



Early Autumn: A Story of a Lady

Louis Bromfield

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Bromfield takes a close look at the Pentlands- a fictional rich family in New England- exposing the hypocrisy and ignorance behind their luxurious facade. Bromfield's eloquence when describing both his characters and their surroundings is breathtaking, and his accuracy in describing the characters' complicated emotions makes it apparent that he knows human nature very well. A fascinating study on the struggle of one woman to escape the stifling influence of her husband and in-laws.

Early Autumn: A Story of a Lady Details

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From Reader Review *Early Autumn: A Story of a Lady* for online ebook

Maria says

I found this book on my quest for a classic written by an author who lived in Ohio. After doing a bit of research, I came across Louis Bromfield. I learned he was born in Mansfield, Ohio, and that he wrote several books including this one a Pulitzer Prize winner! I'm happy to say that I found a gem in more ways than one: the book was fantastic and the author was quite enjoyable. I will definitely read more Bromfield.

So this book struck me as something that transcends its time. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1927 for this book, and it was easy for me to see how this book was the winner. Bromfield focuses his story on a rich, Puritan New England family, the Pentlands. We get a glimpse into the Puritan world and the families daily lives.

I think what set this apart for me was the exploration of gender roles in relation to Puritan society. (view spoiler)

I enjoyed the simpleness of this book to focus on this snapshot into daily life: the emotions that any person could feel; the importance of one's place in society; finding love; the struggle of what to do in difficult predicaments; and battling preconceived notions of society and family.

I found the writing to be quite well done, and am looking forward to exploring more of Bromfield's writing. I'm glad to have discovered such a fantastic local author.

?Laura says

I don't think I had ever heard of this book or this author before I started my Pulitzer challenge, and I wonder why. It is my favorite Pulitzer winner to date. The writing and the story flowed effortlessly for me and I felt that in *Olivia* the author created a character who felt very real and timeless. I highlighted many passages and could relate to many of Olivia's thoughts and emotions despite the nearly 90 years which have elapsed since the writing of this book. I found it to be a truly brilliant work of literature.

Erika says

Beautiful, kind Olivia Penfield lives a stifling existence with a soulless husband and his puritanical New England family. Unable to stand a life with no joy or even diversion, she starts an affair—although it's pretty tame by today's standards—with a wealthy up and coming politician and they fall passionately in love. Will Olivia leave the lies and oppression of her miserable in-laws, or will a sense of duty compel her to stay? *Early Autumn* is only an OK book. The plot meanders along until reaching a very predictable ending, and unlike other novels that tread this familiar ground (Edith Wharton's brilliant *Age of Innocence* comes to mind) the writing is often plodding and old fashioned. Also, for some reason, many descriptions and ideas are repeated numerous times, which slows down the action.

That said, there are some great passages and some of the characters, especially Olivia's conflicted father-in-law are wonderfully well drawn.

Liz Chapman says

Jacob picked this up from the library to read for himself, but I commandeered it for the weekend. It took me a while to get into. It was written in the late 1920s, which was a slightly more verbose time in literature, and it lacked the sharp and powerful imagery of Fitzgerald. But I was soon sucked in. It's funny...the whole thing seemed very British/New England-ish. When I was halfway through the novel, I realized that there had only been two events that seemed to have any effect on the plot at all. But as I continued reading, more and more happened, and furthermore, "nothing happening" is central to the theme of the novel.

The book is about what happens when traditions become more important than people, when a family name (Pentland) means more than life itself. It's also about what people are like when they don't have to work for anything...when everything is given to them.

I think the book has its flaws, although I still think it was fantastic. The flaw(s) are discussed below in the spoiler bit. The dialogue was absolutely sparkling. I kept thinking that someone ought to make a movie of this book, if someone hasn't already. It would lend itself brilliantly to film. The author, who for the most part, tells the story somewhat clinically from the 3rd person, also has moments of shiny wit: "The third Pentland had been the greatest evangelist of his time, a man who went through New England holding high the torch, exhorting rude village audiences by the coarsest of language to such a pitch of excitement that old women died of apoplexy and young women gave birth to premature children."

