



Miss Bunting

Angela Thirkell

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Miss Bunting, governess to the County, fulfils her final days during a summer devoted to tutoring delicate Anne Fielding. Class distinctions are sharply delineated, especially by Lady Fielding who tries, in vain, to minimise Anne's contact with the ungainly Heather Adams. Mr Adams continues to involve himself in the affairs of the county, generating ambivalent feelings as well as obligations. His kind inquiries re: Jane Gresham's MIA husband earns her uneasy gratitude. Feelings about Class seem a bit cruel here; perhaps in response to a sense that the barriers are about to fall. Humourous tidbits continue to delight -- see Mrs Merivale's mysterious 'lodger'. Again we encounter the Mixo-Lydians in the person of Gradka, whose ferocious rejoicing over a clash with the Slavo-Lydians foreshadows the Bosnian debacle. And the highlight of the season, the Annual Meeting of the Barsetshire Archeological Society, creates a grand hullabaloo which includes, among other things: furious debate on Vikings vs Roman vs Saxon remains; Lord Stokes 'useful old cob'; and assorted milling about; all adding up to 'a silly afternoon'. Miss Bunting observes all and escapes just in time.

Miss Bunting Details

Date : Published January 1st 1995 by Moyer Bell (first published 1945)

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Author : Angela Thirkell

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From Reader Review Miss Bunting for online ebook

Jocelyn says

One of the best of Thirkell's Barsetshire series, written in 1945. A tribute to wounded veterans, cottage industries that supported the British war effort, wives whose husbands were MIA for months and years on end, and a hierarchical society being undermined by manufacturing and war. Thirkell gets her characters just right, not to mention all the clever humor.

I have been familiar for this series for many years, and just today I had an interesting revelation: take Sam Adams, the self-confident, self-made, generous engineer; then subtract most of his money and add a bit more education, and you have my paternal grandfather.

QNPoohBear says

Anne Fielding being an invalid for most of her early teens is leaving her home in Barchester to come to her family's county home with her governess, Miss Bunting. At the same time, Heather Adams is coming with Miss Holly to do some studying before entering Cambridge. Mrs. Jane Gresham, not quite a widow but most definitely a mother, is charged with finding Heather Adams a suitable place to live and thus makes the acquaintance of the girl and her robust father. Jane's friend Robin Dale, a schoolmaster, has returned from the Italian theater of the war without a foot. He teaches Jane's young son Frank, Frank's best friend Tom Watson and a few other boys to prepare them for Southbridge and other preparatory schools and looks after his elderly clergyman father. As the summer flies by, the county families are thrown together with the Adamses and see the war upset the ordered lives they've always lived.

This book has to be read as a product of a certain time and place. I really disliked the social snobbery displayed in the novel. That sort of thing worked before the war but most especially before the Industrial Revolution when land was most important. I wasn't really sure why Mrs. Merivale was higher up on the social ladder than Mr. Adams. He may be overzealous at times but he means well. He's a doting single father trying to do the best he can for his little girl. Some of the characters' feelings could be justified if he was trying to social climb or thrust his daughter on Society, but he wasn't trying to do either. He didn't understand the subtleties of the social scale and was just happy to see his daughter making friends. Mr. Adams is an excellent businessman and probably more ruthless than he appears but he isn't a buffoon to be made fun of.

This book also has a lot of extraneous details. Not having read Trollope's novels, I didn't know or care about the genealogy and history of the area and its inhabitants. All that bogged down the story. I was confused by it all. Jane's Papa seems to be related somehow to Trollope's characters. I did like hearing about all the old familiar characters from Barsetshire.

The two characters I liked in this novel were Anne and Robin. Anne is sweet and kind, a bit shy and once she started devouring literature, she sounded a lot like me in my younger days! Robin is a great character. I liked the complications in his life and how he just dealt with everything calmly. He has a nice sense of humor about his foot and is very kind to young and old. I want these two to get married when Anne is a little older!

