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Ellen Glasgow

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This novel is an analytical study of the feeling of kinship as it is manifested in the Timberlake family, decayed aristocrats living in a southern city. The story of how two marriages are wrecked and a great wrong done to an innocent Negro boy, is told largely as it is viewed by Asa Timberlake, sixty years of age, husband of a hypochondriac wife, father of two daughters, one utterly selfish and feminine, the other courageous and gailant but confused and unhappy." Book Rev. Digest
Pulitzer Prize, 1942

In This Our Life Details

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Erika says

I think the Pulitzer committee awarded this novel for two reasons:

First, I would guess they were impressed by the central tension in the novel which is the conflict between a person's obligations and his or her desire to be free. The book also looks at whether true freedom is even possible.

The other notable feature is a strong racial consciousness. It's the first Pulitzer I've read where racism is seen in a very negative light and the problems facing African American people are explored with a progressive eye for the time.

Those two qualities--a questioning of life and looking at racism--are why I gave it two stars instead of one. The writing is melodramatic, angst-ridden and repetitive.

VeeDawn says

This is a Pulitzer Prize Winner for 1942. I suppose it shows the schism between the older generation following their duty and the younger generation searching for their own way to be happy. It doesn't have any really likeable characters. I almost stopped reading when the duty bound father, Asa, said he never had one happy moment in his life. Really? Not even one? That seems hard to believe.

I guess I developed my patience as I read about the two daughters, Stanley and Roy (why they had masculine names was never explained) I disagree totally with the idea that Stanley could not help being so appealing to men that she had to run away with her sister's husband. Are you kidding me? She couldn't help herself, she was just looking for happiness. Right. And Roy so strong that she couldn't let her father (the only one who really loved her) help her. A little crazy.

There was a promising ending, Asa and Roy were going to keep seeking for happiness. "In seeking and in finding there is not ever an end, nor is there an end in seeking and in not finding."

One idea that I had wondered about too, "...he found himself wondering why marriage should so frequently develop a grated instead of a softened edge?"

Judi says

Oh boy! I love the reviews. Just my sort of lemonade.

Ben says

In This Our life was the Pulitzer for 1942 and is about an upper-class family in the Virginia, The Timberlakes. The father Asa and mother Lavinia have a emotionless marriages. Lavinia is a hypochondriac and spends most of the book in bed. They have two daughters with male names, Stanley and Roy. Roy is the oldest, sensible, her father's daughter and is married to Peter a surgeon. Stanley is a weak but pretty girl who has had everything done for her her entire life - given what she wants, protected and coddled. When the book opens Stanley is engaged and days away from her wedding with Craig a forward thinking man in the south.

Stanley ends up running away with Peter leaving Roy and Craig to find themselves together. The patriarch of the family is their uncle William who has all the money but not kids of his own. he has a particular soft spot for Stanley that she exploits.

The book is fairly well written and a quick read for nearly 500 pages. The real theme of the book as many of these early pulitzer's are is about the difference between duty to the family and one's station in life and the desire of the self. Asa in particular feels that he has wasted his life and in fact is seeing an old friend on the side. William is the embodiment of the old guard in the south - the family is everything protecting them and keeping the name is all that matters. Roy is the embodiment of a new way of thinking - that you can have your own life. There are a few black characters in the books that are largely treated as filler with the exception of parry - a young ambitious black boy who dreams of being a lawyer but the odds are stacked against him. Several other reviews here focus on an unresolved ending - I think the ending left that way because life is often unresolved and never wrapped up neatly.

Anna Gabur says

This book had such a great plot and such great potential! The events happened unexpectedly and it could have been a real page-turner, if only it hadn't been for the terrible writing. The narrator, as well as every single character, were hysterical, neurotic, tedious and full of pathos. Everyone tried to philosophize and failed miserably (you too, Mrs. Glasgow!) The characters make you want to punch them, because they speak like this:

'Do you know what's wrong with us?' he demanded abruptly. In the first place, we ought never to have learned to think, nor to read and write, though that makes less difference. We're not simple enough.'

And the narrator is equally annoying, trying to sound deep by saying absurd things like *The only way to hold love is to destroy it. or he was [...] an atom without a universe.*

The spoiler-free summary of this book is: "Oh why can't I be happy? I want love more than anything, but do I even know love? Do I know myself? Does anyone know anything? No, I must escape love, I must find something hard to hold on to. I hate how my parents are so soft. Have they always been so tender-hearted? I will never be old and unhappy like them. Oh, but happiness in youth is so rare! I must drink some whiskey." What a waste of a good idea!

Martha Johnson says

This is apparently a bit of a classic and I had to order it from a Baltimore library from Annapolis. I found myself reading very quickly, skimming here and there, which tells me that the writing could have been tighter. We seemed to go over old ground repeatedly, but the novel is about Asa, a 60 year old man who is facing his life and hoping for some freedom. He's devoted to his family although his wife is ill and pretty sour; one daughter is selfish beyond belief and the other is only emerging in her own life.

