

Berlin Diary; the Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934-1941 Study Guide

Berlin Diary; the Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934-1941 by William L. Shirer

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Contents

Berlin Diary; the Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934-1941 Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part I, pgs. 4-44.....	4
Part I, pgs. 44-83.....	5
Part I, pgs. 83-124.....	6
Part I, pgs. 125-165.....	7
Part I, pgs. 165-206.....	8
Part II, pgs. 207-248.....	9
Part II, pgs. 248-289.....	10
Part II, pgs. 289-330.....	11
Part II, pgs. 331-369.....	12
Part II, pgs. 369-409.....	13
Part II, pgs. 409-450.....	14
Part II, pgs. 451-492.....	15
Part II, pgs. 492 - 552.....	16
Part II, pgs. 532 - 575.....	17
Part II, pgs. 575 - 605.....	18
Characters.....	19
Objects/Places.....	22
Themes.....	24
Style.....	26
Quotes.....	28
Topics for Discussion.....	30

Plot Summary

Berlin Diary, the Journal of a Foreign Correspondent 1934-1941, by William L. Shirer, is the fascinating story of the author's experience as a news reporter in Nazi Germany. The book is written from the author's journal from 1934 until 1941 in diary form. Shirer discusses the people he met, the places he went and the various situations he found himself in.

The author and his wife Tess spends the year of 1933 on sabbatical in Spain. Shirer needs to recover from illness he has suffered in India and Afghanistan and an injury he sustains while skiing in the Alps. When he returns to Paris, France, it is a different world that he returns to. Adolph Hitler and the Nazis are completing their first year of holding power in Germany. Both the fascist and communist movements are popular in Europe. Shirer and his wife love Paris but the situation in Germany interests Shirer and he accepts a position in Berlin the following August.

In Berlin, Shirer covers various rallies and press conferences. He watches as Hitler violates the Versailles and Locarno treaties and establishes a German army. Soon after this, the news service that he works for folds and he obtains a job as a radio news broadcaster with Edward R. Murrow and CBS. Radio broadcasting is something new to him and is subject to the censorship of the Nazis. In addition, he must rely on their short-wave transmission facilities.

Shirer watches as the various European countries fall to Hitler. If they do not accept Hitler's terms, the Germans invade. Most countries however accept his terms and became part of the Reich. Others offer resistance and are forcibly overcome by the Germans. Shirer wonders why England and France do not intervene. War is not declared by England until Hitler takes over Poland.

Shirer remains in Berlin to cover the war until 1940. He travels around to the various countries surveying the situation and talking to the people. He describes life in Nazi Berlin ranging from the lack of coal for heat to the rationing of food and other items. At this time, his wife and infant daughter live in Geneva where it is considerably safer. Shirer wants Tess and the baby to go to America, which they finally do in October 1940. He follows in December deciding that he cannot be effective in Berlin due to the degree of censorship his work is subject to.

The book is lengthy but very interesting to read and the reader will find the book worth the time spent reading it.



Part I, pgs. 4-44

Part I, pgs. 4-44 Summary and Analysis

The author has just spent a year on sabbatical in Spain and is now coming back to his former lifestyle. He and wife Tess spend their time swimming, hiking, reading, and entertaining friends.

In February 1934, Shirer works in Paris. He is sent to cover a demonstration at the Place de la Concorde, which turns violent. After the demonstration, he returns to the Herald office to write his story covering the riots and the resignation of Daladier and the cabinet. The next day, Doumergue is named to head the government. A few days later, there is a general strike without any trouble. However, there are problems in Austria. The Nazi socialists fight the Heimwehr under Prive Starhemberg. The fighting lasts until February 15.

Shirer, still in Paris, says he wishes that he can be assigned to Berlin on June 30, when Hitler and Goring secure their power. Hitler secures his position in Vienna as the purges continue. On August 9, Shirer is offered a position in Berlin, which he immediately accepts. He arrives in Berlin on August 25. He notices the difference between the Berlin of the Republic and the Berlin of Hitler.

Shirer first sees Hitler at a party rally in Nuremburg on September 14. He watches how the crowd reacts at the different rallies he covers. Shirer observes how easy it would be for anyone to assassinate Hitler and says he is glad that he attended the Nuremburg rally because he sees firsthand the hold that Hitler has on the German people.

On January 14, 1935, the people of the Saar vote to join the Reich. On March 16, at a press conference held by Dr. Goebbels, it is announced that Hitler has restored universal military service. Hitler has also announced the formation of an army in violation of the Versailles Treaty. Shirer and others wondered if Hitler will get away with it.

Shirer relates how many Jews come to him and Tess for help in going to America or England but there is nothing they can do to help them.

Many of the press correspondents regularly meet at the Ristorante Italiano where there is always a table reserved for them.

After a brief vacation visiting his family in New York, Shirer returns to Berlin to cover the Italian involvement in Africa.

Part I, pgs. 44-83

Part I, pgs. 44-83 Summary and Analysis

Shirer covers the Winter Olympics in February. In early March, Hitler disregards the Locarno Treaty and occupies the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland. They argue that the French violate it with the Franco-Soviet pact. Most of the correspondents at the Taverne feel that the French can stop Hitler in the Rhineland, but they do not. Shirer travels to Karlsruhe in the Rhineland to listen to Hitler give a speech then. Ninety-five percent of the German population support the move.