The rest of the characters I found rather annoying. I sensed something about Miss Bunting that made me sad. She's one of the last of a bygone era. I didn't dislike her as much as I did in the previous book she was in but

I wasn't crazy about her. I would have liked Jane if she wasn't such a snob. Just be rude to someone's face. Don't talk about them behind their backs. I felt the strain she was under but she almost turns into a wet blanket towards the end. Her son Frank is enough to drive any mother crazy! He models himself after his "Uncle" Tony Morland. If you loved Tony (I can't stand him) you'll love Frank. I can actually see my nephews getting into some of the trouble Frank and Tom get into here.

The story ends kind of on a cliffhanger so I want to know what happens next!

Mela says

I simply adore Angela Thirkell's pen, her wit, her observant eye, her sensibility. Her books show me every time what is the true value and power of a novel. You don't need a melodrama, you don't need an action, you don't need even a plot/story. I don't care if Thirkell's characters could have lived. All I care is the world she created in her series. I love this world. I live there when I read her books.

From the first pages, I liked Jane, Robin and Frank. Frank reminded me very much of Tony (one of my favorite characters of series). I had so much fun when he and his friend Tom showed up. Mrs. Thirkell had a talent for describing young boys and their points of views, their plays and so on.

There were also another marvelous descriptions of Mixo-Lydians. I come from Central Europe and I know also Balkan nations a little and I can tell that a satire of them all in Thirkell's novels is one of the best.

I was enchanted by a parallel between Jane's and Robin's losses. Their discussions about it were priceless. The whole issue of being the family of someone who is 'missing in action' was shown in a very moving and truthful way.

We have here also again a nostalgy after the old world which was dying before characters eyes.

This piece had a bit more snobbery than other. But it is a satire, also of British society and snobbery.

Mr. Adams reminded me about Mr. Chawleigh from "A Civil Contract" by G. Heyer (but Heather definitely wasn't like Jenny).

I liked also how Anne's growing up was going on.

The relationship between Robin and his father, and the relationship/acquaintance between Jane and Mr. Adams... Both were brilliant.

PS I am sad because I can't find much more copies of the series. I have only three other books (paper versions, of my own) and there are only three other on Open Library. And all of them aren't next in series... Ehh... But I hope I will find other copies, someday, somewhere.

Susan in NC says

I enjoy Angela Thirkell's books and pick them up wherever I can find them; as another reviewer noted here,

yes, she is a snob of the first order, but honestly so for her class and time. The deprivations of World War II and subsequent rebuilding took a huge toll on British society and caused great upheaval in social class and expectations; perfectly understandable that people of Thirkell's class would long for an idealized past (she's like today's Tea Partiers!) At least she's got a sense of humor about it, and typically dry as one would expect. I enjoy her satirical eye, her characters, and her portrayal of everyday life in the small English villages of Barsetshire at the end of WWII; I would recommend her to fans of Trollope, Gaskell, Austen, Wodehouse and E.F. Benson - not in their league, perhaps, but fun all the same.

Alisha says

Written in the last year of the war, the characters of Barsetshire are still in the thick of it. This book focuses on Jane Gresham, a young mother whose husband has been missing in action for four years. Also part of the action are Robin Dale, a schoolmaster who's back from the front with an amputated foot; Anne Fielding, a 17-year-old who's just on the cusp of grown-up-ness; Miss Bunting, an aging governess who represents the end of an era; and Sam and Heather Adams, a father and daughter who are nouveau riche, good at heart, but not fitting in very well.

Interesting thing about British books written in this time period by a certain class of author. They are chock full of literary allusions, only some of which I get. An acquaintance with Dickens helps, but there's so much more. The author takes it for granted that if you're reading her books, you have at least a smattering of French and a working knowledge of whatever was considered classic and also popular literature 50 to 100 years ago. Doesn't impede enjoyment, though.

A standout in this book is Gradka, the Mixo-Lydian cook hired by the Fieldings. She is hilariously and horrifyingly militant with a sense of humor that is NOT.

