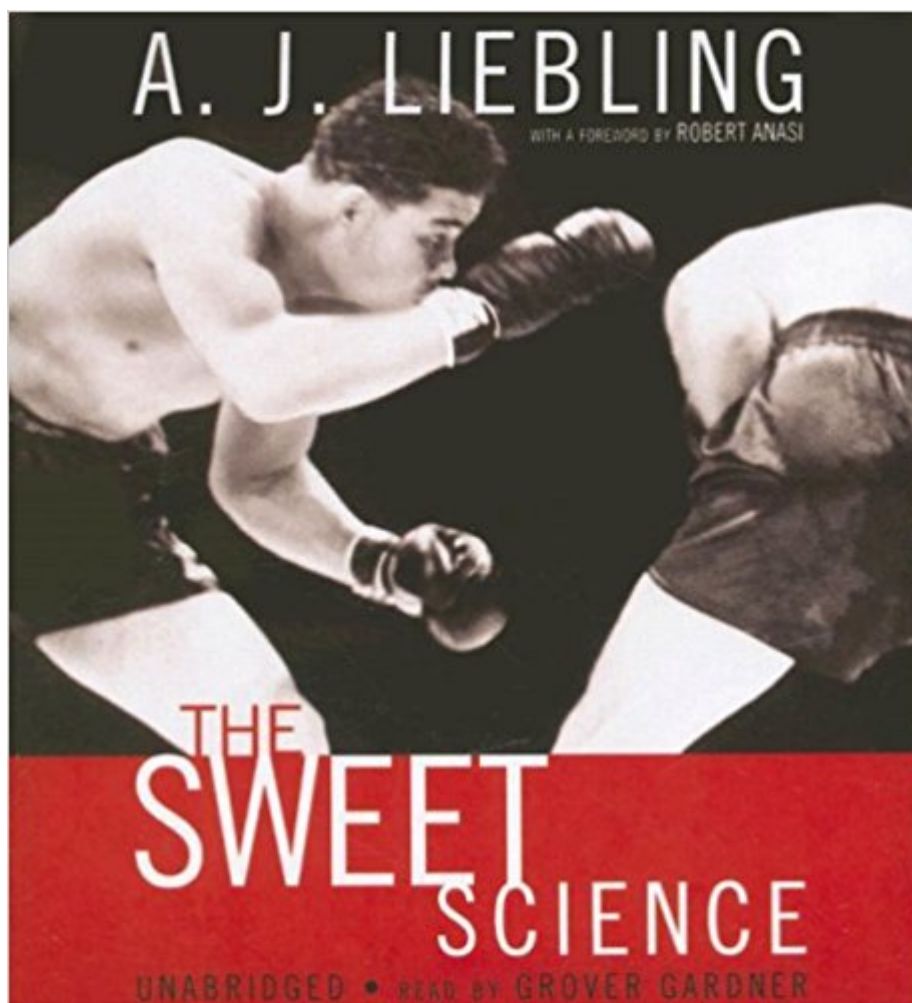




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The Sweet Science



Synopsis

A. J. Liebling's classic New Yorker pieces on the "sweet science of bruising" bring vividly to life the boxing world as it once was. It depicts the great events of boxing's American heyday: Sugar Ray Robinson's dramatic comeback, Rocky Marciano's rise to prominence, Joe Louis's unfortunate decline. Liebling never fails to find the human story behind the fight, and he evokes the atmosphere in the arena as distinctly as he does the goings-on in the ring, a combination that prompted Sports Illustrated to name *The Sweet Science* the best American sports book of all time.

Book Information

Audio CD

Publisher: Blackstone Audio Inc.; Unabridged edition (April 16, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0786158875

ISBN-13: 978-0786158874

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 1.1 x 6.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 50 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,294,795 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #123 in [Books > Books on CD > Sports & Outdoors](#) #192 in [Books > Sports & Outdoors > Miscellaneous > Journalism](#) #441 in [Books > Books on CD > History > United States](#)

Customer Reviews

"Nobody wrote about boxing with more grace and enthusiasm than Joe Liebling." --New York Times

A. J. Liebling (1904-1963), a graduate of the School of Journalism at Columbia University, joined the staff of the New Yorker in 1935. He served as a war correspondent during World War II, writing and filming stories from France, England and the African continent. Liebling is one of the few foreign nationals to have been awarded the Cross of the Legion d'honneur by the French government. Grover Gardner is an award-winning narrator with over eight hundred titles to his credit. Named one of the "Best Voices of the Century" and a Golden Voice by AudioFile magazine, he has won three prestigious Audie Awards, was chosen Narrator of the Year for 2005 by Publishers Weekly, and has earned more than thirty Earphones Awards.

