



Unnatural Habits

Kerry Greenwood

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1929: Girls are going missing in Melbourne. Little, pretty golden-haired girls. And not just pretty. Three of them are pregnant, poor girls from the harsh confines of the Magdalene Laundry. People are getting nervous. Polly Kettle, a pushy, self-important Girl Reporter with ambition and no sense of self preservation, decides to investigate - and promptly goes missing herself. It's time for Phryne and Dot to put a stop to this and find Polly Kettle before something quite irreparable happens to all of them. It's all piracy and dark cellars, convents and plots, murder and mystery and Phryne finally finds out if it's true that blondes have more fun.

Unnatural Habits Details

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Author : Kerry Greenwood

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From Reader Review Unnatural Habits for online ebook

Kathryn says

Always an enjoyable book to listen to, although I got a bit lost at the end, but this is not unusual for me with murder mysteries! I also felt like the ending dragged a little - there seemed to be a lot of different threads in this one, some of which were wrapped up sooner than others, and I think it was that making me feel that the ending was dragging on.

Amalia Gavea says

Disclaimer- I never grant more than 3 stars to a cozy mystery. For me, a 3-star rating means that this is an excellent example of the genre.

When I want to try my luck on a new -to me- cozy mystery series, I have a weird habit. I choose an installment at random and begin. It may be the 2nd in the series or the last, but never the first. I feel I am getting a better grasp of the writing and the characters and the introduction to the plot is quicker. It paid off in the Mary Russell mysteries, it was a disaster in the case of Maisie Dobbs, but here, my acquaintance with Phryne Fisher was interesting.

Without giving too much away, we find ourselves in Australia during the 1920s, where Phryne starts investigating a strange and disturbing case of missing girls. The Church, the social institutions, hospitals, brothels, the Press, everything plays a part in this sensitive case. So, Phryne has to face a number of well - set obstacles from the patriarchal society and the religious convictions in order to discover the truth and the reporter who went missing during the process of her personal investigation.

The novel was a nice deviation from what I have seen lately in the Cozy Mystery genre. Phryne is a charming character, brilliant, considerate, sassy and opinionated in a realistic way, without sounding too abrupt or condescending. She outsmarts her opponents with right arguments and sheer cleverness, not by trying too hard to appear "bad-ass" or however else they call it nowadays. (Honest to God, I do hate this expression...) Her minions, the young people who act as her "Network" -yes, too much "Sherlock", I know- are very entertaining. Each one represents a different "type" and provides a healthy kind of humour without trying to sound smart or inappropriate given the subject matter of the story.

What I really appreciated was the inclusion of many themes worthy of discussion in the novel. There is the tyranny of patriarchy that causes young people to rebel and react without thinking, trying to find an escape. There is the intense presence of the political conflict of the time, with the battle between Capitalism and Communism, the strengthening of the Women's Movement, and the emergence of the theory of Eugenics that caused disaster, mayhem and misery during the following decades. The fact that Kerry Greenwood didn't hesitate to deal with such a disturbing subject in a delicate, realistic and brave manner was a very pleasant surprise.

So, is this mystery something groundbreaking or innovative? No, it isn't, it doesn't have to be. All it needs to be is well-written, faithful in the depiction of the era and respectful towards the reader. And this installment succeeds in all these and becomes an entertaining "quality" light read.

ARC kindly provided by Poisoned Pen Press and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

* Jennifer says

As usual for this series, this book was excellent. Really excellent. Phryne is like the 1920's, female version of James Bond. She's not a spy, mind you, but that same self assurance, unlimited means, elegant taste and ability to strike fear in all hearts, as well as lust in the male ones. She answers to nobody and lives by her own standard of ethics and morality, not the law. Nothing scares her.

Unnatural Habits covers more than a few plots - a missing girl, mistreatment of unwed soon-to-be-mothers, a string of abductions of both women and girls. Phryne tackles them all with efficiency. Relying much more heavily on her family than in the past to resolve these problems, it seems she is more frustrated in her efforts than in previous books. This frustration and how she deals with it rounds out her character a bit, I think.

