The Memory Chalet Study Guide

The Memory Chalet by Tony Judt

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Memory Chalet is a collection of essays written by Tony Judt as he declines into complete paralysis due to Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). ALS slowly paralyzes its victims, and at the time of the collection's publication, Judt has reached the stage of complete paralysis while retaining the ability to speak, which allows him the ability to dictate his essays. Because he cannot jot down notes with a pencil and paper, Judt has devised a mnemonic device to help him retain his memories: the memory chalet. Remembering the much beloved Swiss chalet his family frequented in the 1950s, Judt simply imagines the interior of the chalet. In his mind's eye, he walks through the various rooms, depositing bits of memories here and there - like furniture - to be recollected later, when he "walks" through the rooms again with his transcriber. This way, Judt can store and recall various memories at one time, stringing the pieces together to form essays. He admits that this is time consuming, extremely detailed, and runs the risk of being outrageously confusing, but he has nothing better to do in his spare time than rifle through his old memories, organizing them into imaginary folders.

The collection is broken down into three parts: One, Two, and Three, which seem to be divided by Judt's age. Part One focuses on Judt's childhood growing up in Putney, England. He collects tiny memories of the food he ate, the neighborhood he walked through, and, with startling detail, the train and bus lines he frequented as a child. He discusses his parents and their backgrounds, which greatly affected him as an adult discovering his self-identity. His father was a Belgian immigrant to England, who retained a taste for "European" delicacies such as camembert, good wine, and French automobiles. Judt's mother receives very little recognition in the collection except to say that she didn't really know how to cook, aside from boiling everything "to death," and that she didn't like long drives in the car. Judt talks about his Jewish grandparents (both sets of grandparents were Jewish) and the effect their Judaism had on his personal identity. Part Two focuses on Judt's educational years, focusing primarily on Judt's time at University. After finishing high school - where he met a strict teacher, Joe, who truly taught Judt to speak German - Judt moved to Israel and joined a kibbutz. During this time, he was accepted into Cambridge University and decided to leave the compound. The negative reaction from his fellow Zionists so disappointed Judt that he never returned to Judaism, and forever shirked away from extreme theory in any form.

During his time at Cambridge, Judt studied many different languages, including French and Czech. He also spent a lot of time traveling, expanding his Eastern European knowledge, and researching French intellectuals. Peppered throughout the essays are frequent references to the sixties, which had a strong impact on Judt. Often, he references the Beatles or the "free love" mentality that shaped society, despite the fact that Judt, and many like him, remained conservative in practice while liberal in theory. The final section of the collection focuses loosely on Judt's work life. This is when Judt mentions his three marriages, his personal struggles with Judaism, and his move to New York City. Judt views New York as one of the last remaining "world cities" where people like him, people who reside on the boundaries of society - Judt himself struggled to define himself as solely British, solely American, or solely Jewish - can thrive. It is

interesting that Judt continued to define himself as a person "living on the edge" since his then current condition - dying from ALS - had pushed him physically and emotionally to the boundaries, but he continued to thrive.

Preface, The Memory Chalet, Night

Preface, The Memory Chalet, Night Summary and Analysis

Preface: Tony Judt explains that the essays in this collection were never intended for publication. He began writing down his thoughts when two of his agents suggested that he compile them into a book-length manuscript and have them published. Judt was hesitant, since he had written the work without the benefit of an internal editor. But he eventually listened to the urgings of his agent and published the collection entitled The Memory Chalet.

The Memory Chalet: Growing up in the 1950's, Judt's family frequently took him on vacation to a skiing resort in Switzerland, the home of Judt's fondest childhood memories. Judt has fond memories of his time there, particularly around the age of ten-years-old, when he rubbed elbows with many famous celebrities of the time. Although he only visited the chalet once, briefly, in his adult life, he can recall the details of the chalet in intimate detail. He continues to describe each room in vivid detail for the reader, and discusses how this memory has helped him cope with his Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) diagnosis, which has paralyzed him.

Night: Judt brings the reader through his typical night battling ALS. He describes the slow and painful imprisonment of the disease - first you lose movement a digit or two, then your limbs, followed by your torso which become paralyzed, making digestion and breathing difficult. The paralysis creeps slowly upward making it impossible to chew, swallow, or speak. At the time of the book's publication, Judt was still able to speak or he would not have been able to dictate this text. With extraordinary effort, Judt can lift his right hand a little and move his left arm about six inches. This is the only mobility he has left, making it impossible to scratch an itch, remove his glasses, or make tiny adjustments to his body when trying to prepare for sleep. He encourages the reader to think about how many small adjustments they make to their bodies throughout the day, in an attempt to express the debilitating prison of his disease. This makes nighttime particularly difficult. Once he has been placed into bed by his nurse, he will remain in exactly the same position until they move him in the morning. When he lies in bed, to combat the excruciating desire to wiggle a toe, scratch his nose, or stretch a cramped leg, he scrolls through his life bit-by-by as a distraction. This is how he compiled the memories in this collection.

Analysis

Judt confesses to the reader that he suffers from a neurodegenerative disorder called Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig's Disease. This disorder affects every muscle in the body, slowly paralyzing the patient while leaving the brain fully able to think, feel, and reflect, but unable to put any of those thoughts into action. This has proved to be a completely debilitating and devastating disease for Judt - a writer - who

has been rendered unable to record his thoughts without the help of a transcriber. Judt can still speak his thoughts, but he cannot write them down himself, let alone type them. Because his transcriber comes infrequently, Judt has devised a system of collecting and storing his memories without having to write them down. He simply imagines that he is back visiting the Swiss chalet. In his mind's eye, he walks through the various rooms, depositing memories here and there - like furniture - to be recollected later, when he walks through the memories again with his transcriber: "I, admittedly from within the unusual constraints of my physical imprisonment, have come to see this as the easiest of devices - almost too mechanical, inviting me as it does to arrange examples and sequences and paradoxes in tiny ways which may misleadingly reorder the original and far more suggestive confusion of impressions and recollections" (Page 8).

Part One: Austerity, Food

Part One: Austerity, Food Summary and Analysis

Austerity: Judt's family is environmentally conscious. His wife, for example, only takes restaurant leftovers if they've been packaged in cardboard, and his children are "depressingly" informed about climate change. Judt makes the connection between his family's environmental consciousness and his own history growing up in a post-war, rationed society. During Judt's childhood, bombsites pockmarked London, and many of Judt's friends grew up in government-subsidized housing (Judt's own parents were fortunate enough to rent the apartment above the hairdresser's salon where they worked). Smog from coal fires overwhelmed the city, but everyone muddled through somehow. Because everyone in the city seemed to be struggling, their poverty banded them together, making the shortages and grayness of postwar Britain tolerable. In today's society, however, there is no shortage of destruction, but Judt notes that there is also no sense of togetherness, an elemental loss that will one day bring down humanity.

