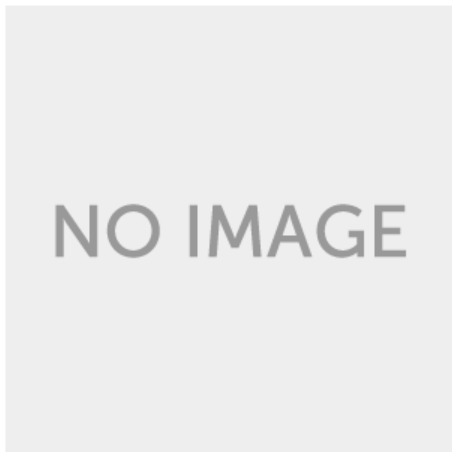


Among The Mad: A Maisie Dobbs Mystery *by* Julia Barrie, Jacqueline Winspear



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Reviews of the *Among The Mad: A Maisie Dobbs Mystery* *by* Julia Barrie, Jacqueline Winspear

Landarn

If your taste in crime fiction runs to blood, guts, and gore, you're unlikely to enjoy reading Jacqueline Winspear's Maisie Dobbs series. If, instead, you favor a more cerebral approach focused on three-dimensional character development and psychological insight, you'll find exactly what you're looking for in Winspear's outstanding work.

Maisie Dobbs is a brilliant young working-class woman who gained an elite education under the sponsorship of the aristocratic family that employed her as a maid. Cutting short her university

studies, she volunteered as a nurse in World War I, where she witnessed the conflict's senseless carnage first-hand and was wounded by the same artillery shell that eventually killed her fiancé. Now, after years of apprenticeship with a physician who was involved in top-secret intelligence work, she is on her own. Maisie bills herself as a "psychologist and investigator," and she quickly proves her skill in both arenas.

In *Among the Mad*, the sixth novel of twelve (so far) in the series, 33-year-old Maisie finds herself and her sidekick, Billy Beale, pressed into service by New Scotland Yard's secretive Special Branch. Together with her on-again, off-again friend and collaborator, Inspector Stratton, and the head of Special Branch, she is charged with finding the man who has threatened the Prime Minister himself. The wide-ranging search takes her and her colleagues into the worlds of Britain's emerging Fascist Party, the militant labor movement, the country's growing chemical-warfare program, and the network of asylums where shell-shocked soldiers and others deemed "mad" are locked away.

The action in *Among the Mad* unfolds over the last week of 1931 and the first month of 1932, a time when Britain was experiencing the worst of the Great Depression. As its title suggests, one of the book's overarching themes is the primitive care of mental illness in that era. As in previous novels in the series, the persistent impacts of World War I loom large, too. But equally important is the emphasis on the desperation of the millions of men now out of work, many of them veterans of the war. With cameo appearances by two prominent historical figures—Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and future Fascist Party founder Sir Oswald Mosley—*Among the Mad* qualifies as a superior historical novel as well as first-class detective fiction.

Manesenci

A fascinating and vivid look at overall psychiatric care in the 30's; and also an intimate focus on the workings of one particularly damaged and abused mind. As a psychology student myself, I was riveted. As an observer of human cruelties to one another; I was torn to my very core. Too often we overlook the pain of the mentally ill, especially those who are left to adapt to normal everyday life with little or no support in transition. Even today, 80 years later, Veterans with mental health problems struggle to get appropriate care. Jaqueline Winspear has done an excellent job at painting a sensitive - but at the same time, horrifying - picture of what possible tragedies can result when secret Government and Military programs are not carefully monitored, and individuals become the collateral damage. Her writing made me cry and made me tremble in fear. I highly recommend this book.

Nikobar

It's Christmas Eve 1931 in Maisie Dobbs' world, more than ten years past the end of the Great War that was to "end all wars."

The war goes on though for so many of those who participated in it. Millions of men and women who were grievously wounded either physically or psychologically - or both - continue to struggle with their wounds and with trying to make a place for themselves in the world. Maisie Dobbs' work as a psychologist and investigator often seems to bring her into contact with these desperate people and that is the case once again in *Among the Mad*.

It begins with Maisie walking down a London street with her assistant Billy Beale, on their way to meet with a client. Suddenly, Maisie gets one of her premonitions. She orders her assistant to go back as she walks forward toward a disabled man sitting on the street. He has one missing leg and the other injured and Maisie feels the distress coming from him. As she approaches him with her arm outstretched, he detonates a hand grenade, blowing himself up and injuring some of those on

the street. Luckily, Maisie is not seriously injured but she is deeply affected by the event.

The next day the prime minister's office receives a letter threatening a massive loss of life if the writer's demands are not met. Curiously, the letter mentions Maisie's name which leads her to be investigated by Scotland Yard's elite Special Branch. She is cleared and then seconded to the Special Branch as a part of the team investigating the letter and trying to prevent a terrorist attack on the city.

While Maisie is involved in this case, she is also trying to help Billy, whose wife has descended fully into the abyss of melancholia following the death of their small daughter several months before. She is finally deemed to be a danger to herself or her two living children and she is committed to an institution for the care of the mentally disturbed, but this particular institution turns out to be a chamber of horrors and Maisie and Billy work to get her moved to a more humane facility.

Meanwhile, an incident at a veterinary facility results in the death of several dogs from some sort of chemical attack and this is followed by the killing of a number of birds by, apparently, the same means. Further letters received at Special Branch warn that the next victims will be human. And, indeed, a young government official is then killed. The letter writer warns that the next event will be a mass killing.

Maisie and the rest of the team race to find the writer of the letters and to stop him before he can accomplish that killing. They each follow different leads and Maisie investigates those who have been involved in research into chemical warfare. Her inquiry leads her into the world of shell-shocked men, a world of the darkness that she first encountered as a nurse during the war.

Jacqueline Winspear once again explores the theme that she has adopted as her main topic in this series, which is that of the treatment of those who fight a country's wars when they return home, often battered and damaged, from those wars. It was an issue after the First World War and every war since and it is still an issue today. We can read it in the headlines of any of today's newspapers. Winspear, through her character Maisie Dobbs, is an advocate for the humane treatment of such victims of man's inhumanity. These novels seem very timely in that regard and they give us pause to think about how far our treatment of shell-shock - now called PTSD - has come in a hundred years. Or not.

Anarus

The Maisie Dobbs saga continues with *Among the Mad*, and although I have read only books 1,2, and 3 previously, this book 6 is a solid and moving and consistent addition. The evocation of post-WWI England's struggle with the Depression, the return of maimed (in body and mind) men from the war zone, the high unemployment, and the feelings of desperation and hopelessness in the populace are all dispassionately laid out in this installment. It is the early training of Maisie in meditation and respect for Theosophical ideas that seems to permeate the series, and brings calm to the reader amidst the chaos of a world gone awry and few social supports to improve the situation. The solving of the mystery takes place in the midst of the uncertainty, and the reader looks forward to the next book that will also chronicle Maisie's move from depression to hopefulness.

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