



Claudine at School

Colette

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Claudine is a head strong, clever and extremely mischievous schoolgirl. Along with her friends the lanky Anais, the cheerful Marie and the prim Joubert twins Claudine wreaks havoc on her small school. Always clever, witty and charming Claudine is more than a match for her formidable headmistress as they fight for the attention of the pretty assistant Aimee. The horrors of examinations and good-humoured bullying are the backdrops in this immensely funny and delightful novel with which Colette established the captivating character of Claudine. Through the games, the fun and the intricacies of school life Claudine emerges as a true original; lyrical and intelligent she is one of the twentieth century's most beguiling emancipated women.

Claudine at School Details

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Author : Colette

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From Reader Review Claudine at School for online ebook

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

This is the first of four novels tracking the life of winsome, clever Claudine. The story opens with the famously familiar sentence: My name is Claudine, I live in Montigny; I was born there in 1884; I shall probably not die there. Claudine's certitude and confidence propels her through her life, and in Colette's hands, tells her story with vivacious detail. Claudine's school life is full of intrigues, and even the seemingly simple task of passing exams is lush with drama and excitement. Speaking with a voice wiser than her years, Claudine is a critical observer, and she uses her gifts of beauty and wit to further herself as needed.

Although the Claudine novels were originally penned at the invitation of Colette's unscrupulous first husband, who was hoping for something scandalous to publish under his name, they do not lack depth, character development, or lyrical narrative. This is the kind of novel that deserves frequent rereading, and for those who haven't read it yet: do so now!

Mel says

It's not often that you read a book with such an unrepentant main character. Claudine is great, she's probably the most self assured person I've read in literature, which after reading lots of Lesbian WOE lately was very refreshing. She's the preetiest, smartest, most troublesome girl at school. There's so much about school girl crushes, and queer women in these books, also without any guilt or judgement. The adventures, particularly sitting for the examinations, are great fun. It did feel like the ending dragged on a little bit and there really wasn't a great deal of plot but it was lots of fun.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"My name is Claudine, I live in Montigny; I was born there in 1884; I shall probably not die there."

Colette as a young girl.

She is, considering the times, a wild child. It is the turn of a new century, and she is well ahead of her contemporaries and far removed from the Flappers of the 1920s, who were trying to be emancipated women. The headmistress of her school, Sergeant, finds her nearly intolerable, not only because of her attitude, which is certainly rebellious, but also because she is jealous of her relationship with one Aimee Lanthenay.

"I talk to Mademoiselle Aimee. Our intimacy is progressing very fast. Her nature is like a demonstrative cat's; she is delicate, acutely sensitive to cold, and incredibly caressing in her ways. I like looking at her nice pink face, like a fair-haired little girl's, and at her golden eyes with their curled-up lashes. Lovely eyes that only ask to smile! They make the boys turn and look after when she goes out."

Things have progressed to lingering kisses and some heavy petting when Aimee drops Claudine for

Mademoiselle Sergent. It is, after all, in her best interest. What can Claudine offer, except passionate embraces, but the headmistress can litter her future with little presents and not to mention provide her a helping hand with her career.

How scandalous! The **"Heartless Little Thing"** has handed Claudine her first taste of unrequited love.

Lanthenay's little sister, Luce, is also attending the school, and she is head over heels in love with Claudine. Under different circumstances, Claudine might have welcomed the attentions of such a little dove, but given her state of mind over Luce's sister, she is more interested in applying a steady stream of torture lightened by moments of paying some mild attention to her. She gives her hope and then dashes it unmercifully.

Colette

Claudine is also navigating the treacherous waters of the attentions of older males. Whenever the District Superintendent Dutertre visits, he is very attentive to her. *"Oh, you little thing, you charming little thing, why are you so frightened? You're so wrong to be frightened of me! Do you think I'm a cad? You've absolutely nothing to fear...nothing. Oh, little Claudine, you're so frightfully attractive with your warm brown eyes and your wild curls!"*

How could he help himself? After all, she had **"naughty eyes"**. She is just beginning to understand her appeal to men. After all, she may only be 15, but she has the curves of a grown woman. She is ripe for the plucking, as far as Dutertre is concerned. Claudine, in her pride, might have brushed it all off as just part of being an attractive woman, but this scene is a great example of the underlining, cynical theme of the novel that lends some understanding into why an attractive, intelligent girl, like Claudine, might rebel against a corrupt adult system.

