

had no knowledge of the language. Against this background was her growing friendship with Harry Jermyn.

I settled down expecting a fast action book full of political and romantic intrigue, but although I found it interesting enough and was fascinated to see how Henrietta's love affair with Harry Jermyn intermingled with the political climate of the day, on the whole I was not impressed with this version of the story. I found it rather slow in the telling and for me, at least, it lacked any real passion or fire. The main characters, although historically correct, did not really come alive, and had they been simply characters in a story would have been very flat indeed. Fiona Mountain has been likened to Philippa Gregory, but on the basis of this one book, I don't think Gregory has much to fear yet.

Marilyn Sherlock

THE PILGRIM

Hugh Nissenson, Sourcebooks, 2011, \$24.99/£16.99, hb, 368pp, 9781402209246

Young Charles Wentworth, motherless from infancy, is raised by his beloved Puritan minister father to lead a pious life in early 17th-century England. From his childhood, he witnesses the everyday occurrences of terrible disease, poverty, harsh punishments, and crime, and he suffers a personal crisis in faith, realizing he cannot live up to his father's high standards. Educated at Cambridge and sent to London to make his way after his father's death, Charles finds work as a law clerk and romance with his employer's daughter, Sarah. When tragedy strikes, the brokenhearted Charles decides to take ship to the Plymouth Colony in the wilderness of New England in 1622 in hopes of finding redemption.

Onboard, he meets Henry Winslow and his sister Abigail, who are also seeking a life of religious freedom and peace. Charles finds himself drawn to the pale and pretty Abigail, but they are separated for a year, as Charles, determined to further his goal to find God's salvation and aid the struggling colony, agrees to help found a new settlement up the coast. During the course of this daring adventure, he discovers that New England, even with its issues of starvation, greed, harsh winters, and Indian problems, holds bright promise for those looking to affirm their spiritual faith and lead a new life of freedom. When news arrives from England that could prove life-changing, Charles knows where his heart and soul lie.

Nissenson has penned a bleak, unsparing novel, peopled with flawed humans and accurate period details. It's not for the faint of heart (plenty of graphic violence here) and at times a real downer, but always with hope lingering in the background.

Michael I. Shoop

THE ELOQUENCE OF BLOOD

Judith Rock, Berkley, 2011, \$15.00/C\$17.50, pb, 400pp, 9780425242971

The Eloquence of Blood opens on Christmas Eve in Paris of 1686. Against a backdrop of a harsh winter, ex-soldier and now-Jesuit scholar

Charles du Luc is struggling with issues of his faith and the more mundane worries of his college's financially precarious situation. When hope dawns in the form of an expected donation, someone else appears to have equal claim on this fortune. Murder complicates the situation, and du Luc is called upon to solve it, as the public suspects that something less than holy is at work, and anti-Jesuit violence grows.

Rock provides meticulous details of everyday life across various social classes with an engaging style; the touches of humour and insight into the creativity of Jesuit scholars and their involvement in dance and plays are particularly welcome as a contrast to some of the grim realities of poverty and illness. This is the second mystery featuring du Luc, the first being *The Rhetoric of Death*. It isn't necessary to have read the first to find oneself quickly pulled into du Luc's world, however, as Rock skilfully weaves information throughout that hints at the first book and du Luc's past. In du Luc, Rock has created a highly likeable scholar-detective. I hope that his adventures will play out for many books to come.

L.K. Mason

SEA OF TROUBLES

M Stanford-Smith, Honno, 2011, £8.99, pb, 353pp, 9781906784270

We have, in the first pages, a host of people of varying social position with confusing names, firmly in the writer's mind and in her notes, yet they confuse the reader. Too many sections need to be read twice to gain understanding. What, for instance, does the following phrase mean to an average person: 'choleric at the queen's tourney...?' The main character Nicholas, is also referred to as Nick and later as Nicolo. There is a Toby, then Tobias, on the same page.

The book starts with a bang in 1599 as young actor/nobleman, Nicholas Talbot, Lord Rokesby, returns to his burning castle. After a few early and banal chapters (as with *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*) the book moves forward. Nicholas, appointed ambassador to Venice by Elizabeth I, romps through Europe with his troop. Beautiful descriptions of costume, castles, rivers and acquiescent ladies abound. He meets his friend Christopher Marlowe, sometimes called Kit, who writes plays for guess who? Inigo Jones appears, stunned by the Palladian villas along the Brenta.

The few errors include Grande Canale for Venice's Canal Grande, and anachronisms such as 'killing glance' and 'gear' for clothes. After a splendid scene at the Doge's court, ships are built and the troop sets sail for England, only to be shipwrecked. Piracy and bullion appear. Through Oporto Nicholas struggles back via the French court, even more splendid, to an England and the frozen Thames with stalls and games.

Few 17th-century events or characters are left out. Burbage moves his Rose Theatre to Bankside to be called the Globe, and Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is aired. But where is William Shakespeare? This book contains far too much information and too

little development. It would make four books, which would be easier to read.