Again I have a copy where the synopsis on the back reads like some scandalous romance novel. Stupid, ridiculous synopsis. It's not remotely. One young couple gets vaguely engaged by the end, and the wife of the MIA man pines for news of her husband and appreciates the solid assistance of Sam Adams, who becomes protective towards her on occasion. If anybody picked this up thinking they were getting something salacious, all they got was tea parties, tennis matches, and a lesson on the British social system during the war. Yay!

eghzarw says

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Kay Robart says

See my review here:

<https://whatmeread.wordpress.com/2015...>

Leslie says

The first Thirkell I couldn't like and quite possibly the most boring book I've ever read.

Anne says

This month's book for the Angela Thirkell reading group. I love contemporary British fiction from this era, particularly books that take place during the Second World War. While she is a snob of the first order, Angela Thirkell is one of the few authors who chronicled the war year by year through her fiction.

LDuchess says

NOT Moyer Bell version shown above. Mine is Hamish Hamilton, hardbound, 1945/1974. With dust jacket.

Sweet...continuing the closeness of Barsetshire society. Anne Fielding, Jane Gresham, Miss B, of course...and all the others. Begins the redemption of Sam Adams (and Heather--sort of).

Janelle Fallan says

Why has it taken me so long to find Angela Thirkell? She is a 20th Century successor to Elizabeth Gaskell -- whom I LOVE -- using many of the same fictional settings as Anthony Trollope in his Barchester series. I am looking forward to many happy hours with both Thirkell and Trollope.

Craig says

Quit about a quarter of the way through. Had some of the feel of a book written 100 years earlier, but without much wit or developed depth of character. Just didn't care enough about any of it to finish.

Leslie says

This 14th entry in Angela Thirkell's Barsetshire series had a lot of references to the Trollope series, especially in the families - the Frank Greshams and the Dales in particular. While knowing the Trollope series isn't required to enjoy this novel, it does add a spice to the storyline revolving about Mr. Adams of Hogglestock. Although I laughed aloud at several points while reading this, this novel (written at the end of WW2) has a feeling of sadness, not just about the dead & wounded men but for the loss of a state of society Thirkell had captured so wonderfully in the early books in the series. As she says

"...Jane Gresham, who felt as the Fieldings
did that another piece of the pre-war world had
gone and the tide of a Brave and Horrible New
World was lapping at her feet."

While I understand this feeling, not being from that time and place I cannot truly sympathise & can only hope that the light humour I enjoy so much will continue in the rest of the series.

Ellie says

I loved the earlier Barsetshire books (pre-war), but this one definitely wasn't one of my favourites - too much glaring elitism!

If you're interested in reading anything by Thirkell, I highly recommend you try High Rising, The Brandons and/or Wild Strawberries :)

Anyhow, back to *Miss Bunting*:

The treatment of Mr. Adams and Heather particularly troubled me. Thirkell continuously reminded us of their gaucheness and that they throw money around. Seriously, they're trying to be nice, and people are looking down on them because of the [stupid!] class hierarchy. I got so sick of the patronizing way people were 'putting up' with their unorthodox manners. Thank goodness Anne was making an effort to be friendly.

Of course, it wouldn't be a war book without copious amounts of racism... Towards the Germans in particular, but to be honest, towards pretty much every other country mentioned as well.

It frustrates me that xenophobia when labelled as 'patriotism' becomes a virtue. And of course, every person

with true English blood *must* be patriotic...

'...and Jane again felt ashamed that the word 'patriotic' which heaven knew we all were, or ought to be, or wished to be, should make her feel uncomfortable...'

On another note, historical books are often sexist, although it's generally quite subtle. Considering that, I could hardly believe this quote:

'The Admiral...had always liked his womenfolk good-looking or smart, preferably both.'

I don't recommend this particular book, but she's written some other brilliant ones.

Katharine Holden says

I don't think I'm going to continue reading Thirkell's books. She's lost the sparkle and wit I loved in her pre-war and early-war novels. Her characters now spend much of their time sitting around and talking openly about how lower class every one is these days. It may have been how she felt after the war, and it may have been true, but the repetition becomes dreary to read.
