

Berlin Noir Study Guide

Berlin Noir by Philip Kerr

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Plot Summary

Against the backdrop of the rise and fall of Nazi Germany, Philip Kerr has produced a trilogy focused on the life of Bernhard Gunther, former police officer turned private investigator. A man who is obviously of superior abilities, Gunther is sought by wealthy and influential individuals to solve crimes, initially involving murder but, ultimately, morphing into complex situations involving greed, corruption at all levels of government, fraud, and treachery. The reader is first introduced to Gunther as he is called upon by wealthy German industrialist Hermann Six to solve the murder of his daughter and son-in-law and the theft of an incredibly valuable necklace from their safe. The investigation takes Gunther into the inner workings of a rising Nazi Party of the 1930's and the scramble of politicians to find favor and power within the new regime. As well, the necklace is only one of two very valuable items held within the safe. Documents implicating Six in fraud and corruption have been taken as well, and their recovery proves more dangerous than solving the murder or jewelry theft.

The second tale involves an initial investigation of the blackmail of the homosexual son of a wealthy publisher. In the course of solving this crime, Gunther becomes embroiled in a case of serial murders of young German girls, is forced to re-join a police force he does not admire, and embroils himself in the increasingly antisemitic and militaristic bureaucracy of Berlin. The blackmail and the murder cases, moreover, are woven together by common threads of bribery, corruption, and greed, as the blackmailed son is found to be in conspiracy with criminals bent upon control of government officials and increasing the anti-Jewish activity in Berlin. Appalled by the direction in which his country is headed, Gunther nevertheless see the opportunity to destroy some of the evil, only to be disappointed by the outcome once the scoundrels are exposed. It appears that no one has hands clean enough to do the right thing.

A defeated Germany and a depressing ruined Berlin provide the setting for the beginning of the third book of this trilogy. The scene quickly shifts to a renewed and rebuilt Vienna, however, as Gunther is employed to find the evidence that will free a former police colleague who has been accused of the murder of an American Army Captain. His marriage in trouble, and his pockets empty, Gunther is willing to leave his unhappy existence for a new adventure. Once again, however, he is pulled into new political treachery, as American and Soviet forces compete for power in post-war Europe and are both willing to deal with former Nazi officials to achieve their ends. Gunther, on the other hand, has had a bit of an epiphany, and, even having served time in a Russian prisoner of war camp, feels a need to find some way in which to atone for the horrific evil perpetrated by the Nazi regime. His guilt stemming from not taking a stand against the Nazis has weighed upon him heavily, and when his investigation leads him on a path of exposing Nazi war criminals in hiding, he willingly accepts the challenge. Other forces are at work, however, and though he uncovers a nest of Nazis believed to have been dead, neither the Americans nor the Russians are willing to take the action he believes is necessary. In the end, he is compromised again, ever the practical man, choosing life in Vienna and a reconciliation with his wife.



Book I: March Violets, Chapters 1-9

Book I: March Violets, Chapters 1-9 Summary

Nazi Germany's capital city of Berlin is preparing for the Olympic Games, and government workers are busy dismantling anti-Jewish signs, so that the country will appear less objectionable to foreign visitors. Bernhard Gunther, a local private detective, is more concerned, however, with the loss of his secretary, Dagmar Lehman, from whose wedding he has just returned. His evening will be a bit longer, moreover. Returning home, he is met by a lawyer who states that a client is in need of his services and wishes to see him immediately. Willing to lose some sleep for two hundred marks, Gunther is driven to the home of Doktor Hermann Six, a wealthy German industrialist. Six's daughter, Grete, and her husband Paul Pfarr, a lawyer working for the Department of the Interior, were recently murdered, their house burned in an attempt to hide the crime. Both were actually shot to death, and their safe was ransacked. Six states that an extremely valuable diamond necklace was stolen from the safe and believes that if Gunther can find the thief, he will also have found the murderers. As well, he produces a letter from the insurance company, stating that it has hired Gunther to recover the necklace, which will give the investigation legitimacy. Encouraged by the large sum Six is willing to pay, Gunther agrees to start immediately.

The beginning of Gunther's investigation involves a short trip to the remains of the burned home. Here, he finds nothing of interest, except the arrival of the maid who had been on holiday. Realizing that she may be a good source of information, he offers her a ride to her home. Frau Schmidt informs him that the couple fought a great deal, probably due to Grete's drinking and Paul's long hours at work. He was in the SS, much to his father-in-law's dismay, and it appears that they, too, had heated arguments. Six hates Hitler; Paul loved him. The next step is to visit pawn shops for information on jewelers who might handle such a valuable piece of property as the necklace. One Jewish shop owner gives him several names and sells him an SS badge which might come in useful at some point. A visit to the the morgue and the pathologist who conducted the autopsies reveals that the couple was indeed shot before the home set on fire, that she was pregnant, and that the couple had had sex shortly before their deaths.

Pursuing the idea that a gem dealer will eventually have to be involved in the fencing of the necklace, Gunther is intrigued by Gert Jeschonnek, who shows a deep interest in the possibility of sharing a reward with Gunther for its return. Setting him up, Gunther shows Jeschonnek a picture of the necklace, stating that it was stolen from an Indian princess currently staying at the Adlon Hotel. He has friends at the Adlon switchboard who will verify his story and let him know if anyone calls to inquire. On his way out of Jeschonnek's office, Gunther manages to make a clay cast of two office keys from the secretary's desk, knowing that he will return for a private look into Jeschonnek's files and desk.



Additional information comes Gunther's way when he meets with the young cop, Stahlecker, who tells him to back off the case because it is too hot. It seems that Paul Pfarr, in addition to being SS, had also joined the Gestapo and was one of Himmler's favorites, appointed to investigate governmental corruption, particularly within the labor unions. Himmler is angry over Paul's death and has named a special team of investigators, who are currently looking for a mistress who has disappeared. Gunther's activities have not gone un-noticed by others. Returning to his office, he finds two criminal inspectors, who have torn his office apart and who now want to know what he knows about the Pfarr case. Gunther sticks to his story about investigating for the insurance company, but they insist that he turn over any discoveries to them immediately.

A reporter friend of Gunther's is unable to find much written about Six from newspaper archives but knows of a woman reporter who did some research a while ago. He will attempt to find her and put them in touch. Unfortunately, she lost her job as did most women when the Third Reich established itself, as the new policy is for women to stay at home and raise more members of the superior race. Gunther's best informant, a man by the name of Neumann, reveals that a safe cracker this good would probably now be a member of a "ring." When pressed, Neumann tells Gunther that there are several "rings," groups of rich ex-convicts who are supposed to be involved in rehabilitation of criminals but who, in fact, have put together organized crime groups. The most well-known in Berlin right now is called the "German Strength." Additional information from Neumann reveals that the German Strength group has killed Gerhard Von Greis, a government official, and that Kurt Mutschmann, a premier safe cracker recently released from prison, has somehow double-crossed Red Dieter, head of the German Strength. Gunther's last activity of the day is to break into Jeschonnek's office, where he finds a phone number next to his name in a wastebasket. When the dialed phone is answered, Gunther recognizes the voice immediately—Haupthandler, Six's personal secretary. In Jeschonnek's personal phone book, moreover, is the name and address of Von Greis, the missing government official, and additional telephone numbers he will attempt to trace.

Book I: March Violets, Chapters 1-9 Analysis

These first nine chapters serve to introduce the reader to a number of important elements of this story. First, the backdrop of early Nazi Germany, with its increasingly militaristic activity and its anti-Semitic thrust, reminds the reader that Gunther is living in a potentially dangerous atmosphere, and, as any student of history knows, conditions in the early 1930's were but a minor precursor to the horrors to come. Corruption is perhaps a bit of a surprise, but it is rampant from the local police up to and including governmental departments, which gives some hint for a possible motive to kill Paul Pfarr. As well, it appears that organized crime is firmly entrenched in this new Germany and seems to operate without fear of reprisal or prosecution. Further, while homosexuals are officially outcasts, there appear to be more than a few in government posts.



Gunther emerges as a cynical, often humorous, but practical man. As a former police officer, his new career as a private investigator seems natural, and it is revealed that he was an extremely successful detective while with the police. He must make a living on his own now and is obviously happy to have a case in which the rewards may prove substantial. His personal feelings about the Nazi Third Reich are demonstrated by his numerous sarcastic comments and his refusal to stand at attention during parades or listen to inciting speeches from Party leadership. Clearly, he is not a fan but will not openly oppose the new order and jeopardize his freedom and career. This may be a reflection of many Germans during this time. While their consciences may be bothered by the trend in Nazi ideology, they are concerned more with their own personal well-being and, so long as the new governmental policies do not impact them negatively, they will remain quiet and as "invisible" as possible. Policies against Jews and the wholesale attempts to remove women from the work force are bothersome, certainly, but economic conditions for many Germans are improving, and this itself is cause for some optimism.

Other characters are introduced so quickly and randomly that the reader is left wondering who the real "players" will be as the plot progresses. Certainly, the discovered relationship between gem dealer Jeschonnek and Six's private secretary Haupthandler hints that they will be involved as Gunther's investigation moves forward. The additional involvement of Mutschmann, Von Greis, and Red Dieter, however, are unclear and appear at this point to be almost unrelated to the primary murder investigation. The obvious animosity between Six and his son-in-law, moreover, provides another potential avenue of research for Gunther. Like most good detective novels, however, the reader is given a flurry of information, the sorting out of which will consume the remainder of the story.



