



The Drowning of Arthur Braxton

Caroline Smailes

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An urban fairy tale from the acclaimed author of *99 Reasons Why*.

Arthur Braxton runs away from school.

He hides out in an abandoned building, an old Edwardian bathhouse.

He discovers a naked woman swimming in the pool.

From this point on, nothing will ever be the same.

The Drowning of Arthur Braxton is an unflinching account of the pain and trauma of adolescence and of how first love can transform the most unhappy of lives into something miraculous. It is a dark and brooding modern fairy tale from one of our most gifted writers.

The Drowning of Arthur Braxton Details

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Author : Caroline Smailes

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From Reader Review The Drowning of Arthur Braxton for online ebook

Angelica says

So weird. So good.

Emma says

Okay so before this review gets complicated, its one of those books where you love it...but it is a little bit fucked up. You sort of think to yourself "am I allowed to like this book because its so messed up?", and my answer is yes, yes you can because this truly was a spectacular read!

There's been so much buzz around this novel that I gave in and downloaded it from the Kindle store (mainly because I couldn't wait a few days to order the physical copy because I'm demanding and lazy-oops!).

This book carries with it a dark plot and attached with some awfully messed up characters. Sadly I don't want to give too much away of this book as its too good to spoil!

I love the historical context to this book, where its basically set in old Victoria bathhouses in the north of England- and the back of the book it does tell you a great deal of the superstitions that arose during this time period.

You first meet Laurel who gets a job at The Oracle (name of the bathhouse), where she works alongside three "water healers". All three are unique in a sense that they're messed up people with a great deal of spiritual beliefs. What keeps you intrigued with this book up to the very end is what happens to Laurel, you're given a taster of who she is and then you're left on a cliffhanger which isn't wrapped up until all the loose ends begin to tie together and you're enlightened!

The book is set out in third person with each character giving their perspectives as well as starting from the past and ending with the present, you begin to wonder why each chapter tells you a name of a person and when they've gone missing- the outcome may not be what you're immediately thinking to begin with!

You meet Arthur who is troubled teenager, bullied in school and with a dysfunctional family. He finds comfort in visiting The Oracle as he finds love with the beautiful naked lass, Delphina. Their love story isn't for me like any other, its tragic and yet so wonderful all at once.

Some of you who have read this book maybe thinking- "Has she gone mad? This book was so sad!" Yes it is a sad book but the sadness in a way is happy. I'm not entirely sure that makes sense, maybe I've gone mad from reading this book? Who knows! But it works out to be a sad but happy ending to an extent.

All I can say is, I can't begin to express how well written this book is and Smailes to me is such a creative writer. She kept me glued to this book throughout and despite the heartbreak and corruptness of her characters, this book is simply beautiful.

Rachel Louise Atkin says

I thought this book was amazing. There such a mix of themes here - coming of age, fairytales, magical realism. Smailes puts them all together in a way which means they aren't mismatched, and I instead it becomes a compelling, very Northern novel that I had to give five stars.

It is about a boy called Arthur Braxton who one day finds a girl swimming in an abandoned pool, and that's all I'm going to say. It's one of those stories best gone into blind, because the more confused you are at the beginning, the more you benefit from the way everything ties together at the end.

The characters were brilliant, and matched with the prose they embodied a very Northern voice. Smailes also uses different forms to speak for each character which shows she has thought a lot about how she wants this story to be told.

Overall, I just loved reading this. It was written so well that I couldn't wait to get back to it and read about Arthur and his angsty teenage life. This is a must for anyone who likes fairytales and teenage fiction.

Essie Fox says

Modern day tales of the complexities within dysfunctional families - the realities of love, life, death and sex - are entwined with the myths of ancient Greece in a story of love, loss, betrayal and redemption.

Mehl says

[(although that did change quite quickly when Martin kept harassi

Suanne Laqueur says

I'm between three and four stars. This was one weird book. But I kind of liked it. Actually I'm at a total loss, I'm going to have to think about it and mambo dogface for the banana patch.....