She has a great family of characters around her: her two adopted daughters, her personal maid, the Butlers, Bert and Cec and Tink, the newest member of the family. Each individual and interesting in their own right, and a lot of fun to read about. My only complain in this book is Phryne's new habit of referring to them all as minions, which seems disrespectful and not at all in keeping with the personality Ms. Greenwood has gone to such great lengths to establish for Phryne.

Ms. Greenwood does an excellent job of relaying the history of Melbourne in 1929 (give or take) - she really brings the city to life and as a transplant to Melbourne I love reading about the areas I recognise and learning about the history - the good, the bad and the very colourful.

I adore this whole series, and I'm hard pressed to even name one book in the whole that isn't excellent and a recommended read to anyone enjoying the genre. I look forward to Phryne's future adventures and pray Ms. Greenwood never tires of her.

Brenda says

When Miss Phryne Fisher observed a young woman being harassed by boys on the street, she intervened. But Polly Kettle wasn't particularly grateful for her rescue – a reporter from a local paper in Melbourne she was filled with a determination to get ahead; to get her story at any cost. And her cost came when she vanished – it seemed she'd been abducted; Phryne was sure she would find her, with the help of her good friend, Jack Robinson the local policeman.

When three young women who were very pregnant disappeared from a nearby residence, as well as small blonde girls also going missing, the ire of Jack Robinson was up. Phryne, along with her helpers Dot, Jane, Tinker and Ruth decided to investigate. And so began the search through places of ill-repute, the Magdalen Laundry of the local convent, the nearby Catholic church and a place at Bacchus Marsh – to name a few. Bert and Cec were of assistance but the dangers were immense. The murder and mayhem of the late 1920s in Melbourne continued unabated. Would Phryne succeed in her goal to find Polly Kettle plus the missing women and girls? Or was it already too late?

Once again Aussie author Kerry Greenwood writes a stunning Phryne Fisher tale with *Unnatural Habits*.

Filled with mystery and intrigue, light and entertaining titbits, laugh out loud moments and lots of suspense, *Unnatural Habits* is thoroughly enjoyable. Highly recommended.

Marianne says

Unnatural Habits is the nineteenth book in the popular Phryne Fisher series by Australian author, Kerry Greenwood. A chance encounter with a young female reporter for *The Daily Truth* in a laneway leads Phryne Fisher to investigate the disappearance of three pregnant girls and said reporter. Margaret Kettle, better known as Polly, is determined to make her name as a serious journalist and steals a colleague's story on White Slavery. But her enquiries into the fate of three very pregnant teenagers last seen at a pious widow's nursing home mark the last sighting of the enthusiastic if somewhat careless reporter.

Her questions in a variety of places have ruffled some feathers, but whose? Someone associated with the Convent of the Good Shepherd and their workhouse-like Magdalen Laundry business? The owners of local brothels or exclusive Gentlemen's Clubs? Or does her disgruntled colleague have a hand in her disappearance? What does the employment agency, *Jobs For All*, have to do with it? And just who is going around performing involuntary vasectomies on deserving males?

In this instalment, Phryne makes full use of her daughters (on vacation from school), of Dot, of her new employee, Tink and of her taxi drivers, Bert and Cec. Her minions (as she repeatedly refers to them in this instalment) are put to work on a secret code and other researches as well as taking active parts in the interrogation of witnesses. Phryne adopts an assortment of disguises: a blonde actress, a pregnant girl and a nun, as required by the different strands of the investigation. As well as white slavery, eugenics, virginity tests, kidnapping, slave labour and a female-run fruit-growing collective all feature. With this excellent novel, Greenwood once again proves herself a mistress of historical crime fiction.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Well...another good novel and the title speaks for itself, a bit.

Phryne gets into a case with some very sad, unpleasant and unsavory situations. The books do not flinch at blunt and graphic depictions and that doesn't bother me. I've mentioned Phryne's proclivity to enjoy (graphic) sex with (sometimes seemingly any available) numerous sex partners. That's not what I refer to here. The plot here is one that's a bit more serious (not that murder isn't serious enough) than some of the other books

The humor is still here and it's well handled in the face of a somewhat more serious plot. Again I can recommend it. Enjoy.