In May, Mussolini triumphs over Ethiopia and in June, the Shirers and Knickerbockers vacation in Yugoslavia. In September, Hitler announces a plan to make Germany self-sufficient in raw materials and denies that it is a war plan. Both Germany and Italy recognize Franco's regime in Spain in November. Shirer comments that the policies of England and France have ceased to make sense to him. In November, the Nazis announce the anti-Comintern Pact with Japan. It seems to Shirer that the agreement calls for joint action against Russia.

In May 1937, Shirer has to do a live broadcast on the German reaction to the crash of the Hindenburg. He and Tess have been invited on the flight. Since it is a radio broadcast, it has to be approved by the German censors beforehand.

In June, the Shirers and Knickerbockers attend the Paris Exposition in France and then vacation on the Riviera. Tess remains there awaiting the birth of their first child. Shirer is unemployed in August since his company Universal Service folds. A few days later, he does a test broadcast for CBS and begins working for them on October 1.



Part I, pgs. 83-124

Part I, pgs. 83-124 Summary and Analysis

Tess returns in September and they pack for their move to Vienna where Shirer will be based. Shirer has to travel to Paris, Geneva, London, and Rome to meet the CBS radio people. Austria is a neutral country and they are happy to be leaving Berlin after three years living there. There are food and other shortages in Germany.

Hitler talks of peace to visiting leaders, but Shirer says he is preparing for war and quotes several passages from Mein Kampf in support of this position.

Shirer's first broadcasting assignment is to cover the line Power Conference in Brussels. He has to hire other reporters to do the actual broadcasts per CBS policy.

In February 1938, Hitler reorganizes his staff and then meets with Schuschnigg of Austria. Among other things, he demands that the Nazis be included in the cabinet or the Reichswehr will invade Austria. President Miklas of Austria has to agree to the demands.

On March 11-12, Shirer learns that Schuschnigg is out of power and the Nazis are in but he is not allowed to broadcast the information. Schuschnigg wants to hold a plebiscite but Germany threatens to invade so it is canceled. Nazi censors will not allow a report from Vienna so Murrow tells Shirer to fly to London to make the report. Murrow flies to Vienna to check out the situation. They try to arrange for short-wave transmitters that can reach New York and arrange for speakers from Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and Rome.

In April, Tess and the baby come home from the hospital. There is a plebiscite on April 10, 1938 in which ninety-nine percent of the Austrians vote to join the Reich. On May 20, German troops are ready to invade Czechoslovakia.

On June 10, the Shirers move to Geneva even though Tess is still bandaged from the surgery she has had recently. Shirer cannot work in Austria any longer due to the censorship. Shirer disagrees with others that Hitler is prepared to go to war over Czechoslovakia. In September, Tess and the baby go to America so Tess can establish residency for citizenship.



Part I, pgs. 125-165

Part I, pgs. 125-165 Summary and Analysis

In a speech given on September 12th, Hitler demands self-determination for the Sudetenland. He does not threaten however to invade Czechoslovakia. Shirer is in Prague at the time. The Czech government says that it will fight if it is invaded and Shirer remains in Prague for several days to see if war will begin. After brief fighting, the revolt is put down. There is no German invasion. Shirer has problem sending his broadcasts so he cables the information.

Chamberlain of England meets with Hitler and agrees on a plebiscite for the Sudetenland but the Czech government refuses to accept it. Murrow tells Shirer that Chamberlain will meet Hitler in the next few days and that both the French and British are asking the Czechs to surrender to Hitler. Shirer covers the meeting at Godesberg at which neither Hitler nor Chamberlain can reach an agreement. In a speech on September 26, Hitler says that he will reach the Sudetenland by October 1 even if he has to go to war. He does not have to. On September 30, Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier sign a pact together, giving Sudetenland to Germany. The Czechs are not consulted but are told instead that they have to accept these terms.

Murrow and Shirer meet in Paris on October 8. Both feel that Poland will be the next conquest and that there will be a war in the next few months.

With Tess and Eileen in America, Shirer finishes his novel about India and begins writing a play. He finishes the play in Brussels a few weeks later while he is an observer at an international radio conference. Tess and the baby arrive in Switzerland for the Christmas holidays.

When the Pope dies on February 12, Shirer travels to Rome to cover the funeral and witness the election of the new Pope. On March 15, 1939, Bohemia and Moravia are annexed to the Reich. The Italians entered Albania on April 7 and Germany is expected to invade Poland at any time.



Part I, pgs. 165-206

Part I, pgs. 165-206 Summary and Analysis

Shirer is in Berlin on April 28 for Hitler's address to the Reichstag and sails to America in late June. Tess has received her citizenship. He finds out that many Americans feel that there will not be a war. In London on July 14, Murrow and the European staff meet to plan their war coverage. Back in Berlin in August, Murrow and the other correspondents discuss whether Hitler will go to war over Poland. According to the German newspapers, Poland threatens Germany and not the other way around.

On August 11, Shirer arrives in Danzig, Poland. It reminds him of the situation in the Sudetenland a year earlier. The people of the city want to be part of Germany. He then goes to Warsaw where he finds the people calm, confident, and ready to fight.

