



Day for Night

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Richard Cottar is a respected independent film writer and director; his wife, Joanna, is his increasingly successful and wealthy producer. Together they are about to embark on a film about the life of Walter Benjamin, the German Jewish intellectual who killed himself in northern Spain while on the run from the Nazis in 1940.

Taking its cue from Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, *Day for Night* is an unsettling, riveting story of reversals — of gender, power, and history.

- 1 At its heart, *Day for Night* is a novel about loss — loss of country, of love, of partner, of certainty. And it is a novel, then, about empathy as a result. How do we learn to empathize with people who have upended our lives? Do you think that Joanna successfully comes to this state of acceptance of her loss by the end of the book? Do you think Elliott does?
- 2 London is very much a character in this novel, complicated, beloved but about to change irrevocably. Where have you lived that has affected you this way, where you feel your city or town has witnessed the most important parts of your life? What did you love most about that place? Do you feel it's changed now?
- 3 The author frequently portrays love at the edges of what's deemed acceptable in her novels. Here it is Richard's love for the much younger actor who's to star in his film. Do you think that Richard's love for Elliott was worth the price? Do you feel that, for Richard, being shocked alive again, so to speak, was worth what he risked in his life with Joanna and in his professional life? Do you think we actually have a choice if struck by lightning?
- 4 Paralleling Richard, Joanna and Elliott's story is the story of Walter Benjamin and the making of the film about him. Some scenes around this are delivered as film dialogue and set instructions. Did you enjoy this format? If so, what did you like about them?
- 5 This book is a portrait of a marriage at a crisis point. Did you sympathize more with Richard or Joanna? Why? Do you think that if he had lived, they would have survived as a couple?