



## Precocious

*Joanna Barnard*

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**Precocious** Joanna Barnard

'Can there be a more unreliable narrator than a teenage girl?'

Fiona Palmer is (un)happily married when a chance meeting with her former teacher plunges her headlong into an affair.

Intercut with the realities of their adult relationship, Fiona remembers first meeting the enigmatic Henry Morgan as a precocious and lonely fourteen-year-old. Her schoolgirl crush developed into an intense relationship, but it was always one which she controlled.

Or did she?

## Precocious Details

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Author : Joanna Barnard

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## From Reader Review Precocious for online ebook

### Vera Burrows says

Precocious by Joanna Barnard

Fiona Palmer has a crush on her English teacher, Henry Morgan. Who didn't have a crush on a teacher at sometime during one's school life? This one is different though; very different. Fiona feels the connection and Morgan feels it too. She is fourteen; he is old enough to ... clichéd, but fitting nonetheless. Teenage emotions run rife, emotions that are known to us all and superbly verbalised by Barnard in her ability to invade the mind of a girl seeking to be loved. Morgan, on the other hand, is skilled and experienced in luring his willing pupil first to after-school consultations and later to extraneous activities of the most licentious kind.

Years later when they unexpectedly meet again, Fiona is married and still finds the attraction all-consuming. The reader is convinced Fiona is old enough to control what happens in the complex relationship, but Barnard cleverly provides us with twists and turns, intrigue and antipathy, and the chaos of rational and irrational behaviour when it is least expected.

Precocious by Joanna Barnard must be at the top of every readers' must read list ... exactly that ... MUST READ.

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### Annette says

I have to admit to being a bit weary of unreliable narrators - it seems to be the go-to narrative mode for everyone these days.

The first 80 pages of this book is uneven, a bit muddled in places and jumps about so you have trouble sinking into the story and working out who is who. I felt there was a lack of clarity in the writing at the beginning. But there is something there in the story that is compelling and keeps you reading even if it is a somewhat tabloidy voyeurism.

The sections where the main character is supposed to be 14 never quite rang true for me, she felt much older somehow and also the truncated sentences (a trend with some writers) meant I had to go back and re-read to understand what she meant. I wonder if people write in this way because it feels immediate or is it because that's how people text each other so it comes more naturally, either way it's a bit like hyperventilating as you read, exciting at first then later uncomfortable and open to misinterpretation.

The book improves as you go further and the writing becomes more confident, though I never came to care about any of the people involved and I did feel that this lacked a deeper analysis and intelligence to it - not in the same league as Notes on A Scandal which is mining the same territory. The characterisation is weak and somewhat two dimensional but the events and obessional internal monologue are scurrilous enough to keep many riveted.

There are some nice turns of phras, and of course the taboo subject is compelling but by the end of it you're left feeling a bit grubby, as if you've spent the afternoon listening to gossip about someone you hardly know, yet none the wiser about the people or issue involved or why they did what they did just that they did it and

perhaps it's unimportant anyway. Nevertheless this is a confident debut.

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### **New Adult e dintorni says**

Mi trovo davvero in difficoltà a descrivere e a dare un giudizio su questo libro, perché credo di esserne stata particolarmente coinvolta, purtroppo quello che mi ha trasmesso è stato un senso di inquietudine e spesso angoscia, per me è stata una lettura faticosissima, e non so quanto riuscirò a essere obiettiva, ma ci provo. Fatta la premessa iniziamo, la sinossi è scritta molto bene ma non ti prepara a quello che andrai a leggere. Il romanzo parla in realtà di un tema molto scottante: i rapporti tra insegnante/alunno, anche se non originalissimo. Questa volta l'autrice cambia il punto di vista e la voce narrante della vicenda è una trentenne, Fiona, donna felicemente sposata, almeno fino al momento dell'incontro con Morgan il suo vecchio insegnante, che non ha mai dimenticato.

È una storia che parla di ossessione, di tradimento, di fiducia.

