

Dinah Jefferies

Contemporary Authors Online. 2017.

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Updated: Dec. 21, 2017

Born: 1948 in Malacca, Malaysia

Nationality: British

Occupation: Novelist

Updated: Dec. 21, 2017

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PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born 1948, in Malacca, Malaya; married Jon Owen (divorced); married Richard Jefferies, 1998; children: Jamie (son), one daughter. **Education:** Attended Birmingham College of Art; Graduate of University of Ulster. **Addresses:** Home: Gloucestershire, England.

CAREER:

Writer and educator. Dartington Hall School, Dartington, England, teacher. Previously, worked as an au pair in Italy.

WORKS:

WRITINGS:

The Separation, Penguin (New York, NY), 2014.

The Tea Planter's Wife: A Novel, Crown (New York, NY), 2016.

The Silk Merchant's Daughter, Viking (New York, NY), 2016.

Before the Rains, Penguin (New York, NY), 2017.

Contributor to periodicals, including the *Sunday Express*, *Daily Mail*, and *Guardian*.

Sidelights

Dinah Jefferies is a British writer. Born in British Malaya, she moved with her family to England as a child. Jefferies earned a degree in English from the University of Ulster. For a time, she taught at Dartington Hall School, a boarding school in Devon, England. She released her first book, *The Separation*, in 2014, when she was sixty-five.

In *The Separation*, Lydia searches for her husband and children, who mysteriously disappeared while she was out of town. Her daughter, Emma, narrates another section of the book and hopes to be

reunited with her mother.

Jade Craddock, a writer in the *Bookseller*, noted that the book was "at times harrowing and always stirring." "This is ... a heartfelt and absorbing story about tragedy and loss, love and forgiveness, and it will appeal to a wide audience," asserted a contributor to the *Historical Novel Society* Web site. Reviewing the book on the *South China Morning Post* Web site, Tessa Chan commented: "This is a worthy debut that not only provides insight on this dark moment in Malaya's history, but is also an ode to maternal love--to the powerful bond that links Emma and her mother from across the world." Louise Jones, a critic on the *Bookbag* Web site, remarked: "The pace was slow and the narrative excessively wordy in places, which made the plot drag." However, Jones concluded: "Despite these irritations, the book also has [many] redeeming features. Emma is a delightful character and the parts of the story written from her teenage perspective are a pleasure to read."

An Englishwoman named Gwen moves to Ceylon with her new husband, Lawrence, in *The Tea Planter's Wife: A Novel*. There, she interacts with a variety of colorful characters. Discussing the development of the book's plot in an interview with Tracey Warr, a writer on the *Displaced Nation* Web site, Jefferies remarked: "Sometimes I have the kernel of an idea before I hit on the location. For *The Tea Planter's Wife* I did have the idea of a life-changing secret before I chose Sri Lanka--or Ceylon as it was then known."

Catherine Coyne, a reviewer in *Library Journal*, commented: "This atmospheric and suspenseful novel is reminiscent of Daphne du Maurier's classic *Rebecca* and will enthrall fans of gothic romances." A *Publishers Weekly* critic described the volume as "an engrossing tale of mystery, manners, and prejudice set against the backdrop of Ceylon." John Charles, a contributor to *Booklist*, called it "a superbly written novel that readers of historical fiction as well as women's fiction will treasure." Writing on the *New York Journal of Books* Web site, D.R. Meredith asserted: "Love, suspense, guilt, and hidden secrets with an underlying theme of race relations seamlessly blend together in a timeless story of an innocent young Englishwoman struggling to find her place in colonial Ceylon against unexpected circumstances and facing cruel choices." Meredith added: "Although many younger readers may wish Gwen was more feisty and less prone to fits of crying, Jefferies stays true to the times and the customs of social behavior. All in all *The Tea Planter's Wife* is an enjoyable read."

The Silk Merchant's Daughter tells the story of a half-Vietnamese, half-French girl, who has romantic feelings for both an American business contact of her father's and a Vietnamese activist. In the same interview with Warr on the *Displaced Nation* Web site, Jefferies commented on how the setting of the book inspired its story. She stated: "It's all about sensory detail. For my third book, *The Silk Merchant's Daughter*, set in Vietnam, it was all about evoking the contrast between the elegant French quarter of Hanoi, as opposed to the clutter and noise of the ancient Vietnamese quarter with canaries singing in bamboo cages and the scent of charcoal and ginger in the air. The setting has to work to support the story in some way, ... as this is a story of a woman caught between two worlds. I needed to show how different those two worlds were."