Food: Judt opens the essay by stating that even though one may have grown up on bad food, they may still have a craving for it, as a comfort food, later in life. As a child, Judt's only gastronomic adventures occurred on Sabbath nights at his Jewish grandparents' house. Although Judt's mother was Jewish, she was embarrassed of her heritage and held no knowledge of Jewish cuisine or how to cook it. Like many mothers in Britain during the 1950's, Judt claims that his mother simply "boiled everything to death" (Page 35). Judt's mother's cooking directly contrasted with the cooking at his paternal grandparents' - Polish Jews - house. Although none of the traditional dishes his grandmother cooked involved greenery or other fresh vegetables, she was a magician when it came to sauces. As an old man now, Judt can still smell the aroma of the Polish spices, can still imagine the tender meat falling off his fork, and can still feel the texture of his grandmother's matzo balls. When he was old enough to cook for himself, or to purchase his own takeaways, Judt typically bought Indian food because it most reminded him of the spices in his grandmother's cooking.

Analysis

Judt uses his memories of postwar Britain to comment on the seemingly endless consumerist spirit of today's society. Judt's own son, for example, cannot comprehend how those growing up in the 1950's made so much out of so little. It is clear that Judt remembers his childhood fondly, and that he wishes society hadn't changed so gravely. To underscore this point, Judt compares the two postwar leaders, Winston Churchill and George W. Bush. In postwar Britain, Churchill could only promise "blood, toil, tears, and sweat" to those who survived the bombings. Sixty years later, George W. Bush could think of nothing more than to ask America, in the wake of 9/11, to continue shopping. Judt struggles to reconcile how the element of "togetherness" has decayed from society and everything has become about consumption. Judt uses his own experiences and morals to preach lessons to the reading audience. Although it is not addressed directly,

this desire to give unsolicited advice about life may be due to the fact that Judt is dying and he wants to preserve his wisdom for future generations. For example, he closes the essay "Austerity" by saying, "If we want better rulers, we must learn to ask more from them and less for ourselves. A little austerity might be in order" (Page 32).

In the essay "Food," Judt examines what it means to be English through the varying cuisines of the country. Although Judt grew up in a Jewish household, he never really ate Jewish food unless he was at his more traditional grandparents' home. In his mother's home, Judt ate "traditional" British food, which simply meant anything fried or boiled. Another interesting aspect of traditional British food is the introduction of Indian curries. In fact, Judt and many other British ex-pats claim to miss Indian curry more than any other English food, and he states that curry feels like England's most "native dish." This is interesting to note because growing up, Judt was somewhat ashamed of his Jewish background and wouldn't discuss Jewish food with his British classmates. Through his love of Indian food - with spices that resembled his grandmother's Polish-Jewish cooking - Judt learned to appreciate the multi-cultural nature of Britain, and eventually learned to feel English while appreciating his Jewish heritage.

Part One: Cars, Putney, The Green Line Bus

Part One: Cars, Putney, The Green Line Bus Summary and Analysis

Cars: Judt's father was obsessed with cars, particularly Citroens made by the French. Most men born before the First World War were confined to tiny "runabout" cars - if they could afford even these. For Judt's generation, having been born between the two World Wars, cars symbolized freedom and prosperity. Many could afford cars when they came of age, gas was cheap, and the roads were still relatively empty. Judt spends much of this essay contemplating his father's love of Citroens. He was born in Belgium but moved to Britain in adulthood. Though he learned to speak perfect English without an accent, he held a disdain for some "common" British things like Nescafe while he secretly indulged his craving for European delicacies such as Camembert cheese. Judt rationalizes that just as his father hated common British foods, he likely also hated common British cars, preferring to honor his roots by purchasing only European models. He then explains why French cars were the only acceptable model, particularly after the Second World War. While his father was pleased by the attention his European car brought him, particularly when driving it through an impoverished neighborhood, the attention embarrassed Judt. The family frequently went on long road trips together, even though Judt's mother hated them. In those days, everyone did activities as a family and it might have been considered disrespectful for the mother to stay behind.

Putney: Judt grew up in Putney, a neighborhood in London that boasted a good zip code. Judt spends the majority of this essay describing the neighborhood in statistic detail creating a lot of information about the area, but not creating a vivid picture of the setting for the reader. Essentially, the reader learns much about Putney's public transportation routes, but little about what Putney actually looked like. Judt then details what the shopping experience was like in Putney, and the different places both he and his mother spent their spare change. Again, although it is clear that Judt grew up in an "unmistakably and reassuringly middle class" neighborhood, he still claims to have lived in "genteel poverty" (Page 54). At the age of ten, his family moved away from Putney to Kingston where they lived until they "ran out of money." When Judt returned to Putney as an adult, it wasn't the same as he remembered it despite the fact that he describes very vivid sights, smells, and memories of the place. He concludes the essay by saying that "nostalgia makes a very satisfactory second home" (Page 56).

The Green Line Bus: Throughout the fifties, Judt took the Green Line Bus to and from school. The Green Line Bus was obviously green in color, but also happened to pass through the greenest areas in the outskirts of London. As a child, Judt often rode the bus from end to end just to appreciate the beauty of the city. Because the line had fewer stops than the other lines, the driver and ticket-master often had time to talk with the

passengers and each other. A friendly neighborhood bond grew from this association, which further perpetuated Judt's desire to be a part of this tiny travel culture. Today's green line bus in London is nothing like its predecessor from Judt's childhood. The drivers have little to no interaction with their passengers, and the green countryside has become dotted with apartment buildings and businesses. Even the color of the bus itself has changed. Perhaps this more than any other aspect of the city best symbolizes the industrial changes the city has undergone, and the nostalgia that clouds Judt's precious memories.

Analysis

All three of the essays in this section are somewhat superficial, focusing almost solely on Judt's memories of his childhood. While they are relatively interesting to read, and this is certainly a subjective statement, these essays are lighthearted in comparison to the rest of the collection. There aren't messages or morals for the reader to walk away with aside from the value of nostalgia for a dying man.

