The Dark Room Study Guide

The Dark Room by Rachel Seiffert

Contents

Plot Summary

The Dark Room, a set of three stories chronicling the events before, during, and after World War II in Germany, follows three characters in their journeys of self-discovery and acceptance. From Helmut, a physically disabled young man unable to join the war effort, to Lore, a young teenager responsible for assisting her four younger siblings in their escape to Hamburg, to Micha, a schoolteacher who discovers his grandfather's past as an SS man in the German military, these characters embark on harrowing journeys which test the foundations of all they know and love. A powerful novel filled with emotional and psychological discovery, *The Dark Room* draws a complete image of Germany's involvement in World War II and illustrates the lingering effects of that war on the countries youngest generations.

This novel, consisting of three individual stories, chronicles the experiences of German citizens before, during, and after World War II. Helmut, a young physically disabled man unable to join the German army, finds solace in the darkroom of a photographer as World War II begins to affect Berlin. When his parents are killed and his kindly employer disappears, Helmut is left to fend for himself, finally learning to be independent. During his trials, he captures the essence of war in Berlin on film and finally joins the German Army as Berlin falls to the Russian forces.

Lore, a young teenage girl, finds herself alone with her four siblings when her Nazi parents are captured and taken to labor camps. The second story of the novel follows Lore and her siblings as they attempt to flee to Hamburg to live with their grandmother. Along the way, they are helped by a seemingly Jewish prisoner, Tomas. Lore finds herself falling in love with Tomas and the children begin to see him as a father figure. Lore, confused by the images of Jewish extermination and unable to understand her parents' involvement in the Holocaust, struggles to come to term with the effects of being the child of Nazi parents in the immediate aftermath of the war. When Lore's brother, Jochen, is killed trying to cross the Russian border, she and her siblings find themselves depending on Tomas to take them to safety. Following their arrival in Hamburg, Lore discovers that Tomas is a Nazi criminal who has stolen the identity of a dead Jewish prisoner to escape the Russian Army. As Tomas flees, Lore is left with a myriad of conflicting emotions.

Micha, a young schoolteacher, is surprised to learn that his grandfather was a member of the German Waffen SS during the war. Obsessed by a need to discover the true nature of his grandfather, Micha journeys to Belarus, where he meets Jozef Kolesnik, a German who also fought in the war. Through Micha's conversations with Jozef, he learns that Jozef himself was a murderer of the Jewish people, and that Micha's own grandfather was also responsible for the deaths of many Jewish and Belarusian people. Unable to come to terms with his grandfather's crimes, Micha disassociates himself from his family, who Micha sees as unwilling to face reality. When Jozef dies, however, Micha travels back to Belarus to see Jozef's wife, Elena. Through Elena's grief and acceptance of her husband, Micha learns the true meaning of unconditional love, and is finally able to accept his grandfather's crimes and re-associate with his family.

Through the eyes of these individual characters, this novel presents a rare perspective on the Holocaust and the tragedy of World War II: that of the next generation of German citizens. Too young to participate in the war, these brave characters struggle to accept the truth of their county's heritage, as well as their own family's involvement in the atrocities of the war, and are able to find the courage and strength to accept themselves and their role in the aftermath of World War II.

"Helmut," Section 1 (Pages 3-14)

"Helmut," Section 1 (Pages 3-14) Summary

The Dark Room, a set of three stories chronicling the events before, during, and after World War II in Germany, follows three characters in their journeys of self-discovery and acceptance. From Helmut, a physically disabled young man unable to join the war effort, to Lore, a young teenager responsible for assisting her four younger siblings in their escape to Hamburg, to Micha, a schoolteacher who discovers his grandfather's past as an SS man in the German military, these characters embark on harrowing journeys which test the foundations of all they know and love. A powerful novel filled with emotional and psychological discovery, *The Dark Room* draws a complete image of Germany's involvement in World War II, and the lingering effects of that war on the country's youngest generations.

During April of 1941, Helmut is born in a small clinic in Berlin to a veteran father, Papi, and adoring mother, Mutti. Papi is told that his newborn son has a congenital birth defect, a missing pectoral muscle in his chest. While the condition is not fatal, Helmut will never have full use of his right arm. As the couple watches Helmut's development, they see the child as a normal, healthy infant, although his right side does appear thinner than that of his left. While Papi searches for work in the aftermath of World War I, Mutti takes Helmut to the coast and as he plays naked in the sand with the other children, Mutti is relieved to find that no one mentions Helmut's now obvious physical defect.

Papi finds work in Berlin as a photographer's assistant, working for Herr Gladigau. As part of Papi's salary, Gladigau offers to create a record of the life of Papi and his family by taking family portraits on a regular basis to show their son's growth and development. Of the first prints, Papi chooses the print that hides Helmut's disfigurement, but Gladigau prefers the more somber poses that show Helmut between his parents, poses where his disfigurement is more obvious. In these poses and the portraits that follow, Gladigau is sorrowed to see the thin faces and patchwork clothing of Papi and his family, and gives Papi a full time position. The family moves to a better flat by a train station where Helmut spends his time watching the trains and the people who travel on them. As Helmut begins school, he is reminded of his disfiguration when he is stopped from participating in sports, and is instead left with the heavy children and other children with disfigurements, despite his father's objections. As a result, Helmut becomes less interested in the other children and more interested in the arrivals, departures, and distances at the train station. When he is allowed onto the platform, he begins to collect old tickets from passengers who feel pity for him and are charitable to him.. The photographs Gladigau takes show a prosperous family, whose clothing has become new, and whose weight has increased. For years, the poses of the family are such that the disfigurement of Helmut is disguised.

When Helmut reaches puberty, he is disturbed to find the hair that should grow under is right arm grows instead on his collarbone, and, as his muscles become more defined, his twisted chest becomes more pronounced. In gymnastics, his limitations become even more pronounced, but he is well educated, and knows he has much to offer to the new Third Reich of Germany. Helmut becomes the darkroom technician for the shop, and through his meticulous, thorough work, develops Gladigau's prints with accuracy and beauty. Under a sink, Helmut finds a stack of American magazines filled with images of American women in various lighting and poses; at night, he dreams of photography.

Soon, Helmut attempts to join the German military, along with three neighbor boys. Due to his condition, however, Helmut is refused for service. When Papi finds a position with a factory on the outskirts of Berlin, Helmut takes his place as Gladigau's assistant. As war begins, Mutti and Papi join the Nazi Party and an image of the Fuhrer, Hitler, is placed on the wall by the family portrait. When the last portrait is taken, Gladigau also takes an image of Helmut alone, and his mother interprets the facial expression in the image to be that of pain. Although the portrait is nearly perfect, and placed into a high priced frame, Mutti places it in a drawer, rather than on the wall where visitors might see it.

"Helmut," Section 1 (Pages 3-14) Analysis

This section introduces the characters of Helmut, Mutti, Papi, and Gladigau, as well as many of the themes present throughout the rest of the story. Helmut, a child with a physical defect, is often alone in life as his parents inadvertently show the shame of having a disabled son. His mother's relief at the coast, his father's attempts to force him into regular psychical education classes, his parents' constant exercising routines with Helmut, and his mother's refusal to place the individual portrait on the wall, all show Helmut's parents' continued shame of their son, which is a theme repeated throughout the story. Helmut, on the other hand, appears to accept his limitations and, although he realizes his imperfections, he knows he is a capable, strong man. Mutti and Papi, though loving parents, are clearly not as accepting of their son's condition. Gladigau, a kind, gentle man, learns to trust Helmut and begins to give him more responsibility, foreshadowing Helmut's later interest and involvement in photographing the war. Gladigau is clearly able to see past Helmut's disability and thinks of him as a friend and understudy, showing the strong bond these characters form throughout the story.

Further, this chapter introduces the coming of the Third Reich and the onset of World War II, which are vital themes to the plotline. Mutti and Papi become more prosperous with each German victory, symbolizing the prosperity of Germany as a whole during this timeframe. Within the photographic record of the family, readers can see the change from post World War I poverty, from the used clothing and hunger stricken features of the post World War I, to the successful pre-war prosperity illustrated by the newer clothing and plump cheekbones. These images are symbolic of the changes in Germany as war creates a booming economy. When Helmut's parents join the Nazi Party and place the image of Hitler rather than Helmut on the wall alongside the family

photographs, the reader can see this act as a symbolic representation of the political environment of Berlin.

"Helmut," Section 2 (Pages 15-22)

"Helmut," Section 2 (Pages 15-22) Summary

War takes over the thoughts and activities of the people in Berlin. Helmut feels shame that he cannot participate in the war. To pass the time, he returns to tracking the timetables of train arrivals and departures, and discovers that the city appears to be emptying. Neighbors disappear and the businesses near Gladigau suddenly have no owners. Even business at Gladigau's is slowing though Gladigau's new use of color film does attract some customers. For the first time, he and Helmut travel to the inner city and find a street lined with swastika banners in full red color. The color film reveals a new element for Helmut, and he begins to experiment, and is pleased with the results.

One evening at the station, Helmut is accosted by a soldier of the German army who is concerned about Helmut's tracking notebook being used by enemies. When the station attendant explains about Helmut and his hobby of trains, the soldier relaxes, but takes the notebook with him. Helmut, now afraid to openly track the drain from Germany, begins to work from memory, writing his summaries at the end of the day from the safety of his home. However, his notes appear untrustworthy, as they show an increase in traffic when Helmut fully believes there is a decrease as work becomes scarce.

Helmut begins exercising his right arm again, desperate to join the German army and to please his father. Papi is promoted at the factory as eastern expansion of Germany continues, and the family goes on holiday to the coast. Helmut refuses to remove his shirt, and notices he has become heavier over time. He can barely keep up with Mutti and Papi, but since Gladigau has given him a camera for his birthday, Helmut occupies his time with photography. Upon their return, Helmut learns that the train station is to be rebuilt, and that he is responsible for photographing the development. Helmut uses the responsibility to further his tracking of the drain of people from Berlin, as he devises complex calculations to use the number of people in his photographs as guides for an actual departure statistics.

"Helmut," Section 2 (Pages 15-22) Analysis

From Helmut's observations, it is clear that Berlin is beginning to clear of people. As another symbolism of the success of the Third Reich in relation to the economy, Papi is promoted while many of the underclass leaves Berlin for areas where work is not as scarce. Additionally, the continued departure of soldiers from Helmut's neighborhood with very few arrivals symbolizes the military situation across Germany during World War II, as many young men were killed at the front lines.

The attack of Helmut at the hands of the German soldier in the station also symbolizes the fear at the time of German military infiltration. The soldier is clearly concerned that Helmut is not loyal to Hitler, which was a common concern as Germany purged its own

population of those not loyal to the Third Reich. Further, the unexplained disappearance of many in the neighborhood represents the removal and encampment of many German citizens during the war.

This chapter also shows Helmut's dedication as he continues to track the exodus from Berlin. Even when accosted by German soldiers, Helmut invents a way through his photography to continue his efforts. Through this, Helmut is able to expand his knowledge and use of photography, showing his clear aptitude for the trade, in addition to confirming the concept that Berlin is losing people. Unfortunately, this chapter also shows Helmut's continued shame about his physical disability.

"Helmut," Section 3 (Pages 22-37)

"Helmut," Section 3 (Pages 22-37) Summary

The war is taking more and more young men from Helmut's neighborhood, but Helmut is still not among them. As Paris falls, and his parents return from a victory celebration, Helmut can again feel their shame concerning his inability to fight for Germany. When the first bombs strike Berlin, Helmut watches as the far side of the city burns. He feels fear, and yet also a sense of thrill.

When Gladigau expresses displeasure over the amount of film Helmut is using at the construction site, Helmut begins to occasionally steal film, and sneaks another camera from the shop to continue his tracking of people in Berlin. When the station is completed, there is a grand opening, and Helmut is in charge of the photography of the event. His images are perfect and both he and Gladigau are pleased. Gladigau gives Helmut another camera for his birthday, and Mutti and Papi take both men out for ice cream. Gladigau suggests a photograph be taken, and all agree. Papi and Mutti are embarrassed by Helmut, Papi for his son's heaviness and disfigurement, and Mutti for his lack of conversation. Mutti notices in the printed image that this is the first photo of Helmut in which he is not between his parents.

As the war reaches its second year, the economy begins to tighten. Germans are told not to waste food and that extravagance is to be avoided, as resources are needed for the war. In the images Helmut takes in the shop, many women wear black, and many are of families without fathers. The young men who arrive do so in full uniform, planning to leave the image behind for their families as they go to the front lines. Helmut himself photographs the streets of Berlin and the people of the city, visually representing the effect of the war on the population, but also using his excursions to track the number of people on the streets he passes, thereby continuing his tracking of the people of Berlin. Gladigau compliments his abilities, and even allows Helmut to choose an image for the window display. When the shop closes, Helmut reexamines the images, and again sees the constant reminder of war.

On an autumn morning, Helmut is roaming the city, photographing scenes. He comes upon a group of trucks in a vacant lot, and sees a crowd of gypsies being forced into the trucks by SS men. The possessions of the gypsies are scattered everywhere, and as Helmut takes pictures from a hidden position behind a wall, he sees the SS men rob the gypsy women of their jewelry, beat the gypsy men, and shove the women and their children into the trucks. One woman attempts to escape and is beaten unconscious. Through his lens, Helmut makes eye contact with one of the gypsies, and is finally noticed by the SS men themselves. Helmut escapes, frightened, as they shout and demand him to return. He finds solace in the darkroom. When he develops his photos, however, he is angry and ashamed at the results. Too far away to capture the details, his recollection of the event is far more frightening and troubling than his images represent.

