



Wigs On the Green

Nancy Mitford

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Wigs on the Green by Nancy Mitford is a hilarious satire of the upper classes. Eugenia Malmain is one of the richest girls in England and an ardent supporter of Captain Jack and the Union Jackshirts; Noel and Jasper are both in search of an heiress (so much easier than trying to work for the money); Poppy and Marjorie are nursing lovelorn hearts; and the beautiful bourgeois Mrs Lace is on the prowl for someone near Eugenia's fabulous country home at Chalford, and much farce ensues. One of Nancy Mitford's earliest novels, Wigs on the Green has been out of print for nearly seventy-five years. Nancy's sisters Unity and Diana were furious with her for making fun of Diana's husband, Oswald Moseley, and his politics, and the book caused a rift between them all that endured for years. Nancy Mitford skewers her family and their beliefs with her customary jewelled barbs, but there is froth, comedy and heart here too. 'Deliciously funny' Evelyn Waugh Nancy Mitford was the eldest of the infamous Mitford sisters, known for her membership in 'The Bright Young Things' clique of the 1920s and an intimate of Evelyn Waugh; she produced witty, satirical novels with a cast of characters taken directly from the aristocratic social scene of which she was a part. Her novels, The Pursuit of Love, Love in a Cold Climate, The Blessing and Don't Tell Alfred, are available in single paperback editions from Penguin or as part of The Penguin Complete Novels of Nancy Mitford which also includes Highland Fling, Christmas Pudding and Pigeon Pie. This edition of Wigs on the Green is introduced by journalist and editor Charlotte Mosley.

Wigs On the Green Details

Date : Published March 30th 2010 by Penguin (first published 1934)
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From Reader Review Wigs On the Green for online ebook

Isabel G L says

Me puse a leer *Trifulca a la vista* porque otro libro de la autora, *A la caza del amor*, me había gustado muchísimo, sin embargo este no ha estado a la altura. Quizá también ha influido el halo de misterio que rodea a las obras prohibidas y que crea unas expectativas que luego no se cumplen, pero el libro me ha parecido correcto sin más: a ratos ingenioso, a ratos divertido y a veces (las partes del nazismo) totalmente desconcertante.

Ginger says

My first Nancy Mitford, and perhaps not the place to start, as it was just ok, but it was the one my library had in stock on Overdrive and it was a charming enough diversion for a cold winter week, and the action did pick up toward the end.

I'll try another Mitford soon.

Sonia says

Trifulca a la vista es una obra fresca y entretenida que no carece de cierto humor a costa de la emergencia de las corrientes de pensamiento fascistas y nazistas anteriores a la II Guerra Mundial. Una novela ligera y sin pretensiones que se lee en un momento siempre con una media sonrisa en los labios frente a los curiosos personajes que por ella desfilan.

Sin embargo, hay que tener en cuenta que esta es una más de esas obras inglesas rescatadas por *Libros de Asteroide* que nos quieren vender como joyas universales perdidas y que sin embargo son novelas muy muy locales y en cierto modo costumbristas. El problema frente a ellas es que esa sociedad y sus maneras nos son completamente ajenos y así vemos como pintoresco lo que era habitual y nos perdemos matices por simple desconocimiento.

El libro es recomendable como lectura ligera para pasar un rato entretenido pero esta muy lejos de ser o poderse apreciar como esa gran novela que nos quieren vender.

Shannon says

My last Nancy Mitford novel! Have left it for last due to controversy surrounding it (Hitler, Fascism) and based loosely on two of her sisters (Diana & Unity).

Yes, there is a character who adores Hitler, there isn't a way around it. Written in 1934 and making fun of Socialism/Fascism, Nancy had no idea of the horrors that would come and subsequently refused to republish it in her lifetime due to familial and cultural sensitivities (Unity famously shot herself in head, unsuccessfully, when World War II was declared). In spite of its uneasy history, this novel is delightfully funny, just as every other Mitford novel I've read, even more so than some.

This is Nancy's attempt to make sense of her sisters' choices. To gently poke fun at them, like all the sisters

did throughout their lives.

It's a novel full of characters that are so obviously Nancy's: Jasper, not a penny to his name, but made of charm; Anne-Marie Lace, a comedic Madame Bovary; Eugenia, who is (misplaced) passion personified, "if she had been born 20 years sooner, she would have been a suffragette"; Lady Chalford, who, terrified of the changing world, hasn't left her home in sixteen years.

