell found that her heart was beating and her loins were on fire. She looked up at Rochester and found she could hardly breathe.

"Yes, my lord."

"Good. On your knees. No, off the bed. For this is your god, and you must worship it."

I just thought that last line was particularly apt and powerful. He also said:

"This bed is your stage," Rochester said. "From such a stage you could do anything."

Which was another great line when applied to Nell and her life.

I really liked how the author showed Nell having stray meetings with the king at various times in her life. It really helped build a nice foundation for their eventual relationship. I also felt that the author did a great job of including important factual events and political happenings in the background. It really gave me a nice frame of reference for when things were actually occurring.

The last quarter of the book was very sad for me. It was rough watching Nell lose such important people. I

though the author did an excellent job showing her pain and heartbreak though. I never felt that any of it was gratuitously included and it was very sad watching Nell try to cope again and again.

Although I really enjoyed this book I don't think I'd ever want to walk in Nell's shoes. She had a hard life and I was sorry to see her never be valued as much as I wanted her to be. She came a long way in life, and she was content, but I was a little sad she never got the happy ending I hoped she would. Alas, that's usually the case when I read books based off of real historical figures.

Review originally posted at Fiction Vixen.

Mrs Giggles says

Gillain Bagwell's debut effort *The Darling Strumpet* was first published in trade paperback format back in 2011. Hilariously enough - or maybe not, depending on how much you value your \$7.99 - the mass market paperback that I have in my hands declares this story as "historical romance" on the spine. There is even a tagline on the gorgeous cover - "A novel of Nell Gwynn, who captured the heart of England and King Charles II" - to make it sound like this is the literary upgrade of an average romance novel, where reading it will make you feel smarter and more profound about love.

Well, first of all, this is a romanticized tale of Nell Gwynn's life, yes, but it is only romantic in that Nell tells me that she's in love with King Charles II. That man is juggling her and three other mistresses at the same time, and he never tells her or behaves in a manner to suggest that he's in love with her. The "love" thing happens in the later half of the story. The first half is the story of Nell's rise from nobody to mattress queen, with some sex scenes, including a threesome. reminiscent of those sexy times Bertrice Small usually writes, only Ms Bagwell's sexy times are tamer compared to Ms Small's. Oh, and King Charles II dies in the end, and so does Nell. So, if you are expecting a romance novel, as in a romance novel and not a soap opera with a tacked on ending that tries to emulate some kind of "When Evita and Rose DeWitt Bukater compare who has the bigger kind of tearjerker ending" melodrama, then you may want to wave that \$7.99 somewhere else.

Nell Gwynn, in history, is supposed to be this witty, beautiful, and popular actress whose greatest claim to fame is that she is a long time mistress of King Charles II. Alas, historical fiction tends to treat her like a placeholder for political events during her time, and this one is no different. Worse, this version of Nell is flat, boring, and devoid of any memorable trait. I always assumed that Nell would have a pretty good degree of cunning to retain King Charles II's interest as well as survive the dangerous political currents of his court, but from Ms Bagwell's version of Nell, it's more akin of Nell just somehow stumbling to the last page by default.

This Nell shows little actual wit, and the few "witty" scenes are lifted from previous anecdotes in history, such as Nell's famous line to King Charles II and his brother the Duke of York, "But this is the poorest company I ever was in!" or her line to a bunch of enraged mob who mistook her carriage for that of Louise de Kérouaille, "You are mistaken; I am the Protestant whore." Left to her own devices, Ms Bagwell's idea of "wit" for Nell often falls flat. This Nell's wit, therefore, is an informed attribute. I don't see the vaunted wit; the author just insists that it's there... somewhere.

The author also doesn't seem to know what she wants her version of Nell to be. I think Ms Bagwell just wants Nell to be liked, so she has Nell becoming this weepy creature that is often carried along by the people

around her. This Nell has no interest in politics or anything at all. Her greatest concern, whenever some political disturbance takes place, is when the theater would reopen. When the man she is living with, Charles Hart, comes home to complain bitterly about King Charles II shutting down the theater after a play offended that man, Nell's response is to ask Hart whether he wants to practice his lines with her now that he's home. Nell is this... girl-child thing... that manages to waddle all the way to the last page without having to display any depth in her character.

The only time Nell actually does something on her own is to leave her mother and become a prostitute in the author's version of Nell's teenage years. Even then, her sister does all the actual work to help Nell get set up at the neighborhood posh brothel. That's understandable, given that Nell is in her early teens, but Nell's passive character becomes exasperating to follow when she grows older and she's supposed to be even a little shrewd and smart. But no, the guys are the ones who pursue her, and she gets passed around until, how lucky, the King thinks that she's hot and decides to keep her as his mistress.

