

## BOOK REVIEWS

Sally Butcher: *Persepolis*: Pavilion, 2016: 256 pp., hardback, £25.00.

The sub-title is 'Vegetarian recipes from Peckham, Persia and beyond'. In her family's shop in Peckham, selling all things Persian from comics to candy, the indefatigable Sally Butcher has set up a restaurant. Even as I write this notice, friends of my visiting daughter from London have texted her to say they are lunching in *Persepolis*: a tidy serendipity. The author is not only tireless, but infectiously enthusiastic in presenting her collection of delights like pomegranate and fennel cordial, date and tamarind pickle, red pepper sour orange soup and millet porridge with ginger. In tune with the *zeitgeist* and some. Excellent, do-able, enticing: this notice is short because the daughter is leaving the house, book under arm, ready to cook. Prospect is proud to have been Sally Butcher's launch-pad.

Scott Cutler Shershow: *Bread*: Bloomsbury, 2016: 170 pp., paperback, £9.99.

Joanna Walsh: *Hotel*: Bloomsbury, 2015: 170 pp., paperback, £9.99.

These are two of Bloomsbury's 'Object Lessons' series, edited by the games designer Ian Bogost and cultural studies professor Christopher Schaberg. The intention is to expose 'the hidden lives of ordinary things'. The 'Object Lessons' project encompasses these nicely produced books as well as shorter essays along the same lines in *The Atlantic*. In essence, the editors propose an object and allow the authors (either creative writers, philosophers, or academics in the humanities) to riff as they please on the topic. The result is often rewarding: each volume a little masterpiece of cultural allusion. This may, or may not, assist your understanding of the object in question, but it very likely will provoke sideways thoughts. Both authors here have some practical relation to their theme: Walsh has reviewed hotels (perhaps as a mystery customer), Shershow is an avowed bread-making enthusiast while earning his living as a professor of English. His book deploys his literary expertise to useful effect, producing some nice examples and citations which accumulate towards a pleasing enough essay on the many aspects of bread that intersect with human experience – so many indeed are these aspects that all the well-read author needs do is thrust his hand blindfold into the seething dustbin of history and something is bound to stick to it. In his case, it's bread riots, the adoption of settled agriculture, different sorts of bread and social status, breadlines for the hungry, leaven and literary metaphor, a good dollop of Christianity and scripture, then two more focused discussions of the paleo diet and our strange relationship with gluten (à propos of which, I note that our village store – which would fit inside a broom cupboard – stocks three sorts of gluten-free flour). The hotel book is altogether more difficult. What it reveals of hotels is virtually nil beyond the