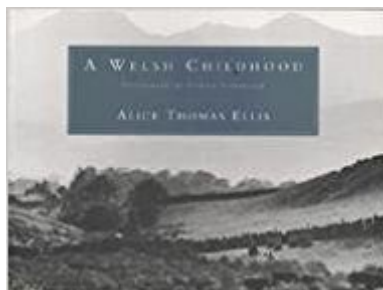


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A Welsh Childhood



Synopsis

Shadow of a Soul marks the premier appearance of Russian poet Bella Dizhur in English. It is also the first complete collection of her poetry in any language. Included, in facing page translations, are poems, (written over a period of 50 years before the book was published in 1990) some of which brought her sharp criticism in the Soviet Union: she was denounced for being the Akhmatova of her time and criticized for an aesthetic pessimism. Included for the first time is the entire poem Janusz Korczak, which won Dizhur the title of Korczak Laureate from the West German Korczak Committee. It is a moving account of his life, and ultimate death when he chose to accompany his children to the gas chambers of Treblinka during World War II.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

These two memoirs celebrate the magic of growing up in small villages in the British Isles during the 1930s and 1940s. For Walsh, it was a time of contentment in a closely knit Irish farming community where "luxury was a full stomach and being clothed." Her reminiscences of odd neighbors, local customs, holy days, and school are interspersed with folklore and ghost stories. She looks back at her childhood with fondness and delight. Novelist Ellis's (Serpent on the Rock, LJ 10/1/95) nostalgia, on the other hand, is filled with melancholy, not only a yearning for what is gone but also a sorrow for what has changed. Her portrayal of the unspoiled beauty of the North Wales coast contrasts sharply with her depiction of its present-day ugliness, a condition brought about by tourism and suburbia. Along with details from her childhood, Ellis presents legends, myths, historical facts, and memories of raising her own children in an isolated wilderness area. Her scenic descriptions

are enhanced by an abundance of evocative black-and-white photographs of the Welsh landscape. Though their moods are quite different, both books are well written and suitable for regional collections. ?Ilse Heidmann, San Marcos, Tex. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A Welsh Childhood is strengthened by photographs, large and handsome: they celebrate the misty greyness and wetness of rural Wales, small, ruined houses in vast, luminous landscapes.

Alice Thomas Ellis is not a household name in the U.S., but in the UK she is well-known as the author of a series of short sharp novels and as a journalist full of humor (sometimes of the blackest variety), blessed common sense, and an invincibly strong Catholic faith. Her faith is not the main focus of this sublime book of memories from her life in rural Wales, but her stance as a traditionalist has never been more evident, as she bemoans the wanton destruction and defilement of some of the most beautiful countryside in Great Britain. In her inimitable way, she declares: "As to the changes in the way of life -- economic pressures, market forces, and all sorts of imponderables I don't understand crowd in from outside to distort and obliterate not only the worst but the best of all that has gone before, and nothing will convince me that this is a Good Thing... There are high-rise blocks on the shores of Anglesey. Who let them do that? And why?" The book covers not only her own childhood but some of the childhood of her own numerous children when they lived in rural Wales with "no other habitation for miles, no electricity, and no telephone." The stress, happiness, and tragedy of those years is conveyed by Ellis with clarity, brevity, and a haunted lyricism that epitomizes the meaning of the Welsh word hiraeth: a lifelong yearning for what is gone or out of reach. Highest recommend for those who can appreciate it.

Perhaps not for all tastes this autobiographical series of set pieces is wonderfully reminiscent of life in small country areas not all so long ago. There is a sense of time lost folded into the scattered vignettes. I would suggest that it would be particularly appealing to those of Welsh ancestry and/or those who have lived in small American towns. The photographs are very much in synthesis with the stories and point up the sense of enjoyable loss.

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