La storia racconta due linee temporali nella vita di Fiona, che si alternano tra di loro in modo abbastanza uniforme. Da adolescente lei è una ragazza che vive una situazione familiare difficile, con i genitori che non sono più una coppia, e trova conforto nei suoi sentimenti per un insegnante. Da donna sposata lei capisce che suo marito le dà tutto, ma la routine e questo ricordo idealizzato e ossessivo per il suo professore/mentore non la abbandona mai e le impedisce di vivere appieno il matrimonio.

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### **Arwen56 says**

Questo romanzo è come un aereo sulla pista di decollo: i motori salgono di giri, i freni vengono rilasciati, si schizza in avanti, si prende la rincorsa ... si prende la rincorsa ... si prende la rincorsa ... si prende la rincorsa ...

Il problema è che non si decolla mai. :-D

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### **Nicola says**

The premise of *Precocious* -- a twentysomething woman runs into a teacher with whom she had an affair at the age of 14 -- is tantalising and slots nicely into the domestic thriller oeuvre. But the story itself feels much too slight; it never really seemed to dig in to the complexities of the emotions involved. Rendered in broad strokes, the characters and situations didn't quite jump off the page for me.

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## **Laure says**

Great book. The author has a real understanding of her characters and their motivations, which makes come out as flawed but deeply real on the pages. The question central to the book of who is to blame and the fact that memory is selective and we tend to only remember what suits us and the narrative we want to create for ourselves was really well done.

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## **Bookread2day says**

Precocious is a story of how Fiona Palmer writes with enthusiasm in her diary on scraps of paper and notebooks.

You assume of course, that I kept a diary all those years...Scraps of paper... Notebooks. I don't know how much of it to believe myself, to be honest. Can there be a more unreliable narrator than a teenage girl?

This page turning scandal takes us through how Fiona meets up with her ex school teacher that she used to have a crush on.

There are some lessons you shouldn't learn in school. At school fourteen year old Fiona had fallen in love with her teacher Henry Morgan. Her crush developed into an intense relationship.

Fifteen years later married Fiona by chance meets up with her former school teacher again. Are they both just becoming friends again or could it plunge into more? Fiona shares her secret with one of her best friends that she had just met up with her ex teacher Mr Morgan and went for a meal with him and that they kissed. But Fiona is supposed to be married even though she thinks that she is unhappily married. The reason why Fiona got married to Dave was to protect her from the catalogue of mini disappointments that surrounded her life.

The story of Precocious is a controversial, compelling debut novel from an award-winning writer, Precocious is a Lolita for the modern age.

I would like to thank the publisher for sending me a proof copy.

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## **Benedetta Cipriano says**

All'inizio lo stile mi aveva messo in una condizione di svantaggio, non riuscivo ad appassionarmi alla storia, mi sembrava di leggere qualcosa di troppo distante dal mio mondo.

Superato però il limite stilistico, mi sono ritrovata nel terzo capitolo completamente attaccata alla storia. Perchè non è la solita storia banale tra professore e studentessa, è la storia di un grande amore, la storia di un tormento, della crescita, dell'incredibile delusione. Questo romanzo è pura verità, lontano dai soliti schemi racconta al lettore la potenza della verità.

Non è una storia dolce, è una storia dal retrogusto dolceamaro, che sono sicura vi stupirà.

Vi tiene con il fiato sospeso fino alla fine.

Consigliato!

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## **Margaret Madden says**

A schoolgirl crush is almost a rite of passage. An influential teacher. A bright young girl. A love of literature and a disdain for frivolity. Fifteen year old Fiona Palmer idolises her English teacher, Henry Morgan, and he returns her unwavering attention. A line is crossed, but just who is to blame?

Years later, Fiona, now married, bumps into her former teacher and the passion inside her is reignited almost at once. Their past is not long becoming the present but can they stop it before someone gets hurt? Can a precocious child and an enigmatic teacher work together with no sexual involvement? Can a mutual respect for each other remain innocent? Does age really matter? Joanna Barnard asks these questions, and more, within the pages of her debut novel. It is a story of obsession, trust, honesty and betrayal. A coming of age tale with a sting in its tale...