Geoffrey Harfield

| 18th century |

THE GILDED SHROUD

Elizabeth Bailey, Berkley Prime Crime, 2011, \$15.00/C\$17.50, pb, 368pp, 9780425242896

The screams of the maid announce the discovery of the strangled body of Emily, Marchioness of Polbrook, in the early hours of the morning. Lord Frances Fanshaw, the brother-in-law of the murdered woman, needs to keep the horrifying incident from being made public, and prove his brother, the missing marquis, did not commit the crime.

It falls to Otilia Draycott, the widowed companion of the dowager marchioness, to root out the criminal. With her probing questions and reticent manner, Otilia exhibits a fine intellect with the ability to discover the who, why, and how of the murder. Francis cannot help but be attracted to Otilia, and vice versa, and they discover more interests in common than murder.

Beautiful writing and gorgeous language that immerse the reader in the period highlight this romantic mystery. The problem: we don't know which period. Up until page 55, where the Revolution in France is discussed, we have no timeframe. There is no description of the costumes (think: panniers), hairstyles (think: wigs or powdered hair) or historical background (think: who's ruling Great Britain?) to clue in the reader. Instead of a Regency, I discovered this was a Georgian novel. The cover blurb should not be the way to anchor a time period in a historical.

Monica E. Spence

SURGEON'S MATE

Linda Collison, Fireship, 2011, \$19.95, pb, 292pp, 9781611791426

Patrick MacPherson, born Patricia, is surgeon's mate aboard the frigate H.M.S. *Richmond*. The ship and her survivors depart the 1762 siege of Havana at the opening of the story. During the siege, MacPherson earned the approval of the ship's surgeon and the suspicion of some of her shipmates. The life MacPherson has built as a medical officer in the Royal Navy is further complicated by a romantic attachment to the ship's gunner, Brian Dalton. In New York City, where the *Richmond* has carried the surviving infantrymen, MacPherson's professional and personal existence are threatened by the jealousy of the *Richmond's* other surgeon's mate. Compassion for a patient removes MacPherson from the Royal Navy's reach and sends her in company of New England smugglers into the Caribbean.

Surgeon's Mate is a sea adventure from a unique perspective. MacPherson struggles to gain competency in 18th-century medicine and deals with the pressure of discovery when "Every good

thing I had done, was undone by the fact I hid a woman's body underneath these masculine clothes." Patricia's struggle with the age-old dilemma of wishing to have it all is interestingly played out in the microcosm of a mid-18th century ship of war, and in an America approaching revolution against Europe. She finds herself torn between a desire for freedom, respect, and the professional challenges of the life of a man and a surgeon, and the love of a good man.

Patricia's story may appeal more to a young adult audience than action-loving fans of naval fiction. This is the second novel in a series detailing the adventures of Patricia / Patrick MacPherson, inspired in part by historical accounts of 17th- and 18th-century women who worked in men's guise as soldiers, sailors, and marines.

Eva Ulett

THE CHAMOMILE

Susan F. Craft, Ingalls, 2011, \$15.95, pb, 251pp, 9781932158946

Lilyan Cameron runs a wallpapering and artist shop in 1780 Charlestown, South Carolina. The future "Charleston" is under siege from the British during the Revolutionary War. Her parents dead, Lilyan lives with her Cherokee companion, Elizabeth, and is compelled to look after her brother. Her brother fights with the rebels and is arrested and held captive on a dismal prison ship in the harbor. Lilyan meets a handsome Greek officer named Nicholas who is serving with Francis Marion, the notorious Swamp Fox. With her new love, she contrives a way aboard the ship – using Christian charity as an excuse – and rescues her brother. Lilyan joins the resistance against the British and promises to spy to free her country from tyranny. In her first assignment, painting a mural for a British lady, she must save Elizabeth from disaster and they both end up fugitives in the wilds of South Carolina. Will Lilyan survive and be reunited with her true love?

I wanted to know more about Lilyan and her life before 1780 to better understand her character. I didn't even learn her age until page 61. I didn't know that Nicholas had a thick accent until pages after meeting him. Their romance is sweet but happens too quickly. Some situations aren't believable, such as a prisoner being able to keep the ingredients for invisible ink on his person. Elizabeth is important to the story, but she isn't a well-rounded character. Twice, her foolish actions jeopardize everything and bring tragedy that could have been avoided.

The story gets preachy in places, but there's plenty of action and lush details of early Charleston and the wilds of the Carolinas.

Diane Scott Lewis

THE COLONEL'S LADY

Laura Frantz, Revell, 2011, \$14.99, pb, 408pp, 9780800733414

After a failed romance, Roxanna Rowan leaves her genteel Virginia life and travels to the wild Kentucky frontier of 1779. She plans to join her soldier father at an isolated wilderness fort, but he

has been killed in action. Roxanna is stranded at the outpost with the dashing Colonel McLinn, one of Washington's western commanders. McLinn, whom Frantz tells us was inspired by George Rogers Clark, struggles with secrets that can cost him his relationship with Roxanna as well as a military victory over the British and Native Americans in Kentucky and Ohio.