This would also be a great vehicle for discussing symbolism. At times I felt it was a bit heavy-handed, but I think that's only because I was looking for it. There's a dash of Dickens-esque naming too—the family name "Pentland" seems to literally mean "a land of imprisonment"...a place where one is permanently "pent up."

I'd recommend this book if you were looking for something literary enough to give your English major heart a turn and simple enough to not be too challenging.

(Also, my writing style tends to mirror that of whatever I've been reading. Remember when I said that literature in the 1920s was verbose? Look how long this review is...)

SPOILER ALERT

I feel slightly as if Nora had stayed with Torvald after all ("A Doll's House"). Part of me is satisfied that Olivia has found peace in the end, but it's a peace which I'm not sure is genuine. It almost has the same feeling as the peace one might have from "finally loving Big Brother." I'm still processing it, but it wasn't quite the cathartic ending I was aching for. I feel a little ill at ease, having just put the book down. Like the orchestra was building to one final crescendo-ing note, and then just went silent. I'm not sure if that's what the author is intending. I'll keep processing.

Vitani Days says

Di questo romanzo, premio Pulitzer nel 1926 e per la prima volta proposto in edizione integrale, è proprio il caso di dire che mi ha attirato la copertina (illustrazione di Pierre Brissaud, impossibile restare

indifferenti!). La storia è quella dei Pentland, un'antica e potente famiglia del New England, e di Olivia che a un Pentland è andata sposa.

Attraverso gli occhi di Olivia, costretta a un noioso matrimonio di convenienza, si verrà a conoscere la storia della famiglia Pentland - dagli antenati piccoli commercianti e puritani fino ai fasti della generazione di John Pentland. Fasti ormai trascorsi, complice la malattia dell'unico erede maschio rimasto alla dinastia.

Tre sono gli eventi che sconvolgeranno la monotona vita di Olivia: il ritorno di Sabine, cugina di famiglia dei Pentland, donna libera, affascinante e anticonformista; l'innamoramento nei confronti dell'irlandese O'Hara; il ritrovamento di alcune vecchie lettere che portano alla luce un grosso scandalo sepolto nel passato della famiglia, che ribalta letteralmente le prospettive.

Olivia, pur non essendo una Pentland di sangue, è la spina dorsale della famiglia: donna pacata ma decisa, è attorno a lei che la narrazione ruota. Scoprirà pian piano che "essere una Pentland" non è affatto una questione genetica: è, bensì, un modo di vivere. Vero protagonista della vicenda è infatti il concetto di "famiglia", di borghese omertà e di protezione, un mondo chiuso dove non esistono sgarri né felicità. Come Sabine e Horace, che per il loro spirito inquieto vengono allontanati. Come Olivia, che cerca di trovare la felicità attraverso la figlia Sybil. Come il vecchio John, che sotto sotto approva gli outsider, i "diversi", le persone che riescono a sentire la vita come Higgins lo stalliere, ma che crede fermamente nel ruolo delle convenzioni e della tradizione, trascinando tutti nel baratro con lui.

Tutto questo corredato da un finale per nulla ovvio.

