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Revolutionary Road



Synopsis

Hailed as a masterpiece of realistic fiction and as the most evocative portrayal of the opulent desolation of the American suburbs since its publication in 1961, *Revolutionary Road* is the story of Frank and April Wheeler, a bright, beautiful, and talented couple who have lived on the assumption that greatness is only just around the corner. With heartbreaking compassion and remorseless clarity, Richard Yates shows how Frank and April mortgage their spiritual birthright, betraying not only each other, but their best selves. In his introduction to this edition, novelist Richard Ford pays homage to the lasting influence and enduring power of *Revolutionary Road*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The rediscovery and rejuvenation of Richard Yates's 1961 novel *Revolutionary Road* is due in large part to its continuing emotional and moral resonance for an early 21st-century readership. April and Frank Wheeler are a young, ostensibly thriving couple living with their two children in a prosperous Connecticut suburb in the mid-1950s. However, like the characters in John Updike's similarly themed *Couples*, the self-assured exterior masks a creeping frustration at their inability to feel fulfilled in their relationships or careers. Frank is mired in a well-paying but boring office job and April is a housewife still mourning the demise of her hoped-for acting career. Determined to identify themselves as superior to the mediocre sprawl of suburbanites who surround them, they decide to move to France where they will be better able to develop their true artistic sensibilities, free of the consumerist demands of capitalist America. As their relationship deteriorates into an endless cycle

of squabbling, jealousy and recriminations, their trip and their dreams of self-fulfillment are thrown into jeopardy. Yates's incisive, moving, and often very funny prose weaves a tale that is at once a fascinating period piece and a prescient anticipation of the way we live now. Many of the cultural motifs seem quaintly dated--the early-evening cocktails, Frank's illicit lunch breaks with his secretary, the way Frank isn't averse to knocking April around when she speaks out of turn--and yet the quiet desperation at thwarted dreams reverberates as much now as it did years ago. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, this novel conveys, with brilliant erudition, the exacting cost of chasing the American dream. --Jane Morris, .co.uk

"So much nonsense has been written on suburban life and mores that it comes as a considerable shock to read a book by someone who seems to have his own ideas on the subject and who pursues them relentlessly to the bitter end," said LJ's reviewer (LJ 2/1/61) of this novel of unhappy life in the burbs. It is reminiscent of the popular film *American Beauty* in its depiction of white-collar life as fraught with discontent. Others have picked up on this theme since, but Yates remains a solid read. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* is not an easy novel, but it is an important one, and it will give readers a great deal to ponder. Yates offers no simple answers, refuses to preach, and compels readers to think past slogans, cliches, and simplistic moral answers to complicated problems that are peculiarly American. In an age where artists and entertainers are eager to bring a prior decade to life--think *Mad Men*--*Revolutionary Road* is remarkable because Yates wrote it in 1961 and set it a mere five or so years earlier; he writes without the advantage of hindsight, without a sense of how to draw in modern audiences by accentuating details about the past that will keep them glued to their screens or turning their pages. His characters' world is essentially his own, and given the nature of the conflicts and the tragedies that unfold in the story, his accuracy and perception is remarkable. Many themes are at work in *Revolutionary Road*, but perhaps the most important concerns the plight of women in an era where there was no birth control pill, and when marriage literally meant for hundreds of thousands of women imprisonment in a home, often in a suburb (the setting of Yates's novel), with no intellectual stimulation. Days stretch endlessly as women clean, cook, care for a growing number of children, and wait anxiously for husbands to return from work--often in the family's only car. For women who dared to buck the status quo, the inevitable demise of their children is the result, Yates suggests. April Wheeler, Yates's heroine, was abandoned by her parents and