Germany is winning the war, and has taken Poland, the Ukraine, the Caspian, and the Steppe. As Gladigau and Helmut develop film, they listen to the radio and both smile as the victories are announced. Helmut is now nearly unaccepted at home as his parents look down on him, and as his neighbors eye him with reproach, but Helmut feels at peace with his employer in the shop. In the spring, people begin to openly leave Berlin, convinced of the British and American plan to strike the city. Already, many areas of Germany have been destroyed by the bombings, but Berlin has been spared. Gladigau, on the news of the death of a client's son, decides to close his shop for the winter, and speaks of Papi moving Mutti and Helmut out of Berlin. Helmut questions Gladigau about his loyalty to Hitler, and the two continue to work without speaking.

As the second wave of bombing in Berlin begins, Helmut refuses to evacuate with other neighbors, and instead begins to wander the burning streets. His parents, absent during the bombing, are not to be found. As Helmut flees the neighborhood, he is pulled into an underground shelter with strangers. Upon and emerging, finds himself in unfamiliar landscape. The entire neighborhood has been destroyed. His parents do not return. He sleeps in the partially destroyed shop.

"Helmut," Section 3 (Pages 22-37) Analysis

Clearly war is taking its toll on the people of Berlin. Through his camera lens, Helmut captures this invasion of war on the lives of the Germans;, his images symbolize the penetrative effects of the war as women lose husbands, children lose fathers, and entire cities are destroyed. The economy, once booming, is becoming stagnant as war uses all the country's resources, as is shown by the closing of shops and the exodus of people from Berlin.

Helmut's theft of film shows his dependency upon photography as a means of escape. Now clearly bonded with Gladigau, Helmut still takes from him in order to continue his photography of people. His bond with his employer is also vital, in that he is now unaccepted at home. Helmut represents the youth in Germany who are unable to serve in the army during World War II. Unable to control their circumstances, these individuals are hated by those who have lost loved ones in the war, and those who are family to them often are ashamed.

Helmut's experience with the SS men is his first personal glimpse of the German Reich, and is terrifying. As he watches the brutality, he can only think to capture it on film, but is highly disappointed in the results. He is very hard on himself, showing the effect of his continued life as a disabled man in a time of war. When the bombs drop on his area of Berlin, readers can sense the death of Mutti and Papi, though it is not mentioned. As Helmut is depicted lying frightened and alone on the floor of his darkroom, readers feel a deep sense of loss and grief for the young man. His darkroom, once a symbol for the prosperity and wealth of prewar Germany, has become another symbol: that of the destruction of all that is safe and loved by the people of Germany.

"Helmut," Section 4 (Pages 38-43)

"Helmut," Section 4 (Pages 38-43) Summary

Helmut, weeping with grief, now homeless and alone, continues to try to find his parents, but they do not appear. As he travels to the neighborhood of Gladigau, he is in awe of the unburned buildings. Gladigau and the other residents have left the area. Following another night of nightmares in the darkroom, Helmut finds shelter in an abandoned cellar. Responsibly, he closes the shop after securing it from looters, and then takes to the streets, viewing the destruction. The days pass as those unable to flee are fed from soup kitchens and given warm winter clothing. Helmut sees corpses being pulled from rubble, and dreams consistently of the death of Mutti, Papi, and Gladigau.

Left alone without purpose, Helmut makes a home in the cellar and spends his days watching the trains. After making friends with the new station guard, he is given a position sweeping floors for food. The injured soldiers return by train, missing arms and legs, and often beg for food. Helmut, angry at their lack of respect for their uniforms, reports them to the guard. When the bombing of Berlin stops, the trains are closed for a few days, and Helmut sleeps in the empty station.

In the summer of 1944, the bombing stops again, and Helmut's duties at the station increase. He is sleeping better now, and is again able to photograph Berlin. He spends much of his day capturing images of the destruction, and the empty war-torn streets, keeping meticulous notes of his photographs in the notebook he once used to track the exodus from Berlin.

"Helmut," Section 4 (Pages 38-43) Analysis

Helmut, though alone, is showing the true nature of his character in this section: that of a strong, independent photographer who is able to capture the power and beauty of a war-torn city. Able to fend for himself for the first time, Helmut is able to cope with his newfound freedom, although the grief of his lost loved ones is apparent. Helmut's actions in this section represent the citizens of Berlin following the bombing by Allied forces, as they struggle to find even the basic necessities, such as shelter, food, and clothing, in a city ripped apart by war.

Helmut's anger and rage at the wounded soldiers clearly shows his respect for the German army, and towards his own disability. While Helmut himself certainly could have used his disfigurement for charity, and did so as a child, he sees these soldiers as showing disrespect toward an institution he wants so badly to become a part. He sees their begging as signs of weakness, and improper while in uniform. This obvious love for the military foreshadows Helmut's own happiness as a soldier later in the story.

The use of the same notebook Helmut used to track the depleting population of Berlin as a photographic logbook shows two major points. First, Helmut is now comfortable in

the emptiness of Berlin, and no longer needs to track the departure of citizens, since he now understands that Berlin will never return to his image of home. Additionally, the use of the notebook symbolizes the restructuring of life that is necessary in war, as resources are used and reused to preserve more for the war effort. Helmut, convinced of German victory, logs the images to develop later, once the war is over and Germany is in triumph. This symbolizes the continued belief of the German people that victory would come, and illustrates their never-ending resolve, even in a ravaged city.

"Helmut," Section 5 (Pages 44-47)

"Helmut," Section 5 (Pages 44-47) Summary

As autumn comes, Helmut is beginning to allow his grief to pass, and focuses on the future. He is excited to show Gladigau his images of the war when Gladigau returns. As the bombing begins again, however, the call for a last stand in Germany is given, and Helmut is finally admitted to the German military. Given only an overcoat and an armband, Helmut is proud to dig trenches and pile rubble in an attempt to stop the Soviet army that is advancing on Berlin. He photographs all he can in order to preserve what he sees as the greatest moments in his life. As the refugees come through the station, Helmut photographs them, or repeats the phrases and beliefs of the Third Reich, while the starving, injured, and ill refugees stare blankly out the window. Those who do speak talk of a Soviet army the size of a continent, whose brutality is never ending.

In April of 1945, Helmut takes a picture of his brigade atop a rubble mountain they have created to stop the still advancing Soviet army. All in the brigade are heavy or disfigured, yet in an image taken by another soldier, this time including Helmut, all are smiling, proud to be of use in the time of war. Helmut, for the first time in any photograph, is also smiling, while the city behind him lay destroyed.

"Helmut," Section 5 (Pages 44-47) Analysis

Though short, this section is perhaps the most poignant in the story. Helmut is finally given a chance to join the Germany military as he answers Hitler's calls for a final stand. Proud to be a part of something he has longed to belong to all his life, Helmut is finally happy. Although the pile of rubble he and his brigade have painstakingly created will soon be easily overrun by Soviet tanks, and although Helmut will soon not even recognize his beloved Berlin, he is finally at peace with himself and with his disability. The reader is given the impression that Helmut does not perish in the eventual surrender of Germany to the Allied forces, but one is left with the sense that although Berlin is now destroyed, Helmut will continue to photograph the city as it begins to rebuild. Helmut's final act of bravery in Berlin during World War II represents the heroic effort of the final forces of Germany as the young, disabled, and sick answer the call to give their lives for their country. Those, like Helmut, whose entire lives are spent longing for an opportunity to serve, are given one as a last effort to save the city, and it is such an opportunity that allows Helmut to finally accept his own disability, and prove he is a strong and capable soldier.

"Lore," Section 1 (page 51-56)

"Lore," Section 1 (page 51-56) Summary

In Bavaria in early 1945, Lore lays awake listening to sounds outside of her room. When she rises to find the source, she sees her father, Vati, in uniform, with soldiers at the door. The war is ending, and the family has to leave. As Mutti, or Lore's mother, packs their bags quickly, Lore readies her four siblings, including younger sister Liesel, younger brothers Jochen and Jurgen, or Juri, and baby brother, Peter. They arrive on a farm deep in a valley, where the family can wait out the ending of World War II. The landscape is beautiful, and the children can barely remember their war torn cities, as the children play outside near the brook and the fields sway in the wind. The farmer's wife brings Mutti and the five children food each day, since Vati has gone back to the war.

One evening, Mutti is called outside by the farmer and his son. The children, told to stay in bed, rise to the door to spy, but can hear nothing. They are arguing when Mutti returns, smashing a dish to the floor in her anger at them. They are sent to bed, and Lore watches as her mother stays awake, holding the baby, eyes darting around the room. Lore realizes the end is near.

"Lore," Section 1 (page 51-56) Analysis

This introductory section to the second story in the novel introduces the main character, Lore, and her close-knit family. Her father, clearly in the German military, takes the family away to avoid capture. Readers are given the sense that the family is running from the American and Russian forces, foreshadowing later information about Vati and Mutti's involvement with the Party. The farm is representative of many areas to which the families of German soldiers fled in the close of the war, as they attempted to spare their families from American and Russian prison camps.

Even in this short section, it is clear that Lore is largely responsible for the upbringing of her siblings, and that she cares deeply for them, which is a theme throughout the story. When Mutti is called outside, it is Lore who attempts to quiet the children, and Lore who cares for them. This relationship foreshadows the journey of Lore and her younger siblings across Germany later in the story.

"Lore," Section 2 (Pages 57-74)

"Lore," Section 2 (Pages 57-74) Summary

In the morning, Lore finds her mother burning many of their belongings, without voicing a reason. Later Mutti takes the burned badges of the Party from the fire, and tells Lore to go far from the farm, and drop them in the river. Unable to find a spot deep enough, she instead buries them, telling baby Peter who is with her that before the victory there will be pain and blood. She prepares herself for the tragedy. Shortly after returning to the farm, the American soldiers arrive by Jeep, and Mutti goes to greet them. Lore, watching from the window, sees only the passing of a slip of paper, which the American soldiers and Mutti sign.

Mutti becomes ill, and Lore is left to tend the children. She takes money from her mother, and buys food from the farmer's wife, who asks Lore to let Mutti know the farmer wishes to speak with her. When she returns, she slips into bed with Mutti, grateful for her soothing presence. When Mutti is well again, she leaves for town to purchase food, but returns with none, and tells the children Germany has lost the war. Lore is again left to tend to the children, and again goes to neighboring farms to buy food. Upon her return, the farmer's son informs her that the Americans will soon come to take their mother, since she is a Nazi. He tells Lore that Mutti has been trying to find someone in town to take them, but no one wants them. Lore pushes the young boy, who shoves her to the ground. Lore's young siblings begin to throw rocks in her defense, and the young man walks away.

When Mutti wakes, she informs Lore that she must leave; that the Americans are coming to take her to a camp. She tells Lore to get the children to Hamburg, to her Oma's home. She leaves her with money and jewelry, convinced that Lore can travel by train and tram. She tells Lore she is not going to prison, and that prisons are for criminals. Lore, now alone with four young children, counts the money, and calculates how much food it and the jewelry will purchase. She makes dinner for the children, and comforts them.

In the morning, the farmer and his wife come to the farm, telling them they must leave. As Lore explains that her Mutti has written to Oma in Hamburg, and that they are to travel by train to meet her, the farmer's wife explains that there has been no post, and no trains are running. Told by the stationmaster to get permission from the Americans to travel, Lore instead memorizes a map of Germany, and plans to take her siblings and walk toward Hamburg, convinced that if her mother wanted her to get permission from the Americans, she would have mentioned it.

Lore buys all the bread she can, and purchases all the food she can from neighboring farms. She packs the children's belongings, and explains to them that they are to say, if asked, only that they are going to Hamburg to be with Oma and Mutti. They are not to mention the camps, or their Vati. As the children walk, Juri loses control of the baby

carriage, and twists his ankle. The family is forced to stop and spend the evening in a barn. In the morning, the family eats apples as Lore carries Juri on her back to avoid strain on his already injured ankle. When Lore sees a farmer and his wife traveling by cart, she asks for a ride, and offers to pay, which the farmer refuses. The wife is critical as she notes their Nazi backgrounds, clear from the accents in their voices. As the children spend the day taking turns in the cart, Lore is aware of the woman's clear distaste. As she presents food to the children, the woman asks if it is stolen. After they are dropped off near a town with a soup kitchen, Lore tells her siblings to avoid any conversations with people about Mutti or Vati.

"Lore," Section 2 (Pages 57-74) Analysis

As Lore is asked to bury the Party badges of her parents, it is clear that her parents are high members of the Nazi party. This knowledge foreshadows the eventual deportation of Mutti to an American camp, as do the comments of the farmer's son. It is clear from the beginning of this section that the neighboring farmers want Lore and her siblings to leave, out of fear that their association with the Nazi family will bring trouble for their own families.

Lore and her siblings appear to represent the vast number of children left homeless and alone following the end of World War II. As the Nazi party members are placed into camps, many children were left with grandparents and parents, often having to travel long distances through dangerous territory to reach their destinations. The wife's comments about the trains foreshadow the children's dangerous journey. When Juri twists his ankle near the beginning, it is clear to readers that the journey ahead will be very difficult.

