

The bookshop

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



of the of the Concerned 8 July The Bookshop The Bookshop, a novel by Penelope Fitzgerald got published in the year 1978. The novel primarily deals with a small English town in the late 50s, where the parochial attitude and approach towards things and issues bring to test the very grit and resilience of the ordinary people trying to achieve ordinary goals in a somewhat extraordinary way. The Bookshop attempts a realistic approach towards a moral and ethical map making of this small English town that is not only marvelously piercing in its force, but is also rather imbued with a wry and ironically comical animation (Wolfe 30). The Bookshop is a novel whose true strength does not lie in the unfolding action. Nor is this book peculiarly marked by an intensely exciting plot. Rather the books conjures up the reader's interest and participation by its evocative delineation and chronicling of the prosaically ordinary times, and how the very ordinary people try to come to terms with and succeed against the limitations and constraints imposed by these times (Janik & Jankik 125). The Bookshop is primarily about the extraordinary persistence and will required by the ordinary people to fulfill their seemingly simple and readily accessible goals. It celebrates the courage mustered by the ordinary people against the stifling narrow mindedness, starkly limiting regimentation, and the blatant injustices imposed by the financial and social inequalities in the ordinary day to day life (Lewis 27). In that context the prompt under consideration that is " The ordinariness of human lives can never be a measure of the effort it takes to keep them going", could very well be regarded as one of the themes of The Bookshop. This theme is vividly and emphatically illustrated throughout the novel. The Bookshop unravels the story of a gentle hearted

widow Florence Green residing in the small town of Hardborough in 1959. Florence is left with a meager inheritance, using which she intends to open a bookshop in Hardborough, that will be the first and the only bookshop in this small town. Florence by her very ability to churn out success out of a seemingly impractical business proposal attracts the wrath and ire of the less prosperous shopkeepers in the neighborhood (St. Clair: Online). By embarking on an innocent attempt to enlarge the worldview of her town's people, she inadvertently ends up crossing the town's unofficial art doyenne, Mrs. Gamart. The people of Hardborough are presented in the novel as a bunch of nosy and opinionated simpletons, who simply cannot be blamed for their narrow-mindedness (St. Clair: Online). The limitations and constraints marrying this small town in the late 50s get further accentuated by an ever-present lack of communication routes. The residents of this town simply cannot find any creative means of killing time than by maliciously choosing to meddle in other people's affairs. Not only they leave no effort untried to dishearten Florence, but rather everybody in the town seems to be pathetically satisfied at seeing her fail, but the town recluse Mr. Brundish. Irrespective of the overpowering odds stalling the success of Florence at Hardborough, it is a kind and encouraging letter from Mr. Brundish that motivates Florence to go on with her objective. When Florence goes to the Bank to solicit a loan to buy the Old House, a damp and dilapidated property infested by a poltergeist, where she plans to open her shop, the manager Mr. Keble though initially seems unsure of her talents in running a business, somehow agrees to extend to her a loan. Later when Florence goes to attend a party hosted by Mrs. Gamart, she is abjectly humiliated and disheartened,

when she learns of Mrs. Gamart's plans of opening an arts centre at the Old House. Somehow, Florence's books shop manages to do well and she even succeeds in setting up a circulatory library at her shop. Again by procuring and displaying the copies of *Lolita*, a controversial novel, at her shop, Florence ends up attracting much negative legal attention and some letters from her solicitor conveying to her Mrs. Gamart's displeasure regarding the crowds at her shop and the distastefulness of her choice to display and sell *Lolita*. Finally Mrs. Gamart inflicts a deathly blow to Florence's ordinary yet cherished dream by soliciting the help of her nephew in parliament, to legally evict Florence from the Old House. The novel has a bleak ending, which starkly conveys the fact that sometimes ordinary people, despite their best efforts, tend to fail. The evil is sometimes too overpowering and the ordinary people irrespective of putting in a tough struggle can be brought low. Yet, the novel does accrue much respect for the heroic struggle of the ordinary people. Works Cited Janik, Vicki K & Janik, Del Ivan. *Modern British Women Writers*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002. Lewis, Tess. "Between Head & Heart: Penelope Fitzgerald's Novels". *New Criterion* March 2000: 29-27. Wolfe, Peter. *Understanding Penelope Fitzgerald*. New York: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. St. Clair, Pamela. "Shelved Dreams in Penelope Fitzgerald's *The Bookshop*". *British Literature*. 1 May 1999. 8 July 2011 .