



The Exile

Pearl S. Buck

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The biography of the mother of Pearl S. Buck, a portrait of an American woman in China.

The Exile Details

Date : Published February 1st 1976 by Pocket (first published 1936)

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Author : Pearl S. Buck

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From Reader Review The Exile for online ebook

Edith says

This is Pearl Buck's biography of her mother. It is a companion book to "Fighting Angel". Can't wait to get started.

I found this book so interesting and such a pleasure to read that I didn't want it to end. I generally read in short spurts anyway, but I found it really necessary with this book because there were parts I found so heavy that I had to take a break just to digest them. Pearl obviously loved her mother intensely and she writes of a woman I would love to have known. This creative, spunky, courageous, uncomplaining mother, who forged a life for herself and her children in a culture radically different from hers, just astounded me with her energy and spirit. All this with a husband who had such a one-track mind (winning Chinese souls for Christ) that he hardly existed on the same plane as regular people. I can't think when I've read of a woman that I admire more than this brave, feisty mother of Pearl Buck's. I simply fell in love with her.

Nancy Welbourn says

This review is by my grandmother, from her "Books I Have Read" diary, started in 1938. It is on page 7.

This book is laid in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is the story of an American woman who felt that she had to go to China to be a missionary. She married an American man who had the same idea, and they went immediately to China.

It is a very sad and pitiful story, and there are some descriptions of China that are really hard to believe, and yet they are beautiful. This woman is very pious and she is always waiting for a sign from God. She is of a very rebellious nature, really too much so to be called a saint. She has seven children, and she thinks that God punishes her for her wickedness, because 4 of them die.

The book gives you a very vivid description of the life the missionaries had to live. They get a furlough only every 8 years! It is, though a very good book.

Additional details

Publisher: Triangle Books

Recommended by: Mary C. Wheeler School, Providence, R.D.

Borrowed from: Study Hall

Sharon says

I bought this hardcover book published in 1936 on eBay for \$3.00. It is in very good condition for an 80-year-old book. It smells a little musty but the pages are sturdy, high quality paper with beveled edges. It even

has a dust jacket. Pearl Buck is the author of The Good Earth, which won both a Pulitzer and the Nobel Prize for literature. This book is a biography she wrote about her mother. I recently read two interesting biographies of Pearl Buck and family by Peter Conn and Hilary Spurling which were both excellent. So the story of Pearl Buck and family continues to occupy my reading time. One book leads to another and then another. I am very interested in the experiences of Christian missionaries in China in the early 1900s and am still trying to understand why they stayed in a country where they suffered so many losses, including the death of young children to cholera, diphtheria, malaria, dysentery and TB. It is understandable that both Pearl and her mother lost faith in God at the end of life. Prayers did not save them.

Adelaide McGinnity says

This is not nearly as good as The Good Earth. The major issue is, I believe, the subject matter; it is very difficult - if not impossible - in my view to write a novelization of the life of one's mother, for it is very difficult for a writer to view their protagonist dispassionately enough to fully enter into the character. The result is a flat and not particularly interesting saint, which of course means the story - which is in essence a character study - falls flat as well.

Still, there are redeeming aspects, most notably how (in a similar fashion to The Good Earth) the plot bucks all the common formulas. In most novels, readers can rest easy, knowing that little pretty children are not likely to die without a drawn out scene of great pathos; here, as in other Buck books, every character is always at risk of a quick and ignominious death.

Sandy Carmichael says

Wow! A bio about her mother who was an amazing mother, woman, Christian and American. The way P.S.Buck has with words is magical---her word/writings sooth my soul. She learned well from her mother.

Vicky says

Very good. Wish I had known it was a biography of her mother before I started. I should have read the Goodreads reviews first! Not that very long ago, people had lives that were so difficult... it's a wonder that any of us are here. Maybe we have religion to thank? This story certainly highlights the fact that it was a strong motivator for the Buck family and ancestors to keep on when there seemed to be so little joy in life. But on the other hand, Carrie could find happiness despite great loss, and it came from within. Inspirational, really.

