



## Fighting Angel

*Pearl S. Buck*

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## **Fighting Angel** Pearl S. Buck

The biography of the father of Pearl S. Buck. "A vigorous biography of the author's father, a lonely adventurer ranging the turbulent interior of old China through the hazards of famine, banditry and revolution." from the cover of the first edition, published in 1936.

## **Fighting Angel Details**

Date : Published 1964 by Pocket Books (first published January 1st 1936)

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Author : Pearl S. Buck

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## From Reader Review *Fighting Angel* for online ebook

### Judith says

I don't think I ever read anything by Pearl Buck, except the famous "The Good Earth", but as soon as I started reading this one, which is a biography of her father, a missionary in China, I was awed by her talent. She has the best story-telling voice and I was instantly captivated. I don't generally approve of missionaries, particularly coming from America to convert the "heathens" to Christianity. However, Buck portrayed her father in such incredible depth that I admired his tenacity and his utter conviction in his cause. But that is beside the point: the point is that this story is sheer story-telling magic and it's a true story.

The history begins when Andrew (the father), at the tender age of 7, overhears a neighbor tell his mother that he is the only ugly child in the family. The mother agrees, but says that he has more goodness in him than all the rest combined. From this offhand comment, his destiny is set and he is determined to be the best do-gooder that ever lived. Thus follows a life of joyous deprivation and single-minded purpose. It simply amazes me how some people a.) have a vision of their purpose on earth and b.) have the courage to follow that vision. He lived and worked in China for about 60 years, never allowing himself the slightest luxury, and working through revolutions, droughts, famines, and constant battles with his own church, and according to his daughter, he was the happiest guy on the planet.

There are so many interesting vignettes about this family. One of my favorite is that Andrew's own mother, after raising 7 sons on a farm determined at the age of 65 to do no more work. So she let the house get dirty, let others cook the meals, and sat on the porch enjoying the scenery for the next 10-15 years till she died. Her family was incensed but they couldn't change her mind.

Buck really keeps herself in the background of this book, but there is a heartbreaking scene where she describes trying to explain to her father the significance of her novels, and her Nobel prize. He didn't read her books, but said something like, he hoped she wasn't writing anything that wasn't true.

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### Sue says

When I read "The Exile" which is the biography of her mother, I was turned off by how consumed her father was with his mission to evangelize China. Reading this one gives me a better sense of the man. But I'm still bothered by his all-consuming drive at the expense of relationship with his family. It seems to me that there's more to evangelism than just how many souls you can claim for the Kingdom.

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### Andreea says

Biografia tat?lui autoarei, un misionar cre?tin în China. Pe lâng? talentul evident al scriitoarei, transpare via?a extrem? pe care a dus-o Andrew, tat?l, un om consumat de misiunea lui (cre?tinarea poporului chinez), atât de consumat încât f?r? s? realizeze vreodat?, într-un fel sau altul ?i-a sacrificat familia.

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## **Carol says**

WOW! What a life! In my opinion her father, Absalom Sydenstricker (1852-1931), must have had Asperger's because throughout the book, he reveals those tendencies. It must have been difficult having a father who put all his time, money and effort to convert the Chinese to become Christians, especially through wars and revolutions. Thank God that her mother nurtured the children and basically all the responsibilities were on her shoulders (but he didn't relinquish the checkbook until he was 70 years.) He didn't value his daughters. They were only good to clean and make his food.

This book expresses Pearl's conflicted portrait of her missionary father. She later remarked that reading Melville's *Moby Dick* "saved her soul." Perhaps she saw something of her father in Captain Ahab, a figure also bent on a mission. Pearl Sydenstricker Buck was born in 1892 in Hillsboro, West Virginia, which was on a missionary furlough. Her father was a man who only saw his "work" (lifetime of evangelizing) and barely had any close relationship with his wife and children. One part I thought was endearing was the reaction of the children regarding shipment of goods (only allowed \$1) from Montgomery Ward. His wife supported him when they tried to get rid of him when he hit 70 years. Yet he never valued her work and didn't even want to see her on her death bed. He was grateful that she was unconscious, and drawing her last breathe, when he came in their room. He immediately went back to his work in his office. He never shed a tear that day or even the day she was buried. A perfect example of Asperger's Syndrome.

