



When Huai Flowers Bloom: Stories of the Cultural Revolution

Shu Jiang Lu

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Set against China's turbulent years between the early 1960s and the late 1970s, *When Huai Flowers Bloom* is the literary memoir of a young girl who manages to sustain love, imagination, and strength during this most chaotic time. With twelve separate yet interconnected stories, Shu Jiang Lu alternates between storyteller and listener as she relays haunting memories and explores the devastating effect of Mao's anticultural Cultural Revolution. Lu weaves together the voices of multiple real and fantastic characters: her parents and their treasured yet forbidden bookcase; the mysterious vendors beckoning from Pear Flower Alley; the immortal martial hero; the reactionary opera singer and the black demon novelist; the whispering ghost and dancing fairy; and the author herself, discovering her storyteller's voice in the military camps of her youth. *When Huai Flowers Bloom* is a poignant, persistent journey toward voice and freedom.

When Huai Flowers Bloom: Stories of the Cultural Revolution Details

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From Reader Review When Huai Flowers Bloom: Stories of the Cultural Revolution for online ebook

Mary Catelli says

A good book, and even though it's memoir, an interesting book for the fiction writer, especially the fantasy or science fiction writer, for two reasons.

The first is it's about stories as well as about the Cultural Revolution. Why we tell stories and what they mean.

And the second is that even though it's a memoir, large chunks of it read like magic realism. Cool stuff. Explanations of this or that, or the stories the narrator is told, and -- hints.

Steve says

Having read a fair amount of the genre of bittersweet reflection works dealing with the Cultural Revolution, I'm disinclined to put Shu Jiang Lu's "When Huai Flowers Bloom" on the list of mandatory reads, but that's not to say it doesn't have merit. While she tries hard to turn lyricism into poignancy, she often struggles with consistency. Ms. Lu writes with a high level of verbosity, stringing endless similes together as if the word "like" carried a commission. Unfortunately, the thrust of a piece might get buried beneath the flowery excesses, clichéd phrases and repetitive language. Perhaps I'm nitpicking, but in one short piece, she uses the word "creamy" so often to describe a flower (the titular one) over the course of less than twenty pages that it became comical when it was meant to be otherwise.

Over the course of twelve stories, Ms. Lu reminisces about life in China as seen through her own eyes or through her retelling of the lives of her relatives. Her dreamy narrative style rarely engaged me, making this collection something I labored to finish, despite being less than two hundred pages. There were some stories that combined her penchant for wordy excess with the impact of the grim events from her past to create moving and evocative tales. Unfortunately, there are others that seemed like pure self-indulgence in need of objective editing.

This isn't a bad read by any means; merely one I didn't much care for. Obviously the author can't be blamed if her style isn't to my liking. More than that however, is the fact that there are other memoirs or novels related to "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" that pack a stronger punch. For that reason, I recommend "When Huai Flowers Bloom" more for Sinophiles looking to broaden their Mao-era library or for those who prefer the blade of brutal honesty a bit blunted.