Linda says

Caroline Stulting, called Carie, grew up in a close family in West Virginia. She wanted to feel closer to God, and when she met Presbyterian missionary Absalom Sydenstricker (called Andrew in this book) she decided to make a sacrifice of her life and go to China as his wife and helper, in the hope that God would speak to her. She was a hard-working woman of strong will who bore seven children, four of them dying before the

age of six. She always saw herself as an exile from America, and tried hard to teach her children that they were Americans. She never really heard the voice of God that she hoped for, and eventually exiled herself from her husband and from his strict Calvinist religion. I was interested that Buck changed the names of her family members in telling their story. I suppose it was because the book was written in 1936 and she wanted to give them a little more privacy. I read this book years ago and was happy to read it again.

Debbie says

This biography of Carie Sydenstricker, mother of Pearl S. Buck, reads more like a novel. The product of Dutch and French Huguenot immigrant parents, she was raised in a deeply religious Presbyterian community in West Virginia. From her pioneer parents and grandparents, Carie inherited a strong character, courageous and lively spirit, a love for music and the beauty of nature, and a keen sense of humor. After two years in seminary she married a stiff, rather remote scholarly minister and joined him on the missions field in China where she spent her life in service to others.

Pearl tells her mother's remarkable life story with deep affection and insight. At times the book can be difficult to read; the hardship and heartache Carie endured seem too much to bear. Pearl is candid about her mother's struggle to reconcile her strict religious upbringing that seemed to frown on all things fun and lighthearted. There's a lot to be learned from the reading of this book; would be an excellent book club read.

Rebecca says

"The Exile" is Pearl Buck's biography of her mother, and it serves as a companion to "Fighting Angel," her biography of her father. "Companion," probably isn't the best word because Pearl Buck's mother and father were anything but companions to one another. Perhaps it would be more accurate to state that their biographies, like themselves, are more like two sides of the same coin.

While "Fighting Angel" focused on Andrew (Absalom) Sydenstricker's pioneering missionary career, it rarely mentioned his wife, Carie, or children, except when describing their almost complete alienation from him. By contrast, "The Exile" is almost entirely about the family. Pearl Buck's greatest success in these paired biographies is her ability to tell two drastically different stories of two drastically different lives, only to have the reader realize that this is essentially the same story of the same joint life -- just experienced completely differently.

This difference in experience is certainly due to the difference in characters. While Andrew is driven by a maddening goal to bring the gospel to all the world, Carie is motivated by a desire to "be good," to serve others and care for her children. She is frequently described in "The Exile" as a lover of beauty, be it nature or music, while Andrew is portrayed in "Fighting Angel" as being almost completely oblivious to such "frivolities," as he would no doubt deem them.

But the difference is also in the gender of the protagonists. As a man, Andrew's world -- both physical and metaphorical -- opened up to him, while Carie's gave her only limited possibilities. As a result, I regret to say that while I absolutely abhorred Andrew as a person, I was more moved by his narrative because he was constantly engaging with the outside world, while in Carie's biography, every attempt to find voice and purpose seems to be thwarted by gender, illness, loneliness, or theological doubt. Both biographies could be

viewed as tragedies, as both of Buck's parents seemed mired in the helplessness of wanting to do more than one was capable or doing. Even so, there are some powerful revelations of the human struggle that make this pair of biographies an important read.

My main critique of "The Exile" is that it was written with too heavy a hand in regard to nationalism. Perhaps it is my postcolonial worldview coming through, but I found Pearl Buck's obsession with America as the paragon of morality and cleanliness wreaked of unearned superiority, and I'm not sure why it appears in this work at all. In Buck's other works, she seems more critical of the United States, endearing readers to her beautiful, albeit complex, homeland of China, but in this work, "America, the Beautiful" is one of her central themes.

I found myself wanting Buck to write more about her parents' unspoken theological and existential conflicts. For instance, one of my favorite passages appears almost at the end of the book:

"To [Andrew] she was only a woman. Since those days when I saw all her nature dimmed I have hated Saint Paul with all my heart and so must all true women hate him, I think, because of what he has done in the past to women like Carie, proud free-born women, yet damned by their very womanhood. I rejoice for her sake that his power is gone in these new days" (283).

Yet there is very little reflection on gender, theology, or marital conflict in this biography. Instead, there seem to be one too many mentions of Carie's love of beautiful cloth or the flowers she grew in her garden.

So this book gets three stars from me for a fascinating other-side-of-the-coin perspective of the same subject matter as expressed in "Fighting Angel," but it just misses the four and five star marks because of an unearned obsession with America and the underdeveloped character of Carie.

