

# **Miss Buncle's Book Study Guide**

**Miss Buncle's Book by D.E. Stevenson**

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# Plot Summary

In "Miss Buncle's Book" by D. E. Stevenson a woman, Barbara Buncle, takes up writing with the hope that it will bring in an income. Her novel, written under the pseudonym "John Smith," is a thinly veiled, satirical depiction of her hometown, Silverstream. The novel, "Disturber of the Peace," becomes a bestseller once the villagers in Silverstream realize that the villagers in the fictional Copperfield are modeled after themselves, and are not always a flattering portrait. "Miss Buncle's Book" has a wide range of characters and jumps around from character to character throughout the course of the novel, which is told in linear form.

The novel opens with a dreamlike description of the village of Silverstream. Then the novel turns to the London publisher Arthur Abbott, who has received a copy of "Disturber" and does not know what to make of it. He invites John Smith in for a meeting and is shocked to see that it is a woman, Barbara Buncle. He decides to publish the novel.

Meanwhile, in Silverstream, Vivian Greensleeves, a vain and arrogant widow, has just had a letter telling her that the new vicar, Ernest Hathaway, is rich. She decides to pursue him and make him her husband so she can be wealthy again like she was when her husband was alive. Ernest, for his part, is extremely conflicted about his wealth and decides to live on a church salary alone, signing his wealth off to his uncle for a year. Throughout the novel Ernest will experience much hardship and desperation under his self-imposed poverty. Vivian knows nothing of his loss of income, though everyone else in town does.

Sarah Walker, wife to Dr. John Walker, is first to read the novel and recognizes that Silverstream is Copperfield. She thinks the novel is brilliant but wonders what will happen next, fearful of the reactions of those in the novel. Eventually the other villagers read it, and some, in particular Agatha Featherstone Hogg, are outraged. They go see Mr. Abbott to try to stop him from publishing it but he tells them he cannot do that.

Barbara enjoys her newfound wealth and slowly becomes accustomed to it. She meets Sally Carter, Mrs. Carter's granddaughter, one afternoon and strikes up a friendship. Colonel Weatherhead and his neighbor, Dorothea Bold, become engaged and marry in France to avoid gossip.

Mrs. Featherstone Hogg hosts a drawing room meeting for the villagers to discuss "Disturber" after her husband and their lawyer says she cannot press charges for libel. At the meeting Vivian Greensleeves accuses Sarah Walker of being John Smith, which she initially denies and leaves the meeting. Vivian and Mrs. Featherstone Hogg conspire to kidnap Sarah Walker's children, and do so in January. Sarah gets them back after signing a form saying she is John Smith.

Sally begins lessons with Ernest because he needs the money and because even though she is 17 her grandmother treats her like she is 7 and says she needs an



education. In the course of their lessons, Sally and Ernest fall in love, and Sally lets it slip to Vivian that Ernest is poor. Vivian breaks it off and Sally and Ernest are engaged by the end of the novel.

Barbara and Arthur fall in love and get married. By the end of the novel, Barbara has become more confident and more stylish and has truly transformed into a writer by profession. Upon publication of the sequel to her novel she moves in with Arthur in town. The townspeople figure out that she is John Smith, but when they go to confront her they see that she has gone.



# Chapter 1 "Breakfast Rolls" - Chapter 2 "Disturber of the Peace"

## Summary

Chapter 1 "Breakfast Rolls" - Chapter 1 opens by describing a sleepy morning day in the English village of Silverstream, which is nestled in a valley in the country. The sun is personified as it looks down upon the village and observes the people who live there, including the cows at Twelve-Tree Farm, and the baker, Mrs. Goldsmith. Mrs. Goldsmith worries that her new delivery boy, Tommy, will be late. She thinks about her customers in Silverstream and how their morning rituals differ. For example, Colonel Weatherhead eats his breakfast early while Mrs. Greensleeves is rumored to lounge in bed until ten o'clock. Tommy does show up and mocks Mrs. Goldsmith for her lack of faith in him.

The narrative then shifts to Tanglewood Cottage, the residence of Miss Barbara Buncle. Mrs. Dorcas, or "Dorcas" as everyone calls her, a long-serving servant in the Buncle house, now functions as a cook, maid, and parlor maid but despite her elderly age remains sharp and strong. Dorcas rushes around to get Miss Buncle's breakfast ready for her when she comes down at nine o'clock. The mail arrives, as do the rolls from Mrs. Goldsmith's bakery, and Miss Buncle settles down to sift through the mail. She is astounded when she receives a letter from the publishing firm Abbott&Spicer. Mr. Abbott has written to her to tell her that they are accepting her novel for publication, the novel, "Chronicles of an English Village," that she wrote under the nom de plume "John Smith." He invites her to come meet with him on Wednesday. Miss Buncle runs out of the room to share her excitement with Dorcas.

Chapter 2 "Disturber of the Peace" - In London, the publisher Mr. Abbott eagerly awaits his meeting with John Smith. The reaction of his nephew and employee at the publishing firm, describing Smith as "...either a genius or an imbecile" peaked his interest in the novel, which he read for himself and found to be really quite unique and extraordinary, perhaps even a potential bestseller. Mr. Abbott really does not know what to make of Smith, who seems to toe the line between writing a biting satire of English country life or else someone who was recording things exactly as they were. Either way, Abbott intends to publish "Chronicles of an English Village." Mr. Abbott rereads the novel and finds that its merits increase. He is especially impressed at the characters, who all seem so three dimensional and believable. The narrator describes Mr. Abbott's bachelor life as a single man who stays up late reading manuscripts. He sends a letter to invite John Smith to meet him, the same letter Barbara received in Chapter 1.

The hour of the meeting arrives and so does Barbara Buncle. Mr. Abbott can barely believe that she is John Smith and urges her to use her name for publication. Mr. Abbott tries to decide about Barbara Buncle's character and thinks she is very simple person based on her appearance, albeit an attractive young woman nonetheless. Their conversation continues, and Abbott is startled to discover that Barbara wrote the novel



about the fictional Copperfield village (a thinly disguised Silverstream) because she was desperate for money because she has had bad luck with her dividends. Barbara brainstormed different things she could do to make money but finally settled on writing. She felt that she could only write what she knew, so she relied on her neighbors to provide the behavior and actions that inspired her characters. Barbara admits she is having trouble telling the difference between the fictional characters and her neighbors sometimes. They decide to rename the novel "Disturber of the Peace." Abbott signs her to the firm and secretly hopes she has not exhausted her material because he hopes for a sequel, so he leaves the possibility of future novels open in the contract.

Dazed, Barbara leaves and goes to a restaurant for a coffee. She cannot believe she's an author. On the train home she sits with Colonel Weatherhead. Barbara enjoys privately observing a neighbor who was good material for the novel, someone who she cast in a positive light and somewhat hopes he will be good for more copy, more inspiration. Meanwhile, Colonel Weatherhead thinks unpleasantly about how he has gained weight.

## Analysis

Chapter 1 "Breakfast Rolls" sets the tone of the novel while introducing the themes of Satire and Gossip/Speculation and introducing characters in the village of Silverstream. The third person narrator uses a personified version of the sun as the vessel through which to open the story and view the town. Overall it is a very cozy feeling giving the sense of a sleepy village where tiny concerns and any behavior out of the usual is magnified by neighbors and used as fodder for gossip and speculation. Descriptions are slightly mocking, just like the tone of the narrative voice. Clearly the reader is seeing a satirical bent on things, a theme that will echo throughout the novel.

The reader gets the sense that there is a class divide among the baker Mrs. Goldsmith, whose work either prevents or allows for the indulgences of the richer villagers. Indeed Mrs. Goldsmith's careful consideration of her customers and neighbors introduces the reader to the more prominent personalities and major characters in the novel, as well as describing their personalities as seen through the eyes of someone who depends on their business. This perspective is reinforced by Mrs. Dorcas, a servant to Miss Bunce. Dorcas is frank with Barbara and not afraid to chide her or be brutally honest with her employer. One gets a sense of how much work is involved in maintaining Barbara's lifestyle. At first glance Barbara is modest and in disbelief that a publisher would want to publish her book. As the reader will see, she and Dorcas are quite close, and Barbara enjoys sharing her news with her maid. It was noted earlier that Barbara lives alone and that her parents have passed away.

Chapter 2 "Disturber of the Peace" introduces the themes of Money/Finances and Writing/Books while also reinforcing the theme of Satire. Writing and Books are prominent given the setting of the chapter, the London office of the Abbott&Spicer publishing firm. The reader also gets to see a contrast with Mr. Abbott and Barbara and how different their worlds are. Mr. Abbott is alarmed when he discovers that Barbara



only wrote the novel because her finances were in a frightful state and she needed money desperately. She is quite unlike any author he has ever met—for example, she does not have especially compelling answers to his questions about how she felt when writing it—yet he is utterly captivated by her personality, appearance, and attitude. This foreshadows their romance later in the novel.

Barbara remarks with surprise and awe that she is now an author—"How very odd!" she says. Yet the reader sees in this chapter that she does share some characteristics with other writers. For example, she found it hard to separate the characters from the real people living around her, much like many authors who find that their characters come to life. This is seen at the end of the chapter when she encounters Colonel Weatherhead on the train and silently muses over how she portrayed him in the novel while wondering if he will now provide good copy. She is mining her world and surroundings and the people in her life for material. The divide between fiction and reality will continue to puzzle Barbara now that writing fiction has become her occupation.

The theme of Satire is underscored by Abbott's frequent references to "Chronicles of an English Village." He goes back and forth about whether it was a satirical novel. This question also runs throughout "Miss Buncle's Book" as the narrator is somewhat snarky and spares no one a witty or biting observation. "Chronicles of an English Village"—now renamed "Disturber of the Peace"—is indeed a satire, whether intentional or not, yet "Miss Buncle's Book" is also a satire on English village life.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe how the narrator sets the tone of the novel. What words would you use to describe the early morning routines of those in the village, both the working class and the wealthy?

## Discussion Question 2

Abbott is astonished by Barbara Buncle with everything from her appearance to her attitude. Having seen her character in two chapters so far, how would you describe your own first impressions of this character? Does she seem like a typical writer to you?

## Discussion Question 3

What do you make of Barbara's decision to make the people in her village fodder for her novels. Is this a fair way to treat your neighbors? What potential obstacles can you guess Barbara will encounter as a result of publishing an unintentionally biting satire of her surroundings and the people she knows?



## Vocabulary

stoking, nuisance, sanctum, imbecile, lamentable, simpleton, satire, clamor, connoisseur, dictum, gallant, jocular





# Chapter 3 "Mrs. Greensleeves" - Chapter 4 "Mr. Hathaway"

## Summary

Chapter 3 "Mrs. Greensleeves" - Chapter 3 introduces the reader to Vivian Greensleeves, a pretty, vain, money-hungry social climber determined to rise above poverty. A widow, Vivian is curious and hopeful after reading her friend Iris' letter in which Iris tells her all about a new vicar who has come to Silverstream, Ernest Hathaway. Iris' brother Bob knew Hathaway at Oxford, and supposedly the vicar is extremely wealthy, although a little aloof and quite a goody-goody. Iris puts down Silverstream and cannot imagine why Mr. Hathaway would move there, but she sees potential in the situation and hopes Vivian will meet him so she can hear all about it. Vivian thinks she is right, that she is not getting anywhere in Silverstream because there are few eligible bachelors around. She goes to church and tells her servant Milly to prepare something for lunch in case she brings a gentleman home.

On her walk, Vivian encounters Mr. Snowdon and his two daughters, Isabella and Olivia. No longer young, the two sisters are nonetheless quite sheltered and delight in each other's company as well as that of their father. To escape from a lengthy, boring discussion of one of the sister's poems that was accepted for publication Vivian catches up with Barbara Buncle, whom she describes as a "dull, frumpy creature" because of her clothing. Vivian aggressively introduces herself to Mr. Hathaway and invites him to lunch, nearly insisting on his attendance. At lunch Vivian observes Mr. Hathaway and decides he is dull and that his money is wasted on him because he does not even appreciate having a pretty woman like her nearby. Mr. Hathaway admits he has been boring, but Vivian lies and says he has been very interesting and invites him to come back for dinner later that week. Mr. Hathaway accepts her invitation to return for dinner on Thursday, and she confesses she is a wandered, lost soul who needs salvation, hoping to seduce him so he marries her and she gets his money. Mr. Hathaway begins to come over more often, and the village starts to wonder why, no thanks to Vivian's maid Milly gossiping with the villagers like her aunt, baker Mrs. Goldsmith.

Chapter 4 "Mr. Hathaway" - Chapter 4 focuses on the character of Ernest Hathaway, the new vicar for the village church. Mr. Hathaway is already popular throughout Silverstream, and in the opening pages of the chapter the narrator describes the villagers' reaction to him at the Tennis Club. Mr. Hathaway is an excellent player, especially against someone who can match him in skill. Barbara Buncle is a frequent partner for him, even though she seems to worsen as time goes on. One day Barbara goes to the Tennis Club and watches a doubles game that includes Ernest as a player, and Vivian watches with her. The narrator describes the mutual mistrust and dislike the villagers have with Vivian (excepting some of the men, who enjoy her attention). The match ends and the observers compare notes. Barbara admires Miss King's bold and honest take on the game and stands up for her. Barbara seems to have a new spring in



her step now that she has read her book in print, Mr. Abbott having sent her some copies earlier. Mr. Hathaway backs out of another game explaining that his Uncle Mike is in town.