Tracey says

I have to admit that it has been some time since I read Phryne Fisher, I did manage a handful of the early novels, even watched the television series but was surprised to realise that Miss Fisher is up to book 19. This

was no deterrent in reading *Unnatural Habits* for the only things that seemed to be different, from my memory of the earlier books, is that Phryne's household has grown and she has more notoriety with the general public.

Miss Fisher is still her independent, free-wheeling, scandalous lady of Melbourne. When comes to solving a mystery Miss Fisher's approach is simply to rattle the cages and see what or who comes loose. In this mystery, Miss Fisher is seeking to discover the whereabouts of three missing girls and the journalist, Polly Kettle who was reporting on the story.

The book for me was a quick read, the mystery engaging and a bit like meeting with an old friend after a couple of years away, a pleasurable get together. Yet once you have had that catch up, you are quite okay to wait some time before the next one because not much has changed. Miss Fisher still thumbs her nose at society, still approaches life with a take no prisoners' attitude and shows her vulnerability briefly.

I do not know how many times 'Oh you are Miss Fisher, I have heard so much about you' was used to allow Phyne to gain trust or intimidate reluctant people. It seemed that no one was willing to stand up to Miss Fisher and perhaps that is what she needs is a worthy adversary.

The support characters are just that and are fleshed out well. Melbourne in 1929 is believable and you can walk into the world with great ease and feel that you are there.

The other thing is if you are trying to diet, do not read this book. There are so many descriptions of food that I could feel the calories leaping off the page.

Look it is a good read, it is fun, it is engaging and is perfect escapism.

Karen says

It's almost impossible now to read these books and not have visions of the perfect Essie Davies as Phryne in the TV series wafting elegantly before your eyes. Which actually enhances the storylines as, although always beautifully described and outlined by Greenwood, she now has a physicality and a more three dimensional feel. It also didn't hurt that the dialogue, which was always crisp, sharp, clever and funny, has a voice as well.

I sort of lost my way with the Phryne Fisher series somewhere back in the middle of what is now 19 books, and it was actually sharing the listening to the audio books with himself in the car that rekindled interest. It's too easy to forget the humour, and the gentle social commentary in these books, especially when the cover art and the blurbs often tend to suggest that there's something slightly on the cosy side about the series.

Whilst the delivery might be cleverly on the lighter side, and the humour subtle and very tongue in cheek, the plotlines are often veering into non-cosy territory (as does Miss Fisher's love life), but possibly, to my memory, never quite so pointedly as in *UNNATURAL HABITS*.

For a book that's set in 1929 there's something depressingly current day about the main storyline - the mistreatment, abuse and exploitation of young girls. Girls who are the victims of rape, abuse, poverty, neglect or simply girls who made a mistake, they were abandoned to systems and organisations which, whilst carefully revealed in *UNNATURAL HABITS*, were obviously appalling. Whilst Greenwood is cautious in her revelations of details of what went on, there is no masking the revulsion and disapproval of the institutions and facilities that treated young women, and their babies with such awful cruelty. It's the restraint with which many of the observations are made that makes them all the more pointed.

As with all things Phryne however, this is not a single stream plot. In the search for missing young girls, Phryne encounters a variety of establishments and people from the "gentlemen-only" Blue Cat Club, to the

farming commune of women in Bacchus Marsh, and a brush with the "middle-class" which seems to have the potential to derail Phryne more than any of society's "fringe dwellers" ever would. In a particularly satisfying sidebar, there's also the small matter of a vigilante anaesthetising and surgically, and very skilfully, sterilising serial women abusers.

Melbourne, and Greater Victoria, are always lovingly rendered in these books. There's obviously considerable research into the locations of the period, but the books never read as a geographical treatise. The action insinuates itself into the landscape of the time beautifully, the little details of what Phryne sees, and experiences, come alive for the reader, transporting you back, for example, to the fledgling Apple Orchards of Bacchus Marsh and surrounds.

As you'd expect, there is quite a bit of ladylike and very non-ladylike action in these books. Phryne commits acts of daring doing in order to save the day, ably assisted by her retinue of minions (now where have I heard that word before...). Her household continues to evolve, her wardrobe to beguile, and her Melbourne enchant. You can't help but foster a sneaking desire for an Adventuresses Club, to see the wonder of the Blue Cat Club, and the Block Arcade as it was then.