March Violets, Chapters 10-13

March Violets, Chapters 10-13 Summary

A quick trip to the residence of Von Greis reveals a trashed apartment and a run-in with a Gestapo Officer, who is seeking clues to Von Greis's disappearance. Gunther talks his way out of this fix, and learns that Goering actually owns the apartment. Back at his office, Gunther is visited by Inge Lorenz, reporter Muller's friend, who once did some research on Hermann Six. According to Inge, Six inherited his father's business but is angry for the new government's control of business in general. Impressed by both her intelligence and good looks, Gunther offers her a secretarial position, asking her as well to set up a date with an old boyfriend who works at the German Labor Service. Specifically, Gunther wants to know why Paul Pfarr spent so much time there and the name of his mistress.

While Inge addresses her tasks, Gunther attempts to locate Mutschmann, to no avail. A visit to the Tegal Prison, where he was incarcerated, reveals that both Mutschmann and his cellmate, Hans Bock, received visits from Kasper Tillessen, member of the "German Strength." After a long day, Gunther is allowed no rest, moreover, as he is visited by Officer Reinacker, who takes him to Goering's home. Goering wishes to hire Gunther to look for Von Greis, because Von Greis has important, confidential information and was "squeezing" people in order for the information to remain secret. The blackmail money provided Goering with funds to pursue many projects, one of which was purchasing works of art. More important, however, Goering does not want the information to fall into the hands of one of his largest rivals, Himmler, the new Gestapo chief. Gunther agrees to take the case, receives a picture of Von Greis, and asks, in return, that Goering tap the phones of Haupthandler and Jeschonnek.

Inge arrives at the office the next morning with information about Paul Pfarr. He was despised by many for his continuing investigation into official corruption, had a mistress by the name of Eva, and his secretary, Marlene Sahn, may have more information. Gunther will have a full day again, following an investigation which is becoming increasingly more complex. His first stop is at Haupthandler's beachfront apartment where, flashing the Gestapo badge he bought from the pawn broker, he convinces the caretaker to allow him entry. There, he finds two suitcases, filled with new male and female clothing, as well as tickets to London. Perhaps Haupthandler is leaving with Pfarr's mistress, now that they have murdered the couple and taken the jewelry. Gunther and Inge then visit the abandoned-looking residence of Tillessen, finding Von Greis dead and partially-burned papers. Within the remaining scraps is a pay slip to Hans Bock from a construction company. Trying to deduce the connections among all of the dead, Gunther now concludes that Mutschmann and Bock must have broken into the safe at the Pfarr home as well. A visit to Bock on his job site, is now required. With tough persuasion and the threat of a charge in the murder of Von Greis, Bock eventually reveals that he and Mutschmann are members of the German Strength "ring," and that they were asked to break into a safe in order to retrieve documents. Bock slipped away



but assumes that Tillesson drove Mutschmann to the crime scene. Both men are now missing, but Red Dieter is looking for Mutschmann.

The Germania Roof is a favorite night club of Red Dieter, and Gunther and Inge plan an evening of dining and dancing. Dieter, indeed, is there, and he and Gunther exchange a bit of what they know. Dieter knows that Gunther is looking for the jewels, and Gunther knows that Dieter is looking for the papers which had obviously also been in the Pfarr safe. They agree that they may have mutually compatible goals, and Red informs Gunther that a large man at the bar is probably there to follow and kill Gunther. Sending Inge out, Gunther slips out a back way, ambushes the man, and learns that he had been hired by Haupthandler.

March Violets, Chapters 10-13 Analysis

What first appears to be a single investigation of the murder of a married couple for the purpose of stealing a valuable piece of jewelry has now expanded into a far more complex case. As Gunther begins to put the pieces of this puzzle together, he realizes that he may be into something far larger and more dangerous. Obviously, Paul Pfarr has many enemies within the Third Reich, as it appears that he was bent upon exposing corruption at all levels of government. The involvement of Red Dieter and the German Strength "ring," moreover, adds additional danger for both Gunther and Inge, as does the revelation that Haupthandler is obviously involved and willing to hire a professional hit man to kill Gunther. Now, it appears that there may have been two crimes at the Pfarr household and perhaps two separate sets of criminals. Mutschmann was obviously sent by Red Dieter to retrieve highly incriminating documents from Pfarr's safe, but Dieter was not interested in any jewelry. Yet, the jewelry is missing. The conclusion that Haupthandler was the jewelry thief is obvious, given his association and communication with Jeschonnek. Gunther is hoping that the telephone taps will reveal more about the plans of Haupthandler, but he does now know that Haupthandler is planning to flee the country and will have to complete the sale of the necklace in order to do so. It will be Gunther's job to discover the location of the exchange, catch Haupthandler in the act, and return the necklace to Hermann Six. The remaining issue for Gunther, however, is the identity of the murderer, as both Haupthandler and Dieter had motives. The information Pfarr possessed made him a huge threat to both the "German Strength" and many government officials and would certainly warrant his murder. On the other hand, perhaps Haupthandler was discovered as he was removing the jewelry and was thus forced to shoot Pfarr and Grete. The pieces are not yet all in place.



March Violets, Chapters 14-19

March Violets, Chapters 14-19 Summary

Gunther receives the results of the wiretaps Goering agreed to conduct, and he now has the information regarding the place and time of the exchange. He sends Inge in his car to wait outside Haupthandler's beach house, while he meets with Marlene Sahm, Pfarr's former secretary. Marlene reveals that Pfarr had critical information revealing corruption and conspiracy among organized crime, labor unions and Hermann Six. Six owns a number of banks, and union funds were deposited there and then used personally by Six to play the stock market, making everyone wealthy. Von Greis was in possession of further documentation, and Pfarr had him arrested in order to obtain it. For turning over this information, obviously, Von Greis was killed by Dieter, probably with Six's blessing. Marlene also confirms that Pfarr had a mistress but that Grete had a lover as well, his identity unknown to her.

Gunther takes a cab to Haupthandler's, where he finds his car, but not Inge. He slips into Haupthandler's home, confronts Haupthandler, Jeschonnek, and the mistress. Jeschonnek is killed in self-defense, just as the home is invaded by three men who knock Gunther unconscious. Inge is nowhere. Gunther is taken to the local police station where he relates all that he knows about the jewel heist and the probable escape of the thieves. After hours of grilling, his story checks out, and he is released and returned to his car. Inge is still missing, and Gunther is frantic. When his day-long search reveals nothing about her location, he decides to wrap up the Six case and collect his fee. He reveals all that he knows and surmises that Paul Pfarr's mistress probably killed the couple and has run off with Haupthandler, and collects his forty thousand mark fee. When he tells Six that his daughter was pregnant, Six immediately reacts. Grete was unable to have children. A picture of Grete is produced, and a shocked Gunther realizes that Grete is, in fact, the woman he has mistaken for Pfarr's mistress. She and Haupthandler had obviously taken the diamonds to begin a new life together, after killing Pfarr and his mistress. Six now frantically reveals his treachery to Gunther.

Six knew all along that Pfarr had the papers, and allowed Red Dieter to hire Mutschmann to break into the safe to retrieve them. He believed that Mutschmann had also taken the jewelry and knew that, if Gunther could find Mutschmann, he would have both the jewelry and the incriminating papers. Six's conspirators now have Haupthandler and Grete and are torturing them to discover the location of the papers. Quickly, they jump into Six's boat and speed up the river to the German Strength headquarters on an island. During the ride, Six reveals that Grete was adopted and, as an adult, researched her heritage, only to discover that she was part gypsy. Pfarr was furious, believing that he was married to one of inferior racial background, and was determined to destroy Six in revenge.



Arriving at the German Strength headquarters, Six and Gunther are led to Haupthandler and Grete, both alive but in bad condition. Grete is carried out to Six's boat, but, just as they are leaving, police arrive, and, in the shoot-out, Grete is killed. Six, Dieter, and Gunther are all arrested, and Haupthandler eventually dies from his torture. On the fifth day of imprisonment, Gunther learns that Dieter has been executed and that Six is under house arrest, not yet charged with anything. The Gestapo do not want to charge Six. They want the incriminating documents so that they may blackmail Six for the remainder of his life. In order for Gunther to gain his ultimate release, he must agree to a deal with the Gestapo. Mutschmann has been found, hiding in a prison, having committed a minor crime to save himself from assassination by Dieter. Gunther is to go "undercover" as a prisoner and befriend Mutschmann, in order to learn the location of the documents.

Life in prison is horrific for Gunther, but he manages to find Mutschmann, who is dying of hepatitis. Befriending him as he vacillates in and out of consciousness, Gunther is given a single clue—"Pick them up by the nose." Gripped in his lifeless hand, however, was a paper with directions to the location of a briefcase, containing the documents. Gunther is released from prison, but Inge has never surfaced.

March Violets, Chapters 14-19 Analysis

The first story of this trilogy ends without great satisfaction for the reader. While the original crime investigation is resolved, there are many loose ends which may never be "tied up." The documents are still missing, the necklace has not been recovered, and murders will go unpunished by the legal system. The Gestapo is revealed for what it truly is—an organization far more interested in covering up corruption in which it is complicit and in lining its pockets through blackmail and graft. For the two survivors, there is little solace. Six must now live with the guilt that his activities have resulted in the death of his only daughter. There is little to suggest, moreover, that he will alter his behavior, and now the threat of the document discovery hangs over his head. He will be a pawn of the Gestapo and other government officials for the remainder of his life. For Gunther, who has fallen in love with Inge, there is no resolution. She has vanished, and no amount of investigation and requests for assistance reveal anything regarding her fate. Physically damaged from his stint in prison, his only consolation is that he has forty thousand marks in his pocket and will be able to live comfortably within a country whose leadership is progressively moving toward policies and activities which he finds repugnant. It is obvious that he will remain in Germany and continue to pursue his career, surrounded by the backdrop of antisemitism, foreign aggression, fraud, and crime.