Returning to Berlin on August 23, foreign news commentator Hans Kaltenborn is refused entry by the secret police. Later that evening at the Taverne, Shirer and the others discuss the Russian-German pact that basically invites Russia into Poland. The British have a treaty promising to defend Poland. Americans are advised by their embassy to leave unless their presence is absolutely necessary.

At the end of August, the rationing of food and other goods begins in Germany. The ration cards make the German people realize how close to war they are, as talk between the British and the Germans continue. At midnight, Hitler announces the formation of a war cabinet. The war begins the next morning, on September 31, 1909.

Part II opens with Hitler's attack against Poland. The British and French send an ultimatum that demands the withdrawal of troops from Poland. Germany refuses and the British declare war. Shirer and others wait for the British and French to bomb Berlin, but it remains quiet. On September 4, the passenger ship Athenia is sunk. The British claim that it is a German u-boat but the Germans deny it. The British bomb Cuchaven and Wilhelmshaven while the British and French embassy staff members depart from Berlin.

Shirer relates that the Germans will only allow taped broadcasts from the front and that CBS will only allow live broadcasts.

The Germans meet little resistance in Poland. By September 8, they reach Warsaw. Shirer remains in Berlin during this time.



Part II, pgs. 207-248

Part II, pgs. 207-248 Summary and Analysis

The war has been going on for a week and life in Berlin is still normal. The Allies begin a blockade of Germany that cuts off some supplies. On September 17, the Russian Army invades Poland. The next day, Shirer drives to the front near Danzig. He watches the battle with other news correspondents. The Poles finally surrender. Later that day, Hitler gives a speech in Danzig. He is angry because he cannot give the speech in Warsaw because the Warsaw Poles are still fighting there. Hitler does not offer a peace and says that Germany will continue to fight as long as England and France continue the war.

By September 21, the Germans have concluded the counter attack, even though Warsaw is still fighting. In the United States, Roosevelt asks Congress to repeal the neutrality law so they could help supply the Allies. Warsaw surrenders on September 27. Two days later, the Germans and the Russians sign a treaty regarding Poland and the continuation of the war.

On October 5, 1939, Hitler reviews his troops in Warsaw. Hitler wins the war in Poland but has to give the Russians half of Poland. Shirer returns to Geneva on October 9, having been gone for two months. He is back in Berlin on October 15. A German U-boat sinks the British battleship Royal Oak in Scapa Flow, Britain's naval base, to everyone's amazement.

After both NBC and CBS are cut off the air on October 19, Shirer informs the Germans that they will stop broadcasting completely if they can only broadcast things favorable to the Germans.

On November 7, Holland and Belgian offer to mediate peace but the Germans are not interested. The next day, Hitler gives a surprise speech to the German people telling them to be prepared for a long war. A bomb explodes at the hall twelve minutes after Hitler departs. Since it is one of the few times Hitler does not remain behind to talk to the people, the suspicion arises that the Nazis arranged it to solidify support behind Hitler.

Part II, pgs. 248-289

Part II, pgs. 248-289 Summary and Analysis

In November, the execution of traitors and those who committed crimes against Germans continues. While there has not been any military action for two months, it is expected to change. When Shirer returns home in Geneva on December 1, the Russians invade Finland. Shirer has to arrange for transmitters so they can report on the situation in Finland. Finally, Murrow makes arrangements with the BBC.

On December 10, Murrow in England and Shirer in Berlin have the first Berlin-London phone conversation that is allowed since the beginning of the war. On December 14, the Graf Spee sinks off the coast of Montevideo. There are several days of conflicting reports as to what really happened. Shirer spends Christmas in Berlin. He spends the next two days with the German fleet at Kiel and Hamburg.

New Year's Eve, Shirer is back in Berlin. On January 8, 1940, Shirer interviews General Ernst Udet who is the man responsible for building Germany's air force along with Goring. There is no coal for heat in the cold Berlin winter.

On January 18, Shirer meets with Murrow in Amsterdam. They enjoy the good food and feel that the Dutch are blind to the dangers that they face. Shirer returns to Berlin on January 22, having to fight his way onto a crowded train. The Germans have relocated a sizable part of the Polish population.



Part II, pgs. 289-330

Part II, pgs. 289-330 Summary and Analysis

Shirer spends some time with his family in Switzerland and is sick with the flu. He returns to Berlin on February 23. The food shortages are worse than ever. Many public schools are closed due to the lack of coal. The Germans have amassed considerable troops on the Dutch border. American representative Summer Welles arrives in Berlin for talks with Hitler. Afterwards, Shirer learns that there is no chance of an immediate peace. Hitler also wants the naval disarmament of Britain.

On March 13, a Russian-Finnish peace agreement is announced. There is no longer any discussions about a German offensive. However, on March 17, the Germans bomb British bases at Stromness and Kinkwall. On March 20, the British strafe the German seaplane base on Sylt and the German newspapers claim that the British have bombed Denmark. Shirer tours the area of Sylt but cannot travel to the northern side of the island.

Germany continues to receive iron from Sweden. The ships avoid the British blockade by staying within the Norwegian three-mile limit. Shirer and others wonder why the British allow it. On April 8, the British announce that they have placed mines in Norwegian territorial waters. The next day, Norway and Denmark are invaded. The Danes do not offer any resistance but the Norwegians do. In Norway, the Germans have troops on both sides of Trondheim.

