

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Katherine Arden is an American novelist. Born in Texas, Katherine studied French and Russian at Middlebury College. She has lived abroad in France and in Moscow, among other places.

Known primarily for her *Winternight* trilogy of fantasy novels, which are set in medieval Russia and have garnered nominations for Hugo and Locus Awards, she is also the author of the *Small Spaces* series of horror novels for middle grade children. The first in the latter series, *Small Spaces*, won the Vermont Golden Dome Book Award in 2020.

She currently lives in Vermont.

Goodreads/Wikipedia.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Arden was originally inspired to set her novel in WWI based on a photograph of a German calvary soldier wielding a spear and wearing a gasmask. How familiar were you with WWI and did you learn anything new or unexpected through this story?
2. The book's title was inspired by the memoir "Ghosts Have Warm Hands" by Will R. Bird, in which a soldier describes being guided by his brother's ghost. Encounters with ghosts and the supernatural are frequently mentioned in World War I memoirs. Why do you think these themes are so common in accounts from this war?
3. In the beginning of the book we are introduced to three Parkey sisters who can speak with ghosts. They tell Laura that her brother Freddie is not dead and that she needs to find him. Were you skeptical of their powers?
4. There were many fantastical elements to the book. Laura seems to be haunted by her mother's ghost, Faland's hotel, mirror, and violin. So, were the fantastical elements of the book real or a reaction to the trauma they experienced?
5. *The Warm Hands of Ghosts* is set during World War I, even though novels set during World War II tend to be more popular. Why do you think the author chose World War I as the backdrop for her novel?

6. The novel alternates between the viewpoints of siblings Laura and Freddie. Did you prefer one character's perspective over the other? What drew you to their viewpoint? Conversely, was there a perspective you found less engaging?
7. Laura and Freddie both encounter Faland, the mysterious hotelier and violinist, who offers them a glimpse into their heart's desires through his mirror. Who is Faland, and what significant role does he play in the novel?
8. Those who visit Faland's hotel and leave go insane trying to find him again, but many also disappear to never be seen again. How was Freddie able to escape from Faland?
9. Reflect on what happened to Pim's son, Jimmy. Was it necessary? How did you feel upon discovering Gage's involvement in Jimmy's fate, and what are your thoughts on Pim's reaction to finding out what happened to her son.
10. What motivates Wilfred Ivan to help the German soldier, Winter, to the point of committing murder and deserting the army? Was his decision justified, and is it possible to find justice in the chaos of war?
11. Freddie and Winter share a traumatic experience, while Laura faces her own wartime trauma. After the war ends, they must all find ways to move forward. How do each of these characters cope with their trauma. Do you think they will be successful in their efforts to rebuild their lives?
12. Arden's previous adult novels are set in medieval Russia, a time we know about only through secondary sources. How would writing a novel set in World War I be different? Arden is also interested in where myth meets history. Discuss the differences of myth, history and where they overlap.

Staff Librarian

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Laura's been discharged from her position as an army-hospital nurse in Belgium in 1918, but an eerie message during a séance and a puzzling box of her brother's belongings send her back to the front to find answers. With swirling atmosphere and supernatural elements emerging organically alongside the facts of history, Arden (*The Bear and the Nightingale*, 2017) thoughtfully weaves together the brutality of war and the tightrope walk between hope and despair. Ghosts are on the mind of just about every soldier in Laura's hospital, but there's one man in particular they keep talking about: Faland, whom soldiers obsessively seek out, and who just might know what happened to Laura's brother. Tension builds as chapters alternate between Laura and her brother's perspectives and the truth becomes ever more sinister. Arden excels at sumptuous, immersive world building, and the muddy, foggy, war-ravaged landscape comes vividly to life in her hands, especially the otherworldly places that seem to flit in and out of sight. Fans of historical fiction and earthy ghost stories will appreciate this arresting tale.

Publisher's Weekly

Arden (*The Bear and the Nightingale*) blends a meticulously researched WWI epic, an eloquent family saga, and a touch of the supernatural in this breathtaking historical fantasy. Nurse Laura Iven returns home to Halifax, Nova Scotia, after being wounded on the Western Front and honorably discharged from the medical corps. When she learns in early 1918 that her soldier brother Freddie--her last living family member--is missing and presumed dead, she's overwhelmed with questions, so she volunteers to return to Belgium, where she'll work at a private hospital and seek answers in her limited spare time. The narrative shifts between Laura's perspective and Freddie's own, a year prior, as he falls in with a mysterious and potentially mystical new friend, adding captivating depth and tension to an already intriguing premise. Arden's carefully constructed plot makes each unexpected twist feel as inevitable as it is shocking. Through resonant prose, she literalizes the apocalyptic qualities of WWI while dwelling in moral complexity and delivering vibrant, fully fleshed-out characters. The interwoven supernatural elements lend the historical details greater weight. The result is a powerful page-turner.