Although this is not an original idea, the concept of a teacher/pupil relationship is addressed in a slightly different way. This time the narrator is a thirty year old, married woman, recalling her experiences as a fifteen year old student in love with her mentor. She almost loves him before even setting eyes on him, as he is extremely popular with the students of the school. In his twenties, handsome, in an intelligent way, he is a bit of an enigma and this appeals very much to the unusual Fiona. She is the stereo-typical, angst ridden teen, with dreams of becoming a writer and being different to her peers. Mr. Morgan spots this trait, and plays on it. However, Fiona is also very adept at playing the game of seduction. Is it as simple as abuse of authority or does some blame lie with the 'mature' nature of Fiona? The author divides the narrative between the two frames, fairly equally, with Fiona guiding us through past and present. It becomes very obvious that she is not a nice person. Not at all. Neither is Henry. They are well matched. Both narcissists, both void of genuine emotion and neither having an ounce of compassion for anyone but themselves. There are secrets, lies and hidden agendas from both ends. Manipulation and desperation ooze from the pages of this novel and the writing is superb. The detail within the story is finely tuned and the prose is delicate, yet simultaneously harsh. There is however, a lot of repetition and it dragged on in places. The ending was also a let-down for me, as once again, the precocious protagonist walks away unhindered and unharmed.

Overall, a beautifully written book, with a clever character driven plot. It was just lacking something, which I can't put my finger on...

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## **Shelleyræ at Book'd Out says**

In *Precocious*, Joanna Bernard's protagonist, Fiona Palmer, has never forgotten her first love. She was just fourteen, a bright but lonely girl, when she developed a crush on her handsome and attentive English teacher, Henry Morgan, and the two plunged head long into an all consuming affair.

Fiona is now thirty and when a chance meeting with Henry highlights the mediocrity of her marriage and career, she abandons both to recapture the passion and excitement of their once illicit relationship.

Moving between the present and past, Barnard details the evolution of the relationship between Fiona and Henry. Fiona's teenage diary entries and recollections reveal her vulnerability and angst, chronicling her schoolgirl crush, and her growing determination to seduce Mr Morgan.

*"When I think about it, I have really sort of worked on him, and I feel like I'm getting somewhere. In the space of about a year, I've decided I would get close to him and I have.... I have got a tiny piece of HM - but it gives me hope. I will get all of him someday."*

Fiona's second tense present voice details their reunion as adults, her obsessive desire to reignite their relationship and to finally become his legitimate lover, an equal partner.

*"You are everywhere.*

*HM Your initials. I see them in car registrations and my heart skips a beat. I seek out the letters H and M in newspapers and draw them together with my eyes.*

*HM.*

*Him. Him, him, him. You, you, you. Parasite of my thoughts."*

But as the story progresses, Fiona's fairytale notions are slowly stripped away. Morgan is revealed as a skilled manipulator, and the ways in which he nurtured and inflamed Fiona's teenage devotion become clear. While Fiona has always been convinced she was the instigator of their relationship, learning that she was not the first, nor had been the last, in a long line of student conquests she is forced to reexamine their past, and present, relationship.

Barnard's exploration of the relationship is thoughtful, avoiding sensationalism in favour of realism . The writing is skilled, with an immediate and intimate tone that draws the reader in.

Compelling and provocative, Precocious is a thought provoking story about an unsettling subject.

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### **Karen says**

This is a book about a woman meeting up with a teacher she had an affair with as a teenager. I did enjoy it and at times it was a real page turner, but somehow finished up a bit disappointing. Overall a good read though. 8 out of 10

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### **Kevin says**

I find myself unsure how to describe this book. It deals with very intense issues in a surprisingly gentle way - that's not to say they are downplayed, more that it handles them with a delicacy and objective perspective. The result is both refreshing and unsettling.

The plot unravels gently before you, it doesn't deliver shock or drama in that regard - the author deftly offers new information that seems to simply fill in gaps rather than a huge reveal. This also lends itself to a pretty subtle character development. Despite that I didn't really warm to any of the characters - probably only really Mari despite her fairly minor role.

The story covers two timelines in Fiona's life, alternating between them fairly evenly. As an adolescent she seems to not fit in, and finds solace in her feelings for a teacher. As a married woman she seems to have a

similar feeling of not quite belonging, and turns her feelings once more to the man who defined her "type". The plots run alongside each other smoothly, with few anachronistic checks, and a general sense that both could exist without the other, but that they are both richer as a pair.