At the same time, Claudine is not above using her beauty to get herself out of some tight spots. Like when she is late for her final exams before a panel of men.

"'I was in the garden over there. I was having a siesta.' A pane of the open window showed me my dim reflection; I had mauve clematis petals in my hair, leaves on my frock, a little green insect and a lady-bird on my shoulder; my hair was in wild disarray...The general effect was not unattractive...At least, I could only presume so, for their Lordships considered me at length and Rouibaud asked me point-blank:

'You don't know a picture called Primavera, by Botticelli?'

Aha! I was expecting that.

'Yes, I do, sir...I've been told that already.'

I had cut the compliment off short and he pinched his lips with annoyance."

The interesting thing is they are so distracted by her appearance that she is forgiven, but she could have gained even more points if she had allowed Rouibaud to believe the compliment was not only well received, but original. In true Claudine fashion, she uses her advantages to titillate the men, but at the same time, she lets them know what a bunch of lecherous idiots they are.

Her father has over 3000 volumes of books in his library, of which Claudine takes full advantage, but he is

an indifferent parent, more interested in studying slugs than paying attention to his daughter. She comes home and talks to him about the grand part she is playing in a school festival:

”Ye gods! Am I going to have to show myself over there?”

‘Certainly not, Papa. You remain in the shadow!’

‘Then you really mean I haven’t got to bother about you?’

‘Really and truly not, Papa. Don’t change your usual ways!’”

I may identify with the father more than I’d like to admit.

I’ve noticed that some reviewers consider Claudine ruthless and are appalled by her behavior, but I had a completely different read on Claudine. She is the smartest girl in the school, and that gives her a wider margin of error with her numerous offenses because the headmistress knows she needs her final exam scores to increase the prestige of the school. Claudine pushes back against those who are impressing morality upon her without living moral lives themselves. Her father is as nice as they come, but knows absolutely nothing about parenting a young girl. Basically, she is raising herself. She is trying to come to terms with her attraction to women and the attention she is receiving from men. She acts like she despises all of her classmates, but in truth she knows she will miss them. Claudine is prideful, willful, and probably doomed once the outside world starts to exert pressure to conform her.

I didn’t like 15 year old girls when I was 15. In fact, I didn’t like myself very much, either. When I first started the book, I was fighting my own reluctance to become mired in the trials and tribulations of a teenage girl, but it wasn’t long before I started to notice aspects that I respected and, dare I say, liked about Claudine. This novel was published in 1900, but feels contemporary in style and theme. It is a strangely compelling and breezy read.

Colette and the lecherous Willie.

Originally, the book was published under Colette’s husband’s name, Henry Gauthier-Villars, known as Willy, who seemed to make a living off publishing other writers’ novels under his name. It was his idea for his wife to mine her experiences at school and mix in some titillating scenes of young girls with burgeoning sexual interests. Those scenes are mild by the standards of today, but at the same time, I could see how they would have been scandalous in the day. Henry was quite the libertine with a steady stream of steamy affairs, and he encouraged Colette to engage in lesbian dalliances, certainly more for his stimulation (my impression) than for any concern for her own pleasure. I plan to read a biography of Colette next, which should provide more insight into her novels as I steadily work my way through her body of work.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Vanessa Wu says

I am going to cheat a bit because I'm reading The Complete Claudine but I only want to review Claudine at

School for now. I dislike long reviews and most long books, so, whereas I have reservations about The Complete Claudine, I like Claudine at School.

The first dozen pages are brilliant. The description of Montigny is as good as anything I've ever read. Even in English the descriptions roll off the tongue and create luxuriant images in your mind's eye. You can tell the author is very sensual and thinks about sex all the time.

The way Claudine establishes an immediate intimacy with her English teacher, Aimée, is also brilliantly conceived and executed. This is wonderful, wonderful writing and I was melting with pleasure reading it.