Emma says

Review by Beth

This is a novel which will take your breath away and stay with you for a very long time. I finished it last week and I still keep bringing sections of it back and thinking about what could have been.

Despite the title the novel is more than just Arthur's story – it's put together in layers and flips forwards and backwards in time giving the reader glimpses of the whole picture which is finally drawn both beautifully and tragically together at the end.

All is not what it seems as the urban grittiness of reality meshes with the spiritual world of the water healers and the mysterious Delphina who completely takes over Arthur's world. His mind moves from his terrible school, his broken father and his absent mother to his impulsive need to spend as much time as is physically possible in the abandoned, near derelict bathhouse, to be near Delphina.

This novel works because it's a mash-up of possibly the most urban, modern landscape you could imagine in Manchester with the ethereal and mythical qualities brought out by the bathhouse, the history of the water healers and their tales. A further layer comes in the retelling of several classical Greek myths – Castor and Pollux, Medea and Jason and Apollo and Daphne. All tales were beautiful but I think the retelling of Medea and Jason through Maddie is the most hard-hitting and took my breath away.

Smailes writes in a way which just connects with me, her style just fits with the way my brain works and it's something which means I believe in the characters deeply and have an emotional involvement which is very rare for me. This novel will make you cry, take your breath away and I encourage everybody to at least give it a go.

Blair says

The Oracle is an old bathhouse in a northern seaside town, believed by the locals to have magical properties. Three 'water-healers' work there, and the book opens with the narrative of a teenage girl named Laurel, who has been employed there as an assistant-cum-receptionist. Some years later, a boy called Arthur Braxton breaks into the building - now dilapidated - while attempting to escape from a group of classmates who are bullying him, and meets a beautiful girl who is swimming in one of the pools. Arthur is the butt of his so-called friends' jokes, has no money and struggles to look after his mentally ill father, but when he meets Delphina, his life is transformed, despite the odd circumstances of her life and her strange group of friends. The Oracle is in danger of demolition, and Arthur finally finds himself with a purpose: to save the building and make Delphina happy. However, mystical forces surround the place, and while they may protect Arthur from those who seek to harm him, they will also make his mission more difficult.

From my holiday notebook: Odd story, but creative storytelling. Billed as an 'urban fairytale' which is accurate, but was perhaps a little too 'urban' for me. Told mainly in dialect which I don't mind but it seemed a bit inconsistent at times and the constant swearing (and Arthur going on about his bloody hard-on all the time) got on my nerves. Also, the narrative voices weren't different enough from each other, although I did like the different narrative techniques the author used. The main problem was that I couldn't believe whatsoever that Arthur's feelings for Delphina could ever have been love. They were both so young and his dominant feeling towards her was obviously lust, based almost wholly on her looks. I did wonder if this was what you were *meant* to think, but coupled with the complete failure of literally every other relationship in the book, it's giving a very bleak message if so. Overall I enjoyed this but was expecting a lot more as I've seen quite a few five-star reviews.

Additional notes: I can't say I disliked this story, but I had quite a few reservations about it. I was particularly troubled by the depiction of sex, sexuality and relationships: I felt like there were quite a few disturbing situations (Martin's abuse of Laurel, the fact that Arthur's motives towards Delphina were so blatantly sexual, the odd and sudden thing with Arthur's dad and 'Stella') yet these weren't really resolved as part of the story's conclusion, so I had no idea what (if any) message the book was trying to convey. I also couldn't remember how it ended without going back and checking, which might be because I've read so much within the past week, but also seems a decent indication that I didn't enjoy it all that much. Crucially, I

didn't like Arthur and I felt sure Delphina deserved better, so I wasn't exactly invested in their relationship. I did like the surreal details of the plot - the Oracle itself and the characters who lived there, especially Kester and Pollock - but I'm afraid I have to disagree with what seems to be popular opinion: for me, this was no more than average.