Ciò che di questo libro sorprende, al di là della "classica" saga familiare, è la profondità psicologica dei personaggi: Olivia in primis, tratteggiata con tale delicatezza che non si può non amarla, ma anche tutti gli altri comprimari. Ognuno con la sua indole e le proprie debolezze, ognuno con le sue sfaccettature di pena e umanità. I personaggi presentati come negativi rivelano così inaspettate sfumature di luce - si riesce, quantomeno, a empatizzare con loro - e i personaggi positivi hanno i loro lati oscuri. Fortissimo il binomio fra il ruolo della "famiglia" come legaccio e insieme di doveri, contro la libertà di scelta e i desideri dell'individuo. Nella dimora dei Pentland non si è più identità singole, ma si agisce sulla base del bene comune della comunità. Ed è per questo che regna, non vista, la sofferenza. Per tutti, tranne che per pochi individui abbastanza indipendenti da smarcarsi. Questa sofferenza trova le vie di fuga più estreme, dall'ubriachezza del capofamiglia alla pazzia della vecchia matriarca, fino al continuo risentimento della vecchia zia Cassie, che vorrebbe sottomettere e dominare tutto quanto è intorno a lei. Spiccano, su tutti, le donne: sono loro il vero motore della narrazione, e sono loro che tenteranno di opporsi al veleno che la famiglia Pentland rappresenta. Ognuna a modo suo, con risultati differenti e nient'affatto scontati, perché il peso dell'appartenenza alla famiglia Pentland è come un'acqua cheta che, a lungo andare, finisce col corrodere.

Romanzo come ho detto di notevole finezza psicologica: parte lento, ma appena si ingrana con la lettura fila via come l'acqua. Scritto con mano garbata e sensibile.

Gail says

I liked this book for its subtle presentation of wisdom. Very good descriptions of thoughts and feelings of one standing at middle age looking at lost opportunities of youth vs. stagnation of status quo as the future. "It was because they possessed a curious, indefinable solidity that the others at Pentlands all lacked, and a certain fire and vitality. Neither blood, nor circumstance, nor tradition, nor wealth, had made life for them an atrophied, empty affair, in which there was no need for effort, for struggle, for combat. They had not been lost in a haze of transcendental maunderings. She was one of John Pentland's dead, who lived by watching others live."

Lectrice Hérétique says

Prix Pulitzer 1927, *Précoce automne* est à peu près aussi guilleret qu'Ethan Frome, ma précédente lecture. Mais le souvenir d'avoir adoré *Les nuits de Bombay* il y a des années m'a poussée à redécouvrir Bromfield. Il n'y a pas que la rigolade dans la vie !

Olivia Pentland, presque quadragénaire et très bien conservée, est l'épouse esseulée d'Anson Pentland, héritier de la dynastie du même nom, et vit depuis vingt ans au sein d'une famille dans laquelle son intégration reste relative. Mère de deux enfants, elle nourrit plus d'espoir pour sa fille adolescente que pour elle-même, et tente de lui faire quitter ce milieu étriqué où tout le monde épouse son cousin et vit quasiment en vase clos.

L'histoire regorge de personnages étoffés et passionnants, la tante Cassie, vieille femme envahissante qui se plaît à se mêler de la vie des autres, tout en ayant renié son propre bonheur, le vieux Pentland, gardien fidèle et loyal d'une épouse à moitié folle et cachée aux yeux du « monde », le transparent et rigide Anson, dépourvu de personnalité, obsédé par l'histoire de sa famille, ou la flamboyante Sabine, rancunière, avide de vengeance et vilain petit canard de la famille.

Le retour de celle-ci, une cousine partie depuis vingt ans, sorte d'enfant prodigue rebelle et pleine de vie va bouleverser la terne existence d'Olivia, lui faisant entrevoir les possibilités d'une autre vie. Secrets de famille, traditions d'un autre âge, folie, hypocrisie, la bonne société américaine des années 20 est passée au peigne fin au travers du destin d'Olivia, résignée certes, mais encore assez jeune pour se permettre d'espérer autre chose pour sa fille, et peut-être pour elle-même.

Un beau roman, pas très optimiste, un peu violent par son fatalisme.

Elizabeth (Alaska) says

I suspect happy people don't make especially good stories, and you ought not to expect many of them in this. Oh, there are a couple of them, but they try not to openly flaunt it. The others realize they gave up their shot at happiness when they were young, and married the wrong people for the wrong reasons. So they were stuck. Stuck because they believed and lived as if family and appearances count for a lot more than happiness.

