



Alice in Exile

Piers Paul Read

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Alice in Exile is Piers Paul Read's triumphant return to the fiction for which he is widely praised: romantic, dramatic, and rich with detail. It features Alice Fry--an independent woman in a world ruled by men--and the two men who love her. It is 1913 when Alice meets Edward Cobb, the eligible son of a baronet. When Alice's father, a radical publisher, gets involved in a scandal, Edward breaks off their engagement, unaware that Alice is expecting his child. Desperate, she travels to Russia to serve as a governess for charming Baron Rettenberg, as the Russian Revolution and World War I rage on.

Alice in Exile Details

Date : Published March 9th 2004 by St. Martin's Griffin (first published 2001)

ISBN : 9780312325787

Author : Piers Paul Read

Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, Russia, Fiction, Romance, War

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From Reader Review Alice in Exile for online ebook

Tasneem Kaddam says

this reminded me of the pocket stories we read as teenagers, something that's just put together with no sense of reality and not much thought to the story, the characters or the ending. from Alice being portrayed as some wonder woman who stands by her beliefs but only in the beginning because as much as she despised the bourgeois she loves and lives and ends up giving up who is supposedly the love of her life for the privileged life she longed to get away from.

the writer himself after realizing the poor story attempted to add much of the history and A LOT of famous names of writers or free thinkers to give some kind of depth to this painful novel.

Tedious is the word for it.

Kristen says

This is a gorgeous, satisfying book. If you liked *Dr. Zhivago*, you'll love *Alice in Exile*. It's also a bit like Alan Furst's books, which also evoke a tender, somewhat melancholy mood that brings to life not only a past era but a past sensibility, both good and bad.

Read is slightly notorious in Great Britain for being a Catholic anti-feminist. It doesn't show in *Alice in Exile*, in fact, he does a really marvelous job of giving us the world through 1913 suffragette Alice's eyes. She's young and naive, yes, but she's never less than brave and resourceful in facing them.

Alice Fry is studying languages at the university, something she's able to do because her father has a bit of money, just enough that he can be a radical publisher and take care of his family, which in those days meant servants. Alice falls in love with Edward Cobb, the heir of a baronet, that is, a man who has too much money to ignore but who is not descended from aristocracy. And he falls in love with her.

Society, though, conspires against the couple, and they break it off. Without telling Edward that she's pregnant, Alice accepts a job offer with a Russian baron - she'll be the governess to his two younger children. He is a womanizer, or rather a connoisseur of women...

All of this plays out with the coming war looming in the background, and then it's upon the characters.

One of the real pleasures of the book is its measured pace. So much is from the interior, intelligent viewpoints. It's not a book that would make it past the relentless *show! don't tell!* of today's agents.

Here's Edward, arguing about women getting the vote with the conservative woman his family wants him to marry (p. 56):

"So what are the intelligent arguments against it?"

"Oh, there are a number. First of all, most women are simply not interested in politics and quite rightly see their proper sphere of power and influence in the home."

"But there are women like you," said Edward, "who know as much if not more than most men about what is going on in the world."

"Of course, but first of all we are a small minority and always will be, and secondly our influence is more effective if it is exercised through men.... It sounds fine to say that women should be independent of their fathers and husbands; some idiots even make it sound like the emancipation of slaves; but in reality it's a Gradgrind's and Casanova's charter that will make working-class women into wage-slaves and middle-class girls into sluts."

Elsbeth spat out the word 'slut' with a particular vehemence and glanced sharply at Edward as if to say that he should know whom she had in mind. Or did he imagine it? Edward may have been sensitive to the charge that he was behaving dishonourably in sleeping with Alice Fry, but he was surprised to find in Elspeth so strong an apologist for a strict sexual morality... did he feel unmoved by Elspeth's beauty because he had been so frequently and thoroughly satisfied by Alice?

Here's sample, from page 221, about Alice's second Easter in Russia:

... during the long liturgy of the Easter Vigil, in the church packed not just with the villagers, but also with the walking wounded from the house, she did not feel the 'enlightened' superiority to the superstitions of the peasantry that she had shared with Baron Rettenberg the year before.

Quite to the contrary, the faith and hope that animated the candlelit faces struck her as more real and so, in a sense, more true than the sneer of the sceptic; it was as if the stone gargoyles or wooden carvings from the Middle Ages had come to life, drawing her into the certainties of an age of faith.

The book is about love and war, England and Russia, adultery, justice, faith, and families. It's a marvelous read.