In "Cars," Judt quips that while automobiles were an expensive investment, "it was quite fun at the time" (Page 48). Judt reflects on how cars brought his father the only true happiness in his life, and that he suspects his father felt trapped in an unhappy marriage, stuck in a job he didn't care for, and very few friends with whom to share his thoughts. Cars, though expensive and somewhat luxurious at the time, were his only outlets to express his passion. Through the comparison of different car models, Judt creates strong symbols for Britain's relationship with other European countries after the war. "German cars were of course out of the question" (Page 43).

In "Putney," Judt recounts, in detail, his childhood home. It is interesting to note that as an adult Judt returned to Putney and found that it was not as he remembered it, despite the vivid sensory images he had retained from childhood. This essay functions as a question of memory; because the real-life Putney Judt experienced as an adult differed so greatly from the Putney of his remembrance, does that undermine what he thought were his childhood experiences? For a man in Judt's condition, relatively unable to create new experiences, memories are profoundly important as he stated in the prologue. It is interesting to hear Judt question the authenticity of his memories, which is essentially questioning his entire existence. Those who live solely in memory possess a third-space, neither truly in the past or truly in the present, which can be both exciting and isolating.

Again all three essays highlight how Judt grew up in a privileged Jewish family, although he tries to make-light of their financial status throughout the collection by claiming that he grew up in "genteel poverty" (Page 54). He may have made this choice so as not to alienate audiences.

Part One: Mimetic Desire, The Lord Warden

Part One: Mimetic Desire, The Lord Warden Summary and Analysis

Mimetic Desire: The theory of mimetic desire states that as humans, we are innately drawn to people and objects that are loved by others. For Judt, this explains his love of trains. He claims that he has always loved trains and that trains have always love him back: "Love, it seems to me, is that condition in which one is most contentedly oneself. If this sounds paradoxical, remember Rilke's admonition: love consists in leaving the loved one space to be themselves while providing the security within which that self may flourish" (Page 66). Growing up, Judt felt uncomfortable around most people and would invent excursions to explain his time away from his family and friends: excuses, essentially, to be in solitude with the trains. Judt was particularly interested in the way that trains mimicked the social classes he saw in mid-century Britain, with their various cabins classifying different levels of comfort divided by the fortune of their passengers. For Judt, it is most painful to note that in his present condition, he will never again be afforded the luxury of solo traveling, if even the luxury of boarding a train again. He closes the essay by saying, "no more solitude: no more becoming, just interminable being" (Page 71).

The Lord Warden: In this essay, Judt discusses how everyone is European now. Due to the relative ease with which people can travel across states, countries, and continents, the barriers between countries and cultures are becoming thinner and thinner. As a child, Judt has fond memories of boarding The Lord Warden, a ship from England to France and back again. While most people had cars by the time Judt's family made this trip, which would have made the travel much quicker, the main reason why people took the ship was to shop. Rationing was still in effect during Judt's childhood, but aboard the ship, each Englishman was allowed a certain quota of cigarettes and alcohol, luxuries that would never be afforded with their ration cards.

Analysis

"Mimetic Desire" is arguably one of the most heartbreaking essays in the collection. Although it starts out relatively dully. explaining in painstaking detail the London train system in the 1950s, it eventually comes around to the point that because of his disease, Judt has not only lost his physical ability to travel, but has also lost his one true love in life: solitude. The solitude of traveling alone, "becoming" travel is profoundly different from the solitude of his disease, which has cursed him to a lifetime of simply "being". There is no mystery, no surprise in Judt's day-to-day, and he is painfully aware that he will never recapture the energy and thrill of his halcyon days. This essay is also uncharacteristic of the collection because it is almost devoid of levity. There is no one-liner, or clever quip to sum up the moral of the story for the readers. It ends heavily, with

Judt's banal acceptance of the depression in his life. The knowledge that he will never again be with his true love, and there is no hope of that death sentence ever being revoked. Essentially, Judt will never be himself again, not even in his heart.

In "The Lord Warden," Judt comments on how the romanticism of sea travel has been lost in modern generations. This essay is yet another commentary on the romanticism of nostalgia, and the way modern society has changed for the worse (a recurring theme in much of Judt's writing). Today, no one has reason to travel by ship unless it is a cruise ship. Even then, dining rooms glow under the neon lights of McDonalds signs and are dwarfed by the raging lights of the nearby arcades, movie theatres, and yoga studios. Even the main decks are closed nowadays and passengers cannot see the romantic view of the ship pulling away from the land (in Judt's mind filled with passengers waving white handkerchiefs). Despite the changes that today's society has made to sea travel, Judt values international travel by any medium as an important way to band society together. When you travel from your comfort zone to a new environment, it bands travelers together through the passage of time and space, and the intimations of change and difference. Because of this collapse of ethnocentric symbols, even cultural symbols can reflect new cultures. English breakfasts, for example, conjure images of France for Judt who ate this national symbol each morning on his journeys to and from France aboard The Lord Warden. This melding of culture and symbols is integral, Judt argues, to the real European (and arguably "world") union.

Part Two: Joe, Kibbutz

Part Two: Joe, Kibbutz Summary and Analysis

Joe: Growing up, Judt attended the Emanuel Public School in London. Many of the teachers had been in employment there since the First World War. Many of the older teachers were staunch believers in corporal punishment. Judt struggled in school primarily due to the incessant anti-Semitism he was faced with daily. The only subject he thrived in was German. This course was taught by Paul Craddock, or "Joe," who had survived some unspecific wartime experience and therefore had a complete lack of humor. Joe spent several hours each day drilling grammar, vocabulary, and style. He ran daily tests of memory, reasoning, and comprehension. He verbally assaulted the students if they performed less than perfectly on their exams. The students simultaneously feared and respected him, and Judt reflects on how he can still speak German with passing grace, while he cannot say the same about the various other languages he's learned.

Kibbutz: As a teenager, Judt took part in most of the mainstream obsessions: the Beatles, mild drugs, and political dissent, but he put all this aside in the late 1960s when he joined the left-wing Zionist movement. He spent summers working on an Israeli Kibbutz, or collective farm. The Zionist movement stressed separation and ethnic difference for young Jews, and Judt became a prophet for the movement, even giving a keynote speech to young Zionists in France. During his final summer in Israel, Judt became disillusioned with the Zionist cause when he realized that there was no real future for Israelis in the agriculture business, and that many Jews were exploiting the cheap Arab labor - the same Arabs the Jews were determined to shift off their land. He was also surprised by how little many Zionists knew about the outside world simply because it didn't directly affect their cause. Judt was finally released from the kibbutz when he was accepted into Cambridge University. The community had not accepted his proposal to attend college, so he left the movement altogether, and essentially became "dead" to the Zionist people.