The prose is interesting enough to tell the story without getting in the way of telling the story. I've read books where good prose made up for a less than great story, but not here. It's not necessarily a *great* story, but good enough. In the beginning, I was curious why the Pulitzer Committee thought it worthy of its prize. Do not be fooled - all those pages of laying a foundation makes the latter third very good reading.

Even so, the ending is a bit predictable. It's not the ending you want, but you sort of know its coming. The characterizations are good enough. If you're making your way through the Pulitzers, you'll be glad to have this one on the list. For me, just a good, solid 4 stars, but I'm glad not to have missed it.

Anna Gabur says

Normally I am not a fan of early 20th century novels because they are very melodramatic, full of pathos and not very relatable. This was not the case here. The writing was lean and pleasant, the plot, while dated, was not exactly cliché. I found myself invested in the lives of the Pentlands in a way that doesn't happen often. Good book.

David says

This book makes me hate books.

I guess people back then liked books where all kinds of extraneous details were shoved in for no good reason. This book should have been 20 pages long.

Bookslut says

Yuck. There were a lot of good elements here, in the setting and the backstory, but once I knew Olivia would be sacrificed to endless Duty, I felt like it was pointless. And that happened pretty early in the book. The ending was weak, and the moral was dissatisfying and murky. Even the vocabulary was so limited, repetitive, and predictable. It seemed like a nondescript 1925 melodrama, and nothing that history can't easily leave behind.

Lynn says

This book won the Pulitzer Prize, but I can't see why. The characters are very flat, and it's too explicit that they just represent ideas. There is this old New England family, representing a conventional but hypocritical way of life. Everyone is unhappy, whether a martyr to tradition although she gets no pleasure from it, or a person who flouts tradition out of bitterness and gets no pleasure out of that. The only son and heir was sickly and died, barely even a metaphor for the idea that his aristocratic way of life has, duh, died out. The other young people escape, in the sense that the daughter elopes with her lover, a young man of no social standing. (Even the unconventionality in this book is conventional.)

Realini says

Early Autumn by Louis Bromfield

Early Autumn is an insightful, excellent, thought provoking, sad Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1927.

Among the main characters, the most important is Olivia Pentland, a tragic figure that at the same time inspires admiration, compassion, respect and melancholy, as she stands as the Last of the Mohicans, the sole

representative of a family with a long tradition, which the protagonist rejects and embraces at once. She has been married to Anson, when she was very young and wanted to get away from a life with her overbearing aunt, but while she escaped one misery, she has also opted for a life with an impossible man, who “does not have cold blood, has no blood at all”.

All the meaning in the life of Anson – a false one at that – is offered by the book he is working on, *The Pentlands and The Bay Area*, a history of this noble, old, moral, traditional family which occupies all of his time, even if it is more than a vain effort, for it is based on falsehood.

Olivia would find some old letters in the attic that would reveal that in the past, one of the cherished, honored ancestors, Savinia Pentland has had an affair with a man and the only child to continue the line of the family was actually the result of infidelity and therefore the pride of this honorable family is misplaced and there is no “bloodline left”.

As the most important personage is approaching the age of forty, to be celebrated in just a few weeks, Sabine Callender arrives at Durham, the home of the Pentlands and she is one of the family, in spite of the hatred she feels for those who have stolen her happiness with the wrong education.

As a girl, she was taught nothing of what is important in the world, she has married a man she has loved, but with what she received from Aunt Cassie among others, she was unable to find happiness with a man that was full of vitality and zest and who went on to marry another woman- strangely, Sabine would be friends with this other consort.

Sabine and Aunt Cassie are in appearance as different as humans can be, but in spite of the conflict which has them arguing constantly, they represent the same type of interfering personage, one who wants to change the life of others for “their own good „as the heroine and the patriarch of the family would discover.