I've always intended to get through Nancy and her sisters' complete works and then move to biography, letters, etc, but this novel has me wanting to get to the biography now – I need more context!

Sophie says

I enjoyed this novel, but not as much as her later works. However, there were some hysterical witty quips and farcical send-ups that made this a most enjoyable read. I think that, due to it being set in a small country town, there was not the same sense of satirical observations of the upper classes that Mitford is so good at in her later novels. It is also a much smaller book conceptually, because it focuses on small middle-class characters with few eccentricities, and is set in a small town. After reading her later novels where the English countryside, London, Paris and rural France are frequent destinations, *Wigs on the Green* seemed like a smaller novel comparatively. You can certainly see, once reading a few of her novels, that her writing style continues to get better and better, and her confidence grows with the realization of the strengths in her writing.

Not my favourite Mitford, but still a fantastic read.

David Haws says

I first encountered the expression "*wigs on the green*" in a *Downton Abbey* episode. I loved the expression so much, I googled the etymology (it's an Irish version of "going to the mattresses") and the title of this novel popped up. I knew something about the Mitford sisters, but didn't know the oldest (and apparently the only apolitical) daughter had been a novelist. On closer inspection I realized that I was familiar with one of her post war titles (*Love in a Cold Climate*) but this one had been published in 1935, poking fun at the her sister Unity, and her sister Diane's soon-to-be-second-husband Oswald Mosley.

It's a little frothy, which I suppose is to be expected in an English comedy of manners, and had enough humor to be worth reading on its own. It's probably not, however, as interesting as the author.

Jaylia3 says

Nancy Mitford fans, including me, have been waiting a long time for this novel to be republished. Even used copies of *WIGS ON THE GREEN* have been hard to find, since after its release in 1935 it has only rarely been back in print. It became controversial because it was written at a time when Hitler was someone to laugh at, at least for Nancy, and it caused uproar in Nancy's family because Diana and Unity, her two passionately fascist-leaning sisters, did not like the way their beloved movement was teasingly ridiculed. Nancy never let it be reprinted in her lifetime.

Nancy's determination to always find something ironic or funny in even the worst situations makes for wonderful reading and this book is no exception. Her humor manages to combine the social insights of Jane Austen with the laugh out loud absurdity of P. G. Wodehouse. In the aftermath of WWII, laughing at Hitler and his followers seemed about as inappropriate as basing a sitcom on Osama bin Laden, but part of the fascination of this book is its glimpse into the thoughts of a world before the catastrophes of the Holocaust.

In plot and tone WIGS ON THE GREEN is more similar to Nancy's first two frothy, fast-paced novels, HIGHLAND FLING and CHRISTMAS PUDDING, than it is to her later more serious novels, The PURSUIT OF LOVE and LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE. Though the later novels are considered her masterpieces, to me they ramble and I enjoy her early, breathlessly funny books more. The political bent of WIGS ON THE GREEN gives it a greater heft than her other early novels, so fans of Nancy's later work may appreciate it more than her first, more purely fanciful books.

Most of the action in WIGS ON A GREEN takes place in and around the small village of Chalford where Anne-Marie Lace, the Local Beauty, fights boredom by assuming the role of patroness and muse for the town's meager, mercenary artist colony. Lady Marjorie is hiding out, thinly disguised as a commoner, with her friend Poppy while she tries to decide what to do about the duke she just jilted. Work-weary Noel Foster and his freeloading friend Jasper Aspect, based on Nancy's difficult husband Peter Rodd, are both scheming to marry the village's wealthy, politically obsessed heiress. This fanatic heiress, Eugenia Malmain, was inspired by Nancy's sister Unity, who by all accounts was an amazing and paradoxical force of nature.

When Nancy had Eugenia climb on an overturned washtub in Chalford's village green to exhort the locals to awake, and save the diminishing prestige of Britain by joining the Union Jackshirt party, it was before anyone knew about the tragedies to come. At the time Unity's obsession with Hitler and fascism just seemed like a great joke to Nancy, and she couldn't resist what she saw as good material for her book.