Analysis

In the essay "Joe," Judt discusses how the idea of a teacher like Joe would be impossible today. Today's teachers don't make nearly enough money to support themselves while still truly caring about the success of their students. Joe was incredibly politically incorrect; today's teachers would never be able to call their students "utterly useless!" (Page 90). Although his teaching practices were unconventional at best, Joe managed to teach his students fluent German, perhaps because of his rough demeanor in the classroom. While many of the other teachers at Emanuel thrived on corporal punishment, Joe showed Judt, and the rest of his students, that strict expectations and demands were far more effective teaching tools than a cane to the legs. Judt's teaching style and academic expectations will be a continual thread throughout the collection,

particularly as Judt strives to leave messages of learning with his audience. These themes tie nicely into the essays "Meritocrats" and "Words" later in the collection.

The Zionist movement is an extreme Jewish faction that believes young Jews of the Diaspora - or scattering across the globe - should return to Israel and live in Israeli settlements, eventually reclaiming the land, which they believe God promised to them. Zionists also believe in the Jewish people living as a removed community, with some factions even believing that all Jews should dress alike, raise their children together, and share all meals. Although Judt desperately wanted to believe in the Zionist cause - there was something attractive and natural about collective living - he couldn't reconcile the Zionists' extreme lack of understanding of the outside world. The true Zionists believed in making all decisions together, as a community. Young Zionists often weren't allowed to leave the community to attend college unless the community agreed to let them go, and even then the students were allowed to study only specific subjects. When Judt was accepted into Cambridge, he leapt at the opportunity to leave the group which was beginning to resemble a cult. Clearly Judt was never truly invested in the mentality of the Zionists and was likely using the group as an excuse to explore his own cultural background.

"Kibbutz" provides an interesting vehicle for Judt to explore the ever-present feud between Israelis and Palestinians about land. Although Judt is Jewish, he appears to be a Palestinian sympathizer, although he would likely define himself as a humanitarian sympathizer. Whatever his political standing, Judt is vocal about his distaste for violence and extremism in any form. It is interesting to note that when Judt returned to the kibbutz two years after leaving for Cambridge, his Zionist "brothers" refused to acknowledge him, making very clear that the movement was not about true Jewish community, but about furthering a specific political cause. Judt's experience at Kibbutz was not all bad, however. This experience helped prepare Judt for the various political movements that would sweep through his college campus. While many students were distracted by political trends, Judt felt somewhat immune to fanaticism and was able to focus solely on his schoolwork: "I knew what it meant to be a 'believer' - but I also knew what sort of price one pays for such intensity of identification and unquestioning allegiance" (Page 98).

Part Two: Bedders, Paris was Yesterday

Part Two: Bedders, Paris was Yesterday Summary and Analysis

Bedders: In this essay, Judt reflects on the presence of Bedders - essentially house maids employed to work for Cambridge students - during his college years. Bedders were traditionally older women who cleaned students rooms, changed their beds, undertook shopping, and generally cared for the young men away from their mothers for the first time. During Judt's time at Cambridge, few students had experience with domestic servants and were uncomfortable with the idea of a woman "at their disposal." Judt uses anecdotal stories about the bedders to explore the social hierarchy in Britain during the time. Judt has no first-hand stories of a male student ever having intimate relations with his bedder, no matter how young and attractive, because class inhibitions would have certainly constrained the woman. He also recounts an incident when a bedder was nearly inconsolable after seeing a group of young co-eds nude on the lawn (this was during the free love era of the 1960s).

Paris was Yesterday: While he was studying at Cambridge, Judt had a deep affection for French intellectuals such as Frances Mauriac, Raymond Aron, Maruice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu. French intellectuals were known for their affinity to simply discuss ideas without feeling the need to add politics, humor, or sex. Judt was accepted into the highly selective Ecole School in Paris, world renown for producing many of society's great French intellectuals. Judt muses that in today's society, French intellectuals are no longer the most respected as society seems to respect intellectuals who can weave various topics together, tying politics to religion to science to love, and so on.

Analysis

The essay "Bedders" is an engaging and fascinating look into the practice of domestic servitude in Britain. This essay provides not only a rare glimpse into the lives of the under-documented bedders of Britain, it also provides great fodder for discussion of social class. In the anecdote of the bedder upset by the nude co-eds, Judt points out that she was seemingly more upset by the fact that her charge - one of the nude men - had addressed her as an equal. When the charge noticed her discomfort, he laughed, and spoke to her as if chiding a friend. This action broke the rules of social hierarchy and humiliated the bedder. She was not the charge's equal and would never be, but at least she had the "traditional claim, even if only during their student years, upon their forbearance and respect" (Page 108). Essentially, there was no point in being a servant if the invisible contract of respect was broken. This is an interesting mentality suggesting that while those of lower class status in mid-century Britain knew they would never rise in ranks, they were still prideful of their position so long as the rest of society acknowledged them as necessary cogs in the societal machine, and didn't regard them as simply "workers." The essay "Paris was Yesterday" is simply a look back at the way

French intellectualism affected Judt and how society no longer admires this medium of intelligence.

Part Two: Revolutionaries, Work

Part Two: Revolutionaries, Work Summary and Analysis

Revolutionaries: During the 1960s, it was trendy to be considered a social revolutionary. Judt himself went to many demonstrations and protests against what he believed to be an oppressive government. He recalls having a paint bomb explode in his pocket before a first date and wishing desperately that the red liquid had been blood - all the better to impress his date with. But the "revolutions" that Cambridge was a part of had been amicable with the police (the authority figures of the time), even friendly. For Judt, being part of a social movement was a bourgeois activity afforded to many students who were already part of the social elite. He mentions political activist Raymond Aron who practically despised college-aged revolutionaries for their penchant to view social change as "fun" and "trendy" rather than as a vehicle for serious social change.

Looking back, Judt feels regret for his days as a "revolutionary" on the Cambridge campus. Despite considering himself a supporter for political change, he had no idea of the lengths to which Polish and Czechoslovakian students were going 250 miles away to unravel their political governments. As an adult, Judt considers his revolutionary attitude "delusional." While his schoolmates considered themselves to be "rebels" had they managed to be arrested during a peaceful protest with friendly police, they had no idea of the true courage it took to stand against the government as the students in Poland and Czechoslovakia were doing at the same time. While British "rebels" were released from comfortable jail cells in time for lunch, Polish and Czech prisoners withstood weeks of torture, interrogation, and imprisonment to make their demands publicly known.