The Pale Criminal, Part I, Chapters 1-14

The Pale Criminal, Part I, Chapters 1-14 Summary

As Germany begins swallowing up neighboring territory, Gunther remains in his self-employed position as a private investigator. Now, however, he has a partner—Bruno Stahlecker, a former fellow police officer who has become so disenchanted with the Nazis that he can no longer be employed by government at any level. Gunther has received an anonymous note regarding a former missing person's case and is told to be at the old, burned-out Reichstag building at midnight. There he finds Arthur Nebe, Berlin's Chief of Criminal Police, who, also disenchanted with the Nazi government, believes that a change will have to come from within, in the form of an overthrow of the current government. He asks Gunther to return to the police department, in order to be a part of the new "order" once Hitler is overthrown. As well, Heydrich, Nebe's boss, believes Gunther can solve a case plaguing Berlin at the moment. Gunther is not interested but does learn from Nebe that, when Inge's apartment was redecorated, drug paraphernalia was found behind a false panel in her bathroom. She was probably a drug addict, and this may explain her disappearance.

Back at the office, Gunther has received a call from Frau Lange, the wealthy owner of Lange Publishing Company. Her son, Reinhard, a homosexual, is being blackmailed over a series of letters he wrote to one-time lover Dr. Kindermann, who is a psychiatrist purportedly treating him for his condition, but who is obviously homosexual himself. There are ten letters in all, and she has "purchased" four of them to date. She wants Gunther to find the blackmailer and retrieve the remaining letters for her. Son Reinhard, himself wealthy with a trust fund, is also the owner of a magazine, called Urania, which dabbles in the occult and is terrible with money. Gunther's plan is to make the next delivery, as well as to check himself into Kindermann's hospital for a few days, in order to investigate the doctor.

Gunther's hospital stay reveals very little, other than the information that a male nurse, Klaus Herring, has been fired and left very angry. Perhaps, Gunther muses, he took the letters and is the blackmailer. Meanwhile, Frau Lange has received another blackmail note, and Gunther and Bruno arrange the drop and surveillance. The money eventually makes its way to the apartment of Klaus Herring, and Gunther leaves Bruno there on stake out while he takes the news to Frau Lange. The plan is for Bruno to break into the apartment once Herring leaves, retrieve the remaining letters, and then to deal with Herring shortly thereafter, perhaps with a good beating.

While Bruno is on the stake out, the Gestapo picks up Gunther, delivering him to Heydrich, who convinces Gunther to re-join the police force, under threat of losing his license and his gun permit. Heydrich needs Gunther's expertise in solving a string of murders of young teenage girls. Gunther also learns that Bruno has been murdered while on stake out, that Klaus Herring is the killer, and that Herring has committed suicide. Proceeding to Herring's apartment with other police officers, Gunther



determines that Herring had been strangled prior to the hanging and finds a small SS pin in his closed fist. He reveals nothing but searches the apartment for the remaining letters of Reinhard Lange, to no avail. He will have to work on this case in his spare time, now that he is back on the force, with the title of Kommissar.

Gunther is given a team of officers to investigate the rape-murder cases plaguing Berlin. As well, he brings in a forensic psychiatrist (Frau Von Hofe) and a professor of forensic medicine (Hans Illmann). Four bodies have already been found—young blonde girls, raped, hanged by their feet and their throats cut—and a fifth girl is missing. The bodies have been left all over Berlin, and no witnesses have reported seeing any girls forcibly taken by any means. Gunther assigns his team, Korsch, Deubel, and Becker, to specific tasks and then personally pursues an investigation of sadism by visiting pornographic shops and a brothel. An anti-Semitic magazine, published by Julius Streicher, shows drawings of young girls killed in the same manner as the real crimes, with the accusation that Jews are killing gentiles in the name of "ritual murder." A party official in Nuremberg, Streicher is completely corrupt, and the police have been watching him for months. Streicher certainly has motive for the current murders, not the least of which is his hatred for Goering, Himmler and Heydrich, and the desire to embarrass them with a crime spree that remains unsolved.

One break in the case occurs when another girl is missing. Interviewing the girls at her school, Becker discovers that a Jewish girl remembers a man in uniform drove to the school at dismissal and who, upon learning that she was Jewish, drove off. Further, the girl remembers a strange tobacco smell coming from the car—probably marijuana. When shown a photograph of Streicher, however, she is unable to positively identify him.

The Pale Criminal, Part I, Chapters 1-14 Analysis

Gunther's comfortable existence as a private detective is certainly disrupted by the Berlin police, when he is forced to re-join the force by Chief Heydrich, in order for a team to be established to crack a horrific case of serial murders of young German girls. As well, Gunther has a private case of blackmail which he continues to pursue, although there are certainly hints that the two may be somewhat related, even in the early stages of the investigation. Gunther proves to be an excellent negotiator, however, as he is able to obtain the rank of Kommissar, thus giving him a wide range of independence and an enviable salary. His team appears to be professional, except for Deubel, who is eventually dismissed when he arrives drunk for a meeting, having lost his small pistol which was the same type used to murder a Jewish suspect.

Antisemitism is obviously on the rise, even in Berlin, which has until now remained a bit more restrained. While Jews are restricted in business operations and certain rights, there is not the wholesale destruction of homes and businesses seen in other parts of the country. Antisemitic literature is particularly prevalent, as well, depicting Jews as evil and murderous. As Gunther believes, it is only a matter of time before harsher measures against Jews will become the norm.



Hitler continues to build the military, and there is no question that invasions of neighboring countries are eminent. Many police and military officials oppose this militarism, however, and Gunther is encouraged that perhaps an invasion of Czechoslovakia will bring about a revolt which will overthrow a leader he sees as insane and evil. His hopes are dashed, however, when England and France capitulate and allow Germany to occupy the Sudetenland, thus averting war with those two countries.

This section also portrays the sophistication of criminal investigation of the time, as Gunther uses the services of a psychiatrist who is able to profile the criminally insane individual who is probably perpetrating the murders and a professor of criminal forensics, who is also being used as a consultant. As Gunther is "educated" by these two, and completes some recommended reading, he becomes far more knowledgeable relative to insanity and, indeed, sees Hitler in much of the descriptions.



The Pale Criminal, Part II, Chapters 15-20

The Pale Criminal, Part II, Chapters 15-20 Summary

While completing the difficult task of informing the parents of one of the missing girls that their daughter's body has been found, Gunther and Becker inform the family that traces of hashish have been found in her mouth, indicating that the murderer is using this substance, as well as an officer's uniform, to lure the girls. The parents are concerned that there is no publicity regarding the murders and believe that all of Berlin should be warned. Heydrich has received strict orders, however, that the crimes are to remain unpublicized. Gunther learns that the parents had hired a private investigator, Rolf Vogelmann, to look for their daughter, to no avail. Vogelmann, unknown to Gunther, is taking out full page newspaper advertisements for his services, ads, it turns out, that are paid for by Lange Publishing. Attempts to get additional information from Frau Lange about this are fruitless, but she does tell Gunther that Reinhard has managed to retrieve the other six letters which were mysteriously missing from Herring's apartment. Gunther agrees to return the other four that he has and collects a hefty fee for his work. The connection between Reinhard and Vogelmann has intrigued him, however, and it is time for some undercover work.

Gunther meets with Hildegard Steininger, the widowed mother of another missing girl, and she agrees to allow Gunther to pose as her husband, as they employ Vogelmann. It is immediately obvious that Vogelmann is a fraud, as he asks none of the questions that a professional investigator asks. A "tail" is immediately put on him, but Hildegard is now frightened that Vogelmann knows where she lives. Gunther agrees to stay there and continue to pose as her husband. When Vogelmann returns a few days later, stating that he has been unsuccessful, he introduces Hildegard and Gunther to Dr. Rahn, a friend who can arrange a seance with a brilliant psychic, for a hefty fee. Gunther now understands the scam and is further disturbed when they produce a copy of Urania, Reinhard Lange's magazine, to support their claims of success. A background check on Dr. Rahn reveals that he is in the SS and a fanatical antisemite.

The seance is certainly revealing. In attendance are Vogelmann, Rahn, Herr Weisthor (the psychic), Reinhard Lange, Dr. Kindermann, and Himmler. Still posing as Hildegard's husband, Gunther goes to the restroom and jimmies the window so that he may return for some investigation once the session is over. During the session, Weisthor "contacts" Hildegard's daughter, who tells them that her body can be found in an old beer barrel at a brewery just outside of Berlin. She also insists that her death was a part of a religious ritual and hints that her killers are Jews. Obviously, Vogelmann, Rahn, Weisthor, Lange and Kindermann are conspirators in the murders, hoping to convince Himmler to launch a pogrom in Berlin. Sneaking back into the house following the seance, Gunther overhears a conversation among the conspirators during which Weisthor gets his necessary injection of cocaine and they talk of a meeting they will soon be attending at which they will press their antisemitic plans to Himmler. A quick search of Weisthor's study reveals that he is in the SS as well, and that the operation in which they are



involved is titled "Project Krist." Weisthor bears a resemblance to Streicher and could actually be the murderer.