Library Journal

Laura nursed soldiers during the Great War until an injury sent her home to Halifax, where the war followed her in a harbor explosion that killed her parents. Her brother Freddie is all she has left, so when Laura receives suspicious news of his death, she returns to the front line to find the truth. Freddie dug his way out of a shelled bunker alongside a German soldier. Unwilling to return to being enemies, they flee the trenches and encounter a fiddler who offers a magical escape from the war, for a price. Arden's World War I setting is visceral, with real-world horrors that make warm-handed ghosts and seductive devils comforting in comparison. The touch of fantasy enhances the uncanny, shifting realities of a world in turmoil as Laura's search for her brother brings her closer to the fiddler and a choice between man-made despair and supernatural oblivion. The wartime bonds Laura and Freddie forge ground the story and leave readers hoping for them to find an escape that doesn't cost their souls. VERDICT Like the fiddler himself, Arden's (*The Winter of the Witch*) gripping historical fantasy will draw readers in and keep them engaged.

Kirkus Reviews

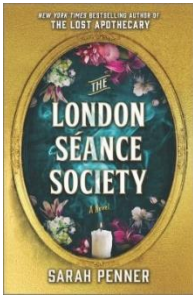
Set on and off the battlefields of Belgium in the final year of World War I, this novel adds a supernatural touch to its vividly realized historical details. Arden moves on from her fantasies set in medieval Russia--*The Bear and the Nightingale* (2017) is the first in the trilogy--to a more realistic and often grueling depiction of the horrors of war. In January 1918, 24-year-old combat nurse Laura Iven has been sent home from Flanders to Halifax, Nova Scotia, after receiving serious wounds. When she's notified that her younger brother, Freddie, who's serving in Belgium, is missing and presumed dead, she becomes convinced he's still alive and heads off to search for him. In an alternating timeline that begins several months earlier on the front lines, Freddie finds himself buried underground in a concrete German pillbox, his only companion the wounded German soldier Hans Winter. The two form a strong bond and eventually dig their way out, only to be confronted by more mud, blood, and death. Freddie, ashamed of his feelings for Winter and what he sees as his betrayal of his country, takes what seems like refuge with the mysterious fiddler Faland, who shows the guests at his glimmering hotel a mirror that reveals their hearts' desires and then steals their memories to make his music. As the novel proceeds, the two storylines merge, with Laura attempting to save Freddie before it's too late. Arden titles her chapters with quotations from *Paradise Lost* and the biblical Book of Revelation, and appropriately so: The landscape, both physical and spiritual, that the characters navigate is hellish, and for better or worse, their old world is being transformed into a new one. Unabashedly grim though laced with faint hints of hope, the novel immerses the reader in a war often overshadowed by the one that would follow a couple of decades later. A surprisingly successful merger of history and fantasy.

READALIKES



***The Witch's Lens* by Luanne G. Smith**

With her husband off fighting at World War I's eastern front, Petra Kurková embraces her fleeting freedom, roaming the city at night with her camera. A born witch, she's discovered that she can capture the souls of the dead on film. Her supernatural skills don't go unnoticed by the enigmatic Josef Svoboda. He's recruiting a team of sorcerers to infiltrate the front lines, where the bloodshed of combat has resurrected foul creatures. Photographing the escalating horrors is beyond anything Petra imagined. But Petra can't turn back. Not before she discovers her husband's fate and the myriad ways her magic is manifesting.



***The London Séance Society* by Sarah Penner**

1873. Lenna Wickes has come to Paris to find answers about her sister's death, but to do so, she must embrace the unknown and overcome her own logic-driven bias against the occult. When acclaimed spiritualist Vaudeline D'Allaire is beckoned to England to solve a high-profile murder, Lenna accompanies her as an understudy. But as the women team up with the powerful men of London's exclusive Séance Society to solve the mystery, they begin to suspect that they are not merely out to solve a crime, but perhaps entangled in one themselves.



***The Weaver and the Witch Queen* by Genevieve Gornichec**

Oddny and Gunnhild meet as children in tenth century Norway, and they could not be more different: Oddny hopes for a quiet life, while Gunnhild burns for power and longs to escape her cruel mother. But after a visiting wisewoman makes an ominous prophecy that involves Oddny, her sister Signy, and Gunnhild, the three girls take a blood oath to help one another always. The bonds--both enchanted and emotional--that hold them together are strong, and when they find their way back to each other, these bonds will be tested in ways they could never have foreseen in this rich, searching novel of magic, history, and sworn sisterhood.