The Land in Winter

by Andrew Miller



About the Book

December 1962: In a village deep in the English countryside, two neighboring couples begin the day. Local doctor Eric Parry commences his rounds in the village, while his pregnant wife, Irene, wanders the rooms of their old house, mulling over the space that has grown between the two of them.

On the farm nearby lives witty but troubled Rita Simmons, who is also expecting. She spends her days trying on the idea of being a farmer?s wife, but her head still swims with images of a raucous past that her husband, Bill, prefers to forget.

When Rita and Irene meet across the bare field between their houses, a clock starts. There is still affection in both their homes; neither marriage has yet to be abandoned. But when the ordinary cold of December gives way --- ushering in violent blizzards of the harshest winter in living memory --- so do the secret resentments harbored in all four lives.

An exquisite, page-turning examination of relationships, THE LAND IN WINTER is a master class in storytelling --- proof yet again that Andrew Miller is one of the most dazzling chroniclers of the human heart.

Discussion Guide

1. Andrew Miller has set a novel on the verge of great change; it?s the 1960s before it?s *the* 1960s. The contraceptive pill has arrived but for married women only. The Beatles are touring but are just another band playing small clubs. Great social change is beginning, particularly for women, but Irene and Rita?s lives still feel limited. What struck you about their friendship? How does their one outing together reveal their differences in both class and their lives at home?

2. Early in the novel, Eric imagines that love ?might just mean a willingness to imagine another?s life.? If this is the case, which characters --- if any --- do you think succeed in loving one another? Which do not?

3. As much as the Big Freeze makes up the setting of THE LAND IN WINTER, so does the recent horror of World War II --- something that skillfully underpins the story, though Miller rarely points the lens directly towards this knowledge. In what ways do you see the characters (who would have been children and teenagers during the war) affected by this?

4. In his suicide note, Stephen Sorey writes that human beings are ?addicted to violence.? Do you think this is true, in the world of the novel?

5. For Miller, writing is ?how you transform yourself, others, the world. It?s your politics. It?s a kind of revolution.? What revolution occurs in THE LAND IN WINTER? What ?moral,? if any, did the novel leave you with?

6. Towards the end of part one, Irene throws an elaborately planned party that much of the village attends. It?s a raucous affair that seems a quintessential snapshot of the 1960s, but it?s also the only part of the novel in which all of the main players are in the same place. This is the calm before the storm both literally and figuratively --- the threads are beginning to fray. At what points during this night do the lives of Irene, Rita, Eric and Bill begin to unravel?

7. The snow, which acts with such powerful force on each of the characters? lives, is described in the novel?s last sentence as ?meaningless.? Do you think the winter itself is portrayed as something with agency?

8. Andrew Miller has said that his characters undergo ?a Hamlet-like struggle towards a moment of being able to act decisively.? What events lead towards this moment for Bill, Eric, Irene and Rita? Do you think the novel?s conclusion is inevitable, the end result of an inescapable buildup? Might things have turned out differently?

9. Much has been made of what swims under the surface of Miller?s work. For this novel, he notes it as an attempt to convey the experience of a moment, of a specific period of time. ?I remember as a schoolboy,? says Miller, ?there being a sort of dare whereby you pressed the tip of your tongue against the terminals of a battery. You got a little shock, not particularly painful, but it made you cry out. That ?cry?, perhaps, is what I?ve tried to get down on the pages here.? What do you think THE LAND IN WINTER is about?

Author Bio

Andrew Miller?s first novel, INGENIOUS PAIN, was published by Sceptre in 1997. It won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the Grinzane Cavour Prize for the best foreign novel published in Italy. It has been followed by CASANOVA; OXYGEN, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the Whitbread Novel of the Year Award in 2001; THE OPTIMISTS; ONE MORNING LIKE A BIRD; PURE, which won the Costa Book of the Year Award in 2011; THE CROSSING; NOW WE SHALL BE ENTIRELY FREE; THE SLOWWORM'S SONG; and THE LAND IN WINTER, which won the Winston Graham Historical Prize and the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction in 2025. Andrew Miller?s novels have been published in translation in 20 countries. Born in Bristol in 1960, he currently lives in Somerset.

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