Realizing that Reinhard Lange is the weakest link, Gunther uses harsh interrogation techniques and threats of torture to wring the truth out of him. Weisthor is actually a former mental patient of Kindermann, and Bruno was killed by Kindermann, Rahn and Weisthor, so that he could not identify them as the killers of Klaus Herring. The teen murders were, as Gunther suspected, a plot to enrage Berliners against Jews. At this point, Gunther takes Lange to Kindermann's office, search warrant in hand, and finds Weisthor's complete file. Among the other files is one of Inge Lorenz, a woman with whom Gunther had fallen in love years ago but who disappeared during another investigation. Lange reads his own file, in which Kindermann refers to him as a "neurotic effeminate." When Kindermann enters with a gun, Lange lunges at him, only to be shot and killed. Before Kindermann can shoot again, Gunther smashes a bust onto his head, knocking him unconscious and dragging him out to his car for a ride to the big meeting Himmler is hosting in a small town outside of Berlin.

During the drive, Kindermann explains that he had been treating Inge for depression and using cocaine to do so. She had gone without it for some time and then stopped in to see him. He gave her an injection, which was too severe, and she died. At this point, Gunther stops the car, takes Kindermann into the woods, kills him, and proceeds alone to the meeting. Gunther reveals the entire treachery to Heydrich and, together, they inform Himmler. The perpetrators are taken away by police, but Gunther's satisfaction is short-lived. While he has managed to save the Jews from blame for the murders, he is dismayed to learn that, because a Jewish fanatic has killed a German diplomat in Paris, the order has been given in Berlin to allow "spontaneous expressions of German public outrage...against Jews. (p. 517) Obviously, synagogues, shops and neighborhoods will be burned and looted. As well, punishments for the murderers will not be as desired, probably because they have information on Himmler which must remain secret. Rahn and Weisthor are forced to resign from the SS but are never tried and convicted. Rahn dies in a suspicious accident and Weisthor is retired to a tiny remote village.

The Pale Criminal, Part II, Chapters 15-20 Analysis

Gunther once again shows himself to be an excellent judge of character and a dogged and determined investigator. He is a risk-taker as well, willing to bend the law, engage in breaking and entering and, in all cases, demonstrates a profound ability to intricately plan schemes for detection and entrapment. His hunches relative to the ethics and character of others are generally correct. Fortunately, because he is not a part of the bureaucracy of this Nazi government, he is not embroiled in its corruption and underlying alliances and therefore may operate to expose whatever necessary to solve crime. Unfortunately, Gunther has no control over the ultimate outcomes and punishments of criminals who are within the bureaucracy, and his disappointment at the final outcome is clear. When murderers are not brought to trial because of their positions and their information about other officials, justice is not served.

The increasing treachery of both government officials and the top leadership in the Nazi Party is a continuing undertone of this section. It is clear that the antisemitic activities and violence against Jews is occurring throughout the country and will soon invade Berlin, where Jews, up until this point, have not been victims of pogroms. By the end of this novel, however, the burning and looting of Jewish neighborhoods is but a precursor to the horrors yet to come.



A German Requiem - Part I - Chapters 1-9

A German Requiem - Part I - Chapters 1- 9 Summary

The third part of this trilogy begins in post-war Berlin. Germany is now occupied by four countries—the United States, France, England, and the Soviet Union. The Cold War has begun, and life in Berlin is not easy. It sits in the middle of the Soviet zone, and there is fear among native Berliners that they may soon be cut off from the western portions of Germany. Gunther is now married and living with his wife in less than luxurious conditions. During the war, Gunther was sent to the Russian front, captured, and served some time in a prisoner-of-war camp. He is slowly returning to health and still actively pursuing his career as a private investigator. Wife Kirsten is a waitress in an establishment frequented by American soldiers and appears to be providing sexual favors for goods which they are unable to obtain on the open market. Gunther is obviously unhappy and hoping for a case which will be both lucrative and time-consuming. He is therefore quite happy when a Russian intelligence officer, Colonel Poroshin, arrives to request Gunther's assistance in investigating a murder in Vienna of which Emil Becker, a former colleague of Gunther's on the police force, is suspected. The colonel states that Becker once saved his life, and he must now attempt to repay the debt. A cursory investigation, through a visit to Becker's ex-wife, reveals that Becker is now quite wealthy, involved in black marketeering, and living with a new girlfriend. She hopes he hangs.

Gunther decides to take Becker's case for a five thousand dollar fee, papers which allow free and safe travel to and from Vienna and the opportunity to leave his wife for a while, while he contemplates the future of their marriage. A second meeting with Poroshin results in the details of the case. Becker was hired to bring packages back and forth from Vienna to Berlin, supposedly advertising layouts for a Viennese company. The company representative was a man by the name of Konig, and Becker's contact in Berlin was Eddy Holl. According to Becker, he ran into Holl, drunk and in the company of an American Army Captain Linden, and Holl contacted him the next day telling him to forget he ever met Linden. When Becker returned to Vienna, he was contacted by Linden for a meeting. Linden wants information about the packages Becker is delivering and the advertising company that has employed him. Becker is not able to give much information, but, fearing Linden's motives, follows him. Linden meets with another man in an old film studio, shots are fired, the other man comes out, and Becker finds Linden dead in the studio, surrounded by a large amount of stolen tobacco. Knowing that Becker had been a police detective, Konig asks Becker to look into the disappearance of an American friend, Captain Linden, offering a large reward. Seizing upon the opportunity, Becker returns to the studio, which is surrounded by police officers. Becker's gun, a .38, is confiscated, but not before Becker realizes that it is not his gun and has at some point been switched on him. It, of course, turns out to be the gun that killed Linden.



The only information Poroshin has about Linden is that he was assigned to the Berlin Documents Center, which holds all Nazi records, including everyone who was a Party member and all Party documents captured when the American and British forces invaded Germany. Gunther talks his way into the Documents Center and learns that Linden's funeral will be held in Vienna but also that he often visited the Drexler's, husband and wife Jewish lawyers, bent upon finding Nazi war criminals. A trip to the Drexlers' reveals that they have been murdered by poison gas slipped under their door on a tray.

Prior to leaving for Vienna, Gunther also meets with an old and reliable informant, Neumann, who is now guarding Nazi war criminals at a prison. Neumann does not know Eddy Holl but is able to tell Gunther that the German arm of the Viennese advertising company is in the town of Pullach, just outside of Munich.

A German Requiem - Part I - Chapters 1- 9 Analysis

Post-war Berlin is a depressing place. Even though Gunther is existing at a reasonable level, shortages and rationing make life less than luxurious and have caused most Berliners to scrape for all that they can. Stories of black market sales, Germans congregating in large open-air markets to sell whatever of value they have left to occupying soldiers, and the increase in prostitution as a means of securing a few luxuries, are common. Even Gunther's wife is providing sexual favors in order to obtain coffee, cigarettes, and other coveted items. Gunther himself is still recuperating from his wartime imprisonment, and the prospect of earning a huge fee for a case is something he cannot decline. His troubled marriage lends another incentive.

In the latest case, it appears that the Nazis will again be involved. The murdered Captain Linden's position in the Berlin Documents Center and his affiliation with the Nazi-hunting Drexler's strongly hints that there may be some schemes afoot to protect former Nazis from detection. As well, it appears that Becker, who is obviously content to market anything profitable, has been involved in more than the mere transport of advertising layout copy. What remains unclear is the motive for framing him for Linden's murder, as it does not appear that Becker has been a major player in whatever the advertising agency may be engaged.



A German Requiem - Part I, Chapters 10-18

A German Requiem - Part I, Chapters 10-18 Summary

Upon his arrival in Vienna, Gunther is met by Dr. Liebl, Becker's attorney. The biggest surprise is that, despite the bombings and destruction during the War, Vienna looks beautiful, completely renovated, most unlike Berlin. From Liebl, Gunther receives additional details of the case against Becker as well as the remainder of his fee and living expenses. Becker has evidently done quite well for himself in Vienna, able to afford a high-priced lawyer and a nice home. As they discuss the War and its aftermath, Liebl reveals that many Austrians collaborated with Nazis and that many former German Nazis are now living in Vienna with false identities. For their part, the Austrians are attempting to distance themselves from any Germans at the present time.

Becker's girlfriend, nurse Traudl Braunsteiner, arranges for Gunther and Liebl to meet with Becker in prison the following day. Becker explains his brief history with Konig, informing Gunther that he did open one of the packages, assuming it held drugs, and was surprised to find that it contained Nazi Party, army and SS files. He insists, however, that the files were on minor players. Gunther muses that the files may have been meant for Linden who was working with the Drexlers to hunt Nazis. Asked about Konig's background, Becker tells Gunther that he was in the Austrian Nazi Party, had escaped to Germany to avoid arrest and joined the Bavarian police in Munich. In 1933, he joined the SS. Now in Vienna, he is purportedly an advertising executive with a girlfriend, Lotte, who works in a local club. Now, Konig and Lotte have disappeared.

The story becomes much more complex, as new names are thrown at Gunther. Konig has an associate, Max Abs, who is now somehow related to the death of a headstone maker by the name of Pichler. Finding Abs's address, Gunther discovers that he has left quickly for some small town outside of Munich, perhaps Pullach. At the same time, Gunther is accosted by American Officer John Shields from the International Patrol and then by Captain John Belinsky of the the U.S. Counter-Intelligence Corps. Both are interested in the murder of Linden and headstone maker Pichler, and both insist that Gunther keep them informed as his own investigation continues.