UNNATURAL HABITS, by dint of the subject matter that it tackles, seems to have headed off into slightly darker territory than previous books, but it does it elegantly, and with the same sense of wrongs to be righted, offences to be avenged, and life to be lived.

<http://www.austcrimefiction.org/review/unnatural-habits>

Carl Brookins says

I confess it's a cause for celebration when another Phryne Fisher adventure shows up. Yes, the publisher sent this novel in the hope that I'd give it a review. Yes, I have written elsewhere that I love the Phryne Fisher crime novels. The Honorable Phryne Fisher is an aristocratic displaced single woman living on her inheritance in Melbourne, Australia where she serves the downtrodden and criminally beset. Her relations with a few coppers is excellent and she has over the years, taken to her bosom four needy souls, Dot who became Phryne's secretary and factotum, and two teenaged girls, Jane and Ruth, rescued from serious poverty. Now a fourth, a boy named Tinker, a lad of unusual skills for one so young has joined the menage. Life on the streets and waterfronts will do that, I suppose.

In the early Twentieth Century, when the series is set, women as emancipated as is the Hon. Miss Fisher, are rare indeed. Her wealth is a great help, but so too are her attitudes and her diverse talents. Distant and poor relation of the aristocracy of the UK, the Great War elevated her to wealth and high society. Bored, she decamped to Australia, after a stint as an ambulance driver in the war. She is, in this outing, the mistress of a monstrously wealth Chinese merchant named Lin Chung.

The plot centers on the mysterious disappearances of small blond girls from the city. The question of why, since no bodies are discovered, is what has been done with them. At the same time, questions are arising as to the treatment of young pregnant and unmarried women by the local Catholic church.

This novel is darker and grittier than most of the previous stories in this series, but Fisher makes do in a most forthright fashion, focusing her justifiable wrath on kidnappers and religious zealots. Smoothly written as

always, the pace is jaunty the scenes are well illuminated and the novel is thoroughly satisfying. I live in the hope for more adventures with this most excellent female investigator.

Andrea says

I received a copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

This is by far my favorite Phryne story so far!

There are so many issues discussed in this book (from homosexuality and a club that offers a safe haven for them under the guise of "gentlemen's club" to brothels, child abuse, communist communes, white slavery, and Eugenics (the idea that a population can be improved by controlled, scientific breeding to weed out "flaws"), all set to the seemingly glittering world of the 1920s. As always, Greenwood's extensive research results in an incredibly rich and fascinating scenery.

Phryne, as always, has multiple problems to solve that are all connected: pregnant girls, abused and abandoned by their families, have disappeared from a convent laundry where Phryne uncovers revolting practices; beautiful, blonde children have gone missing and appear to have been sold; desperate girls disappear from an employment agency that offers jobs overseas and are never seen again; and then the reporter that has uncovered the connection behind this disappears without a trace...

This is much darker than some of the other books in the series I have read. Phryne's outrage at the goings-on at the convent the three girls have disappeared from is so touching, and her frustration at her inability to save each and every child that suffers at the hands of the nuns there is incredibly moving. I have never been so in awe of her as in this book. The way she fearlessly takes on abusive priests and nuns, fathers and mothers who sell their children, and the slavers who sell children is so incredibly inspiring. There were times she was quite terrifying in her "angel of vengeance" state, but it was incredibly satisfying to see her take on such scum with the help of her loving and supportive family (which now includes three minions/ adopted children; her lover Lin; the Butlers; and her faithful sidekick and maid Dot).

Nikki says

Unnatural Habits is one of the more memorable entries in the series, in that it has a lot of social commentary and some really appalling details which are, as far as I can tell, historically accurate, like the laundry run by nuns, the lying in homes where unmarried women had their babies and they were taken away, white slavery, etc. There's also some interesting stuff with the Blue Cat Club — a gay club which apparently really existed — and the newspaper office where Polly Kettle, wannabe ace reporter, works. Phryne gets into quite a lot of trouble in this one, and the expanded circle of her minions, including Tinker, stand her in good stead.