The head of the family in the first part of the narrative is John Pentland, a wise old man, Anson’s father, but very different from the son and much closer to his daughter in law, who has not only the respect of the patriarch, but she is the one to continue his legacy and inherit the fortune.

His own parent calls Anson “an old woman „and after they have had two children, Sybil and Jack, the couple have had no intimate relations and they are as distant from each other as strangers would be, the mother telling her husband that he has actually abandoned his children to her exclusive care.

Jack has been a very sick child who would actually die – it feels like no spoiler alert is needed since this looming tragedy is mentioned from early on, the doctor had said it would happen and his mother knows that the son was kept alive only by her efforts and those of John Pentland...indeed, when the poor boy dies, she feels sorry that he had to live this miserable existence of pain, disease and restrictions.

The formidable, strong, brave, determined Irish Michael O’Hara is the neighbor of the pretentious Pentlands and he is the exact opposite, full of vitality, open to the new, a man of the future, whereas Anson and Aunt Cassie represent the old fashioned, redundant, obsessed with the past, retrograde and lifeless ghosts of a dying world.

Michael O’Hara is an aspiring, ascending politician whose career may even bring him to the White House- in the view of his friends and comrades- who falls in love with Olivia and he is ready to abandon all his prospects, sell his farm and run away with this woman, if she agrees with it.

The heroine is more than reluctant to begin with, their rapprochement is brought about by Sabine Callender, who would do anything to hurt the Pentlands- more, she would like to see the end of the family, their annihilation- and as the neighbor used to ride in the mornings with Sybil, he would like to go horse riding with the mother, who has this last chance to enjoy life and be happy.

Olivia cannot take this opportunity if she is not to compromise the future of her daughter, as she is

experiencing a romance of her own, with the arrival of the dazzling, bon vivant, radiant Jean de Cyon – in his own words “a bastard- who would never be accepted by Anson and Aunt Cassie.

In order to prevent the Aunt Harpy and the insensitive father from ruining the happiness of Sybil, Olivia accepts the initiative of her friend Sabine, although she is more and more convinced that the latter is “aunt Cassie turned upside down” and allows her daughter and the young pretender to escape and marry before their other relatives make this impossible.

John Pentland has lived in solitude after his marriage, for his now mentally sick wife has had a breakdown on the wedding night, seeing as she had a puritanical view of sex and she has only accepted it...once, after which the poor man lived in a platonic relationship with Ms. Soames, never to have indulged in another intimate act with anyone.

Alas, he now demands the same thing from Olivia, after he names her the new head of the house of Pentland, after his death, she is the inheritor of the wealth and as he repeatedly states, the only one capable of keeping the household together, Anson has always been unable to lead, or control anything.

This means that the protagonist would have to abandon, give up her last chance of happiness and not run away with Michael O’Hara, whose career in turn would be crushed if he chooses to be with a runaway married woman- Anson declares he would never give her a divorce, acceptance that was required by the flawed law of the age.

Early Autumn is a fascinating, magnificent story.

Maddy says

I barely got into this and I was just feeling a "no" from it. Usually, I like historic romances but this was totally boring. After Howard's End, I think I should switch up my reading preferences for a while. I tried to read this for the A-Z classics challenge that I'm doing but I'm putting this aside to try other books for the challenge and to help clear my book shelves.

Maybe I just don't get the books that win the Pulitzer prize. So far the books I read that won the Pulitzer, I haven't really enjoyed but I've heard so many good things about the prize that I'll still attempt to read more of these books in the future. I might give this another chance later but now is just not the time for me for this book.

Loretta says

I'm not really sure what to say about this Pulitzer Prize Winner. What I can say is that I really wonder how this book won the prize in the first place. By 100 pages I really wanted to stop reading the book all together but struggled on. First, there were too many characters, all who I didn't care about, at all. And secondly, to me, it seemed that there really wasn't much of story here. Not one that really kept my interest.
