



# Resistance

*Owen Sheers*

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## **Resistance** Owen Sheers

Imbued with immense imaginative breadth and confidence, Owen Sheers's debut novel unfolds with the pace and intensity of a thriller. A hymn to the glorious landscape of the Welsh border territories and a portrait of a community under siege.

1944. After the fall of Russia and the failed D-Day landings, a German counterattack lands on British soil. Within a month, half of Britain is occupied. The seat of British government has fled to Worcester, Churchill to Canada. A network of British resistance cells is all that is left to defy the German army.

Against this backdrop, Resistance opens with Sarah Lewis, a twenty-six-year-old farmer's wife, waking to find her husband, Tom, has disappeared. She is not alone, as all the other women in the Welsh border valley of Olchon wake to find their husbands gone. With this sudden and unexplained absence, the women regroup as an isolated, all-female community and wait, hoping for news.

Later, a German patrol arrives in the valley, the purpose of their mission a mystery. When a severe winter forces the two groups together, a fragile mutual dependency develops. Sarah begins a faltering acquaintance with the patrol's commanding officer, Albrecht Wolfram, and it is to her that he reveals the purpose of the patrol. But as the pressure of the war beyond presses in on this isolated community, this fragile state of harmony is increasingly threatened.

Imbued with immense imaginative breadth and confidence, Owen Sheers's debut novel unfolds with the pace and intensity of a thriller. A hymn to the glorious landscape of the Welsh border territories and a portrait of a community under siege, Resistance is a first novel of grace and power.

## **Resistance Details**

Date : Published June 7th 2007 by Faber Faber (first published February 10th 2007)

ISBN : 9780571229635

Author : Owen Sheers

Format : Hardcover 289 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Science Fiction, Alternate History, War, World War II

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# From Reader Review Resistance for online ebook

## **Helmisade says**

What a disappointment! Such a great idea, an obviously talented author and a book that never really goes anywhere. Plus the female lead (Sarah) is probably the most boring woman in the history of literature. She has no thoughts, ideas or opinions of her own. She thinks about sheep and her husband and seems to act purely on impulse. I hope she was not intended as a tribute to Welsh women.

The opening chapters promise excitement, tension and scandalous love affairs. Unfortunately the book soon turns into a boring praise of farm living and the countryside. Because country people are like more authentic and stuff (will this myth ever die?). There's a lot of stuff about sheep, "simple yet honest folk doing the right thing" and descriptions of weather. The descriptive parts are admittedly beautiful, but they alone can't save the narrative.

The German officer and his team are the one interesting and not entirely shallow part of the story. I would have enjoyed a book told entirely from their perspective since there's actual character development, personal discovery and realistic conflict. It's a pity these interesting Germans ended up in a cardboard Welsh village full of cardboard women straight out of a travel guide.

I won't say anything about the lousy ending. At least it was consistent with the boring story. This is one book where I find myself rooting for the Nazis and that's not exactly a good thing.

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## **Arila says**

It's probably not one of the worst books ever written but I can't help giving it one star for being one of the most boring ones I have ever read. The premise sounded so interesting: Hitler is winning World War II and Germany is invading England. However this book is focused on farming, at which I am definitely not interested. A group of women are abandoned by their husbands who join the resistance and they have to survive alone and learn how to take care of their sheep. I have never read so much about sheep.

Nothing really happens in all the book, zero suspense. It's not a novel about characters neither, they are all so plain. Oh god, I hated this so much, I don't even know how I managed to finish it.

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## **Caroline says**

Started off with a bang, ended with a whimper. I read the last chapter over b/c I didn't quite know why it ended or how it ended. But the overall story line was highly captivating. I just wish that the author had a clearer definition on what he was writing. It wasn't a mystery, it wasn't a love story, nor was it a spy story.

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## **Sue Lyle says**

I loved this book. It captured the landscape and feel of a Welsh Valley on the English border and all the characters were real and deep. The imagined story of what would have happened if D-day had failed and the impact of German soldiers arriving in the valley in 1944. Historical fact mixed with imagination and a deep love of the landscape and people. Didn't want it to end. I think it has been made into a film. Recommend it to all my Welsh friends and those who love Wales or want a glimpse into rural life in the 1940s. I loved that the main characters were all women as the men left to join the resistance. I also loved the realistic nature of people's reactions and their changing emotions over the year of the story. So believable.

