



## The Polyglots (Neversink)

*William Gerhardt*

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## **The Polyglots (Neversink)** William Gerhardie

The Anglo-Russian author William Gerhardie was hailed by writers including Graham Greene, Edith Wharton, Evelyn Waugh and others as a “genius,” and this, his long-out-of-print second novel, is generally acclaimed as his comic masterpiece—not to mention “the most influential English novel of the twentieth century,” according to William Boyd.

It tells the unforgettable tale of an eccentric Belgian family living in the Far East during the turbulent years just after the First World War, which displaced them, and the Russian Revolution, which impoverished them.

Recounted by a conceited young English cousin who visits during a military mission, the story is filled with a host of fascinatingly idiosyncratic characters—depressives, obsessives, sex maniacs, and hypochondriacs—often forced to choose between absurdity and tragedy. Yet Gerhardie depicts them as both charming and poignant, as they each struggle for love and safety in tumultuous times . . . and the protagonist finds his conceit shredded as he falls head over heels in love with one of them.

Gerhardie’s portraits of Europeans in exile, attempting to escape from the era’s upheavals, draws on his own experiences as an officer in the British Mission. He has summoned up a world adrift, where war and revolution have broken up the old order, but nothing has come to replace it. And he does it with unforgettable humor and a sharp eye for the absurd.

Hilarious, poignant, panoramic in scope, *The Polyglots* redeems, from the Babel of the interwar period, a stirring vision of love and human sympathy.

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