



Maitreyi

Mircea Eliade

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Set in 1930s Calcutta, this is a *roman à clef* of remarkable intimacy. Originally published in Romanian in 1933, this semiautobiographical novel by the world renowned scholar Mircea Eliade details the passionate awakenings of Alain, an ambitious young French engineer flush with colonial pride and prejudice and full of a European fascination with the mysterious subcontinent.

Offered the hospitality of a senior Indian colleague, Alain grasps at the chance to discover the authentic India firsthand. He soon finds himself enchanted by his host's daughter, the lovely and inscrutable Maitreyi, a precocious young poet and former student of Tagore. What follows is a charming, tentative flirtation that soon, against all the proprieties and precepts of Indian society, blossoms into a love affair both impossible and ultimately tragic. This erotic passion plays itself out in Alain's thoughts long after its bitter conclusion. In hindsight he sets down the story, quoting from the diaries of his disordered days, and trying to make sense of the sad affair.

A vibrantly poetic love story, *Bengal Nights* is also a cruel account of the wreckage left in the wake of a young man's self discovery. At once horrifying and deeply moving, Eliade's story repeats the patterns of European engagement with India even as it exposes and condemns them. Invaluable for the insight it offers into Eliade's life and thought, it is a work of great intellectual and emotional power.

"*Bengal Nights* is forceful and harshly poignant, written with a great love of India informed by clear-eyed understanding. But do not open it if you prefer to remain unmoved by your reading matter. It is enough to make stones weep." — *Literary Review*

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) was the Sewell L. Avery Distinguished Service Professor in the Divinity School and the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Many of his scholarly works, as well as his two-volume autobiography and four-volume journal, are published by the University of Chicago Press. Translated into French in 1950, *Bengal Nights* was an immediate critical success. The film, *Les Nuits Bengali*, appeared in 1987.

Maitreyi Details

Date : Published March 28th 2003 by Humanitas (first published January 1st 1933)

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Author : Mircea Eliade

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Alecu Matraguna says

cea mai tare poveste de dragoste citit? până acum, cartea e vibrație pură.

Nancy Freund says

Wow. Much to consider, and as Alain says early in the novel of his love for Maitreyi, he can't describe it, because describing it will somehow corrupt it, (paraphrased here). I can't set the book down and talk about it yet. Must let it swirl around in my head a while first. But I'm so intrigued to imagine how this book is taught in Romanian high schools. Wonder if it still is today. And I wonder if its companion piece, written 40 years later from the POV of Maitreyi is also taught.

It doesn't seem written in 1933, I can at least put that down on paper now. It seems filtered through language, cultural distance and miles, but not time. I am very grateful for the gift of this book.

Teo says

Awful :)

Maitreyi is awful.

Allan is OKish.

Elena Dru?? says

O carte frumoasă, dar prea zaharită?

Exotismul, misticismul și puritatea acestui roman par să fie argumente care nu pot fi negate pentru ideea că dragostea există mai presus de orice altceva. Finalul deschis al romanului este motiv de gândire oricărui cititor sceptic față de puterea iubirii...

...?i dac? n-ar fi decât o p?c?leal? a dragostei mele? De ce s? cred? De unde s? ?tiu? A? vrea s? privesc ochii Maitreyiei...

Adelina Traicu says

După două încercare de a citi cartea i-am descoperit latura pasională, senzorială și în sfârșit sfârșitoare a iubirii.

M-a zdruncinat, căci mi-e greu să renunț la iubiri puternice.

A avut și momente în care păreau de necrezut vorbele, sentimentele dar raportate la trecutul celor doi și perioada respectivă, parcă prinđ contur.

Angela says

An absolutely fabulous love story between different worlds, but essentially the same...The atmosphere is fantastic...you can smell the perfumes, can taste the flavours, can feel that delicate "sari"...can even think in that specific way..that Maitreyi is used to...
Fabulous and sweet and touching!

Andreea Obreja says

I hate him! He gets what he wants, then leaves, doing all kinds of stupid stuff because suffering for love is just so poetic and everybody just loves a sad hero... Or in the beginning when he just couldn't admit what he really thought and mocked everything Indian so that he wouldn't look bad. And in the end he just HAD to be such a cynic about that girl's thoughts <.<

I don't feel like rating this. There were some things I liked but I can't remember them because I'm too furious. I shall rate it in the future, when I may be less subjective.

I just kind of hated everything about this story. The language was extremely sickeningly-sweet and over-affected. The story-line was somehow good but I hated each and everyone in it: narrow-minded people who can only see things one way and no other, who only think of themselves and how something makes THEM look. Some may say this is reality: well, you know what, I despise it! And no, it's not, in reality people do care about each other but this book is written from the point of view of someone very young and selfish.

He's like every teenager out there, imagining "What would people think if I threw myself in the Gange? Will they then understand my suffering? Will they be sorry for what they did to me?" So instead, he doesn't kill himself, just disappears for a few days to scare everyone that he could have killed himself, without it being as definitive and painful as dying.

