



# **The Coldest Winter: A Stringer in Liberated Europe**

*Paula Fox*

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**The Coldest Winter: A Stringer in Liberated Europe** Paula Fox

In this elegant and affecting follow-up to her extraordinary memoir, *Borrowed Finery*, a young writer travels through a Europe ravaged by the Second World War.

## **The Coldest Winter: A Stringer in Liberated Europe Details**

Date : Published October 17th 2006 by Picador (first published 2005)

ISBN : 9780312426248

Author : Paula Fox

Format : Paperback 144 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, History, Biography, War, World War II



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### **Georgia says**

A perfect winter read. Paula Fox writes about her experiences traveling abroad in Europe as an early twentysomething journalist with haunting brevity as she recounts her experiences among the postwar cities of London, Paris and Warsaw. Fox somehow avoids the sentimental even in her most personal experiences. Her short essays reflect the devastation wrecked on the people and places of Europe. A great short read that could be finished in one sitting or a couple of metro rides in my case

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### **Linda says**

Another "to-read" bites the dust. I love goal setting! But, enough about me. This is a memoir. Paula Fox is known to me as a Young Adult author. Her YA books are very good and very good for young adults. Her biography **BORROWED FINERY** was quite a grim look at her childhood, and this book follows that but with not much mention of that childhood. She does mention her father briefly and all of the good contacts that she makes in her trip to Europe are because of some acquaintance of her father. Plus, near the end of the book she goes into some of her ethnic heritage which is exotic and enviable. At first I couldn't quite get this book. It seemed clunky and hard to concentrate upon. Later, and this is a very small book of one hundred thirty-three pages, I became entranced and couldn't put it down. Fox's story is a marvelous peek into a period of time that none of us can imagine. Her portraits and the people that she meets, rather off-handedly, Sarte, for instance, are excellent. She feels the repression of Franco's Spain and goes hither and thither without much knowledge, to places that are still horribly damaged by the war. This is balanced reporting about war. I wish there were a bibliography and an index. The pictures in the book are not attributed. That is, we don't know who the people the places, etc. are. We just have to suppose. I guess that is part of the art of the book, but I found it annoying that I had to be the one to decide who was who and where. Still, and all it is worth the read.

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### **Amanda says**

This memoir ended up not really being my thing.

If this was a bunch of stories coming from someone I know, I'd be sitting there with rapt attention and wanting to know all of the details and I'd really appreciate them. Coming from a stranger though, I found most of it to be rather boring. It's also really disjointed and kind of hard to follow. Or maybe I was just so bored by it I missed details. I also find that for me personally, I don't do well with memoirs that are really just collections of thoughts and short stories. I find that I'd rather read these types of memoirs in little pieces as opposed to trying to read it like an actual book.

It's not bad, but it wasn't my thing personally.

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### **sara fasy says**

Memoir of 1947 post-war Europe, fledgling journalist, written by Paula Fox whose illustrious screenwriter parents abandoned her at early age- her book Borrowed Finery explores her childhood. This book finds her at 23, sent to be a stringer in Prague and Warsaw, spare portraits of the demoralized rubble-strewn cities, then Spain and the Franco influence with allusions to defeated Republicans living in semi-hiding. Interesting to see the way memory works at such a distance, you can imagine the Paris of the time and the clothes and food and trains and hotels and sense of purpose in the odd selection of characters she highlights. I seem to return from time to time to chronicles of WWII and its aftermath- fueled by movies like the recent Black Box (Hollywoodized but interesting!)

Interesting juxtaposition of privilege (her job arranged by powerful parents) and privation (post-war conditions in Eastern Europe abominable and sad).

A good read on the plane from LA. and stood in contrast to the bright mechanized world of the present in its most hedonistic frenzied trendy consumer state...

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### **Bruce says**

Wanting to escape life in New York, where she'd grown up, Fox saves up her earnings from waiting table and books a bargain passage to post-war London in 1946. She gets a job as a stringer from a start-up news service and gets dispatched briefly to Paris, and then to Poland during the coldest European winter in twenty years. In Warsaw she meets Mrs. Grassner, a woman from "a Jewish woman's organization in the Midwest." Fox is there to cover the human interest stories surrounding the new Parliament. Grassner tells her she is there to help Jews escape to British Palestine. "Didn't I know, she was asking, that the Poles and the worst anti-Semites in Europe? Had I imagined that Hitler had instructed *them* how to kill Jews?"

Clearly all the demons of the war have not been exorcised with the allied victory. This is reinforced by Fox's next destination: Spain where the repressive regime of General Franco and the fascists still rule. She's visiting her great-uncle in Barcelona. *Tío Antonio* had been turned in to the secret police by a visiting relative for writing to his sister in Long Island. In the letter he wishes that Spain might be liberated from the fascists as was the rest of Europe. He been taken into custody and beaten for this treasonable act.

Fox' style is clear and direct; her witness is powerful.

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### **Suzanne says**

In this heavily atmospheric memoir we see a Europe still devastated by the recent war. Instead of the euphoria and prosperity America is experiencing, the places Ms Fox visits- London, Warsaw, Prague, Barcelona are all still stunned and rubble filled, with shell shocked and grief stricken survivors. As we now know , some of Europe never does fully recover, but seeing it first hand thru Paula Fox's eyes is fascinating, eyeopening and ultimately very sad.