An evening at the Cassanova Club, where Lotte works, results in Gunther's meeting Veronika, another hostess, who tells him that Konig and Lotte are on vacation. On a subsequent visit to the club, Gunther goes to the aid of Veronika, who is being raped by two Russian soldiers, and Belinsky arrives to assist Gunther. The evening ends with a long conversation between Gunther and Belinsky, during which Belinsky reveals that Linden was a member of the CIC and was assisting Belinsky in finding former Nazis. Belinsky is following Gunther in the hopes that Gunther's investigation will resolve the issue of Linden's death. Gunther proposes his theory to date. He believes that Becker was delivering files to Linden in Germany and that both Eddy Holl and Max Abs are



working for The South German Industries Utilization Company, probably a shell corporation for something else, located in Pullach. Belinsky ends the conversation by requesting that Gunther not mention him or the CIC to Shields, as there is "bad blood" over a recent incident.

Gunther is uncomfortable with so many individuals interested in the investigation and, indeed, following him. As well, the incident with the Russian soldiers cause him to realize that he is defenseless. A friend of Becker, therefore, delivers a requested gun.

A German Requiem - Part I, Chapters 10-18 Analysis

These chapters serve up additional names, backgrounds and events which appear to confuse the reader on purpose. As in the earlier two novels of this trilogy, one is bombarded with so much seemingly unrelated information, it is difficult to see how everything will ultimately fall into place. Many others are obviously interested in Gunther's activities, and the apparent competition and animosity between two American organizations is a bit puzzling but certainly not unbelievable, given the territorial nature of investigatory organizations in general.

Emil Becker is portrayed as a selfish opportunist, willing to engage in any type of illegal activity for profit and desert his wife in Berlin. He is therefore not Gunther's favorite person, but, if innocent of murder, is, nevertheless, entitled to an acquittal. The investigation, however, may be leading Gunther down a treacherous path, specifically, involvement in the hunt for former Nazi officials now hiding in Vienna under assumed identities. The fact that Konig was a former SS officer certainly creates the suspicion that he may be involved in assisting the Nazis, and yet he is sending Nazi files back to Germany, possibly to Linden and the Drexlers. Survival in post-war Europe, however, has obviously meant that many individuals may work for a variety of groups, to include former Nazis, Nazi hunters, Americans, or Soviets, and perhaps more than one group at a time. These conflicting "loyalties" may make Gunther's task more difficult.

A short depiction of the beauty of Vienna, rebuilt and thriving, in contrast to Berlin, in which destruction and rubble still abound, speaks to the obvious anger of the occupying forces toward the Germans. Life in Berlin remains depressing and hard, while the Viennese enjoy good relationships with occupying forces, few shortages, and a return to their former lifestyles. Though many Viennese obviously collaborated with the Germans, there is not the priority of tracking them down for punishment that there is for former German Nazis. Further, the black market appears to go unchecked, as the activities of Becker clearly demonstrate.



A German Requiem - Part II, Chapters 19-38

A German Requiem - Part II, Chapters 19-38 Summary

Working with Belinsky, Gunther learns that the company in Pullach is an American-sponsored organization run by the Germans, the goal of which is to rebuild the German economy. Basically, it is a "think tank," designed to promote capitalism as a means of fending off Communism promoted by the Soviets. As well, he learns that Lotte Hartmann is back in town and now a card dealer at a local casino. Hoping to locate Konig through her, Gunther and Belinsky devise a scheme to have Gunther and Lotte arrested together, and then to have Gunther bribe the police to secure their release. All goes as planned, and Konig contacts Gunther the following day, to express his gratitude, ultimately offering Gunther a position with his organization, obviously the Pullach company, with a location outside of Vienna as well. Accepted into the organization, Gunther deduces that Belinsky has known about this group all along and, in fact, Belinsky admits as much. He informs Gunther that the organization is being investigated by the CIC, because they believe that former Nazi war criminals, under assumed names, are now a part of the group. He wants Gunther to become a mole, and, although he feels a bit uncomfortable with the arrangement, Gunther agrees to do so as a means of personal atonement for his country's shameful past.

In the midst of interrogation by leaders of the Organization and his belief that both Belinsky and Becker have not revealed all they know, Gunther is shocked to see Poroshin in Vienna in the company of Becker's girlfriend, Traudl. Further, to prove his allegiance to the Organization, he is asked to kill Traudl by its leadership. As well, Shields is calling to inquire about his progress. To further complicate his life, moreover, Gunther receives a letter from his wife, asking for a reconciliation and begging him to return to Berlin. When he is then informed that Traudl has been killed by a hit-and-run driver, Gunther is ready to quit, were it not for his need to ferret out war criminals if able.

Following a night of drinking, Belinsky drives Gunther home, only to discover Veronika waiting, in need of help. One of her customers, a prominent local dentist, Dr. Karl Heim, has died of a heart attack in her room. Belinsky and Gunther retrieve the body, drive it to the Russian zone, and place it on railroad tracks. In emptying his pockets, however, they find a card of Major Jesse Breen, a liaison officer between the CIC and the Organization. A search of Heim's office shows that he does not have many current patients, and that most of his work has involved full mouth extractions and replacement with false teeth. Both Konig and Max Abs have had the procedure, and it becomes obvious that they are probably not who they claim to be. At this point, Gunther insists that Belinsky reveal all that he knows. Belinsky confesses that he knows Becker is innocent of Linden's murder. A trace on the gun used revealed that it belonged to Heinrich Muller, chief of the Gestapo during the war. According to documents, Muller was killed a few years ago, but dental records revealed that the body was not, in fact that



of Muller. Belinsky believes that Muller is now in the Organization and wants Gunther to find him. If Gunther can find Muller, Becker will be free to go, but time is running out with Becker's trial soon to begin.

Gunther proceeds to Becker's jail cell and demands to know the full truth. Becker confesses that Traudl was not his girlfriend but Poroshin's, that he is a minor member of the Organization, and that he does not care who other members are, so long as he is paid well to carry documents. Gunther is further disgusted as Becker confesses that he gained release from a Russian POW camp by killing a sick man who was about to be released and taking his place. Now, Gunther is determined to infiltrate the Organization completely and expose every German war criminal possible.

Konig takes Gunther to a lovely home in a small village outside of Vienna. There, he is shocked to meet up with Arthur Nebe, whom he thought was killed in the last days of the war. Nebe explains that he and many others faked their own murders, changed their identities and teeth, and made certain that documentation of their deaths reached the Americans. He admits to having used Becker as a courier but, in the process, also learned that Becker was passing information to Russians as well. He is happy that Becker will hang for the murder of Linden, an obvious set-up. Arrangements are made for Gunther to return the following morning for a large meeting with Organization leaders, and Gunther returns to Vienna to reveal all that he has discovered to Belinsky. A new scheme is devised between these two allies.

Belinsky tells Gunther to return the next morning as scheduled. If Muller is there, Gunther is to raise and lower the blinds in the bathroom, and Belinsky and his assistants will raid the home. A further complication, however, is that Konig is looking for Dr. Heim, and Lotte has told Konig that he was last seen with Veronika. Veronika is now missing, and Gunther is certain that they have taken her to the Organization's headquarters, in an attempt to learn his whereabouts. Heim must be found and given the information he has about these former Nazis. Gunther, for his part, feels responsible for Veronika and determines to return to the headquarters early in the morning in an attempt to save her. His efforts are foiled, Belinsky double-crosses him, Veronika is killed, and Gunther finds himself imprisoned in the basement. At this point, Arthur Nebe reveals the reason for Linden's murder. Linden was a de-nazification officer who got greedy. He was paid by Nazi officials to document their demise but then began to work with the Drexlers to expose them. Muller saw to it that all three were murdered. Nebe notices that Gunther has not eaten the food brought to him, especially a piece of strudel. Nebe accepts Gunther's offer of the strudel, not knowing that Gunther had slipped a cyanide capsule inside for his own use later. Nebe quickly dies, leaving Gunther a Walther .38 in the process. Escaping the basement, Gunther steals a car, speeds through a U.S. Army checkpoint and into a shop window. As he falls into unconsciousness, he hears American voices.

Waking up in an U.S. Army hospital, Gunther is greeted by Shields, to whom he relates the entire tale. Shields returns a few days later to inform him that Belinsky was actually a Russian intelligence officer, looking for Nazi war criminals. Further, Shields is not interested in pursuing Nazi members of the Organization, for they may indeed prove



useful in the future. Gunther is disgusted but realizes that, in the interest of his own health, he will not protest. He has more pressing concerns, moreover. The Soviets have cut off Berlin, and an American airlift is now in process to provide supplies. Gunther is certainly worried about his wife and does not know how and when he will be able to return to her. He returns to his accommodations in Vienna, with plenty of his original fee money left, not prepared for the final twist.

Responding to an anonymous note for a secret meeting, Gunther is surprised to find Poroshin, who is willing to tie up the remaining loose ends for him. Belinsky and his men never intended to raid the Organization's headquarters because they wanted Muller and the others alive. They have all escaped to Pullach, being used by the Americans against the Russians. Eventually, the Russians shall expose them for who they are, creating world-wide embarrassment for the United States. Belinsky, another loose end, has been eliminated. In a final gesture of appreciation for Gunther's efforts, Poroshin has managed to get Kirsten out of Berlin. She is waiting for him at the Cafe Mozart.