The theme of the scorn held in post World War II Germany for the Nazi Party is clear through this chapter, as well as through the rest of the story. This is best shown in this section by the wife of the farmer who gives the children a ride. She is critical of Lore and her family, and immediately assumes that they are Nazi party members,, and assumes that the food so carefully purchased by Lore is stolen. These comments symbolize the immense political hatred held for even the children of the Nazi Party by some of the citizens of Germany. Lore, now knowing their status as unwanted Nazi children, is left to lie about her parents in an effort to reach the safety of Oma's home.

"Lore," Section 3 (Pages 75-80)

"Lore," Section 3 (Pages 75-80) Summary

As Lore and her siblings struggle on, Lore begins to lose her sense of direction, and hesitates to ask for directions. However, when the family runs out of food, she is forced to knock on doors, requesting food in exchange for money. Lore discovers she is heading the wrong direction, and must change course. The family hungrily eats, and walks on again before dawn.

As they reach a town, Lore leaves the children to wait while she goes to find food. As she waits for shops to open, she joins a crowd gathered in the square. Lore finds the crowd looking at blurry images of hundreds of skeletons, piled on top of one another, and of rows of naked, emaciated dead men and women. As she sits, faint with thirst, lack of food, and shock, a young woman gives her water, and a heel of bread. When finished, Lore goes to the house of the young woman, asking for more food for her siblings, and presents Mutti's jewelry in payment. The woman allows the children to stay the night in exchange for a portion of the food she is able to purchase with Mutti's wedding ring. The amount of food is much less than Lore expects, but when questions, the woman simply shrugs. Lore leaves the woman with her share of the food, and sleeps with her siblings on the floor.

"Lore," Section 3 (Pages 75-80) Analysis

Lore's experience with the photos of the Nazi concentration camps is her first glimpse of the horrors of Nazi Germany. However, it is clear in the story that Lore does not understand the images, and that the politics of this war are far beyond her. She does not understand what her parents were a part of, nor can she understand the hatred directed at her and her family. In this, Lore symbolizes an entire generation of Germans whose parents' actions and beliefs during the war left them in a state of limbo, since they were too young to share the beliefs of their parents, and yet were still a part of the Nazi Party.

The experience with the young woman and her child is again a representation of the lengths to which individuals were forced to go during the aftermath of the war in Germany. The young woman presumably cashes in Mutti's ring for cash, and uses only a portion of it for the children's food. The reader is left with the assumption that the young woman has stolen a portion of the profit, and in addition, receives part of the food purchased. Such actions were not uncommon after the war, as poverty and hunger drove many to commit otherwise unthinkable deeds.

"Lore," Section 4 (Pages 81-115)

"Lore," Section 4 (Pages 81-115) Summary

Lore has become the sole decision-maker for the family, as she fends for food and shelter. Lore tires of her siblings' constant questions, and shouts, hurting their feelings. In the argument, Lore lies and tells them Vati will be in Hamburg waiting for them. When Liesel becomes ill, Lore finds food from citizens of a village, and finds shelter in a church. Upon waking, they find that the carriage they were using for storage of extra clothing has been stolen in the night. Continuing on, they trade their belongings for beds and warm water to wash with, beg food from farmers, and, when lacking those kind citizens, dig turnips and potatoes from the fields.

In Nuremburg, they reach a shelter, and find space on the floor amidst a mass of other refugees. During the night, one woman speaks of the cowardice of Hitler, and Lore hears threats from those around her. The following day, the family waits in line for food throughout the morning, only to find that the shop takes only Nuremburg coupons in payment for food, not cash. A woman behind Lore convinces the shopkeeper to allow the children to wait until the end of the day and to give them anything which remains. As the shopkeeper is wrapping the food, a young man enters the shop, asking for any remaining rations, and is told they are going to Lore and her family. The man smiles and exits the shop.

The children find shelter with an old woman during the evening, who awakens Lore and demands payment. Lore gives her only money, and the woman is unsatisfied. In the morning, the children are infected with lice, and Lore is forced to pay the old woman for paraffin, which the woman says will kill the lice. After paying, the old woman gives her scissors to cut the hair from Liesel and Peter's heads, and Lore realizes the paraffin did not actually kill the lice She has no choice but to cut their hair. As she does, she again sees the young man from the shop, and he waves.

The following day, the children again see the man in the soup line. Realizing the man is near starving; Juri runs to him and offers his bread, which the man takes. Later, as they walk, Lore knows the man is following them, keeping pace with their small footsteps. As a military jeep approaches, Lore decides it is too late to run, and can only force Liesel, Juri, and Peter into a ditch before it arrives. She sees the man now running toward them. When the American officers ask about her parents, Lore points to the man coming toward them, saying she does not know him, but the Americans do not understand. To her surprise, the man states that he and his "siblings" are traveling together to reach their grandmother. He shows the officers papers, and Lore can see a tattoo on his arm. He mentions being held in Buchenwald until the liberation and talks about their journey since that time. The soldiers allow the children to ride in the jeep to Fulda.

After they leave the jeep, the man continues with the children, but Lore is ill and must stop. While she feels reservations about the man, she knows he can help them get to

Hamburg, and she asks him to allow a rest. He leads the children from the road and they camp for the night. In the morning, the man takes Peter and the twins to town to get food. When they arrive back at camp, Lore learns the man is named Tomas, and that he has been able to find them lodging for the night. As Lore sleeps in the hayloft, Tomas stays awake, watching.

The following day as Lore helps Liesel remove her bloodied socks, Liesel tells Lore of her conversations with Tomas. Tomas has said it is dangerous to talk of Hamburg, since no one is allowed over the American zone into the British zone, but that he will help the children cross. He also speaks of the punishment the Nazi soldiers will receive, but Liesel assures Lore she did not mention Vati. When Lore is well, she buries the remaining photos of Vati while Tomas sleeps.

The family comes to a wide river, and Tomas decides they must swim across. Tomas goes first, carrying the family's bundle of possessions, and returns to help the twins and Liesel cross. He will return to help Lore cross with Peter. Lore, however, attempts to cross on her own, and nearly drowns both her and Peter before Tomas rescues them. They warm themselves by the fire he and the twins have made, and Tomas tells of his escape from the Russian zone. When Lore wakes later, she can see the tattoo again on Tomas's arm as he sleeps.

The family attempts to cross the border by boat, but the captain of the ship fears discovery, and apologetically forces them from the boat. As the family walks again, Tomas tells Lore of his life prior to the war, when he was a thief and was imprisoned. He states that he was in a camp run by Germans until the Americans came. When Tomas attempts to cross the border with the family, he is turned away, and they camp in a nearby forest.

"Lore," Section 4 (Pages 81-115) Analysis

This section introduces readers to the character of Tomas, a seemingly unlikely companion for the children. According to Tomas, he was imprisoned in a German camp, and only freed with the American liberation. Lore's notice of the tattoo on Tomas's arm further suggests the idea that Tomas is a Jew. Tomas does not know of the family's ties to the Nazi party, and sees only children trying to reach Hamburg. His kindness appears to be partially genuine, and partially due to the need for security they provide him as he attempts to pass through borders. With small children, individuals are more likely to assist them in their journey.

Again, readers can see the innocence of Lore and her siblings as they travel unknowingly with a seemingly Jewish prisoner. The relationship forming between Lore and Tomas symbolizes the ironic situation in Germany during World War II, where loyalties were based on religion and race alone, and without prior knowledge of a person's background, these preconceived notions were dropped, allowing for unlikely relationships.

Additionally, this section again shows the length to which individuals in post war Germany would go to avoid hunger and homelessness. The old woman in this section sells Lore and her family paraffin to rid them of lice, knowing the solution is unfit, but needing money to survive. The old woman appears to symbolize the poor refugees of the time, who can steal and lie to children in order to survive. On the other hand, this section also shows the overwhelming care and assistance given to refugee children in Germany. The woman in the baker shop, the American soldiers, the farmers who give food, and Tomas himself all show clearly that while some individuals used the children's need for their own benefit, still others are genuinely interested in assisting them. These characters symbolize the vast network of social support given to refugee children at the time.

"Lore," Section 5 (Pages 116-136)

"Lore," Section 5 (Pages 116-136) Summary

The group finds a train platform on the other end of the forest, but Tomas persuades them that they should travel by forest, and walk through the night. When daylight breaks, the children rest in the forest, each hidden by the thick underbrush. The smell of cooking suddenly reaches them, and Tomas goes to investigate, telling the children to stay hidden. Jochen, however, runs after Tomas, and as the children watch, is shot down by Russian soldiers. Tomas returns with the food, and the group runs, stopping only to eat. When Tomas pressures Juri to keep walking, he mentions he is waiting for Jochen, and Tomas informs him Jochen is dead.

Finally, in the British zone, the group sleeps in a hayloft. During the evening, Lore wakes to find Tomas inching toward the ladder. When she asks where he is going, he lays back down. The following day as he and Lore go into town to beg for food, Lore asks him to continue helping them get to Hamburg, and he repeatedly refuses. As they near their camp, Juri runs to Tomas, embracing him. Tomas stiffens, and gradually yet gently pushes Juri away.

The group continues and reaches another train station, but is unable to get tickets. As the train pulls in, Tomas lifts Juri, Liesel, and Peter through a window into the train, and a soldier stops him. Lore can only watch as Tomas talks with the soldier, showing his papers yet again. The soldier allows the group to board, and Tomas lifts Lore through the window, intending not to board himself. Juri, however, screams loudly until Tomas reluctantly boards the train, as well. Once inside, Juri crawls into Tomas' lap, and sleeps. Lore wanders through the train, and hears two young men discussing the images of death Lore herself saw in the village. One young man claims the piles of bodies are simply staged by the Americans and Russians, and that they are not real. His friend disagrees. Lore returns to her own compartment.

As the train stops, the group waits on the platform for the next train. Hungry, Lore asks if anyone can spare food, but is ignored. The group continues traveling this way, using trains when they can, and walking when the trains do not arrive. Tomas talks a guard into giving them an egg for Peter and the rest eat at soup kitchens in the villages. In Elbe, Tomas takes Juri and promises to return with a ride for them to Hamburg, as Lore and the other children wait in line at the Red Cross for food. When Tomas returns, he explains that he has gained them boat passage to Hamburg.

Finally reaching their destination, Tomas and the children find themselves on the streets of Hamburg at night, and find shelter in an abandoned building. When Juri cries, Tomas comforts him. In the morning, Lore attempts to locate the house of her Oma, but is confused by the bombed buildings, and is forced to return to the others for another night. On the second morning, Lore is hailed by her Oma's housecleaner, Wiebke, and is taken to see Oma. The house, beautiful in Lore's memory, has been bombed and now

has no second story. Much of the main floor is also destroyed. Oma comes to her, asking of her mother, and gives her food as Wiebke brushes Lore's hair. Lore explains that their mother is with the Americans, but that they are unsure of their father's whereabouts. Oma strongly hugs her, saying that Lore must not feel ashamed of her parents. She promises to help the children find Vati and Mutti, and tells her that "Some of them went too far child, but don't believe it was all bad."

"Lore," Section 5 (Pages 116-136) Analysis

The death of Jochen in this section is shocking, but represents the many individuals killed during the Russian, American, and British occupation of Germany following the war. Just a child, Jochen follows Tomas, now a father figure, and dies for his innocence, symbolizing the death of purity in Germany. This shows the atmosphere that existed in much of Germany, even for small children, as the opposing forces collide into chaos. This chaotic nature is also represented by the description of the group's ride in the train. Further, the conversation about the pictures of the dead bodies, which Lore overhears, symbolizes the feelings about the Holocaust in Germany, and about the American forces within the country. Many believe, as the young men appear to, that the images are staged by Americans to rally Germany's citizens against the Nazi party.

This section also shows the developing relationship between Lore and her family and Tomas. Throughout the chapter, Tomas attempts to leave the children, but their clear love for him forces him to stay. By the end of the section, Tomas is clearly taking the role of a father figure, as he finds the group shelter and food, and allows Juri to hold his hand and sleep near him. Lore, too, finds herself lying close to him, enjoying the feeling of his near presence. Since readers believe that Tomas is a Jew, this situation foreshadows clear problems for these relationships, in light of the family's clear status as members of the Nazi party. This sense of foreboding is further emphasized when readers are introduced to Oma. Her statements clearly reflect that while she understands what the Nazis have done, she does not blame them for their actions.

Oma appears to represent many of the German Nazi citizens following the war. Convinced of their righteousness, Oma and other like her seem to feel as though the actions of the Nazi party were wrong, certainly, but understandable. Oma tells Lore not to feel ashamed of her parents, clearly showing her understanding of the Holocaust, and her knowledge of at least some of the horrific deaths. However, she also states that it "wasn't all bad," showing her acceptance of the situation. Clearly, Oma's feelings are mixed regarding the aftermath of the war.

"Lore," Section 6 (Pages 137-147)

"Lore," Section 6 (Pages 137-147) Summary

As Lore prepares the children to present to Oma, she informs Tomas that she did not betray his secret. Liesel cries out when she finds that Vati is not with Oma as Lore had promised and is angry, but asks if their father is being punished now in prison. As they lay down to sleep, Juri informs Lore that he knew Vati would not be in Hamburg, as Tomas told him of the many fathers now in prison for their actions during the war. Tomas has decided to stay in Hamburg, making a home for himself in the abandoned house, and the children visit often. Lore is always surprised at his appearance, seeing him far differently in her mind between visits.

