



## **The Traitor's Wife: The Woman Behind Benedict Arnold and the Plan to Betray America**

*Allison Pataki*

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A riveting historical novel about Peggy Shippen Arnold, the cunning wife of Benedict Arnold and mastermind behind America's most infamous act of treason . . .

Everyone knows Benedict Arnold--the Revolutionary War general who betrayed America and fled to the British--as history's most notorious turncoat. Many know Arnold's co-conspirator, Major John Andre, who was apprehended with Arnold's documents in his boots and hanged at the orders of General George Washington. But few know of the integral third character in the plot: a charming young woman who not only contributed to the betrayal but orchestrated it.

Socialite Peggy Shippen is half Benedict Arnold's age when she seduces the war hero during his stint as military commander of Philadelphia. Blinded by his young bride's beauty and wit, Arnold does not realize that she harbors a secret: loyalty to the British. Nor does he know that she hides a past romance with the handsome British spy John Andre. Peggy watches as her husband, crippled from battle wounds and in debt from years of service to the colonies, grows ever more disillusioned with his hero, Washington, and the American cause. Together with her former love and her disaffected husband, Peggy hatches the plot to deliver West Point to the British and, in exchange, win fame and fortune for herself and Arnold.

Told from the perspective of Peggy's maid, whose faith in the new nation inspires her to intervene in her mistress's affairs even when it could cost her everything, *The Traitor's Wife* brings these infamous figures to life, illuminating the sordid details and the love triangle that nearly destroyed the American fight for freedom.

## **The Traitor's Wife: The Woman Behind Benedict Arnold and the Plan to Betray America Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Traitor's Wife: The Woman Behind Benedict Arnold and the Plan to Betray America for online ebook**

### **Erin says**

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot....>

I was more than a little excited when I first stumbled across Allison Pataki's *The Traitor's Wife*. Though familiar with the story of Benedict Arnold's betrayal, I'd never read a fictional account of it and couldn't believe my luck when Howard Books approved my request for an ARC four months before its Feb. 2014 release date.

Looking back on that enthusiasm makes it hard admit, but I'm a reviewer and can't deny this debut wasn't as satisfying as I'd hoped it'd be. Though I enjoyed Pataki's keen understanding of the historic subject matter, the book itself left me confused and bewildered.

Peggy Shippen is the obvious center of this piece which is why I was disappointed with the lack of clarity in her character. There are a handful of moments in which she is as astute as Abigail Adams and as seductive as much speculated widow of Mount Holly, but these are largely overshadowed by episodes of spoiled self-indulgence and pathetically infantile outbursts. Maybe it is just me, but the inconsistency in her manner, personality and personal motivations undermined the authenticity of Pataki's portrayal and often left me wondering if the author had a definitive idea of who this woman was and the role she played in the conspiracy.

I had similar difficulty with Clara. I don't think the audience is ever afforded a real understanding of Peggy's confidant and that made it hard to connect with her on an emotional level. Perhaps I've been spoiled by maids such as Hannah in Philippa Gregory's *The Queen's Fool* or Barbara in Eva Stachniak's *The Winter Palace*, but I genuinely feel *The Traitor's Wife* would be a stronger piece if more effort had been put into developing Clara outside the Shippen and Arnold households.

Characterization issues plagued the supporting cast as well, but I think I've said enough on that particular subject and there is another aspect I want to touch on before wrapping up. The atmosphere, dialogue and values depicted in these pages did not feel authentic to colonial American culture. I don't know if this was an intentional decision meant to benefit Pataki's readers or indicative of the author's inexperience as a writer of historic fiction, but either way I didn't expect to this piece to be quite so theatrical and fluffy.

I recognize I read an ARC edition of *The Traitor's Wife* and that the finished publication may differ dramatically, but I'm not entirely convinced four months of spit and polish will rectify all of my concerns and though I certainly appreciate the book as light historic fiction, I'm not sure I would recommend it to those looking for a deeply compelling narrative of the conspiracy that might have crushed the revolution and the ambitious dreams of America's founding fathers.

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### **Lori says**

I have to admit that I really didn't know much about Benedict Arnold except that he betrayed America in the

Revolution... and whether this was entirely historically accurate it still peaked my interest in finding out more about Arnold and his wife!!! Loved Clara and was so glad the story was told from her point of view... no one sees and hears more than an 'invisible' person!!! I also really liked Peggy... she was a master manipulator and a really fun character to root against!!! I wonder how Old Benny would have fared if he'd never been smitten by 'Miss' Shippen... guess we'll never know!!! Overall, a very entertaining read!!!