Work: In this essay, Judt recounts his personal history in the workforce. As a child, he always wanted to be a historian although he didn't truly understand what that meant; he was simply interested in history. His first job was in the music department at WH Smith, a bookseller in England. Four years later, he dropped out of high school and joined an Israeli freighter where he spent four weeks degreasing pistons. Although the work was backbreaking and afforded very little pay, Judt learned much about music, culture, and women from his fellow sailors. Back home, he worked in a Sussex brickyard, ferried groceries around London as part of a delivery service for the local grocer, and escorted American tourists around Europe. In the end, Judt has done what he always wanted to do: study history and write about it. He is pleased that he was able to make a living pursuing his dream. Many in the world haven't been so fortunate.

Analysis

Judt makes it clear that no one should feel bad about being born in the right place at the right time. He, for example, was born into a middle-class family that afforded him the opportunity to study at an ivy-league school, find a good job, and make a good living for

himself upon graduation. That said, Judt encourages students, particularly those of certain means, to take a keen interest in the wider world around them. There is always social change to be made somewhere in the world, to provide fair opportunity for everyone in the world to make a life and name for themselves. Judt's message to the reader is embrace the real political changes that need to be made for the world at large, rather than simply one's own social class, cultural group, or geographic neighborhood. To see the world as one large family, rather than to divide by gender, race, or social class, and to act for the benefit of all people (not just those similar to yourself) is to be a true revolutionary.

In the essay "Work," Judt recounts his work experience and the various lessons he learned about himself through each job. The overarching theme of the essay, however, is to never judge a person by their employment or lack thereof. There is a tendency to self-aggrandize one's position based on the "othering" of the unemployed: "At least I have a job and am not a worthless wretch sucking support from the government." When an individual feels the desire to judge or dismiss a person simply because of their employment, or lack thereof, Judt encourages them to consider what life must be like for those living on the other side of the welfare line. "Walking a mile in their shoes" is somewhat clichéd advice and rather simplistic in comparison to the morals Judt preaches in other essays of the collection. It does continue to stress, however, the seeming guilt that Judt has about being born into a family of means. It is interesting to compare Judt's fluctuation between appreciation and scorn for the opportunities his social and economic position has brought him. In some essays, Judt presents himself as a middle-class, highly educated individual, while in other essays he seems to present himself as impoverished, living in "genteel poverty." The reader may be confused about Judt's personal and social identity, since it seems to fluctuate based on the societal point Judt is attempting to make. This back-and-forth flip-flopping of identity runs the risk of undermining Judt's message.

Part Two: Meritocrats, Words

Part Two: Meritocrats, Words Summary and Analysis

Meritocrats: Judt attended King's College of Cambridge during an era of strict social expectations. Dinner at the common hall, for example, was formal, begowned, and required. Curfews were strictly enforced but the "middle-class bohemian" hostel wardens often regarded the social expectations and rules with a wink, smiling benignly upon breaches of school rules. However, students made successes of themselves by doing well in exams and following the imposed social rules. Judt notes that perhaps the most valuable aspect of his college education was the instructors' disregard for standardized public testing. They seemed to assume that students would succeed based on their talents alone, not on a societal measure of intelligence. When Judt himself became a teaching fellow, he attempted to mimic the bohemian style represented at King's College. He also suggests that as a whole, society should be satisfied with mediocrity. Demanding that all students meet high academic standards stifles talent, which Judt believes is the only marketable skill in the real world.

Words: When Judt was a child, he was constantly surrounded by a flow of words that he didn't understand, words in Russian, Yiddish, French, and English. He always thought that speaking, expressing one's belief, was the whole point of adult existence. He spent hours listening to debates on Marxism, Zionism, Socialism, and many others. He learned how to spin words for different rhetorical effects. He studied "good" English and "proper" speech. While Judt has prided himself on his mastery of the English language, he is also envious of orators who have been given the gift of self-restraint, thinking before they speak in an argument. Judt notes that articulacy seems to suggest intelligence and inarticulacy suggests "a shortcoming of thought" (Page 150). It is a fine balance for teachers to encourage students to express themselves within the constraints of lingual authority and implying, "Don't worry how you say it, it's the ideas that count" (Page 151).

Analysis

"Meritocrats" is an interesting look at society's educational expectations. In this essay, Judt argues that society should teach students to accept academic mediocrity, freeing up more time to nurture talent. Judt argues that those who have actual talent in a specific field should be given allowance to pursue a future in it. Standardized testing puts too much emphasis on performance rather than talent and creates too level a playing field for job applicants. While an engineer may be extraordinarily talented in design, for example, he may not perform well in reading comprehension on a standardized test of intelligence, thus making him a less desirable applicant than an individual who is less talented in design but performs better on a standardized test. Judt believes that his time at King's College nurtured talent above performance, and this, he suggests, was the key to his ultimate success. While Judt makes some important and interesting points about the nature of society's current education system, he does not

acknowledge the subjectivity in assessing talent, and critics may argue that Judt's bohemian argument for academic mediocrity is just as shortsighted as society's argument for measured success.

Language is particularly important to Judt because it is his only way of interacting with the world since the onset of his disease. Judt seems unclear, however, of how he wants language to function in society. He chides scholars and academic writers for being too obscure, hiding ideas behind theory and methodology which gives rise to glib articulacy. He also chides modern writers, however, for their "pithy allusions" as substitutes for true exposition. He finds text messaging and shorthand unintelligible, and fears that many of today's writers are too insecure about their ideas to commit to the appropriate form and function of language. It is interesting that Judt condemns teachers who suggest, "it's the ideas that count" rather than the standardization of language, particularly when partnered with the essay "Meritocrats" which seems to argue the complete opposite: that standardization should be banned and ideas, or "talent," should be the focus. Judt may simply be presenting opposing arguments for the pursuit of intelligence, but the seemingly conflicting messages about formal education muddy his arguments. It is clear, however, that Judt has a profound respect for language since it is his only interaction with the world. He ends the essay with a heartbreaking plea, particularly resonant given his physical condition: "If words fall into disrepair, what will substitute? They are all we have" (Page 154).