The character of Uncle Mike is introduced. Uncle Mike is a reverend, and he has always served as a role model, advisor, and confidant for Ernest. Ernest greets him in his garden and the two exchange easy banter. Ernest explains his problem to his uncle; the vicar thinks he has too much money, that he does not deserve his wealth and that it is wrong to live with it when he is supposed to live humbly. Ernest tries to give money away to people as charity, but it ends up making people think that he is rich and overly generous with his money. Mr. Hathaway's solution is to live on his stipend from the church and give all his money to Uncle Mike to distribute as he sees fit for one year. Uncle Mike doubts Ernest could survive on his stipend since he is so used to extravagant things and the wealthy lifestyle. Uncle Mike agrees to Ernest's scheme, though he worries for him, and thinks a year of poverty should do him no harm as long as the money is safe. The next day Ernest asks Uncle Mike if he is a fool, and his uncle replies that he thinks it is a good thing for him.

## Analysis

Chapter 3 reinforces the theme of Money and Finances while also touching upon Gossip and Speculation as well as the theme of Love and Romance. Money and Finances and Love and Romance are connected in this chapter; Vivian, a widow with expensive taste and money problems, needs to find a source of income, preferably from a man. She is a classic gold digger and finds none of the men in the village eligible bachelors. When she hears of Ernest Hathaway the vicar and his flush funds, she makes him a project that she hopes will end in a marriage that will solve her money problems. As the reader soon learns, Mr. Hathaway has his own money problems.

The author makes a connection between the Money and Finances theme and the theme of Love and Romance by suggesting that at that time women did not work to support themselves, at least not women who were of the upper class like Vivian Greensleeves. Thus Vivian Greensleeves' solution is to marry someone who will make her financially comfortable (if not more than comfortable). She does not look at men like Ernest Hathaway as a potential lover but rather only for his money. This contrasts with Barbara Buncle, a single woman who had such bad money problems that she wrote a book, never imagining that it would prove to be rewarding emotionally and financially.

Chapter 4 also deals with the theme of Money and Finances. At the Tennis Club the reader sees that Vivian Greensleeves is zeroing in on Ernest as a potential match because of his money. Ernest has been giving off the appearance that he has limitless wealth as he describes to his uncle the charity funds he doles out to the villagers. This has created a reputation for him that he is not entirely comfortable with. He hopes to get rid of some of the money in his scheme of giving the funds to his Uncle Mike to supervise for a year so he can live on his stipend. However, Ernest Hathaway is used to



having money his whole life, with every financial indulgence resolved and taken care of for him. Uncle Mike thinks this will be challenging for sure.

Ernest presents a contrast to two characters readers have seen so far, Barbara Buncle and Vivian Greensleeves. Both of those characters experience financial hardship. Ernest, however, has abundant wealth and is easily taken advantage of as a generous person. His idea to live on his stipend alone is both admirable and naive yet as the novel goes on the reader will see that it reveals the true character of people in the village.

Also present in this chapter is a look at Gossip and Speculation. Vivian is a character who inspires much gossip from the people in the village. So too is Miss King, whose cigarette smoking, frank manner, and masculine clothing style causes many people to judge her and wonder about her. Miss Buncle likes her though and finds her refreshing. Miss Buncle herself is the subject of gossip as people tend to underestimate her intelligence and think she is a bit empty headed because of her clothing and appearance. The town's impression of Barbara is explored several times throughout the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

Is Vivian Greensleeves a character worthy of readers' pity and sympathy? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe the characters of Miss. King, Vivian Greensleeves, and Barbara Buncle as seen through the eyes of the town. What impressions do they give off? How do people view them? What are some of your own observations of these characters and how does the narrator judge them?

## Discussion Question 3

How would you characterize Ernest Hathaway's desire to live on his stipend and give away all his money? Do you think he will be able to do it?

## Vocabulary

dearth, nuisance, skittishness, frumpy, malicious, immersed, cunning, lax, acquisition, murmuration, vacant, tersely, blithely



## Chapter 5 "Mrs. Walker" - Chapter 6 "Mrs. Carter's Tea Party"

### Summary

Chapter 5 "Mrs. Walker" - This chapter focuses on Sarah Walker, wife to the town's doctor, John Walker. Sarah is the first person in Silverstream to read "Disturber of the Peace," and she reads it on the night of her fifth wedding anniversary with her husband while she waits for him to come home from a house call to deliver the Sandeman baby. She decides to postpone their anniversary dinner.

Sarah stays up late reading "Disturber of the Peace" in the study ignoring John's instruction not to wait for him to come home. Sarah appreciates her husband's medical skills when he delivered their twins three years ago. Sarah talks to the dog, Nell, and reflects on how the people in the book seem so alive and familiar. Eventually it dawns on her that the fictional town of Copperfield is very much like Silverstream—perhaps even exactly like it—right down to the description of the family doctor, clearly modeled after her husband. Sarah mentally runs down the list of people in the town who could have written the novel, but nobody fits. Sarah finishes the first part of the novel and presses on to the more lyrical and fantastical second part in which a magical piper boy travels through town, his music affecting the residents in mostly positive ways.

Sarah finishes the novel just as her husband walks through the door. They settle in front of the fire with biscuits, and he tells her about the delivery of the baby Sanderman boy. Sarah recounts her experience reading the entertaining and fascinating "Disturber of the Peace" and urges her husband to read it. John is apprehensive of how the book will go over.

Chapter 6 "Mrs. Carter's Tea Party" - Barbara Buncle and many women of the town attend a tea party at Mrs. Carter's home. Mrs. Featherstone Hogg is supposed to attend, which makes Barbara nervous because Mrs. Featherstone Hogg is a very imposing and intimidating person. She has a reputation for bossing everyone around and getting her way. Everyone in town is afraid of her.

Mrs. Carter talks about how her granddaughter is coming to stay with her to rest and recover with sunshine and fresh milk just as the doctor prescribed. At that moment Mrs. Featherstone Hogg bursts in shouting "Filth!" and slamming "Disturber of the Peace" down on the table. She tells everyone that they are in the book and announces that she intends to sue author John Smith for libel. Somehow Barbara makes it home and calls Mr. Abbott for reassurance. He calms her down and says he will come over the next day to see her.



## Analysis

Chapter 5 reinforces the themes of Love/Romance and Gossip/Speculation. In this chapter the reader sees the first portrait of a loving romantic relationship built on mutual support, affection, and domestic comfort in the married couple of John and Sarah Walker. Sarah is supportive of John not only emotionally but also professionally as she grounds him in the non-medical world and offers the perspective of a detached person. Likewise, John presents stability for Sarah. They are truly partners in life. This marriage is offered in contrast to the budding romance between Mrs. Greensleeves and Mr. Hathaway, a relationship built on inequality, misunderstanding, and murky motives.

Chapter 5 also touches on the theme of Gossip and Speculation. Mrs. Walker enjoys speculating about the the author of "Disturber of the Peace." Her husband, however, seems apprehensive of the novel's impact, noting in the closing quote from the chapter that "It seems to me there are breakers ahead."

This theme of Gossip and Speculation is picked up again in the next chapter. At Mrs. Carter's tea party the imposing Mrs. Featherstone Hogg declares that "Disturber of the Peace" is "filth" and that she intends to pursue legal action against John Smith for libel. Earlier in the chapter Barbara noted the terror Mrs. Featherstone Hogg inspires in the townsfolk. The reader gets to see this for herself in this chapter as Mrs. Featherstone Hogg belittles everyone, including Miss King, whom she insinuates is an "imbecile." Barbara is so shaken by this encounter, especially knowing full well that the people of Silverstream are likely to go along with Mrs. Featherstone Hogg since she demands cooperation and frightens potential opposition, that she calls Mr. Abbott. Her emerging relationship with Mr. Abbott is displayed with his interest in his new writer quite evident. Barbara seems unconvinced that she is safe from libel claims even though Mr. Abbott says they have no case against her.

Also in Chapter 5 the reader hears mention of Mrs. Carter's grandchild. Note that the granddaughter is referred to as a child. Mrs. Carter also intends to put her in the old nursery room. Her age is never revealed, an important detail left absent and one that serves to set the granddaughter's character in mind before she enters the novel. As the reader soon sees, the granddaughter, Sally, is not a child at all but a seventeen-year-old young woman who is quite capable of responsibility and is babied by everyone around her.

## Discussion Question 1

How would you describe Sarah and John Walker's relationship? How does it contrast with other romantic relationships or potential romantic relationships seen so far?



## Discussion Question 2

How does Barbara interact with everyone at the tea party? Does she fit in or seem detached from her neighbors?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Mrs. Featherstone Hogg. Why do you think people do whatever she says? Do you see any weaknesses she has that could prove to be her downfall?

## Vocabulary

belatedly, dutifully, muffler, pristine, advent, subdued, jargon, unbridled, aspersions, veracity, breaker, delectation, scintillating, aghast, languid, libel, trifle



# Chapter 7 "First Fruits" - Chapter 8 "Miss King and Mr. Abbott"

## Summary

Chapter 7 "First Fruits" - This chapter opens with Mr. Abbott and Barbara Buncle sitting in her rather shabby living room discussing the novel and the reaction it has been getting. Mr. Abbott says that no lawyer has a libel case against the novel and tries to calm her down, privately observing how attractive she is. Barbara says she only chose him as her publisher because he was first alphabetically, and she is really taken aback because she did not expect this sort of reaction from her peers, although in retrospect she admits she probably should have.

Mr. Abbott marvels at the luck and chance behind this successful bestseller. He gives Miss Buncle some money from her earnings, and she reluctantly accepts it, still in awe and disbelief that her book is making a profit. He feels that she deserves it, and he is happy to pay her a little early even though she did not ask. The narrator reveals that Barbara's finances were in much more dire straits than Mr. Abbott realizes.

Chapter 8 "Miss King and Mr. Abbott" - While Mr. Abbott waits to see Miss King regarding "Disturber of the Peace" he muses on the peculiar character of Barbara Buncle and all her contradictions, such as how she speaks poor English grammar yet writes good English sentences. Miss King requests that Mr. Abbott withdraw "Disturber of the Peace" from circulation. Mr. Abbott entertains the idea outwardly but of course inwardly never considers it.

Miss King tries to appeal to his sympathy by defending herself from the harsh portrait—or "photograph" as she puts it—of her in the novel. She demands Mr. Abbott tell her who John Smith is and says she will not leave his office until he does, but he cuts the meeting short and leaves through a side door to escape Miss King. In retaliation she searches his desk but finds nothing to support her case or that reveals who John Smith really is. On her way out of the office she runs into Mr. Bulmer, who has come to find out who John Smith is, but Miss King expects he will get nowhere.

## Analysis

Chapter 7 illustrates the themes of Money/Finances and Writers/Books. Miss Buncle's attitude towards money is more immediately revealed by the narrator in her reaction to the funds received from Mr. Abbott. Overall, Miss Buncle's reaction to the publication and success of her novel could best be described as disbelief and wonder. Barbara did not expect the publication of her novel, much less its success, nor that it would find a readership in Silverstream, and certainly not the financial success. For someone who is characterized as keenly observant in her depictions of her neighbors, Barbara seems at





times naive. Still, she has held her private money woes close to the chest as Mr. Abbott does not know how much his financial gift means to her both on a personal level and on a practical level.

From this point forth in the novel, Barbara will learn what it means to be a successful writer and assume that role. Humble and modest, she nonetheless relaxes into the role as a natural. She will have to continue to come to grips with her newfound financial success. Although she dreamed she would be wealthy, never did she imagine that dream would come true, nor did she have a clear picture at what her new reality would be when money troubles did not have such a hold on her.

Chapter 8 introduces some ideas about Writing/Writers and Books. This chapter shows how essential it is for a writer to have a good publisher who, like Mr. Abbott, defends her work and protects her from scandal and even legal action. Mr. Abbott does not seem genuinely intimidated by Miss King and deflects her accusations, even outsmarting her by leaving the room another way. Mr. Abbott is clearly a professional who handles delicate matters with ease and not without a sense of humor. He also seems impressed with how accurate Barbara's writing is that he can tell that Miss King is really Miss Earle.

Another thematic point with Writers and Books is that books are shown to be very powerful and influential. Miss King says that she has the power of the village behind her and her demands. Clearly the book has made a big impact if people are outraged enough to commute to London and meet with the publisher. Even the reserved and morose writer Mr. Bulmer was inspired enough to make the commute. Evidently the power of the written word can be brutally effective and the topic of much Gossip and Speculation.

## Discussion Question 1

To what do you attribute Barbara's success? Persistence? Luck? Talent? Or something of a mix.

## Discussion Question 2

What do you make of Mr. Abbott's characterization of John Smith as "a particularly simple-minded" person to Miss King? How have his observations and actions shown he believes otherwise? Do you think this is a fair way to combat Miss King's worries and demands?

## Discussion Question 3

Contrast Mr. Bulmer's reaction towards the novel to Miss King's. Are they united by outrage? Or divided by their missions?





## Vocabulary

emphatically, monosyllabic, inarticulate, tremulously, philanthropist, paradoxical, sententiously, exorbitant



# Chapter 9 "Mrs. Bulmer" - Chapter 10 "Feu De Joie"

## Summary

Chapter 9 "Mrs. Bulmer" - This chapter focuses on Mr. Stephen Bulmer's wife, Margaret Bulmer. The wife of a cold and persnickety husband, Margaret has evolved over their years of marriage into a very submissive and docile woman living in quiet terror of upsetting her husband. She can tell something is wrong when she finds her husband burning a book, "Disturber of the Peace," in the fireplace. Now Margaret notices a change in Stephen. He seems less likely to complain about things or do things that might upset her. Privately Stephen is ashamed and resentful that David Gaymer, the author character in "Disturber of the Peace," might be modeled after him because it is an unflattering portrait, one in which Gaymer's wife leaves him for another man because he is so horrible to her.