On April 23, Shirer goes to Lausanne for a meeting of the International Broadcasting Union and returns to Berlin on April 29. Shirer travels down the Rhine, which divides France and Germany. Life continues in a normal way for the people within view of troops on both sides of the river. On May 1, the German troops are successful at Trondheim since there is no Allied support. The next day Shirer and others learn from the BBC that the British troops have landed at Trondheim. They withdraw to build their naval forces in the Mediterranean for battle against Italy.

Shirer thinks the Germans will move into Holland next.



Part II, pgs. 331-369

Part II, pgs. 331-369 Summary and Analysis

German newspaper headlines on May 9 announce that the British have plans to spread the war. Shirer feels that it will spread no matter who spreads it. On May 10, Germany enters Holland, Belgium, and Luxemburg. Hitler cannot survive the economic war or the blockade however. The Germans justify the invasion, saying that England and France are preparing to attack Germany through these countries. They announce that they will answer the bombing of their cities with five times the number of strikes against the English and French. The Dutch army surrenders on May 14 after five days of fighting. German troops approach Belgian.

Shire wants Tess and Eileen to leave for America. She makes plans to leave through Spain and Portugal. Shirer worries that they will not be able to leave if Italy enters the war. Americans in Switzerland have been warned to leave via Bordeaux since there is more German activity on the Swiss border. Tess and the baby are planning to travel to Paris on their way to Bordeaux. He tells her not to make the trip since it looks like the Germans will reach Paris before she does. The Germans continue their move through Holland and Belgian.

On May 19, Shirer and other journalists travel to the front. Driving through the industrial part of Germany, Shirer notices very little damage from Allied air attacks. Bridges and railroad tracks are intact. They spend the night in Aachen. Shirer observes that Belgians and Dutch do not blow up any of the bridges to slow down the Germans. They are overcome too quickly. The journalists begin to see real devastation when they drive through Belgium. Most of the citizens have fled ahead of the Nazi arrival and are just returning.

Many of the journalists on the trip shop for things in Belgium that they cannot purchase in Berlin. The street cars are in operation in Brussels but there are no private cars. After spending an afternoon in Brussels, they begin their return trip to Berlin. In Aachen, Shirer hires a car to take him to Cologne to make a broadcast and then returns to Aachen.



Part II, pgs. 369-409

Part II, pgs. 369-409 Summary and Analysis

Shirer sees a battle at the front near Aachen on May 21. He interviews General von Reichenau who is the commander of the German 6th Army. The General's headquarters are in a country chateaux and he gives them permission to visit the front. The journalists are taken to a place where they can view the fighting but they are too far away to tell what is really happening. Shirer notices that there are no Allied observation planes to direct the firing.

As soon as Shirer arrives at his Aachen hotel, British bombers fly over. He writes notes about the air raid while he is writing his story.

On May 26, the Germans take Calais and Belgian surrender on May 28. Hitler will not allow the publication of any casualty lists so the German people do not really know what is happening. There is talk that Hitler is preparing to bomb London and Paris. On May 31, Shirer summarizes what Hitler has accomplished in three weeks.

Shirer is back in Berlin on June 1. The British have a supply base at Dunkirk on the French coast which is under continual attack by Goring. The British are stubbornly defending Dunkirk. To the people of Berlin, the war still seems to be distant.

The Germans bomb Paris on June 3. Tess is still trying to make arrangements to reach Bordeaux. Hitler announces a new offensive in the west on June 6 but few details are released. Finally, they announce that the line is from Reims to the Argonne. Italy enters the war on June 10 as the Germans get closer to Paris. Roosevelt gives a speech on June 11 which promises material help for the Allies. The Germans are now in a position to use their entire army against Paris.

On June 12, Geneva is bombed. Tess tells Shirer that she and the baby are okay. Paris falls on June 14. This marks the end of the Reich's second phase. The third phase is the final destruction of the enemy. Shirer leaves for Paris on June 15.



Part II, pgs. 409-450

Part II, pgs. 409-450 Summary and Analysis

Shirer arrives in Paris on June 17. He is amazed that the streets are deserted. He meets Walter Kerr and Demaree Bess at the hotel and learns that most of his friends have left the city. Three million out of a total population of five million people had fled. The city is declared an open city and the Germans are well behaved, but the roads outside the city are clogged with millions of refugees.

On June 21, the Germans sign their armistice with France. The ceremony takes place at the same place that it did in 1918 to make German revenge complete. Shirer covers the ceremony at which Hitler is present. The French must also fly to Italy to sign an armistice with the Italians. Then the fighting will stop.

Returning to Paris after the ceremony, he and a friend stroll around Paris, where life is returning to normal. Shirer returns to Berlin on June 27. His conclusions about the French situation are that they did not fight too much. While they blew up many bridges, they left many strategic ones in place. Some feel that there is a great deal of treachery from fascists and communists in the French army. All of Shirer's broadcasts are on transmitters arranged by the Germans.

On July 4, Shirer is in Geneva to visit his family and to rest for a week. Switzerland is totally surrounded.



