

THE WISH
HOUSE
CELIA REES

FROM THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF *WITCH CHILD*

The Welsh Books Council has named *The Wish House* to their shortlist for the 2006 Tir na n-Og Award for best English-language title!

SYNOPSIS

As the novel opens, Richard is on his way to an art gallery for an exhibit of works by Clio Dalton and her father, the late Jethro “Jay” Dalton. Clio, who sent Richard the invitation, was his first adolescent love, and he is attending mostly out of curiosity. Six years have passed since their fateful summer together. . . .

At the beginning of that summer, fifteen-year-old Richard expects the vacation with his parents at the shore to be like any other. His mother takes her usual break from domestic chores, and his father spends his days fishing. Richard plans to hang out with his friend Dylan, who lives in the seaside village year round and works on his father’s farm. In past summers, the two boys spent time exploring the woods and visiting their favorite places, including the ruined Wish House.

Richard is dismayed, however, when Dylan seems older and is too busy working to spend time with him. Left on his own, Richard wanders in the woods and onto the Wish House property. He discovers that a family has moved into the deserted house where he and Dylan used to play. The Wish House’s owner is well-known artist Jethro “Jay” Dalton, and the place is alive with people—exotic people—from Richard’s perspective. Richard first meets Lucia, Jay’s free-spirited wife, then Clio, their wild and unpredictable daughter. Clio and Richard begin a whirlwind romance in the woods that surround the Wish House. They spend evenings camped out among the trees, their passions soaring as their relationship deepens. Richard becomes a fixture at the Wish House, even posing for Jay’s paintings.

People come and go from the Wish House. Meg, Jay’s first wife, comes for part of the summer, along with her children, Clio’s half-siblings. Friends come by for a day or a week, all enjoying the open hospitality of the Wish House. Soon, Richard is comfortable among them all. But from time to time, jealousy rears its head as Richard sees other young men vie for Clio’s attention. The summer comes to a shuddering end when Richard learns that Clio is also involved with an older man. Jumping to a mistaken conclusion, Richard destroys some of Jay’s precious work. By the time Richard returns to the city, life has changed forever and the Wish House is once more deserted.

During the exhibit opening, Richard and Clio visit for a short time. Richard leaves the art show older, wiser, and perhaps finally released from Clio’s spell.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Richard: a young man attending an art exhibit and remembering his momentous fifteenth summer

Clio: Jay and Lucia’s daughter

Jethro Arnold Dalton (Jay): artist and owner of the Wish House

Lucia: Jay’s second wife

Joe: Jay and Lucia’s son

Dylan: Richard’s best friend

Martin: photographer and friend of the Daltons

Hammond: art dealer and friend of the Daltons

Meg: Jay’s first wife

DISCUSSION POINTS

Before reading:

1. What possible meanings could the book’s title have? What is the significance of calling a house a “wish” house?
2. Why might the author choose to tell part of the story through painting captions?

While reading:

1. What are some of the ways in which nature and death are connected in this book? Consider the herbs from the witch’s garden, the motif of drowning, and the metaphoric death of love. As the story grows wilder, so does the plant life. How does Richard react to losing control? Does Richard feel comfortable as part of nature? How does his connection to nature differ from that of the Dalton family? Make note of any mentions of nature out of control.
2. Make note of the titles of the various paintings by Jay Dalton that are described in the book. Who are the subjects of and models for each of the paintings? How do these paintings and their descriptions relate to events that unfold in the book? How do the exhibit notes affect the pace of the story?
3. Note the titles and nature of the pieces in Clio’s show that are not her father’s work. What do they reflect?
4. Names of characters are significant in this story. At first Lucia mocks Richard’s stammering rendition of his first name. Clio calls her father by his first name. Are there other examples of the role names play in the novel? Consider the titles of the various Dalton paintings.