Therefore, much of the story is inward looking, about his dreams and hopes and frustrations. His patience requires a little patience to read about -- endless coffee making for the wife, endless grumpy conversations, and lots of repeated description about his torn and worn clothes. It's the Depression and life is raw.

However, the plot unfolds well. There are some good twists. The characters live into their destinies, in some ways. It'll be a good book for a book club discussion.

Thom says

Meh.

Christine Sinclair says

This novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1942, and although it is a bit dated, it's still a good read. The film that was based on it starred Olivia De Havilland as Roy and Bette Davis as Stanley (the younger, prettier one!). Why the daughters have boys names is never mentioned or explained. Hmmm. Good story with interesting characters, but a bit too much philosophizing for my taste. (I love the edition I bought on E-bay, a Franklin Library book bound in green leather with gilding on the cover and the page edges, and green moire endpapers. Beautiful!)

SusanInSedalia says

So glad to be finished with this bloated, ponderous, repetitive novel. It was like spending almost a week with your least favorite older relative who complains and lectures and never stops talking. More favorable reviews call Glasgow's Pulitzer winner "analytical", but it feels more like the author wallowing in self-indulgence.

Skip it and instead watch the 1942 film of the same title starring Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland. Three cheers for Hollywood. It's truly a case of talented and competent screenwriters knowing what to emphasize and where to trim the fat. Also kudos to the casting department who worked magic bringing these dreary, willfully unhappy, unlikable characters to life.

Sally says

This novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1942. There was a movie based on it the same year with Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland as the two sisters and Charles Coburn as the grandfather. Unfortunately this is the sort of novel that gives Pulitzer Prize novels a bad name. Set in the South just prior to WWII, the novel features the romantic and existential dramas of two sisters named Stanley and Roy (those really are their names). Their father Asa is a sad sack, from decayed Southern gentility, who thinks that the world is an unhappy place and has to work hard at a factory once owned by his family. It's now owned by his wife's brother (magnificently played in the film by Charles Coburn) who is rich and greedy for more. He occasionally gives money to his sister's family, especially because his sister is a hypochondriac who stays in bed all the time. Stanley, the younger sister, is amoral, anxious for excitement, and apparently appealing to all men. Grandfather spoils her and gives her a car and lots of money, even after she has dumped her nice lawyer fiancée and stolen her sister's husband. She causes lots more trouble, is still bored, but because of her family doesn't get punished even for an awful crime (the film give her just deserts but not the novel). Poor Roy mopes a lot and is depressed since her sister keeps stealing her men. There is a secondary plot about a young African American man, Parry, who wants to become a lawyer, but becomes discouraged when arrested for Stanley's crime. An example of the depressive state of the characters. "Last year, when she looked back, was as blank as all the

other years and the days and the hours that had gone by and were now blotted out.... Do I hate love, because it can ravish your heart while it wrings the blood from your veins?"

Jimmy says

Well, it got better in the third part. At least the story became a bit more interesting. But the writing was problematic and the editing of the version I read was atrocious. There was not a single character I liked. Not one. And I utterly loathed Stanley. Everyone in the novel was pathetic and unhappy. It was a depressing story.

Donna Jo Atwood says

This book won the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 1942. I read it as part of the 2009 Spring Challenge. in This Our Life takes place at the end of the Depression (or the beginning of the reader's depression, brought on by reading it). The characters are hopeless, the situation is hopeless, the dialogue is hopeless. Let's put a black binding on it and call it quits.
I didn't like this book!

Read 15.5 Reading Challenge

Rina says

This novel is an analytical study of the feeling of kinship as it is manifested in the Timberlake family, decayed aristocrats living in a southern city. The story of how two marriages are wrecked and a great wrong done to an innocent Negro boy, is told largely as it is viewed by Asa Timberlake, sixty years of age, husband of a hypochondriac wife, father of two daughters: one utterly selfish and feminine, the other courageous and gallant but confused and unhappy.

Above description is copied from Goodreads. I couldn't have done it better. Published in 1941 the writing style is very hard to read as it repeats several phrases and concepts too many times to be an easy read. Many times the questions leave you a bit wondering, i.e. "You mean?" as the reader is to infer what the character is saying.

As far as the characters, most I could not stand and wished someone would slap them upside the head, hard! and explain how things ARE not how they wish them to be.

As a study goes its fine but as the novel it purports itself to be, not so fine at all.

Allison says

Overall, I really enjoyed this book. However, there was something unsatisfying about the ending.

Tracy says

Good lord. This book was weak. I might say there's at least a semi-happy ending, but a really happy ending would have been if 75% of the characters died in the end. What a slog.
