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## A television series recommendation: *Bramwell*

By Jared Rhoads

Need something better to watch at the end of a long week than reality shows and political attack ads? We all do. I recommend *Bramwell*, a drama series from British television that originally aired from 1995 to 2000 and is now available on DVD.

The title refers to the fictional Dr. Eleanor Bramwell, a physician who is pursuing a medical career in London at just prior to the turn of the 20th century. Despite her qualifications, she is denied a job at the main hospital, so instead she opens a free clinic called the “Thrift” for the poor in London's east end. She manages to grow the clinic in the face of many challenges and contrary to the advice of her wise and loving father, who is also a doctor.

Due to the nature of the clinic that Dr. Bramwell runs, there is sadly a self-sacrificial component to the series. But this element actually strengthens the stories rather than softening them. Time and again Dr. Bramwell is shown to be happiest when she is solving challenging medical and managerial problems, such as making difficult diagnoses or figuring out how to expand the clinic and hire quality help. She is clearly most miserable when she feels compelled to give up what she values or is required to hobnob with wealthy donors who are only interested in helping the clinic for pretentious reasons. Viewers will cheer and love her when she's heroic, and be occasionally saddened by her internal struggle to reconcile her life with conventional morality. Unfortunately for Eleanor, an accessible philosophy of enlightened self-interest did not exist in 1899.

(My only caveat is that while the first three seasons are superb, the fourth—and final—season is rather terrible. Indeed, my recommendation is to stop after three and ignore the fourth altogether. The characters and plots are much altered, and only for the worse. I can only guess that the show either hired new writers or the writers decided to experiment with a more modern, illogical, irrational approach. Such a shame.)

Nevertheless, as a whole, the plots and acting are top-notch for a TV series. Lead actress Jemma Redgrave as Eleanor Bramwell is charming. If you like medical dramas—or even if you just like Victorian England—you'll like *Bramwell*.