



Queen Lucia

E.F. Benson

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Queen Lucia is the first book in the Mapp and Lucia series.

Mrs. Lucas, Lucia to her intimates, resides in the village of Riseholme, a pretty Elizabethan village in Worcestershire, where she vigorously guards her status as "Queen" despite occasional attempts from her subjects to overthrow her. Lucia's dear friend Georgie Pillson both worships Lucia and occasionally works to subvert her power.

Queen Lucia Details

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From Reader Review Queen Lucia for online ebook

Ali says

I'm not quite sure how I have managed to make it to my advanced age without ever having read any of E F Benson's Mapp and Lucia books - but there it is. I am now delightedly anticipating the remaining books I have to look forward to. I actually read this first book in Volume one of the Wordsworth classics The Complete Mapp and Lucia – which contains the first three novels. I like to spread out such delicious treats however, so I have decided to read (and review) each book separately – although I suspect I will be reading at least one of the next two books this month.

In 'Queen Lucia' we are introduced to the rarefied atmosphere of Riseholme where no one seems to do anything very much; but read, listen to music, plan dinner parties, indulge in the latest fad of the moment, and speculate about their neighbours.

"The hours of the morning between breakfast and lunch were the time which the inhabitants of Riseholme chiefly devoted to spying on each other."

The undisputed queen of Riseholme is Mrs Emmeline Lucas – otherwise known as Lucia, who lives in three Elizabethan cottages made into one, surrounded by her Shakespearean garden (beds named for Shakespearean characters). Nothing of a remotely social or artistic nature takes place in Riseholme without Lucia being at the heart of its inception and preparation. Always at her side is her husband Philip – or "Pepino" and her "gentleman-in-waiting" Georgie. Lucia is hilariously affected, she pretends to speak Italian – despite only knowing a few phrases, practises playing new pieces of music, then upon sitting down to play declares it to be the first time she has tried it. Using baby language with Georgie while plotting to retain her hold over Riseholme society, Lucia goes as far as to "steal" her neighbour Daisy Quantock's "Guru" – in order to continue to hold sway. Moving Daisy's Indian Guru into her spare room so he can hold his yoga classes in her house is just one of the ways Lucia connives to put herself at the centre of Riseholme society. "Throughout August, guruism reigned supreme over the cultured life of Riseholme, and the priestess and dispenser of its mysteries was Lucia. Never before had she ruled from so elate a pinnacle, nor wielded so secure a supremacy. None had access to the guru but through her: all his classes were held in the smoking-parlour and he meditated only in Hamlet or in the sequestered arbour at the end of the laburnum walk. Once he had meditated on the village green, but Lucia did not approve of that and had led him, still rapt, home by the hand."

Lucia's reign is soon threatened however, when a professional singer and Italian speaking beauty sweeps into Riseholme, captivating all – especially Georgie. Olga Bracely's presence leads to a couple of very unfortunate and highly embarrassing episodes for poor Lucia, which hardly endears the newcomer to her. Wonderfully satirical and hugely witty Queen Lucia is an absolute guaranteed literary pick-me-up. Many of the characters – in fact almost all of them are not really very likeable – however in a funny way that is definitely part of the charm. Lucia is fairly monstrous in her way, although not absolutely hateful. She is pretentious, snobbish and hypocritical, although also very slightly pitiful, there were moments I started to feel sorry for her. Georgie however is a comic delight, very vain and very camp he indulges Lucia in her pretensions, before being blinded by the light that is Olga Bracely. I adored the hilarious Daisy Quantock and her series of fads, having once been fascinated by Christian Science, she takes up yoga, and after losing her guru, embraces spiritualism, and which ever new fad Daisy endorses Lucia is soon to follow. Brilliantly comic, Queen Lucia makes me long to meet her rival Miss Mapp in the next instalment – which I may be doing, as early as next week.

A.J. says

Emmeline Lucas - you may call her Lucia (pronounced loo-CHEE-ah, of course) - rules the upper-class social roost of the small English town of Riseholme in the care-free time between world wars. Not everyone is perfectly content with this pecking order though and some yearn for the chance to upend her domination. This book sort of plays out like Dangerous Liaisons... well, except minus the liaisons for the most... and nothing is really dangerous... and the ending is happily tied up... but still!

In this book all the lively characters are women or effeminate men, and the other men are left to be more or less genial background decor (the manly women do luck out though with some choice scenes). But that's not a criticism, just an observation, because oh what characters!

I really enjoyed this book, and the narration by Nadia May (aka Wanda McCaddon) was very good.