A German Requiem - Part II, Chapters 19-38 Analysis

The final part of *The German Requiem* is difficult to follow in spots, because so many new names and events are introduced, all of whom and which are intertwined and lead Gunther into an extremely dangerous situation. While Gunther is truly attempting to do the right thing, others around him are calling the shots and are certainly less than altruistic. Shields, Belinsky, Becker, Nebe, and Poroshin all have their own agendas, motivated by greed, survival, or the new conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. None of them, even U.S. officials, appear to be interested in tracking down Nazi war criminals who appear to be thriving in the new post-war era, assisted by both Russians and Americans. What Gunther comes to realize in the end is that his own personal atonement will not be possible, for exposing the treachery, double-crossing, and willingness to turn a blind eye on evil men will only result in his own death. He has money, nice accommodations in Vienna, and a wife who has been brought out of Berlin for him. To remain silent and allow his newly-found principles to be compromised is the practical solution.



Characters

Bernhard Gunther

As the protagonist in each of the three novels, Gunther is a private investigator with just enough independence and guts to survive in a country, the government of which he personally opposes. He is bright, dogged in his pursuit of solving cases for which his fees are significant, and astute enough to maintain his independence of thought and action while others around him succumb to the vagaries of corrupt bureaucrats. Gunther thrives in the collection of details, because, according to him, it is in these details that one nugget may be found which ultimately leads to resolution of the mysteries he is hired to solve. Having been an extremely successful police detective, Gunther uses his investigative skills, as well as his many contacts throughout Berlin, to pursue the truth and these, coupled with his innate powers of deduction and "gut" feelings, gain him the reputation of being the best in his profession. On a personal level, Gunther can at first be characterized as a practical man who is focused on his own well-being and financial health, though he thoroughly opposes the ideology of the Nazi regime. He is single and enjoys a lifestyle of an affluent bachelor in pre-war Germany, although he falls in love with a woman who ultimately disappears. It is not until the second novel that he learns of her fate, and his response is impulsive and unlike his usual careful demeanor. He murders, in cold blood, the individual who killed his love with a lethal drug overdose. By the end of the war, Gunther is rather unhappily surviving in Berlin, a city in ruins and occupied by four other countries. He is happy to transport himself to Vienna on a case and while there has a bit of an epiphany, realizing that he can perhaps atone for his own guilt by exposing former Nazi officials, now in hiding, and bringing them to justice. Though his efforts are ultimately thwarted by both the United States and the Soviet Union, Gunther makes peace with himself and his wife and the reader is left with the understanding that he will remain in Vienna and continue his private investigation profession.

Hermann Six

A wealthy industrialist who dislikes the Nazi regime's increasing control over his business, Hermann Six employs Gunther to solve the murder of his daughter and son-in-law, along with the theft of an expensive piece of jewelry from their safe. He is aptly portrayed as a self-centered individual, whose real aim is not so much the solution of the crime of murder but, more important to him now, the recovery of documents also in the safe that implicate his collaboration with organized crime "rings." Six and his son-in-law were clearly at odds, primarily because Six did not reveal to Paul that his daughter was adopted and that her racial background is not pure, a matter of deep concern and anger for the young husband who is moving up in the Nazi Party. In the end, it is discovered that Six's daughter did not die but, in fact, is in the process of fleeing with her lover and the money gained from the sale of the jewelry. The organized crime leadership with whom he is "in bed" now has his daughter, torturing her and her lover for



information. In the end, Six loses his daughter, and the documents are not recovered by his efforts. They will obviously be used in the future to "keep him in line," as has become typical of the bureaucracy set up by Hitler.

Inge Lorenz

A former reporter, Inge Lorenz has lost her job because the new Nazi leadership insists that Aryan German women marry and raise Aryan German children for the future of the Fatherland. She meets Gunther at the request of a former colleague, because she formerly conducts research on Hermann Six's background. Their meeting expands into both a professional and personal relationship, as Gunther offers her a job as his assistant and, ultimately, falls in love with her. Toward the end of *March Violets*, Inge drives Gunther's car to a planned meeting spot and then disappears. Despite his best efforts, Gunther is unable to find a trace of her whereabouts and concludes that she must have been kidnapped and murdered. In the second work, *The Pale Criminal*, Gunther learns that Inge was a one-time drug addict who visited her former doctor supplier while waiting for her rendezvous with Gunther. The doctor accidentally overdoses Inge and then disposes of her body.

Reinhard Lange

Reinhard Lange is a self-centered, unprincipled young man who lives on the wealth of Lange Publishing Company, which is owned by his widowed mother. He dabbles in the occult and lives in a state of opulence and decadence, consorting with a group of Nazis who are willing to commit serial murders in order to incite Germans against Jews. Lange is a homosexual, however, and exposure could mean prison. When he is blackmailed with letters he has written to a doctor lover, his mother employs Gunther to find the culprit and recover the remaining letters. Lange is clearly in over his head, moreover, and the only end can be his death.

Dr. Kindermann

A figure in *The Pale Criminal*, Kindermann runs a psychiatric clinic outside of Berlin. His more important work, however, is the collaboration with a group of murderous sadists who kill German teenage girls, in order to place blame on Jews and pressure governmental leaders into taking more drastic measures against the Jews in Berlin. Kindermann also uses drugs, specifically cocaine, to treat and control his patients and is discovered to have been responsible for the overdose given to Gunther's lover, Inge Lorenz. For this act, Gunther kills Kindermann, in cold blood, with no regrets.

Arthur Nebe

Arthur Nebe is first introduced in *The Pale Criminal*, as a police chief who needs the help of Gunther in solving the serial murders of teenage girls in Berlin. He pressures



Gunther into re-joining the police force to conduct the investigation and is willing to pay a high salary and allow great flexibility in order to resolve the crime. Gunther appears to like Nebe, for he hints at support of an overthrow of Hitler and the avoidance of war. Nebe is again introduced in *A German Requiem*, not dead, as records indicated, but, rather, alive in Vienna and working with a group of former Nazi officials to plan the economic recovery of Germany, possibly funded by both Americans and Soviets. Gunther is appalled at the lengths to which Nebe is willing to go to protect the identities of himself and his cohorts, to include murder of innocent individuals and collaboration with men who clearly committed acts of mass murder during the Nazi regime.

Rolf Vogelmann

Posing as a private investigator, Vogelmann is part of a group of Nazi fanatics, in *The Pale Criminal*, who want to move against Jews much more quickly than the Nazi regime has done, especially in Berlin. To this end, the group has concocted a scheme to murder Aryan German girls, blame it on the Jews as a form of ritual murder, and incite Berliners and the government to take violent and drastic actions against the Jews. His part in the scheme is to offer his services to grieving parents and then to introduce them to a fake psychic who then tells the parents where to find their children's bodies, along with imparting information that the murders were indeed ritual killings conducted by Jewish groups.

Emil Becker

In *The Pale Criminal*, Becker is part of the police team put together by Gunther to investigate the serial killings of German teen girls. They part ways when the crimes are solved and Gunther returns to his private practice. The war is over by the time they meet again, in Vienna, in the third novel of the trilogy. Becker has been involved in the black market and has also served as a courier for an advertising firm, which is merely a front for an organization of former Nazi officials. Gunther is brought to Vienna by a Russian officer whose life Becker once saved, because Becker has been framed for the murder of American Captain John Linden. Gunther ultimately proves Becker's innocence but not in time to save him from conviction and execution.

Palkovnik Poroshin

Poroshin is a Soviet military officer who employs Gunther to investigate the murder of an American Intelligence Officer in Vienna, in order to gain the release of Emil Becker who once saved his life. Poroshin is not seen much in *A German Requiem*, but Gunther becomes suspicious when he sees Poroshin in Vienna with the girl who is supposed to be Becker's lover. In the end, Poroshin is the one individual who provides Gunther with all of the details that tie up the morass of corruption and intrigue connected to the original case, and, in a final gesture of good will, manages to bring Gunther's wife out of Berlin and to Vienna, for reconciliation and a much happier lifestyle.



Captain John Linden

In *A German Requiem*, John Linden is an American intelligence officer in charge of the Documents Center in Berlin that houses all records of Nazi officials. He is murdered. When Gunther is employed to find the true killer, it becomes obvious that Linden was murdered because he had knowledge of Nazi war criminals who, presumed dead, were, in fact, living under other identities in Vienna and working with an organization to plan the economic recovery of Germany, funded by Americans and, perhaps, Soviets as well.

Roy Shields

An officer with the U.S. Military Police in Vienna, Shields brings Gunther into his office to demand that he keep Shields informed of any results of his investigation. In the end, Shields demonstrates that the goals of America do not include active pursuit of Nazi war criminals, but, rather, taking whatever steps necessary to win the Cold War.

John Belinsky

An American of Russian descent, Belinsky poses as a member of the Counter Intelligence Commission and wins the trust of Gunther. In the end, however, it is revealed that he was actually working for the Soviets and attempting to gather evidence that the United States was using former Nazi war criminals to promote its plans for post-war Germany.

Konig

A former Nazi official, Konig now resides in Vienna, disguised as an advertising executive. He is a member of the "Org," a group of former Nazis, funded by America, the purpose of which is to promote capitalism in post-war Germany.

Mutschmann

A safe cracker who, under orders from Red Dieter, head of the German Strength Ring, broke into the home of Paul Pfarr to steal documents incriminating many individuals which could be used for blackmail. Mutschmann did not turn the documents over to Dieter and, fearing death, commits a small crime to get back into prison. Gunther is later sent "undercover" to the same prison to obtain the location of the documents.

