



Mariana

Monica Dickens , Harriet Lane (Preface)

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Monica Dickens's first book, published in 1940, could easily have been called Mariana - an Englishwoman. For that is what it is: the story of a young English girl's growth towards maturity in the 1930s. We see Mary at school in Kensington and on holiday in Somerset; her attempt at drama school; her year in Paris learning dressmaking and getting engaged to the wrong man; her time as a secretary and companion; and her romance with Sam. We chose this book because we wanted to publish a novel like *Dusty Answer*, *I Capture the Castle* or *The Pursuit of Love*, about a girl encountering life and love, which is also funny, readable and perceptive; it is a 'hot-water bottle' novel, one to curl up with on the sofa on a wet Sunday afternoon. But it is more than this. As Harriet Lane remarks in her Preface: 'It is *Mariana*'s artlessness, its enthusiasm, its attention to tiny, telling domestic detail that makes it so appealing to modern readers.' And John Sandoe Books in Sloane Square (an early champion of Persephone Books) commented: 'The contemporary detail is superb - Monica Dickens's descriptions of food and clothes are particularly good - and the characters are observed with vitality and humour. *Mariana* is written with such verve and exuberance that we would defy any but academics and professional cynics not to enjoy it.'

Mariana Details

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From Reader Review Mariana for online ebook

Karin says

Mary Shannon has gone away to brood while her husband is at war in WW II. During a storm she hears on the radio that her husband's ship has gone down; frantically, she tries to telephone to get news, but her line is down. During the long night, she remembers her life from about age 8, and it is part coming of age and part becoming her own person. This is the second novel by Monica Dickens, the great- granddaughter of Charles Dickens, and she said that it was semi-autobiographical.

Part of this book gripped me more than others. I did root for Mary, even if she was often self-centered; I think that is a natural part of most children's development, and if she didn't get out of it as early as many of us think she should have, just look around at how many self-centred teens and early twenties people there are today.

As far as women authors went, Monica Dickens was only outsold at that time by Daphne du Maurier, however, her work hasn't remained as popular over time. I haven't read du Maurier for years, so can't give a good comparison as to why, but I do think it's a shame she's so little known now. I didn't love this book, although I suspect that when I was younger I'd have liked it more.

Jane says

This may be the loveliest opening to a novel that I have ever read.

“Mary sometimes heard people say: ‘I can’t bear to be alone.’ She could never understand this. All her life she had needed the benison of occasional solitude, and she needed it now more than ever. If she could not be with the man she loved, then she would rather be by herself.”

It captured my own feelings perfectly, and expressed them more beautifully than I ever could.

MarianaMary escaped to the country with just her small terrier dog, Bingo, in tow. Her husband was at sea, in the navy, and the country was at war. Because she wanted to be quiet, to remember, to think.

It was lovely watching Mary and Bingo settle in, lovely to be reminded of the depth of Monica Dickens' understanding of character and of her talent for catching exactly the right details to paint a perfect picture.

I was particularly taken with her understanding that a terrier can be sound asleep and alert at the same time
...

The peaceful scene was disturbed when Mary switched on the wireless, when she heard that her husband's ship had been hit. There were survivors, there was hope, but Mary had a night to get through before she found out the next morning if her husband was alive or dead.

It was a sleepless night, and as she lay awake Mary turned over memories in her mind.

She remembered her childhood, with a mother who had been widowed in the last war and who worked as a

dressmaker to support them. Her husband's family would have helped but she didn't want to be beholden to them. It was enough that they gave Mary lovely, idyllic summer holidays in the country. And a place in a bigger family.

She remembered going to drama school with grand plans, and coming to realise that she was on the wrong path. Fashion college in Paris was a much better idea. She could have a lovely time and she could play a part in the family business. Mary had a wonderful time in Paris, and she made a marvellous catch. But even the most marvellous catch is not necessarily the right catch.

Mary found her happy ending back in England, at the most unexpected moment.

Now it has to be said that Mary is not the most sympathetic of characters. She is often awkward, thoughtless, selfish even. But she was real, and for all her failing I did like her, I did want her to find her path in life, her place in the world. Sometimes fallible heroines are so much easier to love.

And Mary was real, alive, and her emotional journey was so utterly real. There were highs and lows, tears and laughter. Every emotion a young woman might go through. And so many incidents, so many moments to recollect.

All of this was observed so beautifully, with understanding, intelligence, and just the right amount of empathy.

But if Mary's life was the foreground, the background was just as perfectly realised. Her world was as alive as she was, and every character who was part of that world, even if only for a short while, was caught perfectly.

I loved watching over Mary's life. It was an ordinary life, but every ordinary life is unique and Monica Dickens highlighted that quite beautifully.