While the plot requirements sometimes throw Roxanna into TSTL situations (where she seems Too Stupid To Live), Frantz's prose shimmers with power and poetry. The story is morally strong without being preachy or pedantic. Roxanna and McLinn build a lasting love despite steep obstacles and bitter betrayals both personal and political. This is a richly textured tale of love, forgiveness, and redemption by faith set against a vivid backdrop of frontier warfare. It is a keeper, and highly recommended.

Elizabeth Knowles

BECOMING MARIE ANTOINETTE

Juliet Grey, Ballantine, 2011, \$15.00, pb, 461pp, 9780345523860

Becoming Marie Antoinette, the first in a planned trilogy about the life of the Archduchess of Austria and Queen of France, is a fantastic read. The novel begins at the court of Schönbrunn in 1766, when Marie is just a carefree girl. At the age of ten, she is promised in marriage to Louis Auguste, the future king of France. She knows that her fun-loving days are coming to a rapid end. Her mother, the imposing Empress Maria Theresa, is counting on her to make a solid alliance between France and Austria.

In preparation for her marriage, it becomes apparent that Marie has been indulged too much and must buckle down with her studies. Every hour of her day is accounted for and is spent perfecting herself – learning the Versailles glide, styling her hair and clothes in the latest French trend, and even enduring braces to straighten her teeth.

Marie is placed under an enormous amount of pressure, but she is determined to fulfill her duty and be loved by her new family and countrymen. After arriving in France, she finds it almost impossible to make a connection with her husband, the Dauphin. She dedicates herself to breaking through his shell and becoming his friend. Their relationship has its ups and downs, eventually blossoming into friendship, then finally love.

The novel is wonderfully different from others I have read about Marie Antoinette as it focuses on her young life in Austria, a part of her life that is usually overlooked. Grey's novel has a little bit of everything: the glitz and glamour of the French court, young love, and international politics. The most enjoyable aspect of the book is seeing Marie find her own way and becoming her own person. I can't wait for the next in the trilogy.

Troy Reed

THE PIANIST IN THE DARK

Michèle Halberstadt, Pegasus, 2011, \$24.00/ C\$30.00, hb, 140pp, 9781605981185

Maria Theresa von Paradis was the musically talented daughter and only child of the secretary of the Empress of Austria. She was taught by and worked with master musicians, including Mozart and Salieri, and she was renowned for her beauty as well as her concerts. She was also blind, and that condition is at the crux of Halberstadt's compelling novella.

Joseph Anton von Paradis refused to accept that his daughter's blindness, which came upon her suddenly as a small child, was permanent, and he had her subjected to many "treatments," provided by the top physicians of 18th-century Europe; in today's world, these would be more likely classified as torture. When Maria Theresa was seventeen, Joseph Anton enlisted the aid of Franz Anton Mesmer, a philosopher, musician, and most importantly, a healer. Dr. Mesmer's medical methods were nontraditional: his theories of animal magnetism and early work with hypnosis alternately thrilled and repulsed the moneyed upper class at whom his treatments were aimed.

Halberstadt's fictionalized account of the purported relationship between Mesmer and Maria Theresa depicts a young woman shedding both her innocence as well as her blindness, only to realize that with sight – visual and psychological – much of what she thought she knew of the world was painfully wrong. Scandalous gossip about the prodigy and the older man led Joseph Anton to retrieve his daughter from the healer's home, and Maria Theresa retreated into the much safer world of music and blindness. The descriptions of how a blind musician sees and hears her surroundings, and how her emerging feelings affect her other abilities, add depth and insight to the many layers of this lustrous story. The larger story of late 18th-century Viennese society, medicine, and psychological sabotage enrich it even further.

Helene Williams

SCANDALOUS DESIRES

Elizabeth Hoyt, Grand Central, 2011, \$7.99, pb, 400pp, 9780446558938

Widow Silence Hollingbrook has a quiet life, working as headmistress of a foundlings' home in the stews of St. Giles. When one of her beloved children is abducted by local pirate king "Charming" Mickey O'Connor, Silence will stop at nothing to get her back. But it turns out that sweet Mary Darling is Mickey's daughter, placed in the foundlings' home to ensure her safety – and now Mickey wants Silence to move into his extravagant palace to help care for Mary. Silence is used to being a proper lady who plays by society's rules, so how will she handle living in close proximity to a handsome rogue?

The third novel in Hoyt's Georgian-era Maiden Lane series stands alone effectively, but there are plot threads that weave through all of the books in the series. The sexual tension between the two main characters is believable, the dialogue is clever, and the secondary characters (including a mutt named Lad) are charming. Hoyt has quickly become one of the leading names in historical romance, and