Part II, pgs. 451-492

Part II, pgs. 451-492 Summary and Analysis

On July 15, the German press reported that the troops are ready to attack Britain. There is a victory parade in Berlin on July 18. The next day, Hitler offers peace to Britain. There is no official reaction from the British until July 22 and the answer is no.

Hitler's plans for the new order are revealed on July 25. This includes all of the territories conquered by the Reich. While the region is self-sufficient in food, it lacks raw materials.

Shirer and other journalists are flown to Hamburg on August 4. The Germans tell them that they can see whatever they want there. They notice that the RAF bombings have caused little damage. The Germans announce that they do not accept responsibility for feeding the people in the occupied territories. They are hoping that the Americans will supply food.

In mid-August, the Germans begin a big air attack on England. The journalists are taken to Belgium and France to see the front. In Calais, they see German bombers heading for England. Shirer comments on how well camouflaged the German positions are. They reach Brussels on August 16. Shirer talks to local residents who hope the British and Americans will help. Shirer is back in Berlin on August 20.

Berlin is bombed for the first time on August 26. Shirer is working on this broadcast when it happened. After the broadcast, he and the others watch the bombing. The bombings continue.



Part II, pgs. 492 - 552

Part II, pgs. 492 - 552 Summary and Analysis

The nightly bombing raids on Berlin continue. Concentration camp prisoners remove time bombs. They are promised release if they survive. As the British are bombing Berlin, the Germans bomb London. Shirer again comments on the Nazi propaganda and how the people are being lied to. Berliners now know that they are being lied to.

The bombings continue along with the censorship. The censors have the right to censor whatever they want and the broadcaster has the right to decline to broadcast because of the censorship.

Shirer is in Geneva on September 16 when the Germans attempt a landing in England. They are not successful and suffered heavy losses. When he returns to Berlin on September 18, he sees a long hospital train unloading the wounded. There is talk of a new British weapon, which is a wireless torpedo that spreads flame on the water. While this is going on, the Italians fight in Egypt. Shirer thinks that the focus of the war will now be in the Mediterranean. He also feels that the British should increase their bombings of Berlin because of the effect on morals and worker productivity. Long hospital trains continue to bring the wounded to Berlin.

Shirer wonders why he stays in Berlin since the degree of censorship has increased. He is not allowed to mention bombing attacks when they are in progress during his broadcast.

British bombing resume on September 23 and are very heavy on the 24th. The Germans have enough food but the strain from lack of sleep due to the bombing raids has become obvious.

Shirer feels that even if Hitler wins the war that he will not be able to organize Europe.



Part II, pgs. 532 - 575

Part II, pgs. 532 - 575 Summary and Analysis

On September 27, Germany, Japan, and Italy sign a military pact against the United States. They have promised to help one another if attacked. Shirer covers the announcement of the pact and feels that Hitler will not need this pact if he had thought that he could easily win in England. Hitler and Mussolini meet again in Bremer on October 4.

In mid-October, Shirer is still thinking of a travel route to America for himself and his family. He is alarmed about rumors of Hitler going into Spain to take Gibraltar. Lisbon, Portugal is the only place where a boat or plane can go to America unless one goes through Russia. Tess is supposed to leave at the end of October and Shirer is supposed to follow in December. He feels his usefulness is over due to the censorship.

Tess and Eileen depart on October 23. They travel by bus to Barcelona and then by train to Lisbon where they board a boat for America. On the same day, Italy marches into Greece. When served with the usual ultimatum, the Greeks reject it.

Hitler believes that Churchill and the British will have to accept the terms of the peace that he offers. He cannot accept the rejection. His plan includes the massive air assault that will wipe out the RAF in two weeks. Then the Luftwaffe will take out the British Navy and mount a land invasion. The British however have scattered and hidden their RAF planes in various places. The Germans try the air attacks but sustain such heavy casualties that the rest of the plan is never implemented.

On November 6, Roosevelt is reelected, much to the dismay of the Germans. On November 12, Molotov of Russia arrives in Berlin. Since Shirer is planning on leaving Europe in December, he is busy obtaining the appropriate documents and making travel arrangements.

There is also rumors that the Nazis have begun to euthanize the mentally unfit.



Part II, pgs. 575 - 605

Part II, pgs. 575 - 605 Summary and Analysis

On November 27, there is the hint of a big story but Shirer knows that he is leaving on December 5. There are stories of sabotage in Holland. On December 1, Shirer writes that the one and a half year blockade has not really hindered the Nazis. There is food rationing but they are not starving. The Germans have sustained little damage from the British air raids. Even though there is no enthusiasm for the war, morale is still good. Hitler gave them the reunification of Germany, something no other leader could.

Shirer feels that Germans and the world understand Hitler. He is surrounded by loyal men but has no friends. Shirer feels that Hitler is contemplating war with the United States and feels that he can take England before American aid becomes effective.

On December 3, there are a variety of farewell parties for Shirer even though he still does not have all of his exit papers. He does his last broadcast from Berlin. His papers arrive the next day and he leaves by plane on December 5. The plane ices up and has to land at Dresden. He arrives in Lisbon on December 7 and meets Ed Murrow in the town of Estoril the next day. They spend the next few days vacationing until Shirer's ship sails on December 13.



