

authorities, and the study protocols and the statistical analysis plans were reviewed by the authorities as well as by independent safety monitoring and advisory boards. In both studies the cases were subjected to blinded adjudication by clinicians. In the EURAS study all reported cases of VTE, confirmed as well as unconfirmed, were sent to the authorities for review. With this level of transparency the focus should be on the scientific aspects of the studies rather than industry sponsorship. As for statistical power, both studies were large (each comprised about 60 000 women) and sufficiently robust in statistical terms to detect meaningful differences in relative risk estimates (see Figure 1).

### Concluding remarks

In conclusion: the existing evidence continues to suggest that the risk of VTE attributable to COCs is a class effect, primarily dependent on the dose of estrogen. The perpetuation of the debate about the existence or non-existence of small differences in risk attributed to individual progestogens will not lead to a consensus among the scientific community as long as the discussion is based on observational studies.

### Statements on funding and competing interests

**Funding** None identified.

**Competing interests** The author was actively involved in the conduct of the EURAS and the German case-control studies; both were post-authorisation safety studies for European health authorities and were funded by the manufacturer of drospirenone (Bayer Schering Pharma AG).

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## FICTION BOOK REVIEW

**Tomorrow.** Graham Swift. London, UK: Picador, 2008, ISBN-13: 978-0-33045-026-3. Price: £7.99. Pages: 256 (paperback)

On a summer's night, Paula lies awake contemplating her incipient 50th birthday and reflecting on 16 years of family life and parenthood. So far, so many parallels with my own and no doubt the lives of many other readers. But it soon becomes clear that she is also worrying about a major challenge, a family milestone, that lies ahead tomorrow for Paula, Mike and their 16-year-old twins, Kate and Nick.

Paula and Mike met as students in Brighton, in the 'Swinging Sixties'. Their days together come across as happy times developing independence from their very differing but equally challenging upbringings. They settle down, marry, and both find themselves in good jobs, comfortable, contented, but lacking children in their lives.

Swift explores themes of relationships, fidelity, bereavement and the impact of infertility, lineage and parenthood. A black cat called Otis plays an unexpected, if somewhat unlikely, central role in the development of Paula and

Mike's family story. Without children, a kindly elderly neighbour suggests they adopt a stray cat, which fills an apparent void in their lives. When Otis returns from a long, mysterious and much-mourned absence, Paula finds herself unexpectedly confiding in her sympathetic local vet, with perhaps predictable consequences.

The book is written in an elegiac yet compulsive style. Whilst it is unlikely to be considered the poolside hit of the summer, its rhythm and reflective prose placed a gentle grip on my night-time reading routine. I liked the sense of climax that builds gradually; however, a clinical audience is unlikely to be surprised by the underlying theme, once revealed. Tomorrow usefully explores a neglected aspect of fertility, in addition to the more usual territory: the ethical and moral dilemmas thrown up by modern social attitudes to long-term relationships and childlessness. It reminds us that people respond to these challenges as individuals, often in an unexpected way, and that as clinical practitioners this can be hard to predict, both in the immediate and longer term.

Perhaps because the narration lies entirely with Paula, the book fails to properly explore some of the other interesting issues her family

have faced: the biologist who is confronted with unexplained infertility and the impact of this on lineage and heritage; the reactions of the twins themselves on learning the truth; the role of the veterinary surgeon with his more prosaic approach to conception. Some readers may find the self-absorption and analytical approach of the narrator irritating. But I feel that the book reminds us that, for many people, these are big and pertinent problems that don't always fade with the passage of time. As technology and science advance, we are likely to find ourselves grappling with ever more complex puzzles, and wondering at the variety of the human response.

In the end, I was a little disappointed by this book. It promised much at the beginning but ultimately it wallowed too much in the Paula perspective. More from Mike would have provided more food for thought, and even some valuable insight into masculine attitudes to parenthood, biological or otherwise.

Reviewed by **Imogen Stephens**, MD, FFSRH  
Consultant in Public Health Medicine and  
Associate Editor, *Journal of Family Planning  
and Reproductive Health Care*

We hope that journal readers enjoyed reading *Tomorrow*, and also discovering whether their opinion of the book matched that of our guest reviewer. In the January 2010 issue, the fiction book under scrutiny will be *The Whole Day Through* by Patrick Gale (288 pages, Fourth Estate, 2009, ISBN-13: 978-000730-601-5).

We want to remind journal readers that if they would like to offer to review an appropriate fiction title of their own choosing then they should contact the Journal Editorial Office by e-mail ([journal@fsrh.org](mailto:journal@fsrh.org)) in the first instance with details of their nominated title.



## JOURNAL READER OFFER WINNERS

The five lucky winners of a copy of *Tell It To The Bees* (kindly donated by the book's publisher, Tindal Street Press) are:

- Victoria Evans (Chichester)
- Dorothy King (Chester)
- Sarah Little (Linlithgow)
- Clodagh Ross (Edinburgh)
- Samantha Whiteside (Kincardine)