PS - The creator of Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced bouquet, of course) had to have been a fan of Lucia. Hyacinth is like a middle-class and even more ridiculous version of her.

Nigeyb says

My introduction to the world of E.F. Benson's **Mapp & Lucia** novels was via the BBC TV adaptation broadcast in the UK in late December 2014. E.F. Benson's Mapp & Lucia novels were also recommended to me on GoodReads.

I am writing this review having just finished Queen Lucia, the first book in the Mapp and Lucia series. The novels, in chronological order, are:

Queen Lucia (1920)
Miss Mapp (1922)
Lucia in London (1927)
Mapp and Lucia (1931)
Lucia's Progress (1935) (published in the US as Trouble for Lucia (1939))

There are also five other books based on the same characters written by other authors.

In this first book in the series we are introduced to Mrs Emmeline Lucas, known by all as Lucia (due to her penchant for using Italian phrases), along with a host of other memorable characters.

Whilst I am not convinced Queen Lucia should be taken at face value, it is a satire after all, it does give broad hints at the lifestyle of the idle rich in 1920's English society. For a book that was written almost a hundred years ago, it also feels remarkably fresh and readable.

One character, the gullible Mrs Daisy Quantock, is prone to embrace some of the era's health crazes and as such we get a short but interesting exposition of the tenets of Christian Science, and then an amusing dalliance with yoga - taught by her personal guru; and then onto another splendid infatuation with spiritualism via the services of a Russian medium known as Princess Popoffski.

The arrival of Mrs Quantock's Indian guru prompts Lucia to ensure she can utilise the guru's social currency in the competitive world of the village of Riseholme, a pretty Elizabethan village in Worcestershire, where Lucia vigorously guards her status as "Queen" despite occasional attempts from her subjects to overthrow her. Lucia's dear friend Georgie Pillson (another fantastic character) both worships Lucia and occasionally works to subvert her power.

I did a little research to try to establish the pronunciation of Riseholme (apparently based on Broadway in the Cotswolds) and understand it is pronounced "rizzum", which sounds credible.

E.F. Benson appears to simultaneously have affection for his Riseholme characters and hold them in mild contempt. None of the characters is especially likeable however their foibles and absurdities became more endearing as the book progressed, and their frequent humiliations become ever more amusing.

This comedy of manners captures the social order of 1920s England for those fortunate few who had the money to spend their time enjoying dinner parties and other social events, painting, writing letters, giving music recitals, parading their social status and exchanging gossip, whilst their servants facilitated their lives of ease and comfort. This premise, in the skilled hands of E.F. Benson, is the foundation of some beguiling comedic moments as he nails the snobbery and competitiveness of village life, and especially Lucia's ludicrous affectations.

I will admit that I was slightly bored during the first couple of introductory chapters, then my feelings changed to ambivalence, however by the final third I was enjoying every page. By the end of Queen Lucia I was thoroughly charmed and now appreciate how these books have inspired so much affection and devotion in their readers.

I'm a convert and I look forward to reading the rest of E.F. Benson's Mapp & Lucia novels.

4/5

Claire says

I read all of the Lucia books when I was 13 and thought they were so funny. I remember laughing out loud quite a bit. This time around I still enjoyed Queen Lucia, but not as much, and I'm not sure why. It was all very witty and amusing, but I found myself a little bored. Also, the silly factor, which I thought was so funny when I was younger, grated on me a bit. Maybe I'm just jaded now! Solid three stars for me this time.

Susan says

I can't remember why I downloaded this book from the Guttenberg Project, I must have read about it somewhere, but I'd had it for ages before I got around to reading it.

It was surprisingly good, about a small village community where one very snobby lady, who thinks rather a lot of herself, likes to rule the roost.

This is the story of how her plans to always be at the centre of things can sometimes become somewhat unstuck.

It's full of interesting and quirky characters, some of whom I really liked, some of whom were not so

likeable.

This was a fun read, and I was pleased to learn that there are several more installments in the series.

Susan says

Emmeline (Lucia) Lucas wants nothing more than to rule over her friends and neighbours in the Elizabethan village of Riseholme. This novel is the first in a series featuring 'Queen Lucia' and introduces us to the characters and settings where the books are set. Published in 1920, the story begins with Lucia returning from London and looking forward to her pursuit of Art for Art's sake. Riseholme is her own, personal fiefdom, where she reigns supreme with no poverty, discontent or upheaval. She is used to directing the life of her community; the culture and entertainment. However, change is in the air and her position is about to be threatened.