The children stay with a family across from Oma's, the Meyer's, as Oma continues to search for Mutti and Vati. One day, they family takes a picture, since Oma has found Mutti and would like to show her they are safe. Lore can barely recognize them in the photograph, with their torn clothing, thin bodies, and serious faces. She knows they have changed.

Lore begins to visit Tomas more often, and the two agree the time is not yet right to reveal him to Oma. Tomas and Juri become very close, and as Lore cries at night, Wiebke unknowingly comforts her about her mother, not knowing it is Tomas who Lore misses. When a letter arrives from Mutti, no mention is made of Jochen or of Tomas, but she assures them Vati is safe, although he may be gone for a long time. She encourages them to go to school, when they can, but Lore can only think of Tomas.

"Lore," Section 6 (Pages 137-147) Analysis

In this section, more than any other, readers can see clearly that Lore is falling in love with Tomas, or at least with the idea of him. She sees him as a father figure to Juri and Liesel, and to Peter, but the reader can sense that Lore sees Tomas as much more to her than a father figure. In previous chapters as well as in this section, Lore finds herself waiting for Tomas to touch her, and is comforted by his presence. Clearly, he is more to Lore than a simple father figure, which again foreshadows problems, considering he is potentially Jewish.

Mutti's lack of mention regarding her fallen son, as well as everyone else's seemingly ambiguous behavior regarding Jochen, is a symbol of the acceptance of tragedy in war. At this point in the story, Lore and her family have seen numerous deaths, corpses, and tragedies, as others in their position have seen by the end of the war. Thus, the loss of a family member, while important, is simply another tragedy.

"Lore," Section 7 (Pages 145-156)

"Lore," Section 7 (Pages 145-156) Summary

Lore is traveling by tram when she sees two women looking through a newspaper. The images in the paper are those of the murdered Jews, and the text tells of work camps and prison camps, as well as of trials. When Lore innocently mentions her belief that the images are of American actors, the women inform her they are of murdered Jews. Lore, shocked, sees the uniforms of the officers, similar to those of her fathers, as the women point to the soldiers stating they are murderers, and that they are bad men who are now in prison. She searches the images for Vati's face, but does not see him.

When Lore visits Tomas, she asks if he has seen the images. She mentions the trials, and Tomas seems surprised they have begun the punishment already. Lore explains that the women told her that the bodies were of Jewish people, and begins to ask Tomas about the fathers in the prison he mentioned to Juri. Tomas turns to her, lips pulled back from his teeth, and angrily asks, "What do you want from me?" Lore, seeing only the hate in his face, stops visiting Tomas. She is unable to sleep, as the images of dead Jewish individuals seep behind her closed eyes, and she thinks continuously of her Mutti and Vati, and of their crimes.

One afternoon, Juri does not return from visiting Tomas, and Lore goes to fetch him. She finds Juri alone in the abandoned house, and finds Tomas has left. Juri explains that Tomas left because he thought Lore knew his secret. When Lore states that she does not understand, Juri informs her that Tomas stole the papers he used to get them to Hamburg from a dead Jew. He knew, according to Juri, that the Americans were coming to free the Jews, and knew that the country now hated Nazis. As a result of this information, he chose to steal the papers from the dead Jewish individuals, and pretended to be a Jewish prison camp survivor in order to escape his crimes. Lore and Juri burn the papers as night falls. Lore tries to unravel the situation, knowing now that her parents and Tomas were involved in the slaughter of the Jews, and knowing that Tomas was both bad and good, as were her parents. The children return late in the evening, and Lore goes to Oma the following morning, asking why her parents are in prison. Oma repeats that Lore's mother and father have done nothing wrong and that everything has changed, but reiterates that Vati is not a bad man.

As winter comes, Juri finds friends his own age, and Liesel learns English from the American soldiers in Hamburg. Lore returns only once to the cellar, and buries the blankets Tomas used, seeing images in her head of her Nazi badges and the photos in the paper and feels ill. When she returns home, she finds that Mutti has sent them a picture of herself, healthy and plump. Lore tries to describe Vati to her siblings in a way that matches their mother's new look, but thinks only of bombs and death. She sees Tomas's face in the flames of the fire, and misses him.

Five weeks later, Lore celebrates her birthday with Juri and Peter on a ferry. Lore is annoyed with Juri as he asks many questions about the future, and about Tomas. Lore escapes to the front of the ferry, where the fierce wind bites her face and legs. Opening her coat, she faces the wind and closes her eyes as she begins to cry. She looks forward to a future where everything is new, and the images of death, betrayal, bombs, and lies are simply memories.

"Lore," Section 7 (Pages 145-156) Analysis

This section finishes the foreshadowing of previous chapters as readers learn of Tomas's true identity. As a Nazi, Tomas understood that he needed to become someone else in order to avoid capture from the Allied forces. As a result, he stole the belongings of a dead Jewish individual, and used those papers to help Lore and her family escape to Hamburg. What had previously seemed an unlikely relationship between a Jew and the child of Nazis becomes something even more sinister: that of a relationship based solely on lies. When combined with the knowledge from previous chapters that Tomas was becoming a love interest of Lore and a father figure for the children, such an act becomes even more unwittingly cruel.

In this ending section, Lore's plight symbolizes the plight of all children of Nazi parents following World War II. Faced with conflicting emotions between love for their parents and disbelief and disgust at their actions, these children are left not only with these confusion emotions, but are also seen by the community as extensions of their parents. Even though Lore and her siblings were not responsible for the slaughter of the Jews, and even though Tomas may not have been a party to such actions, both were forced to accept the hatred of their peers. While Lore simply faces such tragedies head on, as she does the wind in this section, Tomas chose to hide his identity. Both characters were forced into their actions by the political situation, and both symbolize vastly different ways in which the individuals of the time dealt with the tragedy of the Holocaust.

"Micha," Home, Autumn 1997

"Micha," Home, Autumn 1997 Summary

Michael, a schoolteacher, is visiting his Oma, Kaethe. Michael has recently begun to map his family tree in his mind, and Oma is the center of this tree. Michael is close to his grandmother, and spends the afternoon playing cards with her and showing her the newspaper clippings that he has clipped for her throughout the week. When he returns home, his girlfriend, Mina, and his sister, Luise, are cooking dinner. Micha, as his sister calls him, leaves them to return his mother's car. As he drives, he maps his sister and parents within his mental family tree.

Michael stays for dinner with his parents. Mutti is retired, and spends much of her time with new hobbies while Vati is still working. Following dinner, Vati drives Michael home, laughing about his wife's ability to make him feel boring. The following morning, Michael sees Mina off to work, eats breakfast, and travels to the university library. As he looks for the phrase "holocaust" in the library catalog, Michael thinks back to his recent discovery about his Opa Askan. During a birthday celebration for his uncle Bernd, Micha realizes his mother and her brother are fourteen years in age apart. His Oma states that the war got in the way, but Micha points out the war only lasted six years. Oma replies casually that Askan did not return from the war until 1954, because he was in a Russian prison, as a member of the Waffen-SS. Micha, surprised, is disturbed by the knowledge.

A week later, Mica is browsing through the titles at the library, taking notes as he reads about the Holocaust. As Micha read a story of a journalist's experiences with an old woman who was mocked on a tram, he writes that she was a Jew. Micha is surprised at how indifferent his own notes appear. Later, as he and Mina bathe together, Micha is able to relax and simply enjoy his loved one.

Micha thinks of the various memories of his Opa, including beautiful drawings he made for Micha when he was a child. Micha also carries with him two photos of Opa. One is a black and white image of his grandfather holding him following his christening. Opa is not looking at the camera, but only at his small grandson. In the next image, which is color, Opa is again not looking at the camera, but is instead focused only on his grandson. Micha enjoys these images because they show his grandfather only had eyes for him.

On Saturday, Mina and Micha visit Mina's parents. Mina's father, during conversation, refers to Germany as racist. He does not intend it to be cruel, only factual. Micha knows Mina's family would like them to marry, and on the way home, Micha again asks Mina to marry him, but she replies no, as she has done in the past. When Micha asks if she is Turkish, like her family, or German, Mina replies she is both, but a German first. Micha nods, but in his head, thinks of her first as Turkish, then Germany, which bothers him.

As Micha continues to research the Holocaust, looking for some indication as to what his grandfather may have done, he finds numerous images of slaughtered Jews, with German soldiers smiling. While he does not see Askan, Micha is still afraid he will eventually see an image of his grandfather. When he asks Luise about what she recalls, she says Bernd's fiancye, Inge, has mentioned drunken rages, but she herself only remembers a kind man. Thinking back, Micha can recall an incident in which his grandfather stood in the hall, hands shaking so badly he could not button his vest. Following a large glass of wine, his shaking stopped.

Micha takes Mina to see Opa, and together, they look through a photo album of images from Askan and Kaethe's past. On the way home, Micha admits to Mina he has stolen one of the photographs, and Mina is angry. Micha finally admits to her that his grandparents were Nazis, and Mina is shocked as he tells her his plans to discover if his grandfather murdered anyone during the war. Following a viewing of videotapes of Hitler and Himmler the next day, Micha discusses with Mina how he feels, and wonders aloud if his grandfather admired Hitler. He also admits that while he was able previously to love his Opa, he now sees him in his mind as a Nazi.

Micha calls a phone number that claims to have access to a database of war criminals and survivors. He asks about Askan Bell, his grandfather, but the service has no record of him. The man on the phone is comforting, as he informs Micha that many SS men were held captive by the Russian army, even though they had committed no crimes. Feeling as though he is at a dead end, Micha visits Oma, asking her about Opa's war experiences. Oma mentions several towns Opa was stationed in, and talks of letters he sent while stationed, which he burned when he returned home. Micha is afraid to ask more questions. When Micha's parents visit later for dinner, they admonish him for visiting Oma on a non-regular day, stating that it confused her.

Micha locates footage of Hitler that is highly disturbing to him. Filmed at a Christmas party with his nieces, Hitler plays with the children laughing, but does not look at the camera. Too much like the photos of his grandfather, the images give Micha nightmares. Micha decides to travel to Minsk and other areas Opa served while in the SS to search for the truth.

"Micha," Home, Autumn 1997 Analysis

This section introduces many of the main characters in the story, including Micha, Mina, Oma, and Opa Askan. Michael, a schoolteacher, has taught lessons related to the Holocaust, but was unaware of his grandfather's role in the SS. Now, this knowledge drives Micha to discover more. In this section Micha is clearly torn as he fights between images of his loving grandfather and images of a Nazi SS man. Mina, on the other hand, does not fully understand Micha's determination, and seems to be uncomfortable with the subject. Although clearly a happy couple, this conflict foreshadows problems between these characters later in the story. Additionally, Oma clearly loved, and still loves, Askan, and accepted whatever he may have done in the war. Again, although

Micha and his grandmother are very close, it is clear that problems between Micha and Oma will arise as his journey leads him to discover the truth.

This chapter also introduces some of the main themes of this story. First, Opa is clearly an alcoholic, shown by his shakes in Micha's memory prior to having a drink. Readers are left to wonder if the alcoholism was a sign of Opa's crimes, which is later confirmed in the story. Additionally, as in the other stories of the novel, the theme of shame is apparent, as Micha struggles to come to terms with his grandfather's potential crimes, and his own thoughts about the war and the Jewish people.

"Micha," Belarus, Easter 1998

"Micha," Belarus, Easter 1998 Summary

Mina comes to the train station to see Micha off to Minsk and gives him pretzels for the journey. As he arrives in the city, he checks into a hotel, but is unable to sleep. In the morning, he finds himself disoriented in the foreign city. He purchases a map, and finds it scattered with red dots. Looking in the atlas, he discovers these marks represent areas of the city where Nazi atrocities occurred, such as razed villages, cleared Jewish ghettos, and executions.

Micha makes his way to a village where Opa spent his final days fighting in the war. Unable to find a hotel, Micha asks a car mechanic who, unable to speak English or German, still manages to mime that he will allow Micha to stay in his home. Micha loves the cozy room, and agrees to stay for three nights. As they eat, the mechanic, Andrej, pushes a map of Europe over to Micha, indicating he would like to know where Micha is from. When Micha points to Germany, he expects a negative reaction from Andrej and his mother, but both simply smile. As Micha eats, Andrej fetches a translator, and Micha lies through him that he is a tourist, too embarrassed and ashamed to admit the truth.

In the morning, Micha realizes he is afraid, and does not know where to begin. As he writes to Mina, he admits his fear and his feelings that he is a coward. As he imagines asking others in the village if they remember Opa, Micha fears their response would include tales of murder and destruction. The following morning, Micha seeks the translator, and asks who he might see for questions regarding the occupation and Nazi invasion. The translator suggests a museum in town, and hails him a cab.

In the museum, Micha finds a wall of photos, taken prior to the war, when the village was thriving. On the opposite wall are photos taken during the war, which show the execution of Jews, mass killings, piles of dead bodies, and smiling German soldiers. There are images of SS men pointing guns at the heads of children, and images of the SS men smoking and laughing while behind them lay rows of dead, naked bodies. Micha scans the photos, but does not see his Opa. He asks the young female attendant if she knows which German forces occupied the area, and learns that Opa's division was in fact one of them. Micha is clearly uncomfortable, and the woman is embarrassed for him. Micha finally gathers the courage to ask the young woman if she knows of anyone who would be willing to talk about the occupation, and she tells him to return in the morning, and that her grandfather may be able to help. When Micha returns in the morning, the woman's grandfather is there, but refuses to speak to Micha. Instead, he tells his granddaughter that Micha should visit Jozef Kolesnik in the next village for information, and walks away.