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## **Sarah Sammis says**

Pearl S. Buck was the daughter of a Southern Presbyterian missionary. Though she was born in the United States, she grew up in China. *Fighting Angel* is her biography and memoir of her father Absalom Sydenstricker (or Andrew as he's called in the book). The book is written with Buck's usual straightforward approach of weaving simple words together into fully realized worlds.

Her memoir though is written without warmth. Though she refers to herself sometimes in the first person, she calls her parents by their first names (Carie and Andrew). I don't know if these names were their actual nicknames or if she altered them slightly on purpose. She also sometimes refers to herself as Comfort (her middle name) making it seem as if she is speaking of a different person.

The portrait she paints of her father isn't complimentary. She focuses on his religious zeal for saving souls but repeated notes that he only believed a certain subset of humankind had souls worth saving (namely men of certain means). She goes on to describe how her father hated women, hated the rich, hated fat people, hated most of his family and so forth. Yet somehow she seems to expect her readers to respect this man that was her father!

While I enjoyed her style of writing I came away not feeling I knew her any better and knowing that if I had met her father I'd have to restrain myself from punching him in the nose. I am glad I read the book but it isn't a book I would want to reread.

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## **Rose says**

This is Pearl Buck's biography of her father, Andrew Sydenstricker, missionary in China in the late

19th/early 20th century. He is a fascinating man--single-minded in fulfilling his calling. I love anything by Pearl Buck. She writes beautifully and gives inside glimpses of the life of the Chinese and the life of American missionaries in China.

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### **John says**

Very boring but not a surprise for me as i remember the autobiography of the author was the same. She should have stuck with fiction . I have given many of her books 5 stars. She is one of my favorite authors. This bio of her father may be well written but I did not like the person she was describing , not one thing about him was of interest to me. I think it was because of people like him that the Boxer Rebellion came about. Perhaps my atheism influenced my review. NOOO the guy was a jerk

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### **Rebecca says**

What a gorgeous gorgeous memoir of Pearl Buck's father, written by Buck herself. This is one of those books that I'd recommend, regardless of whether or not you know/love Buck's work. The honesty with which Buck seems able to recount her father's life in all its complexity and pain as a missionary in China and a not-so-great father is astonishing.

It's also a fascinating study in the nonfiction-fiction continuum in that while all that Buck writes rings incredibly true, she finds it necessary to change her father's name from "Absalom" to "Andrew," and never refers to him as "Father" anywhere in the book. In fact, she refers to herself infrequently as "I" and more often than not simply as "Carie's daughter." It is almost as if she needed these distancing techniques in order to truly portray her father, a man who was so focused on his vision to evangelize that he seemed unable to relate to those closest to him, namely his wife and children.

Yet Buck resists painting her father as cruel. Instead, she manages to hold the paradox of his life as a "fighting angel," a visionary prophet whose true belief (in something Buck herself doesn't even seem to believe in at the time of writing the memoir) mars his ability to be fully human.

Quite frankly, I don't know how she accomplishes this, but it works. By the end of the memoir, I found Andrew to be sympathetic despite his tyrannical nature.

Fascinating tidbit on this book from Paul A. Doyle's biography of Pearl S. Buck: "Today, most general readers and even many literary critics and historians are under the impression that Pearl Buck received the Nobel Prize for THE GOOD EARTH. This is simply not true. The Nobel Committee citation, which accompanied the award, read 'For rich and generous epic description of Chinese peasant life and masterpieces of biography.' Selma Lagerlof, the Swedish novelist who was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature and who was a member of the Nobel Committee, revealed that she cast her vote in favor of Pearl Buck because of the excellence of Miss Buck's biography of her father."

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### **Mary JL says**

Pearl S. Buck wrote this biography of her father and their life in China. It details his missionary efforts and

her relationship with him.

I read it and enjoyed as I enjoy Pearl Buck's style of writing. It is a better biography than "the Exile"--about her mother--because it is a more balanced portrait.