I resisted reading this book, just because, as a lover of boxing and literary journalism, my tendency

is to love books I don't hear praised much, and to find myself underwhelmed by canonized classics. I never liked Leonard Gardner's "Fat City" or W.C. Heinz's "The Professional," but I loved Ralph Wiley's "Serenity" and Tom Hauser's "The Black Lights" about a now-mostly-forgotten champ named Billy Costello. I took the plunge into "The Sweet Science," and while I loved some of the writing, especially the very revealing looks at Archie Moore and Rocky Marciano, those bits not about the Old Mongoose or the Brockton Blockbuster left me relatively cold. Some of this has to do with Liebling's style, which is logorrheic (that sounds like a sexually-transmitted malady, but is just another word for "wordy"). He also demonstrates a weird over-reliance on Pierce Egan's old "Boxiana" treatises on fighting. And he's strangely attached to using the word "cove," which in modern lexicons usually means a recessed area by the sea-line or a sheltered nook, but for him (and probably in other archaic lexicons) means an expert. Some people like this maximalist (sic) approach to their boxing journalism, but it just doesn't work for me, as a matter of personal preference. It's like reading Joyce Carol Oates' essays on Tyson; after awhile I don't want to hear anymore about the quotidian limning of the primal urge instantiated in the ring. Some hyperbole is fine, but I much prefer Mark Kram's eloquence over Liebling's muddled historical metaphors. That said, this is just a personal preference (and I'm in the visible minority with my dissent here), and there are snatches of true poetry in and among the larger whole. Liebling's work is an artifact from a time when men wore cigar-smoke as a kind of cologne, and fights were as apt to happen at the Polo Grounds as at Madison Square Garden. In that sense, the book's a good time capsule, but even if I were searching for something to recommend on pure nostalgic grounds, I'd rather recommend some Budd Schulberg (whose "The Harder they fall" was loosely based on the story of the mafia's connection with heavyweight champ Primo Carnera, later adapted into a great movie starring Humphrey Bogart).

If you enjoys details of the history of boxing and the back door dealings then this is a great spot to start..... "Joe" was a boxing writer for many newspapers from the 20's and 30"s. He was there when the Original Sugar Ray was pounding his way to the top along with Joe Lewis and Rocky Marciano.....and many of the old Champions who got paid little but loved the sport.....The many secrets of the "Sweet Science" are revealed in this great book, It contains many details so has to be read carefully to savor the special contents of his labors and those of the fighters from this generation..... It's a piece of American History that thankfully will not be forgotten because of his writing.....

When I first read this collection of essays about boxing, I thought I noticed a certain sameness about them. Most of the essays follow a pattern - Liebling visits the boxers while they're training, he goes to the bout and describes the fight in some detail, then leaves for home, or often for a bar and reflects on the fight. But the book is so good that immediately after finishing, I felt compelled to read it for a second time, and I noticed that each essay has its own theme, a slightly different and interesting take on the sport. Liebling was an expert on boxing history, and when he wrote these essays had been attending bouts for over thirty years. Often the essays feature names still familiar today - Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, Rocky Marciano. Liebling is erudite and opinionated. He sympathises with the older boxers, and prefers guile to raw punching power. He also dislikes television and cultivates a humourous disdain for fans who go to boxing matches only to be seen. He's the sort of fellow you would like to drink with in a bar because he's utterly fascinating. The whimsical quality of some of his writing is apparent in the following excerpt, when he's describing how putting sparring partners on the preliminary card makes for bad fights: "Sparring partners are endowed with habitual consideration and forbearance, and they find it hard to change character. A kind of guild fellowship holds them together, and they pepper each other's elbows with merry abandon, grunting with pleasure like hippopotamuses in a beer vat." That's great writing. A final note; this book is a window into an different world, the age just before television took hold, when many people still took their amusement outside their homes. Unfortunately, that world is gone, but you can explore it in this wonderful book.

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