But, shortly after this, the author introduces several ludicrous plot twists that stretch credulity. They are charming and funny in their way but the situations become caricatures of reality and Claudine loses her charm and becomes cruel, spiteful and selfish.

I lost patience with her but fortunately the book is short. And I have not lost patience with Colette, whose works I am continuing to explore. I will eventually read the other Claudine novels but for now I might take the Complete Claudine off my shelf and dip into something else.

Czarny Pies says

I always found snippy little bitches so charming and easily forgave them when they made me the victim of their mocking. Claudine is the sauciest of all school girls in Western literature. You should love this tale of a horrid little brat.

Francisco says

Creo que es la primera novela que leo entera en francés (aunque había leído cuentos, como Le petit Nicolas, y obras de teatro, como La leçon). Después de haberla leído, me resulta mucho más fácil entender el francés hablado!

Volviendo al libro en cuestión: el argumento me atrapó, pero Claudine es muy mala! (no en el sentido de "traviesa": mala gente, especialmente con las compañeras) La escritura me resultó muy agradable, aunque admito que no entendí TODO el vocabulario.

Mi edición del libro también tiene su historia porque lo compré sobre el "Boul Mich" :-)

Claire says

One of my favorite books at all time--and one of the reasons I wanted to become a writer. If you haven't read Colette before, this is the one to start with.

Lobo says

Klaudyna na półce stała od dawna, kurczyła się w zacnym towarzystwie innych księzek, które chciałam mieć w bibliotece, chociaż nie koniecznie miałam czas je czytać. Wziłam się za powieści Colette po chwili w ramach prokrastynacji, po chwili ze względu na reaserch, albowiem dobrze jest być przyjemne z pożytecznym.

Wiedziałam, że mam do czynienia z serią owianą atmosferą skandalu, na póły pornograficzną. To nie stawia wysoko poprzeczki, prawda? Zwłaszcza, kiedy sobie przypomnę, jak łatwo zszokować francuską opinię publiczną. Virginie Despentes współcześnie nie robi to bez większych problemów. Byłam więc przyjemnie zaskoczona, kiedy w połowie lektury pierwszego tomu dotarło do mnie, że mam do czynienia z serią, która się nie zestarzeje, ponieważ nie jest wyjątkiem reliktem swoich czasów i obowiązujecej w nich moralności seksualnej. Klaudyna to szczery, zabawny, cholernie inteligentny i bezpretensjonalny zapis doświadczeń, ubarwiony literacko dokładnie tak, aby bawić się z czytelnikiem w kotka i myszkę – puszczenie oka do odbiorcy nie przysłania bowiem szczerze wyznać. Byłam zachwycona. Po prostu wszystkie tomy w ostatni deszczowy i ponury weekend. Za recenzję z premedytacją wziąłem się dopiero po przeczytaniu ostatniego tomu. Po chwili to kwestia formalnej strony serii – poszczególne tomy są tak krótkie, że czyta się je wszystkie jednym tchem, poza tym ukadają się w zamkniętą całość. To bardziej jak pocięta jedna powieść w odcinkach niż seria powiązanych z sobą powieści.

Klaudyna w szkole współcześnie może szokować z innych powodów niż te, które jej rozśawiły po wydaniu. Szczegółowo o erotycznych zadurzeniach i relacjach dziewcząt, dotknięcia i muśnięcia, lesbijski zwizek nauczycielek, biedna Klaudyna próbująca uwieść swój pserek, to w rzeczy samej drobiazgi. Chociaż, uhm, mamy w kulturze jakiś inny zapis doświadczeń nastoletnich lesbijek? O pewnym okropnym filmie wolę nie wspominać. Co nie zniszczonego male gaze? No wcale nie za bardzo. Zachwyty Klaudyny nad urodą koleżanek wciąż pozostają najbliższe temu, czego doświadcza dorastająca lesbijka. W przeciwieństwie do większości z nas jednak Klaudyna miała szczęście być przed kulturą NO HOMO, więc jej zauroczenia mogły być odwzajemnione bez większego stresu i nikt jeszcze nie sypia o to samo ci seksualnej, Krafft-Ebing jeszcze nie wywarł takiego wpływu na postrzeganie ludzkiej seksualności. Ciężko więc Klaudynie pewnych rzeczy nie zazdrościć, nie tylko dzikiej swobody, jakiej doświadczała jako nastolatka dorastająca pod opieką ekscentrycznego ojca.