Antonella Moretti says

Immaginate la Cina del 1880. Immaginate come doveva essere per uno straniero vivere nelle campagne dello Jiangsu in quei tempi lontani. Niente WeChat, niente grattacieli di acciaio e specchi, niente treni proiettile. Povertà, sporcizia e malattie. E il soprannome di "diavolo bianco" sempre appiccicato addosso.

"L'esilio" è stato scritto nel 1936 da Pearl S. Buck e racconta la storia di sua madre, Caroline, che fu missionaria in Cina a cavallo tra il diciannovesimo e ventesimo secolo. Biografia che traccia con realismo le tappe della vita di Caroline, il libro è anche un appassionante romanzo.

Caroline parte per la Cina seguendo il marito Andrew (il padre della Buck, il cui vero nome era Absalom), un missionario totalmente immerso nel suo proselitismo, al quale si lega nella speranza che un giorno Dio le dia un segno, parlando alla sua anima. Questo segno da parte di Dio non arriverà mai, arriveranno anzi momenti bui, numerosi terribili lutti (perderà quattro dei suoi sette figli in Cina) e tanta solitudine, in quanto il marito sarà sempre in giro nelle campagne cinesi a cercare di convertire fedeli, cieco ai bisogni della famiglia e totalmente assorbito dalla sua missione. La protagonista si dibatte tra la sua educazione presbiteriana severa e puritana e il carattere vivace ed allegro, che ama la bellezza. I suoi dubbi religiosi la tormenteranno durante tutto il corso della storia, e questo contrasto la rende un personaggio vivo, umano, attualissimo.

Quello che più mi ha stupefatto nel libro sono i punti di contatto che ho trovato tra la moglie del missionario, una sorta di sposa accompagnante ante litteram, e la mia storia di expat moderna nel Celeste Impero. Non certo le difficoltà della vita quotidiana (leggete questo libro se pensate che vivere nella Cina oggi sia difficile!), ma le sensazioni, i dubbi e le nostalgie che accompagnano la scelta di trascorrere la propria esistenza in un paese così diverso da quello di origine.

Peccato che il libro non sia più in stampa! Ma sicuro si potrà trovare in qualche fornita biblioteca.

Ash H. says

Very well written book, I liked it better than the "The Good Earth", though comparison is not justified since this is a biography of her mother and the other is a work of fiction.

She brings home what late 19th and early 20th century China was like. And her mother's anguished despair on losing children, to trying to keep faith in God and how husband and wife, two human beings, so physically close but in reality miles apart.....it is as if she paints a collage with words, you feel it all. And the worst, maybe for her as a child of that marriage, but unbelievable as written word is how her mother and father drift apart. You can almost feel the smouldering anger eventually crystallising into absolute tearing of emotion till nothing is left behind, nothing you can even talk about. It is gut wrenching to read because Pearl Buck, their child is writing it, she understood it so well. I am amazed how this work is not as well known as it should be.

John says

this was ok, parts of it made me feel like I was rereading Buck's auto bio again. Her mother's life was similar to hers with regards to their married life. Easy read but not much of interest for me.

Stefano says

Peripezie di una donna americana di origine olandese che seguì suo marito, pastore presbiteriano nella missione di introdurre la religione cristiana in Cina. Quello che più ho ammirato è stata la sua umana religiosità fatta di cure ai poveri e di continue domande di un segno divino, visto che 4 dei suoi bambini sono morti per l'inadeguatezza della vita in Cina ai primi del novecento. Storia vera scritta dalla figlia che vide la durezza di comportamento del padre, che pieno di cultura formale ricordava solo un lato delle lettere di San Paolo dove la donna doveva essere sottomessa all'uomo!

Mi è piaciuto molto nonostante un linguaggio a volte arcaico.

Leona says

I lost interest in this book part way through, and stopped reading.

Mary JL says

This is Pearl S. Buck's biography of her mother. It shows a lot about life in China before the Second World War and how her missionary parents fit in.

It is not quite as good as the biography she wrote of her father--which was "Fighting Angel"--but still a fairly decent book.

Recommended for fans of Pearl S. Buck; fans of biographies or anyone interested in life in China in the 1920s.

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