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## **K.M. Soehnlein says**

It's 1946. Europe is devastated by World War II -- not yet in Marshall Plan recovery mode -- when Paula Fox, then only 23, spends a year traveling as a "stringer" (a reporter filing occasional dispatches to a wire service based in London). This memoir isn't really about the news stories she was sent to write, but more about episodes and impressions made on a young woman who isn't sure what she's seeking or what she expects to find.

Fox is young and impressionable and attractive, but this isn't really a coming of age story as you might expect from the "American abroad" set-up. Fox spends some time in London and Paris, but the bulk of this slim book -- its most memorable chapters -- take place in Poland, a country in ruins not just physically but morally, during a winter so cold Fox puts newspapers under her coat to stay warm.

If, like me, you're a fan of Fox's tightly plotted "Desperate Characters," you might find this memoir a bit slight, though her strong sense of insight is on display in flashes throughout. I wish there was a stronger sense of story or suspense at work. The book takes a while to find its momentum, and the episodes don't always add up to something greater than brief portraits of people Fox meets along the way and remembers from a distance of decades later.

Still, as a short informative book it's worth a try, especially if you're curious about the era it depicts.

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## **Jennifer says**

I really enjoyed this book. What I appreciated most was Paula Fox's elegant simplicity. She had this amazing ability to create a scene, a feeling, even complete character profiles in very few words. I was amazed that such a huge experience could be culled down to so little and yet still convey so much activity. The last paragraph of the chapter entitled "Perlita" is something I always want to remember:

"As I look at her in my mind's eye, I am reminded not of the loftiness or dignity of the human spirit but, rather, its sudden capacity in dire circumstances for an overarching sympathy, its redemptive humbleness."

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## **Jordan says**

Short, tight and affecting prose pace a journey through Europe a year after WWII. Beautiful travel writing; makes me want to go on a journey.

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## **Peter says**

I came across a story about Paula Fox in *The New Yorker* as I was reading this. The story covered both her life and writing, and apparently she's experienced quite a few setbacks that would devastate a lesser person.

This memoir has kind of a dreamy quality, probably since it was written many years after the fact. I was just plodding along with the story, thinking it was just a pleasant remembrance of a time long ago, but also wondering what the point was really, when the final chapter very movingly explained it all.

I can see a low budget independent movie of this being made with someone like Ellen Page or Jennifer Jason Leigh as Fox.

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### **Margaret Sankey says**

In an impressionistic memoir, Fox describes her time as a stringer for American and British newspapers in the immediate aftermath of WWII in England, France, Czechoslovakia, Spain and Poland, encountering concentration camp survivors, adrift members of the resistance, cynical wheeler dealers and idealistic political strivers, many of whom were hungry for anyone to document their existence.

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### **Judy says**

This brief memoir of the author's time as a young post-war journalist, working as a stringer in Europe, consists of a series of vignettes as the author moves from assignment to assignment. In this respect, it is less a memoir than a series of sketchy recollections assembled into a book. The writing is spare; the author provides just enough detail for the reader to form a vague image of the time and place. The author seemed to be subtly melodramatic at times: I felt as if she were hinting at some bigger event to occur, and there was never anything that came next. Although the book was engaging enough, I did feel disappointed that my expectations of that "greater event" were not met.

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### **Beth says**

Beautifully written (but spare) account of a young journalist traveling in northern Europe immediately after WWII. The book is as much a "coming of age" novel, as it is a bleak portrait of the devastation and destitution Europe faced in the aftermath of the war. Fox is a sublime writer. She perfectly captures the emotions and innocence of a young woman making her way out into the world, as well as providing a bleak portrait of the remains of war.

I have recommended this book to everyone I know.

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### **Nanou says**

En 1946, Paula Fox, âgée de vingt-trois ans, quitte New-York en bateau, en partance pour l'Europe, soulagée de s'éloigner pour un temps de la ville synonyme pour elle de toutes les difficultés de la vie. Vivant successivement à Londres, Paris, Varsovie, Barcelone et Madrid, exerçant des métiers variés, elle découvre les villes européennes juste sorties de la guerre et rencontre tout un tas de gens aux expériences diverses : des rescapés des camps, d'anciens partisans de Tito, la représentante d'une organisation juive enquêtant sur les mesures prises par le gouvernement polonais pour faciliter l'installation des familles juives

en Palestine, des opposants au régime franquiste. La confrontation de son propre vécu à des existences meurtries contribue à la faire définitivement entrer dans l'âge adulte et c'est une autre femme qui reprend le chemin des États-Unis à la fin de cette année européenne.

Comme toujours chez Paula Fox, la plume est distanciée, presque froide, en accord avec les températures qu'elle affronte, en particulier lors d'un voyage de presse en Silesie. Mais j'ai regretté que son propos reste superficiel, lorsqu'elle décrit ses expériences et ses rencontres. Correspondante d'une petite agence de presse britannique à qui elle envoie régulièrement ses articles, elle ne nous en fait partager ni le sujet ni le contenu. Personnellement, j'aurais aimé en savoir un peu plus. D'ici quelques semaines, je doute qu'il me reste beaucoup de souvenirs de ce court livre. Malgré tout, j'ai cru retrouver dans certains des personnages décrits ici quelques figures familières des autres romans de Paula Fox, lus précédemment.

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### **Kelly says**

Fascinating. Very quick read, but extremely evocative. I've read just enough about Europe from WWI to WWII to be familiar with much of what she described. What was most interesting, however, was this vision of how life continued immediately after the war. Somehow, stories that I know seem to just jump to the fifties, particularly the American fifties of prosperity and (relative) contentment. This book really illuminated small lives that lived in the aftermath of those horrible years.

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