The next morning Stephen leaves for his train and the house seems to breathe a sigh of relief. Usually Margaret and the children have to be all-but mute around Stephen when he is working on writing lest they risk his wrath. In light of his recent change in behavior, Margaret wishes she could ask someone like her friend Sarah Walker for advice, but in so doing she would have to reveal how bad Stephen treated them before, behavior which she really does not want to call attention to. She decides in the end to go seek Sarah's advice, and on her way to the Walkers' house she waves to Barbara Buncle, who is having a bonfire in her lawn.

Sarah is pleasantly surprised to see Margaret, though she cannot help but look at her through the eyes of "Disturber of the Peace," which painted David Gaymer's wife Edith as a tragic figure and victim of domestic unrest. Margaret says she is worried about Stephen and eventually realizes she has to reveal his past brutality in order to put the recent events in context. Sarah is rightfully horrified. Sarah begins to suspect that Stephen has read "Disturber of the Peace" and tries to put herself in his mind to imagine how he must have felt reading it. Sarah tells Margaret not to worry and that Stephen will probably treat her better but she should not let on the reason why and should "keep him guessing." Sarah leaves Margaret with "Disturber of the Peace," which she reads at Sarah's urging.

Chapter 10 "Feu De Joie" - Barbara Buncle enjoys the bonfire in her front lawn. She has not told anyone the reason behind her bonfire—to celebrate her newfound career and financial success. She reflects on her earlier trip to the bank to deposit the money Mr. Abbott had given her. In order not to draw attention to herself she told the banker, Mr. Black, that she received the money from her uncle.

While watching the bonfire, Barbara's new neighbor Sally introduces herself and joins her. Sally is in fact Mrs. Carter's granddaughter who she had told everyone about at her



tea party. Yet Sally is not the child Barbara expected; she is in fact seventeen. Sally reveals she is a very capable young woman who even ran her father's home. She was all set to go to Calcutta with her father but got appendicitis.

Sally asks why they Barbara is having a bonfire, and Barbara says she is celebrating something personal. Sally calls it a "feu de joie" a French term for a fire of joy. The two women sit back and enjoy the fire. Sally says she thinks her grandmother would have a fit if she saw her there but says she would not know because Mrs. Featherstone Hogg had come to talk about "Disturber of the Peace." Sally has much praise for the novel and found it extremely funny. Sally seems to think John Smith has shaken everyone up and revealed their true nature, and she goes so far as to say she would marry him. She characterizes him as a crusader of the written word and truth and justice and wonders if she will ever meet him. Barbara is privately amused and astonished. Sally leaves, and Barbara says she will have her over for tea some day.

The chapter closes with Barbara pondering the reaction "Disturber of the Peace" has gotten. In the press the novel has received mixed reviews which puzzles her. Nonetheless the book is selling well, and Mr. Abbott writes her a congratulatory note urging her to begin another novel along the same lines.

## Analysis

Chapter 9 reveals much about the theme of Writing and Books. At this point in the novel Stephen Bulmer offers a contrast to Barbara Buncle, the other author in Silverstream. Stephen seems to excuse his bad behavior by embodying the stereotype of the tyrannical, moody, and Byronic writer. Meanwhile, Barbara has all but stumbled into the role of writer blind. As the reader will see as the novel goes on, Barbara becomes subject to the artistic temperament in some ways. Still, Stephen is moved by "Disturber of the Peace" and observant enough to recognize himself in the character of David Gaymer. It frightens Stephen that people see him this way, and it frightens himself to see that he is this way. Thus, readers see one of the first instances in how books can affect real change in people. "Disturber of the Peace" is influential enough that Stephen radically alters his behavior to be kinder and more considerate to his wife and children.

Chapter 10 addresses the themes of Money/Finances, Gossip/Speculation, Writing/Books, and Satire. Barbara is still in a daze at consequences of writing her novel. Going to the bank to deposit the money Mr. Abbott gave her is a surreal experience. Knowing that she cannot reveal the true source of her income, Barbara attributes her money to an uncle. This is still a time in history where women were not expected to have a generous income of their own or be self-reliant, so naturally Barbara wants to protect herself from Gossip and Speculation or raising any red flags that might draw unwanted attention to her situation. Still, she feels that she can celebrate with her bonfire.

Sally Carter is not what Barbara expected at all. Mrs. Carter had gone around talking about Sally as if she were a small child instead of seventeen years old. Yet she is a



remarkably capable and mature young woman as evidenced by her discussion with Barbara. Sally talks about how she ran her father's house as the mistress of the estate, read whatever she liked, and hosted parties, dinners, and social engagements. Sally upends traditional gender conventions with her experiences as the head of the household and as someone who grew up with independent thought being encouraged. Although her grandmother expects her to be a docile and subservient young lady following the sexist norms of the time, Sally is strong-willed, educated, and confident enough to form her own opinions, such as with "Disturber of the Peace" and author John Smith.

Her analysis of the novel's impact stuns Barbara, who did not expect that she was capable of having such a real revolutionary effect as Sally describes. Of course the great irony is that Sally wishes to meet John Smith, even going so far as to saying she wants to marry him, yet the true author of the novel, Barbara, is sitting next to her keeping John Smith's identity a secret out of necessity. Indeed, this chapter gives more insight into what it means to be a writer and publish books. Barbara is seeing the kind of reaction she is getting in the paper, mixed reviews, and is confused at how this is both frustrating to not know if the writing is truly good or bad and positive because it means the novel sells better. From this chapter the reader can gather that once the authors' novel and characters are released out into the world for the public to read anything can happen. The writer can only control so much of what happens to the book. Several of the reviews hint at the books satirical nature, which, again, Barbara did not intend. She truly cannot control the reaction of others.

## Discussion Question 1

How is author Stephen Bulmer a contrast to the other author in *Silverstream*, Barbara Buncle? Given what you've seen from Barbara in Chapter 10, do you feel she is going to turn out like Stephen?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Writing and Books. Can you think of any novels that, like "Disturber of the Peace," caused a big reaction among people you know but had mixed reviews? Are there any popular novels that you have read and had different opinions about from other people who have read it?

## Discussion Question 3

Why might women like Sally Carter and Barbara Buncle upset the traditional ideas about women? How do they subvert conventions society has about young women?

## Vocabulary

morose, vivacity, commiseration, twain, amiability, deduction, hysterics, disclosures, lamentably, lenient, supercilious, domicile, plaintively, allegory, smug, unsolicited



# Chapter 11 "Colonel Weatherhead and the Bishop" - Chapter 12 "Mrs. Featherstone Hogg"

## Summary

Chapter 11 "Colonel Weatherhead and the Bishop" - At the opening of the chapter Colonel Weatherhead is working hard on pulling up a nasty kind of weed called the Bishop. It is taxing work every autumn and he never lets anyone else do it because it gives Colonel Weatherhead a sort of pleasure and accomplishment once it is done (not to mention physical exercise). Yet he does not want any of the fellow villagers to know that he is tending to his own garden. He instructs his staff to tell Mrs. Featherstone Hogg he is not home when she stops by in the midst of a Bishop pulling session. Mrs. Featherstone leaves a package with Simmons the servant and insists that Simmons give the package to the Colonel, who later discovers it is a book. It is, of course, "Disturber of the Peace."

The next morning Mrs. Featherstone Hogg calls up and asks if he has read the book yet. She implores him to read it and says they will discuss it on Saturday. On Friday Colonel Weatherhead starts the book because he, like many of the villagers, does whatever Mrs. Featherstone Hogg says because she is so intimidating. He reads and finishes the book and is reflective. At first he thinks the book amused him, but upon further thought it makes him feel quite depressed and insignificant in its commentary on English villagers and their contentment with a rather empty and boring existence.

The Colonel decides to take a walk even though it is rainy, and he stops in to see his neighbor, Mrs. Dorothea Bold. They bond over how lonely they are, each single and unmarried, and for the first time since they have known each other in four years the Colonel sees Dorothea for who she is—pretty, kind, amusing, good company—and who she could be to him, a wife. He proposes to her and they accept. The narrator draws a comparison between their engagement and that of Major Waterfoot and Mrs. Mildmay in "Disturber of the Peace."

Chapter 12 "Mrs. Featherstone Hogg" - Mrs. Agatha Featherstone Hogg does not have a good trip to London. Her husband cannot convince their lawyer, Mr. Spark, to pursue legal action against the publisher of "Disturber of the Peace" because the lawyer thinks they do not have a strong libel case. Agatha fights with her husband, Edwin, and lets on that she is especially hurt by the insinuation that she was a chorus girl when they met even though Edwin points out that she was.

Nevertheless, Agatha meets with Mr. Spark, who cautiously but decisively rejects Mrs. Featherstone Hogg's argument. He chooses to focus on the humiliation angle, that any jury would find it hysterical to see the real-life people who inspired the villagers in



fictional Copperfield. Mrs. Featherstone Hogg blows a fuse and launches a tirade against Mr. Spark and Edward. Edward tells Agatha that he intends to follow Mr. Spark's advice, and then he says she is making herself ridiculous. The chapter ends with Mr. Featherstone Hogg going back to Spark and implying that he might write Mrs. Featherstone Hogg out of his will.

## Analysis

In Chapter 11 the reader gets to see more of Mrs. Featherstone Hogg's personality and the effect she has on other people in Silverstream. Colonel Weatherhead is terrified of her, even to the point that he is afraid she will judge him for pulling up his own weed, the Bishop. Throughout the novel the reader sees how Mrs. Featherstone Hogg is a bully and a formidable presence. In the end, however, she does not get what she wants: to find John Smith and charge him with libel. Regardless, this chapter makes it plain that the Colonel is an important person in the village, someone whom others seek out to get their opinion on for pressing issues. People look to him for leadership.

The Colonel's relationship with Dorothea Bold represents the topic of Love and Romance. Both Dorothea and the Colonel are lonely, unmarried, single, and middle-aged. They have lived next to each other for a few years now, and it is only in visiting Dorothea in passing does the Colonel realize not only his love for her but also how they would be well suited to a marriage built on mutual admiration and companionship. As the reader will see throughout the course of the novel, courtship, marriage, and engagement are frequent topics that the author addresses. Numerous couples will become engaged and married, all presenting different pictures of love and marriage. Doubtless the Colonel and Dorothea's relationship is one of the positive depictions of love and relationships.

Chapter 12 reinforces the terrifying character of Mrs. Agatha Featherstone Hogg, who has now gone to London to meet with her and her husband's lawyer, Mr. Spark. Mr. Spark says they have no case for libel, which upsets Agatha. She cannot see that she would be the object of ridicule as Mr. Spark suggests. Even Edward, her husband, says she would look ridiculous. Thus she has some measure of delusion and irrationality to her. Yet he cannot control her actions, and she seeks to continue her crusade against John Smith. This chapter's purpose is mainly to characterize Mrs. Featherstone Hogg and impress upon the reader her commanding presence, though there are signs that she is even wearing her husband thin.

## Discussion Question 1

Why would the Colonel be afraid of Mrs. Featherstone Hogg and not want her to see him after he has worked on the Bishop's weed? Would you be afraid of her, too?



## Discussion Question 2

What aspects of Dorothea and the Colonel's conversation would lead you to believe theirs would be a good marriage? How are they well suited to each other?

## Discussion Question 3

What do you predict will happen to Mrs. Featherstone Hogg if she pursues her libel case without the support of her husband and her lawyer? Does she seem like the kind of person who would lose a battle she is fighting?

## Vocabulary

tussle, conscientious, reconnaissance, perplexity, strenuous, galoshes, trifle, peroration, rigor, germinate, sanctum





# Chapter 13 "Colonel Weatherhead and Mrs. Bold" - Chapter 14 "Sunday and Monday"

## Summary

Chapter 13 "Colonel Weatherhead and Mrs. Bold" - Mrs. Agatha Featherstone Hogg returns to Silverstream and immediately calls upon Colonel Weatherhead. She learns that he is at Mrs. Bold's house, so she pursues him there. Although Agatha does not intend to give up the libel suit, she is worried about being written out of Edwin's will, so she privately decides not to say anything more about it to him. Before going over to Mrs. Bold's, Mrs. Featherstone calls up the writer Mr. Bulmer and the two decide to have a public forum of sorts to gather all the people who are annoyed at "Disturber" in one place. Mr. Bulmer will host.

Mrs. Bold's driveway is all torn up and filled with puddles of rain, so Agatha sends her chauffeur to Mrs. Bold for assistance. Agatha sees Colonel Weatherhead come out of Mrs. Bold's house and demands that he gets in her car so they can talk about the book. Mrs. Featherstone Hogg points out to the Colonel that the soldier character who gets married to his neighbor is in fact him, which secretly alarms Colonel Weatherhead because now he starts to see the parallels with his engagement to Mrs. Bold. He hopes that Dorothea has not read it because he fears that she would think he would only have proposed to her because of something he read in a book. Through his conversation with Agatha he realizes that comparisons could certainly be made between Silverstream residents and the fictional Copperfield residents. Colonel Weatherhead agrees to read the book, though he thinks to himself that he really doesn't care about who John Smith is, only what the implications are for his relationship with Dorothea. He exits the car and goes home.

