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West With The Night: A Memoir



Synopsis

A new edition of a great, underappreciated classic of our time Beryl Markham's *West with the Night* is a true classic, a book that deserves the same acclaim and readership as the work of her contemporaries Ernest Hemingway, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and Isak Dinesen. If the first responsibility of a memoirist is to lead a life worth writing about, Markham succeeded beyond all measure. Born Beryl Clutterbuck in the middle of England, she and her father moved to Kenya when she was a girl, and she grew up with a zebra for a pet; horses for friends; baboons, lions, and gazelles for neighbors. She made money by scouting elephants from a tiny plane. And she would spend most of the rest of her life in East Africa as an adventurer, a racehorse trainer, and an aviatrix—she became the first person to fly nonstop from Europe to America, the first woman to fly solo east to west across the Atlantic. Hers was indisputably a life full of adventure and beauty. And then there is the writing. When Hemingway read Markham's book, he wrote to his editor, Maxwell Perkins: "She has written so well, and marvelously well, that I was completely ashamed of myself as a writer . . . [She] can write rings around all of us who consider ourselves as writers . . . It is really a bloody wonderful book." With a new introduction by Sara Wheeler—one of Markham's few legitimate literary heirs—*West with the Night* should once again take its place as one of the world's great adventure stories.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One of the most beautifully crafted books I have ever read, with some of the most poetic prose passages I could imagine, such as the following, resonating with a stately and timeless quality so

absent in our modern life: There are all kinds of silences and each of them means a different thing. There is the silence that comes with morning in a forest, and this is different from the silence of a sleeping city. There is silence after a rainstorm, and before a rainstorm, and these are not the same. There is the silence of emptiness, the silence of fear, the silence of doubt. There is a certain silence that can emanate from a lifeless object as from a chair lately used, or from a piano with old dust upon its keys, or from anything that has answered to the need of a man, for pleasure or for work. This kind of silence can speak. Its voice may be melancholy, but it is not always so; for the chair may have been left by a laughing child or the last notes of the piano may have been raucous and gay. Whatever the mood or the circumstance, the essence of its quality may linger in the silence that follows. It is a soundless echo.

Born in England in 1902, Markham was taken by her father to East Africa in 1906. She spent her childhood playing with native Maruni children and apprenticing with her father as a trainer and breeder of racehorses. In the 1930s, she became an African bush pilot, and in September 1936, became the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic from east to west. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Markham's *West with the Night* was originally published in the early 1940s and disappeared, only to be rediscovered and reprinted in the 1980s when it became a smash hit. This latest incarnation is a lavishly illustrated edition. Though Markham is known for setting an aviation record for a solo flight across the Atlantic from East to West-hence the title-she was also a bush pilot in Africa, sharing adventures with Blor Blixen and Denys Finch-Hatton of *Out of Africa* fame. Hemingway, who met Markham during his safari days, dubbed the book "bloody wonderful." Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Awesome read! Hemingway gave this the highest of praise and I must agree. I love stories about strong females, especially from the 30's and 40's when it was even harder to do so. Her upbringing and venture off on her own at age 17 and half was incredible. I like that each chapter is a memory from her past and ends at the end of the chapter. The next chapter may be years later when she is much older. You could actually pick this book up and read any chapter without having to start at the beginning if you knew the basic story of her life. Markham has a way with words that sings to you like poetry. I usually pass books on when I am done but this one will stay in my bookcase.

My book club choose this for a month I was unable to attend, so I'm just now catching up with it. I'm sorry I missed the discussion because it would have been interesting to see how it was

received. What a woman she was! Growing up running wild in Africa, independent horse trainer, flyer at a young age, Beryl had a wild streak and an independent spirit. She had a gift for writing, too. She has the ability to make the reader feel she is right there, whether Beryl is making impossible landings, crossing the Atlantic east-to-west in a solo flight, or hunting elephants from the air to spot them. An adventurous woman for an adventurous time.

I didn't know anything about Beryl Markham or where she was raised before I started reading this book. It's a remarkable story that often has nothing to do with flying. Beryl grows up on a ranch in Kenya and had more dangerous adventures and scars than most little girls could survive. It sounds as though she ran wild from a young age which could explain her lack of fear of anything as an adult. There are those who say that Ms. Markham did not write this, that she couldn't have because she didn't have the educational background. My feeling is that she wrote it. A person who didn't live her life could not have written it with the detail and the beautiful expression of feelings and thoughts. And I don't feel that Beryl Markham had the patience to read and reread and say "No, I meant this, not that". This is an amazing book that I am so happy I purchased and read. I am sorry that some people don't feel that way.

The first chapters somehow missed the mark with me. But I am so, so glad I kept reading. It is hard to find the right words to describe this book and the person who wrote. She grew up in the early years of the 20th century hunting barefoot in East Africa with her dog, her spear and Murani men. The rest of her life was no less unconventional. At 17 she set out on her own. Beryl Markham became a recognized horse trainer and bush pilot in the early days of aviation. It is an odd memoir in that there is no mention of her mother, brother, son or husbands yet the story seemed complete without them. It is easy to see why Hemingway praised her writing. It is clean, eloquent and devoid of sentimentality.

This book comes with a built-in audience...women, pilots, lovers of Africa, loners...and, above all, those who love the English language and how descriptive it can be. This is NOT a memoir; more a series of vignettes that Markham put together from her memory which she announces from the beginning that is extremely hard to recover accurately. Reprinted when she was in her 80s, it became a best seller. The original printing was received well, but not nearly so well as when she was rediscovered. It didn't help that many believe she was not the "real" author; she never wrote anything else that came close to the beautiful prose exhibited here. Praised by Hemingway, who

evidently envied her writing skills, fame faded away from this woman whose personality was forbidding (except for her lovers, one presumes) and enigmatic. Not one word about her somewhat unconventional life is present in this volume, but her deep and abiding love for Africa is evident throughout. Worth reading for its use of language and evocative images, don't look for her to reveal the private details of a life that must have been fascinating.

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