Micha arrives at Kolesnik's home, but no one is inside. He waits until late evening, when he sees an old man and woman watching him from the porch. As Micha begins to speak with him, his fear forces tears to his eyes, and he is too afraid to ask if Kolesnik

remembers his grandfather. The old woman, introduced as Elena, brings Micha vodka and tissues for his tears, but clearly wants him to leave. Kolesnik also asks Micha to leave, stating that it is too difficult to remember those times. Micha returns to Andrej's home, and is happy for Andrej's silent comforting presence.

"Micha," Belarus, Easter 1998 Analysis

Although Micha has sought answers to his questions about his grandfather, he is unable to proceed, even once he is in Belarus, where his grandfather last served. It is clear that Micha feels shame at even the thought of being in a Jewish area as a German, symbolized by his fear of Andrej's reaction to his place of residence. This again shows the theme of shame and embarrassment about his own heritage. Andrej, on the other hand, appears to accept Micha, and even to see him as a companion. While Micha blames his country for the occupation and extermination, it is clear that Andrej and his mother see only a German tourist, and do not judge him nearly as harshly as he judges himself.

The grandfather of the woman in the museum symbolizes those who do, in fact, blame all Germans for the occupation. Unwilling to speak to Micha, but instead appearing only to size him up, the old man clearly dislikes Micha simply because he is German. This ironic twist is symbolic of the racism that existed in Germany and surrounding areas, and still exists. For many of those who recall the occupation, the people of Germany are clearly as to blame as those who actually served in the war.

Kolesnik, to whom Micha was referred, appears to represent those who lived through the occupation and who do not discuss the event that occurred. Later, readers will learn the true reasons for Kolesnik's refusal to speak, but as of this section, Micha can only believe it is because he is German. Again, the theme of discrimination appears, but in reverse order from that which was experienced during the occupation of Germany. This theme of racism and discrimination is present and vital throughout the rest of the story.

"Micha," Home, Spring 1998

"Micha," Home, Spring 1998 Summary

Back at home, Micha and Mina discover she is pregnant, and are happy, but Micha now finds that he is unable to look at the photo of Opa. When he attempts to return the picture to his Oma's photo album, he finds he is unable to see the images as he did previously. Now, he can only see his grandfather as a soldier. When his educational institution commemorates the liberation of the camps, Micha is enraged at the way in which the children are taught about the occupations. As Micha tells Mina, he believes the children should be taught about those who committed these atrocious acts, not simply about the survivor stories. Mina is angry that Micha appears to blame all Germans for their parents' and grandparents' actions.

Micha goes to see his uncle Bernd to discuss Opa and asks about why Opa was an alcoholic. Micha believes the reasons lie within Opa's actions in the war. Bernd describes Opa as a gentle, kind man, but a man prone to violent outbursts. When Micha asks Bernd if he believes Opa killed anyone, Bernd responds only that Opa was a soldier. Following a camping trip taken by Mina and Micha, Luise phones their home, swearing at Micha to stop questioning the family, and demanding that he not speak with Oma the way he has spoken with Bernd. Mina is angry, asking what Micha has done.

Later, as Micha helps his mother prepare a meal, she questions his interrogation of family members. Micha responds that he believes Opa was not a normal prisoner of war, and that the Russians held him for punishment of war crimes. Mutti is convinced that her father did nothing, but Micha refuses to listen. At the table, he cruelly asks if she wants to know, when he finds out if Opa was a murderer. Vati is furious, as is Mutti, and Mina and Micha leave. Mina is also angry, and leaves Micha alone in the house while she calms down. Luise visits, and tells Micha she too has sought answers to the truth about Opa, but found nothing. Luise asks him not to tell Mutti and Vati, but states that she wants to know if he finds anything.

As Micha lay dozing in the apartment, Jozef Kolesnik phones, asking what Micha wanted. Micha tries to explain, but Kolesnik's pressure is too great, and Micha hangs up. Five days later, he receives a letter from Kolesnik, apologizing for his rude behavior on the telephone. When Micha tells Mina he plans to return to Belarus, Mina is angry, not understanding why Micha is so driven to know of his Opa's crimes. Determined, Micha writes to Kolesnik, asking permission to come speak. Micha lies, claiming he is doing a research project on the German occupation of Belarus, and needs assistance in detailing the lives of the German soldiers. He does not mention Opa. Mina is angry, but agrees for Micha to return to Belarus when Kolesnik agrees to the meeting. Mina questions Micha's ability to love his grandfather if he finds out Opa was a murderer, and Micha can only reply that he does not know. A friend of Mina's helps Micha to write a letter to Andrej, asking permission to stay, and he agrees.

Prior to leaving, Micha agrees to meet his Vati at the train station. Vati explains that although he loves Mutti and loved Opa, he is still aware that Opa likely killed people in battle. However, as he explains to Micha, his own father was also a soldier, and he knows his father killed in the line of duty. While he hopes this is true for Askan, Vati also admits that he realizes the possibility that Askan murdered Jews. Vati tells Micha he wanted the situation to stop with his generation, that he wanted Micha and Luise to know the positive side of Askan, and wanted the terrors of World War II not to touch his children the way it touched his generation.

"Micha," Home, Spring 1998 Analysis

Micha is now torn between his love for his family, and his anger at their denial of the truth. This theme of denial in the face of truth is continuous throughout the rest of the story. Micha mentions this denial again as he expresses his anger at the commencement of the liberation, stating that he wants his co-workers to teach the horrors of the occupation in terms of those who committed the crimes, not simply in terms of the survivors. Mina too shows denial as she refuses to discuss the issue further with Micha, stating that she finds it perverse. Mutti denies her father's possible wrongdoing, as well.

This section also shows another theme in the story, that of a constant lack of responsibility for actions. Micha is unwilling to admit that his actions are causing great pain to his family, excusing them as necessary in order to find the truth. Bernd appears to see any killings on the part of Opa as tragedies of war, as does Vati. Mina too states repeatedly that the responsibility of the occupation lies not with her generation, but with those before her. This theme foreshadows the expressions of Kolesnik later in the story.

Micha's feelings towards his Opa symbolize those of the generations following World War II who were forced to recognize the crimes of their country. Many children, grandchildren, and citizens of Germany were forced to admit the crimes of their loved ones and compatriots while still allowing themselves to love their kin, and their country in general. This tragedy of war is often left undiscussed, but is a vital component to the history of any nation.

"Micha," Belarus, Summer 1998

"Micha," Belarus, Summer 1998 Summary

As Micha stands in the home of Kolesnik, he is embarrassed by his previous visit, but the older couple makes him feel at home. Micha promises to take a photo of Elena and Jozef together, since they have only had one photo taken together in their lives, and Elena is pleased. Micha and Kolesnik have agreed that Micha can tape record their conversations and the two spend the first day getting used to the recorder. The following day, Micha begins asking Kolesnik questions regarding the occupation. He explains that the German planes and army came to the village first, and the SS men and police came later, and stayed. The Belarusians and Germans set up a new government, complete with curfews and a new way of farming. Previously, there had been a collective farming community, but when the German occupation began, the farmers were forced to work for the German army, feeding the troops to the east.

Kolesnik, when asked, states that while there were Jews in the area, they were killed by the SS, police, and army. He explains that the SS first set up ghettos for the Jews, forcing them to stop going to school and to stop working. Next, they murdered the Jewish men, the ill, and the elderly, leaving only enough people to keep working at the sawmill and other businesses necessary for the war. The rest were rounded up and shot. Kolesnik continues to explain that even more Jews were killed in the spring, and that by summer, the SS were bringing in Jews from all over the country, killing those they did not need, and forcing the rest to work. Kolesnik explains that this cycle continued until late summer of 1943, and Micha recalls that his Opa was here during that period. Micha, now afraid, asks Kolesnik if they can stop for the day.

During the next recorded conversation, Micha asks Kolesnik to recall the names of some of the German soldiers, and he does so, but Askan is not among them. Kolesnik tells of one German soldier who shot himself following his involvement in the murder of Jewish children. Kolesnik admits to Micha that he was an interpreter during the war for the Germans, and collaborated with them. He admits that everyone near him is aware of his actions, and that is why the grandfather of the woman in the museum sent Micha to him. He also admits that, by the end of the war, he participated in the extermination of the Jews.

Micha is appalled and shocked at Kolesnik's confession. As he calls Mina, he explains that while he is upset at the revelation, he has to go back to ask about Opa. When he returns, he asks Kolesnik about those soldiers who refused orders to kill the Jews. Kolesnik explains that there were no orders to kill them, and that those who did so did so voluntarily. According to Kolesnik, the soldiers were able to refuse responsibility for their actions, since someone else asked them to volunteer. In this way, neither the person asking for volunteers nor the volunteer felt responsible for the Jewish extermination.

Micha calls Mina again, but Mina is angry. She is pregnant, and Micha is not home with her. The two argue briefly, and then end the conversation. The following day, Micha asks Kolesnik about his emotions towards the Jews. Kolesnik admits that he was angry with the Communists for killing his father, and found relief in being able to hate the Jews, although they were in no way responsible for his father's death. When Micha expresses anger at this seemingly unfair transfer of anger, Kolesnik explains that when the Germans came, they convinced the people that the Jews were to blame for all problems, and that the Jewish people were Communists. Kolesnik admits he knew this was a lie, but that he was able to use that lie to justify his actions to himself. He also admits that while he used many excuses, in the end, it was his choice, and he chose to kill. As Micha asks about the German's reactions after a shooting, Kolesnik explains that there was not much conversation, but there was much drinking.

Micha is unwilling to return to Kolesnik's home the following day, so he returns to the museum. He looks only at the photographs of the Jewish families. When he returns to Andrej's home, Kolesnik is waiting. He explains he was worried, since Micha did not show up, and that he has asked Elena to speak with Micha concerning her experiences in the war. Micha agrees to come the following day, but Andrej's mother is angry when he returns inside the home. He cannot understand her, but her tone is clearly one of fury.

The following day, Elena speaks with Micha concerning her memories of the war. She says she feels sad about what her husband did during the war, but that her brother did the same. Elena herself recalls Germans, partisans, and Russians destroying her village, raping women, and stealing food. Elena hid in the barns and corn, only knowing who was ravaging the village by the language used by the soldiers. Micha asks if it is enough for Elena to feel sadness, and she replies angrily that she can feel nothing else.

As he is leaving, Micha asks Kolesnik if he too is sad, and he replies that he is not. Micha, surprised, asks if he is sorry, and Kolesnik replies that he cannot possibly apologize for his actions, since his victims are dead. Micha returns the next day to take the picture he promised of Elena and Jozef. He notes that, like his Opa, Jozef does not look at the camera. Elena, excited, asks to take a picture of Jozef and Micha, but Micha refuses, angering Elena and hurting Jozef's feelings. When he returns to the home of Andrej, he finds Andrej angry that he allowed Kolesnik to visit the home, and offers to leave the following day, relieving Andrej. Micha returns to Kolesnik's home, finally asking about his Opa, and showing Kolesnik the picture of Opa. Kolesnik explains that he does remember Askan, and that he did in fact kill Jews and Belarusian people.

As Micha leave for the bus station, he passes Kolesnik's home, and finds Kolesnik smiling, rushing down the path to greet him. He offers to walk him to the station, and Micha agrees. Micha, glad to be leaving, realizes the old man likes him, but cannot return the feelings. As the bus pulls away, Micha is relieved.

"Micha," Belarus, Summer 1998 Analysis

This section is devoted nearly entirely to the themes of racism, anger, alcoholism, refusal of responsibility, and the tragedies of World War II. Kolesnik transferred his anger at the Communist killing of his father to the Jewish people, allowing him to justify his murders. Even though he knew these actions were wrong and knew the Germans were lying about the Jewish ties to Communism, he was able to deny the truth in order to satisfy his desire for revenge. This shows clearly that Kolesnik allowed himself racist beliefs to accommodate his goal, and to refuse responsibility for his actions. He also indicates that the soldiers felt no responsibility, since the orders were given by others, and the killings were done by still others. In this pattern, neither soldier nor commander is responsible for the mass executions.

Elena, too, may feel saddened by the actions of her husband and her brother, but also appears not to show any true emotions about the rapes and murders within her own village. These reactions to violence symbolize the internalization of the tragedies of World War II. As violence and hatred permeated the lives of the Jews and the Germans, their emotional capacities diminished in response. As Elena states, they are only able to feel sadness, since all other emotions have been virtually distinguished out of necessity.

Kolesnik also confirms the suspicions of Micha, in that he now knows his Opa murdered Jews, and became an alcoholic in all likelihood because of his guilt. Again, although the soldiers outwardly claimed no responsibility in the extermination of the Jewish people, they internalized their actions, and according to Kolesnik, often drank to forget. This cycle of denial and alcohol abuse further confirms that part of the tragedy of World War II was the destruction of not only the Jewish population, but also of the humanity within the German soldiers.

The theme of lingering anger is also apparent throughout this entire section. Mina is angry with Micha for leaving her alone and pregnant, showing his own lack of responsible actions. Mina is unwilling to see why Micha needs to know the information of his Opa, showing her own level of denial. Andrej is angry with Micha for bringing Kolesnik to his home, showing racism and the anger resulting from World War II. Micha himself is angry with Kolesnik, and unable to understand his motivations, showing again his own denial of reality and his own racism. Elena, angry and hurt at Micha's refusal to take a photograph with Kolesnik, also shows her denial of reality. Elena, who can forgive her husband for his actions, cannot understand Micha's inability to do so.