This is a clever novel about social snobbery and one-upmanship. Lucia's neighbours include her second in command, Georgie Pillson, the fad obsessed Mrs Daisy Quantock (her interests even during this one, short novel, include Christian Science, yoga and spiritualism) and visiting opera singer, Olga Bracely. Of course, this novel satirises the idle rich and the author captures that perfectly – that time between breakfast and lunch when the inhabitants of Riseholme duck in and out of shops, spying on neighbours, and hugging titbits of gossip to carry on to others, is wonderfully told. However, although I did enjoy this, I did find the characters a little wearing and I doubt I will read on. It is, though, a good portrait of the wealthy between the wars, and of the lack of privacy in a small, village community.

⌘?Rory?⌘ says

I'm sad because I didn't love this. Both women are so unpleasant. I do realize that they're supposed to be comic characters, but this just didn't work for me at this time. I'm going to watch the BBC series and see if that helps.

Kay says

This book is my cure for the doldrums -- a comic masterpiece. Granted, it helps to be an anglophile and a bit of a misanthrope to boot, but the antics of the villagers of Riseholme, led (or dominated) by the immortal Lucia always make me realize just how *absurdly delicious* life can be.

Once a Luciaphile, always a Luciaphile. It's a select but oddly inclusive group, I've found over the years. Most of my closest friends are Benson devotees. And those folks who aren't? Well, let's just say I don't feel much of a connection to them. This book is, in the words of a recent *New York Times* op ed piece, a "deal breaker" for me.

Every few years I reread the entire six-book Lucia saga over again. This first volume in the saga was as delightful as I remembered it.

Veronique says

3.5

"Hitum, Titum and Scrub"

Don't you just love discovering new books with charming characters. I'd never heard of Lucia, or indeed Benson, and it is with surprise that I entered the leisurely enclave of Risholme. Its inhabitants are a delight of caricature of wealthy England between the wars. The author offers us colourful characters, from Lucia, our social prima donna, to her cohort consisting of her husband Peppino and friend Georgie, ruling over the rest of the village. But of course pretenders to her crown keep popping up, intrigues abound, and a newcomer disturbs the power balance.

This is a comedy of manners with many ludicrous scenes and dialogue that are very entertaining. However, Benson does also raise a very astute point about village life: "*I never knew before how terribly interesting little things were. . . . Is it all of you who take such a tremendous interest in them that makes them so absorbing, or is it that they are absorbing in themselves . . . ?*"

:O)

Ivonne Rovira says

Queen Lucia is the comic period novel for those who shy away from the genre. It's perfect for anyone who's cynically observed Queen Bees at work in any era.

Queen Lucia operates as a delicious satire on two levels: Yes, the novel paints a particularly stinging picture of the social climbing of the British upper middle classes in the period between the World Wars. Our protagonist, E.F. Benson's Emmeline Lucas -- referred to as Queen Lucia behind her back -- considers herself "high-priestess at every altar of Art" and the small village of Risholme's premiere social arbiter, imposing her iron will on all her neighbors. That Mrs. Lucas, whose Italian is virtually non-existent, insists that all of her friends and acquaintances refer to her as "Lucia," with the Italian pronunciation, gives the reader an early indication of just how pretentious Emmeline Lucas is.

That Lucia sees herself as the pinnacle of refinement and exalted sensibility and her hamlet as the pre-eminent bastion of high art in England is part of the delicious joke. Like Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*, the competitive Lucia would rather rule in a Cotswold backwater than serve in London, which she constantly disparages. Will Lucia be able to prevail when a nationally renowned opera singer moves into Risholme? If she doesn't, it won't be for lack of trying, by fair means or foul!

While *Queen Lucia* ruthlessly ridicules the genteel social climbers of the 1920s, the novel also provides a scathing satire of Queen Bees of any period. Throughout the novel, you can see the beginnings of the current trend of suburbanites descending on idyllic rural parts and then transforming them into twee, Disneyfied versions of the original with no consideration for the locals. (Don't miss the send-up of Lucia's rarefied version of an Elizabethan cottage.) And Lucia's maneuvering to maintain her position as the arbiter of style

and taste for Riseholme is hilarious. Scenes of the various residents of Riseholme kowtowing to those above them on the social hierarchy while condescending to those below could, with slight modifications, take place today in the Home Counties in England or the suburbs of Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois or California.

