

The Good Earth

by Pearl Buck

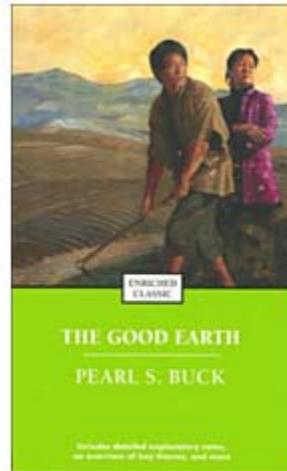
About the book

Pulitzer Prize, 1932

Wang Lung, rising from humble Chinese farmer to wealthy landowner, gloried in the soil he worked. He held it above his family, even above his gods. But soon, between Wang Lung and the kindly soil that sustained him, came flood and drought, pestilence and revolution.

This great modern classic depicts life in China at a time before the vast political and social upheavals transformed an essentially agrarian country into a world power.

Through this one Chinese peasant and his children, Nobel Prize-winner Pearl S. Buck traces the whole cycle of life, terrors, its passion, its persistent ambitions and its rewards. Her brilliant novel—beloved by millions of readers throughout the world—is a universal tale of the destiny of men. (From the publisher.)



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About the author



Pearl Buck (1892-1973) was born in Hillsboro, West Virginia. She grew up in China, where her parents were missionaries, but was educated at Randolph-Macon Woman's College. After her graduation she returned to China and lived there until 1934 with the exception of a year spent at Cornell University, where she took an M.A. in 1926. Pearl Buck began to write in the twenties; her first novel, *East Wind, West Wind*, appeared in 1930. It was followed by *The Good Earth* (1931), *Sons* (1932), and *A House Divided* (1935), together forming a trilogy on the saga of the family of Wang. *The Good Earth* stood on the American list of «best sellers» for a long time and earned her several awards, among them the Pulitzer Prize and the William Dean Howells Medal. She also published *The First Wife and Other Stories* (1933), *All Men are Brothers* (a translation of the Chinese novel *Shui Hu Chuan*) (1933), *The Mother* (1934), and *This Proud Heart* (1938).

The biographies of her mother and father, *The Exile* and *Fighting Angel*, were published in 1936 and later brought out together under the title of *The Spirit and the Flesh* (1944). *The Time Is Now*, a fictionalized account of the author's emotional experiences, although written much earlier, did not appear in print until 1967.

Pearl Buck's works after 1938 are too many to mention. Her novels have continued to deal with the confrontation of East and West, her interest spreading to such countries as India and Korea. Her novelist's interest in the interplay of East and West has also led to some activity in political journalism.

Pearl Buck has been active in many welfare organizations; in particular she set up an agency for the adoption of Asian-American children (Welcome House, Inc.) and has taken an active interest in retarded children (The Child Who Never Grew, 1950).

From Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967, Editor Horst Frenz, Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1969.

Discussion Questions

1. The novel begins with Wang Lung's expectation of rain, the daily boiling of water for his father, and his bathing for his wedding. What might this water imagery foreshadow?
2. Why does Wang Lung feel compelled to purchase the rice field from the House of Hwang? Why does he at first regret it?
3. "And so this parcel of land became to Wang Lung a sign and a symbol." What does the author mean by this?
4. Wang Lung considers the birth of his daughter to be a bad omen. How does he come to regard this girl, who grows up to become a fool?
5. As the family works and begs in the city, what do they think of the foreigners they encounter? What purpose does the author serve in including these descriptions?
6. The abundance of food in the city contrasts with the characters impoverished lives. Discuss the emotionally complex relationship Wang Lung develops with the city.
7. The poor laborers in the city lack knowledge even of what they look like, a fact illustrated by the man who mocks himself in a mirror. How does a new self-awareness come to manifest itself?
8. When Wang Lung becomes swept up with the mob and enters the rich man's house, is the gold he receives there a curse or a blessing? Do you feel any pity for the rich man? What do you think the author intended you to feel?
9. After O-lan steals the jewels, do they function as a bad omen or good luck? Why does O-lan want to keep the two pearls? Why is Wang Lung so astonished by this? What do the pearls signify?
10. As O-lan dies, she bemoans her lack of beauty and says she is too ugly to be loved. Wang Lung feels guilty, but still cannot love her as he did Lotus. Neither woman can control destiny. Lotus was an orphan who had been sold into prostitution because she was beautiful, and O-lan had been sold as a kitchen slave because she was plain. For whom do you feel sympathy? Why?
11. Toward the end of the novel we encounter the belief that things will change "when the poor become too poor and the rich are too rich." Discuss the ambivalence of this statement -- a mixture of both hope and despair -- and how it reflects upon the whole of *The Good Earth*. (Questions issued by publisher.)