Haupthandler

Hermann Six's personal secretary and lover of Six's daughter, Grete. Together, Grete and Haupthandler murder Grete's husband Paul and his mistress, fake the theft of a

valuable piece of jewelry, and plann to go to London and begin a new life. Both eventually die.



Objects/Places

March Violets

A term used to describe those Germans who enthusiastically supported the Nazi regime

The Alex

Nickname for the Berlin Police Department

Museum Island

A township on a small island in a river near Berlin, named for the large number of museums on the island

KZ

Slang term for prison

German Strength

A "ring" run by Red Dieter, bent upon obtaining the documents held in the safe of the Pfarr's and stolen when Pfarr and his mistress are murdered

Dachau

Prison in which both Jews and Aryan criminals are housed. Gunther is sent there "undercover" to befriend safe cracker Mutschmann and discover the location of important documents Mutschmann has stolen from the safe of Paul Pfarr

Gestapo

Specialized Nazi police who are charged with ferreting out "enemies of the Third Reich."

Urania

Occult magazine published by Reinhard Lange



Der Sturmer

A radical antisemitic publication, supported by Julius Streicher, a sadistic criminal who holds a Nazi Party leadership role in Nuremberg.

Project Krist

A scheme concocted by Vogelmann, Otto Rahn, Karl Weisthor and Reinhard Lange to kill and mutilate German girls and pass their crimes off as ritual killings by Jews

Eastern Zone

That part of Berlin occupied by the Soviets following World War II

Johnny's American Bar

Bar/restaurant where Gunther's wife Kirsten works

BDC

Berlin Documents Center, a place housing all records and files of Nazi officials

Denazification Certificate

This is a document given to those who are not part of the Nazi government or party. Possession of this document keeps Germans from internment during the post-war occupation.

Pullach

Small town outside of Munich and site of the Organization headquarters, a group of former Nazis now focused on promoting capitalism in Germany



Themes

Survival

Survival has been notably characterized as man's first basic instinct. In the complexities of a society, moreover, the question arises regarding what an individual is willing to do and to compromise in order to survive. Nazi Germany is portrayed in this work as a dangerous place, not only for Jews, Catholics, and purportedly inferior races, but, as well, for the ordinary Aryan German who fears reprisals for speech or actions critical of the Third Reich. Gunther is just such an individual. Privately, he abhors the new regime, with its antisemitism, militarism, and philosophy of hate. Publicly, however, he must remain neutral and, in some instances, supportive. In the name of survival, he succumbs to pressure to return to the police department and, ultimately, to fight as a German soldier on the Russian front. To refuse would be suicide. Gunther is able to justify his actions, however, with the knowledge that he is able to uncover and expose both crime and corruption, being responsible, in many instances, for the deaths of the perpetrators. An understanding of his own compromises, moreover, allows Gunther to develop a less judgmental approach to others. When his wife has an affair with an American officer in order to obtain luxuries during the post-war occupation, for example, he is saddened, but not reproachful or angry. He is able to accept in others those human weaknesses which external circumstances often promote.

Greed

Greed, it seems, is a common phenomenon to all societies and author Kerr appears to state that, no matter what the political, economic or social structure of a country, corruption will always be present in the form of individuals who find ways to manipulate the system for monetary gain. Nazi Germany, with its rigid, fascist structure, was no exception and greedy individuals were able to find methods of lining their pockets through a variety of venues—blackmail, fraud, development of organized crime "rings," and using powerful political roles to engage in crime for personal gain. Thus, Goering squeezed others, on whom he had incriminating information, to gather funds for his accumulation of works of art; connections between organized crime and the governmental labor department resulted in the use of union funds for Hermann Six's personal financial gain; Reinhard Lange was willing to be a part of murder for promotion of his ambitions; Viennese were willing to collaborate with the Nazis and, during the post-war era, assisted them in their hiding. One is left with the realization that the activities of individuals motivated by greed are amazingly similar. Throughout history, no matter what the societal structure, there have been unprincipled people whose selfish greed served as the only motivator in their lives. Given the events of the Cold War and beyond, moreover, there is no indication that this negative aspect of human nature will subside.



Atonement

Atonement is generally defined as the act of making amends for a wrong committed. Individuals may atone for their own mistakes or sins by correcting what they have done to other individuals or by "paying the price" in the form of punishment. True atonement, however, has, at its core, a genuine contriteness, or sincerity of sorrow, for what one has done. In the case of Bernhard Gunther, the need for atonement arises from his failure to resist and openly oppose the behaviors and crimes of his government. He remained passive in his opposition, as the Nazi Party rose to power and implemented its policies of genocide and military aggression. He allowed himself to be conscripted into military service, though the only other options would have been to flee or die. He secured a transfer to the Russian front in order to avoid involvement in the mass murders of Jews and other enemies of the state, hoping that he could appease his conscience somewhat. Still, he feels guilt and the disapproval of those in his post-war environment, whose unspoken question remains—"How could you have let it happen?" Faced with personal guilt, Gunther attempts atonement for both himself and his fellow Germans by attempting to expose Nazi officials who are in hiding and, in many instances, thriving. Gunther's naivete about the real world of politics, however, is glaringly demonstrated, as he discovers that neither the Americans nor the Soviets embrace his goal. They are far more interested in using former Nazi officials to seek advantage in the Cold War. Gunther's quest for a method of atonement, therefore, is denied. Perhaps, the attempt itself is enough for him, though, as he realizes that, in world politics, it is not the philosophies or ideologies that change so much as it is the players.



Style

Point of View

A first-person narration is the only method by which this series of tales can be told, for it would be impossible to fully comprehend the actions and behaviors of Bernhard Gunther without an intimate and pervasive view into his most inner thoughts and feelings. First, because this trilogy is based upon crime solving by an individual detective, the reader must be allowed to follow the deductive threads of Gunther's thoughts as he attempts to draw connecting links among the great variety of seemingly unrelated events that occur and proceeds to investigate individual crimes which morph into much more complex situations involving larger criminal activity. Second, the reader is plunged into the historical setting of the rise and fall of Nazi Germany, with its horrific policies and practices. One would have a difficult task in developing any empathy for or connection with Gunther, if not allowed to know his personal thoughts and reactions to the increasingly evil nature of his government and its bureaucrats. Once the reader is satisfied that the protagonist is both opposed to wrong doing in general and to the ideologies of his government specifically, it becomes easy to develop a relationship with Gunther and to appreciate his efforts to both bring criminals to justice and to atone for the actions of a regime he did not openly and vigorously oppose. The position of the average German during this time, simply trying to survive in a dangerous and threatening environment, is a bit more understandable when seen through the eyes of Bernhard Gunther.

Setting

Historical fiction is, by its very nature, intimately connected with the time and place of the work. Indeed, the crimes that detective Gunther investigates, and the worlds of blackmail, corruption, and fraud uncovered, would only be possible in a setting such as that of Nazi Germany and the occupation and Cold War that followed Germany's defeat. During the early days of the Nazi regime, for example, politicians and bureaucrats were motivated by greed and their own personal promotion, as they gathered "evidence" on one another and formed alliances among themselves and other corrupt organizations and individuals, in order to be "players" in the new regime. The progressively worsening conditions of the Jews is the essential background for *The Pale Criminal*, as Nazis attempt to incite Germans into violence against Jews by perpetrating crimes to be blamed on them. As the third novel, *A German Requiem*, proceeds, the reader is able to understand the plot sequence only because of the setting. Former Nazi officials are in hiding in Vienna, working with both America and the Soviet Union, as these two super powers vie for power and influence in war-torn and disabled Europe. Conditions in Berlin make the willingness of Gunther to both travel to Vienna and, ultimately, take up permanent residence there, believable. In this trilogy, then, setting is perhaps the most critical element.



Language and Meaning

Author Kerr's use of language provides both credibility and enrichment in all three of the works. A number of terms are obviously relevant to the time period as well as to German idiomatic expressions. Thus, "the Alex" is a slang word for the local police headquarters; a "spinner" is an informant; "puzzler" and "nutcracker" refer to a safe cracker; a "mulemouth" is a smart aleck. Kerr obviously did his homework, as he is not German nor has he lived in Germany. The amount of research and the use of language appropriate to both time and place speak to his determination to produce a culturally and historically authentic work. The reader may at first find some of the terminology confusing; however, once a word or phrase is read in context several times, the meaning becomes clear and serves to enrich the text. Spelling of specific terms and words is decidedly German as well, but a phonetic reading of these allows easy comprehension. "Kriminalkommissar Jost," then, is obviously a high-ranking official of the Gestapo, Hitler's new police force, organized to ferret out enemies of the state. Authentic names of streets, villages and towns serve to lend even greater credibility and speak to the author's diligence in maintaining authenticity. In terms of characters, the use of formal and informal language is important. Gunther is not an intellectual, nor are most of his contacts and colleagues. Their spoken language is of an informal variety and spattered with colloquialisms and some cursing. Nazi Party officials and upper class individuals, on the other hand, use a more formalized speech, and Gunther, at least, is easily able to adapt his language in order to establish relationships with clients.