Part Three: Go West, Young Judt, Midlife Crisis

Part Three: Go West, Young Judt, Midlife Crisis Summary and Analysis

Go West, Young Judt: At the age of thirty, Judt made his first visit to America. He had been invited to teach at a University in California for the year, and made the decision to drive from Boston to Davis, California, with his wife in their purchased second-hand Buick. The couple arrived in Boston and were immediately taken with America's obsessions with size and cleanliness. In subsequent visits to America, Judt discovered that he felt quite isolated from the rest of the world, particularly when in the Midwest cornfields. The only thing that brought a feeling of community in the vast country was its churches. However, the most exciting aspect of American life for Judt was the multitude of universities. Each public university boasted a library containing millions of books - a feat that would be difficult for most European universities to match. Even after returning to Europe, Judt would always miss the vast libraries and how they first made him feel bicultural: he was British by birth and American by academic passion.

Midlife Crisis: While some men get new wives, new jobs, or new cars during their midlife crises, Judt decided to learn a new language: Czech. After reading a letter from a Czechoslovakian dissident requesting the New Statesman newspaper to acknowledge that both the East and West had a role to play in the Cold War, Judt flew to Czechoslovakia and met with Jan Kavan, a '68-era exile. Kavan feared that he had inadvertently given information about the Czech underground during an interview, and desperately wanted Judt to intervene on his behalf and ask the television station not to air the interview. As soon as the editor of the film realized that Judt had nothing to do with Czechoslovakia or the news station, he promptly asked Judt to leave. This experience is what prompted Judt to learn the new language: he no longer wanted to be misunderstood. He wanted to own a language as he had owned German with Joe. He purchased a tape entitled "Teach Yourself Czech" and dedicated two hours a night to its lessons. In time, he was able to write and read it quite well, although he was never able to speak it with the same fluency. Judt believes that learning Czech, and the experiences this tiny language afforded him, made him a completely new person.

Analysis

"Go West, Young Judt" and "Midlife Crisis" are tied together through the theme of the unknown. Judt is a huge proponent for tackling new experiences. Although he is also fond of nostalgia, Judt clearly values travel and new experiences. Perhaps the adventure is what makes the homecoming so sweet. While in America, Judt faced his preconceptions of the nation and was pleasantly surprised. America, he felt, faced its contradictions head-on, juxtaposing a massive library of information in the hometown of the Ku Klux Klan, for example. Judt appreciates the bluntness of America, and even

learns to find the sprawling gas stations in the middle of the corn country beautiful. In the essay "Midlife Crisis," Judt finds value in the experience of learning a new language. The benefits of learning Czech grow exponentially as Judt finds himself traveling more frequently, giving lectures, and most importantly to Judt, earning the respect of his peers. It is interesting that Judt chose to study Czech rather than Russian or Polish (larger languages with bigger followings) and it echoes back to Judt's love of the obscure. It appears that Judt relishes being an authority and earning the respect of those around him. He may have chosen Czech because of his experiences with Kavan, or he may have chosen the language simply because it would give him an edge over other lingual academics who likely would have studied a different Eastern European language. At the end of the essay, Judt discusses all the opportunities learning an obscure language has afforded him. Although the essay is somewhat self-aggrandizing, it is clear that Judt's intended message is that challenge and adventure will reap amazing rewards.

Part Three: Captive Minds, Girls, Girls, Girls

Part Three: Captive Minds, Girls, Girls, Girls Summary and Analysis

Captive Minds: A few years before the onset of Judt's disease, he visited Krasnogruda, the manor house of famed Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz. Milosz was born in 1911 and raised in the interwar Polish republic. He survived the Nazi occupation and moved to Paris. In 1951, he moved to the West and published his seminal essay, "The Captive Mind," which discusses the attraction of intellectuals to the appeal of authority and authoritarianism. Milosz was a believer in "Ketman," or living by the words you preach, without internalized contradiction that plagues most of society (politicians, for example). In Judt's interpretation, he draws on the example of America's enthusiasm to back the war in Iraq post-9/11. Now that the war has been widely viewed as unjust and seemingly unending, many Americans now claim that they never backed the President and in fact, he was a bumbling President. Ketman would say, "we were right to be wrong" (Page 178), meaning it was better to be wrong with Bush than right with bin Laden (an extreme example, but the meaning is clear). In Milosz's argument, the greatest fear many academics truly have is the fear of thinking for themselves.

Girls, Girls, Girls: In the 1990s, Judt was the only unmarried, male professor at the university where he worked. At the time, the university was rife with anti-sexual harassment protection in the "fast-feminizing" department. Physical contact of any kind was immediately thought to be sexual, and a closed-door conversation was proof positive of physical contact. Judt was therefore acting truly recklessly when he had a closed-door conversation with a second-year graduate student about Eastern European politics, and professionally suicidal when he asked her to attend the opening night of a ballet with him. For the duration of the essay, Judt explores the conflict between the sexual revolution of the 1960s with the perpetually strict guidelines for "sexual" behavior in the university setting. He recounts with great humor a former female student who accused Judt of sexual harassment for not accepting her into his history tutorial because she refused to bribe him with sexual services. Judt responded that he hadn't let her in because she simply wasn't smart enough. This response flabbergasted the girl, who thought sexual motivation could be the only possible reason Judt had denied her.

Analysis

"The Captive Mind," written by Czeslaw Milosz had an academic impact on Judt for its artful questioning of authority in academia. In the essay, Milosz questions why most academics feel they must align themselves with a particular political system (Stalinism, communism or fascism, for example,). In doing so, Milosz believes individuals are denying themselves freedom of expression. Not only are many of these political

systems oppressive in and of themselves, defining oneself by aligning to a system also prevents an individual from saying, "I'm a communist, but I see value in capitalism," for example. This censorship, whether or not the individual is aware of it, contributes to Milosz's theory of "captive minds." Judt admits that many of his modern students haven't seen value in Milosz's seminal essay because they simply cannot understand why a writer would align himself with an oppressive political structure - why German writers would write Nazi propaganda, for example. This, Milosz claims, is a characteristic of Western students who have never been put in a position to question their beliefs and therefore cannot be considered free thinkers. This ideal made a strong impact on Judt as a student, and he uses the vehicle of this collection to bring Milosz's grand arguments to his readership.