Every upper-middle-class suburb, whether in the UK or America, contains social climbers who will boast about "traveling in the best society" and will try to dominate their social circles and one-up everyone else. Any woman who has ever served on a committee or sent their child to a private school will recognize modern-day Emmeline Lucases who have proved as competitive and infuriating as Lucia.

Yet, however infuriating, pompous, domineering, and pretentious Lucia might be, her antics will keep you riveted to the last page. Nor will you be able to wait for the next novel, *Lucia in London*.

Roger Pettit says

These days, most of us (ahem, myself included) can only imagine what a lotus-eating life of indolence and leisure, with days spent eating, reading, playing cards and listening to music, must be like. But thanks to E.F. Benson's *Mapp and Lucia* books, we have a good idea of what such an existence must have been like in provincial middle England in the 1920s and 1930s. I have been a fan of these books for years. They are surely amongst the funniest novels in the English language. They are gentle satires on the pretensions of the idle rich. And they are very humorous indeed. "Queen Lucia" is the first book in the series and, in my view, is the best one. It introduces us to the fabulous Lucia (Emmeline Lucas), Georgie and the sundry other characters who provide a rich seam of comical pleasure throughout the series. This is a wonderful book, one which I return to on a regular basis or when I need a pick-me-up. I urge you to read it - and the other books in the series. (Incidentally, there are two additional books in this canon, written by Tom Holt. While not as good as those written by E.F. Benson, they are also well worth trying.)

Shawn Mooney says

If I'd read this first, I doubt I'd have gone on to discover Benson's masterpiece '*Mapp and Lucia*'; but doing it out of sequence after having loved *Mapp and Lucia* so deeply made this a pretty disappointing read too - catch 22. Some funny situations and dialogue, and it was interesting to see the characters of Lucia and (gay-gay-flamingly-gay) Georgie in inchoate form. But this did not fit together into a memorable whole. Read *Mapp and Lucia* instead!

Bob says

The first of half a dozen books in the *Lucia* series, a gentle (though hardly subtle) satire of English small country town life in the 1920s. The first volume introduces the handful of main characters, their milieu and pretensions - among the most absurdly memorable is the classification of formality of dress into "hightum, tightum and scrub" (fully formal dress, fancy dress for more ordinary occasions and relatively casual), the appropriate designation printed on party invitations on so on.

Though I was fairly certain the author had invented this preposterous terminology, a little Googling suggests the terms may actually have been in use in late Victorian England <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/wome...>

Leslie says

4.5 stars

Nadia May does a marvelous narration of this satire of the social maneuvers in English village life during the 1920s. If you like Gaskell's *Cranford*, you will probably enjoy this.

Jeslyn says

"The hours of the morning between breakfast and lunch were the time which the inhabitants of Riseholme chiefly devoted to spying on each other." Now these are my kind of people!

Hilarious - life in "backwater" England with a flair unmatched...from yoga to opera to seances, the jockeying of the village's inhabitants to hold onto (or pilfer) their "next great thing" is well worth reading.

Laughing loudly in public places while reading this...

I'm re-reading Queen Lucia since I got my hands on the complete collection under one cover ("Make Way for Lucia") from the library - 900+ pages is a lot to drag around, but I'm reminded how worthwhile and comically rewarding it is...

Writerlibrarian says

First novel in his Lucia series that has been praised since it was published. It's just an exquisite portrait of a society where pretentiousness, fake emotion, fake culture are the norm. A wonderful satirical view of a class of people that are still very much alive today. Human nature doesn't change that much. Best example the poor Mrs Quantock and her addiction to fads from yoga to medium to Christian diet and so on. There is no real plot but the incisive portraits of the people inhabiting this little quaint bourgeois village of Riseholme is very entertaining. The plotting of who's on top of the food chain and the sweet but hardly innocent artiste that moves to the village and runs to the ground Lucia's little castle offer quite a romp. These characters aren't bad, a little shallow, a little short in compassion but highly fun to read about or to listen to since Queen Lucia is available in audiobook at LibriVox (free to download)

Beverly says

A lovely comic novel about middle-class people attempting to pass for upper class and rich people with too much money and time on their hands getting involved with charlatans in the form of: Indian gurus, Russian mediums, weird religions and fake cures. I kept hoping for someone with common sense, but only one came along, Olga, an opera singer from a poor background.

Terence Manleigh says

May I introduce the indomitable Mrs. Philip Lucas, known to her subjects as "Lucia", the unrivaled Queen of Riseholme society, and future conqueress of Miss Elizabeth Mapp, Queen of Tilling? To read this book for the first time is to embark on a magnificent obsession, as it's the first of many novels concerning the adventures and intrigues of Lucia and her devoted aide de camp, Mr. Georgie Pilson. I've read the series countless times, and it never palls.

mark monday says

Darlings, you simply *must* visit Riseholme. It's just the most precious 1920s English village that you ever could see. Delightful! Decadent! Devious! Demented! Delicious!

