

## Novel of the week

### **A Theatre for Dreamers**

by Polly Samson

Bloomsbury 368pp £14.99

Polly Samson's "blissful" fifth novel is set on the Greek island of Hydra, and features some of the real-life bohemians who made a home there in the 1960s, said Alex Preston in *The Observer*. Its characters include Australian literary couple Charmian Clift and George Johnston, and a "young, charismatic Canadian by the name of Leonard Cohen". Into this "glamorous" milieu steps Erica, an 18-year-old English "ingénue" in search of adventure. In part a "kind of sexed-up *The Durrells*" – replete with "thyme-scented hillsides" and skinny-dipping in crystalline coves – the novel also bracingly interrogates the hypocritical sexual mores of the 1960s.

As Samson shows, the creed of "liberation" did little to release women from domestic servitude, said Patricia Nicol in *The Sunday Times*. "Charmian may recommend Simone de Beauvoir, but putting dinner on the table comes first." And Marianne Ihlen – Cohen's lover and muse – is "content to sit at the poet's feet". This "rigorously researched" novel isn't perfect – the prose can be "overwrought" – but it offers a welcome dose of "heady armchair escapism".