After reading:

1. Now that the reading is complete, revisit the title of the novel. What is the possible significance of the title now that the story has come to an end? Why did Richard and Dylan call this place the Wish House?
2. Why might the author have elected to tell the story in flashback form? What do readers gain by meeting an older version of Richard before flashing back to the summer he was fifteen?
3. Figurative language abounds in the novel. Allusions to other works of literature and other works of art, as well as similes and metaphors, all serve to underscore not only the lyricism of the writing but the magic of Richard's summer as well. For example, there is a reference to the Vale of Illusion, a valley near the Wish House. What might this mean in the story's context? Note how Rees uses various forms of figurative language in a selected chapter or throughout the novel. Try describing a place that is special to you using figurative language.
4. Lucia is fascinated by what she terms not coincidence but "synchronicity" (p. 62). Find examples of synchronicity (as Lucia would define it) in the novel. How do these synchronous events serve to move the plot forward to its inevitable conclusion? Have you ever had a synchronous experience?
5. Tarot cards and the witch's garden are key elements to the plot. How do these play a significant role in the story? How does the theme of foretelling interact with the structure of flashback used by the author? Do you believe there is any power in tarot readings and the I Ching? Have you ever had your fortune told or used something to see what your future holds?
6. Jay remarks that "transience is the artist's tragedy. . . . They hang on to things" (p. 169). What does this sentiment tell readers about Jay? How does this same remark relate to other characters, most notably Richard?
7. Clio, Dylan, and Richard are all becoming adults, yet they are still influenced by their families and particularly their parents. How does each of them react to this influence? Can you see the different sorts of freedom from and reliance upon their parents that each has? Which seems the most limiting? Which situation would you prefer for yourself?
8. Why do you think most of the novel takes place over one summer? Does "growing up" happen at a different pace during the summer? What does the reflection of six years add to the summer's perspective on "growing up"?
9. Does your opinion of Clio change throughout the book? Does Richard become the adult you expected him to be? Does Clio?

AN INTERVIEW WITH CELIA REES

- Q.** *It has been said that the germ of an idea for a novel is akin to the sand in the oyster. What is that piece of sand for you? Is it character, an event, a mood? How did **The Wish House** begin forming its pearl?*
- A.** With *The Wish House*, the grit in the oyster was a house—or three houses, to be precise. The first was a wonderfully atmospheric derelict house that I saw on a visit to the Shetland Isles. The second house belonged to friends of a friend who were artists and had bought an old stone house in Wales and lovingly restored it. The third house is one that I'd known for years. It's in a different part of Wales and looks out to sea. I'd always wanted to live there, so I made the location of this house the setting for the story.
- Q.** ***The Wish House** is told mostly in flashback as Richard's arrival at the gallery sends his thoughts back to the summer he met Clio. Was that a conscious decision on your part? Was there a reason for the story to have this "frame" of sorts?*
- A.** It was a conscious decision, but not one I made immediately. I was going to be writing about artists, so I naturally wanted to show their work. I knew that the book would probably not be illustrated, so I wanted to have a way of "showing" the art to the reader. An exhibit seemed the obvious answer. Then I realized that I could also show Richard and Clio when they were older and put some distance between them and the experience of that summer.
- Q.** *The details you provide about art and the artistic process made me wonder if you have a background in art yourself. Do you? If not, how did you research this process?*
- A.** I can't draw or paint—I wish I could! I'm interested in visual arts, though, and find them very inspirational. I collect a lot of visual reference when I'm writing, rather like an artist might, and I have friends who are artists. Although our disciplines are different, I'm always fascinated by the way they work and feel a great creative affinity to them.
- Q.** *There are so many firsts in this story: first love, first betrayal, first loss. Were you conscious as you wrote the novel that these archetypal themes would emerge and later converge?*
- A.** With this book, I consciously wanted to address *experience* rather than having an event-led narrative. Adolescence is a very intense time, full of change and new experiences. That's why writers find it so interesting! Everyone seems to have had at least one summer when everything seemed to happen at once and after which you'll never be the same again. A time you'll never forget. I know I did! It's called growing up, I guess.

