
by Jacqueline Winspear
Private investigator Maisie Dobbs receives her first assignment from the British Secret Service in *A Lesson in Secrets*, the eighth book in Jacqueline Winspear’s award-winning mystery series. Sent to pose as a junior lecturer at a private college in Cambridge, she will monitor any activities “not in the interests of His Majesty’s government.” When the college’s pacifist founder is murdered, Maisie finds herself in the midst of sinister web of murder, scandal, and conspiracy, activities that point towards members of the ascendant Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei—the Nazi Party—on Britain’s shores. An instant classic, and sure to captivate long-time Maisie Dobbs fans as well as readers of Agatha Christie, Elizabeth George, and Alexander McCall Smith, *A Lesson in Secrets* is “a powerful and complex novel, one that will linger in memory as a testament to her talent and her humanity” (*Richmond Times-Dispatch*).

**Amazon.com Review**

**Amazon Exclusive: Lee Child Interviews Jacqueline Winspear**

Jacqueline Winspear, like her interviewer, the iconic, bestselling author Lee Child, originally hails from the United Kingdom. *A Lesson in Secrets* is her eighth novel featuring psychologist-investigator and former WW1 nurse,
Maisie Dobbs. Here she talks with Child about her work on the series, and her enduring interest in the aftermath of WW1.

Lee Child: People are often surprised that I'm a huge Maisie Dobbs fan, because Jack Reacher is all about a kind of Spartan American masculinity, and Maisie Dobbs is all about a kind of feminine English refinement. But they're both strong, unconventional people. Perhaps that's the cross-genre appeal? Do you find that Maisie attracts an unusual mix of readers?

Jacqueline Winspear: I'm thrilled you're such a Maisie Dobbs fan--and you can count me among those millions of Jack Reacher fans. Maisie and Reacher are both unconventional, but I believe another factor in their cross-genre appeal is that both have endured life-changing challenges. Maisie attracts diverse readers: men and women, all age groups, veterans, nurses, college students, people who have faced troubles, and people interested in the era.

LC: And in fact your novels are driven by violence far worse than mine--off the page, granted, but there's no getting around the fact that at the heart of your books is the aftermath of a horrendous war, with its attendant violence and death. How do you see the role of violence in your novels?

JW: I think you hit the theme there with “aftermath.” The violence in my books is that searing, painful residue left by the passing of a terrible time, when people were also crushed emotionally by the deep losses over a four-year period. In addition, there's that element of violence that lingers--in Among the Mad, for example--when war's tentacles will not let go. We see that again today in the stories of veterans who are still fighting their wars, but the conflict is raging inside them.

LC: As a kid in England I remember seeing hundreds of maimed old men, and hundreds of lonely old women. My grandfather was an example of the first, and two great-aunts examples of the second - sad reminders of a terrible time. Was it something similar that drew you to the First World War and the “Between the Wars” era that followed?

JW: I have the same memories--my grandfather was wounded at the Battle of the Somme, and my grandmother was partially blinded at the Woolwich Arsenal, in an explosion that wounded her sister and killed several girls working alongside her. There were the elderly spinsters in my neighborhood, and for each there was that old sepia photograph on the mantelpiece, of a sweetheart or brother lost to war. Those childhood memories led me to think a lot about what happens after war is done. As a character says in Birds of a Feather, “That’s the trouble with war; it lives on inside the living.”

LC: I was introduced to Maisie Dobbs by my wife, who passed through an airport and picked up the first in the series. She loved it, and urged me to read it, and I'm glad I did. It's one of the very, very few series we both love equally--in fact, perhaps the only one. Is this typical of your readers?

JW: I receive so many emails from fans who tell me that the books are read by all members of the family. And many women tell me that it was their husband who first discovered Maisie. The books are as accessible to readers aged about fourteen as they are to seniors. There are few things today that all age groups within a family can engage in, discuss and get excited about, so it’s lovely when I hear that family members are awaiting the next book so they can all read it.
Maisie is definitively feminine, but she's running a business, and poking around in a "man's world," which is true to the times, and indicative of the early stages of feminism in the West. Was that something you wanted to explore?

It would have been difficult to introduce a character such as Maisie and not explore the fact that the Great War left so many women to forge a life alone. If there was one thing I wanted to do, it was to bring the spirit of that generation to the character of Maisie Dobbs. Of course, some women floundered and lived lonely lives, but there were a great many who blazed a trail. I believe an archetype was born at that time—the stoic British woman who is independent and more than a little opinionated, with a heart of gold under a tough exterior, and who knows what it is to endure. Dame Maggie Smith has played that character in several films.

Maisie understands human psychology in a way that seems to be an early and experimental pre-echo of what we'd now call criminal profiling. It's a huge part of both her process and her appeal. Where did that come from?

That developed in a very organic way. Having established her as a “sensitive,” I wanted to give her real expertise—and there are historical underpinnings to this aspect of her character. Maisie studied the Moral Sciences curriculum at Girton College when psychology was in its infancy. I have the prospectus from 1913, and about one third of the course was the study of modern psychology. It was a time of great experimentation, so Maisie’s processes have their roots in real practices considered innovative at the time.

One of your decisions I admire is the way you have moved the series forward in time so firmly. Most writers would have continued mining the same immediate post-war seam forever. What was your thinking behind that? And how do you keep the character fresh as the series itself develops?

I once heard you say at a conference, “The reader comes back to a series, not to find out what the sleuth does with the case, but what the case does to the sleuth.” I agree. We are all impacted not only by our past, but by our current circumstances and those around us. You always put Reacher in a new area, be it small town or big city; and through his wandering we learn a lot about him. I work with the geography of time. Not everyone likes change and many readers would like Maisie Dobbs to stay as she is in a given book. But life’s not like that—the goalposts tend to move when we are at our most comfortable, and I want to keep the series fresh.

I'm often asked if I have a favorite book within my series, so now I'm turning the tables: Do you have favorites among your novels?

That's such a difficult question, because each book not only represents a different place on my journey as a writer, but has been inspired by something that touched me. I think Maisie Dobbs will always be very tightly held in my affections, because it was my first book and was written at a difficult time in my life, when I was recovering from a horrible accident. The other choice would be The Mapping of Love and Death because it was inspired by the true story of a soldier whose remains lay under Belgian soil for some 90 years until unearthed by a farmer. I learned more about him when I became involved in the quest to discover his origins. When I look at that book, I think of a young man lost to war who was never identified and who was eventually laid to rest as “A Soldier of The Great War, Known Unto God.” I ache for the parents who never knew where their son died, for he had probably been listed as “Missing, Presumed Dead.”

Product Description

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