And I could have stayed in her world quite happily, but morning eventually came, and Mary had to face whatever news of her husband might come. And when it came I had to leave.

I'd love to know what happened in the next chapters of Mary's life, but failing that I'll go back and read about the years I know all over again one day. Because this is a lovely book, and a lovely way to get lost in another life and another world.

Katie Lumsden says

I really enjoyed this - an interesting coming of age story, looking at life in the 1920s and 30s. I really liked the character of Mary, and loved the exploration of different kinds of love.

Lady Dixie says

Absolutely delightful. This is a gentle coming of age tale, set between the two great wars. Mary finds love

and loses love and finds and loses her way. She's absolutely charming, full of inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies. I read that this is a "hot water bottle" book, and indeed, it is.

Claire Fuller says

Read 50 pages. Not for me.

Rachel Hore says

This is one of those comfort reads that take you back to a lovely safe place when it's miserable outside or you're ill or simply having a duvet day. Monica Dickens was at one time hugely popular but now she's seen as old-fashioned, and she probably is, but in a good way.

This is her second book, but her first novel. It was published in 1941 when she was only twenty-four, and it's semi-autobiographical, I would say. Mariana (named for she of Tennyson's moated grange) is the spirited, but ultimately conventional daughter of a widowed mother, and brought up in shabby genteel circumstances. Her psychological 'place of safety' is a country house where she used to stay with her cousins as a child. During the novel she rambles through a series of romances, including an engagement to a wealthy French boy, until she finally discovers her soulmate. There are comparisons to be made with the delightful *I Capture the Castle* by Dodie Smith. You could also say that it's *Bridget Jones's Diary* for the 1930s.

Some readers will find Mariana a little smug, but I didn't mind that too much. She's wickedly funny about the range of elderly aunts, raffish uncles and slovenly maidservants who shamble through her life and I often found myself chuckling over some thumbnail character sketch.

I do admire Persephone Books for bringing this book back into print in a beautiful edition - with flaps - and a lovely introduction by Harriet Lane.

Gitte says

In 'Mariana', we follow a young girl growing up in the 1920s and 30s. We follow her infatuations, her precious memories, her dreams and disappointments. The book is beautiful, dreamy and a wonderful pleasure to curl up with. I enjoyed every single page and wished it would never end.

People don't want to read about people in heaven. They like to lick their lips over them in hell.

I adored our protagonist, Mary. She appreciates the good things in life. She's passionate, creative and dreamy. Although she is very sociable, she values being alone and enjoys her own company.

She had a feeling of calmness, almost of dignity, that she had never had when she was not alone. With other people one was only an unconsidered fragment of the company; alone, one was a complete entity by oneself.

'Mariana' is a wonderful novel that I would recommend to anyone who liked *I Capture the Castle*, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, 'Anne of Green Gables' and Jane Austen. Or anyone who likes to read novels filled with dreams and creativity.

She was nineteen and it felt wrong not to be in love.

Monica Dickens is an - for me at least - unknown author, despite the fact that she has written tons of books and is Charles Dickens' great-granddaughter. 'Mariana' has been out of print for many years and has only recently been reprinted.

My blog: The Bookworm's Closet

Beth Bonini says

This novel (which borrowed heavily from Monica Dickens' own life, and was written when she was only 23) is set in one of my favourite eras: England between the world wars. There is a frame around the story, in which the grown-up heroine is waiting to hear if her husband survived the bombing of his ship, but then we are immediately plunged into young Mary's childhood -- at Charbury, the quintessential family country home in Somerset. The book is mostly about Mary's various false loves -- before finding the one true love -- but all the pleasure is in the detail. Her Uncle Geoffrey, a lazy, feckless, but utterly charming actor, was an absolute scene-stealer.

Hugely enjoyable to read, but it didn't have the emotional impact of *The Winds of Heaven* -- the first Dickens novel that I read.

Margaret says

Monica Dickens was the great-granddaughter of Charles Dickens. Of her novels, I've only read *Mariana*, which I like very much; I would also recommend her non-fiction, particularly the very funny *One Pair of Hands*, about her work as a cook and the households she worked in.

Mariana was Dickens' first novel, published originally in 1940. It begins with Mary, the heroine, learning that her husband's destroyer has been sunk with only a few survivors. While she waits to find out whether her husband is one of them, she takes refuge in thinking of her past: the vivacious mother and actor uncle who brought her up, the beautiful Elizabethan house belonging to her father's family, her education at a strict girls' school and a drama school, and her love affairs in England and Paris.