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### **Caroline Wilson says**

\*\*Appears in the February 2014 edition of the Historical Novel Review\*\*

Beautiful. Tempestuous. Cunning. Peggy Shippen is all these things. As the reigning belle of Philadelphia society during the British occupation of 1778, she is admired by men and envied by women. First the lover of the notorious British spy John Andre, and then the wife of celebrated American general-turned-traitor Benedict Arnold, Peggy and her story are brought to life through the eyes of her loyal maid, Clara Bell.

The Traitor's Wife is a refreshing departure from the typical royal-themed historicals pervading the market today. The upheaval caused by the American Revolution makes for fascinating reading, and yet Peggy Shippen has been little written about. Perhaps it is because she is not a sympathetic character, and this novel does nothing to disprove that notion. Nonetheless, Peggy's magnetic ability to obtain her desires is vividly brought to life; the reader can almost imagine her melting gaze in the midst of her full-fledged assault on the brash, yet unassuming Benedict Arnold.

Unfortunately, this novel has some drawbacks. The story's narrator, Clara Bell, has little depth. While generally loyal to Peggy, she floats along without much purpose beyond bemoaning her living conditions with the Arnolds and pining after Caleb Little, the Shippen family stable hand. Even when given a chance to make a difference, she agonizes over what to do. Additionally, there are numerous mistakes in the details of the period. Descriptions of clothing and customs are misrepresented throughout the novel.

However, it is clear that the author has a passion for the story of Peggy Shippen; she accomplishes the retelling of the historical narrative very well. General historic fiction readers will enjoy the quick plotting and originality of The Traitor's Wife, but historical fiction purists may want to pass.

For more reviews, please visit my website: [www.carolinewilsonwrites.blogspot.com](http://www.carolinewilsonwrites.blogspot.com)

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### **Madilyn says**

I was really disappointed in this book. I usually love historical fiction that is based off of real life events. I like getting a new perspective on the characters situation. But this book was one of those that I just couldn't wait to finish so that I could be done with it. I was expecting something a little less . . . vulgar. Though I didn't expect Peggy to be portrayed as a nice person, (she is the wife of a traitor, after all), I most certainly didn't expect to find such a tramp in the lead role of this novel. She had no shame! I'm not ashamed to admit that I flipped over a few pages to avoid some rather crude scenes. I will never read anything by this author in the future. Now, that being said, there were a few good things about this book. For one, I loved the historical aspect of it (I'm a sucker for historical fiction, as I mentioned earlier), and the second thing is that Peggy, although ruthless, selfish and bratty (amongst other things), had a soft spot for her maid, Clara. It seemed

that the few scenes that I saw Peggy's "good side" were the ones that she shared with her maid/confidant. It made her seem like there was a heart deep down in the abyss of her soul after all. Peggy really was a despicable character. If you want to draw in a reader, allow them to see things from a good guys perspective. I was miserable the entire time I spent reading this book because there was practically NO good in it! (Except towards the end where Clara gave Peggy what-for and held her accountable for her actions). I really can't think of anything else to say about this book. I'm sorry if this review offends anyone (sort of), but hey, it's my honest opinion. Bottom line: don't read this book. Ever.

~The Literary Maidens

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Note: I was provided with a free copy of this book by Howard Publishers in exchange for my honest opinion, and I was not further reimbursed. All thoughts expressed above are completely my own and unbiased.

## Marlene says

Originally published at Reading Reality

The Traitor's Wife is the best kind of historical fiction; the story feels true even though the reader knows that there isn't any way to verify how people felt, or what they said in every conversation.

You end up wanting this to be the real story. And maybe it is.

History is so often written from the perspective of the men who seem to be the prime movers and shakers, but, history is written by the victors. For much of history, women were put on a pedestal and kept in their place. That place was not supposed to be in battle, in government or in writing the history books.

The Traitor's Wife sees that key betrayal of the American Revolution from the point of view of the woman who caused it, and the woman who prevented it.

We all know the story of Benedict Arnold, and his betrayal of the Revolutionary cause. His name has become a byword for treachery. What makes The Traitor's Wife such a fascinating story is that it isn't Arnold's story--it's his wife's story.