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### **Lara says**

First let me tell you how much I loved this book. I adored every second of it and had it not been for those weird German translations then this would have been a five star rating.

So I loved the setting, the interesting and unique characters, the pacing, the great cover, everything. So why did no one check the German sentences?!

Just one of the many possible examples:

"Güten tag, Steiner." (page 134)

Really? Just because it's German doesn't mean that you should put Umlaute in there. Don't get me started on the usage of capital and small initial letters...

So if you don't speak German I can definitely recommend this book to you without any problem at all. Some of the scenes in this book are just gorgeous, the characters are not off the rack and I loved that the story is told from both perspectives (the women of the valley and the German soldiers).

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### **Shonna Froebel says**

This book is a fiction of an alternative history. Here the situation is that D-day was a bust and the Germans are winning World War II and have now invaded Britain.

The action takes place in a very small farming village in Wales. As the novel begins, the women in the village wake up one morning to discover that all the men are gone. There are no notes left for them, and very few clues as to where and why they have disappeared. Getting together, they decide it is in their best interest to keep things quiet and just as they have decided that and began to deal with the way their lives have changed a small detachment of Germans arrives in the village. As the Germans stay into the winter, they develop relationships of a sort with the village women and this changes everything for both sets of inhabitants.

On the women's side we see most of the story from the view of Sarah Lewis, a 26-year-old wife with no children. The German view is given from the view of their commanding officer, Albrecht Wolfram. The characters are what really bring this book alive and we watch through their eyes as the reality of their situation sinks in and see how they deal with it. The what-if nature of alternative history brings an added element to the plot and a feeling of uncertainty about the future we don't normally get with historical fiction.

I found the book fascinating and had a hard time putting it down.

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### **Eliane says**

A beautifully written alternative history rooted in fact, this is the story of an isolated valley on the border of England and Wales and what could have happened had the Germans succeeded and invaded Britain in World War II.

For my book group, the book had particular relevance as we live only a few miles from the Olchon Valley, Llanthony and Longtown. The descriptions of how the women carry on working their farms through the bitter winter resonate strongly when you can see farms just like these out of your window. I loved the slowness of the book, the way that life must carry on, war or no war, the picture of an almost magical valley cut off from the world for a few months. The varying viewpoints of the book - the Welsh women, the German soldiers - create many shades of grey and much ambiguity right up to the ending which caused much discussion in the group.

If you want to see some pictures of the setting in the Olchon valley then go here  
<http://faites-simple.blogspot.com/200...>

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### **Saleh MoonWalker says**

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### **Michael Keyton says**

Before reading this I was a little lukewarm, anticipating a so so alternative history that focused on the Germans successfully invading Britain in 1940. In fact the story focuses on the impact of a small platoon of German soldiers trapped by snow and circumstances in a small Welsh valley inhabited by women whose men have mysteriously disappeared. The beauty of the tale is how the two groups slowly come to terms with and find happiness in the needs of the other.

The other thing I really loved about this book is the language. It is a slow read for the very best of reasons. Sometimes in a book - every chapter or - so you might pause and savour a particular image or phrase. You do this on virtually every page of 'Resistance'

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### **Philip says**

A valley side too far - Resistance by Owen Sheers

In Resistance Owen Sheers re-writes the history of World War Two. Germany has invaded Britain. The

United States, having suffered reversals both east and west, has retreated home to navel gaze. Britain thus is occupied, but has not yet succumbed.

In a remote rural community on the Welsh borders, a whole valley of farming families awakes one morning to find that all the men have gone. No-one knows where. They were recruited, perhaps, into an underground resistance and not one of them let slip any of the details. This, frankly, is incredible.

The demands of farming, however, continue, despite invasions and estrangement. Sarah, though devastated by her husband's, Tom's, disappearance, must battle on. There are dogs to see to, lambs to nurture, pigs to feed and foals to train. This permanence of landscape and activity is thus set against massive upheaval. Not only have the men gone, but German troops have appeared, troops who seem to be more on holiday than at war. Again, incredible.

Alex is good with animals and helps at Sarah's farm, as does Albrecht, an English-speaking, Oxford-educated academic, uncomfortable in military garb. Relationships develop, whilst most involved apparently remain increasingly apologetic.