"Micha," Home, Winter 1998

"Micha," Home, Winter 1998 Summary

Micha is now a father, following the birth of his new daughter, Dilan Lehner. His family comes to visit, and Micha finds he is uncomfortable around them. Mutti asks Micha to call his Oma, and he declines. Luise offers to call her, and Micha angrily replies that he will not associate with her, since she covered up Opa's war actions. Mina sends both of them from the room.

At Christmas, Micha still refuses to see his Oma. He and Luise again argue, and Luise exclaims that Mutti and Vati know the truth, so Micha can leave it alone. Micha replies that they still are not facing the truth and Luise points out that simply because they do not shout about it all day, as he does, does not mean they do not accept the truth. Micha himself is having difficulty concentrating, as thoughts of his Opa killing people come consistently to his mind. He spends much time with his daughter and Mina, trying to dismiss the images in his head.

He and Luise begin to rebuild their relationship, and discuss Opa again. Luise points out that people in war do terrible things, and are generally confused by their own actions. Unable to grasp reality while in the middle of war, they sometimes do terrible things. She continues that perhaps, when in the midst of this, people begin to believe or become their actions, and maybe they have to continue on, despite their feelings about whom or what they have become. Micha is unwilling to admit this. Later, Micha realizes that finding out the truth did not end the conflict within him, and that the conflict will never end. Later, he admits to Mina that when he cries about the situation now, he cries for himself, not those who were killed. Mina explains that she understands his dilemma, but that he needs to remember the good things Opa did during his life, as well. Micha thinks of himself as selfish, but also realizes that his feelings towards Oma and Opa have changed: he is revolted by the thoughts of their actions, and this prevents him from loving even their memory. Later, at home, Micha gets a telephone call, informing his that Kolesnik has passed away. Elena asks him to come to see the grave, and Micha agrees.

"Micha," Home, Winter 1998 Analysis

As Micha's daughter is born, he finds himself again torn between his family and his new revelations. Feeling unable to love his Opa and Oma, Micha has become alienated from his family. Mina attempts to explain to Micha about unconditional love, and the ability to love someone despite his or her actions, but Micha is unwilling to listen. Luise tries to explain to Micha about war, and the tragedy that occurs during war, but again, Micha is unwilling to listen. In this section, Micha shows the characteristics he himself has denounced, such as a refusal to listen to reason, responsibility in one's own actions,

and a denial of fact. Knowing this, readers can sense an upcoming revelation for Micha as the call comes for him to visit the grave of Kolesnik.

"Micha," Belarus, Spring 1999

"Micha," Belarus, Spring 1999 Summary

Micha arrives again at the home of the Kolesnik's to find Elena angry that he cannot stay longer. He explains through a translator that he must return to work. Elena gives him Jozef's room, which makes Micha uncomfortable. He wishes to tell Elena that he was not Jozef's friend, nor hers, but finds the words too cruel. Micha spends the night on the floor of the bedroom.

The next morning, Elena takes Micha to the gravesite, but Micha is again uncomfortable, feeling nothing for the death of the old man. As they leave, Elena takes Micha farther away from home, to a small clearing in the forest. Elena is crying freely, and mimes a soldier firing a rifle. Micha suddenly understands that this is the place Jozef and his Opa murdered Jews and watches as Elena wipes her tears into the ground.

Elena accompanies Micha to the train station, as Micha angrily reflects on her position. He knows Elena feels that her inability to have children is punishment for her husband's crimes. Micha thinks to himself that Elena knew of Jozef's crimes, and loved him anyway, accepting her punishment. As the train moves away, Micha suddenly understands why Elena took him to the clearing.

"Micha," Belarus, Spring 1999 Analysis

This section shows, as foreshadowed, the final understanding of Micha, and the final acceptance of Opa's crimes. Through Elena's grief, and her clear sadness over her husband's crimes, Micha understands what it means to be able to love someone who has committed such horrible acts. Elena has taught Micha a lesson others have attempted to do throughout this story; that it is possible to love someone in whole, without liking their actions, and to accept their actions as a part of them and move forward.

"Micha," Home, Spring

"Micha," Home, Spring Summary

Dilan is walking next to Micha. She trips and falls, and Micha sooths her, wanting no tears on this day. As father and daughter walk, Micha explains to his young daughter that if they look upwards toward the white high-rise building, they will see Oma Kaethe waving to them. Dilan accepts this new family member unconditionally, and Micha is pained to see this unfaltering acceptance. Lifting her to his shoulders, Micha asks Dilan if she can see Oma, and she hesitantly replies that she can. Micha, looking up, can see his Oma waving to her grandson and great-granddaughter.

"Micha," Home, Spring Analysis

Following his revelation about unconditional love and acceptance, Micha takes his young daughter to see his grandmother. He is able to watch as his young daughter, unencumbered by the knowledge of war, discrimination, murder, and fear, accepts his grandmother without thought. Micha has learned, finally, what it means to love another without reservations and without prejudice and judgment.

Characters

Helmut

Born in Berlin, Germany in 1921, Helmut is a dark haired man with a physical disability; that of a missing pectoral muscle in his chest. While the condition is not life threatening, it causes disfigurement of the right arm and an inability to use the arm fully. Prior to World War II, Helmut's life consists of his observations of trains and people at the local station, but as the war begins to affect Berlin, Helmut attempts to join the German military. When Helmut, although in otherwise perfect physical health and quite intelligent, is told he cannot join due to his disability, he finds work with a kindly photographer, and learns to capture life on film.

As war slowly destroys his home, family, and employment, Helmut finds he is a capable, reliable, and independent man as he finds shelter, food, and work on his own. Helmut's photographs of the changes in Berlin following the onset of World War II are testaments to the city. When finally given the opportunity to join the military as a last effort by Hitler to save Berlin, Helmut is at last at peace with himself and with his disability. Helmut's character represents those during World War II who were unable to join the military, and the disgrace and shame often felt by these individuals.

Papi of Helmut

Helmut's father, or Papi, is a hardworking man who believes in his son, but is ashamed of his because of his disability. As a member of the Nazi Part, Papi would like his son to serve Germany in the war, and pushes him to adapt physically to his disability. Eventually, however, Papi resigns to admitting the disability is too great for Helmut, and acquires him a position at the photographer's shop where he himself is employed. While it is clear Papi loves Helmut, his constant shame and embarrassment at this son is apparent, even to Helmut, and affects Helmut's own sense of self. It is only when Papi is killed in a bombing that Helmut finds himself able to survive independently and capably.

Mutti of Helmut

Helmut's mother, or Mutti, is a kind woman who is perhaps too protective of her disabled son. Filled with anxiety and shame over his condition, Mutti is uncomfortable around other mothers whose sons are not disabled. Mutti often tries to keep her son from circumstances that may cause him embarrassment, thereby affecting his development and his sense of self-worth. When she and Papi join the Nazi Party following the coming of World War II, Mutti allows Helmut to find employment, finally allowing him to prove his worth to himself and others. Mutti loves Helmut, but it is her constant concern, shame, embarrassment, and fear for him that often stands in his way of developing skills to survive in war torn Berlin. Upon her death in a bombing raid, Helmut is able to show himself that he is independent and able to survive on his own.

Herr Gladigau

A photographer by trade, Gladigau employs, at one time or another, both Papi and Helmut. An older, quiet, gentle, and prideful man, Gladigau watches Helmut grow into a capable young man, and trusts him with more and more responsibility, finally teaching him to take photographs. Gladigau enjoys Helmut's silent, hard working company, and often dreams of giving him the shop when he himself retires. He observes Helmut becoming a more capable photographer over time and encourages him to continue. Gladigau is not concerned by Helmut's disability, but instead sees it as a simple, small fragment of the whole person, a small part of who Helmut is. It is through Gladigau that Helmut learns many of the traits that allow him to become independent and accepting of his own conditions.

Lore

Lore is an innocent young teenager with four younger siblings living in Bavaria in early 1945. Her father, a soldier in the German army, takes the family to a secluded valley to wait out the war. When her father is captured by the Red Army and her mother is taken by the American army to a labor camp, Lore is left with the responsibility of taking her four siblings to Hamburg. While her love for her siblings is immense, Lore finds she is often exasperated with them as they travel through war-torn Germany. As a child of Nazi parents, Lore finds herself and her siblings hated by many, but in her innocence cannot understand the reasoning. It is only when Lore discovers the atrocities of the Holocaust that she begins to understand other's fury, and begins to feel shame at her heritage.

Lore, a competent young woman, is able to find food and shelter for her young siblings, but is often taken advantage of by adults needing to feed their own families. When a thin, tall man, Tomas, joins the family, Lore is at first suspicious of him and of his motives. As Tomas assists them, however, Lore begins to fall in love with Tomas, believing him to be a Jewish prisoner. As Lore comes to terms with her parent's crimes during the war and with her county's role in the war, Lore is frightened of the reactions she may face because of her feelings. When her brother is killed by the Red Army, Lore accepts responsibility for his death, furthering her shame and suffering.

When the family finally reaches Hamburg, Lore discovers Tomas is not a Jewish prisoner, but is instead a Nazi. When Tomas leaves, Lore is left with her own feelings of inadequacy and anger at the war, and at the political situation, that has caused the virtual destruction of her innocence. However, as Lore develops into a woman in the aftermath of World War II, she finds herself capable of accepting her plight, and stands alone and proud of her own accomplishments, waiting for a future without fear, anger, resentment, and war. Lore's character clearly represents the orphan children of World War II and their plight as they attempt to cross a hostile country in their innocence.

Liesel

Liesel is the younger sister of Lore. During their journey to Hamburg, Liesel often shows the innocence of youth, looking to her sister for answers to questions about the guilt of their father, the war, the journey, and the anger of many towards the children. Liesel is trusting, often believing even the most extravagant stories in an effort to maintain her own sense of self. By the end of the story, however, Liesel, too, has changed, understanding at last that the world around her is cruel, and that her parent's involvement in the German military and in the Party results in their guilt. Liesel is able to continue her love for the family, despite these flaws, showing true unconditional love.

Tomas

Tomas is a young man traveling the same path as Lore and her family. Pale and very this, with gray eyes, Tomas pretends to be a Jewish prisoner to escape the Russian and American armies in the aftermath of the war. A criminal before the war, Tomas is used to lying and deceiving to get what he needs, and at first sees the children only as leverage to assist his own escape. However, as he takes care of Lore and her siblings, and following his role in the death of Jochen, Tomas begins to change, seeing their need for help and guidance. He becomes a father figure to the children, and a love interest for Lore as he finds himself falling in love with the family. However, when Tomas believes his secret is discovered, that he has stolen the identity of a dead Jewish man, Tomas has no choice but to escape Hamburg, leaving Lore and her family behind. Tomas's character appears to symbolize the lengths to which some would go to escape punishment.

Juri

Juri is a younger brother of Lore, and a twin of Jochen. Protective of his sisters and proud of his father, Juri often questions his surroundings but finds himself trusting and loving Tomas as a father figure. Juri admires Tomas, with his criminal history and clear knowledge of the world, and charms his way into the heart of the young man. However, when Jochen is killed, Juri finds it difficult to blame Tomas, and instead chooses to blame Lore. Again, when Tomas leaves, Juri blames Lore. As the memories of their journey begin to fade, Juri finds companionship in friends his own age.

Jochen

Jochen is the younger brother of Lore, and a twin to Juri. Fiercely protective and often unruly, Jochen is often a cause of exasperation to Lore as they attempt to journey towards Hamburg. However, when Tomas leaves the camp one evening for food, Jochen follows, and the Russian Army shoots him, killing him immediately. His death haunts Tomas, Lore, and the rest of the family throughout the novel. Jochen's character

clearly symbolizes the death of the innocent orphans and families in the aftermath of World War II.

Mutti of Lore

Lore's mother is a seemingly depressed woman who is struggling to raise five children while her husband is away in war. Often angry, yet also gentle and caring, Mutti represents the single parent of World War II in Germany. Knowing her association with the Party will endanger the lives of her family, Mutti attempts to conceal the truth. When discovered, however, Mutti has no choice but to send her children alone across war-torn Germany. Mutti's seemingly flat affect throughout the story shows the unfortunate circumstances during World War II that often forced many into otherwise unthinkable choices.

Vati of Lore

Lore's father, or Vati, is a soldier in the German military. Fighting for his country, Vati is unable to care for his family, and hides them, hoping they can escape the oncoming Allied forces. A nearly unseen character in the story, Vati is still a strong character, in that his children clearly idolize him, both as a father figure and as an officer. As the truths about the war become clear to Lore and her siblings, however, this idolization turns to conflicting feelings of love mixed with shame. Lore, in particular, old enough to understand the crimes of the German army, finds herself thinking of her father as a criminal.

Oma of Lore

Lore's grandmother, or Opa, is a symbolic representation of the elderly during World War II. Convinced of the truth of Hitler's platform, Oma defends Vati and Mutti to the end, knowing their crimes but unable to see those crimes as atrocities. She repeats many times that Lore and her siblings should be proud, not ashamed, of their parents, and that while some in the military went too far, the result was not all negative. A hard woman, living through two world wars, Oma is still a loving figure to the children, and a symbol of the strength of family following the war.