The chance to get a little more insight into Unity Valkyrie Mitford will make WIGS ON THE GREEN irresistible to fans of the Mitford sisters. Unity was a beautiful, intense, larger than life girl, who wore a pet snake around her neck at debutant balls. She became a great admirer of Hitler and through determination and persistence she managed to meet him and become part of his inner circle of friends. In her published letters to her sisters she refers to him as her dear sweet Führer. She shot herself in the head when England and Germany went to war, and died of her wounds in 1948.

As shocking as that all sounds, the people who knew Unity adored her. Jessica, the communist Mitford sister, spent most of her life refusing to speak to Diana, the Mitford sister married to British Union of Fascists leader Oswald Mosley. But no one in the family, including Jessica, could ever bring themselves to cut Unity out of their life.

The five star rating is mainly for those fascinated by the Mitford sisters, but I would still give WIGS ON THE GREEN at least four stars, even for people who have never heard of the Mitford family.

Nancy says

I am a huge fan of Nancy Mitford's novels, and enjoyed this as a fun summer distraction (when the temperature was 110 in my area!). That said, it was a bit too silly for my taste.

I love Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster;

I enjoy Evelyn Waugh's clever send-ups of British society;

I like wit and sarcasm, BUT this was troweled on a bit too thick for my taste. That doesn't mean I didn't chuckle, but somehow I expected more from Nancy Mitford.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book is that one of the main characters was based on Mitford's impressionable younger sister, Unity. A Hitler acolyte, Unity was immersed in the Nazi movement as a very young girl and Nancy chose to satirize her in this book. Whatever we may think of Unity, it also speaks volumes about Nancy Mitford that she would expose the frailties (and or eccentricities) of her young sister in this way. It is hard to believe that she wrote this and then told Unity that she would be "very happy with it."

So, in its unique way, this silly book is an important part of British social history. It points out the tolerance of many upper class Brits for Fascism and also sheds additional light on the fascinating Mitford girls.

Hester says

In the introduction to "Wigs on the Green", Charlotte Mosley writes the reasons for Nancy Mitford's third novel not being reissued until after her death. Nancy largely based the character of Eugenia on her sister Unity and she peppered her story with references of divorce which greatly upset her other sister Diana, who divorced her first husband to become the full time mistress of BUF leader Sir Oswald Mosley.

Despite the objections and injured feelings of her sisters, her novel was still published. The story centers around two cads, Noel and Jasper. Noel's aunt has recently died and left him with a small inheritance which he decides to use in order to find an heiress to marry and live the rest of his days in leisure. He stupidly boasts of this fact to his scheming friend Jasper who says he will help, but only if Noel fronts his expenses.

What follows is a summer holiday in a small village where an heiress and child of scandal Eugenia Malmain has turned of age and is ripe for marriage. But when they find her they discover she is not in the least bit interested in marriage or boys, her only passion in life is the Union Jackshirt movement and reclaiming England to its former glory through the means of fascism. Add to that a runaway bride her beautiful friend who has had it with her louse of a husband and the town's aging beauty and the stage is set for romance and mischief.

Eugenia is so passionate about her love of the Union Jackshirt movement that she's all mouth and action and absolutely lacks the tact or finesse needed to pass off the movement as anything other than what it is, a group of dangerous lunatics.

I found the lighthearted banter about Aryans somewhat uncomfortable, but then again I wasn't alive in 1935 living in a country on edge over the possibility of another war with Germany. I would like to have know what the readers of the novel in its day thought about the blase attitude presented within it's pages. Politics aside, Mitford takes sharp aim at how society was changing and how something as once scandalous as a divorce was starting to lose its shame factor.

One of the reasons why I love Nancy Mitford's work so much is because she captured and preserved an England that is quickly becoming lost in today's one world culture movement brought to you by technology.

Mindy says

Well it took me a month to read 170 pages. The part I liked best was the introduction, which gave a brief biography of the author and her family. This was written in 1934 and the author never wanted it to be reprinted because she makes light of people starting to support Hitler's political party. I can understand her misgivings because as good as the writing was, when Hitler was spoken of as a "good fellow" it took me completely out of the story. Would still be interested in other things Mrs. Mitford wrote, but this one was rough for me.

Thomas says

I think this may be the Mitford novel that cured my desire to read any more of her fiction. I really liked *The Pursuit of Love*, I like *Love in a Cold Climate* less, I really didn't like *Don't Tell Alfred*, and I found *Wigs on the Green* tedious. You would imagine a bunch of toffs exclaiming what a lark this book is.