Truly the most laudable aspect of the story remains the manner with which the author doesn't paint the controversial subject matter in sensationalist black and white. She exercises restraint in offering up the events being recounted. I was surprised how sympathetic the protagonists start out. Both slowly reveal the damage inside them. The author deftly shows how Fiona has grown from her early experiences, with some powerfully significant aspects presented both sensitively and capably. The depth this gave her character was very significant in keeping me engaged. Henry offers us a contrasting perspective on how people change over time, and yet it too helped play a big part in keeping me reading.

For my taste the book took a while to get started - I was almost halfway through before I really felt things were happening, but that is a subjective aspect. I was expecting to be a bit more hooked and compelled to keep reading but unfortunately it didn't have that grip over me. That said the book is well written and did offer enough to keep me coming back. I thought the ending was delivered well, however a bit like ending a meal after the main course I was satisfied, but I would've happily had a little extra too. It leaves me feeling content having read it, but despite the strengths I think it is unlikely I will return to reread it.

A complimentary copy of this book was supplied for review by the publisher as part of the "First Reads" program.

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### **Caterina Montebello says**

Mi trovo davvero in difficoltà a descrivere e a dare un giudizio su questo libro, perché credo di esserne stata particolarmente coinvolta, purtroppo quello che mi ha trasmesso è stato un senso di inquietudine e spesso angoscia, per me è stata una lettura faticosissima, e non so quanto riuscirò a essere obiettiva, ma ci provo. Fatta la premessa iniziamo, la sinossi è scritta molto bene ma non ti prepara a quello che andrai a leggere. Il romanzo parla in realtà di un tema molto scottante: i rapporti tra insegnante/alunno, anche se non originalissimo. Questa volta l'autrice cambia il punto di vista e la voce narrante della vicenda è una trentenne, Fiona, donna felicemente sposata, almeno fino al momento dell'incontro con Morgan il suo vecchio insegnante, che non ha mai dimenticato.

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Le narrazioni di presente e passato si dipanano l'una accanto all'altra, a volte con continuità, a volte iniziando con una pagina del diario di Fiona quindicenne, entrambi potrebbero esistere l'uno senza l'altra, ma si arricchiscono insieme.

L'autrice descrive un tema controverso non schierandosi mai, descrive gli eventi, e tutte le sensazioni di Fiona sia da ragazza che da donna matura, le problematiche che via via attraversa e la sua ossessione, con un linguaggio spesso introspettivo.

Sono rimasta sorpresa da come il mio giudizio sui personaggi è cambiato radicalmente man mano che andavo avanti con la lettura. Si capiscono molte cose, ma non perché sia presente una qualche valutazione da parte della voce narrante, ma semplicemente perché i fatti cambiano e si cominciano a vedere le

problematiche vere all'interno dei protagonisti... Mentre nelle prime pagine sentivo comprensione verso di loro, proseguendo questa comprensione spariva, ma anche se sembrerà strano - ne sono rimasta stupita io per prima - non sono riuscita a provare nessun sentimento verso i protagonisti, solo angoscia per la storia. Malgrado sia pienamente consapevole che una è la vittima e l'altro il carnefice non ho provato nessuna empatia nei confronti di Fiona, e questa cosa mi ha davvero colpita. Entrambi i personaggi risultano manipolatori, bugiardi e molto innamorati di se stessi prima che dell'altro. Fiona è molto abile nel giocare il gioco della seduzione e Morgan ha un modo sottile per abusare della sua autorità, a volte sembra quasi lui la vittima.

CONTINUA A LEGGERE LA RECENSIONE QUI: <http://newadultedintorni.blogspot.it/...>

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### **Sue says**

I don't know what to say about this book, it was written really well but I'm not sure how I feel about it. I didn't really like any of the characters especially Fee or Morgan which I suppose is a sign of a good book as sometimes you just don't like the characters. Although towards the end I did start to see why Fee was the way she was and did highlight how things can be taken out of context and taken advantage of with effects years later or that have been carried around through life. It was at time an uncomfortable read highlighting a difficult subject matter which I thought the author did sensitively.

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### **Susan Thain says**

The first time I started reading this book I really couldn't get the gist of it but after starting again I found it an easy read. It really does make you think as well.

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