It's probably the first book I hate with such a passion so you can't say I'm someone who likes to criticize what others write. Actually, I'm pretty generous in my opinions but this book was simply hateful.

Yeah, yeah, great insight into 1930's India and all but you don't really have to read a novel if you want to know those things.

PS: I'm sorry I'm so categorical and I'm sorry if you think I'm wrong. You must know I'm rather sick right now and I may have a fever, so I'm not thinking straight.

Vlad says

Am nevoie de timp sa-mi adun gandurile.

mircea says

o interactiune instinctuala cu incercari de anulare a anumitor limite/constrangeri... o metamorfoza pe nesimtite ce-o vad a fi inevitabila unui tanar fascinat de cat mai autenticul 'oriental'. Unul din acele lucruri ce trebuie facute cat mai devreme in viata, desi poate ca unii nu reusesc niciodata sa iasa din ei nici macar pentru asa o scurta bucată de timp precum s-a dovedit a fi intreaga poveste cuprinsa in aceasta carte.

O frumoasa poveste despre contrasturi si o anumita iesire din sine prin adoptarea unei culturi total diferite si printr-o relationare neobisnuita si poate ca incredibil de instinctuala.

Ei bine... si ce are a face daca nu reușește să se lase în voia schimbării?! Povestea în sine este frumoasă... si poate ca atrage mai mult în virtutea imposibilității lui de a se abandona, ori, altfel, cred că ar fi fost vorba de basm.

Rowena says

3.5 stars

It's tough to rate a book like this. Initially upon finishing it I rated it quite highly, but after I've had more time to think about the content, I felt much less compelled to do so.

Bengal Nights was written by a European man in India (Calcutta in the 1930s), so I knew I was going to be shaking my head a lot. I expected racism, exotification, cultural ignorance and superiority, paternalism and simplification of the other, and I got all those:

"Once more I saw that it was civilized people who were simple, innocent, and clear. These Indians, whom I loved so much that I wanted to become one of them, all nurtured in the recesses of their beings a whole impenetrable history and mythology. How deep, complex and unintelligible they seemed to me."

Even so, this is an interesting book, well-written too (at least well-translated). It's the semi-autobiographical tale about a Romanian academic, Mírcea Eliáde (in this book he is French and goes by the name, Alain) who travels to India for work. He clearly has a couple of agendas. He is a man who believes he can "save" the country and change things, a man who thinks he knows more about the country because of his "superior" status as a European. He is arrogant but he believes he's benevolent and understanding. The following passage is long but it sums up Alain (Eliáde) quite well:

"I was filled with the strange sentiment that I was leading the life of a veritable pioneer, and my work on the construction of railway lines through the jungle seemed to me far more useful to India than a dozen books written about her. I was also sure that the encounter of this ancient world with our modern work had yet to find its novelist. I had discovered an India quite different to the one I had read about in sensational newspaper articles... The deeper I ventured into this wild domain, the more consuming became a hitherto unconscious notion of my superiority, the more violently assertive a pride of which I would never have believed myself capable. I was well and truly in the jungle, no longer a social being with perfect self-control."

Alain falls in love with Bengali teenager Maitreyi Devi, daughter of his employer, and former protege of

renowned poet Tagore, and they embark on an affair. The book is an interesting look into the interracial relationships that can be further complicated by race, colonial attitudes, religion, and societal expectations. There are implications for both but, as to be expected, worse and more serious ones for the woman.

Alain is torn between his life as a privileged white man in India and his intrigue for this other exotic life. Perhaps compounded by his love for Maitreyi, he puts India on a pedestal. I've seen this happen before, it's not new, but it is interesting how common it is and how it manifests itself:

"I described my meeting with Harold to them frankly and confided my disgust at the life the Europeans and Anglo-Indians led in Calcutta-- a life of which I had for so long been a part."

What I'm primarily concerned about this book is ethics. The author masked his own identity in the book yet he mentioned Maitreyi's very clearly and even used an identifier (He mentions her association with Tagore's protegee). If he understood Indian (Bengali) Indian culture like he said he did, surely he would have known better than to write such a tale, fictionalized or not, about a person it can easily be attributed to?

Additionally, the sexual relationship between Alain and Maitreya is quite explicitly stated, and this was Calcutta in the 1930s, so I can only assume that it was a more conservative time than it is now. I'm curious about what compelled Elíade to put all Maitreyi's business out there, it definitely left a bad taste in my mouth.

After I finished reading this book I googled Maitreyi's name and learned that she had found out about this book through a friend and had flown across the world to confront Elíade. In the end, she wrote about the romance from her point of view (Maitreyi Devi- It Does Not Die: A Romance)

Diana says

I was planning on reading this book for a very long time and now that we were asked to read it for our Romanian class I thought that this was the perfect opportunity. I actually think that this book is one of very few that I'm really glad that it is included in the scholarly program, because, to be honest, the other books and authors are really lame. Or maybe it is just my unconditional love for Eliade's literature.

