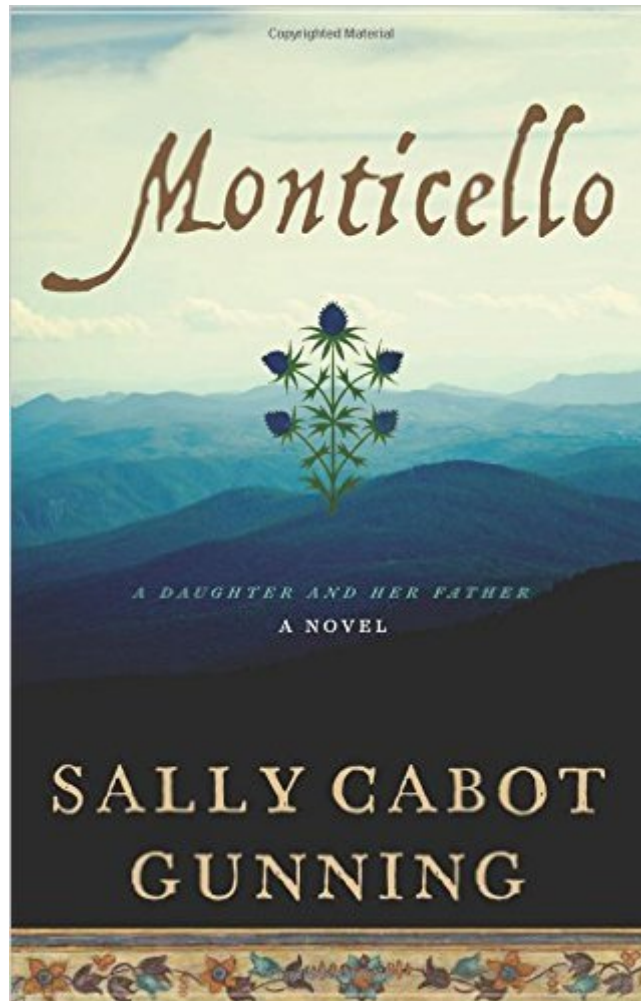


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# Monticello: A Daughter And Her Father; A Novel



## Synopsis

From the critically acclaimed author of *The Widow's War* comes a captivating work of literary historical fiction that explores the tenuous relationship between a brilliant and complex father and his devoted daughter—Thomas Jefferson and Martha Jefferson Randolph. After the death of her beloved mother, Martha Jefferson spent five years abroad with her father, Thomas Jefferson, on his first diplomatic mission to France. Now, at seventeen, Jefferson's bright, handsome eldest daughter is returning to the lush hills of the family's beloved Virginia plantation, Monticello. While the large, beautiful estate is the same as she remembers, Martha has changed. The young girl that sailed to Europe is now a woman with a heart made heavy by a first love gone wrong. The world around her has also become far more complicated than it once seemed. The doting father she idolized since childhood has begun to pull away. Moving back into political life, he has become distracted by the tumultuous fight for power and troubling new attachments. The home she adores depends on slavery, a practice Martha abhors. But Monticello is burdened by debt, and it cannot survive without the labor of her family's slaves. The exotic distant cousin she is drawn to has a taste for dangerous passions, dark desires that will eventually compromise her own. As her life becomes constrained by the demands of marriage, motherhood, politics, scandal, and her family's increasing impoverishment, Martha yearns to find her way back to the gentle beauty and quiet happiness of the world she once knew at the top of her father's little mountain. •