That night Dorothea comes over for dinner at Colonel Weatherhead's. They keep things reserved in front of the servants but express their affection when they're alone, and the Colonel gives her a chaste kiss on the ear when she arrives. Dorothea, having talked with Agatha, wonders if she is in the book and tries to talk about it with the Colonel, but he changes the subject. Colonel Weatherhead mentions his fight with the Bishop, but does not explain right away that it is a vine. This confuses Dorothea, but eventually it is explained. He tells her that he wants to marry her, but he wants to do it right away, perhaps away from Silverstream. They decide to go to France and marry there to get away from any gossip and speculation about their marriage. The chapter closes with Dorothea packing for France and quietly reflecting on her new engagement and how her life has changed so fast.

Chapter 14 "Sunday and Monday" - The next day, Sunday, the Colonel and Dorothea go to church separately. Dorothea remarks that Barbara should buy a better hat, and



Barbara thinks to herself that this is a good idea now that she can afford to do this. Mrs. Carter slips Barbara a note telling her she is coming to tea with her. Mr. Hathaway's sermon is about loving your neighbor and the evils of money, no doubt subjects on his mind. Barbara thinks about how the Vicar has been said to lose a lot of money, though Vivian Greensleeves has apparently not heard this since she is still spending a lot of time with him hoping he will be her financial salvation. He remains dreadfully boring to Vivian.

When Sally comes over for tea she enthusiastically invites Barbara to visit Virginia, her hat maker, and go to a hair salon in London. Barbara agrees and decides to go to London the next day, Monday. On Monday Barbara meets Dorothea on the train, and Dorothea says she is going to her sister's in London. Barbara goes to Sally's salon and gets a rather trendy, albeit unflattering, hairstyle. At Virginia's the hat maker and Barbara discuss Sally's state of mind in her new surroundings in Silverstream. Barbara leaves the shop three hours later, thrilled at the possibilities of having a new look now that she is financially independent and can afford them.

## Analysis

Chapter 13 highlights some aspects of the theme Writing and Books. When Agatha comes to speak with the Colonel and points out to him all the things he missed, she demonstrates that she is quite an astute reader. Even though Agatha is campaigning against the novel, she definitely shows a kind of literary prowess in analyzing the work and seeing herself and her fellow villagers in it. The Colonel represents a foil to her interpretation of "Disturber of the Peace" as he does not pick up on anything the first time around. When the Colonel hears from Mrs. Featherstone Hogg that he is in fact the soldier character that gets married to his neighbor, he is alarmed because he hopes that his engagement to Dorothea will not be seen as the inevitable conclusion to a satirical novel. Thus, this chapter also suggests that writing and literature can have an enormous influence on real life, especially considering Agatha is taking her gripe so far as to have a public forum. Books, the author is saying, can have a real impact. Books matter.

Chapter 13 also continues the theme of Love and Romance. Even though they have only just been engaged, Colonel Weatherhead and Dorothea Bold are clearly attracted to her and have an easy chemistry to their conversations. The author is showing again how they are a good match for each other. Their flight to get married in France also shows the theme of Gossip and Speculation, as these characters, and the Colonel in particular, do not want to be the subject of gossip and speculation after their engagement. The Colonel is worried especially that by having a character like him in the book marry a character like Dorothea people will have even more to speculate about already. If John Smith is truly a Silverstream villager then clearly the Colonel's engagement to Dorothea will come as no surprise. It seems they were the last to know that everyone thinks of them as a couple who should have gotten together long ago.

In Chapter 14 the theme of Money and Finances comes into play. At church there are three people who are experiencing different relationships to money. First, there is Ernest



Hathaway the Vicar. Ernest's sermon about the evils of money seems to be an overcompensation for his own money woes. By bringing attention to the supposed evil nature of money Ernest is trying to justify to himself his radical decision to live on his church income alone. Also in the church is Vivian Greensleeves, who is only interested in Ernest because of his fortune which everyone else in town knows he has lost.

Barbara Buncle also deals with the issues of money, albeit in a positive way. Barbara takes Sally's suggestion that she needs to spend some money on her clothing and appearance and goes up to London to splurge on some much-needed clothing and hats. She even gets her hair done. The author is demonstrating how working hard for your money, and especially after having lived in poverty for no reason of your own, should allow one to spend money once it is earned.

## Discussion Question 1

Are you surprised about the impact that "Disturber of the Peace" is happening? Can you think of any books that have had such an impact on you or your community?

## Discussion Question 2

If you were Colonel Weatherhead and Dorothea Bold would you flee to another country to get married just to avoid gossip and speculation? Or would you weather the storm?

## Discussion Question 3

How would you describe Barbara Buncle's relationship to money? How does it differ from other characters in the novel, such as Vivian Greensleeves and Ernest Hathaway?

## Vocabulary

prototypes, contaminated, laconically, ostracized, barrage, galvanized, caricature, cantankerous, wheedling, consecrated, vacancy, endeavor, desultory, guilt



# Chapter 15 "More about Monday" - Chapter 16 "The Drawing-Room Meeting"

## Summary

Chapter 15 "More about Monday" - While Barbara is in London, Mrs. Featherstone Hogg is determined to drum up attendance for the meeting. She does not realize that John Smith receives royalties from every copy of the novel that sells, and in raising a ruckus about the novel she has in fact been its greatest asset in publicity and marketing. She tells everyone she knows to read it in an attempt to convert people to her cause. For example, she is able to gain Vivian Greensleeves' support after Vivian reads "Disturber of the Peace" and sees the character clearly drawn from her life is frighteningly unflattering. Ernest Hathaway walks in on her crying, so she invents a story about how lonely she is and how she was treated dreadfully by a man in London.

Meanwhile Dr. Walker has gone to see a young patient, Angela, who has a weak chest and difficulty breathing. Dr. John Walker suggests to Ellen, the young girl's guardian, that she take her somewhere with a milder climate. In the course of their discussion, Ellen brings up "Disturber of the Peace" and asks for the doctor's thoughts. He confides that he believes it was written "a very simple-minded person—a woman." They close the conversation and John again emphasizes that Ellen should take Angela to a better climate such as in Egypt.

Chapter 16 "The Drawing-Room Meeting" - Barbara arrives at the Bulmers' house for the meeting after having replaced her hat with one suggested by Sally. The experience is a little surreal for Barbara, who sees the people who inspired her live in the flesh. She starts to wonder at the differences between Silverstream and Copperfield, Mrs. Featherstone Hogg and the character Mrs. Horsley downs. In other words, between fiction and reality.

Mrs. Featherstone Hogg calls the meeting to order, and the villagers speculate about why Dorothea Bold and Colonel Weatherhead are not there and should they wait for the Colonel before starting. Ultimately they begin the meeting when they cannot reach him after calling his house. Mrs. Featherstone Hogg announces that they need to find out who John Smith is and hold him responsible for his libelous and immoral novel. Mr. Bulmer expresses his frustration since he thought he was running the meeting, but Mrs. Featherstone Hogg presses on and opens the meeting to general comments.

Mrs. Goldsmith tries to deny the book's suggestion that her buns in her bakery are full of electricity. Mrs. Dick starts to correct negative ideas about her from the book. Mrs. Featherstone Hogg regains control of the meeting, and they read out apologies from those who could not attend. Next they discuss what they should do with John Smith.



Mrs. Featherstone Hogg thinks he ought to be horse-whipped, but bitter Mr. Bulmer says she cannot vote because she is leading the meeting. The meeting dissolves into petty bickering and off-topic conversations. Vivian Greensleeves takes the floor and says she thinks John Smith is Sarah Walker, Dr. Walker's wife, because she is the only person not held up to scorn in the book. Sarah, who has attended the meeting, vehemently denies this, though she says she wishes she has because the book has been nothing but good for the town and they needed to see this unflattering portrait of themselves. As Sarah storms out of the meeting she runs into her husband and tells him what has happened.

## Analysis

Chapter 15 brings up the themes of Writing/Books and also Satire. There is definitely a satirical air to this chapter, with Mrs. Featherstone Hogg's efforts in fact making John Smith a very successful writer and the novel a bestseller. Her behavior is in fact strengthening her enemy. Meanwhile, Dr. Walker's visit to Angela and Ellen is written in language and a style that has a touch of hyperbole to it. The reader gets the idea that Angela is indeed sick, but the degree to which the characters talk about her make her seem like an exceptionally fragile child on death's door if she does not get to a better climate. In fact, that is not unlike Mrs. Carter's description of her granddaughter Sally Carter before she comes to stay with her.

This chapter also touches on the theme of Writing and Books briefly when Dr. Walker discusses his take on the author of "Disturber." His description of her as "a very simple-minded person—a woman" reinforces the light tones of sexism that run throughout "Miss Buncle's Book." The question of which woman could be the author of "Disturber" is a question that is raised again and again. Barbara Buncle, the true author, is often painted as a simple-minded person by others (including Mr. Abbott) even though she has written a very clever satire. No one thinks she is capable of it, first because she is a woman and second because she has written in such a peculiar style that others think it must be written by someone who is a bit daft.

Chapter 16 also brings up the topic of Writing and Books. Barbara's experience at the drawing room meeting shows how she is becoming a writer. She is starting to look at characters as her children almost and she wonders how she can control them and make them do whatever she wants. In fact there is even a suggestion that Barbara is starting to see reality and fiction blur, no doubt a problem experienced by all writers who model fictional characters after real people.

The rest of the chapter shows strong indications of Satire. The drawing room meeting descends into total chaos as each attendee's issues are brought to life, some of them completely irrelevant. The reader sees how easily Barbara could write a satire of them with their petty concerns and infighting. Sarah Walker's declaration that the town needed to read "Disturber" to see how gruesome they really are seems to be an entirely accurate statement. Whether the villagers will actually change as a result remains to be seen.



## Discussion Question 1

What seems to be the author's message about how people—especially men—keep underestimating Barbara as a woman and as a writer?

## Discussion Question 2

How is Barbara transforming into a writer? Are you concerned for her given her difficulties with discerning fiction and reality?

## Discussion Question 3

How would you describe Sarah Walker's behavior at the drawing room meeting? Were her actions brave or foolish?

## Vocabulary

expenditure, consignment, perpetrated, abhorred, vacillating, demented, ascertain, discordant, erroneous, astounded



# Chapter 17 "Inspiration" - Chapter 18 "A History Lesson"

## Summary

Chapter 17 "Inspiration" - Barbara Buncle races home from the meeting bursting with inspiration for her sequel to "Disturber of the Peace." She initially refuses Dorcas' offer to have something to eat but then relents if Dorcas will bring it to her. Dorcas considers how her mistress has changed and how she does not think it has been for the better that Barbara has become a successful author. Barbara eats the food and then sends Dorcas away with instructions to bring her a strong cup of coffee at eleven-o'clock.

The next morning Dorcas suggests that they start a hen farm to make money so Barbara could give up writing, but Barbara, astonished, remarks that she could never give it up now, that she truly enjoys it and she is financially successful doing it. Barbara tries to give her clothes away to Dorcas. Then she falls asleep and dreams that she is in Copperfield but not as herself, as her alter ego, Elizabeth Wade. Dorcas brings her dinner and a postcard from France from Colonel Weatherhead and Dorothea Bold, who are announcing their marriage. Dorcas and Barbara wonder if "Disturber" provoked this marriage.

Barbara takes a bath and dresses up in her new clothes and realizes that she is not looking at herself in the mirror; she is looking at Elizabeth Wade. Mr. Abbott calls on her. They get caught up on the success of the book—Mr. Abbott implies that the mixed reviews were designed to make the book sell more—and the town's reaction to the novel.

Dorcas has tea with Milly Spikes, the niece to the baker, Mrs. Goldsmith. They speculate on John Smith's identity, though Dorcas does not let on that she knows who he is. Milly gossips about how Ernest the Vicar has lost all his money, and Vivian Greenwood does not even know.

Chapter 18 "A History Lesson" - Mrs. Carter has decided that Sally should have some education because she believes she is "woefully ignorant" and young, childish, and naive. Mrs. Carter decides to hire Ernest Hathaway the Vicar to tutor Sally at Dr. Walker's suggestion. Mr. Hathaway finds himself in a position where he has to seriously consider Mrs. Carter's offer. His experiment to live without money beyond his vicar salary is going very badly indeed. His servant Mrs. Hobday is having to take up other duties since Ernest has had the let other staff members go. Meanwhile, Ernest is engaged to Vivian but has not told her the true extent of his financial troubles. He resolves to accept the tutoring position.

Sally is not happy that her grandmother has hired someone to tutor her. When Ernest arrives he is shocked that Sally Carter is not a young girl like he had been expecting.





Ernest notices how pretty she is. He also recognizes her intelligence, and as the two of them have an easy rapport they decide that they will undertake lessons in more advanced subject matter that will be challenging for her.

## Analysis

In Chapter 17 addresses the theme of "Writing and Books" in its depiction of Barbara Buncle's writing habits. She is seized with inspiration once she comes home. Dorcas, the maid, offers the sense of perspective here. She has noticed that her mistress has changed, and she does not think it is for the better. She worries for her and even suggests that they start a farm to make money so Barbara wouldn't have to write. Yet Barbara loves writing—she loves feeling creative, feeling swept up in her characters and story, and feeling charged with a kind of creative energy. It is work she truly enjoys.

The segment where Barbara is dreaming about Copperfield and becomes Elizabeth Wade foreshadows her eventual transition into a more Elizabeth Wade-like person in the latter part of the novel starting with this section. Becoming an author has allowed Barbara to shed her cocoon of shabby clothing, poverty, and self-doubt. She emerges a much more confident woman, one who is elegant and with refined taste.