What I liked most about this book was that I could actually see the love growing in front of my eyes.

Maitreyi had a really changing personality, she was a really mysterious woman. What I really liked was that Eliade did not put the emphasis on the characters' looks, but on their behaviour and thinking. The feelings were the most important features for Allan, he eventually found out that he had been wrong about many things concerning the beautiful Maitreyi. He fell in love with this mystique Indian teenager, who has never experienced love before, but who is really willing to give up on everything for Allan eventually. I find it very interesting that Mircea Eliade saw interracial love from a different perspective. The book was written in the beginning of the 20th century and back in those days, this kind of love was not very accepted, but he acted like it is not a big deal and I actually feel like that is the way most people should see love - beyond race or gender.

In what concerns the ending of the book, I have quite an unpopular opinion - as far as I know, a lot of people disliked that ending, but I found it really interesting and like it should have been. It was right, it was just like it was supposed to happen. I am not going to give any spoilers, but the one thing I feel is that every ego died in that book and by the end it was all just a book of empty souls.

Another thing that I find interesting is that this book is actually inspired by Mircea Eliade's personal experience in India and it has a lot of autobiography in it.

And to conclude with, I recommend this book from all my heart, it is pure genius and it has some moments

when you just want to melt because of the sweet things that have been happening around there.

Julien M. says

I love it and I hate it at the same time, if that is at all possible. I just finished reading it for the second time and, I don't really remember anything like this after reading it the first time, but it hit something inside me, wherever and whatever that is, and a very weird combination of feelings surfaced. I suppose Eliade succeeded in making the reader, or at least me, feel as close as possible to what he must have felt back then, if not towards Maitreyi, at least towards the book itself. Being able to penetrate to its core this, obviously touching and disturbing at the same time, story, I find myself judging him a lot for his stupid actions and his lack of judgment, but I do not know how different would I have reacted if it all happened to me.

I feel pitty for the human race, for all the stupidity that it bears with so much pride and arrogance, for the immense amount of pain and suffering we put one another through each day, for all the superstitions you - not me, not anymore - live your lives by with so much credulity and zeal, for all the little differences that keep us from seeing our much more obvious things we have in common.

It is pathetic but it also gives me this great impuls to do... something; the opposite; anything other than this; to go out there, to tackle all the Narendra Sens and mrs. Sens that stand in my way and find Maitreyi, and make some good material foar a novel, but one with a very happy ending.

I think I have said everything and nothing. Isn't it great to be alive?

Ioana Fotache says

As vrea ca atunci cand ni se preda cartea asta la scoala sa ni se spuna ce om de cacat ii allan, ce abuz de putere face vrajind o fata de jumatarea varstei lui, ce orientalism extrem are in modul in care prezinta cultura indiana ca ceva exotic si primitiv, ce sexist ii modul in care se foloseste de femei si cumva tot el ii victimiza desi o duce bine-mersi folosindu-se de cine o fi pe cand femeile din viata lui se sinucid sau innebunesc. As vrea ca eseurile de 3 pagini pe care le scriem despre Eliade, marele scriitor romanesc, sa fie despre un roman care invata cititorii cum sa nu fie cand merg in India ca niste albi privilegiati.

Dar nu frate, asta se preda la copii de varsta maitreyiei ca fiind o poveste de dragoste.

Andrei Tama? says

Cinci stelu?e pentru informa?iile despre cultura ?i mentalitatea indian? de prinse ?i -de asemenea!- pentru faptul c? Eliade a fost sincer cu sine ?i cu cititorul. De?i are resurse pentru a descrie iubirea (de citit "Nunt? în cer", un roman psihologic genial!), Eliade nu s-a proiectat pe sine ca un romantic înver?unat, ci ca un occidental care a poposit în India ?i prive?te via?a a?a cum a privit-o ?i "acas?", deci niciun "Maitreyi e via?a mea, a? muri f?r? dânsa...", ci doar o amintire plin? de melancolie neagr?. Eu, la câte am auzit vorbindu-se despre carte, m? a?tept?m la ceva wertherian, ceea ce n-am g?sit decât pe alocuri (?i în varianta wertherianismului modern), atunci când Eliade nu mai avea bani de ?ig?ri ?i se plimba de nebun nopl?ile pe str?zi.

Da, povestea biografiei comune a celor doi e simpatic? (citit? exclusiv), dar mie, citind cartea, nu mi s-a p?rut apoteotic?...

Interesant? oricum perspectiva din care sunt descrise cele dou? obiecte ale iubirii ce provind din medii spirituale diferite.

Andrei Tamas,
24 noiembrie 2015

Adina says

Eliade este scriitorul meu roman preferat.
