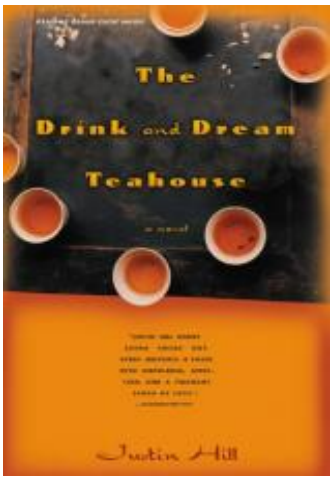
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The Drink and Dream Teahouse: A Novel

by Justin Hill



About the Book

This acclaimed first novel takes us inside China today; into a land filled with contradictions, humor, drama, and beauty; into the small Chinese town of Shaoyang at a moment when the closing of the state-run Number Two Space Rocket Factory throws the contrasts between old world and new world into stark relief. With its soap-operatic array of compelling and wonderfully eccentric characters, **The Drink and Dream Teahouse** introduces a fresh and important new voice.

Discussion Guide

1. China has the longest continuous written history of any civilization in the world. How do the novel's various characters try to come to terms with their past, present, and future? Which character do you think is the most content with his or her life, and why?

2. What messages do you think the quoted lines of poetry convey?

3. What do you believe is Da Shan's motivation for returning to Shaoyang?

4. Da Shan asks for the family genealogy, which Old Zhu re-fuses to tell him. China in pre-liberation times practiced ancestor worship, and many families are able to trace their ancestors back hundreds or even thousands of years. How do you think being the first people not to know their ancestry would affect Da Shan's generation?

5. How much choice does Liu Bei have in letting Little Dragon go? What do you think of Liu Bei's decision to leave Little Dragon behind?

6. Will Madam Fan's plan to marry Da Shan and Liu Bei succeed? Explain why you think it will or won't.

7. The Drink and Dream Teahouse covers one year in the life of people living in Shaoyang. What do you imagine happens after the book ends? How will the characters' lives change?

8. How does the world of **The Drink and Dream Teahouse** fit or differ from your mental images of China?

9. Da Shan and Liu Bei were both involved in the democracy movement of 1989 , which culminated in the Tiananmen Square massacre. How have their futures diverged, and which has stayed truer to their original patriotic intentions?

10. From the perspective of the book, what did it seem China was like before the Communist Liberation? What hopes do you think people had for a Communist China? How much do you think those hopes were realized? How much improvement do you think capitalism brought the lives of the people, and how much has it returned China to its pre-liberation state?

Author Bio

When I look at the facts of my life it seems that I have always been travelling.

I was born in the Bahamas in 1971, crossed the Atlantic in the QEII, went to Florida, and Atlanta. But that was all before I was three years old, when my family settled back in their native Yorkshire. And there I grew up, with no memory of having travelled than anyone else.

What separated me from my classmates was the fact that they had all been born in the local hospital, I was born in Freeport, Grand Bahama Island. When we were asked to write stories on the places we were born, I sat and wrote stories about a place that was no more real than the name. When my classmates asked me if I could speak Bahamian I said yes of course?and spoke a few lines of gibberish.

Yorkshire is famous for three things: pudding, economy and direct talking. The last of the three is certainly something that comes across in my writing. I'm not a writer who elaborates his writing with unnecessary flourishes; nor am I a writer who reaches for a thesaurus when a simple word will do.

I did the usual round of school, senior school, university (Durham?England's third oldest)?where I studied English Language and Medieval Literature. The Literature part I enjoyed, and the social linguistics and pragmatics were fascinating. I think the time I spent recording people speaking, and then transcribing it word by word, and timing and annotating the duration of each pause?has given me a well-trained ear for writing dialogue. Pragmatics (the way language is used as a tool) was fascinating, the rest left me cold. I couldn't understand how people had dedicated their lives to studying Universal Grammar, Phonology, Phonetics, the History of Periphrastic "Do". The attempt to turn language into an equation revolted me.

There are two degrees at university worth getting: a First and a Third. Both require hard work: one to succeed, the other to not get thrown out. It wasn't a complete surprise when I left university with a Third Class degree. It is a writer's degree.

I did a number of jobs to pay off my university debts: postman, furniture delivery man, security guard?where I was

always given the most dangerous jobs because of my size?and hospital kitchen cleaner. Then, when I was 21, I left on a flight to China: taking up a post in remote small town Shanxi.

The time there gave me two things: time to work at my writing?and experiences I could write about. It also gave me a fantastic opportunity to travel through the remoter parts of this fascinating country?and as my Mandarin improved?an increasingly rewarding experience.

The aid agency I was working for had a sound principal: that when a foreigner did the same job they earn the same wage as the locals. This meant I would visit large towns and gaze longingly at the baked beans tins I couldn't afford. It also meant I lived the world looking up at the rich West; as most people in the world live their lives doing.

After three years in China I travelled home via the Silk Route, and found a publisher for my first book A Bend in the Yellow River: an account of my time in China. I left the country again before it was published: this time for Eritrea to take up a teaching post in a small town there. When I was there I wrote an account of the Eritrean struggle in Ciao Asmara. I was in Eritrea for two years: my time cut short when Eritrea and Ethiopia went to war: and I was evacuated as the Ethiopian air force started bombing the airport. It was on the plane out that I had the idea to write a novel.

I was suddenly landed back in the UK, and managed to get a job in Shaoyang, China?starting 3 weeks later. I spent the year slowly crystallising ideas for the novel which I returned to a cottage in northern Britain, and wrote my first novel: **The Drink and Dream Teahouse**

. I wanted to write a book that would sum up everything I thought and felt about modern China. There were so many books about the Cultural Revolution, "misery books" about the sufferings of that time?I was determined to set **The Drink and Dream Teahouse**

in contemporary China. It is a China where the factories are closing, and people are being rammed into the modern age?and like everyone else in the world they are trying to come to terms and make sense of the changes in their lives.

The inspiration for my book came just a week before I left to come home. When the summer was settling in, one of the older members of the college where I taught, died. A marquee was set up; the mourners came out, at night the karaoke singers sang through the night, and it rained: heavy monsoon rain. I travelled back along the Trans-Siberian Railway and kept that scene in my mind: a factory closes, a man dies and then it starts raining.

Critical Praise

"Hill understands, like Tolstoy, that human nature cannot change along with the times....This is a book of exoticisms, intoxicated by the human landscape of the Far East, a place of firecrackers and lotus roots....A first novel filled with sensual delight."

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