Michael Lehner (Micha)

Micha is a thirty-year-old schoolteacher who adores his Oma and Opa, has close ties to his family, and deeply loves his fiancye, Mina. When Micha discovers his grandfather's role in the Waffen SS, however, Micha becomes obsessed with discovering the truth of his grandfather's crimes. Often selfish and cruel in his actions and reactions to the feelings of others, Micha is torn between the love for his grandfather and the disgust he feels at the atrocities of the Holocaust. Micha is appalled by the refusal of his family to admit the truth of Opa's crimes, and often pushes his family and Mina away. Throughout

his journey of discovery, Micha meets Jozef Kolesnik, a translator during the war who eventually assisted the German military in the extermination of the Jews. Micha is appalled, and hurts the old man's feelings often with his harsh questions and seemingly unwillingness to understand Kolesnik's role in the war.

When Kolesnik dies, and his wife shows Micha the clearing where her husband and Opa murdered Jews, Micha finally comes to realize the power of unconditional love, and begins to understand that war often forces individuals to choose actions and lifestyles previously unthinkable. He begins to understand his grandmother's decision to accept Opa's crimes, as Elena accepted the decisions of her husband. Micha learns, through his journey, to accept his family and love them, despite their character flaws and incorrect decisions. Micha's character appears to represent the generation of individuals whose grandparents committed acts of aggression toward the Jews in World War II. Unaffected otherwise by the war, this generation instead had to learn to accept their families involvement in the war, and learn to love them, despite their actions.

Mina

Mina is a strong woman of Turkish decent who is the fiancye of Micha. With strong family ties and a stronger sense of self, Mina is at first unaffected by Micha's obsession with the Holocaust. As time wears on, however, and with Mina's unexpected pregnancy, Mina finds herself often angry with Micha as his obsession takes over his life, leaving little room for her and their unborn child. A kind, loving, and sensitive woman, Mina often feels for Micha's family as his obsession makes him cruel and unfeeling. Mina's character clearly represents the second generation of individuals following World War II. Unaffected by the Holocaust, Mina attempts to stop Micha from his obsession, not understanding why gaining knowledge of his grandfather's crimes is important. Mina's focus on the present, rather than the past, shows her resolve to build a life for herself and her family based on the principles learned from the war.

Mutti of Micha (Karin Lehner)

Karin is a loving, tender, retired woman who adores her children, husband, and parents. As such, Karin is unable to accept the idea that her father was involved in the murder of the Jews, and is angry with Micha for suggesting the concept. While she understands that Askan, her father, was in the Waffen SS, Karin refuses to believe that he committed acts of atrocities. Remembering her father as loving and beautiful, Karin denies even the possibility that Askan was anything other than a strong, wonderful, loving father.

Vati of Micha (Paul Lehner)

Paul, husband of Karin and father of Micha, is a hard worker who loves his wife and family. Paul had lost his father in the war and, as a result, understands far more than Micha does about the tragedies of World War II. Because he grew up during the aftermath of the war, Paul wanted the atrocities of Germany to stop with his generation.

He attempted to protect both Micha and Luise from knowing the truth about Askan, and while he admits to believing the possibility that Askan murdered Jews, he also understands that love for family is unconditional.

Oma of Micha (Kaethe Boell)

Kaethe is the mother of Karin and grandmother of Micha. Her husband, Askan, was an SS man in World War II. Kaethe is fiercely loyal to her husband, despite the crimes she knows he committed during the war. Kaethe, who loved and married Askan prior to the war, understands her role in the aftermath of the war, and chose to continue loving Askan, despite his crimes. Micha, angry with her for what he sees as a refusal to admit the truth, does not understand the concept of unconditional love for one's family, and thus, cannot understand Kaethe's decisions.

Opa of Micha (Askan Boell)

Askan, grandfather of Micha, was an SS man in World War II. As a soldier, Askan killed many individuals, both in the line of duty as a soldier, and in an attempt to follow orders to exterminate the Jewish population. As a result, Askan was an alcoholic throughout life, and was clearly often shamed by his actions. However, Askan allowed himself to live a full life with his family following the war, showing clearly the power of war on the emotional capacity of soldiers.

Jozef Kolesnik

Jozef Kolesnik was a translator for the German military during World War II, and eventually collaborated with them to kill the Jews. While Kolesnik knows his actions were wrong, he does not feel saddened by those actions, seeing them only as past events. While he feels shame at his collaboration, and pity for his wife, he does not apologize for his actions, nor show any remorse. Micha sees this as indifference. Kolesnik clearly represents the World War II soldier. Unable to deal with the emotional components of extermination, the soldiers often turned off the emotional component of their lives, dealing only with the situation as it happened. Kolesnik is presented not as an evil German soldier, but as an old man who was caught in his youth by conflicting emotions of anger, rage, and fear.

Elena Kolesnik

Seemingly a small character, Elena Kolesnik is perhaps the most important character aside from Micha in this story. Elena was a young girl during World War II, and often ran from the various military forces that robbed, raped, and killed the people of her village. However, in the aftermath of the war, Elena married Jozef, whom she knew collaborated with the military that shot her brothers, and terrorized her village. Elena sees her and Jozef's lack of children as punishment for these actions. However, Elena is able to love

her husband despite his actions, showing the true power of unconditional love, and she teaches Micha to accept his past, and love his family, despite their wartime actions.

Objects/Places

Berlin, Germany

Much of the storyline within these short pieces is based in Berlin. Prior to the war, Berlin is a thriving city of industry and prosperity, but with the coming of World War II and through the bombing of the allied forces, the city is destroyed. Berlin is finally overrun by Russian Red Army in 1945.

The Darkroom

A source of peace and happiness for Helmut, the darkroom is also the title of this novel. The dark room appears to be a metaphor for the stages of the stories within the novel, as the images of Germany before, during, and after the war come to light through the eyes of the characters. As in Helmut's story, the dark room of Germany is often a source of mixed emotions for the characters, ranging from anger to happiness to pride to love.

German Occupation

The German occupation, occurring across Europe during the 1940s in World War II, was often blamed for the extermination of millions of Jewish citizens. The German military, part of the Nazi Party, set up ghettos for the Jews and murdered men, women, and children, saving only those who were able to work in labor camps designed to support the German military. The atrocities committed during the German occupation have haunted generations of individuals in all countries throughout the last 60 years.

Hamburg

Hamburg is the eventual destination of Lore and her siblings. Partially destroyed during the bombing of World War II, Lore finds the city a wreckage of corpses, destroyed homes, and military occupation.

Russian Zone

Established following the fall of Germany, the Russian zone was an area of Russian occupation in Germany. Known for their severe punishments for attempting to cross the border, the Russian Red Army eventually built a wall surrounding the zone, which came to be known as the Berlin Wall, thereby creating East and West Germany.

Belarus

A country to the north of Germany, Belarus was consistently invaded and occupied by both the Russian Army and the Nazi parties during World War II, eventually falling to the Soviet Union in 1944. Belarus was one of the countries most affected by the Holocaust, having lost nearly 300,000 of its population to the Nazi labor camps.

Nazi Party / Third Reich

The Third Reich of Germany, also commonly associated with the Nazi party, represents Germany's move from the Second German Reich. Headed by Adolf Hitler, the purpose of the Nazi party, or socialist workers party, was to create a unified Germany consisting of all Germanic peoples of Europe. In an attempt to create such a unified country, the Nazi military proceeded to "eliminate" millions of German citizens, many of which were Jews, in massive slaughters, which when combined, amount to the Nazi Holocaust.

Nazi Swastika

A symbol of the Nazi Party, the swastika represents a unified German people under socialist rule, and is synonymous with anti-Semitism.

Jewish Star of David

A symbol of the Jewish religion, the Star of David represents the six directions of God, those of north, south, east, west, up, and down. In terms of World War II, the Star became a symbol for the Jewish prisoners of Nazi camps, as Jewish people were forced to wear such symbols in an effort to brand them.

Labor Camps

During World War II, and following the war, the Nazi, American, and Russian military forces set up labor camps, designed both to contain certain individuals and, in some cases, to punish others. For the Nazi party, the labor camps became mass killing grounds, where executions, inhumane experiments, and forced slave labor were prominent. For the American armies, the camps were often used to hold those who were members of the Nazi Party, but who were not directly responsible for the Holocaust. Russian camps were often used for the torture and punishment of Nazi war criminals.

Themes

Shame / Embarrassment

Throughout the novel, the themes of shame and embarrassment are prominent, but for very different reasons. Helmut feels shame because his physical disability forces him to be different from the rest of Berlin society during World War II. He is unable to join the military, often mocked, given charity, and generally regarded as less than other members of society. His parents, and particularly his mother, feel embarrassment at their son's disability, as their friends' sons go to fight for Germany.

Lore, too, feels shame when she learns of her country's involvement in the extermination of the Jews, and of her parents' involvement with the Nazi party. This shame conflicts drastically with the love Lore has for her family, and creates a problematic situation for Lore as she tries to grasp the long-term consequences of the Holocaust on herself and her family. Tomas, too, feels shame when he believes Lore knows of his crime in stealing the identity of a dead Jewish war prisoner to escape the Russian and American forces in Germany.

Micha, as he learns of his grandfather's crimes during World War II, also feels great shame. Unable to tolerate his family's refusal of Opa's history, Micha is ashamed of his grandmother's continued love of a man Micha himself now sees as a murderer. Additionally, Micha is ashamed of his compatriots, who seem not to take responsibility for their actions.

This constant theme of the shame and embarrassment felt by the surviving generations of World War II soldiers symbolizes the shame of the entire nation of Germany following the Holocaust. Many individuals on both sides were forced to admit to the drastic and horrific crimes of their predecessors, and accept those crimes as a part of their past. While difficult, it is clear throughout the story that the characters learn from their journeys and are able to come to terms with their shame.

Anger / Violence

Anger and violence are prominent throughout the novel, as the horrific events of World War II unfold within the story. From small altercations with soldiers to the violent destruction of Berlin following the Allied bombing, Helmut captures the violence of war in Germany on film, showing the gradual change of the citizens within the city. Lore, too, experiences violence and hatred as the knowledge of her Nazi status sets many in post war Germany against her and her siblings. Lore sees, through images on walls and in newspapers, the dead bodies of those killed in Nazi camps, and sees corpses pulled from the wreckage of bombed cities. Even her love interest displays anger and violence by stealing the identity of a deceased Jew and by his reactions to Lore's questions of punishment. As Micha, in the third story, travels to Belarus to seek his grandfather's true

identity, he sees images and hears stories of massive destruction, including the mass murder of Jewish children and citizens, suicide, the burning of villages, rape, theft, and cruelty.

This theme of violence is necessary when discussing the surviving generations of the Nazi Party of World War II, since their entire lives were filled with the violence of war. While certainly tempered with moments of unconditional love and understanding, the violence within the lives of this novel's characters allow them to develop fully as characters. Additionally, the descriptions of the violence in the Holocaust allow the reader to fully comprehend the complex issues experienced by the characters.

Unconditional Love

The unconditional love of specific characters throughout the novel is a subtle theme, but one that permeates the entire storyline. Helmut's love for his parents, despite their obvious embarrassment of his condition, allows Helmut to develop into a self-sufficient man following their death. Lore's love for her siblings, and for her parents, despite their involvement with the Nazi party, allows readers to understand the depths of Lore's character and her capacity for tenderness. Elena Kolesnik and Oma's unconditional love for their husbands, despite their actions during war, show clearly the power of such emotion, even in the face of despair and suffering.

It is clear throughout the novel that such love was necessary following World War II. As Luise explains, many soldiers in the Nazi military simply performed the actions required of them by their commanders, never stopping to ask if such actions were moral or just. In the face of war, many characters find themselves saying, doing, and believing things they otherwise would not have. It is clear to the reader, through this theme, that while war destroyed many lives and cities within Germany, the soul of the people could not be as easily ruined.

Nazi Occupation / Holocaust

The theme of the Nazi occupation of Germany and the resulting Holocaust are prominent throughout the novel, but from different perspectives, allowing readers a rare glimpse into all aspects of World War II. Helmut, an innocent young German male, wants more than anything to help defend his country. Not knowing of the Holocaust, Helmut simply wishes to help his homeland. While he does not participate in the German occupation, he does join the forces that are responsible for the deaths of millions. However, his clear desire is not based in Anti-Semitic views, but rather, stems from his desire to be an accepted member of society.

Lore and her family are also affected by the Holocaust, although not as survivors or soldiers, but as victims of circumstance. Vatti, a soldier in the German Army, and Mutti, a member of the Nazi Party, are taken away from the children for punishment. Left with nothing but their own intelligence, the children are forced to travel through war-torn Germany, feeling the stigma of the Party at ever turn. While innocent of any crime, Lore

and her family are taken advantage of, used, lied to, accused of stealing, and treated badly, all due to their status as the children of the German occupation.

Micha's journey to discovery perhaps best illustrates this theme. Along his path, Micha finds images of the deceased Jews, SS soldiers, and villages torn apart by war. He encounters numerous individuals whose lives were drastically changed because of the Holocaust and due to the occupation by German soldiers. It is clear, through these individuals, that the horrors of the Holocaust are not easily forgotten.

