



The Mistress of Nothing by Kate Pullinger

About the author:

Kate Pullinger writes for both print and digital platforms. In 2009 her novel *The Mistress of Nothing* won the Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction, one of Canada's most prestigious literary prizes. Her prize-winning digital fiction projects *Inanimate Alice* and *Flight Paths: A Networked Novel* have reached audiences around the world.

Kate Pullinger gives talks and readings; she also offers private 1-1 mentoring for emerging writers in both print and new media. She is Professor of Creative Writing and New Media at Bath Spa University.

As well as *The Mistress of Nothing*, Kate Pullinger's books include *A Little Stranger*, *Weird Sister*, *The Last Time I Saw Jane*, *Where Does Kissing End?*, and *When the Monster Dies*, as well as the short story collections, *My Life as a Girl in a Men's Prison* and *Tiny Lies*. She co-wrote the novel of the film *The Piano* with director Jane Campion. In 2011, *A Curious Dream: Collected Works*, a selection of Pullinger's short stories, was published in Canada.

Kate Pullinger is currently working on a new novel and an associated digital fiction that build on themes developed in her collaborative digital fiction project, *Flight Paths: A Networked Novel*.

Other current projects include a libretto based on Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, commissioned by the Slovak National Theatre in collaboration with the composer Lubica Cekovska. This work will be premiered in Bratislava in 2013. Recent projects include working with digital artist James Coupe on *Surveillance Suite*, a project that generates stories using facial recognition software.

Kate Pullinger was born in Cranbrook, British Columbia, and went to high school on Vancouver Island. She dropped out of McGill University, Montreal, after a year and a half of not studying philosophy and literature, then spent a year working in a copper mine in the Yukon, northern Canada, where she crushed rocks and saved money. She spent that money travelling and ended up in London, England, where she has been ever since. She is married and has two children.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.katepullinger.com>)



About this book:

When Lady Duff Gordon, a member of the English social elite, comes down with a debilitating illness that requires exile to a dryer climate, she and her maid, Sally Naldrett, set sail for Egypt. Through Sally's keen and floral narration, Egypt is painted as a place of wonder - of luxuries and freedoms not afforded to native English women in their home country. But luxury, especially for a maid of a lower station, comes with a price. From a love affair with her faithful *dragoman* to the biting rejection from the woman she devoted her life to, Sally travels a road of little reward, and finds that even in motherhood and unerring service, she is the mistress of nothing at all.

Source: BookBrowse (<http://www.bookbrowse.com>)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you feel Lady Duff Gordon cast out Sally so harshly? Was she betrayed? Did she truly have an issue with propriety?
2. Following those lines of thought, why does she not treat Omar similarly? Why is she so certain that Sally "tricked" Omar into impregnating her?
3. Should Omar have stayed as loyal as he did to Lady Duff Gordon? Did he fail to protect Sally and Abdullah in the right way? To whom does he owe more loyalty?
4. Sally performs one more "treatment" on her Lady before she is cast out of the house. Would it have been easy, as she stated, to make the cut too deep? Was there a part of you that wanted her take that sort of action against her sick employer?
5. Discuss the relationships and interactions in Omar's father's house. How did you react to Sally and Mabrouka's growing friendship? What commonalities do you see between them? Should Omar have allowed Sally to live with his Cairo family?
6. By story's end, is Sally still an Englishwoman? Is she an Egyptian? Considering Abdullah and her position at the Nile hotel, is she still a "mistress of nothing"?
7. How did the Egyptian setting affect the mood and urgency of the story? Consider the trip up the Nile, the excursion to the Valley of Kings, the political uprising and spreading riots against the



Pasha's Suez schemes, and the French House elevated above the struggling village of Luxor.

8. Why is Sir Alick put off by his wife's appearance and lifestyle when he finally visits her in Egypt? Is Lady Duff Gordon's family still indeed family?
9. Discuss the various members of and visitors to the Luxor household. Which did you enjoy reading about the most? Consider Omar, Ahmed, Mohammed, and Mustafa Agha.
10. Is life on the Nile a new beginning, or some form of afterlife?

Source: *BookBrowse* (<http://www.bookbrowse.com>)

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