The events of Chapter 18 demonstrate the theme of Money and Finances. In this chapter the reader sees how desperate Ernest Hathaway is without his money. His poverty experiment, though well-intentioned, seemed poorly-executed. He has said nothing to Vivian Greensleeves even though he is engaged to her. Whether this is because he is ashamed or in denial remains to be seen. However, he is in such dire straits that he has to become the tutor to Sally Carter.

Yet Sally and Ernest hit it off right from their first conversation. This foreshadows their eventual romantic relationship. With the theme of Love and Romance in mind the author is suggesting that a chemistry and compatibility is the foundation of a good romantic relationship. This stands in contrast to Vivian's relationship with Ernest, which is built on deception (however well-meaning or not) and shallowness.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you know any writers, artists, or creative types who become involved with their work in the same way that Barbara throws herself into her writing? Are you concerned for Barbara? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

What do you make of the segment in which Barbara dreams she is in Copperfield as Elizabeth Wade? How is Elizabeth Wade different from Barbara and how is she similar to Barbara?





## Discussion Question 3

At this point in the novel, how would you describe Ernest's experiment to live on next to nothing? Were his original intentions sincere, shallow, carefully planned or something else? Is he right to keep this from Vivian?

## Vocabulary

recumbent, consternation, indefatigable, interpolated, nocturnal, obliged



# Chapter 19 "Miss Buncle's Holiday" - Chapter 20 "Chiefly about Sally"

## Summary

Chapter 19 "Miss Buncle's Holiday" - Barbara Buncle's new attitude and appearance are noticeable to others, for instance Mrs. Carter when Barbara comes over for tea. Mrs. Carter insists that Sarah Walker is the really John Smith, and she insults Barbara by saying one reason why it could be Sarah (as opposed to Barbara) was because Sarah has brains and is intelligent as well as she is privy to private information since she is the doctor's wife. Mrs. Carter says that Agatha Featherstone Hogg and Vivian Greensleeves have a plan for revenge, but she cannot tell Barbara what it is. Then they start talking about the Colonel and Dorothea Bold. Sally arrives and decides to come to Barbara's for tea the next day at four.

The next day Barbara decides to restrain herself from writing so she can take a break, but she is miserable. Barbara takes Dorcas' suggestion to go for a walk. She decides to go see Sarah Walker. One of the reasons why she wants to see her is because Sarah is a tricky character to write in the sequel to "Disturber." Sarah and Barbara discuss the novel, and Barbara is pleased that Sarah found the novel to be hysterically funny. Barbara says she does not think Sarah wrote it and also warns her about Mrs. Featherstone Hogg's plan for revenge. On her way home Barbara runs into Miss King, who says that she and Angela are going to Samarkand the next week.

Chapter 20 "Chiefly about Sally" - Christmas has come and went. Sally and Ernest Hathaway are enjoying the lessons and often take long walks. Ernest is having trouble keeping Sally separate from Vivian in his mind. He is undeniably attracted to her. On her end, Sally likes Ernest quite a lot and admires how he is different from other men she has known in her life. Ernest's finances are embarrassing, but Sally is able to get her grandma to pay him and pay him well. Sally is not put off by his poverty.

Both Ernest and Sally find their feelings for each other are stressed when Vivian Greensleeves stops by and Ernest ultimately breaks off his lesson with Sally. Sally goes to Vivian's and in backdoor way lets her know that Ernest has no money. Vivian is at first in denial and is extremely angry. Sally is pleased with herself because her plan has worked.

## Analysis

Chapter 19 plays into the theme of Gossip and Speculation. When Mrs. Carter comes over for tea at Barbara's she is firm in her belief that Sarah Walker is John Smith. She briefly gossips about Agatha and Vivian's plan for revenge, but she does not say any more about it to Barbara. Even though she does not know the whole story, Barbara



feels guilty and worried enough that she goes to see Sarah Walker to warn her about the villagers' plan. She thinks this is so important that she even abstains from writing to do it.

Yet Sarah accepts the implication that she is John Smith even though Barbara says she does not believe it is her. Unfortunately, this is foreshadowing for the later event when Mrs. Featherstone Hogg and Vivian conspire to kidnap Sarah's twins and hold them for ransom. Yet Mrs. Featherstone Hogg is such a commanding and intimidating presence that the reader wonders what Sarah could even do to stay clear of her. The gossip that Barbara brings to her, then, is too incomplete to do any good.

Chapter 20 explores the theme of Love and Romance more as Sally and Ernest become more attached to each other. Their lessons have now taken the form of long walks together. Sally does not hold his poverty against him, unlike Vivian, who is enraged when Sally deliberately lets it slip to her that Ernest has no money. Sally's relationship with Ernest serves as a further contrast between his relationship with Vivian. Sally's conversation with Vivian is necessary in order to free them both of the farce that is the Vivian and Ernest engagement, as Sally well knows. Also, Sally enjoys Ernest's company immensely. She finds it easy to converse with him and rather enjoys his tendency to be pedantic. Vivian could never stand this side of him. She found him dull and boring, a fact that she will tell him, and crush him with, soon enough.

## Discussion Question 1

How is Barbara beginning to change in appearance and personality? Is it a good thing? What seems to be the reaction on the part of the other characters?

## Discussion Question 2

Does the author seem to imply in Chapter 19 that gossip and speculation can be good things? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

What about Sally and Ernest works as a romantic relationship? How does it contrast to descriptions of Ernest and Vivian spending time together?

## Vocabulary

aspersions, hob-nobs, vindictive, peevishly, fastidious, threadbare, blithely, extracted, dudgeon, stodgy



# Chapter 21 "Mrs. Snowdon's Memorial" - Chapter 22 "The Children's Party at the Riggs"

## Summary

Chapter 21 "Mrs. Snowdon's Memorial" - Ernest Hathaway is concerned that Sally will not come to her lesson the next day because he worries that he offended her by seeing Vivian, but Sally does come to the lesson and he is extremely relieved that there seems to be no harm done between them, as Sally is equally pleased to see him.

A few days later Ernest is startled to see a sarcophagus at the Snowdon's plot in the graveyard. He believes it is hideous and in poor taste since it stands out from the other more traditional graves. Ernest lectures Mr. Snowdon on the tradition of having a gravestone. Ernest is upset and decides to go to Vivian's for tea since he wants to talk about the sarcophagus more with someone. Vivian is not happy to see him now that she knows about his poverty, having heard about it from Sally as well as from the other villagers. Vivian calls him an imposter and a liar for proposing to marry her when he knew he had no money. She insults him and also calls him boring ("You bore me to death") which deeply offends Ernest. They ultimately break off the engagement because this difference between them is irreconcilable.

Chapter 22 "The Children's Party at the Riggs" - Mrs. Featherstone Hogg is reluctant to give the children's Christmas party, but she does it just like every year anyway, in the second week of January. The villagers receive their invitations, and Sarah Walker is surprised that although her children the twins are invited, she is not. Ultimately the nanny has to take them. At the party the nanny loses track of the children, and Mrs. Featherstone Hogg tells her that Vivian Greensleeves has taken them out for a spin in Mr. Stratton's car. Nannie is extremely upset and calls Mrs. Walker, but Sarah is calm and tells her not to worry, that it was her own mistake in letting them attend.

Sarah calls Barbara Buncl to tell her what's happened, and while Sarah goes to the Featherstone Hoggs' house Barbara walks to the Walker's house. Barbara is determined to tell everyone the truth, that she is the author of "Disturber," but Sarah tells her when she's returned that she has signed a paper saying that she is John Smith and that she was wrong about what she put in the book and also send a letter to Mr. Abbott saying it was her. No matter what she does Barbara cannot get Sarah to accept that she is the true author. Sarah is at peace, and Barbara leaves her when the twins return.

## Analysis

Chapter 21 focuses on the themes of Money/Finances and Love/Romance. In Chapter 21 Ernest shows how concerned he is about money and how much he cares about Sally. In light of their awkward parting when Vivian interrupted their lesson, both Sally and Ernest were anxious about how they would act around each other once they were reunited. Their reunion, however, shows that their bond endures. Their love and romance can sustain such stresses. On the other hand, Vivian breaks up with him and insults him to a deep degree when she tells him that he bored her to death. In contrast, Sally is never bored by Ernest and finds his conversational manner quirky, charming, and endearing.

In Chapter 21 Money and Finances are definitely a prominent theme. The sarcophagus presents a challenge to his personal beliefs. Gaudy and over-the-top, the sarcophagus nevertheless presents an opportunity to show Ernest what lots of money can buy. He is full of reflection on this, especially because the evils of money is something he has delivered a sermon on in the past, so he goes to see Vivian to complain about it. This is the impetus of the conversation that ends his engagement with Vivian, in effect bruising his ego but making him available to be with Sally.

Chapter 22 is mainly driven by the plot and represents the climactic section of the novel, when Mrs. Featherstone Hogg and Vivian conspire to kidnap Sarah Walker's children. In this chapter the reader sees how close Sarah is to Barbara. She is the person Sarah calls when the kids are kidnapped. This climactic scene and the resulting conversation between Sarah and Barbara highlights some of the author's views on Books and Writing. Yet again the reader sees how people underestimate Barbara as the true author of "Disturber of the Peace." Sarah dismisses Barbara's confession that she is indeed John Smith by insulting her intelligence.

Sarah's acceptance of the villagers' accusations reflect her respect for John Smith and his (her) writing. Here the reader sees the full extent of a writer's power. Writing, and Satire in particular, can cause real harm to people when the mirror is held up for people to see their unsavory sides. The author is making the argument that Writing and Books are powerful tools that can spark all kinds of reactions, some of them mild amusement while others gravely serious.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the sarcophagus bothered Ernest so much? Is it right to be able to complain?



## Discussion Question 2

The reader has seen Ernest speak to many people throughout the book—Vivian, the church members, Sally, Mr. Snowdon. How would you describe his conversation style? Do you think you would get along with him?

## Discussion Question 3

How would you describe Sarah's behavior in the scene where she is talking with Barbara? Why does she dismiss Barbara's confession that she is the real John Smith? Why do you think Barbara let her get away with declaring that she is John Smith?

## Vocabulary

arbitrary, sarcophagus, monstrosities, rancor, solicitude, altruism, obstreperous, bluff, bamboozled, flummoxed



# Chapter 23 "Miss Buncle's Day in Town" - Chapter 24 "The Pen Is Mightier—"

## Summary

Chapter 23 "Miss Buncle's Day in Town" - Barbara has lunch with Mr. Abbott in town. The narrator points out that it is Barbara's alter ego, Elizabeth, who has lunch with him, meaning that Barbara is starting to emulate her more confident, elegant, and charismatic character from her sequel. Mr. Abbott has become increasingly more attracted to Barbara. He has, in fact, started to feel that she is perhaps the woman he has waited for his whole life. He decides to propose to her when she hands him the manuscript of the "Disturber" sequel.

After lunch they go to a movie together, but neither enjoy it and both are bored by it. They duck out and have tea, and Barbara says she is worried she will run out of material after "The Pen Is Mightier—" is published, but Mr. Abbott tells her not to worry.

Chapter 24 "The Pen Is Mightier—" - The next day Mr. Abbott receives a copy of "The Pen Is Mightier—" in the mail from Barbara. He had offered to read over the draft the previous day at lunch. Through Mr. Abbott's eyes the reader comes to learn that the sequel to "Disturber" is chiefly about Elizabeth Wade, Barbara Buncle's alter ego. Mr. Abbott deems it "better, funnier, more even in texture." He believes it is a success, yet he feels that the novel is missing a satisfying ending. He thinks about what it could be and makes a decision: it should be a wedding between Mr. Nun the publisher and Elizabeth.

Barbara is delighted by Mr. Abbott's suggestion and agrees to it. Mr. Abbott has asked Barbara if she could make the ending come true, implying that he wants to marry her. She asked Dorcas for advice and expresses her reservations, but Dorcas thinks it's a great idea. Barbara swears her to secrecy. Barbara spends all night writing out the wedding in the novel and by the end of the process she finds her marriage proposal agreeable. She will marry Arthur Abbott.

## Analysis

In Chapter 23 the reader sees again how Barbara is slowly transforming into Elizabeth Wade. Mr. Abbott, who normally finds Barbara enchanting, now finds her utterly irresistible. Barbara has clearly found her mark. She is captivating: confident, charismatic, and chic. Barbara's emergence as Elizabeth Wade has been long in the making in "Miss Buncle's Book." Starting with the first hundred pound note from Mr. Abbott, Barbara has grown steadily more self-assured and confident. As she has indulged more in clothing, hats, and styling that she can now afford, and as she has slipped into a true writer identity, she has emerged like a character in her book.



However, Elizabeth Wade started out as a fictional character more based on fiction than fact. With Barbara's assumption of her identity and characteristics she has truly finessed Elizabeth as the fictional character based on the reality of Barbara Buncle. The author is indeed making a statement about Writing and Books, saying that sometimes fiction reflects reality to the extent that the writer can create a reality out of fiction.