In "Girls, Girls, Girls," the strict guidelines societally imposed on gender-relations interested Judt because he was a child of the sixties. In theory, young men raised in the 1960s would be proponents of the free-love movement, but Judt argues that there was a strict divide between theory and practice during that era. In theory, love was free, but in practice, most young men held fast to the strictly conservative practices of the 1950s. Judt makes a strong argument that, as a respected academic, he should be allowed to have closed-door conversations with students of promise without the fear of this academically nurturing act perpetuating lawsuits. In this way, he mirrors the free-love mentality of his 1960s by saying there should be no boundaries between the intellectual exchanges between professor and students (why shouldn't he be allowed to invite a student to the ballet, particularly if she's stunningly beautiful?). However, Judt playfully comments on his true 1950's mentality of conservatism by admitting to the reader that he ended up marrying the student he took to the ballet. For Judt, clearly, there is no free love without consequence (whether positive or negative).

Part Three: New York, New York, Edge People

Part Three: New York, New York, Edge People Summary and Analysis

New York, New York: In this essay, Judt argues what it means for a city to be called a "world city." Shanghai and Beijing, for example, may be some of the most booming cities in the world, but they don't spring to mind when one considers a "world city." In Judt's perspective, there have only been four world cities, or at least four world cities in which he has lived: London, Paris, Vienna, and New York. New York, in particular, had a deep impact on Judt who recollects a typical walk through his neighborhood during which he would encounter a Sikh newsstand, a Hungarian bakery, a Greek diner, a Ukrainian restaurant, Uniate church, Polish grocery, and Jewish deli. This multicultural aspect of world cities is available many other places (London, for example) but Judt claims this aspect is not as dense anywhere outside of New York City.

Edge People: In this essay, Judt explores self-identity. He contemplates the ludicrous idea of identity study, particularly at liberal arts schools. Such programs encourage students to study the "identity" of a particular ethnic or geographical minority such as "women's studies" or "African-American studies" or "gender studies." He believes such programs encourage sectarian mentalities since, for the most part, students study themselves: blacks study black history, gays study gay rights, and women major in women's studies. He also contemplates self-identity in this young generation who often define themselves by "what [their] grandparents suffered" (Page 202). Young Jews, for example, relate with the Holocaust not because they themselves have been the victims of anti-Semitism, but because their grandparents lived through (or died in) Auschwitz: "Many American Jews are sadly ignorant of their religion, culture, traditional languages, or history. But they do know about Auschwitz, and that suffices" (Page 202). Judt himself prefers to live on the boundaries, as an "edge person," dwelling as neither an American nor a Jew; neither communist nor capitalist. He believes that these people, the edge people, are "his" people.

Analysis

Judt never fully defines what it means to be a world city except to give examples of what is not a world city. Singapore and Shanghai, for example, are not necessarily world cities even though they are economically booming. Mexico City and Sao Paolo aren't world cities even though they each boast 18 million citizens, and neither is Orlando, Florida despite its hundred of thousands of visitors from around the world each year (most to visit Disney World). For Judt, world cities are largely those with European history and art that can be traced back for thousands of years. These cities have historically been central to educational, political, and artistic movements that have spread across the rest of the world. Through his analysis of New York City, in particular,

Judt defines himself as a soulful American: "Chance made me an American, but I chose to be a New Yorker. I probably always was" (Page 200).

Judt's exploration of his self-identity continues in the essay "Edge People" in which Judt claims to belong to the edges of society, where states meet at the border, and he can easily hop from one side to the other: neither truly American nor truly Jewish. He has disdain for people who associate themselves with a particular facet of society without fully belonging to it (young Americans who associate themselves with Judaism because their grandparents lived through Auschwitz, for example, while they know nothing about Judaism as a religion or historic culture). Judt admits that it is somewhat self-indulgent to live on the edges: most people would rather not stick out in society, but recognizing what lives on the other side of the border (both figuratively and metaphorically) provides insight and sympathies that greatly benefit society as a whole.

Part Three: Toni, Magic Mountains

Part Three: Toni, Magic Mountains Summary and Analysis

Toni: Judt opens the essay "Toni" with a reference to his aunt Toni, saying that he thinks about her whenever he is asked what it means to be Jewish. He continues his discussion of self-identity by divulging his personal beliefs, claiming that he is Jewish by culture, not religion, because he rejects the authority of all rabbis. He celebrates few Jewish holidays, does not go out of his way to spend time with Jews, and has married women who are not Jewish. He also finds it odd that some American Jews are obsessed with protecting Judaism, an obsession that borders on Zionism, despite the fact that Jews have an equal opportunity to succeed in America as individuals from any other ethnic descent, and one needn't look far to find a plethora of examples of this success. In Judt's study, only 46% of America's Jews belong to a synagogue, 27% attend synagogue once a month, and only 10% are Orthodox. American Jews in particular are losing their sense of culture and history outside of Holocost study: "And yet they are making a terrible mistake: they have confused a means of remembering with a reason to do so" (Page 215). He closes the essay by saying that he thinks about Toni when questioned about Judaism because she was gassed to death in Auschwitz in the year 1942. He was named after her.

Magic Mountains: In the final essay of the collection, Judt returns to the chalets in Switzerland where he first brought the reader. He discusses why he loves Switzerland even though it is un-trendy to do so: Switzerland never fought in the war, has no important exports aside from chocolate and cuckoo clocks, and is famous only for its criminally private, offshore banks. He loves Switzerland because nothing bad ever happened to him there. Through all his family vacations he simply remembers cleanliness, white snow, and the peace of nature, as if he was the only person there, although he admits this facet of his memory is impossible. Judt's favorite memory of Switzerland is his memory of the trains that ran on a perfectly punctual schedule, like clockwork. It is on this image that Judt closes the collection.

Analysis

The essay "Toni" makes concrete ties between the author and his Jewish heritage while continuing Judt's thread of self-identity, particularly in modern culture. He returns to his early theme of Zionism in his argument that American Jews support Zionism as an insurance policy: "We Jews must stick together: We may need Israel someday" (Page 211), implying that should something catastrophic like Hitler's reign happen again, Jews will need the security of Israel ("their" land) to survive. Judt argues that the Jewish people have never been more influential and successful than they are in today's society, so why are they obsessed with their own preservation? Doubting that Hitler or his beliefs will ever come into power again is just one of many reasons why Judt has fallen away from Zionism. This, and any other extremist thinking is not a part of his identity.

The collection has come full circle with Judt's return to the Swiss chalet he uses as his mnemonic device to store memories. It is interesting to note that Judt's final essay in the collection studies his blissful memories of childhood particularly given that he admits to his memory tricking him (in his memories, he feels as if he is the only person in the country). Judt's only connection to the world since the onset of his disease is through his memories, so it is humbling for him to admit that some of these memories are flimsy. He ends the collection with a lovely analogy of heaven. Although Judt is agnostic and does not believe in heaven and hell (at least not in the terms of Judaism or any other organized religion) his closing line refers back to the punctual time schedule of his beloved Swiss trains: "We cannot choose where we start out in life, but we may finish where we will. I know where I shall be: going nowhere in particular on that little train, forever and ever" (Page 226). This closing line beautifully sums up the collection, which has spanned sixty years of Judt's memories and insights, giving one last moment of hope in the barren landscape of his decay.

