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Maiden Voyage



Synopsis

Maiden Voyage is an account of author Denton Welch's sixteenth year, when he ran away from his English public school and was then sent to Shanghai to live with his father. The book was Welch's first and created a sensation on publication in 1943; its frank description of public schoolboy life forced publisher Herbert Read to initially seek advice from libel lawyers. Even Winston Churchill's private secretary gossiped in a letter that, "the book was reeking with homosexuality? I think I must get it." Today, Welch's expressions of sexuality may seem more demure than outrageous, but his portrayal of the passions and humiliations of adolescence is graphic. As in all of Welch's novels, it is the precisely realized details of the author's physical and social surroundings that make the book such a remarkable journey.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I ordered Denton Welch's books when I read he was one of Barbara Pym's favorite authors. Started with his short stories and am now reading his novels. He is such a lucid writer that you feel you are sharing his experiences with him.

I investigated this book because of an interview in the NY Times with someone I don't remember who mentioned this as a book that was an overlooked classic. I found it to be awkwardly written and not very compelling. I think I must have missed something that made anyone think it was a classic.

When you read Maiden Voyage you will wonder how such deceptively simple language and storyline have gently lifted you from the ground and taken you into such an intimate encounter. The writing appears effortless, the language creates no barriers to understanding. There are many simple pleasures here that we have all experienced or thought at one time but had not thought print-worthy. Yet here they are rolled out like a deliciously intricate lush carpet. My favorite part was the description of one unfortunate school boy who was de-bagged on a train during an outing for school and has bubble gum rubbed in his pubic hair; Welch writes that he thinks that, despite the forced nature of the attack, the boy enjoyed the publicity.

This is the book I want them to toss in my coffin before they nail the lid down. I chanced upon Maiden Voyage many years ago and as soon as I finished it, I wanted to read it all over again. The friend, who realized I had borrowed it, rather unpleasantly made me return it. Written autobiographically by a young English boy, it is an astonishing, often scandalous, and occasionally deviant account of a coming of age. Denton's brilliant style, deceptively simple but frank and intimate is timeless. Aspects of British upper class life have altered only a little since this book was written, which was pre WW2. There are still tormented boys on trains heading back to school and contemplating escape. The glimpses of Shanghai still haunt me. I am rarely as moved by the written word. Denton Welch was a genius, a truly great writer. Maiden Voyage is his most revealing work. Order it immediately! I'm never going to lend my copy to anyone.....

While reading the book, I often find myself embarrassed for the young narrator, about what he guilelessly seems to be revealing about himself. He comes off unconsciously gay. But then I am of a different class in a different era than characters in "novel".

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