Sarah Whitmore willis says

Most of the way through I would have given it three stars. Definitely upped his game in the last few chapters. Beautiful ending.

Gabriella says

The beginning was really interesting but I didn't like the ending at all. The heroine was very naive at first, then she fell in love with a married man who wanted to seduce her. In my eyes the man remained a swine and couldn't understand why she loves him.

So what looked like a good book at first became a morally questionable tale of a woman.

Still, it made me think about past times and my own life too, so in a way it raised interesting ideas in me. I probably won't read it again.

Ro Hart says

This was a refreshing read.
In just over 300 pages we saw life before during and after WW1.
Also living in Russia during that time too.
A romantic story ran through the story and was truly excellent.
Must read more of this author!!

Alice Dove says

So far am loving this book, I am feeling what the main character is feeling and understanding the era.
Updated to add, I have now reduced the star rating to three, as it tailed off significantly into "filler" material, causing me to lose interest. Still a good read, captivating to about half way then a little harder going. Good, intelligent writing. Historical interest.

Shannon says

I had high hopes for this one, but never actually finished it. It's rare that I don't force myself to finish a book, even if I don't love it.

Diane Fordham says

I really enjoyed this book. It is exactly what I like, a good story to keep me interested but also some historical fact to leave me feeling as though I have learned something. This book takes us from pre WW1 years with the opulence of the ruling classes and the ideologies of the suffragettes. We watch the war unfold in Europe and also in Russia where we gain an understanding of the inequalities that led to the turbulence there at that time, and also some of the politics that shaped the events that took place. This was my first time with Piers Paul Read. I believe that it won't be my last.

Lyndsey says

Amazing novel following a woman who flees to Russia. She endures the winters and the Revolution. Such a great insight into Russia and very educational! This novel has it all: romance, betrayal, love, war, poverty, wealth, suspense... It's what good books are made of:). I lent this book to a friend and never got it back, which is a bummer cause I'd like to reread it

Jen says

Bit lightweight and some of the characterisation is quite predictable. I had hoped to find out more background to the Russian Revolution but it really only served to set the scene for the plot. Still, an

enjoyable read.

Joan says

Sadly I am giving up on this one. After 50 pages, he was still just setting the stage and it all felt off kilter somehow. Flat stereotypes of class mixed uneasily with radically modern daydreams.

Jean says

I enjoyed this book very much indeed. It gave me more insight into conditions in Russia towards the end of World War One than I have ever gathered from academic accounts in history text books. The book is well written and held my interest all the way through. Alice Fry develops from an intelligent, independent but rather naive young woman at the beginning of the book into a compassionate and well-rounded woman who endured the many hardships imposed on her by the revolution with equanimity.

Lnaimark says

The author couldn't decide whether he wanted to write a romance or to display all his knowledge about conditions during the Russian Revolution. I must say he's very good at this bit.

BUT...I didn't set out to read gory details about the RR - I thought this was a romance about a strong woman during the early 20th century. Instead, we get a weak-willed, dangerously naive woman who I never managed to like. She has a child by her spineless English lover, Edward Cobb, but never tells him. She falls in love with a married older womanizer (her rescuer) and they carry on under his permanently dispirited wife's nose whilst suffering through the many traumas of the RR.

You can absolutely tell this book was written by a man: Alice (the "heroine") experiences no pregnancy or birthing issues and later on, the child only appears in the story when he contributes to the story line. No issues with child care. It's all done so easily. As I'm sure it appears to many men.

(Sorry. Sidebar.)

And the ending.....oy. Accidentally, the spineless Brit learns Alice has had a child by him. Magically, the spineless Brit shows up at just the right time to save Alice and her lover. Magically, even though Alice has declared her deep, abiding love for the womanizer, and his for her, he convinces her to marry the spineless Brit. For reasons I'm not really clear on. Alice and the Brit go on to have several more children and to adopt the womanizer's child from his (now dead) dispirited wife.

My friend who lent me this book had said "This is a fun, fast read." What? Neither of the above.

Jennifer Dougherty says

I think I'm becoming old and jaded. Any book that ends up neat and tidy -- no matter how many hardships

the characters endured throughout -- isn't cutting it these days. I did like the historical perspective of the Bolshevik Revolution, though.

Cheery says

A captivating and powerful novel. Piers Read writes of strength and suffering. Self-pity is supplanted by regard and reflection. 'Alice in exile' is a fine tale structured by the events of the first world war and the Russian revolution.
