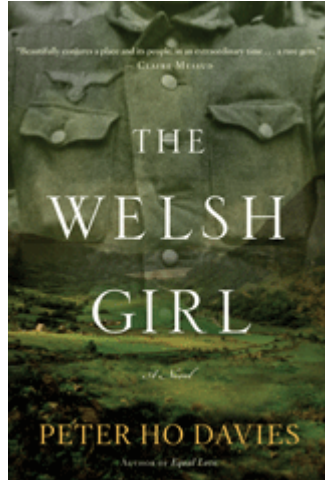


## A Reader's Guide



### The Welsh Girl

by Peter Ho Davies

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### About the Book

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"Beautifully realized...This novel will haunt the reader long after closing the book." —*Oregonian*

### Questions for Discussion

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We hope the following questions will stimulate discussion for reading groups and provide a deeper understanding of *The Welsh Girl* for every reader.

1. The concept of *cynefin* is essential to the life and livelihood of shepherds such as Esther's father. If a flock loses connection with its territory, it will not survive. How does the metaphor weave its way through the novel?
2. The three main characters in *The Welsh Girl* each have some fluency in a second language. What other qualities do Esther, Karsten, and Rotheram have in common? How does their bilingualism shape each of their fates?
3. Esther's hometown is described as "a nationalist village, passionately so. It's what holds the place together, like a cracked and glued china teapot." What problems are inherent in this type of fierce nationalism, and, conversely, are there any benefits? Where else can this nationalism be observed, in the book and in today's world?
4. Secrecy plays a large role in the novel. For example, the purpose of the British Army camp is initially concealed from the villagers. Esther doggedly hides what passed between her and Colin. Karsten misrepresents how he was captured to other prisoners. Rotheram changes his name to obscure his lineage. How do these falsehoods affect outward perceptions, and why are the underlying truths hidden? In your own life, have you ever attempted to keep significant events secret from those around you?

- 5.** Davies has been praised for the vivid pub scenes in *The Welsh Girl*. Is Esther always accurate in her interpretation of what goes on in the pub? How so or how not? In what regard does the pub serve as a microcosm of events outside the pub? What are the driving sources of tension there, and how do they reflect tensions in the world at large?
- 6.** How would you describe Esther's relationship with her father? What bearing might this relationship have on her dealings with Jim, or with Rhys or Colin or Karsten?
- 7.** As a German-born officer in the British Army, Rotheram grapples with serious internal conflict, foremost that of being caught between various cultures. Why is he unable or unwilling to embrace a singular identity? Why does he bristle at being assigned an identity by other people?
- 8.** Discuss how Esther, who has lived on the farm all her life, and Jim, who came to Wales as an evacuee from London, both experience the forces of belonging and alienation. How do other characters such as Karsten and Rotheram experience them as well?
- 9.** How does the landscape of Snowdonia—its rugged hills and green pastures that are so richly evoked—inform the story? Does it surprise you that the war would so intimately affect such a remote area?
- 10.** How does the war change Esther's perceptions of Rhys and Mrs. Roberts, and how does it alter her relationship with them? Do you think she treats them both fairly? How so or how not? What would you have done if you were in her situation?
- 11.** On learning the girl's secret, Mary offers to help Esther and take her to London. Why does Esther make the decisions she does at the end of the book? What effect do you think they'll have on her future and the futures of those around her?
- 12.** What impulse, do you suppose, draws Esther and Karsten together? Why does Esther risk herself to help the German? Can you imagine that their story would have ended differently if they had belonged to another time and place?
- 13.** In your opinion, does geography determine destiny? In other words, does where we're born preordain where our loyalties will fall? How do the events of the novel support your answer? What does Harry mean when he says, "Can't be the butt of a joke if they don't know where you're from"?
- 14.** What do Rotheram's interviews with Rudolf Hess tell you about each of their characters? If it were your call to make, would you have deemed Hess fit for trial?
- 15.** Rotheram observes, "The Jews, he knew, had no homeland, yearned for one, and yet as much as he understood it to be a source of their victimization, it seemed at once such pure freedom to be without a country." How do the events of the novel support this observation?
- 16.** How does each of the main characters' experiences reflect the dehumanizing aspects of war? How has each of them lost something of their innocence? How do their experiences resonate today?

17. Davies provides a brief epilogue that explores what happens to the characters after the war. Were you surprised by the events described there? What outcomes would you have chosen for these characters?

18. Why do you suppose the book was titled *The Welsh Girl*? How do the definitions of the word "welsh" that Davies chooses to precede the novel come to bear on the events and themes of the book?

## For Further Reading

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The following paperbacks from Mariner Books may be of interest to readers who enjoyed Peter Ho Davies' *The Welsh Girl*:

[The Visible World](#) by [Mark Slouka](#)

[Charity Girl](#) by [Michael Lowenthal](#)

[Equal Love](#) by [Peter Ho Davies](#)

[The Ugliest House in the World](#) by [Peter Ho Davies](#)

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