Owen Sheers also wants us to believe a scenario for conquest where the invaders lay siege to the cities. Again this lacks credibility, since German military success in the Second World War seemed to come when invasions went straight to the centre. Where they lay siege, such as Leningrad or Stalingrad, they failed. But then the whole point is that the history has been reversed.

In a situation where passions and tempers would probably have been frayed, tested at least, Owen Sheers presents a community that seems to survive just as before, minus the local males. Resistance is well written and is very readable, often beautiful. But it does demand that one's belief be suspended from very high indeed.

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## **Laura says**

This book provides an alternative history on a British resistance organization made originally by farmers.

The author also describes in some way some details of the 1940s rural life.

Page 239:

"The entire collection of your National Gallery for example is, as we speak, stored inside a mountain in North Wales."

Photo by kind permission of BRB (Residuary) Ltd

More details on this interesting subject may be found at The Gallery in wartime.

Some paintings were stored at Penrhyn Castle, North Wales.

Photo by kind permission of BRB (Residuary) Ltd

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## Robyn says

This is one of those books that will linger in my mind for a very long time. Reading it was akin to meditation - quiet and subtle, yet powerful. It changed my sense of time and place completely.

This book is an imagined history of a Welch valley if Germany had invaded England in WW II. One morning, the women of the valley awakened to realize that all of the men had left, without a word, presumably to join the English Resistance. Shortly afterwards, a small German patrol moves into the area, and the Welch women and German men must come to terms about the complexities of developing relationships with the enemy.

Here are some of the themes that are lingering in my mind:

- 1) The women of the Welch valley come into their own when the men leave. Left to manage their farms on their own, they grow - rather quickly - into being independent. This is particularly true for Sarah Lewis who has deeply buried intellectual curiosity.
- 2) How does love of country compete with love for individuals? In the dire circumstances of the book, everyone has to grapple with these decisions. For the Welch men, do they join the Resistance or stay with their families? Can the Welch women and German soldiers successfully develop relationships that transcend the fact that they are enemies?
- 3) It's about how we can try to cocoon ourselves in a small moment in time (think of snow days or holidays), yet reality always manages to break in.
- 4) I want someone to make this book into a film. It was so visual.

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## Pinariki says

Umut vaadeden bir baslangicla, okuyucunun ilgisini cekiyor. Cok farkli, ilginc bir konu.II. Dünya Savasi'ni Ingilizler degil de, Almanlar kazansaydi ne olurdu? Ve Almanlar Ingiltere'ye cikartma yapsaydi? Savasin, cepheye gitmemis ve sicak savasi görmemis siradan halk (ciftiler, zanaatkarlar vs.) üzerindeki yıkıcı etkisini göstermesi açısından basarili buldum diyebilirim. Ama gittikce yavanlasmaya basladi kitap. Ortalarına dogru konu dagilmaya ve yazarin sürekli ayni sekilde tekrar eden Ingiliz kirsali tasvirlerinde bogulmaya basladim. (ki tasvir okumaya bayılan biriyimdir, kolay kolay sikilmam) Kitabın en az yüz sayfa kisaltılabilecegini ve sadelestirilebilecegini düşündüm bu yüzden.

Bir de Pegasus Yayınları, nasıl kötü ceviri yaparmış bunu da görmüş oldum. Cevirmen wikipedia ve eksisözlük'ten (evet evet eksisözlük!) kaynak göstermiş bazı yerlerde. Kitabı beğenmemem de aslında basarisiz cevirin de etkisi olduğunu kabul etmeliyim. Keske orjinal dilinden okusaydım, belki daha olumlu bir görüş yazabilirdim.

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## Mark Spyker says

Some wonderfully evocative language describing a valley in the Welsh border region, the farming inhabitants whose menfolk have gone off to fight as an underground cell against the Germans when Britain is overrun by Nazis, and the relationships that develop with a German patrol. Unfortunately for me Sheers doesn't really express the feelings developing between the two groups adequately, and is rather naive about the consequences of isolating the two groups through a long winter in war time.

The interesting point here, of course, is the fact that over the centuries Britain has had to accommodate several groups of successful invaders, and Sheers does begin to unpack a little the politics of accommodation, compromise and collaboration. But here too I don't believe Sheers explores the subject fully enough.