Saficzne wątki Klaudyny szokować nie mogą, chociaż dalej urzekają. Co w Klaudynie pozostało szokującego? Swobodne rozmowy o seksualności kobiet. Stwierdzenie, że młode kobiety, dziewczynki wręcz posiadają własne pragnienia seksualne. Całkowite skupienie się na nich w oderwaniu od obowiązującego modelu męskocentrycznej seksualności. Co cudownego, bo unikatowego. Zachwyca mnie to, jak Colette, pisząc pod męskiego odbiorcę (bo kto czytał porno na początku XX wieku?), sprzedawała więcej informacji o kobiecej seksualności niż współczesna prasa kobieca. Nie bez znaczenia jest też, że to seksualność nastoletnia, pełna sprzeczności, wahań, nie do końca wiadoma i pewna siebie, nawet u tak wyszczekanej dziewczyny jak Klaudyna, która przecie wie, że chce, ale nie wie, co konkretnie chce. Bardzo fajne, że nie miałam okazji czytać jej księgi jako ta 14-15 latka, żeby poczuć wspólnotę doświadczenia. Poza tym wydanie WABu jest przepiękne i grzechu warto za sam projekt okładek i już tylko dlatego cieszyć się bardzo, że mam moje Klaudyny na półce.

Jane De vries says

French coming of age but a little slow moving. homoerotic during 1900? The French are ahead of themselves

again! i understand that this is part of a series but i will look into other Colette books first.

Ruthie says

Decided to read this as it kept appearing on lists of books/authors I should have read. I can almost see what the appeal might have been when this book was first published, however, a lousy, dated British translation and a modern view on bullying make this less interesting to read now. Claudine 50 years ago may have seemed bright and flirtatious and risqué, today she comes off as an obnoxious, spoiled "mean girl". I probably would have enjoyed this more had I read it in French, the British slang was so out of place in a French novel!

Disha Bose O'Shea says

I came by *Claudine at School* quite innocently, a tattered copy of it in a second-hand bookshop in Dublin. Upon reading the back, it reminded me of the quite exquisite *Bonjour Tristesse* and I couldn't resist.

As it turns out, *Claudine at School* is only the first of a series of four Claudine novels, and I have already gone and hunted down the others. Such is my desperation to have them all, and so I cannot be happier to review this for my Christmas post.

Claudine at School has at the center of it, Claudine of course, who is but a sixteen-year-old teenage girl in a rural school in the town of Montigny. And no teenage voice has ever been quite as ripe with sensuality, quick witted or as charming before in literature.

It is important to remember that these books were written in the early 1900's, or perhaps even earlier by Colette under the orders of her husband, who then published them under his own name. They were translated into English, as you may imagine, at a much later date. When it had only started to become acceptable to be caught reading about women's sexuality in a mass-printed format.

Claudine is beautiful, she is desirable and up to all sorts of mischief with her mates in school. There is sexual tension between the girls, between the staff and the teachers; and Colette isn't shy to write about them. Needless to say, therefore, that this could very well be one of the earliest and more important books with a strong lesbian narrator.

I cannot praise the book enough for its charm and humour, just read it!

Why you should read it:

If you ever enjoyed the more tame Enid Blyton versions such as *Malory Towers*, *The Naughtiest Girl* or *St. Clare's*; this book is a bit of nostalgia in the same vein meant for an adult audience

As a testament to breaking the constraints of time. The book is still relevant today in my opinion

Why you shouldn't read it:

If you intend on reading a book with a likable narrator, Claudine is quite the opposite

If the story of teenage girls in a school seems childish to you

Annie says

Claudine nous fait partager sa vie dans son école située dans l'Yonne en 1900. Il s'y passe beaucoup de choses et Claudine raconte les relations entre les enseignants, entre les élèves sans concession. Claudine peut être parfois cruelle mais elle est touchante.