Clair Coult says

This was a bit of a Marmite book for me, there were parts I absolutely loved and other parts I didn't really enjoy at all. I really liked the narrative style of Laurel and Arthur. It was refreshing to hear young voices speaking so freely, although some readers might be offended by their use of strong language. I wasn't so keen on the story suddenly changing to script format. That didn't really work for me. I felt removed from the story, like I was watching a play rehearsal rather than reading a novel.

The writing was descriptive and beautiful but there were a couple of occasions where it got a little repetitive and flat. I also struggled with the actions of Maddie and Laurel. As the mother of a stillborn daughter I found parts of the novel particularly painful and difficult to read, despite them being very sensitively written.

I have to admit it wasn't quite the book I expected it to be. It is beautifully dark and mysterious and on the whole I did enjoy it, but perhaps it wasn't the best choice for a holiday read.

Tiffany says

I just did not get this book. I loved the first part - Laurels story, but once we get to Arthur's story, I felt lost. It was like had been left behind whilst the story rambled on.

I also hated Arthur. He is portrayed as a drippy, moany teenage boy who can only has one thing on his mind. As realistic as this may be, it does not make for a good protagonist in my opinion. I spent most the book wishing he'd just shut up.

By the end of the book, I still felt like I had only been told half of the story. Characters just seemed to disappear without a trace which made the plot seem weak and desperate to me. This book just did not resonate with me at all which is a real shame.

Ella says

I'm so confused?

I guess if you like one dimensional characters, prose switching to script format for no apparent reason and "twatting, cock, I sound so gay" being repeated a million times you'd give it five stars?

Mona says

This could have been such an eerie, climatic modern fairy tale about love and abuse. It could have been quoted as genius among those extraordinary that change the archetypes of literature. When I close my eyes I

see the water oracle, hear the trills of magic Maddies voice, the splash of Delphina's performing her beautiful pirouettes. But sadly such a wasted potential.

Let me use the fully allowed language of the author : Its utter fucked up twatting bollocks! Shocking, dark, hopeless, nerve - wracking. Wow! The drowning of AB gave me some language lesson being a non English reader. Was it all necessary? I guess, to a certain extent. Is it our future of literature trend to shock, leave you angry and disgusted? Or is it a trick to sell better, stay in your head for longer? I guess it does those three well enough. So kudos to that, and also for being well written, thought through to keep you turning the pages to discover how ends this absolute "fuckupness". Is the whole society these days shifting towards collective guilt to find solace in imaginary suffering or what? My biggest concern is that according to the story, the likes of Arthur, Laura, Maddie have no place in a real world. They do not fit, so end confined to imagined reality, living happily ever after in " the other world"? Is this what they deserve? So basically if I am being bullied, sexually abused, depressed, or for some other reason do not fit in, my only way out is to find myself " the other world"? And maybe take a rope, cut my veins, jump off the cliff? Is that what's suggested here? Clearly, it is, or that's at least what I felt after reading last sentence. The, in some way happy ending refers too much to something imagined and unreal. Arthur's father in the end experienced "shaggy" happiness, so could his son. But " maybes " its the level of happy for an outcast Arthur. That is kind of sad. I certainly do not suggest happy ending here, as this would obviously sound like a farse. Perhaps more realistic finish of this whole bitterness would at least give a glimpse of hope. Unless what constitutes happiness is subjective meaning to everyone. I am aware this is not a reading for everyone. The title itself gives enough clues to stay clear for some. But still what BA actually want to say? Portray abuse, mental issues, guilty getting away with their crimes? All those characters imposing evil, except for Tommy Clarke and his merry bunch are actually adults. The three water healers to me represent passiveness to something that could have been prevented. To me the kind serial killer Silver is the worse out of them all. His explanations and sorry for being gutless, baffling words " Run for your life!" simply do not reveal enough for those poor souls to change the course of their sad fate. Yes, I know, he says : "whats written within our future cannot pass us by"? Does it really? Or is it simply a way to show the crime of responsible adults, and those who turn blind eye to the wrongdoings of others. I guess and hope that's the intention of the author. Are Laura and Arthur really a landmark of today's teenagers? Many would disagree with the author's vision. But perhaps it is indeed an averaged picture of a young adult these days obsessed with facebook and almost nothing else. All Arthur is thinking about when looking at beautiful lass Delphina is his "boner", touching her tits etc. Well, I get it, that's his hormones playing like a harp on his manhood. Is that all there is in him? Kinda disappointing. The seriousness of some characters' stories is a bit flat to me. The author allows enough pages for Delphina or even quite shallow Arthur to dwell on certain things, but leaves a couple of paragraphs to describe the crimes and whys of others. All these abuse stories sound a bit like taken from a tatty magazine cleverly smuggled within the mystery and poetry of the book. In my opinion the overall message of " the drowning of BA" is not clear enough , especially for a young adult. It left me absolutely heartbroken. There is plenty of distressing stories in literature regarded as good. They equally shockingly describe evil of human being, eg " A thousand of splendid suns" by Khaled Hosseini that leaves a spark of hope at the end of portrayed "fuckupness". Or if not hopeful, at least genius of literature " Lord of the Flies" by William Golding, an absolute must to read for everyone.