Characters

William L. Shirer

William L. Shirer is a news correspondent in Europe in the 1930s. He gets ill in India and Afghanistan and then is injured in a skiing accident in the Alps. He decides to take the year off and with his wife Tess spends the time enjoying themselves in Spain. Shirer is thirty years old on February 23, 1934 and is working in Paris after returning from his year off. On August 9, 1934, he is offered a position in Berlin, which he immediately accepts. He first sees Hitler at a rally in Nuremberg, Germany of September 4. After that experience, he covers many rallies and press conferences. In January 1935, he is almost expelled from Germany but the Nazis decide to let him stay. Shirer and the other correspondents watch as Hitler violates first the Versailles Treaty and then the Locarno Treaty without any resistance from the rest of the world. When the news service that he works for goes out of business, Edward R. Murrow hires him to work for CBS. He begins on October 1, 1951 and the Shirers move to Vienna that is a neutral country. After Austria joins the Reich, they move to Geneva in June 1938 with their baby daughter Eileen. Shirer continues to travel around the continent covering the different events. He is in Berlin when World War II begins and spends most of his time in 1940 in Berlin and travels around Europe. In December 1940, he leaves Europe feeling that he could not be effective in Berlin because of the degree of censorship.

Adolph Hitler

Adolph Hitler is the Austrian who becomes the leader of the Social Democrats and the Third Reich. He is a master at creating mass hysteria and developing a following among the people. Known as The Fuhrer, Hitler is widely admired among his followers and greatly feared by those who opposed him. He holds mass rallies where the crowds wildly cheer as they listen to the propaganda. Meanwhile, the Nazis usurp one country after another. Even though Hitler is Austrian by birth, he appeals to the Germans because he preaches the glory of the Germans and all things Germanic. In March 1935, he restores the formation of a German army and universal military service in violation of the Versailles Treaty. He makes demands on Austria that have to be met or Austria will be invaded. He announces that Germany will protect Germans living outside Germany's borders. On April 10, 1938, Austria votes to join the Reich since Hitler threatens to invade if they do not. He obtains the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia the same way. Hitler tries the same tactics in Poland and the result is the declaration of war by England. He secures Scandinavia, Belgium, and Holland with very little fighting. The Germans meet with some resistance in France but not enough to stop them. After France, he begins bombing London. Hitler thinks that he can take over England and then America by using his tactics and military.



Tess Shirer

Tess Shirer is the wife of William Shirer. She travels around Europe with him, living wherever he is assigned until she becomes pregnant in 1937. She remains on the French Riviera, awaiting the birth of their child. Their daughter, Eileen, is born in Vienna, right before they move to Geneva. She remains in Geneva until October 1940 when she leaves for the United States right before her husband.

Edward R. Murrow

Edward R. Murrow is a CBS news correspondent. He is the European manager that hires Shirer to cover the continental news on October 1, 1937. Murrow is based in London and frequently travels to meet Shirer in various places.

Heinrich Himmler

Heinrich Himmler is chief of the Gestapo and a top Nazi official. He formerly was a country school teacher and is now the number three man in Germany. He is described as ruthless.

Paul Joseph Goebbels

Paul Joseph Goebbels is a top Nazi official who has to authorize all transmissions through Germany. He is also in charge of the Nazi propaganda machine and makes sure that the foreign news correspondents have extra good rations.

Hermann Goring

Hermann Goring is one of the top Nazi officials who is in charge of the war-time economy. He is second in command to Hitler and will take over if anything happens to Hitler. Goring is popular in Germany.

Carl Boehmer

Carl Boehmer is the foreign press chief of the Propaganda Ministry. He has traveled widely.

Hubert Knickerbocker

Hubert Knickerbocker is a journalist and friend of the Shirers. He is married to Agnes.

William E. Dodd

William E. Dodd is the American Ambassador in Berlin.



Objects/Places

Lloret de Mar

Lloret de Mar is a beach town in Spain near the Pyrenees where Shirer and Tess lived for a year.

Paris

Paris is the capitol of France, which is the European country located east of Spain.

Berlin

Berlin is the capitol of Germany and the location of the headquarters of Hitler and the Third Reich.

Nuremburg

Nuremburg is a city located in southeastern Germany.

New York

New York, on the East coast of the United States, is the home of William Shirer.

Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Garmisch-Partenkirchen is in the Bavarian Alps and the site of the Winter Olympics in 1935.

The Taverne

The Taverne is an Italian restaurant in Berlin where the news correspondents gathered to discuss the events.

Vienna

Vienna is the capitol of Austria, a country located to the southeast of Germany.



London

London is the capitol of England where Murrow was based.

Italy

Italy is located in southern Europe and under the control of Mussolini.

Geneva

Geneva is the capitol of Switzerland, a neutral country, where the Shirers moved in 1938.

Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia is a central European country on Germany's eastern border.

Poland

Poland is an Eastern European country bordering both Germany and Russia.