Q. Can you talk about some of the allusions in the novel? I thought I heard echoes of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as well as, of course, references to Arthurian and Welsh legends.

A. The book is set in South Wales, an area steeped in Celtic myth: Arthurian legend as well as the Welsh story cycle of the Mabinogion. Jay, the artist at the center of the story, has a powerful sense of place and draws on this wellspring of myth as a constant source of inspiration. He is a creator of illusions, so it is inevitable that he will in some ways identify with Merlin, or Mâth the Magician. These allusions to myth have resonance for him and, in turn, reveal aspects of his character.

OTHER BOOKS TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST

- *The Arizona Kid* by Ron Koertge (Candlewick Press, 2005)

Sixteen-year-old Billy spends the summer with his gay uncle in Tucson and works at a racetrack, where he falls in love with an outspoken horse exerciser named Cara Mae.

- *Drawing Lessons* by Tracy Mack (Scholastic, 2000)

When Rory's artist father leaves home, she must learn how to live and create her own artwork without him.

- *Graven Images* by Paul Fleischman (Candlewick Press, 2006)

A trio of eerie, beguiling short stories about the unexpected ways in which an artist's creations can reveal truths.

- *Kissing Tennessee and Other Stories from the Stardust Dance*

by Kathi Appelt (Harcourt, 2000)

Short stories about firsts: dances, crushes, loves, betrayals, losses.

- *Trash* by Sharon Darrow (Candlewick Press, 2006)

Two teen siblings run from foster life—and find new expression as graffiti artists—in a stark but hopeful poetic novel.

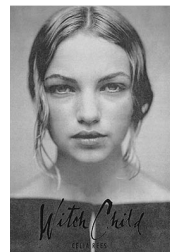
- *A Trick of the Eye* by Dennis Haseley (Dial Books, 2004)

When Richard talks to characters in paintings, they respond.

- *Vegan Virgin Valentine* by Carolyn Mackler (Candlewick Press, 2004)

Mara Valentine is a straight-A senior, a vegan, and her parents' pride and joy. What does a control freak like Mara do when things start spinning wildly out of control?

OTHER BOOKS BY CELIA REES



Witch Child

HC ISBN-13: 978-0-7636-1421-8, ISBN-10: 0-7636-1421-1
PB ISBN-13: 978-0-7636-1829-2, ISBN-10: 0-7636-1829-2



Sorceress

HC ISBN-13: 978-0-7636-1847-6, ISBN-10: 0-7636-1847-0
PB ISBN-13: 978-0-7636-2183-4, ISBN-10: 0-7636-2183-8

WEBSITES

About herbology:

<http://magdalin.com/herbal/>

How to “read” a painting:

www.kcsd.k12.pa.us/-projects/critic

About tarot cards and tarot readings:

www.learntarot.com

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



When the teenage students in Celia Rees’s English classes complained that they couldn’t find the kind of books they wanted to read, she determined to do something about it. The long-time secondary-school teacher had heard an exciting true story that she thought would make a great plot—one that her young readers could identify with—and her plan fell quickly into place. “I’ll have a go at writing that,” she decided, and forged ahead at writing her first book, *Every Step You Take*.

Many books for teenagers have followed, including the riveting, best-selling novel *Witch Child* and its sequel, *Sorceress*. The author says that ever since *Witch Child* was published, she has been “overwhelmed by the way readers have responded to Mary and her struggle to maintain her own identity.”

When she’s not writing, Celia Rees likes to read, watch contemporary thrillers, swim, and take long walks. She has a daughter, Catrin, who has “gone and grown up” and is now a lawyer in London. Celia lives with her husband in Warwickshire, England.

Celia Rees’s books are available wherever books are sold and through educational distributors nationwide.

Discussion guide written by Teri Lesesne, who teaches young adult literature in Texas and is the author of *Making the Match: The Right Book for the Right Reader at the Right Time* (Stenhouse Publishers, 2003) and *Naked Reading* (Stenhouse Publishers, 2006)

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