suffers significant problems when it comes to trust, love, and creating a mature bond. Mrs. Givings, who refused to be "just a housewife, is the mother to an insane grown child who is institutionalized after holding both his parents hostage. Incidentally, it is this insane man who utters the truths that neither the Wheelers nor the Givings themselves are capable of articulating, or who are terrified of articulating. Desperate to escape the mind-numbing routines of domesticity, April pleads with Frank to move to Paris so that he might have the time to read and "find himself" while she takes a job working as an office secretary to make ends meet. The children, she assures Frank, will be enrolled in school. Frank--who habitually tells his wife and everyone else that his job is boring and just that--just a job--finds that when given the opportunity by April to quit and move to Paris, he balks, preferring instead the commute daily into New York, the freedom from the suburbs, and likely not wishing to trade places with his wife. His job is boring, but it gives him status and autonomy, and many chances to move up in the firm. Yates presents readers with a world not only before the Pill, but before Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, and in so doing, Yates offers a story that is the best of American realism. The themes, the plot, the lack of clear-cut answers, will resonate with readers today who will find Frank and April's lives and tragedies uncannily familiar in spite of the novel being over half a century old.

This novel kept me interested throughout. It's not flowery writing and it doesn't seem to need to be. It was refreshing to read an author that isn't trying too hard. Poignant, thought-provoking descriptions of marital interactions that I suspect are largely universal, even in the best of relationships. He touches on the resentments that inherently arise by the act of entrusting your future to another person in a way that marriage does, the realities that surface as the months, years, number of children, various let-downs, etc...accumulate. Not sure if it was Yates's aim to do so but the novel seemed to say a lot about selfishness and solipsism without quite having to drag the story through the post-modern muck that gets so tiring. Would recommend this work to anyone interested in better understanding relationships and mid-life in general.

Revolutionary Road by Richard Yates is an easy book to read, but a difficult book to review. With effortlessly beautiful writing and incredibly vivid characters, this book sucks you into the world of 1960s suburbia with all of its subtleties and quiet dramas. It is, in fact, the skill with which Yates develops his characters that makes this book so difficult to review and to completely enjoy. *Revolutionary Road* is the picture of perfect character-building. From the very first chapter, the

use of dialogue and short, clear passages of description give the reader an incredibly strong sense of who Frank and April Wheeler really are. Right away, I felt like I knew these characters, like I had met them a thousand times before. While this is itself a rare accomplishment, Yates takes this book to the next level by subverting the reader's first perceptions of the characters. By slowly adding chapters from the perspective of characters other than Frank, Yates gives the reader a different angle on Frank's character, his marriage to April, and his relationship with his neighbors and friends. Slowly, the reader discovers more depth to both April and Frank's already round characters, and not everything that is discovered is flattering. It is this evolution of the reader's perception of the characters that makes this book so difficult to review or even completely enjoy. The truth is that there is one character who I absolutely hated more than I have hated any other character in any book, and possibly more than I've hated anyone in real life. I spent the whole book torn between wanting to know what happened next and wanting to throw the book across the room out of sheer anger and frustration with that character. In short, I wanted him to die in a fire. While I'll admit that it takes incredible skill to make a character so believably unlikable, and while I understand that the absolute horribleness of that character was crucial to the theme and plot, it also makes the book difficult to enjoy, or at least it did for me. I'm usually ok with unlikable characters, but this one hurt and frightened me on a deep emotional level, possibly because he was so real. Maybe I'm particularly sensitive to portrayals of spousal abuse and manipulation, but there were times when I considered just not finishing it, even though the writing was incredible. If it hadn't been required reading for a class, I might not have. That has never happened to me before, and I honestly don't know what to make of it. To be honest with you, I still don't know how I feel about this book. The writing was beautiful, easy to read, and incredibly enjoyable. The characterization was among the best I've ever seen. But, despite those two amazing qualities, that one character and all the horrible things he did to another character made reading this book difficult. Because of that difficulty, I cannot recommend this book to wholeheartedly. While I think that a lot of people would greatly enjoy it, there are people I know who would find this book too disturbing and emotionally intense, and because of that I cannot recommend it to everyone. If you don't mind reading a book that has abuse, manipulation, and a seriously messed up character in it, then I would recommend this book as one of the best examples of writing and characterization I have ever read. If you think reading about those things would bother you, then you should definitely skip *Revolutionary Road*. Rating: 4 stars? Trigger warning for domestic abuse and emotional manipulation.

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