Themes

Hitler's Tactics

One of the dominant themes of the book is Hitler's tactics. The Nazi regime practices management of the news through its Ministry of Propaganda. The German people are told what Hitler and his circle wants them to know. This is usually not the truth. The German news never portrays Germany as the aggressor even though Hitler usurps country after country. Hitler tells the target country his terms and if they did not agree to them, the Germans will invade. Most countries yield to his demand without a fight. If there is an invasion, the other country is portrayed as the aggressor and Germany as the defender. Casualty and death figures are distorted so the people do not know the truth. Foreign news correspondents, especially those in radio, are subject to censorship. The German censors decide what they can and cannot broadcast since a written copy of the script has to be submitted for approval before the broadcast. Radio broadcasters, like Shirer, cannot broadcast anything that is not favorable to the Germans.

By 1940, the censor representative sits next to Shirer during the broadcast, checking for any deviation from the approved script and listening to the emphasis on words. The Propaganda Ministry is never interested in the world or that the German people know the truth. They do not want any news about the true number of casualties or the executions that are actually occurring in the different countries that they annex. They want the information slanted in their favor.

Relationships

The relationship between Shirer and his wife Tess is another underlying theme of the book. The book opens as the couple are finishing a year's sabbatical leave in Spain, where they have lived in a small town. They relax, enjoy themselves and entertain friends. Shirer then takes a position with the Paris Herald. They both love living in Europe. Shirer frequently travels to Berlin to cover different events and eventually accepts a position in Berlin so they move there into Nazi Germany.

Neither of them are Nazi supporters however. When Tess becomes pregnant in 1937, she remains on the French Riviera, not wanting to have the baby in Nazi Germany. The Shirers move to Vienna, where their daughter is born. Tess is ill after the birth of the baby and they just make it out of Austria as the Nazis take over. They then establish their home in Geneva, Switzerland. Tess and the baby remain in Geneva while Shirer spends most of his time in Berlin covering the war and traveling around Europe. They see each other when they can. As Hitler takes country after country, and it looks like Switzerland might be in danger, Shirer wants Tess and the baby to leave for America. Eventually, they depart, leaving two months ahead of Shirer's own planned departure in 1940. They are separated for long periods of time because of the war and because he does not want his wife and daughter living in danger.



Determination and Integrity

Determination and integrity is another theme of the book. Shirer is determined to do a good job no matter what the situation is. Like all good reporters, he checks his facts. The problem however is that the Nazi manage the news. Reporters are not free to broadcast whatever they want. The radio broadcasts have to be approved by the Ministry of Propaganda censors before it can be broadcast. The censors will not allow anything that is not favorable to Germany. Shirer believes that he has the right to not make the broadcast if he does not agree with the Nazis. Shirer will not falsify any news stories, not matter what the Nazis want. He tries to personally check the information in the Nazi press conferences often traveling around to different parts of Europe. He talks to people in Berlin and in territories to see the effect the managed news had on them. Shirer has to do his live broadcasts in the middle of the night and this means driving or traveling in blackout conditions to reach the studio. He continues his broadcasts during the bombings, even though he has to use a lip microphone so that New York will not hear the bombs in the background. Eventually, the degree of censorship increases to the points that he feels that he cannot be effective. He quits and leaves Europe.



Style

Perspective

The perspective of the book is that of the author, William L. Shirer. The book is written in the first-person point of view and is in diary form. The author was a European news correspondent who covered the events in Europe before and during the first few years of World War II. He watched as Hitler took country after country and traveled around to the different countries learning firsthand the situation and talking with various people. He lived in war-time Berlin without coal for heat and on food rations. Shirer gives a firsthand account of what life was like under these circumstances and what it was like dealing with the Nazis and their Propaganda Ministry. All of his radio broadcasts were subject to the Nazi censors who would not allow broadcasts that were not favorable to the Germans. During all of this, he kept a journal about the experiences he had. This book is the result of that journal. Shirer kept the journal with the intention of writing a book. He wanted people to know what actually happened in Europe during that period. He wanted people to know how Hitler was able to take country after country and why the German people supported him. The book was first published shortly after he left Europe and the intended audience was the whole world since he felt the world should know what actually took place. Shirer is well qualified to write a book of this kind since he is a journalist and these were his experiences.

Tone

Berlin Diary is written in the first-person point of view of the author, William L. Shirer. Shirer writes in a subjective tone presenting the facts as he found them and freely expressing his own opinions and views. He is not a supporter of the Nazis or Hitler's actions and he makes this point clear to the reader. Shirer does not like the censorship that he is subject to and he makes this fact known. When the censorship becomes too severe, he quits and leaves Europe, feeling that he can no longer be effective in his job as a radio broadcaster.

Shirer tells the reader what he thinks about Adolph Hitler and his tactics. Hitler always presents the territory that he takes as the aggressor and informs the people that Germany is acting in self-defense. Shirer talks to various people and point this out. He did not like the Nazi tactics and he makes this fact clear. His reason for writing the book is to let the world know what is really happening in Germany and Europe. The reader has to appreciate the subjective nature of the book. Shirer writes about his experiences and what he has seen happen. He expresses his views. The reader appreciates Shirer's knowledge and views and his honesty in expressing them. This is why the reader reads the book. The presentation of personal views is appropriate in a book of this nature.