PS, I have a little suggestion here. If the focus of the book was just ONE of those employed disturbing stories, if it was skilfully and more subtly entwined within the beauty of such an original setting, the Drowning of Arhtur Braxton could have been much better.

Madeleine Johansson says

Truly a brilliant story that I would not hesitate giving 6/5 stars.

If you are afraid of uncensored and brutal honesty, this book is not for you.

It's a very different story from many I have read, where every page the events surprised me. There was not a single dull moment.

Beginning with the point of view of Laurel, Smailes kicks off with an ordinary tale that quickly escalates, raising a lot of questions. Following with Arthur's perspective, I had a lot of fun, rejoicing in his excessive, but humorous, use of the word "twat". The first half of the book is in no terms a sugarcoated romance novel, but it was not until the second half I realised the novel's true nature, and that of the characters.

I truly had a brilliant time reading this book. I cried and I felt sick, I laughed and I related to characters. I wanted to throw up, and I was angry. I had the best time, and I would recommend it a hundred times over.

However, although the characters are young, I do not recommend this for a younger audience. It contains a lot of bad language, and covers topic of suicide, bullying and depression. But if you are a teen or older, I hope you do give this one a shot, because it will leave you wanting more, and it will leave you questioning.

I will now buy every other book that Caroline Smiles has written, and then I will be first in line when she writes another one. Truly brilliant. I salute you.

Lowenna says

After watching a YouTube video, I was dying to get a copy in my hands. I had really high hopes after hearing great things but after finishing the book, felt somewhat unsatisfied. In other words, my thirst for this book wasn't quite quenched. I enjoyed the first part of the book where we follow Laurel's journey, warming slightly to her character. The reader then goes on to Arthur's story. This was when my avidity began to lessen. I found Arthur to be very much a stereotypical teenage boy. Although I felt that the author had conveyed his character well through her writing and his inner monologue, I found the writing style, at times, rather exasperating. The use of *words* such as 'probs' and 'maybes' was, to me, rather irritating. Furthermore, the amount of swearing in Arthur's story was, in my eyes, quite unnecessary. However, I do think that Caroline Smailes has used the structure of text to her advantage to portray characters in different lights. As each character tells their story, the variety of ways in which Smailes structures the text makes the read varied and more interesting.

In conclusion, I believe this to be a cleverly written book that leaves the reader baffled and perplexed. I would recommend it to older teens who like dark, weird and very unique reads. I plan to read this again and think that once you have been shocked and mystified by this book once before, you will be able to appreciate how well written it actually is. Approach with a very open mind...

Nick Davies says

There were parts of this I really liked - a strong sense that the teenage participants in this ambitious modern fairy tale were convincing in thought, voice and deed. Some of the descriptions of love and relationships - hostile, platonic and more - were incredibly poignant too. Overall though, I found it all a bit too weird, too

much fantasy and too dark a counterbalance of deeply unhappy personal lives. My disbelief wasn't possible to suspend long enough to really enjoy this - though it will stay with me some time.
