



Dancing the Charleston

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Reviewer:

[Rebecca Butler](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Mona Smith is an orphan aged ten in Britain of the 1920s. She lives with her aunt Florence Watson. They inhabit the former gamekeeper's cottage on the estate of the wealthy Somerset family, to whom Florence has been appointed dress maker. Mona's mother has died. Mona visits her grave regularly. Her father died in World War I.

Mona attends the village school where her best friend is a girl named Maggie Higgins. Mona becomes close to Maggie's whole family. Life seems to roll on without upset until the old Lady Somerset dies. Aunt Florence is worried. Without the patronage of the old lady she and Mona might be thrown out of their cottage. In the event their fears prove to be groundless. The estate is inherited by Mr Benjamin, a bohemian and kindly inheritor. It remains to be seen how much regular work Aunt Florence will now find and how contentedly Mona and her aunt will live with a new family at the manor.

Aunt Florence finds employment as a dressmaker at Harrods store. The staff are snooty and patronising ? though suitably impressed when Mona accidentally knocks on the door of the managing director ? a truly memorable episode.

As ever, Wilson has completed impeccable research, in this case into the life of the 1920s. The behaviour of the protagonists strikes the reader as perfectly credible and astutely imagined. The language is somewhat uneven, with certain modern idioms included. No doubt Wilson included such anachronisms deliberately, to make the text more suited to young readers.

Wilson strikes an unusual note. Books about the 1920s usually focus attention on the people who live in the manor house and their wealthy friends. Wilson innovates by depicting in more detail the lives of those who exist in the shadow of the great house. Wilson also focuses attention on the burden that fell upon an unmarried working woman at that time.

This reviewer found an inconsistency in the characterisation of Mona. In general she is depicted as a caring individual. Mona, as indicated, is treated with great kindness by her friend Maggie and by Maggie's family. They are truly close. But when Mona succeeds in becoming friends with the children in the big house, she drops Maggie and the Higgins family in the most casual and insensitive manner. Such inconsiderate behaviour does not fit with the way Mona has been previously depicted. In every other respect this book matches the reader's expectations of this outstanding author. We sense also that Nick Sharratt relished the task of producing his illustrations of the flapper era. The results are stunning.

Read our [Q&A interview with Jacqueline Wilson](#) [4].

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