Also that it is not the tale of her view of her husband's treason--it's the story of how she encouraged and aided that treachery. Historical records show that Peggy Shippen Arnold was part of the plot, but they don't tell us why.

This is a fascinating version of events, because it doesn't just put Peggy Arnold at the center, but it explains why she did it. More than plausibly, and in a way that rivets the attention.

Peggy is seen through the eyes of her maid, Clara Bell. Clara may not have existed in real life, but she should

have. She sees her mistress much more clearly than the men she manipulated.

Clara is the heroine of this tale. While the Arnolds and their conspirators forget that the maid is even in the room, Clara hears and sees everything, and risks her life to assist the Revolution.

So Clara is the person we follow. She starts out as a young woman awed by the splendor of the Shippen household after her impoverished childhood. She bears the brunt of Peggy Shippen's cruelty, and quietly resists, until she can find a way to make her resistance count.

Escape Rating B+: There are two women at the center of this story; Peggy and Clara. They end up as counterpoint to one another; Peggy is cruel and manipulative to the point of being almost a caricature, and Clara seems to be a bit too good to be true.

It is easy to cast this tale as the fall of Peggy into the depths which we feel she deserves, and the rise of Clara to independence, freedom and true love. Poor Benedict Arnold ends up as the stock character of the foolish older husband manipulated by his beautiful and charismatic young wife.

Except for the introduction of Clara, that could be the true narrative. That's what makes *The Traitor's Wife* so compelling. It feels right.

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### **Aimee says**

Everyone knows the story of Benedict Arnold and I was thrilled to get to read this book and get a more detailed look at the events that turned this man into a traitor. Pataki did not disappoint with a great story that kept me reading well into the night.

The story is told through the eyes of Clara, the maid to Arnold's wife Peggy. Clara is strong, intelligent, and has the unenviable job of looking after one of the most selfish women I have ever read in a book. Pataki does a great job of bringing out Peggy's character, her ability to be deceptive or to play innocent, to be seductive or harsh, whatever the situation warranted for Peggy to get her way. I was fascinated with her ability to get Arnold to do anything she wanted.

The book is also filled with lots of historical details that really added to the book. There are great descriptions of the homes, the parties, the food served, and the clothes worn that really helped to put you in Revolutionary times.

If you are a historical fiction fan I would highly recommend this one. It is one of the better historical fiction books I have read recently. Even if you are not a big historical fiction reader I think this would still be an enjoyable read because of the great characters and an interesting story.

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### **Susanne says**

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## Kathleen (Kat) Smith says

I remember reading about Benedict Arnold in high school and all I can remember even now was that he was a traitor to this country. I had forgotten the circumstances surrounding the details of his betrayal to this country during the American Revolution as we were fighting the British to declare our freedom from King George. What's even more remarkable is the novel from author Allison Pataki that takes all her research into the events surrounding Benedict Arnold and George Washington and filling in the rest with some amazing insight as told from the lady's maid perspective to Margaret Stippen-Arnold, Benedict's wife.

In this novel, we meet Clara Bell who is arriving at the Shippen household to serve as a lady's maid for the two daughters of Judge Stippen, Margaret, the youngest, and Betsy who is engaged to be married. Only Margaret, also known as Peggy believes that since Betsy is already engaged, she doesn't need the help to prepare for social outings as much as she does and commands that Clara work exclusively for her needs. Betsy doesn't seem to mind much and soon Peggy is the belle of the ball. Only her rival Meg Chew is vying for the attention of the same man she is interested in John André, who likes playing them both against each other.

But Peggy believes she has the advantage on her side as long as she is willing to comprise some of her lady-like standards to keep Johnny interested in her much to the dismay of Clara and her parents. But when the war begins to move closer to home, and requires that John André leave for the North, Peggy is heartbroken until she gains the attention of Major General Benedict Arnold who is completely captivated by this eighteen-year-old beauty. Peggy believes that in order to escape the confines of her restrictive household she will stop at nothing including attracting the attention of a man who is twice her age to get what she wants, money, power and a place above everyone else. With Benedict Arnold having closed all the stores in Philadelphia to prevent the goods that were shipped from London from being sold and the money going back to aid the King, he begins to smuggle the merchandise up North to make a tidy profit for himself.

Soon Clara finds herself in the middle of what could be considered treason but has no one to tell. She is just a servant in the household and who would believe her story over that of a decorated General and his soon to be wife. What's worse is the more Peggy tries to manipulate the situation with Arnold to gain what she believes she is due in the world, when things don't go her way, she takes her frustration out on Clara. But with no where to go if she leaves the household as a maid, she knows she must bide her time until she can find a way to help her country before she is found guilty of aiding in their treason attempts with what she knows.

