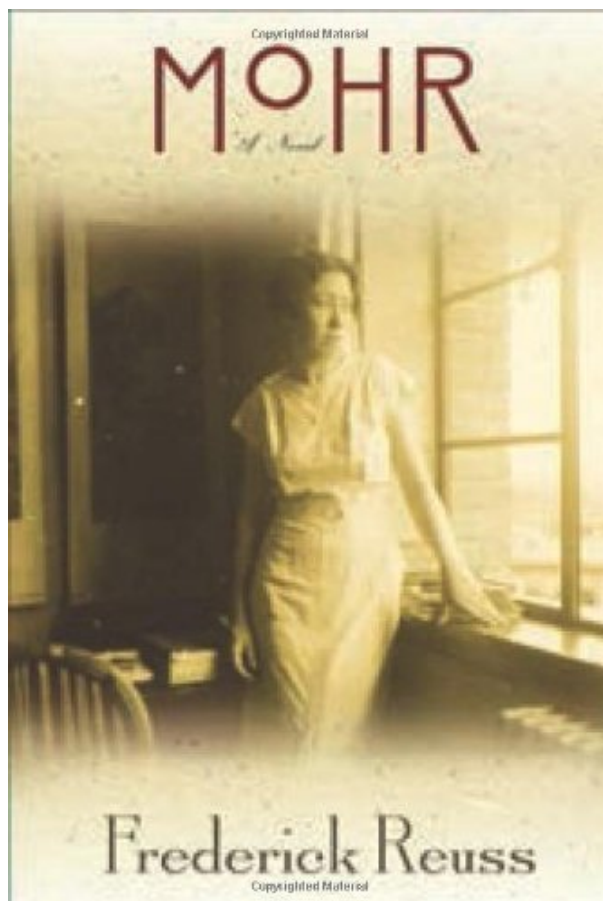


MOHR BY FREDERICK REUSS



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When a solitary man stumbles upon a cache of photographs, sometimes—and only sometimes—he can sense the lives of the people in them. Sometimes he can find in their faces, and in the way they hold themselves or the way they perform before the camera, the light trace of their story.

Following just that path, acclaimed novelist Frederick Reuss has created a love story of historic proportions. *Mohr: A Novel* is about a man and wife whose life together is marked irreparably by a deeply troubled and world-testing era.

With the sort of enthralling narrative step that always marks his work, Reuss allows their story to rise from a cache of photographs he uncovered in Germany—photographs from the 1920s and '30s of the exiled Jewish playwright and novelist Max Mohr; Käthe, the beautiful wife he left behind; and Eva, their daughter, who would live through it all but would never really understand what had happened.

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Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

"Smashing human connections is the easiest thing in the world to do."

By Mary Whipple

Max Mohr was one of author Frederick Reuss's distant relatives, his grandfather's favorite uncle--a physician, friend of D. H. Lawrence, successful playwright, and novelist, who died mysteriously in Shanghai in 1937. Reuss has spent years searching archives for information about Mohr, whose writings were burned by the Nazis. He wants to know, especially, why Mohr left his wife and child, whom he apparently adored, in rural Wolfsgrub, Germany, and, in 1934, set out for China, alone. Using a cache of almost fifty family photographs to provide form for his novel, Reuss now reconstructs the engrossing story of Mohr and his wife Kathe, some of it from letters, much of it imagined.

The result is an insightful story of identity, as Mohr reveals who he is, who he was, and who he might have been. By alternating the setting and point of view between Mohr in Shanghai and his wife Kathe in Wolfsgrub, Reuss establishes dramatic contrasts between Kathe's rural farm life and Max's frantic urban life as he works as a physician during the Chinese civil war and China's battle against Japan. Gradually, the reader recognizes Mohr's inherent contradictions: his apolitical nature but his pragmatism about his future as a Jew in Germany; his naivete in traveling from China to Japan to climb Mount Fuji during Japan's war with China; his love for Kathe and his daughter even as he begins a new relationship; his determination to save lives in China during its war, while leaving his wife and half-Jewish daughter behind in Germany.

As time shifts back and forth, a full picture of Mohr evolves. Mohr recognizes that "he has no good choices...that no good can possibly come from any path he chooses to take," whether he stays in China, returns to his family, or moves elsewhere. "It is only the moment that is real. But it is also only the moment that passes." Ultimately, the reader realizes that the lives of Mohr and Kathe involve a "question of separate destinies, how to be together and apart at the same time."

In exceptionally clear, straightforward prose, Reuss creates an intimate portrait of Mohr and Kathe, while making thoughtful observations about life and human nature. Wartime Shanghai, with all its horror, is seen peripherally here--as it directly affects the life and thinking of Mohr--and when Mohr's story concludes in 1937, the reader is not surprised by the outcome. Ultimately, Mohr remains an enigma, a man who lived in the moment and who, like most of us, can never really be known. As author Reuss journeys into the past, he illustrates one of Kathe's observations about Mohr: "So much of who we are is also all that never was." Mary Whipple

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

super insightful historical novel

By A Customer

Jewish author Dr. Max Mohr, whose latest work *The Diamond Heart* had just been serialized, leaves his native Nazi Germany for war torn China. On the morning he is to depart from his home in the Tegernsee Valley, his weary wife Kathe is sad as if she knows something about her spouse's journey. She wonders why not some place closer like Prague unless they are to remain apart. Their young daughter Eva is excited as her father says his two women will join him soon, but though mom does not dissuade her otherwise she feels that is youthful foolishness. There he becomes a physician in Shanghai while his daughter waits word from him to join him and his wife waits for something else.

Though feeling more like a memoir narrative told in alternating chapters in China (Max's adventures) and Germany (the tales of Kathe and Eva) than a novel, biographical fiction readers will enjoy this interesting look at the highly regarded playwright. The story line is pieced together from family photographs that Frederick Reuss saw with approximately fifty included (part of why the book reads more like a memoir). This is a well written and fascinating period piece that enables readers to compare mid 1930s Germany and China with characters that seem so genuine that the audience can feel the pain of Kathe and the change from euphoria to doubter in Eve. Many readers will be disappointed that Mr. Reuss finally cannot explain why

Mohr didn't take his family. Still this is a super insightful historical novel.

Harriet Klausner

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

From Germany to Shanghai

By ken liebeskind

Max Mohr was a German Jewish writer and doctor who left Germany for Shanghai in 1934 and died in Shanghai in 1937. This is a fictionalized account of his story, full of actual photographs that follow the plot as Mohr recounts his life in the German countryside where he lives on a farm with his wife, Kathe and daughter, Eva. It's an idyllic life but fraught with despair as Mohr's books are banned by the Nazis and he is forced to leave before the Holocaust starts. But he finds war in China as well when the Japanese attack and as a doctor he spends time treating casualties, and eventually becomes one himself when he dies from a heart attack, at least that's what we're told, but he may have been killed because he was Jewish. In China, he falls in love with a nurse and they travel to Japan for a holiday. Mohr actually stays upbeat throughout, always ready with a humorous comment for anyone he comes in contact with. He's not really concerned with his Jewishness although the trauma he experiences is something he reflects on and becomes part of his philosophy, which mixes upbeat humor with the emptiness of life in a cruel, cruel world. Kathe isn't Jewish and remains in Germany, tending the farm and living amicably, but constantly thinking about Mohr, reminiscing about their time together and wondering if they will ever see other again. The book combines the events of their lives with their perceptions of them, which are sometimes philosophical, sometimes bittersweet.

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