In Chapter 24 the theme of Writing and Books is reinforced. Barbara's new enchanting personality and confidence put Mr. Abbott over the edge; he decides to do what he has been thinking he might do, propose to Barbara. Arthur Abbott's manner of proposal is entirely in keeping with the bookish theme. By reading "The Pen Is Mightier—" and making the suggestion that Elizabeth Wade marries her publisher, he has put a literary spin on things that he knows Barbara will like. Sure enough, Barbara is taken aback but impressed. She is flattered and knows that she would be well-suited to Arthur. This brings up the theme of Love and Romance. Like other couples in the novel, such as Colonel Weatherhead and Dorothea Bold and Sally Carter and Ernest Hathaway, the duo of Barbara and Arthur have a relationship built on companionship, mutual interest, and admiration for each other.

## Discussion Question 1

How did Barbara Buncle fashion Elizabeth Wade in her likeness? And how did Elizabeth Wade contribute to Barbara Buncle's personality?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Arthur's proposal seem fitting? How is it the same or different from other characters' proposals and engagements in the book?

## Discussion Question 3

How do Barbara and Arthur compare to other couples seen in the book such as Sarah and John Walker, the Colonel and Dorothea, and Sally and Ernest? What do these happy couples have in common? How do they differ?

## Vocabulary

badinage, gallantly, puerile, sang-froid, fetters, alacrity, buoyed





# Chapter 25 "Miss Buncle and Mr. Abbott" - Chapter 28 "Colonel and Mrs. Weatherhead"

## Summary

Chapter 25 "Miss Buncle and Mr. Abbott" - Barbara knows that Arthur Abbott is coming in a matter of hours to propose, but she is nervous and restless. She tells Dorcas to give Arthur the manuscript of "The Pen..." and goes for a walk. When she returns Arthur is there. She accepts his proposal and they talk about "The Pen...". Arthur can hardly believe some of the things in the book, but Barbara recites the proverb, "Truth is stranger than fiction" because the goings on of the residents of Copperfield are directly modeled off reality in Silversmith. Arthur tells her she will have to leave Silverstream before the wedding because everyone will know it is her if she announces her marriage to her publisher. Barbara says she does not think she will be sad to leave Silverstream.

Chapter 26 "Colonel and Mrs. Weatherhead"- The newly married couple, Colonel Weatherhead and Dorothea Weatherhead (formerly Bold), return from their honeymoon in March. Barbara is the first person to visit them, and she and Dorothea joke about the benefits of getting married. Dorothea tells Barbara that Mr. Featherstone Hogg has been spotted in the company of a much younger woman. Sarah Walker stops in, and the party discusses "Disturber of the Peace." On her way home Barbara reflects on the impact her novel has made and how in the sequel she was kinder to Mr. Featherstone Hogg.

Chapter 27 "Sally's Secret" - Sally pays Barbara a call and tells her how excited she is that John Smith's next book, "The Pen is Mightier—" will be coming out the next week as the paper says. Barbara teases her about how Sally said she wanted to marry John Smith, and to Barbara's surprise Sally says she is marrying someone: Ernest Hathaway the Vicar. Barbara expresses her reservations that Ernest is poor, and Sally says he has written to his uncle and decided to accept his generous income after all. Barbara is lost in thought reflecting on her career as a writer.

Chapter 28 "John Smith" - "The Pen is Mightier—" is released. Mrs. Featherstone Hogg figures out that John Smith is really Barbara Buncle, and she and a coalition of vocal residents (the Snowdons, Mr. Bulmer) gather to go to Barbara's and demand an explanation. When they get to Barbara's they see her cottage is up for rent with instructions to direct inquiries to Mrs. Abbott. They go through Mrs. Carter's garden not really believing Barbara is Mrs. Abbott. They encounter Sarah Walker, who says with nonchalance that she knew Barbara Buncle was John Smith months ago. In the final paragraphs the party of angry neighbors look at Barbara's cottage in amazement. She has indeed gone.



## Analysis

Chapters 25-28 wrap up the novel offering the denouement to the climactic scene with the kidnapping of Sarah Walker's children. Chapter 25 deals with the twin themes of Writing/Books and Love/Romance. Barbara and Arthur's engagement represents a partnership and relationship built on love and respect. Like the Colonel and Dorothea, Barbara and Arthur's romance was a slow-build until they recognized their feelings for each other. Barbara and Dorothea discuss the merits of marriage and engagement, and indeed, since both of their relationships took a while to develop, they have much in common. Later, in Chapter 27 Sally contributes to the happy news when she tells Barbara that she is now engaged to Ernest, who she recently discovered has a lot of money after all. Their relationship was also built on love and admiration, not money.

This chapter also addresses the theme of Writing/Books when Barbara and Arthur discuss "The Pen Is Mightier—". Barbara's observation that "Truth is stranger than fiction" reinforces a central argument of the novel. Throughout "Miss Buncle's Book" the reader has had ample opportunities to observe some of the outlandish behaviors of some of the extreme personalities of Silverstream. In some ways their reactions are unbelievable, such as Mrs. Featherstone Hogg's desire to "horse-whip" John Smith and her conspiracy to kidnap Sarah Walker's children. Yet one can see how they provide much satirical information. Furthermore, Barbara at times struggled with the difference between reality and fiction. In the end she became the character she modeled herself off of, Elizabeth Wade.

Also in the final chapter, Mrs. Featherstone Hogg and co figure out that Barbara is indeed John Smith, yet she is nowhere to be found. When they go to find her, the last words of the novel are "Barbara Buncle had gone." Indeed, in many ways this is true. First, Barbara has literally left town to go live with Arthur Abbott, her husband. She is not living in Silverstream anymore. This offers a departure for Barbara. Perhaps in her transformation into being a writer she realizes that she does not have to depend on Silverstream for artistic inspiration anymore. She can move on with her life no longer bound to the inspiration she found in her small village. Second, Barbara is no longer the same Barbara Buncle at the start of the novel. Instead, Barbara has transformed into an Elizabeth Wade-esque version of herself. The author is showing that Barbara is a dynamic character, one who changes and matures over the course of the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

What seems to be the author's objective in presenting so many different couples in "Miss Buncle's Book"? Is this a novel of courtship?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Barbara's observation that "Truth is stranger than fiction."



## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the final sentence of the novel, that "Barbara Buncle had gone." In what ways has Barbara changed over the course of the novel? How is she no longer the character the reader saw in the first pages? What part of her personality have remained?

## Vocabulary

apprehensive, consummate, ingratiating, chivvy, perspicacious, indubitable, forlorn



# Characters

## Barbara Buncle/John Smith/Elizabeth Wade

Barbara Smith is a middle-aged, single, poor author at the beginning of "Miss Buncle's Book." She writes a novel, "Disturber of the Peace," that becomes a bestseller. Her novel is a satirical, whimsical tale set in Copperfield, a thinly-veiled depiction of her hometown, Silverstream. She wrote the novel with the sole objective to bring in an income.

At the beginning of the novel, Barbara is somewhat frumpy in appearance, wearing embarrassingly-shabby clothing and hats. This is one reason why throughout much of the novel, people do not take Barbara seriously. The general consensus is that she is not especially smart, or at least not perceptive. Mr. Abbott, for example, starts out in their first meeting unable to grasp her character or intelligence. Was she really capable of writing "Disturber"? And indeed, Mr. Abbott continues to objectify Barbara and privately condescend to her intelligence even at the end despite asking for her hand in marriage. Sarah Walker, like other characters, likewise dismisses Barbara's mental capacity to write such a novel.

Barbara transforms throughout the book. First she transforms into a real author, someone who is truly a writer. She goes from a writer by necessity to a writer in truth, adopting some characteristics like slipping into writing-mode and wondering about her characters even while away from her desk; staying up very late or in some cases pulling all nighters so she can write; and being short with her maid, Dorcas, when she tries to bring her food.

Another way that Barbara transforms is by slowly becoming more like her alter-ego, Elizabeth Wade. Elizabeth Wade is the confidant, elegant, and stylish writer character stand-in for Barbara in the sequel to "Disturber." Sometimes the author of "Miss Buncle's Book" will say that Barbara is no longer Barbara, but Elizabeth. Over the course of the novel, Barbara spends more money on clothing, hats, and her hairstyle, and she becomes more confidant as a writer and as a woman, hence her transformation into Elizabeth Wade.

## Arthur Abbott

Arthur Abbott is a middle-aged publisher based in London. He is extremely dedicated to his work and often neglects sleep in favor of reading. He has a steady and calm demeanor and handles crises well, such as when the villagers of Silverstream come to demand that he halt publication of "Disturber of the Peace." Despite getting threats of libel lawsuits, Arthur handles the situation like a pro by outsmarting his opponents.

Arthur is somewhat lonely, but he takes an eye to Barbara Buncle early on. Not only is he captivated by her quirky and evanescent personality, he also finds her pretty and



attractive. As the novel wears on he becomes more sure of his attraction to her, and by the end of the novel he has proposed to and married her. Arthur is a good match for Barbara because he values her career and shares her love for writing and books. He is especially taken with her once she begins her Elizabeth Wade transition.

## **Mrs. Featherstone Hogg**

Agatha Featherstone Hogg is a formidable presence in Silverstream. Agatha terrorizes everyone and is a bully, forcing people to agree to her schemes and crusades based on intimidation alone, and sometimes even threats. In "Miss Buncle's Book" she is on a quest to halt publication of "Disturber of the Peace" and sue Mr. Abbott and John Smith for libel. She is especially upset about the implication that she was a chorus girl when Mr. Featherstone Hogg married her. She is concerned about her reputation. Agatha is the main antagonist in "Miss Buncle's Book," which is especially clear when she decides to team up with Vivian Greensleeves to kidnap Sarah Walker's children and hold them for ransom because she believes that Sarah is John Smith.

## **Colonel Weatherhead**

Colonel Weatherhead is a kind, lonely man when the reader first sees him. He lives alone next door to Dorothea Bold. The Colonel has some standing in the town as Mrs. Featherstone Hogg seeks to convert him to her cause by giving him a copy of "Disturber" and forcing him to read it, and much fuss is made when he does not show up for the forum. Meanwhile the Colonel visits Dorothea one day and is struck by how she would make a great companion to him. He proposes to her, and she accepts. He whisks her away to France so they can marry away from the "Disturber" gossip since there are characters clearly based on him and Dorothea in the novel and they get married. The Colonel does not want Dorothea to think that he only proposed to her because he read "Disturber."

## **Dorothea Bold**

Dorothea Bold is Colonel Weatherhead's neighbor and later his wife. She is very kind and has a calming presence to the Colonel. She is somewhat submissive to the Colonel, though this is in keeping with husband-wife relationships at that time. Dorothea's house is in need of much repair. Indeed, the Colonel takes pity on her, and that is one reason why he devotes more attention to her, later falling in love with her.

## **Sarah Walker**

Sarah Walker is the mother of a twin boy and girl and the wife of Dr. John Walker. She assists her husband in his business and is very intelligent, as many people in the village recognize. At one point John quietly reflects on how Sarah seemed somewhat tried by the birth of the twins but that she is coming around and bouncing back now. This might



be a hint that she suffered from postpartum depression. Sarah is close friends with Barbara Buncle, though she later insults her to her face by saying Barbara could not have been John Smith because Barbara is not smart enough.

Sarah is the first person in Silverstream to read "Disturber of the Peace" and she recognizes right away that it is Silverstream that is spoofed. Curiously enough, there is no equivalent for Sarah in the book. This later leads the villagers to believe that she is the author John Smith even though she denies it at first. Eventually she accepts the blame and says she is indeed John Smith, partially because she is doing it to get her kidnapped twins back and partially because she thinks John Smith is rather brilliant.

## John Walker

Dr. John Walker is the village of Silverstream's doctor. He is trusted by everyone and has a reassuring bedside manner. John is Sarah's husband and the father of their twin boy and girl. John knows how to be firm with his patients even if his advice is not what they want to hear. John can sometimes come off as patronizing. He and Sarah are very close and are clearly in a committed partnership. The love and support they have for each other is evident early on and offers a contrast to some of the other couples or would-be couples in the novel.

## Sally Carter

Before she is even formally introduced in the novel, Sally Carter is thought of as someone who is a naive, innocent child. This is because Mrs. Carter, Sally's grandmother with whom she has come to stay, talks about her in this way. As a result people think Sally is a delicate, fragile little girl, when in fact she is 17. Sally laments her grandmother's tendencies to characterize her this way, but she realizes there is nothing she could do to fight it. Meanwhile, back at her father's house she co-ran the estate and was in charge of putting on fancy parties and entertaining important guests.

Sally finds a friend in Barbara Buncle when she first stops by her bonfire. Sally is friendly and is especially excited about "Disturber of the Peace" because she thinks that John Smith is brilliant, someone who she says she would like to marry. Later on in the novel, Sally does become engaged—to the vicar, Ernest Hathaway, who has been acting as her tutor. Sally loves Ernest despite his poverty, and she recognizes that Vivian Greensleeves does not love him if he does not have money. Sally goes to Vivian and suggests that he does not have money, and this causes Vivian to break off their engagement. Later, when Sally finds out that Ernest is actually quite wealthy, she is shocked and delighted.



## Ernest Hathaway

Ernest Hathaway is the vicar of the church in Silverstream. He is somewhat new to the post when the novel starts. Ernest is described by Vivian Greensleeves as boring, dull, and dry. He seems to like to lecture other people and slip into sermon-speak.

Ernest struggles with his position as a member of the church because he has a large income from his family and a small income from the church. He does not believe that members of the church should live extravagantly, so in the beginning of the novel he signs away his wealth to his uncle temporarily. Living on the church's salary alone proves problematic, and Ernest has to take on tutoring Sally Carter. This later blossoms into love and marriage.

