

land like Mark Twain's St. Petersburg, or Trollope's Barset, or Hardy's Dorset. It is their private, half-spiritual domain, and they call it by this name because the gold and purple of the heath remind them of Byron's —

"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold
And his cohorts were gleaming with purple and gold."

Their love story has another patron poet, the American idealist Alan Seager, whose Sennacharib was pre-World War I Paris, and who gave his life to defend it. Diana and John love Seager, for they find in him the secret of eternal youth.

The story begins in 1927, when John, trespassing in his beloved retreat, is assaulted by a Gayelorde-Sutton gamekeeper and rescued by the queenly Diana, riding out of the woods on a gray pony like some nymph from a Greek legend. From this moment, the day of his fifteenth birthday, his life is devoted to a single object—the winning of Diana and their establishment in Sennacharib as man and wife. Everything he does, everything he thinks, is a move towards the fulfillment of this dream. He strides through the years like a man in pursuit of the Holy Grail, combating not only Diana's wealth, background, and sneering family, but Diana herself, who is swept along by a restlessness she herself does not understand.

And all the time the long shadow of Hitler's Germany moves across Europe, darkening so many dreams and herding both Diana and John towards the climax of the book in a France reeling under the impact of the German Panzers.

To sum up: However practical are our lives, we all, to a greater or lesser degree, spend most of them in the pursuit of dreams. John Leigh's passion for the seemingly unattainable Diana is really a hark back to the chivalric days of knightly endeavor, an attempt to rescue a lady from a tower, one might almost add from a centrally heated, plush-lined tower, that she wasn't madly anxious to leave. Diana's mother, Mrs. Gayelorde-Sutton, is seeking, through her strangled accents and monstrous social pretension, the simple security of a county dame. Her mistake was in not realizing that the age of these ladies had been ground to dust in the cogs of machines. Diana herself ranges farther than any of them. She is seeking a return to the early morning of the world, before Pandora's box was opened, when shepherds piped, birds sang all day long, and youth was as eternal as the stars.

Yet in the end all three return to earth, Mrs. Gayelorde-Sutton in order to earn three square meals a day, and John and Diana to oppose German supermen who, by outlawing humanity, also outlaw dreams.

About the Author

R. F. Delderfield



R. F. DELDERFIELD was born in London in 1912 and grew up in a London suburb and in Devonshire. He became a reporter, later editor, on a small weekly newspaper, leaving it for the R.A.F. in 1939. On his return in 1945 he became a freelance writer. He is the author of many plays, the most successful of which, *Worm's Eye View*, ran in London for five and a half years. Since 1956 he has turned to novel writing. He runs an antique shop in Devonshire, where he lives with his wife and two teen-age children.

Mr. Delderfield writes, "My real aim in writing *Diana* was to protest against the cheapening and exploitation of young love in current fiction and entertainment. I wrote it in the spirit of the Pre-Raphaelites in the mid-nineteenth century—a plea for the return of the Romantic Age—or reaction, if you like, against the squalor of our Angry Young Men's approach to Romance—and that of your Beatniks."

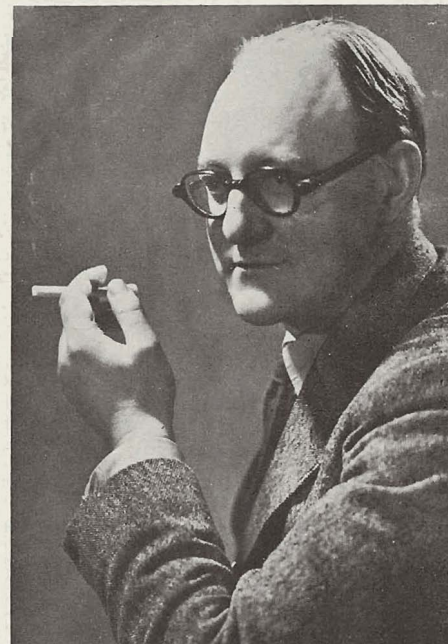


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