Riseholme is ruled by its very own doyenne of style and taste and class, one Emmeline *Lucia* Lucas. She utterly commands the village, an ever-benevolent dictator over all things that truly matter. Her right-hand "man" is Georgie, a bachelor of means and of *a certain age*, a faithful lieutenant whose extensive time spent in Lucia's home creates absolutely no tension whatsoever with Lucia's husband. Precious Georgie! With his embroidery and his watercolors and his lovely color-coordinated outfits and *his cape* - yes darlings, his cape! - and of course his monthly battles with hair-loss and graying. Fortunately he engages the services of hair dye and the *comb-over*, but shhh! We shall not speak of such things! Let us instead speak of more important matters, in quaint baby-talk or made-up "Italian" - much as Georgie and Lucia and her husband *Peppino* often converse!

Some say the village of Riseholme worships social climbing and the highly irrelevant minutiae of Who Said What And To Whom And Oh No They Didn't Oh Yes They Did... and I say, worship away! We all have our own altars!

Some say the village of Riseholme worships whatever the latest fad may be - an Indian Guru promising peaceful meditation one day, a Psychic Russian "Princess" promising drama with the dearly departed another day, a pill promising increased height on the third day... and I say, what is Life without Adventure! Even in charming Riseholme, one simply *must* have adventure! And garden parties! And champagne!

But darlings, what is that on the horizon? Could it be... *Revolution?* Revelation! Perhaps it is time to dethrone Queen Lucia! Olga Bracely, that splendid opera singer hailing from Londontown, has arrived! She brings with her jolly "romps" and match-making and a complete lack of interest in social climbing and snobbery. She is a Real Celebrity, quite unlike that "Queen" Lucia. And whatever else could she bring? Could it be - no, we mustn't speculate - yes, we simply **MUST** - could she be bringing *love* into sweet Georgie's life? Is it possible that Georgie is falling in love... with a *woman*? Scandalous!

Some may say that the pointed comic novel *Queen Lucia* is pure trifle, a dessert item, even a *luxury* when compared to more studied Classics of English Literature. Well I say we must make such Luxuries our Necessities! If something so spiky, so satirical, so scintillatingly silly could even be considered a "luxury". Such things are the Sugar and Spice of Life! And All That Is Nice!

Darlings, your really *must* read it. It is simply Divine!

F.R. says

It's such a pencil-thin line this novel treads, so it's no small accomplishment that it makes it from the first to the last page while scarcely a foot put wrong. At the centre of the book's world is the title character, Lucia, queen of all she surveys. She's a vain, pretentious, snobbish, selfish, passive-aggressive, over-bearing lady who reacts with extra-ordinary rudeness when she doesn't get her own way. The book acknowledges all these flaws, it advertises them, blows them up large so that the reader can get a good look at every single one. Without a doubt it's mocking Lucia and it wants us to join in the mockery, as she really is quite dreadful – but, and this is the incredible part, it also likes Lucia and wants the reader to like her too. And it's there that the book gives itself such a hard and daunting challenge.

This isn't one of those cases where there's a heart of gold lurking deep inside an unpromising exterior; there's little generosity of spirit in Lucia to counter-act her many personality flaws. Yet this novel does – amazingly – manage to make the reader quite like her. It gets us to view her through the prism of those who are devoted to her, through the eyes of those she publically doesn't like yet who still do her good turns. She may indeed be a vain, pretentious, snobbish, selfish, passive-aggressive, over-bearing lady who reacts with extra-ordinary rudeness when she doesn't get her own way, but she is the glue who holds her world together, one who believes in it absolutely and feels she is spreading joy and culture wherever she goes. She's a product of her world, the embodiment of it, and even though there is pettiness and back-biting to her character, there is no genuine malice.

The opera-singer who moves to this little village which holds this novel's full attention, thinks she is buying a house in a little backwater where nothing much ever happens. By the end though she is amazed and delighted by how exciting and dramatic the small things which do happen are. This is a book about small things, about little dramas, about conflicts that take place with a smile and absolutely no vulgar scenes. I'm sure some will be bored by it and others frustrated, but once I was in I found an utterly beguiling book: one which pokes quiet fun at its characters whilst affectionately nurturing them.
