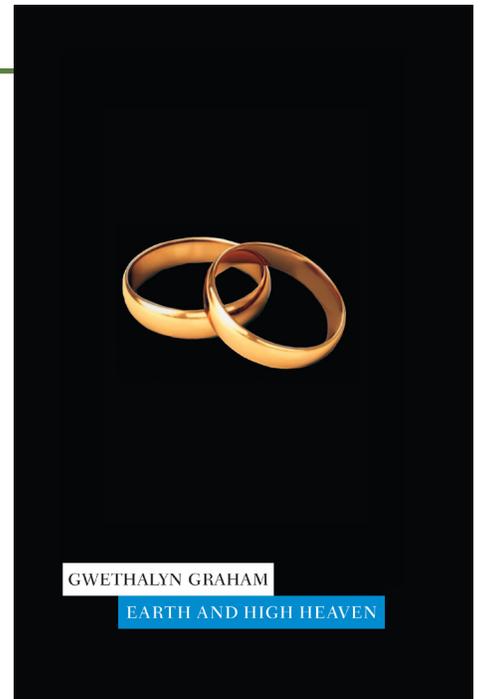


READER'S GUIDE

Earth and High Heaven by Gwethalyn Graham

INTRODUCING *Earth and High Heaven*

When Erica Drake, of the Westmount Drakes, met and fell in love with Marc Reiser, a Jew from northern Ontario, their respective worlds were turned upside down. Set against the backdrop of the first three years of the Second World War, *Earth and High Heaven* captured the hearts and minds of its generation and helped to shape the more diverse and inclusive culture we have today.



IMPORTANT THEMES

Prejudice

The Drake family prejudice against Marc Reiser for being Jewish is the central point of conflict in the novel. More subtly, however, Erica must confront her own prejudice against Jews in order to be with him. There are also sharply divided lines between the Anglo-Protestant and Franco-Catholic in Montreal; Charles' antipathy towards his proposed daughter-in-law because of this divide acts as a foil to his reaction to Marc. Even Rene, who wants to marry Erica, is not immune to this divide, and even less immune to the belief that women are not rational beings. Distantly, the war looms, another specter of hatred by a group of otherwise mannered people against people they don't really know, based purely on stereotypes.

Love

Erica is caught between her feelings for Marc and her love for her parents. With her parents, love means duty and following the life of convention laid out for her. Marc, too, out of love for Erica, does not want her to deviate from the established and thus become an outcast. In this respect, Marc and Charles become united in their aims. The question of whether Erica's parents are so set against Marc out of love for Erica or simply to save face is answered in their tolerance of Erica's sister's choice of philandering boyfriend, their reaction to their son's marriage to a Franco-Catholic, and Margaret's eventual about-face on the matter.

Convention

This novel is in some ways a commentary on circumventing convention, and the consequences for doing so. Erica has felt some consequences for choosing to enter the working world and rejecting the convention of society lady, but the consequences have not materially affected her. The fallout from marrying outside of her class and religion, however, promises to be much more severe. Even Charles, preaching convention to his children and the outside world, departs from it only in private, preserving a more conservative image of himself in public.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think drives Margaret Drake?
2. Who do you think is the “real” Charles Drake?
3. How do you think Erica and Marc’s lives will be after the end of the novel?
4. Discuss the presence of extra-marital affairs in the novel; does their existence undermine either Charles’ argument against Erica and Marc marrying or Erica and Marc’s desire to marry?
5. Is Charles a foil for Marc in any way?
6. How does knowing someone personally affect your relationship with the stereotypes that are applied to people like them? How do stereotypes both limit and broaden our field of vision?
7. Acceptance and tolerance: in what ways are these two things the same or different, as demonstrated in wartime Montreal society?



ABOUT GWETHALYN

Gwethalyn Graham was born January 18, 1913, in Toronto. At the age of 25, in 1938, she won her first Governor General’s Literary Award for Fiction for her novel *Swiss Sonata*. With *Earth and High Heaven*, she won her second, becoming the first ever person to do so. *Earth and High Heaven* also won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in 1945, and was the first Canadian novel to top the New York Times bestseller list for the better part of a year. After *Earth and High Heaven*, Graham wrote for *Saturday Night*, *Chatelaine*, and for film and television, and completed a collection of letters with Solange Chaput Roland titled *Dear Enemies* (1963). Graham died in 1965.