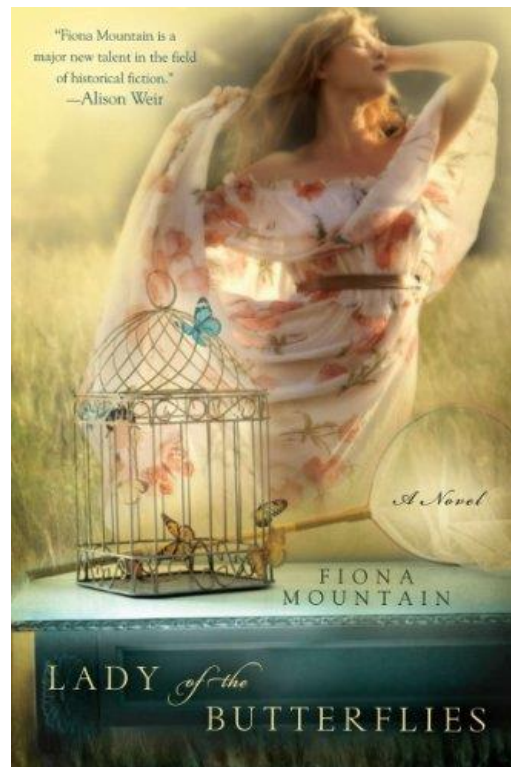


Diana Gallagher, ENTO 896- Outreach

Lady of the Butterflies by Fiona Mountain from Berkeley Books, New York: 2009.

This is a stand-alone novel. The picture on the cover is entirely misleading and, I can only assume, was put together by someone who had only read the title not the book.



Fiona Mountain lives in the Cotswolds in England and writes historical, romantic, and detective novels. One of her detective novels won the Mary Higgins Clark Award. Warnings: No swearing; several graphic sex scenes; some violence.

About the Book

This novel is organized into four parts, as well as by years, ranging from 1662 to 1700. In Part One, the reader meets Eleanor as a young girl growing up in a strictly Puritan household in an

England torn by religious divisions. In addition, the reader learns that they live in the Fens, which at that point was marshy and unhealthy. Her father is strict but does allow her to pursue her interest in insects, particularly butterflies. Others in the community, however, see her as odd. Her father dies of ague, as malaria was termed in the seventeenth century, as had Eleanor's mother and sister prior to the beginning of the novel. As Eleanor matures, she continues her researches into the means by which caterpillars change into butterflies. She also meets her first husband, Edmund Ashfield, although she is still too young to marry.

Part Two opens eight years later, in 1673, and Eleanor has become a young woman. Her guardian wants her to marry Edmund Ashfield and she is quite willing to do so. She also meets his friend, Richard Glanville, who fascinates her and will play a large role later in her life. Another important character is introduced, James Petiver, a real person who was an apothecary as well as a scientist and entomologist. He and Eleanor begin a correspondence that lasts until after the end of the novel. Eleanor marries Edmund but still pursues her interest in butterflies and exchanges specimens with Petiver. She has a son and then a daughter. Her husband sickens and dies of malaria despite the fact the Eleanor sends Richard Glanville to get a medicine known as Jesuit's Powder that could save him. They dose Edmund with it but to no avail. Eleanor, in love with Richard and he with her, blames herself and him for Edmund's death. She refuses to see him for five years.

In Part Three, the question of draining the marshy areas of the land arise again. The community is violently against it while many landholders are for it. Some villagers rise against Eleanor and try to attack her but Richard Glanville appears and drives them off. They are reconciled and Eleanor marries him. He does not approve of her study of butterflies or her correspondence with James Petiver. Over time, they have two children but problems appear.

By Part Four, Richard, as well as Eleanor's son by her first marriage, have begun to hint that her scientific research has made Eleanor insane and therefore unable to hold her own property. She escapes with her other children to London where she finds James Petiver, and other scientists of the time, who encourage her interests. In the end, her husband, his mistress, and her eldest son make it impossible for her to stay in England and she sails for America from which, as Hannah, she continues finding butterflies and sending them to James Petiver. Fiona Mountain has said her research shows that James Petiver had an American correspondent named Hannah and so she decided to provide this as an end to Eleanor's story.

Discussion Guide

1. Eleanor's character is based on Eleanor Glanville, who lived from 1654 to 1709. We don't know how her life ended. How do you feel about the ending the author provided for her character?
2. Metamorphosis is an important part of Eleanor's studies. Are we meant to see a connection between that and the changes she undergoes throughout the novel?
3. Do the romantic elements of the story add or detract from the central theme?
4. How does James Petiver drive the plot despite being involved only through letters for much of the novel?
5. Toward the very end, Eleanor comes to feel that her Puritan upbringing has caused her to misread certain people and events, particularly in regard to Richard Glanville. Do you agree with her assessment?
6. Do you feel that Eleanor's persecution is an accurate reflection of the reality faced by 17th-century women attempting to push the boundaries of what was considered suitable

activities for them? Would people have agreed with her husband and son who had her declared insane?

7. Religion was a hotly contested issue during the 17th century in England and this is reflected in the novel's social and family tensions. Do you feel you have a better understanding of this after reading this novel?