C'est une époque où pour obtenir son certificat d'études il fallait travailler dur. La visite du ministre met tout ce petit monde en émoi.

Ce livre est une page d'histoire de notre système scolaire.

Ed Smiley says

I really enjoyed this book. I knew that Colette was reputed witty, but I was really charmed by this book. Her writing is delicious with a hint of harmless wickedness, if I may mutilate a phrase.

Fun fact: This was her first novel, published in 1900. Her husband asked her to write a memoir of her school days, and "spice it up a bit". He almost threw it away, and then published in *his* name. Today, nobody remembers Willi.

TheSkepticalReader says

Claudine at School is a young adult, coming-of-age, LGBTQ+ novel. Although Claudine is clearly an unlikable, spoiled character, she is an also extremely entertaining figure. She is full of spirit and ideas which lead to one of the most interesting stories I read lately. An added plus is Colette's wonderful writing style; she's written this novel in a way that's just delightfully pleasant. What's more inspiring is that while it's a novel published in 1900, it's clearly far ahead of its time and extremely relatable for the modern reader. I would recommend it to everyone willing to try something a little different but enjoyable.

Duane says

Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette (1873-1954), was a French writer, best known for her novel *Gigi*, which has been adapted into a movie and several stage plays. She also wrote a series of novels of her character Cheri that critics consider her masterpiece. But she started out writing about Claudine. The four Claudine novels are partly autobiographical and *Claudine at School* is the story of a precocious, 15 year old girl who delights in tormenting her headmistress and her fellow students. Set in a small village in the countryside of France at the end of the 19th century, *Claudine at School* is filled with humor and was very entertaining. Colette was an excellent writer but I think overlooked by most of today's readers, even the one's who tend to read classics.

Heather says

My favourite thing is how all the adults in the novel tell Claudine that they've heard that she is mad. And she is, because she's so much smarter than everyone around her, but instead of being a daydreamer, she becomes overly engaged and focusses her attention on events that are beneath her. Anyways it's nice to have a female narrator who's so comfortable in her own skin. (Especially since Colette's husband locked her in a room until she wrote this book & he published it under his own name.)

Michelle says

I feel like I'm missing something...everybody else loves these books from Colette, especially Claudine at School. I felt...fine. Not astounded. Not blown away. Just...fine. And I didn't love Claudine? Everybody else talks about how she's a fresh, feminine, feminist voice, and I felt a bit bored with her sometimes, sometimes annoyed, maybe just entertained by her a third of the time. Claudine creates a lot of unnecessary drama, which I guess she needs to because her small town school is a bit dull. I liked Claudine best when she was put under some pressure but her plucky, spunky self came through--when she was taking final exams, during the last town celebration. I'm definitely going to read the other books in the complete Claudine series I have. I feel like the next book set in Paris might get more interesting!

Ana Rînceanu says

Even though at times I cringed when wickedness crossed the line, I can't deny that this book has charm and an almost irresistible humor. Colette made Claudine a storyteller to rival Scheherazade herself!

Fiona Colley says

I first discovered Claudine in a school library. I absolutely loved it when I first read it at 16 and love it just as much now at 45. If Claudine is flippant and naive (and she's definitely more naive than she likes to think she is) it's because she is supposed to be 15 and the scourge of Mademoiselle Sergeant and the "pretty little Lanthénay". She's a schoolyard bully with undeniable charm. The first literary teenager. Claudine is of course Colette herself thinly disguised. I highly recommend Judith Thurman's excellent biography. If Claudine isn't always likeable then I assume it's because the author herself had some less than sterling character traits.

Iván Ramírez Osorio says

Bello acercamiento a la literatura feminista de principios del siglo XX. En este libro no solo se narra la vida, los problemas, los amores y decepciones de una mujer joven, también se narra el descontento con el rol que la sociedad machista ha dado a la mujer, se alza un grito de protesta contra lo que mal se ha entendido como natural o normal. Un grito maravilloso en favor de la liberación, de la libertad y en contra de las estructuras machistas tan venenosas y nocivas que, lamentablemente, aún nos limitan.