## Vivian Greensleeves

Vivian Greensleeves is a vain and emotionally distant widow with expensive tastes and the singular goal in mind of meeting a man who she can marry and live off of his funds. After her husband died she has found her finances to be tight. Yet there is a dearth of eligible bachelors in town, so when her friend Iris writes her to tell her how wealthy the new vicar, Ernest Hathaway, is she decides to make it her goal to marry him and his money.

Vivian puts up with Ernest's dry, dull, and boring company because she believes he has a lot of money. Everyone else in town knows he has lost his fortune, or at least is less wealthy than he once was, except Vivian. Sally Carter ends up telling Vivian about the Ernest's poverty, which sends Vivian into a rage. She breaks off the engagement. Whereas Sally would gladly marry Ernest without his wealth, Vivian sees no point because she does not see the advantage of marrying him. She clearly does not love him.

Vivian is also instrumental in the plot to kidnap Sarah Walker's children and hold them for ransom. Vivian is the person who accuses Sarah of being John Smith because Sarah is the only one not in the novel. Vivian is clearly motivated by cruelty and malicious intent.

## Stephen Bulmer

Stephen Bulmer is a rather successful writer in town. He is also somewhat of a tyrant to his wife and children, though after reading the writer character who acts like that in "Disturber of the Peace" he reforms and makes more of an effort to be generous and understanding to the point where his wife thinks she has done something wrong. Stephen gets swept away with Mrs. Featherstone Hogg's crusade against John Smith, though even he seems to find her oppressive and obnoxious.

## **Dorcas**

Dorcas is Barbara Buncle's cook, maid, and parlor maid combined and has been with the family for a long time, even since Barbara was an infant. Dorcas is loyal and looks after Barbara, who seems to view her as a trusted confidant and definitely someone whose opinion is worth having. Dorcas makes sure that Barbara eats, and she is especially vexed by Barbara's transition into a writer, one who neglects sleep and talks of her characters as if they are real people (which, of course, to some extent they are).





# Symbols and Symbolism

## "Disturber of the Peace"

"Disturber of the Peace" is Barbara Buncle's (writing as John Smith's) debut novel. "Disturber of the Peace" is about the fictional town of Copperfield, really a thinly veiled depiction of the English village of Silverstream.

"Disturber" was written by Barbara Buncle out of financial desperation. She needed money and needed money fast so she decided to write a book never expecting it would get published much less become a bestseller. The tone of the novel is somewhat satirical and written in a very whimsical, simple style that is sometimes mimicked in "Miss Buncle's Book." While Barbara starts out as a frumpy spinster she soon transforms into a full-time writer and by the end of the novel a sequel to "Disturber" is published: "The Pen Is Mightier—"

The publication of "Disturber" sets in motion the central conflict for much of the book: the villagers' crusade to find out who John Smith and desperate efforts to halt the publication of "Disturber," which they see as libelous since the characters so closely match themselves. "Miss Buncle's Book" definitely makes the case that books are capable of causing much discussion, argument, and controversy. Essentially, the printed word matters and can have a huge impact on daily life. Another argument that might be seen is that the pen truly is mightier than the sword: Barbara Buncle's novel, whether intentionally satirical or not, left a dent in the egos of Silverstream residents. Some, like Sarah Walker and Sally Carter, believed the the novel should hold people up to a mirror and show them who they really are so they can change.

## Barbara's Clothing

At the beginning of the novel, the clothing that Barbara wears is noticeably drab and frumpy as noted by other characters. Barbara is quite poor in the beginning and so does not have money to afford new clothing. She also does not have a sense of style or an eye for trends. Her clothing is one of the reasons why people do not take her seriously.

As the novel wears on, and especially after she seems to find permission from Sally Carter to spend money on herself and her appearance, Barbara transforms into "Elizabeth Wade," her alter ego in the "Disturber" sequel and a much more confident and elegantly styled woman. All of a sudden people start looking at Barbara in a new light.

## The Receipt for a Hundred Pounds

When Mr. Abbott comes to visit Barbara Buncle soon after the acceptance of "Disturber" he gives her a receipt for a hundred pounds. This is the first income Barbara's made



from her novel, and she is in total astonishment, at first not even thinking she has earned it or deserves it. Barbara ends up going to the bank and explaining to the teller that her uncle has died and given her money. The money represents Barbara's genuine modesty and humbleness, and also the direness of her financial situation. The bank teller's attitude seems to suggest that some people do not believe women should have a job and earn money. Indeed, Barbara is one of the few women in her village who has a job and earns an income, though this is kept secret for almost the entire novel.

## The "Feu De Joie"

The "Feu De Joie" is the bonfire which Barbara Buncle has in her front yard to celebrate her newfound success. Barbara is celebrating by herself at first, but Sally Carter stops by and introduces herself, and Barbara realizes she is not the docile, innocent granddaughter Mrs. Carter led everyone to believe. In their conversation, Sally expresses admiration for John Smith the author and says she would like to marry him.

Although Barbara does not tell Sally what she is celebrating, she does tell her that she is celebrating something for herself, so Sally tells her it is a "Feu De Joie," a French term for a fire of joy, in other words, a celebratory fire. The fire represents Barbara's growing acknowledgment of her own success as a writer and an end to her poverty. Barbara remains this humble and modest throughout the novel.

## "The Pen Is Mightier—"

"The Pen Is Mightier—" is the sequel to "Disturber of the Peace." Written by Barbara Buncle under the pseudonym "John Smith," "The Pen..." is released at the very end of the novel. With the second novel Barbara's writing finds more confidence and her voice is more refined. The subject of the novel is still Copperfield, the fictionalized version of Silverstream. Notable in this sequel is Elizabeth Wade, Barbara Buncle's alter ego who makes an appearance and, thanks to the suggestion of Mr. Abbott, marries her publisher. Mrs. Featherstone Hogg quickly identifies Barbara Buncle as the author John Smith based on evidence in the book.

## Mrs. Snowdon's Memorial

Mrs. Snowdon's memorial is large and gaudy, in the opinion of the Vicar, Ernest Hathaway. The memorial is large and showy and it serves to remind Ernest of his lost wealth. One of the things he struggles with throughout the novel is knowing how to be modest and pious with and without money. At the point in the novel when Mrs. Snowdon's memorial makes an appearance Ernest is feeling the strain of his financial hardship. It reminds him of his reliance on financial privilege however much he might wish he could live on next to nothing in an effort to be pious and close to God.



## Tea

Tea, a steeped tea leaf drink favored by the English, comes up several times throughout the novel. A tea party at Mrs. Carter's provides the setting for Mrs. Featherstone Hogg to burst into the room and start blasting off on "Disturber." Tea parties represented social gatherings for people, and in "Miss Buncler's Book" they are frequently places where women gather to gossip about their neighbors. At other points in the novel characters will invite visitors in for tea or offer tea as a sign of hospitality and a gesture of comfort. Having tea is a way for people to bond and spend time together.

## Colonel Weatherhead's Bishop Weed

Colonel Weatherhead's Bishop weed is a thorn in his side, something that plagues him every fall. He resolves to take care of the problem himself, and he vigorously attacks the weed. This tires him out and makes him sweaty and unkempt, so he does not want any of his neighbors to know that he is doing physical labor. He deliberately avoids Mrs. Featherstone Hogg because he does not want her to see him like this. Thus the Bishop's weed shows how relentless and tenacious he is in pursuit of something, how much he cares about appearances (i.e. his garden), and how he does not shy away from physical work that his neighbors might hire someone to do.

Last, in his early conversations with Dorothea Bold, Colonel Weatherhead referred to the weed as "the Bishop" and "my Bishop," which caused confusion as she thought it was an actual bishop, a person of the church. Thus the weed served as some comic relief in the form of a long-running gag.

## The Postcard from the Weatherheads

Colonel Weatherhead and his wife, Dorothea Bold, send postcards from France to various Silverstream villagers to announce their marriage. Some of the villagers are shocked while others, like Barbara Buncler, are happy for the couple. The Colonel and Dorothea left town because they wanted to be away from the gossip in the village. The Colonel also had read "Disturber" and was nervous that people would think the novel was the reason why he married Dorothea because in the novel a military man marries his neighbor. The Colonel doesn't want Dorothea to think he only proposed to her because of what he read in a book, so part of his motivation for taking her away was so she would not have a chance to read the novel that everyone in the village was talking about.

## Food

Several times Dorcas tries to get Barbara to eat food, but Barbara is caught in a rush of writing motivation and refuses to eat it, too caught up in writing to let it go. Somehow Dorcas gets her to eat, for which she is grateful. Meanwhile, in contrast, Mr. Bulmer, the



other writer in the village, is terrible around his children and wife because he does not want to be disturbed and wants total silence. He is also very particular about eating meals. Thus food represents a point of contrast for the two writers, Barbara and Mr. Bulmer, and the way that they react to being disturbed when writing.



# Settings

## Silverstream

Silverstream is a tiny English village somewhat close to London. Silverstream residents are gossipy and suspicious of each other's intentions. The villagers rarely discuss what's going on in the outside world, so they are somewhat isolated from current events and contemporary life, if not literally then certainly in spirit. The villagers take their community seriously and feel threatened when John Smith's novel "Disturber of the Peace" spoofs their lives. Even if the Silverstream village is somewhat bland on the inside, John Smith's novel clearly has wide appeal, and it seems that people find Copperfield, the stand-in for Silverstream, quite captivating as the novel is a bestseller around the country.

## Copperfield

Copperfield is the fictional town in "Disturber of the Peace" that is, in fact, a thinly veiled portrayal of real-life Silverstream. Many of the people in Silverstream have counterparts in Copperfield. Barbara Buncle (aka John Smith) certainly adds a bit of hyperbole to Copperfield, however, as some of the portrayals are clearly exaggerations. Yet the residents of Silverstream are clever enough to recognize themselves in the Copperfield characters and identify the town as their own.

## London

London, sometimes referred to as "Town," is where Mr. Abbott's literary agency is located. Barbara goes to see him early on to discuss her book, and she returns to visit him from time to time. Other characters go to see Mr. Abbott as well, such as Mrs. Featherstone Hogg, though they hope to halt publication of "Disturber of the Peace." Barbara also goes shopping while she is in town.

Thus London represents a kind of modernity and wealth. For Barbara it is where her wealth started, with the acceptance of her novel by Mr. Abbott's agency, and where it is managed, as Mr. Abbott guides the novel through publicity and marketing as it turns into a bestseller. Also, London is where Barbara buys the clothes and hats that allow her to transition into being more Elizabeth Wade, her counterpart in the "Disturber" sequel, meaning a more confident, self-assured, and charismatic woman.

## Barbara Buncle's House

Barbara Buncle's house is a bit dumpy and kind of run down, a result of her not having much money and being in dire financial straits at the outset of the novel. Yet it is where she really becomes a writer once she transforms to writing full time. At the end of the



novel, in the final scene Mrs. Featherstone Hogg and other characters come to confront Barbara about her authorship of "The Pen is Mightier—" but Barbara has gone and has left a note up about the cottage being available for rent.

Thus her house represents a transition for her as she becomes not only successful but also married to Mr. Abbott and she moves to London. Barbara has transformed from a tiny village spinster into a high society married lady. She no longer needs her house.

## **Dorothea Bold's House**

Dorothea Bold's house is rather run down and needs a lot of work to fix it up. She has let it get away from her and it needs all kinds of repairs. Fortunately she and Colonel Weathershead get married and will be living together. Similar to Barbara Buncler's house, Dorothea's house is a place of transition as Dorothea moves out of spinsterhood and into married life.



# Themes and Motifs

## Satire

"Disturber of the Peace" is a puzzling book for many, not the least Arthur Abbott, the book's publisher. In the opening pages of the novel he cannot decide if the person who wrote the book wrote a deliberately satirical novel or if it should be taken at face value. In the end, it is not ever resolved. Certainly if Barbara wrote a satire she was not aware she was doing it at the time since it seems that she does not even know what the definition of "satire" is. Yet as is the case with many satires, the humor, whether intentional or not, is lost on residents of Silverstream with a few notable exceptions (such as Sarah Walker and Sally Carter). Instead of laughing at themselves, Silverstream villagers by and large all follow Mrs. Featherstone Hogg's quest of injustice to persecute the true identity of John Smith.

Meanwhile, "Miss Buncle's Book" has a satirical slant to it as well. The author's language sometimes slips into the same lofty and quasi-judgmental omniscient voice that readers can expect from Barbara Buncle/John Smith. Furthermore, the novel satirizes quiet village life in England where everyone gossips and there are no secrets. Romances are widely discussed and speculated on, and money problems drive a lot of public opinion about certain members of the town.

## Money and Finances

In ways that might seem subtle at first, money and finances drive a lot of the plot, conflict, and characters in "Miss Buncle's Book." Often, money and finances determine a character's motivations and actions.

First, Barbara Buncle only becomes an author and writes "Disturber of the Peace" because she desperately needs the money. Her single motivation for taking up a career path that she had no previous interest in is to earn money. Throughout the book Barbara becomes more comfortable with the money she has earned. When she first gets an advance she is shocked since it feels so surreal. Yet as the novel wears on she becomes more comfortable in her newfound wealth, especially after Sally Carter urges her to spend money on new clothes, a new haircut, and new hats. By the end of the novel her fortunes have reversed all thanks to her own work.

The duo of Ernest Hathaway the Vicar and Vivian Greensleeves show just how much money can affect relationships. Vivian Greensleeves, a widow, targeted Ernest as a potential husband to save her from her money issues because he had a reputation for being wealthy. Vivian eventually becomes betrothed to Ernest still under the impression that he is wealthy.