Just as *One Pair of Hands* and her other autobiographical works do, *Mariana* draws on Dickens' personal experiences: she too spent her holidays at an ancestral house, she too went to drama school, she too spent time in Paris after leaving school. Perhaps partly because it's based on her own life, the book is full of the small domestic details Dickens is so good at, of clothes, food, gardens, and houses, which I find so fascinating. I've only read this twice, but it's quickly turning into a perfect comfort read.

Arpita (BagfullofBooks) says

Mariana by Monica Dickens is a coming of age novel about a young girl, striving her whole life, to find the perfect love. It's a story that has great depth and one of the most striking endings I have read in the longest time.

Mary lives with her working mother and uncle in a small flat in London. She remains disconnected to her everyday life in London but highly anticipates the time that she can spend during the holidays with her extended paternal family in the countryside. Her first love is for her cousin. But the love is rather one sided.

We witness Mary's emotional awakening as a young child, besotted with cousin Denys. Later as a young woman, we find her engaged to a young Frenchman in Paris, called Pierre. Though Pierre helps her to overcome her loneliness in a foreign city, Mary knows that the relationship is tinged with her doubts. Later, when she is working in England, she finds love in the most unexpected way. Sam, a young architect is everything she has always, unknowingly been looking for. With Sam there are no doubts, no fears or insecurities. But with the outset of the Second World War, lives fall into jeopardy. Can Mary's love survive the ordeal?

While Mary is enrolled in drama school as a young girl, she is asked to recite Tennyson's poem 'Mariana'. As revealed later in the novel, this is quite a pivotal moment in the novel. Mariana is a poem about a woman who is disconnected from society and despondently awaits the return of her love. The poem is laced with doubt and desolation. There is an absence of a conclusive ending in the poem, just as there is in the story by Dickens. But there is a faint whisper or a premonition of what may come to pass. Some endings are best left unsaid.

It is only at the end of the novel that we fully realize that Dickens' Mary is Tennyson's Mariana and the full force of Dickens' genius strikes us.

<https://bagfullofbooks.com/2017/03/01...>

Emy says

Mon avis : <https://everydayreadingblog.wordpress...>

Girl with her Head in a Book says

Review originally published here: <http://girlwithherheadinabook.co.uk/2...>

I adored this book – it was such a comfort read. I feel a real sense of sadness that it is only a library book – giving it back is going to be a wrench. There are obvious parallels to I Capture The Castle but to me, it recalled far more The Pursuit of Love, only a far gentler version; there is none of the trademark Mitford spikiness, it is self-deprecating rather than skewering. This is a true coming-of-age tale with the blithe ingenue heroine Mary at its heart. The story begins with her as a young wife, listening to the wireless and hearing that her husband's ship has gone down. Stuck out in the countryside in the middle of a storm, with no access to a phone line, Mary has no way of finding out what has become of him and, unable to sleep, she

lies in the darkness thinking of all of the events of her life that have brought her to this point. From such a bleak beginning, the novel immediately lightens, going back to Mary's idyllic childhood, the long summers spent amongst her cousins at Charbury, her bohemian dress-maker mother and her would-be movie star uncle – it becomes a comedy of manners, with the reader watching a young girl grow up in a world which knows that her ultimate fate is only ever going to be matrimony.

There is more than the whiff of the memoir about Mariana, with many of the details drawn from Monica Dickens' own life. There is a comfort about many of the early events of the story, with various childish adventures and mishaps that would not be out of place in a Noel Streatfeild novel. Still, there is an added layer to many of the anecdotes, with the adult Mary reminding herself of details that her mother reported later, of tensions and arguments of which at the time she was ignorant – these days were not as halcyon as she believed. Yet all the same, Mariana never sets out to be a novel that is going to rock the boat; as a young woman growing to adulthood in the 1930s, Mary is extremely conventional in her outlook – inheriting the outlook of her father's side of the family, she is horrified when her mother suggests that when she grows up she will have to out to work. "Oh no, I shan't do that, I'm going to be married and have twenty-six children with names going all through the alphabet, like Arthur, Barbara, Chloe, Egbert, Felicity, George, Harriet, Ipheginia – ' The twelve year-old Mary is no crazed husband-hunter, she just knows that the only career she is interested in is that of wife.

There is a real nostalgia to Mariana, particularly in its descriptions of Charbury, her grandparents' country house. There are frequent descriptions of food – the nursery teas and the high dinners to which the children are invited on their best behaviour, then the wonderful evening when Mary's Uncle Geoffrey takes her to the Cafe Royal. The food really hits its zenith when Mary spends her year in Paris, with the dashing Pierre available to guide her to all of the best spots – then when Mary realises on the boat home to England that she cannot possibly remain in France, since England looks 'so comfortably unexotic, like a cabbage.' Food is a part of Mary's identity – and with the advent of rationing, not only is the reader wistful for the luxurious pre-rationing cuisine, but Mary is having to find familiarity elsewhere.