I received *The Traitor's Wife* by Allison Pataki compliments of Howard Books, a division of Simon and Schuster Publishers for my honest review. I did not receive any monetary compensation for a favorable review and the opinions expressed in this review are strictly my own. Being a fan of Downton Abbey, I love how Allison chose to use the maid's perspective of the historical facts to bring this story to life in her debut novel. Interwoven beautifully into this story are the real facts about the betrayal of Arnold's service to this country as well as the role Margaret Shippen-Arnold truly played in this event. I applaud her diligence to the research it took to bring this into a masterful novel that keeps the reader both entertained and captivated by the events. There is even a discussion guide included in the back that is perfect for book clubs as well as the details and research it took in creating this novel. I easily give this novel at 5 out of 5 stars and will definitely be looking for more of Allison Pataki's novels in the future.

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## **Paul Pessolano says**

“The Traitor’s Wife” by Allison Pataki, published by Howard Books.

Category – Historical Fiction/Romance Publication Date – February 11, 2014.

“The Traitor’s Wife” is very low on historical accuracy but very high on romance. The story is based on Peggy Shippen who married Benedict Arnold and was able to convince him that his country had betrayed him and that he therefore should have no qualms about betraying his country.

Peggy Shippen was the daughter of Judge Shippen of Philadelphia, one would be better to say that she was the very spoiled daughter of Judge Shippen. Philadelphia, at the time, was under British control and Peggy was a top socialite who championed the British cause and was a favorite of Major John Andre.

The story is told through the eyes of Clara Belle (sorry could not help thinking of the clown on Howdy Doody) who was the maid to Miss Peggy (sorry but could not help thinking of Miss Piggy). Clara became such a part of Peggy and Benedict’s lives that she was privy to their plot to overthrow the fledgling colonist movement. When the British abandoned Philadelphia the high society life enjoyed by Peggy came to an abrupt end, that is, until she sought the favor of General Benedict Arnold. Arnold, who came completely under the spell of Peggy, is convinced by her that his country had betrayed him and that he should betray his country. This, of course, was her scheme to improve her social status and get back in favor of the British.

Clara, who knows of the plot, confines in Caleb Little, a stable boy for the Shippens who has now become a colonial soldier, and possible beau to Clara.

A very good story for those looking for a romantic novel loosely based on historical fact.

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## **Katherine says**

***”If you can’t break the rules, you might as well seduce the man who makes them.”***

**Synopsis:** Never underestimate the power of a spoiled brat who doesn’t get what she wants.

### **Biblio-Babble**

**Peggy, Please Throw Away Your Shot... and the Wine Bottle:** Nothing like a glass of wine at breakfast to keep Peggy Shippen Arnold powered through the day. The aforementioned spoiled brat in the synopsis, she’s the daughter of a highly respected judge and future wife of Benedict Arnold (though she would really rather bone John Andre). Fanatically supportive of the Loyalist cause in the Revolutionary War, she marries Benedict Arnold as a means to an end in order to sway him to the Loyalist cause without him knowing it. Peggy is actually much more than a spoiled brat because while her intentions for the Loyalist cause are rather horrible in their reasoning, she’s actually quite a good strategist. She’s completely on par with her husband and if she had the chance, she would’ve been a great military commander. For all her spoiled ways and selfish endeavors, she’s deliciously conniving. Some readers may find her annoying, but the author made her fascinating to me.

**Beware the Quiet Ones:** Despite this novel being about Peggy Shippen, the author decided to tell her story from a fictional servant's standpoint. And despite being given a name more fitting to a milk cow than an actual person, Clara Bell (yes, that's her God given name), plays a pivotal, albeit fictional role, in the exposition of Benedict Arnold's plan to betray the nation. I don't know why people who have servants think that they're invisible, but they aren't. They actually kind of, ya know, hear everything you say, **BELIEVE IT OR NOT.** Clara probably had the most character development, with her starting as a meek, mild servant who probably couldn't say boo to a goose to finally standing up for herself to the whiny entity that is Peggy. While I occasionally thought that Clara's viewpoint was lacking and questioned whether or not it was necessarily needed, it did succeed in the author's purpose of giving us an unbiased perspective of Peggy.