Structure

The structure of Berlin Diary is appropriate to the nature of the book. The book, which is written from the journal of new correspondent William L. Shirer, covers the years 1934 to 1941 and is divided into two parts. Part I, entitled Prelude to War, deals with the pre-war years 1934 until September 1939. Part II, entitled The War, covers September 1939 until December 13, 1940 when Shirer leaves Europe. There are no chapters in the book and it consists only of journal entries. Each journal entry has the city, month, and day that it pertains to. The top border of each page has the year, city, month, and day that section on the page pertains to. This way, the reader can always determine the date and place of the material.

There is a Foreword section at the beginning of the book in which the author states his reasons for writing the book. He intentionally keeps a journal for the purpose of writing a book to inform the world of what is happening in Germany and Europe. The brief Table of Contents gives the titles and page numbers of the two parts. There is a detailed Index at the end of the book that makes it easy for the reader to look up information. At various places in the book, there are explanatory footnotes which provide additional information about an event. Unfortunately, the book lacks any pictures or maps that would have been useful to the reader.

The chosen structure works well for the book and offers easy reading, even though it can be lengthy at times. The book is well worth the reader's time.



Quotes

"And the year just past, 1933, may very well have been one not only of transition for us personally, but for all Europe and America. What Roosevelt is doing at home seems to smack almost of social and economic revolution. Hitler and the Nazis have lasted out a whole year in Germany and our friends in Vienna write that fascism, both of a local clerical brand and of the Berlin type, is rapidly gaining ground in Austria" (Part I, pgs. 3-4.)

"At noon Tess turned on the radio for the news just in time for us to hear a ringing personal attack on me, implying that I was a dirty Jew and was trying to torpedo the winter Olympic Games at Garmisch (which began in a few days) with false stories about the Jews and Nazi officials there. When I got to the office after lunch, the front pages of the afternoon papers were full of typically hysterical Nazi denunciations of me" (Part I, pgs. 45.)

"Somehow I feel that, despite our work as reporters, there is little understanding of the Third Reich, what it is, what it is up to, where it is going, either at home or elsewhere abroad" (Part I, pg. 84.)

"No word from Prague tonight as to whether the Czechs will accept Chamberlain's ultimatum. I still hope against hope they will fight" (Part I, pg. 135.)

"Then when Hungary and Romania and Yugoslavia have been similarly reduced (Hungary practically is already), Germany will be economically and agriculturally independent, and the great fear of Anglo-French blockade, which won the last war and at the moment probably could win the next, will be done away with. Germany can then turn on the West and probably beat her" (Part I, pg. 173.)

"One week after the Anglo-French declaration of a state of war the average German is beginning to wonder if it's a world war after all. He sees it this way. England and France, it is true, are formally fulfilling their obligations to Poland" (Part II, pg. 207.)

"What if Himmler and his gang are up to, obviously, is to convince the gullible German people that the British government tried to win the war by murdering Hitler and his chief aides. The censor today cut out all reference to my script to the Reichstag fire" (Part II, pg. 252.)

"The crying problem of Europe, I am beginning to think, is not Communism or Fascism-



is not therefore social. It is the problem of Germanism, of the mentality so clearly expressed by Rust. Until it's solved, there will be no peace in Europe" (Part II, pg. 328.)

"As I see it, Hitler had three choices: to wait and fight the war out on the economic front, as was done all winter; to meet the Allies in some easy spot, say the Balkans; to seek a decision in the west by striking through neutral Holland and Belgium. He has chosen the third, and the biggest risk" (Part II, pg. 332.)

"More on the never war an official statement tonight says that for every German civilian killed and every stone damaged in Germany during the night raids of the British, revenge will be taken many times over" (Part II, pg. 386.)

"I have a feeling that what we're seeing here in Paris is the complete breakdown of French society—a collapse of the army, of government, of the morale of the people. It is almost too tremendous to believe" (Part II, pg. 412.)

"Peace for Britain with Germany absolute master of the Continent is impossible. Also, the British must have some reason to believe they can successfully deny their island and in the end bring Hitler down. For Hitler has given them an easy way out to save at least some pieces for themselves" (Part II, pg. 453.)

"And yet the war is not yet over, or won. And it was on this aspect that people's minds were concentrated today, if I am any judge. They long for peace. And they want it before the winter comes" (Part II, pg. 494.)

"Hitler and Mussolini have pulled another surprise. At one p.m. today in the Chancellery, Japan, Germany, and Italy signed a military alliance directed against the United States" (Part II, pg. 532.)

"It had been a long time, but they have had happy years, personally and for all people in Europe they had had meaning and borne hope until the war came and the Nazi blight and the hatred and the fraud and the political gangsterism and the murder and the massacre and the incredible intolerance and all the suffering and the starving and cold and the thud of a bomb blowing the people in a house to pieces, the thud of all the bombs blasting man's hope and decency" (Part II, pg. 605.)

Topics for Discussion

Why did Shirer and Tess take a year off in Spain? What changes occurred in Europe during that time?

What were the events that led to the beginning of World War II? What was Hitler's goal before the fighting began?

What is the position of the Russians as World War II begins? How does it change? Why?

What was the position of the United States in 1939? What was the neutrality bill? Why was it repealed?

Discuss the use of propaganda in Nazi Germany? How were certain facts and events presented to the German people? Why?

What is the new order? Where did the term originate? How was it applied?

Why did Shirer decide to leave Berlin permanently? What were the factors he considered?