Anyone who likes Pearl Buck's writing, or is curious about life in China in the early half of the 20th century will enjoy this book.

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### **Betsy Lightfoot says**

I found *Fighting Angel* to be a profoundly touching and deeply moving book by Pearl S. Buck, about her father. From other reviews on GoodReads, I see that she also wrote one about her mother, called *The Exile*. I'm going to have to track that one down, and read it as well.

Part biography, part character sketch, this book covers the life of her father, Andrew, as he grew up, left his family farm, and came to China as a missionary. He spent the rest of his life in China, except for a few short furloughs home, and made it through several revolutions with a child-like serenity.

As I was reading, I kept wondering if Andrew had what would today be labeled as "Asperger's Syndrome". Obviously, if he were, he was very high functioning, and would have been seen as merely eccentric. Such things, as the fact that the notion of marrying would probably never would have even entered his head, if his mother hadn't said she'd only bless him going out as a missionary unless he did.

Or another story, which seemed to be typical of how he viewed things. Someone had donated a great deal of money, in remembrance of his wife, for Andrew's mission to build a chapel. But Andrew didn't need a chapel at that point, he needed a boat. So he bought one, never considering whether the person who donated the money would want his wife memorialized that way or not.

Over all, he had much more success dealing with the Chinese people than he did with his fellow missionaries, though how many of the converts he made were true, deep conversions is left doubtful.

I was left with the impression that Pearl, though she loved and respected her father, didn't really like him too much.

(One final note: I got this book through Google Books via B&N. It was an OCR'd copy, apparently without being edited after it was scanned. I showed my husband one short paragraph which had the word "tell" come out as "teU", "Carie" (Pearl's mother's name) as "Cane", and at least two more scanning errors. This continued through the whole book. I don't know if Gutenberg has this book yet or not, but I'd suggest trying to get it there before looking at Google Books.)

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### **Monta says**

I had no idea that Pearl Buck wrote biographies of her parents! I borrowed this book from my mom ages ago

(she has since passed away). I recently found it on a shelf. I think it may be a first edition. The book was originally published in 1936, and this book is signed by my grandmother in 1937! Really interesting. I feel dI got to know Pearl S. Buck better. And it was riveting to "meet" her dad! This really delved into culture for me in a couple of ways. First, different parental relationships in a different age. Second, a very religious man in the same setting as the establishment of the LDS church by Joseph Smith. This really put the religious fervor of that day into perspective. Very, very interesting. And a little Chinese history to boot. Really an interesting read!

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### **Debbie Brown says**

The biography of Pearl S. Buck's father who was a Chinese missionary. It was a little slow and kind of sad since she portrayed him as so devoted to God that he ignored his family. Pearl was a little bitter I think. She also wrote a biography about her mother, but I can't find the book. I think her perspective would be really interesting.

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### **Mary says**

When a person becomes obsessive in a cause, a creed or their work it affects the people around them. Pearl Buck shares her stories as the daughter of a missionary in China. Her writing talents takes you back to China and all the hardship and loneliness her family suffered. Her simple form of writing brings the feelings of the people involved to the surface in a unique way.

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### **Adelaide Mcginnity says**

This is just "The Exile" again, except with Buck's father, rather than her mother, as the subject. To get my review of "Fighting Angel", take my review of "The Exile" and swap "mother" for "father" and "saint" for "bigot," with the additional complaint that writing the same book - particularly the same not particularly interesting book - twice is inexcusable.

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### **Linda says**

In a companion volume to "The Exile" about Pearl Buck's mother, she now writes about her father, Absalom Sydenstricker, called Andrew in the book. His life was focused entirely on saving souls for God. He had total faith that his opinions and ideas were always correct and he had practically no social skills. I believe he loved his children and his wife, but he had no idea how to interact with them. I was impressed with Carie's story in "The Exile" but after reading about Andrew, I have an even greater respect for Carie as a strong woman and loving mother, living with her children while Andrew was gone for weeks at a time preaching. The most compelling part of the book for me were the later chapters, especially the days the family hid from the revolutionary soldiers in the "Nanking Incident" and his retirement and death. I'm glad that I read what might be called "the other side of the story."

