

The Devlin Diary

Readers Group Guide

Introduction

Teaching history at Trinity College, Cambridge, is Claire Donovan's dream come true – until one of her colleagues is found dead on the banks of the River Cam. The only key to the professor's unsolved murder is the seventeenth-century diary kept by his last research subject, Hannah Devlin, physician to the king's mistress. As Claire and historian Andrew Kent follow the clues Devlin left behind, they discover the life of an extraordinary woman and a hidden conspiracy involving King Charles II which might still have deadly consequences today.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your first impression of Claire Donovan? What did you think of Andrew Kent at the beginning of the novel? How did your feelings about these characters change throughout the story? What were major turning points for you?
2. *The Devlin Diary* has two major settings: the court of Charles II and present-day Trinity College, Cambridge. Each of these places has unique characteristics, yet they share a few similarities. How are these two communities different? How are they similar?
3. Claire Donovan and Hannah Devlin are both strong women in predominantly male cultures. How does each woman approach difficult or delicate situations throughout the book? What is similar and what is different about Claire's and Hannah's situations and personalities? Which female character did you relate to more? Why?
4. What motivates Hannah Devlin to step beyond the circumscribed role of a respectable woman in seventeenth-century London society? What does Hannah appear to sacrifice by flouting society's conventions?
5. "A woman after all. Something inferior to man is his implication – what all men imply when they speak of the "weaker" sex, the "gentler" sex, a woman's modesty." Do you believe that either Claire or Hannah is a feminist? Why or why not? What does it mean to be a feminist?
6. Hannah says, "After Sarah died I was overcome by a great melancholy.... And I prayed as I have never prayed before or since, that I might know the right thing to do" (p. 245). What is the role of God and religion in the novel? How does faith affect the lives of Hannah and Claire? How do they each express their beliefs? Does their faith change throughout the story?
7. Throughout the novel, rumor and innuendo play a large role in shaping people's perceptions. What is different about rumors in the 1670s versus the present day? What is the same? In which time period did rumors play a larger role?

8. Many of the characters in this novel harbor secrets from others and many characters are not entirely honest with themselves. Which characters in both the historical and contemporary stories seem straightforward and at ease with themselves and their desires?
9. Ralph Montagu and Edward Strathern, two very different male characters, are attracted to Hannah Devlin. Do the same aspects of Hannah's character attract each man? How did your opinion of each man change during the course of the novel?
10. What is the role of Theophilus Ravenscroft in the novel? Do you believe the author inserted him in the historical story merely to provide some comic relief? Does he have a counterpart in the contemporary story?
11. "Is Madame Severin truly dangerous or simply mad?" (p. 256) Which did you believe while you were reading? Why?
12. How is Colbert de Croissy, the French ambassador, different from the English courtiers at King Charles's court? What differences between French and English cultures during the late seventeenth-century do you infer from the novel?
13. How does the author use language and imagery to bring the characters to life? Did the novel's characters or style remind you of another novel in any way?
14. Several characters during the course of the novel seem to have ulterior motives or act oddly. "Odd is simply odd - anyone can see it. Or, at least, most people can see it, if they're paying attention." Claire points out that Andrew Kent does not seem to have the ability to notice when someone is acting oddly. Do you believe that women have this innate ability more often than men?
15. Lord Arlington says, "Innocence is but a commodity in this world." Is this statement more true in 1672 or in the present day? How would the two protagonists feel about this statement? Do you believe that it is an accurate statement about real life? Why or why not?
16. Whose story is *The Devlin Diary*? If you had to pick one, is it Claire's story or is it Hannah's? Why? Who changes the most from the beginning to the end?
17. How did this book touch your life? Did it inspire you to do or learn something new?