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I loved, loved, loved *The Aviator's Wife* by Melanie Benjamin. Since then I have devoured as many

fictionalized biographies as I can find. I'm not sure what genre Monticello falls into (historical fiction? fictionalized biography?) but I absolutely loved every page. Sally Cabot Gunning does a fantastic job of creating a book about Martha Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's oldest daughter, that spans her life from her return to America from France when she was seventeen until after her father's death. We get to know Martha as a young woman, a newly-wed, a mother, and as a woman who was able to successfully run her father's home. In this book Martha was aware of her father's relationship with his slave, Sally Hemmings, and the children they had together. Although a work of fiction, I enjoyed the way Martha must make peace with Sally and her father and the feelings they have for each other. I loved this book - the time period it is set in as our country is new and starting out, the intimate look at Thomas Jefferson's family including his children and grandchildren, and the legacy he left all drew me right in. I've been gushing about this book to friends since I picked it up and hope that Gunning finds more interesting historical figures to bring to life.

excellent historical fiction - I never felt the author was making merry with facts. The book arrived the day I left on a trip that included spending a day at Monticello so perhaps that is why I rated the book so highly. I could not shake my feelings for the family long after I left the gorgeous yet modest estate of the 3rd President of the United States. The book itself makes me fervently wish I could go back in time and meet these people myself, give Jefferson some financial advice as thanks for all he had sacrificed for our country. Martha was an amazing woman and the love she had for her family was boundless.

A rather slow-moving account of the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and the only child he had with his wife Martha to survive to middle age. Martha "Patsy" Jefferson Randolph apparently lacked the beauty attributed to her mother, although no portrait or even sketch of the older woman has ever been found. Portraits of Patsy indicate that she did resemble her father, being tall and red haired. She was by all reports an intelligent woman and we know she had a convent education whilst living in France with her father. She was very much against slavery and showed great empathy towards the plight of enslaved people in general and her father's human property in particular. Although she had twelve children with her husband, Thomas Mann Randolph, the marriage was very unhappy, as her husband was a heavy drinker and his behaviour was erratic to say the least. They were separated for several years until shortly before his death. Patsy was devoted to her father. She rushed to his defence with her presence when his relationship with enslaved woman Sally Hemmings became known; Sally was Patsy's half aunt, being the half sister of

Patsy's mother. Jefferson and Hemings had several children together, so Patsy was surrounded by half brothers and sisters in the enslaved population of Monticello. The author explores this complicated life and the relationships without much deep emotion in my opinion. The research was apparent, the dialogue was realistic, but I never felt much vibrancy from Patsy herself. I think this will be a book popular with discussion groups and there are not that many books where Patsy is the featured character.

Interesting and easy read, I finished the book in about three days, and I am usually a slow reader. One thing I liked about the book was that I found it calling to me, and I wanted to get back to it as often as I could. Martha Jefferson is Thomas Jefferson's oldest daughter, and the narrator positions her between the "great man" who was her father and her husband, Thomas Randolph a man of ideas with few successes. The novel does a good job of making you feel for her in both situations. It also deals quite a bit with her ambivalence about slavery and her father's relationship with Sally Hemings. I really enjoyed the look into Jefferson's life after his presidency, as he slid into financial and physical hardship. The father-daughter relationship is very interesting and complicated as well. While the two were very close, there was so much that they couldn't discuss in terms of slavery and Hemings. Martha's longing to discuss and ultimate failure to be able to do so was a bit frustrating, but understandable. Gunning does a wonderful job of making the characters relatable people. Overall an enjoyable read, especially if you like historical fiction.

Monticello: A Daughter and Her Father; a Novel by Sally Cabot Gunning is a haunting, bittersweet and melancholy tale between Thomas Jefferson and his daughter Martha Jefferson Randolph. Gunning uses historical research and uses letters from Randolph to express her opinion on slavery. What I found haunting, bittersweet and somewhat melancholy is how things could have so much different if women were treated as adults rather than as chattels of males as shown in Monticello. I am sure Gunning's interpretation of the role of women during Jefferson's time, is historically accurate, and thanks to her novel it tells about how Randolph suffered due to societal constraints. I also appreciated how Gunning's book showed the quandary both Jefferson and Randolph felt when it came to slavery. Recommend. Review written after downloading a galley from Edelweiss.

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