**Do You Wanna Build a Spy Ring?:** But just as Clara Bell was there to give us an unbiased viewpoint, I did feel that it took some things away from the novel. Such as the inner workings of the spy ring plot that consisted of John Andre, Benedict, and Peggy. We get a lot of upstairs/downstairs scenes, but not enough actual plotting out spying scenes, from my perspective. John Andre is given far too few scenes, which is kind of shame considering how important a role he played in Peggy's mind and heart. The final act where they meet for the last time and the plot being foiled felt really rushed and pushed aside for more downstairs drama. The buildup to the actual treachery was done excellently. The final product, not so much.

**Love and Seduction Are In the Air:** And you thought those Revolutionaries were such prudes, didn't you? There's so much lurve in the air it's a wonder there was any fighting to be had. Some of them were misplaced (what the heck was that ill-fated, totally misplaced flirtation/romance with Clara and Andre's helper?), some of them misguided by ill-intentions (Peggy probably didn't love Arnold for actually being him). And some of them are just plain sweet (Clara Bell and Caleb Little, if he ever managed to get the gerddarn stick of straw out of his mouth). Perhaps the two romances that are given the most time are Peggy and Benedict's and Clara and Caleb's. Clara and Caleb's is a drawn out 'will they or won't they, please just tell him' type of romance, but Caleb's so damn likable that you'll forgive Clara's extremely feeble attempts to unjustify her feelings for him.

**Men Never Cease to Amaze Me:** In the sense that the Benedict Arnold in this book has been turned into a sniveling, groveling dish rag. At least here in America, he's always been portrayed as this larger than life, charismatic man who just so happened to be a traitor. But here, he's at the complete mercy of Peggy to the point where she almost breaks him down to nothing. It was startling to read, but may I confess that it was kind of nice to believe that, at least in this fictional sense, he got schooled. YAS.

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For anyone still going through serious Hamilton withdrawals, this book should help ease the pain. With taut characters and an interesting perspective into a well-known yet seemingly archaic scandal, the story of the real traitor to the nation is told in a way that will have you flipping the pages long after told yourself you'd read just one more chapter

And just as Peggy seduced the general who made the rules, she'll seduce you with her seemingly selfish but deliciously wicked ways.

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### Linda says

I was really looking forward to reading The Traitor's Wife. I absolutely love historical fiction. This one seems to miss the mark. It's not that it isn't an entertaining read. I suppose it all depends on your expectations as you enter into the story. If you enjoy romance novels, then this one fits the bill for you. The depiction of

Peggy Shippen as solely a spoiled, self-indulged, demanding woman makes for good copy, but it really doesn't hold enough interest. Peggy had to be far more than that to turn the heads of John Andre and Benedict Arnold. Beauty can only do so much. I wish that Allison Pataki would have delved into Peggy's manipulative intelligence and her crafty analytical skills. Peggy is painted as a whiney brat who always got her way. She, obviously, was far more than that. She was not a victim of her circumstances. She set up situations to benefit herself and her station in life. The character of Clara seemed too modern day in her thinking and her involvement in what seemed to be "double dating" with her mistress, Peggy. In using Clara's viewpoint, emotions, and observations, we lose the core of Peggy. And isn't that what we envisioned upon turning the first page of this novel?

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### **Tracy says**

This was a fantastic book! I had never heard of Peggy Shippen and had no idea the part she played in Benedict Arnold's treason during the American Revolution.

This story was very well written and had me absorbed into it! I so wanted Peggy to get what she deserved, but at least her servants were able to break free in the end.

I appreciated the author's note at the end regarding what was historically accurate and what was fiction. Amazing how much of it was true!

This is my third book by this author and definitely a favorite! I look forward to more books by her!

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### **Doris says**

I was particularly interested in reading this book as I live in the Hudson Valley region of NY, where part of the story takes place. And I've read some brilliant historical fiction; unfortunately, this book did not measure up.

I found the cast of characters to be two dimensional and quite dull (Peggy, on the other hand, was so colorful she strayed into the stereotypical). Clara's colorless persona set the tone (as first and third person narrator) and nearly all of the plot unfolded through her eyes (when they weren't downcast). But for some of Peggy's scheming dialogue, the majority of it lacked luster and was full of missed opportunities to add life and breadth and depth to the characters portrayed here.

The historical facts I found intriguing and thought the cover was fabulous but there was a lot of unmet potential in between.

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