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Praise for *The Observations*

“To match Bessy you’d have to go back to Becky Sharp or the more astute observers of Charles Dickens. Her eye is keen, her mind quick and tart, her voice gorgeously in love with language. . . . She bewitches and amuses from the first moment.”—*The State*

“Entertaining ... rollicking and engaging. A confident, fresh, roguishly charming first work.”—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“Sharp, funny and tenderhearted, Bessy is an accomplishment for Londoner and first-time novelist Harris, who also manages the pace, period and book-within-a-book conceit nicely.”—*Publishers Weekly*

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“Bessy’s unique, witty voice distinguishes *The Observations* this boisterous novel.” —*Booklist*

“Bessy’s is the *The Observations* freshest voice to come along in a long time. . . . *The Observations* will make you laugh and it will make you cry, and it will *The Observations* be remembered for *The Observations* a long time to come. Told by the highly entertaining narrator, Bessy Buckley, it is utterly unputdownable.”—[Bookreporter.com](#)

“*The Observations* is a deliriously captivating tale of sex, ghosts, lies and mysteries. But that’s not the good part; the good part is our narrator Bessy, a fifteen-year-old Irish maid living in Scotland with the freshest, sharpest, naughtiest and most charming voice you’re apt to encounter in literature for a good long time. I adored her, and couldn’t put her story down.”

—Elizabeth Gilbert, author *The Observations of Eat, Pray, Love* and *The Last American Man*

“In Bessy, Jane Harris has created an unlikely heroine with all the appeal and fearlessness of Moll Flanders and Scarlett O’Hara. Her complete lack of self-consciousness makes Bessy the perfect narrator. Throughout four hundred pages of mystery and intrigue, it is not the flawless plot that leaves the reader rapt but instead, Bessy’s comic observations. This novel could be held up as an illuminating slice of social history. . . . But *The Observations* is so much more than its title suggests. In this, her first novel, Harris has shown that powerful characterization is the real key to literary success.”

—*Daily Express* (London)

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“The comparisons with Michel Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White*, and *The Observations* especially with Sarah Waters’s *Fingersmith*, are inevitable but misleading. The book’s size, its young criminal female narrator, its use of cross-class deceit and Wilkie Collins-influenced layering of plot twists may conveniently categorize it, but Harris’s voice is an original one, and her rollicking yet delicate narrative pitch sets the book apart. . . . Jane Harris has pulled off a difficult trick, showing the heart behind the tart with genuine and affecting empathy, cleverly undercutting preconceptions that the character has, at least on the surface, fulfilled. The beleaguered but spirited protagonist’s emotions are suppressed, hinted at, and beautifully described in a series of stories within stories built on shifting realities as deception is met with counter-deception. Despite the easy comparisons, this is a true one-off.” —Joanna Briscoe, *The Guardian* (London)

“This first novel by Jane Harris moves with assurance and pace. . . . Harris’s research into the lives of servants in 1863 is impressive, as is her knowledge of the experimental and haphazard treatment of mental illness at the time. Her creation of a voice and a vernacular for Bessy is one of *The Observations* the novel’s pleasures. . . . [Harris] skillfully addresses the nature-and-nurture question in this accomplished novel.”

—Felicity Scott, *The Times Literary Supplement* (London)

“Bessy Buckley can hold her head up with Moll Flanders and Becky Sharp as a living, breathing mortal. . . . Her speech is peppered with happy similes, drawn from the slums of Dublin and Glasgow. . . . The most impressive aspect of Harris’s management of Bessy’s written and spoken language is that it entirely resists condescension; there is no patronizing aspect even to the humor that it produces. . . . The plot is not the most important element of *The Observations* this book. What one takes away is Bessy Buckley’s earthy voice, clear as a bell, ringing out her tale of love, loss and redemption.”—*The Times* (London)

“Jane Harris has created a piece of Victorian Gothic, told with unVictorian bluntness and humor.

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. . . Intriguing, with a gloriously twisty plot.”

—*The Times* (London)

“Harris is already being spoken about in the same breath as Sarah Waters and Michel Faber. In *Bessy*, she has created a bawdy, picaresque character who holds our attention for more than four hundred pages. *The Observations* combines the best qualities of literary fiction with page-turning accessibility.”—*The Observer* *The Observations* (London)

“I wept at the end of this brilliant first novel because I was so moved at the way Jane Harris sustains the vivacity, *The Observations* eloquence and pathos of her tale. Comparisons might well be made with Michel Faber and other writers who have turned to the Victorian cat’s cradle of *The Observations* social and sexual tensions for context. But Harris’s exploration of this territory is unique, not least in *The Observations* the ebullience of the language that issues from Bessy Buckley’s errant Irish tongue. Bessy is an unforgettable character. . . . Her observations bring extraordinary verve and veracity to the novel. . . . These are Harris’s raw materials: obsession, domination, transgressive love and above all sexuality, repressed and otherwise. Harris has distilled these themes into a superbly uncorseted evocation of life in Victorian Scotland that never falters.”

—Jennie Renton, *Sunday Herald* (Glasgow)

“Jane Harris’s debut novel is a confident and carefully wrought tale of secrecy and revelations, full of the twists and turns of classic nineteenth-century melodrama. . . . Harris maintains [Bessy’s] voice with aplomb throughout this captivating novel. A thoroughly satisfying and engrossing read.”—Waterstone’s Books Quarterly (bookseller)

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## The Observations

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