

## Monticello

William Morrow

By Sally Cabot Gunning

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### Introduction

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.

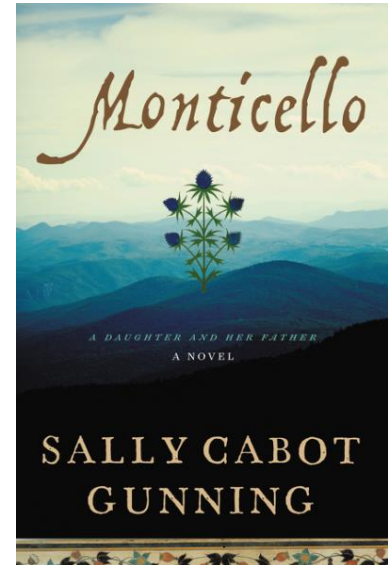
After the death of her beloved mother, Martha Jefferson spent five years abroad with her father, Thomas Jefferson, on his first diplomatic mission to France. Now, at seventeen, Jefferson's bright, handsome eldest daughter is returning to the lush hills of the family's beloved Virginia plantation, Monticello. 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."

### Questions for Discussion

1. Is Martha Jefferson Randolph someone you admire or pity or both? What were her strengths and weaknesses? Explore this same question in regard to Thomas Jefferson.
2. If you were Martha Jefferson, living in her day and time, what would you have done the same and what differently? Explore this same question in regard to Thomas Jefferson.
3. Has this book changed your view of any of the Jeffersons or Randolphs? If so, how?



4. Do you think Jefferson's plan to emancipate and expatriate the slaves would have worked? What do you see as right and wrong in this plan? If you were an emancipated slave, born in America, would have wished to stay or leave?
5. Do you admire or pity Sally Hemings or both? If you were she, would you have made the same or different choices?
6. Do you feel that Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings diminishes him?
7. What do you think of Martha's feelings about Sally?
8. Is William Short a positive or negative influence in Martha's life? It is known that they stayed in touch in their later years, but the nature and extent of the relationship is unknown. What would you imagine this relationship to be?
9. What do you wish the historical figures in this novel had done differently? How do you see America today if they had done differently?
10. Everyone comes to Thomas Jefferson in a different way, influenced by his or her own time in history. How has today's political climate influenced your image of the man?