Dustincecil says

Sharper than a tack--funny too!

I loved this gossipy frolic. My first time with Nancy Mitford left me more than impressed with her ability to shed light onto the hysterical tedium of truly first-world problems.

Can't wait to check out more.

KOMET says

All in all, this was a lightly entertaining story in which 2 friends of the monied class in early 1930s Britain (Noel Foster and Jasper Aspect, a glib character and shameless sponger) conspired to marry 2 wealthy heiresses while taking a break from London one summer.

dianne says

This send-up of fascism at a time when, little did they know (1934, much like late 2015) funny looking, clown-like people could really take control and ruin millions of lives - written by a member of England's 0.01% during Hitler's rise - is brilliant. Nancy (i'm guessing) must have been the "smart" Mitford sister, as this was held out of publication for many years as it was written as a satire of her sisters (Unity and Diana) and their unbridled infatuation with fascism, Hitler, & Il Duce. Might have been funny in 1934, but apparently it became painful with the wisdom of hindsight.

So as the western world votes its way into fascism again we can relive these happy moments with exquisitely defined characters, a typical English village replete with its types, the requisite UNlanded gentry scheming to marry heiresses, and heiresses running from engagements to dukes. A fine plot.

A central character is a sort of unholy Joan of Arc. Heiress to millions, locked on the grounds of an estate (which makes Blenheim sound like an outbuilding) with only her grandparents who haven't left the grounds since the total devastation of the family's reputation by a legal divorce (can you *imagine?*) decades ago. This, they feel, makes Eugenia (the heiress) unmarriageable.

Eugenia, trapped in an absolute world, finds her own absolute passion - hers is political - Captain Jack and the Union Jack Shirts (English Fascists). A true believer in the Rise of the Aryans, especially the English Aryans - an even more pure England and All That Was and Will Be Again. At one point she keeps non-Aryans out of her carriage (on the train) with a dagger. Swell gal. Sounds a lot like Make Feudalism Great Again.

All of the enemies want peace. How simply intolerable.

There are so many flawless descriptions of English eccentricities that perhaps only someone in a Mitford-like position could know and write so well. There are of course so many insane Peers that an entire asylum, er, inpatient facility only for them, is built to exactly match Parliament. They hold sessions, vote on important issues, build birds nests, play with blocks - you know - pretty much everything they did on the outside. Even fight with the few Socialists who "...put a perfectly exaggerated value on human life, you know. Ridiculous. As I said in my speech, what on earth does it matter if a few people are killed, we're not at war are we? We don't need 'em for cannon fodder? Then what earthly good do they do?"

Specifically, about the Peer building the huge nest high in a tree, "That's a first-class nest he has made. They tell me it is entirely lined with pieces of the India Report. Of course we miss him in the House just now, but I bet you he is doing good work up there all the same."

Ah, Britannia. Definitely recommended.

Elizabeth says

E Wein: Basically, the thing I like BEST to read is early 20th century chick lit.

Sara: Is that a thing?

E Wein: It wasn't called chick lit till the 1990s or whatever, but that's DEFINITELY what this is. It's like chick lit only it's better written and the clothes are more stylish.

Sara: That's what you should read, then.

Quite frankly, I found *Pigeon Pie* much more disturbing and cringeworthy in its politics than *Wigs on the Green*, which is just plain *silly*. Despite Mitford's protests to her sisters at the time of publication, and despite her own clear devotion to the British aristocracy and the English countryside, I feel that she is laughing up her sleeve at the ridiculousness of Fascism the whole way through this story.

But it's not really about Fascism. That subject is just a vehicle for a goony drawing room comedy. And I did enjoy the comedy. (view spoiler)

"Nobody ought to write books before they're thirty. I hate precocity." - Jasper Aspect

Silvery says

0,3 estrellas

Polémica Wigs on the Green (Trifulca a la vista).

Esta novela (mi primera acercamiento con Mitford) inspirada en su entorno familiar y en su hermana Unity La "Nazi" que es un fiel bosquejo de la protagonista, no podía ser más que incomoda e inapropiada en su tiempo.