Structure

Since this trilogy is a work of historical fiction, each of the three works is set within a chronological time frame of Nazi Germany. *March Violets*, the first tale, is set during the early days of the Third Reich and its attempt to establish systematic control of Germany, the lives of its citizens, the operations of its businesses, and complete control of dissemination of information. The establishment of key governmental departments provides the backdrop for Gunther's first criminal case and allows the reader to see the internal workings and, indeed, the corruption that greed and power quests cause. In the second work, *The Pale Criminal*, Nazi authority is clearly established, and the impact of Nazi militarism and antisemitism is evident. Thus, Germany occupies neighboring territory without resistance from England and France, and "spontaneous eruptions of violence against Jews" are allowed. World War II, however, is left out. The third work, *A German Requiem*, is set in post-war Germany and Austria, following defeat of the Axis Powers and the resulting occupation and Cold War, in which the two emergent superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, compete for influence and control in a ravaged Europe. The chronological structure remains intact throughout, however, as the reader is given just enough information about the war to understand the post-war conditions of both Germany and the survivors who must now attempt to reconstruct their lives.



Quotes

Berlin. I used to love this old city. But that was before it had caught sight of its own reflection and taken to wearing corsets laced so tight that it could hardly breathe. I loved the easy, carefree philosophies, the cheap jazz, the vulgar cabarets and all of the other cultural excesses that characterized the Weimar years and made Berlin seem like one of the most exciting cities in the world.

Behind my office, to the south-east, was Police Headquarters, and I imagined all the good hard work that was being done there to crack down on Berlin's crime. Villainies like speaking disrespectfully of the Fuhrer, displaying a "Sold Out" sign in your butcher's shop window, not giving the Hitler Salute, and homosexuality. That was Berlin under the National Socialist Government: a big, haunted house with dark corners, gloomy staircases, sinister cellars, locked rooms and a whole attic full of poltergeists on the loose, throwing books, banging doors, breaking glass, shouting in the night and generally scaring the owners so badly that there were times when they were ready to sell up and get out. But most of the time they just stopped up their ears, covered their blackened eyes and tried to pretend that there was nothing wrong. Cowed with fear, they spoke very little, ignoring the carpet moving underneath their feet, and their laughter was the thin, nervous kind that always accompanies the boss's little joke, (p. 50)

Corruption in one form or another is the most distinctive feature of life under National Socialism. The government has made several revelations about the corruption of the various Weimar political parties, but these were as nothing compared to the corruption that exists now. It flourishes at the top, and everyone knows it. So most people figure that they are due a share themselves. I don't know of anyone who is as fastidious about such things as they used to be. And that includes me. The plain truth of it is that people's sensitivity to corruption, whether it's black-market food or obtaining favours from a government official, is about as blunt as a joiner's pencil stub, (p. 59).

I was just poking around. You ask ten people ten dumb questions, and sometimes you hit a raw nerve somewhere. Sometimes, if you weren't too bored to notice, you managed to recognize that you were on to something. It was a bit like panning for gold. Every day you went down to the river and went through pan after pan of mud. And just occasionally, provided you kept your eyes peeled, you found a dirty little stone that was actually a nugget, (p. 79).

Goering nodded..."Many positions in the bureaucracy of the Reich fall to my patronage. Consequently, I'm often approached by a former colleague, a business contact, to grant a small favour. Well, I don't blame people for trying to get on. If I can, I help them. But of course I will ask a favour in return. That is the way the world works. At the same time, I have built up a large store of intelligence. It is a reservoir of knowledge that I draw on to get things done. Knowing what I know, it is easier to persuade people to share my point of view. I have to take the larger view, for the good of the Fatherland. Even now there are many men of influence and power who do not agree with what the Fuhrer and myself have identified as the priorities for the proper growth of Germany, so



that this wonderful country of ours may assume its rightful place in the world." He paused. Perhaps he was expecting me to jump up and give the Hitler Salute and burst into a couple of verses of Horst Wessel; but I stayed put, nodding patiently, waiting for him to come to the point, (p. 135-36).

During the night, Mutschmann's breathing grew shallower, and in the morning Mendelssohn pronounced that he was on the edge of coma. There was nothing that I could do but lie on my stomach and look down and wait. I thought of Inge a lot, but mostly I thought about myself. At Dachau, the funeral arrangements were simple: they burned you in the crematorium and that was it. End of story. But as I watched the poisons work their dreadful effect on Kurt Mutschmann, destroying his liver and his spleen so that his whole body was filled with infection, mostly my thoughts were of my Fatherland and its own equally appalling sickness. It was only now, in Dachau, that I was able to judge just how much Germany's atrophy had become necrosis; and as with poor Mutschmann, there wasn't going to be any morphine for when the pain grew worse, (p. 237).

But nothing surprises me now. I've grown used to living in a world that is out of joint, as if it has been struck by an enormous earthquake so that the roads are no longer flat, nor the buildings straight, (pp. 245-6).

"The new Germany," he said, "is all about arresting the decline of the family, you know, and establishing a national community of blood. Things are changing. For instance, there are now only 22,787 tramps in Germany, 5500 fewer than at the start of the year. There are more marriages, more births and half as many divorces. You might as well ask me why the family is so important to the Party. Well, I'll tell you. Children. The better our children, the better the future for Germany. So when something threatens those children, then we had better act quickly," (p. 304).

I shook my head. "I hate bureaucracy," I said. "I loathe it. But what is required here is a bureaucracy of information. What is relevant will become clear later on. Information is the lifeblood of any criminal investigation, and if that information is contaminated then you poison the whole investigative body. I don't mind if a man's wrong about something. In this game we're nearly always wrong until we're right. But if I find a member of my team knowingly submitting wrong information, it won't be a matter for a disciplinary tribunal. I'll kill him. That's information you can depend on," (p. 312).

I shook my head and heard myself sigh. How did it ever get to be this bad? How was it that a sadistic monster like Streicher got to a position of virtually absolute power? And how many others like him were there? But perhaps the most surprising thing was that I still had the capacity to be surprised at what was happening in Germany, (pp. 390-91).

Personally, I had long ago come to the conclusion that for years Hitler had been deceiving everyone with his speeches about peace. And I'd seen enough westerns at the cinema to know that when the man in the black hat picks on the little fellow standing next to him at the bar, he's really spoiling for a fight with the sheriff. In this case the sheriff just happened to be French, and it didn't take much to see that he wasn't much



inclined to do anything but stay indoors and tell himself that the gunshots he could hear across the street were just a few firecrackers, (p. 409).

In late 1947 Berlin still resembled a colossal Acropolis of fallen masonry and ruined edifice, a vast and unequivocal megalith to the waste of war and the power of 75,000 tonnes of high explosive. Unparalleled was the destruction that had been rained on the capital of Hitler's ambition: devastation on a Wagnerian scale with the Ring come full circle—the final illumination of that twilight of the gods, (p. 536).

No German, however respectable, considered himself to be above a little black-marketeering now and again, and with an average weekly income of about 200 marks—enough to buy a packet of cigarettes—even legitimate businesses had plenty of occasions to rely on black-market commodities to pay employees. People used their virtually useless Reichsmarks only to pay the rent and to buy their miserable ration allowances. For the student of classical economics, Berlin presented the perfect model of a business cycle that was determined by greed and need, (pp. 548-49).

But Konig was hardly listening. "We fought the wrong war," he said, "the wrong enemy. We should have fought the soviets, and only the Soviets. The Allies know that now. They know the mistake they made in letting Russia have a free hand in Eastern Europe. And they're not about to let Germany or Austria go the same way," (pp. 688-89).

There was, it seemed, some theological basis for a rejection of German collective guilt. Guilt, said the priests, was really something personal between a man and his God, and its attribution to one nation by another was blasphemy, for this could only be a matter of divine prerogative. After that, all that there remained to do was pray for the dead, for those who had done wrong, and for the whole dreadful and embarrassing epoch to be forgotten as quickly as possible. There were many who remained uneasy at the way the moral dirt was swept under the carpet. But it is certain that a nation cannot feel collective guilt, that each man must encounter it personally. Only now did I realize the nature of my own guilt—and perhaps it was really not much different from that of many others: it was that I had not said anything, that I had not lifted my hand against the Nazis. I also realized that I had a personal sense of grievance against Heinrich Muller, for as chief of the Gestapo he had done more than any other man to achieve the corruption of the police force of which I had once been a proud member. From that had flowed wholesale terror, (pp. 733-34).

And then, a few days before I was discharged, it came to me in a sickening realization. Because I was German these Americans were actually chilled by me. It was as if, when they looked at me, they ran newsreel film of Belsen and Buchenwald inside their heads. And what was in their eyes was a question: how could you have allowed it to happen? How could you have let that sort of thing go on? Perhaps, for several generations at least, when other nations look us in the eye, it will always be with this same unspoken question in their hearts, (pp. 824-25).



Topics for Discussion

Why does Hermann Six hate the Nazi Regime? Do you think most wealthy industrialists and businessmen felt as he did? Why or why not?

Gunther clearly dislikes the ideologies and activities of the Nazi Regime, even in its early years. What were his specific initial objections?

Gunther can be characterized as a pragmatist, in that his instinct for survival precludes his open opposition to a government he sees as evil. Is he justified in his passive acceptance of things as they are?

One pervasive theme of all three novels is the greed and corruption among government officials. Cite examples from each work to support this theme.

Gunther is so enraged by Kindermann's responsibility for Inge Lorenz's death that he shoots him in cold blood. Given the times in which this murder occurred, was it justified? Why or why not?

Gunther attempts to atone for his guilt by pursuing and exposing Nazi war criminals, so that they can be brought to justice. What is his response when neither Americans nor Soviets will proceed? Is it a credible response given Gunther's basic nature? Why or why not?

What are the reasons given to Gunther for the American lack of interest in bringing the former Nazis to justice? What comment do you think the author is making about America's commitment to its ideals?