More than anything, Mariana is a truly funny novel – my personal favourite was the scene from Mary's childhood when she struggles through her algebra homework, with both her mother and uncle trying to help her. Her mother 'with puckered brows trying to cast her mind back to the days of the Dulwich High School, and Uncle Geoffrey breathing down the back of Mary's neck, out of his depth but willing to have a good guess'. As the conversation continues, Uncle Geoffrey doggedly repeats the question to himself since his 'policy was, when in doubt, always go back to the beginning.' This was so reminiscent of my own childhood struggles with maths that I had to laugh – Dickens has a real ear for dialogue and it is this which lifts what could otherwise be a very run-of-the-mill tale into being a novel to truly treasure.

Much of Dickens' wit is highly observant, such as her words on Mary's classmate Cecily Barnard who 'couldn't even write her own name and was not allowed to lock the door of the lavatory' – then there is also the horror of Mary's first friend Muriel, whose 'oppressive attachment' proves hard to shake off. There is the shudder of true recognition in Dickens' description of Muriel as 'like those undergraduates whose political and religious convictions are as obtrusive as their Adam's apples.' It is with relief that Mary discovers Angela Shaw as a friend instead. The comedy hits its most absurd height with Mary's attempts to train as an actress which are harrowing in their awfulness – Dickens conjures up vividly Mary's leaden lack of aptitude, something which must have been a cathartic experience since Monica Dickens too was kicked out of drama school for not being able to act.

I read the book with no pre-conceptions – I even somehow missed the blurb – and so observed Mary's romantic adventures and misadventures with no expectations about where the cards would fall and ultimately

I was glad that I had done so. This is not a story with wild twists and turns, it is the story of how a young girl came to be but perhaps the biggest surprise is that Mary's conclusion is not a romantic one, but a realisation that she is complete in herself. That no matter what the morning may bring, she will have to go on. 'When you were born, you were given a trust of individuality that you were bound to preserve. It was precious. The things that happened in your life, however closely connected with other people, developed and strengthened that individuality. You became a person Nothing that ever happens in life can take away the fact that I am me. So I have to go on being me.' Mary may appear rooted in the domestic, but for all that, she makes a surprisingly revolutionary revelation. I can think of few novels which left me feeling quite so much happiness, and the only reason I didn't whoop at the final few lines was that I was on a bus. A reassuring read but one with an incredibly warm heart.

Gina says

Charming and highly readable. It was a tad predictable but Persephone novels have yet to disappoint me with wonderful observations of the time period and witty conversation I really connected with Mary as a heroine, it was a nice cozy read!

Ali says

Well I really enjoyed this book, it's the story of Mary who we first meet when she's about eleven. We follow her through holidays at her grandfather's large country house with her cousins, schooling, a short spell at a dramatic arts college, an art course in Paris, her first job, and a couple of misjudged romances. There are a host of loveable characters - one of my personal favourites being Uncle Geoffrey. Of course as with many of these republished works that Persephone offer - some of the language is slightly non PC and rather dated - but you have set things in the context of the times they were written in and not mind too much - I love things written in the 20's 30's and 40's (this was originally first published in 1940) - although madly I often had the voice of Ceila Johnson ringing in my ears as I read - but that could just be me - I saw Mary as a younger Ceila Johnson I think.

Helene Jeppesen says

BEAUTIFUL! "Mariana" has become one of my favourite books of this year so far!

It deals with Mary, an impressionable, creative child living in London with her mother. Mary is a daredevil, but she also has a fascination for life and everything surrounding her, and her fascination is contagious. Reading the chapters about her childhood kind of reminded me of the childhood scenes in "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee, simply because they brought back the nostalgia of my own childhood and what it feels like to be little and free.

"Mariana" continues the narrative of Mary as we follow her into young adulthood and later adulthood. By that time, my heart was sold and I was eager to stay with Mary and find out what would happen to her. This was one of those books that made me think about it when I wasn't reading it, and when I was reading it, it was with a persistent smile on my face.

Monica Dickens, the granddaughter of Charles Dickens, masters the craft of writing really well.

"Mariana" is kind of written like a jigsaw puzzle in which you get small bits and pieces, but it's not until the very last page that you get to see the big picture. Alongside that, "Mariana" is funny, honest and insightful. It

basically tells the story of young girl who grows up to become a woman, and it does so very well. I loved this book! I cannot praise it enough! And I'm thankful that I have another book by Monica Dickens waiting for me on my bookshelves :)