The Duke of Buckingham, the guy who becomes Nell's procurer in his ambitions to find a woman to supplant King Charles II's current mistress Barbara Palmer, is portrayed here as an elderly friend and confidante. No mention of Nell wanting money from Charles, because this would distort the author's agenda to portray Nell as a gold-hearted tart, and no mention of Nell's cunning efforts to secure titles for her illegitimate children. No, Nell is this selfless, giving sweetheart who only wants the love of the king, and who only does something when she gets jealous about his other women, and even then, in the end all women are happy to share him because they all know he has a place for each of them in his heart.

No, no mention of Nell possibly dying from syphilis - she dies of a broken heart, poor thing, after Charles took his kingly affections to the afterlife. No mention either of Nell leaving some money in her will to Newgate prisoners, because the author would prefer her sweet, saintly Nell leaving money for poor people without criminal records instead.

Perhaps knowing that all that bland one-dimensional sweetness will put me to sleep, the author has some half-baked sex scenes thrown in, although these scenes only serve to either show me how every good guy wants Nell from first sight because she's so amazing or how every bad guy wants Nell and turns her into a victim of their rampant beastly lusts. Nell's exchange of her body for financial security is made so pretty by showing me how those guys give her money willingly because she's just so witty, beautiful, awesome, and sexy and she's only doing it because she really needs the money.

Sigh.

Interesting political events are glossed over quickly, and the later half of the story is like a history book chopped up with all the readable bits thrown out to be replaced by Nell making cow eyes at Charles. The author for some reason introduces a cartoon crazy guy that shows up every few years to terrorize Nell, and even then, this problem is solved by the men around Nell. Nell, like she always does, just cries and acts like the most tragic (and sexy, don't forget that, oh, and also witty) heroine in the land.

The Darling Strumpet is pretty amazing in that the author manages to use over 300 pages to turn one of the most popular figures in Restoration England history into a singularly bland and lifeless thing with no discernible personality throughout the whole story. Nell is every man's favorite personality-free mattress of love, King Charles II is a pimp daddy with more bastards than the entire NBA roster, but their love is so pure that when Nell dies, they meet again in heaven, along with Nell's ex-lovers turned BFFs, where they'd presumably have a holy orgy forever as Céline Dion belts out their love anthem, specially composed by James Horner just to cherish this beauteous love for all time.

Moppet says

The Darling Strumpet opens in May 1660. As the restored King Charles II makes his official entry into London, the young Nell Gwynn is taking the first steps in a career which will take her from oyster seller, to prostitute, orange girl, actress, courtesan and finally to royal mistress. At this stage in her life, sex is a means to an end for Nell, but Gillian Bagwell conveys her sensual nature by describing her pleasure in eating a hot pie she buys after selling her virginity for sixpence.

Nell's life as an actress and Restoration playgirl will be familiar territory to anyone who has read Kathleen Winsor's *Forever Amber*, but whereas Winsor was interested in the rivalry between the actresses, Gillian Bagwell focuses on the camaraderie of the theatre, which becomes a true home and a second family for Nell. Nell's roles also allow her to create a public image and to win popularity.

Forever Amber, for all its racy reputation, never ventures beyond the bedroom door – I remember being particularly frustrated when Amber breezes in after her first night with the king – to which the reader is not made privy! By contrast, *The Darling Strumpet* is refreshingly frank, and while the sex scenes are not just vanilla (there's definitely some chocolate and raspberry ripple in there too) they are both well written and true to the time and the historical record. The Restoration, at least for the court, was a period of hedonism and sexual freedom comparable to the Swinging Sixties three hundred years later – and Nell makes the most of it. She is a born survivor who has to learn to trust her head over her heart, yet she never loses her compassion for those still mired in the poverty into which she was born.

The atmosphere of Restoration London is beautifully rendered in this richly textured novel. Sedan chairs, frost fairs, hot wassail, changeable silks – the details on every page evoke time and place, while the dialogue strikes the right note between authenticity and accessibility. The Earl of Rochester in particular has some wonderful lines, as does King Charles, whose relationship with Nell is realistically drawn. *The Darling Strumpet* packs the events of twenty-five years into fewer than four hundred pages, and while I found it enjoyable and very readable, the relatively limited page space and the breaking up of the narrative into short scenes meant that it sometimes seemed a little breathless. I find it easier to engage emotionally with longer scenes and one in particular, Charles's last meeting with Nell, has stuck in my mind as particularly moving.

I would definitely recommend *The Darling Strumpet* to anyone looking for a rich and spicy winter read – thanks to Berkley for providing me with a review copy.