Meanwhile, Ernest has lost his wealth, or rather put it in safekeeping with his uncle, because he thinks he should lead a more pious life and only accept his church salary.



This does not go well; Ernest is used to wealth and privilege, and he makes a series of desperate blunders throughout the year as a result of not having wealth. Perhaps the best decision he makes is to accept Mrs. Carter's offer to teach her granddaughter, Sally. Sally and Ernest fall in love, even with Sally knowing about his poverty, and she gently but sneakily tells Vivian that Ernest has no money. Much to Sally's surprise after her engagement to Ernest, he does indeed have money and will be accepting it from his uncle now.

## Gossip and Speculation

Gossip and Speculation is one of the main themes in "Miss Buncle's Book." One of the central topics that residents of Silverstream gossip about is the true identity of John Smith. A fury of speculation surrounds the anonymous author, who the residents correctly identify as a Silverstream resident. This drives much of the plot as one of the climactic scenes of the novel—Mrs. Featherstone Hogg and her co-conspirators kidnapping Sarah Walker's children and holding them for ransom—swirl around allegations that Sarah Walker is John Smith.

It might be tempting to hold Barbara Buncle above criticism as a noble and distinguished author of fiction who has a bountiful imagination, but in truth "Disturber of the Peace" was based on her town. She did not censor or shelter anyone and instead lifted the Silverstream villagers' lives and spun them into thinly disguised fiction. Therefore Barbara is guilty as a gossip herself, as much as if not more than any of the other residents.

The villagers are also prone to gossip about each other for other reasons. The residents are especially concerned with the romantic entanglements that may or may not be happening. For example, they gossip about Colonel Weatherhead and Dorothea Bold's engagement. They also gossip about money, such as Ernest Hathaway and his unexpected poverty. The cycle of gossip and speculation in Silverstream fuels not only the story in "Miss Buncle's Book" but also a best-selling series of novels written by Barbara Buncle (aka John Smith).

## Writing and Books

Writers are prominent characters in "Miss Buncle's Book," and books are indeed a central theme themselves. Barbara Buncle is a writer quite by accident. She simply ran out of money and could not think of anything she could do to earn an income other than write. Even though she is somewhat of a novice she is very clearly a natural. Her book has wide appeal not just in Silverstream where people would naturally be interested in it but throughout the country as well. She took Mr. Abbott quite by surprise with her novel, and indeed he thought at first that she was a man. He could not envision what this debut author would be like mainly because he could not figure out the tone or intent behind the novel. Barbara stuns him, and he cannot decide if she is somewhat daft or somewhat brilliant.





Barbara also finds out what it's like to be a writer. She does not necessarily consider herself to be one at first but grows into the role. The reader gets to see Barbara's transformation into a true creative, someone who cares for her characters and is constantly thinking about her writing. She is compared and contrasted with Mr. Bulmer, the tyrannical writer she satirizes in her book. Mr. Bulmer is a commanding presence, someone who seems to use his occupation as a legitimate excuse to be rude and angry to his wife and children. Even though Barbara does not act this way, she does wreak havoc on her maid, Dorcas, staying up very late and never eating and being in general a formidable presence. Yet she includes Dorcas in her creative process and seems to truly value what she thinks.

Books are clearly of great significance in "Miss Buncle's Book" since the central object that puts much of the plot in motion is a book: "Disturber of the Peace." The author seemed to be making a point of argument that books and reading were important and could still have an impact on society even in the early part of the 19th century. Books are seen as conversation starters and instigators for conversation and controversy.

## Love and Romance

The nature of love and romance finds various expressions throughout the novel. The novel chiefly concerns itself with romantic love as opposed to familial love or friendships. In fact, at least three couples are formed throughout the course of the novel: Barbara Buncle and Arthur Abbott; Sally Carter and Ernest Hathaway; and Colonel Weatherhead and Dorothea Blake.

Sarah and John Walker seem to have the perfect marriage. They are extremely well suited to each other and are truly partners in business, love, and as the parents of two young twins. Through the chapters that feature these characters the reader sees that they admire each other and are supportive of their pursuits and ambitions while also being there for each other during tough and trying times. This is held up as a model romantic relationship in the novel.

Barbara and Arthur make a natural pair. Each are in middle age and have not settled because they haven't found the right person until they meet each other. They complement each other intellectually and share a passion for writing and books. Arthur seems to think that Barbara is enchanting and magical, and although the reader does not get much of a feel for Barbara's feelings towards him she clearly loves him enough to marry him, especially since she is independently wealthy and does not have to worry about marrying for money.

A character that does have to worry about marrying for money is Vivian Greensleeves, who digs her claws into Ernest Hathaway believing he is wealthy. Much to her surprise, shock, and anger, he is poor, which she learns from Sally. Sally has recently become Ernest's tutor and finds that she hits it off with him. Their engagement is an expression of mutual love and admiration and a testament to their easy chemistry and rapport,



especially because Sally does not think that Ernest has any money until after they are engaged and she finds out he does.

Finally, Colonel Weatherhead and Dorothea Blake's romantic relationship is interesting because everyone in the town seems to think they are a good match. In fact, two characters who are very clearly versions of them are in "Disturber" and the military officer proposes to his neighbor just like the Colonel does in real life. They are both past middle age but want to marry for companionship in old age. The author seems to think this is one foundation of love and marriage: a mutual desire to not be alone anymore and to spend the rest of one's life in the company of someone they love.

# Styles

## Point of View

The point of view in "Miss Buncle's Book" is third person omniscient, meaning the narrator is all knowing but jumps around from character to character. The chapter titles generally indicate which characters are going to be the main focus for the chapter. Sometimes in a single chapter the narrator will describe the thoughts of more than one character. This type of point of view allows the author to explore many different characters. It also reinforces the style that one might expect from John Smith, aka Barbara Buncle, writing the Copperfield novels, which is to say that it has a wide cast of characters and knows everything about them in a gossipy kind of way.

## Language and Meaning

The language of "Miss Buncle's Book" is accessible with vocabulary that is somewhat elevated. At times—such as with the opening pages and some of the later chapters describing Barbara Buncle's thoughts on her characters and transition into becoming Elizabeth Wade—the language is written in a somewhat dreamy and whimsical style with personification of objects like the sun. This is most likely to mimic "Disturber of the Peace," which has a kind of magical realism quality to it in the second half of the novel.

## Structure

The novel is divided into 28 fairly evenly spaced chapters. Sometimes events of a single day or situation stretch across a few chapters, but otherwise the chapters are episodic. The events of the novel take place in a linear fashion with a climax at Mrs. Featherstone Hogg's Christmas party for the village children and the final chapters spent wrapping up loose ends.



## Quotes

It will have been deduced from the foregoing that Mr. Abbott was a bachelor — what wife would have allowed her husband to sit up till all hours for two nights running reading the manuscript of a novel? None.

-- Narrator (chapter 2)

**Importance:** This quote gives an idea of Mr. Abbott's character. He is a bit aloof and very passionate about books and reading. His work is everything to him, and he cares so much about it that it invades her personal life. This quote also hints at Mr. Abbott's marriage to Barbara Buncle at the end of the novel. She is indeed the sort of wife who would allow this behavior because she understands his love for books and publishing.

'I'm an author,' she said to herself. 'How very odd!'

-- Barbara Buncle (chapter 2)

**Importance:** Here Barbara grapples with her new status as an author, not just of stories that amuse herself, but ones that land her a big contract with a London publishing house. Her path to authorship and publication is unlikely—she can still hardly believe anyone would want to read her novel, let alone publish it. Yet in this chapter the reader sees Barbara is very much indeed like a writer, for she is someone who cares about her characters deeply and has trouble distinguishing between her fiction and her reality. She may not have started out an author in the way she (or Mr. Abbott, for that matter) expected, but she is certainly turning out to be one.

If only I could sell up the house and take a flat in town, she thought, but town's no fun without money. Nothing is any fun without money, I must have money somehow."

-- Narrator (Vivian Greensleeves) (chapter 3)

**Importance:** In this quote Vivian Greensleeves expresses her problem—that she does not have money—and describes her relationship to money. She wants to have fun with it, to enjoy having money. She is desperate to have money and will even pursue a loveless courtship with the new vicar, Ernest Hathaway, rather than live without money.

Fancy that tiny piece of paper representing so much! It really was rather astonishing (when you come to think of it) what that tiny piece of paper represented—far more than a hundred sovereigns (although in modern finance less). It represented food and drink to Barbara Buncle, and, perhaps, a new winter coat and hat; but above all, freedom from that awful nightmare of worry, and sleep, and a quiet mind."

-- Narrator (chapter 7 paragraph 64)

**Importance:** The narrator describes Barbara Buncle's attitude towards receiving her first piece of income from selling her novel for publication. It addresses the theme of Money and Finances. For Barbara, being poor was really serious. A number of characters are poor or experience financial hardship in the novel (Vivian, Ernest,



Barbara), and here the narrator pinpoints how much relief Barbara feels from bringing in an income.

No, I don't,' Sarah said firmly. 'If he had lost a lot of money he would have behaved quite differently about it. Stephen was sitting up last night reading a novel.

-- Sarah Walker (chapter 9)

**Importance:** Here Sarah is explaining to Margaret Bulmer about her husband's bizarre behavior, that he is now acting more courteous and respectful towards her. Sarah realizes that Stephen was reading "Disturber of the Peace" and had seen his likeness reflected in the writer character in the novel. This quote depicts the importance of the theme Writing and Books. The author is making a point that writing and books can have a real impact on people's lives.

Most people in Silverstream did what Mrs. Featherstone Hogg told them to do; it was easier in the long run, they found."

-- Narrator (chapter 11)

**Importance:** This introduces the character of Mrs. Featherstone Hogg as someone who is intimidating and a bully. Even Colonel Weatherhead, a military man, feels shaken in her presence and would go along with whatever she says. Mrs. Featherstone Hogg drives the dramatic action of the plot for much of the book as she crusades against John Smith first for libel and then for direct humiliation and harm.

When at last Barbara emerged from the shop she felt somewhat dizzy, and tremendously excited—she had never known until now that clothes could be exciting."

-- Narrator (Barbara Buncle) (chapter 14)

**Importance:** Part of the action in "Miss Buncle's Book" comes from Barbara's transformation over the course of the novel. At first she was someone who was fairly timid and self-conscious. Barbara's shabby and frumpy clothing was often remarked on by the other characters. Upon following Sally's advice, she goes to a boutique in London and enhances her wardrobe. Her transformation into Elizabeth Wade, the more confident version of herself, has begun.

It would be exciting to write a play, Barbara thought, to see your creations put on the garment of mortality, to hear your words issuing from their mouths."

-- Narrator (Barbara) (chapter 16)

**Importance:** At the drawing room meeting Barbara looks around at the villagers and is quietly astonished. The people in front of her are the people she used to base the characters off in "Disturber of the Peace." They are both her creations and not her creations; on the one hand they are her fictional characters, but on the other hand they are real, live people in front of her. The reader gets a sense of Barbara's love for the creative process and how she cares for her characters. Writing a play would allow her to see her characters actually say and do what she wants them to do. This quote shows how Barbara is truly transforming into a writer.



Barbara sat up the better to deal with this mass of information. Copperfield had vanished, and with it, Elizabeth Wade.

-- Narrator (chapter 17)

**Importance:** Just before this quote happens, when she has just been woken up by Dorcas, Barbara has been dreaming a lengthy and extended dream in which she is fused with her fictional counterpart, Elizabeth Wade. In the dream she goes into Copperfield, the fictional town stand in for Silverstream, only it is really Silverstream, or vice versa. The author describes this whole segment in a very whimsical style like that of John Smith. This touches on one of the themes of the book, Writing and Books, and brings into question fiction and reality, which is explored later in the book. Also this quote represents the transition of Barbara Buncle into a more Elizabeth Wade-like character.

Oh you!' laughed Mrs. Carter. 'Nobody ever thought of you. You could never have written 'Disturber of the Peace.' Sarah Walker has brains.'"

-- Mrs. Carter (chapter 19)

**Importance:** Mrs. Carter's comment, in which she implies that Sarah Walker has brains while Barbara Buncle does not, illustrates how the villagers do not see Barbara as someone with a threatening or formidable amount of intelligence. They never guess that it could be her as the true author of "Disturber" until the sequel is published. Even Sarah underestimates Barbara, as does Mr. Abbott when he first meets her and even after. This serves as a way to characterize Barbara in the eyes of the other characters even though the reader knows that she is the true writer.

You bore me to death."

-- Vivian Greensleeves (chapter 21)

**Importance:** In this quote Vivian tells Ernest Hathaway what she really thinks of him. She breaks off the engagement with him after finding out from Sally that he is really quite poor. To Vivian their entire engagement and relationship has humiliated her and wasted her time. When she says "You bore me to death" she really damages him because he thinks that he is quite lively and exciting. It wounds him on a personal level. This quote also serves as a contrast to Sally Carter's character in which she finds Ernest's speaking style endearing and charming. She was never in their relationship for the money, unlike Vivian.

Truth is stranger than fiction.

-- Barbara (chapter 25)

**Importance:** Barbara here recites a truism to Arthur Abbott while they discuss the sequel to "Disturber." More so than anyone Barbara knows how truth is stranger than fiction because she based her characters on truth, the people in her village of Silverstream. The reader has also seen how truth is stranger than fiction in the outrageous actions of the villagers. And throughout the novel the lines between fiction and reality sometimes blur.