
Kaye Gibbons

Divining Women
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How did you decide to set *Divining Women* during the Spanish influenza epidemic?

I've always been interested in medical history, as readers can see in *Charms for the Easy Life* and *Sights Unseen*, and as a young girl, stories about Florence Nightingale, Clara Barton, and the like inspired me, so it became a natural thing to involve issues of public health in my writing. Also, the personal conflicts of the novel called for a wide, large, uncertain and deadly time, which the First World War and the epidemic provided.

Do you think Troop Ross has any redeeming quality about him?

Other than his childhood and claustrophobic mothering obstacles, I don't see any softening traits, or vulnerabilities, for Troop, and as I dislike him, I'm not bothered by his overly evil nature. At 46, I've learned, finally, that some individuals seek to offer nothing more than an elemental negativity.

***Divining Women* meditates on what it means to be a woman, a wife, a friend, and a mother. Are these themes that have preoccupied you in other books, and in your real life?**

Having raised three daughters and written books about women and the extraordinary layers of their lives, womanhood has been on my mind, personally and professionally, for as long as I've been doing both literature and laundry.

You dedicated this novel to your three daughters, each of whom shares a name with a character in your book. Can you talk a bit about that authorial decision?

I needed names, nothing symbolic implied. That day, I may not have been able to find the phone book.

***Divining Women* explores issues of femininity that most people take for granted as obsolete today: hysteria, confinement during pregnancy, a woman's place is in the home. What do you think your readers will make of these "old" ways of thinking about women?**

I hope they appreciate the ease that's come with appliances and antibiotics, but I also want them to note that the spiritual nature of femininity and the struggles inherent in marriage have been and will always be changeless, unaffected by time. Surfaces of our collective womanhood change...the depths never do.