The book also has the delightful side plot that someone is going around in a nun's habit, knocking men out, and very skillfully and carefully operating on them so they can't have any more children, in cases where they mistreat their wives/children, don't provide for them, etc, etc. It's problematic, of course, because it's an assault, but it's also just glorious poetic justice in a fictional context, so I don't feel too bad for laughing about it.

The ending is predictably dramatic, and Phryne predictably kickass in bringing things to a neat conclusion. And I love the glimpses we get beyond her armour in her reaction to the laundries and what she sees in the lying in home.

Originally posted here.

Bea Charmed says

I really should be used to the differences between the books and TV episodes by now. The episode inspired by this book bears almost no resemblance to the book. Basically, all they have in books common is missing pregnant teen girls.

So, the book. Phryne encounters a female reporter and finds herself getting involved in the case of some missing poor, young girls. Then the reporter goes missing. And soon, Phryne and her crew, or minions as she likes to call them, are on the hunt and up to their necks in white slavery, slave labor, virginity tests, child marriage, sexual abuse, kidnapping, and a socialist-inspired fruit farming collective run and worked by females only. There's a lot going on and at times my attention wandered but Phryne and minions were full of life and opinions and passion. Phryne is more self-centered and sybaritic than in the TV show and at times, I thought she needed to woman up and be less indulgent but she never backs away from doing what she thinks is right and enacting her own version of justice. When you are in trouble, Phryne Fisher is just the woman to help you. Provided she thinks you're worth helping.

Greenwood has beautifully developed the relationships in the series. They're layered, rich, and complex. She weaves politics, economics, social issues, a hint of romance, humor, and mysteries into a brew that's dark with a hint of sweet, rich, and engaging.

Some favorite quotes:

"Miss Fisher is a force of nature and there is never anything you can do about her."

"Well, darling, one does not like to watch a nice little woolly baa-lamb go leaping and gamboling into a field full of large bitey wolves. It has a certain morbid interest, I agree," said Phryne, sipping deeply. "But it is basically a blood sport and I don't even like fox-hunting."

The egg whites, apparently, had completely declined to be whipped.

...but Jane's writing looked like an intoxicated inky spider had staggered across the page on the way to the bar for another drink. Which it really didn't need.

Terri says

I always love Miss Fisher! This one is about tracking down missing girls who are pregnant and forced to work in a horrible laundry by the Church. Another multilevel story with lots of twists and mysteries to solve. The gang (and its newest member - Tinker) investigate with enthusiasm. Loved it!

Jennifer says

This was my first time reading this author. It's also one of the few times that I enjoyed the television version better than the book. I will try to read a few more to see if they grow on me but overall, I find the story written very lightly while the subject matter was very dark and heavy. The characters seemed very 2 dimensional and somewhat a disappointment.

Ivonne Rovira says

Pretty, blonde girls who are down on their luck have begun to disappear in Melbourne — including three in their eighth month of pregnancy. In the nineteenth novel to feature the Honorable Phryne Fisher, set in 1929, the fabulous Phryne begins the investigation with the disappearance of a well-meaning but blundering girl reporter with the made-for-19th-century-melodrama name of Polly Kettle. Phryne's investigation then expands to the three missing unwed mothers and, eventually, to the larger criminal enterprise.

More details would spoil the novel for the reader, but the mystery proves very cleverly plotted. I can also say that all of Phryne's fabulous family is back: the Butlers, her adopted daughters Ruth and Jane; her loyal maid and friend, Dot Williams; Dot's shy boyfriend, policeman Hugh Collins; Inspector "Call Me Jack — Everyone Else Does" Robinson, "red-raggers" Cec and Bert, Phryne's sister Eliza and her lesbian lover Lady Alice Harborough, and the worldly wise Dr. Elizabeth MacMillan. What a joy! Just like meeting up with old friends unexpectedly while out at dinner or shopping! Plus there's a new addition to Phryne's eclectic household: orphan Tinker, an urchin apparently picked up in No. 18 in the series, *Dead Man's Chest*, which I have yet to read.

Lastly, author Kerry Greenwood sometime draws attention to serious matters in her lightheartedly novels, and she does so here. The silence of the Church in the face of predatory priests and the sanctimonious cruelty of the Magdalene Laundries will prove a lesson for those who thought such crimes were of more recent vintage.