Nancy Mitford ve humor y situaciones cómicas donde no las hay. Esta cargada de situaciones insulsas y personajes pedantes y decadentes. Personalmente encuentro que es una novela más bien mediocre.

Le di tres estrellas por que Nancy sabe escribir y a pesar de lo sosa que es la trama, me fue posible finalizar la novela sin odiar a su autora.

("No puedes publicarlo de ninguna manera, así que más vale que no pierdas el tiempo con él", le escribió Unity a Nancy),

Ali says

Being rather a fan of The Mitfords, and having read several biographies and letter collections as well as some of Nancy's later, better known novels, I was very curious when I heard Wigs on the Green was being re-issued. Having been out of print since not long after it first appeared, it is easy to why it caused such disquiet among her family. The introduction by Charoltte Moseley casts an interesting light upon this, and apparently Nancy took out 3 chapters which particularly mocked Sir Oswald Moseley. There is plenty of Nancy's famous wit in evidence here, but this is really no scalding satire. The novel is light and frothy, funny and very tongue in cheek, and yet even now after all these years it is hard to see the humor in fascism. There is plenty of Wodehouse like jolly japes - a lovely country house, eccentric relatives and impoverished young men looking to marry money. All in all a 1930's cosy read - albeit a slightly uncomfortable one politically.

Israel Montoya Baquero says

Entretenida y loca comedia de enredos, donde destacan de forma magistral las burlas a costa del movimiento fascista ingles y, en especial, el capitulo dedicado al manicomio para nobles chalados

Jonkers Jonkers says

Enjoyed this despite the rather uncomfortable references to Nazism. Amusing, well-written and more than a touch of Wodehouse about it (praise indeed!). Will read some more Nancy Mitford.

Kate says

Depending on your attitude, it's either wildly inappropriate or absolutely hilarious that I was listening to Nancy Mitford's *Wigs on the Green* concurrently with the podcast, *My Dad Wrote a Porno*. If you've experienced both, you'll appreciate that the frequent mentions of hedge mazes, manicured lawns, horses and duchesses are quite similar in one sense... and also very much not. Anyway, the important thing is that both made me laugh. A lot.

There's a juicy back-story to *Wigs on the Green*, notably that the novel was truly about Nancy's two Fascist sisters, Unity and Diana, and that the relationship between Nancy and her sisters imploded after its publication (I really should read *The Mitford Girls*, which has been languishing on my TBR stack for over a decade). Nancy never allowed the novel to be printed after WWII, on the basis that jokes about Nazis were not funny in any context. And obviously they're not, yet the elements of the story related to class and marriage are sharp and very, very funny.

'Marriage is a great bore. Chaps' waistcoats lying around in one's bedroom and so on. It gets one down in time.'

At the centre of *Wigs* is an heiress, Eugenia – she's a staunch advocate of 'social unionism' and her grandparents are keen to find her a suitable husband. Along comes world-weary Noel Foster and his scheming friend Jasper Aspect, both in search of a meal-ticket. Add a Lady disguised as a commoner; the local beauty who behaves well above her station; and a grand scheme to hold a pageant – and in the tradition of satires, all sorts of shenanigans ensue.

It's abundantly clear why Nancy's relationship with her sisters was fractured after the publication of the book – she mercilessly pokes fun at politics and those involved –

"Under the social unionist regime," said Jasper, "your captain should make a law that all really beautiful houses must be preserved and occupied... so many are being destroyed – allowed to stand derelict or worst of all, handed over to the proletariat, turned into piss-cart counters and ice-cream booths. That is too ignoble. Beautiful houses ought to be a setting for beautiful women, their lovers and perhaps a few frail but exquisite little children."

'That evening, Mr Leader was dragged from his bed by masked men wearing Union Jack shirts and flung into an adjacent duck pond. As the weather was extremely hot, he took no chill and suffered nothing worse than a little mortification and the loss of his eau de Nil pyjama trousers'

And there's no question as to what Nancy's stance is – *'When you find school girls like Eugenia going mad for something you can be pretty sure it's nonsense.'* But politics aside, *Wigs of the Green* shows off Mitford's razor-sharp wit, wicked caricatures and snappy dialogue.

Like any good satire, *Wigs* culminates in a great, final fiasco – horses bolting, pageant costumes gone awry, and couples stealing across lawns at midnight. Jolly good fun.

4/5 Irresistible froth.