Pam Norfolk, a reviewer on the *Lancashire Post* Web site, suggested: "This is a story that comes alive not just because of the tingling undercurrents of mystery, rivalry and simmering suspense but through the power of Jefferies' evocative prose, which draws us into an alluring, 'other' world of sun-filled, ancient streets." "Evocative descriptions of life in French Indochina intertwined with a brutally truthful depiction of a country in a state of war make this a gripping read," asserted a critic on the *Historical Novel Society* Web site.

In an interview with a contributor to the *Linda's Book Bag* Web site, Jefferies described the plot of her 2017 novel *Before the Rains*. She stated: "This book is an unashamed love story set in Rajasthan, India, which is the most gloriously romantic place I've ever been--India's hilltop forts and ornate palaces were magical and I hope to go back. But, as is usual with my books, there is an edge. When Eliza, a photojournalist, is sent to a princely state to photograph the royal family she's determined to make a name for herself." Jefferies continued: "But when she arrives at the palace she meets, Jay, the

prince's handsome brooding brother. She is enchanted by him and by India but can't ignore the shocking poverty she sees around her, nor the plight of women. Gradually she awakens to the injustices of British rule too and must find her way in this alien world. The bond between Eliza and Jay is powerful and they have much in common, but their families and society have different ideas, and she is left with heart-breaking choices."

Nell Young, a contributor to the *Culturefly* Web site, commented: "Jefferies describes the complex emotions of love and loss with extreme sensitivity, and coupled with the steamy settings of her book, it makes for a heady concoction, providing the perfect setting for her strong, independent female protagonists." "Dinah Jefferies' ability to conjure up the sights, smells, tastes and atmosphere of a particular country at a particular time in her writing is second to none," asserted a writer on the *One More Page* Web site. The same writer called the book "an emotional and gripping read ... with excellent pace and fantastic locations."

FURTHER READINGS:

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

Booklist, July 1, 2016, John Charles, review of *The Tea Planter's Wife: A Novel*, p. 42.

Bookseller, May 23, 2014, Jade Craddock, "We Love This Book," review of *The Separation*, p. 20.

Library Journal, September 1, 2016, Catherine Coyne, "Second Wives," review of *The Tea Planter's Wife*, p. 94.

Publishers Weekly, July 18, 2016, review of *The Tea Planter's Wife*, p. 183.

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Bookbag, <http://www.thebookbag.co.uk/> (May 13, 2017), Louise Jones, review of *The Separation*; Ani Johnson, review of *Before the Rains*.

Culturefly, <http://culturefly.co.uk/> (February 23, 2017), Nell Young, review of *Before the Rains*.

Dinah Jefferies Home Page, <http://www.dinahjefferies.com> (May 13, 2017).

Displaced Nation, <https://thedisplacednation.com/> (December 3, 2016), Tracey Warr, author interview.

Historical Novel Society, <https://historicalnovelsociety.org/> (May 13, 2017), Carole McEntee-Taylor, review of *The Separation*; review of *The Silk Merchant's Daughter*.

Kirkus Reviews Online, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/> (June 22, 2016), review of *The Tea Planter's Wife*.

Lancashire Post Online, <http://www.lep.co.uk/> (February 22, 2016), Pam Norfolk, review of *The Silk Merchant's Daughter*.

Linda's Book Bag, <https://lindasbookbag.com/> (February 19, 2017), author interview.

New York Journal of Books, <http://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/> (May 13, 2017), D.R. Meredith, review of *The Tea Planter's Wife*.

One More Page, <http://www.onemorepage.co.uk/> (February 20, 2017), review of *Before the Rains*.

South China Morning Post Online, <http://www.scmp.com/> (May 25, 2014), Tessa Chan, review of *The Separation*.

Writer at Play, <http://www.writeratplay.com/> (January 21, 2017), author interview.*

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)

"Dinah Jefferies." *Contemporary Authors Online*, Gale, 2017. *Biography In Context*,
http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/H1000325720/BIC?u=23069_lcls&sid=BIC&xid=e8bb85ee.
Accessed 25 May 2018.

Gale Document Number: GALE|H1000325720