I liked the book, but I don't think he did the subject matter full justice!

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## Chris says

Maps and journeys dominate this novel. Historic maps of the medieval world. A route across southern England. The cul-de-sac that is an isolated valley in the Welsh Marches. The pathways of human memories. The unmapped future when one steps off the end of the known world. The past as it might have been if history had taken a different direction.

All fictions could be said to be alternative histories, in that they describe people who may not have existed and events that may never have happened in our own physical world. *Resistance* however sits firmly in the alternate history genre given that it envisages what might have happened if Nazi Germany had finally triumphed; it's a popular theme, explored for example in Philip K Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*. In Sheers' novel Hitler's armies have seen success both on the Eastern Front and in Western Europe, and have begun their successful invasion of Britain in autumn 1944. The novel's action focuses on the Olchon valley, an isolated location north of Abergavenny, and it is here that a group of German soldiers are sent on a clandestine mission by Himmler and where they mysteriously encounter an all-female community.

Foregrounded are the German officer, Albrecht Wolfram, and Sarah Lewis, the farmer abandoned by her husband Tom; the latter, we surmise, has joined a covert Auxiliary Unit manned by insurgents — as the Germans call them — to maintain resistance against the occupiers. Sarah and the other women (Maggie, Mary, Menna and Bethan) are completely in the dark as to why their men have left, but with winter approaching they have no choice but to get on as best they can with the demands of hill farming. It comes as a complete shock when Captain Wolfram and his men appear. What do they want, and why are they here?

Sheers explores in great subtlety the relationships between the soldiery and the women. In particular Albrecht, a former scholar, and Sarah, who left school early, find they have more in common than they expected — missing loves, similar sensibilities, a respect for literature, and a recognition of their shared humanity. Against their relationships there is, mixed in with some reluctant toleration and socialising, a background of suspicion, distrust and fear in the wider community; and of attempts to restore some normality being punctuated by savage acts of reprisal.

Invisibly binding foreground and background like threads in a tapestry are more abstract themes. Albrecht's



surname reflects the tribute paid to the medieval poet Wolfram von Eschenbach: Wolfram is best known as the author of *Parzival*, the story of Sir Perceval's quest for the holy grail. In the late 13th-century Hereford Mappa Mundi, which looms large but mostly hidden in these pages, the quest theme is also strongly represented: illustrated prominently are Jerusalem as the centre of Christian pilgrimage and Crete's labyrinth as symbolic of the classical quest. The search for a special relic to take back to Himmeler's parody of Camelot, the Wewelsburg Castle, is in fact just one of many Arthurian themes in this novel; another is Sarah's childhood remembrance of Welsh artist and poet David Jones who had enthralled her with tales of Arthur and of the spirit of a king within the mountains. (This latter may be the medieval hero Owain Lawgoch rather than King Arthur, however, as Owen Sheers the poet will have known.)

Borders and margins are everywhere: in the Welsh Marches; Offa's Dyke itself — built to separate the Mercian Angles from their Cambrian neighbours — running on the ridge above the valley named from a river with a Welsh name; in the sheep farmers, conscious of their Brythonic heritage but geographically resident in England's Herefordshire. More intangible are the understandable barriers between Albrecht's men and the valley women, and those between the locals at the Llanthony Show and poor shunned Maggie.

I very much admired the author's recreation of life in the Welsh hills, the minutiae of exacting tasks combined with isolation and with the usual anxieties accompanying subsistence farming. This slow pace of life is beautifully echoed in the pace of the narrative as we move through the rural year, from autumn to summer. Violence is never dwelt on, and rarely visceral; while there is always a constant sense of menace and of the world turning inexorably, the shocks are few but telling.

The final violent deed, done by somebody we might least expect, is to me narratively speaking exactly right; it symbolically crosses the border between wartime uncertainty and a hopeful future, with the object itself a gateway to be utterly destroyed so as to allow stasis to be overcome. The genius loci is thus summoned from his cave, the final crossing of the ridge over which Offa's Dyke runs an escape from the perils of No Man's Land. The hand of the poet, I feel, is evident everywhere in this wonderful novel; it's a healthy way to respond to the horrors of war and conflict and to exalt the human spirit.

<http://wp.me/s2oNj1-resist>

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