

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

Carry Me by Peter Behrens

1. At the beginning of *Carry Me*, Billy says, “This will become the story of a young woman, Karin Weinbrenner” (p. 5). Why does Billy say this? What does this reveal about his character and the significance Karin has in his life?
2. What is the meaning of the title, *Carry Me*?
3. Billy admits, “This is a story . . . I shall try to be honest even when it’s apparent I am making things up, delivering things I couldn’t have witnessed” (p. 6). What does this comment say about Billy’s reliability as a narrator?
4. Sections of *Carry Me* are prefaced by newspaper clippings, letters from archives, diaries, postcards, extracts from a book written by Karin, and so on. Why are these included? How does their authenticity contrast with the Billy’s reliability as narrator? What can/should be believed?
5. What does *El Llano Estacado* mean to Billy and Karin as children? How does that meaning change as they get older? Why do the two cling to the notion of this storybook place? What happens when Billy discovers that what he thought was fantasy is, in fact, a real place?
6. In many ways, Karin has spent her life running away: trying to swim to America; fleeing on horseback for the Taunus hills; or telling Mick she’ll go with him when he’s leaving for Brooklyn. Why does she hesitate when it’s so crucial to leave Berlin with Billy?
7. Throughout the novel Behrens creates an atmosphere where characters are caught between worlds — the English and German, Europe and America; reality and dreams; the old Germany and the horrors of the new — and they perpetually seek escape from one to the other. How successful are they? Why do they fail or succeed?
8. In many ways, this is a novel of outsiders. Billy frequently feels pushed away or kept at a distance by those he loves, including his mother and Karin. In your opinion, does Billy ever sincerely feel as though he belongs?
9. The novel’s epigraph contains a quote by W. B. Yeats: “In dreams begin responsibility” (p. vii). Do Billy’s and Karin’s dreams carry the weight of responsibility? Or do their dreams merely offer the hope of escape from responsibility?

10. In some ways, Billy assumes responsibility for others. Of his mother, he says, "All my life I have felt guilty" when regarding her assault (p. 33). He also feels responsible for Karin throughout the novel. What is it about his character that makes him assume accountability for others, and how successful is he in his role?
11. As events unfold, why does Billy not entirely recognize the horrible truth about what is happening in Germany?
12. Karin works to get Jews out of Germany. Why do you think she doesn't attempt to secure her own father's escape from the country?
13. Why do you think Behrens ends the book where he does, on a note of promise as it were, rather than two pages sooner?