Racism / Discrimination / Anti-Semitism

Another clear theme throughout the novel is the racism, discrimination, and Anti-Semitic treatment of many individuals because of the war. Helmut is often discriminated against because of his physical disability, and because of his resulting status in pre-war Berlin. Lore and her siblings are discriminated against because of their association with the Nazi Party during and immediately after the war. Micha discriminates against those who fought in the war. Clearly, this theme represents the ever-present discrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism in Germany over the whole of the twentieth century.

What is unique about this novel's portrayal is that the story tells not only of the horrors felt by Jewish people during World War II, but also of the discrimination felt by the opposite side. Lore, her siblings, Tomas, Helmut, Jozef, and many other characters are not Jewish. However, through their eyes, readers can still see discrimination, not only of the Jewish people, but also of these characters. Thus, discrimination and racism is seen not just because of the Anti-Semitic views of the war, but as a common human experience. When presented outside of the context of war, it is clear to readers that such actions are not bound within times of war, but are in fact timeless problems in Germany, as well as in many countries.

Denial of Fact / Responsibility

A final theme within this novel is the denial of factual information and of denial of responsibility for one's own actions. Throughout the stories in the novel, characters often deny obvious facts, such as the clear indication of crimes committed by loved ones. Additionally, characters such as Jozef Kolesnik and Micha himself often deny their own responsibility for actions they commit, choosing instead to blame outside forces or individuals. This denial, in both cases, serves often to harm others within the lives of the individuals, and the lives of the individuals themselves.

For example, Helmut's parents spend the first several years of his life attempting to hide his physical ailment. Rather than accepting the truth, and allowing Helmut to grow as a person who accepts his faults, Helmut's parents instead choose to deny facts, which lead to self-doubt and shame within Helmut. Had his parents allowed Helmut to grow with their support and encouragement, he may have become independent and self-sufficient far before their death. However, by continuously hiding his disfigurement,

Helmet's parents encourage only shame and humiliation, halting the proper development of self.

Tomas, on the other hand, appears to refuse responsibility for his actions. When Jochen is killed following him over the Russian zone on Germany, Tomas neither apologizes nor mourns the loss of the boy's life. Instead, he chooses to blame Jochen and his siblings for not following his orders, even though they are mere children. Oma, in this story, denies the truth when she tells her grandchildren not to feel shame, and that their father is not a criminal. Throughout the story, it is clear that Lore's father is a German soldier responsible for at least some of the events during the Holocaust. Rather than teaching the children to love him regardless of his actions, Oma instead teaches the children to deny the facts, and accept only their own beliefs.

Micha's family, too, refuses to face reality as they insist that Opa is not a murderer. Micha's father is able to admit this truth, but rather than accepting it, he instead chooses to hide behind his rationalization of the actions. Jozef, too, rationalizes his behaviors, blaming the Soviet army, the Jewish people, and the death of his father for his behaviors in the war. Again, instead of accepting responsibility and moving forward, Jozef instead denies the truth, and allows himself to believe as he chooses, despite the facts.

Style

Point of View

These three stories are told from a third person point of view, in the present tense. The narration flows as though from someone intimately involved in each of the three stories, allowing the characters to think, speak, and act naturally throughout the story. With such a difficult and complex issue to discuss, one would expect a sentimental narrative style, but the author avoids this and instead uses factual information and the honest thoughts of the characters to convey a deeper meaning.

This third person point of view is not only necessary for the storyline, but is also essential to truly develop three completely different sets of characters in completely different periods. The inner thoughts of each character are vital to understanding the complex range of emotions brought about by World War II, and are only possible through third-person narration. Further, the third person narrative allows the focus of the novel not to settle on one character, but to develop all characters equally, showing the drastic differences in personality and characteristics. For example, the story of Lore and her siblings is only moving and comprehensible because of the shifting thoughts of various character viewpoints, which can only be accomplished through third person narrative.

Setting

The novel contains three separate stories, each within different periods in the twentieth century, and each in different locations. The first story, "Helmut," is based solely in the city of Berlin, Germany between April 1921 and April 1945. This time span allows readers to follow the life of Helmut, the primary character, and experience not only his childhood, but also his life as an adult. Additionally, this frame of reference allows readers to see the city of Berlin both before the start of World War II, during the Allied bombings, and at the very end, in 1945. This historical look into a primary city of Germany lends the storyline necessary background information, as the reader can visualize the vast changes of landscape, culture, population, and politics throughout the first part of the twentieth century.

The second story, "Lore," opens in Bavaria in early spring in 1945. Lore and her family of Nazi Party members quickly leave the small country to settle in a valley rich with life. Soon, however, Lore and her siblings must leave the safety of the valley, and begin traveling across Germany to reach Hamburg. The family travels through numerous unnamed villages, but also passes through Nuremburg, Kassel, Hannover, and Hamburg. In addition to the various towns and villages, the family moves through both the Russian and American zones in post war Germany. The interesting point of the storyline for "Lore" is that the names of the towns are virtually unnecessary, as the focus of the children remains consistently on Hamburg. Lore and her siblings do not know the

landscape of Germany, but simply understand those towns they have memorized from the American map. The lack of descriptive names throughout the story simply furthers the reader's understanding that the children are not prepared to travel across the country, but are forced to do so by circumstance. The story closes in Hamburg in late winter of 1946.

The third story, "Micha," also takes place in various portions of Europe between autumn of 1997 and spring of 1999. The story opens in Hannover, Germany in 1997. As Micha journeys to find his grandfather's past, his travels lead him first to Berlin, for a changeover in trains, and then to Minsk, Belarus, where his grandfather served in the SS. His journey then leads to a group of eight small villages outside of Minsk, where the true atrocities of the war took place. Micha encounters destroyed Jewish ghettos, clearings where many Jews were killed, and numerous areas of countryside where labor camps existed. Again, the purpose of the unnamed villages in this story is to convey to readers that the atrocities Micha encounters occurred all over the country of Belarus, as is stated by the young woman in the museum. However, the country itself is vital to understanding the storyline, since Belarus fought not only the Russian Red Army but also the Nazi occupation.

Language and Meaning

The novel uses simple English to convey the base plotline, but also uses a vast amount of German language to convey the country of origin within the story. German phrases and cities are commonly used, and the novel successfully translates such usage seamlessly into the storyline. This gives the novel a feeling of authenticity without the common problem of forced translation. Language becomes a vital component to the storyline, as the characters struggle in Belarus to understand one another. Pantomimes and other gestures assist the characters in their efforts to convey meaning to one another. Again, the author conveys such gestures seamlessly, allowing for a sense of true companionship without seeming inauthentic.

Interestingly, the author also uses a non-standard form for dialogue. In "Helmut," the narrator conveys all of the storyline, and no dialogue between characters is actually spoken. In "Lore," conversations are indicated using only dashes, and the reader is left to interpret the speaker. In "Micha," conversations are again indicated by dashes, but the change of character in the conversation is indicated using italics. While this varies greatly from traditional forms of conversational dialogue, the effect is wonderful, as readers find themselves able to sense who is speaking through tone, language, and tense alone.

Structure

The 278-page novel is divided first into three stories, and then further subdivided. Both "Helmut" and "Lore" are divided by date as well as through symbolic characters. "Micha," on the other hand, is more appropriately broken by date and place of storyline.

These breaks, while varying from the standard chapter form, are successful in conveying a sense of continued time while still allowing for plot changes and changes of viewpoint. Each of the sections, as well as the three stories combined, is chronologically ordered to show a complete view of Germany before, during, and after World War II. In total, the three stories tell the tale of Germany from 1921 through 1999.

Quotes

"And they name their tiny boy Helmut, bright nature, because that is how they see him. Perfect enough, and that is just fine." (Narrator, "Helmut," p. 4)

"He knows he is fit, feels he has a strong heart and good lungs and swift legs to offer his nation. He also knows he is imperfect." (Narrator, "Helmut," p. 10)

"He sees the change in the city. The blocked streets, the missing buildings. Craters and mountains where once it was flat. Helmut can feel the difference between then and now, the pattern of the city shattered every night and the changes becoming part of each new day. He watches the people: chalking street and shop signs on the remaining walls, walking on and over and under and through. Slow progress across the rubble, ankles twisting, feet slipping, legs disappearing up to their knees. Still the go on." (Narrator, "Helmut," p. 40)

"They describe an army the size of a continent, angry and brutal and without mercy. These people speak of punishment, and bring with them a faint sense of deserving. As they pass they tell tales of emaciation and ashes, of stinking smoke and puts full of bodies. Some say they have seen these things, others dispute it. Their voices half-hearted, matter-of-fact. Vague, hungry, and weak." (Narrator, "Helmut," p. 46)

"But in this photo, Helmut is doing something which he never did in any of the many pictures lovingly printed by Gladigau over the course of his childhood. Helmut is standing high on his rubble mountain, over which Soviet tanks will roll over with ease, and he is smiling." (Narrator, "Helmut," p. 47)

"Lore listens for gunfire from the other end of the valley. Sometimes she opens the window a little, in case the battle noise is too faint to make it through the glass. Eyes searching the cloudless sky for the Luftwaffe, she imagines bombs in the valley, fire and death. Hears only birdsong." (Narrator, "Lore," p. 54)

"-Before the victory there will be pain. She steels herself for the blood and flames." (Lore, "Lore," p. 59)

"The woman unwraps bread and boiled eggs from her pockets. She watches while Lore gives the children their food. - Did you steal that? Lore shakes her head, ears burning." (Narrator, "Lore," p. 73)

" - They shot him. Lore lies down with Peter among the stones and cries. Juri stands still and small. Tomas shouts now. - He ran the wrong way. He should have stayed in the trees. He should have stayed in the gully. All of you, like I told you." (Tomas, "Lore," p. 122)

"Some of them went too far, child, but don't believe it was all bad." (Oma, "Lore," p. 136)

" - Tomas stole these things? - You mustn't tell, Lore. He said it didn't matter. The man was a Jew, you see. He was dead already." (Juri, "Lore, p. 150)

"She tries to unravel Tomas and prisons and skeleton people; lies and photographs; Jews and graves; tattoos and newspapers and things not being as bad as people say. In the middle of it all are Mutti and Vati and the badges in the bushes and the ashes in the stove and the sick feeling that Tomas was both right and wrong, good and bad, both at the same time." (Narrator, "Lore," p. 152)

"Lore looks forward to the silence at Oma's, to Wiebke's smiles, and Liesel's cake. She looks forward to when there will be no more ruins, only new houses, and she won't remember anymore how it was before." (Narrator, "Lore," p. 156)

"Opa came back New Year 1954. He was Waffen-SS you see. She said it as if Michael knew already." (Oma Kaethe Askan, "Micha," p. 164)

"He prepares himself to look closer, tells himself what they will show. Public executions, smiling Germans, mass graves, mass shootings. He is right. Heads hanging loose, bodies hanging long from trees. Young men aiming rifles at kneeling children. Soldiers standing, smoking in the sunshine, and behind them, the dead lying in pale and naked rows." (Narrator, "Micha," p. 195)

" - Someone else said it was the thing to do. Even if they didn't order it, not really order it, they still said it was the thing to do. So you weren't responsible, you see? And then you did it, even though they didn't order you to do it. So you did it voluntarily. And that way, the ones who gave the orders weren't responsible either." (Jozef Kolesnik, "Micha," p. 241)

" - It is hard to say this, Herr Lehner, even after so many years. It is difficult to know this about myself, do you see? I can give you all these reasons. I lost my father, I was hungry, I wanted to help my family. Orders were orders, I was not responsible, they said the Jews were communists, Communists caused my pain. Over and over I can say these things. Nothing changes. I chose to kill." (Jozef Kolesnik, "Micha," p. 236)

"She has no children. A young woman in an empty village, she told me that. She knew how many were killed. And when he came back, she loves one of the murderers. Had no children. Found her measure of blame and loved him." (Micha Lehner, "Micha," p. 276)

Topics for Discussion

Do you believe Helmut's parents were too protective of him during his childhood? Why or why not?

In "Helmut," Herr Gladigau disappears following the bombing and fails to return to the shop. When Helmut attempts to find Gladigau, he finds the old man's home still intact. After reading the story, what do you think happened to Gladigau? Explain your answer.

Why do you think Helmut was smiling at the end of the story, for the first time in a photo? Explain your answer.

In "Lore," Tomas suggests that Lore's father is in a prison of the Russians, and is being punished for his actions during the war. Lore's grandmother, on the other hand, states that Lore's father has done nothing wrong. Explain why these two characters view the situation differently.

At the end of "Lore," Juri and Lore discover that Tomas stole his papers from a dead Jewish prisoner in an attempt to escape the Russian and American armies. Within his wallet, Lore finds strips of cloth, which bear the same number as Lore had seen tattooed on Tomas's arm. If Tomas was not truly a Jewish prisoner, how do you think Tomas received the tattoo?

During the children's journey, many individuals take advantage of them, including the woman with the paraffin, the woman who took Mutti's gold chain, and Tomas himself. Do you feel these individuals acted morally? Why or why not?

In "Micha," Michael often behaves cruelly and without thought for the feelings of others. Do you feel Michael was justified in his treatment of others? Why or why not?

During the war, Jozef Kolesnik collaborated with the German military and assisted them in the extermination of Jewish people. Elena knew this, but still married Jozef. Why do you believe Elena married Jozef, in spite of his actions?

Following Elena and Michael's journey to the clearing at the end of "Belarus, Spring 1999," Micha states that he knows why Elena took him to the mass grave. Why do you think Elena took Micha to this area of atrocity?