Characters

Tony Judt

Tony Judt is the author of the collection The Memory Chalet. He is a sixty-something-year-old retired professor and writer who suffers from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). Judt was struck down by this disease at the age of sixty and will likely die from its side effects very soon. The disease is also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease because it affected the famous baseball player. ALS slowly begins to paralyze the patient, starting with a digit or two before claiming and entire limb, then all four, then the torso all the way up the neck. The patient slowly loses the ability to walk, digest food, and speak. At the time when he penned this collection, Judt was still able to speak, which is how he dictated his essays. Otherwise, Judt is a complete vegetable. He outlines the painful details of his paralysis in the essay "Night," which describes the physical and emotional excruciation of not being able to scratch an itch, relieve yourself in the toilet, or adjust your position in bed.

Although the collection itself offers very little direct insight into who Judt is, the reader can deduce much from his writing. For example, the reader learns that Judt is a fanatic of trains. He describes his love for trains multiple times in the essays. His love of trains was first born when he realized the freedom trains afforded him. As a young boy living in Putney, he would often use his pocket money to buy tickets for trains that chuffed through the English countryside. He would return home in time for supper and would therefore never have to explain where he had been, which made the trips seem all the more exciting. Although Judt is agnostic (another detail the audience gleans from the essays) and does not believe in heaven and hell (at least not in the terms of Judaism or any other organized religion) his closing line in the collection refers back to the punctual time schedule of his beloved Swiss trains: "We cannot choose where we start out in life, but we may finish where we will. I know where I shall be: going nowhere in particular on that little train, forever and ever" (Page 226). This closing line beautifully sums up the collection, which has spanned sixty years of Judt's memories and insights, giving one last moment of hope in the barren landscape of his decay.

The reader also learns that Judt was married three times, has two sons, and a proclivity for Eastern Europe having spent many years traveling through and studying Czechoslovakia. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of Judt's character is his self-reflection on Judaism. Judt doesn't believe in the authority of rabbis, doesn't attend synagogue, and certainly isn't Orthodox. This is interesting given that he spent many years working on a Zionist farm in Israel. Although it is clear why Judt shirks away from extremism of any kind (which is why he left Israel) it doesn't necessarily explain why Judt doesn't believe in religious Judaism, even in its mild modern interpretations. Judt chides American Jews for their disconnection from cultural and religious Judaism, but it isn't clear to the reader if Judt intends this critique to reflect back on himself.

Joe

Joe was the German teacher that Tony Judt had while he was attending Emanuel high school. Joe was an unconventional teacher, frequently embarrassing and insulting the students for sub-par performances. Despite his politically incorrect teaching style, Joe was a very effective teacher. To this day, Judt can speak German with passable fluency.

Uri

Uri was Judt's fellow Jewish Zionist living on the kibbutz. When Judt returned to the kibbutz after two years away, studying at Cambridge, it was Uri who rudely questioned, "What are you doing here?"

Rose

Rose was Judt's bedder during the years that he was studying at Cambridge. Rose was an older woman well-versed in the social expectations of her position. She never impeded on Judt's life as a young scholar, and Judt worked hard not to offend Rose in her position.

Raymond Aron

Raymond Aron was a political activist during the 1960s who had a profound impact on Judt during the cultural revolutions. Aron had deep contempt for college students because he believed that the students saw Cultural Revolution as something fun and trendy rather than as a serious vehicle for social change.

Jan Kavan

Jan Kavan was a '68-era exile of Czechoslovakia who, upon being released from prison, feared that he had inadvertently shared information about the Czech underground with a reporter during a particularly exuberant interview. He requested that Judt intervene on his behalf and request that the television station remove the interview from their evening lineup. Judt's request was ignored.

Czeslaw Milosz

Czeslaw Milosz was a Polish poet born in 1911 and raised in the interwar Polish republic. He survived the Nazi occupation and moved to Paris. In 1951, he moved to the West and published his seminal essay, "The Captive Mind," which discusses the attraction of intellectuals to the appeal of authority and authoritarianism.

Toni Avegael

Toni Avegael was Tony Judt's aunt. She was sent to Auschwitz in the year 1942 where she was gassed to death. Tony was named after her. He claims that whenever someone asks him what it means to be Jewish, he thinks of her.

Objects/Places

The Memory Chalet

The Memory Chalet is a mnemonic device Tony Judt uses to collect and store his memories. Because Judt is unable to write or type, he must imagine that he is walking through his childhood chalet depositing memories like furniture to be recollected the next time he walks through the rooms. This has proved to be an effective tool for Judt, and this is how he collected each of the memories discussed in the collection.

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is the disease Tony Judt suffers from. He was struck down by this disease at the age of sixty and will likely die from its side effects very soon. The disease is also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease because it affected the famous baseball player. ALS slowly begins to paralyze the patient, starting with a digit or two before claiming and entire limb, then all four, then the torso all the way up the neck. The patient slowly loses the ability to walk, digest food, and speak.

Putney

Putney is the neighborhood in London where Judt grew up until the age of ten-years-old. Putney is described as a late-nineteenth-century suburb of the mansion flats, "subdivided Victorian terraces and Edwardian brick and stone villas, typically 'semi-detached' but often quite sizeable" (Page 52). Judt describes his neighborhood as having rows and rows of graceful buildings with homogenous facings. The area itself was "unmistakably and reassuringly middle class" (Page 52). Judt grew up in a neighborhood where everyone knew one another, and you could walk to the butcher, the baker, or the hairdresser and get exactly what you came for without ever having to ask.

The Green Bus Line

The Green Bus Line was the London bus line that Judt took to and from school in the 1950s. This line was unique not only for its green color, but for the paths it took through London's lush livery. Because the stations were relatively far apart, the driver and ticket master had enough time to speak with each other and to the passengers, creating a strong sense of traveling community.

The Lord Warden

The Lord Warden was a ship that traveled from England to France and back again during Judt's childhood. Because of the rationing system in England, many people would take the ship to France with the sole purpose of shopping duty free on the way back. There, passengers could stock up on luxuries like cigarettes and alcohol that never would have been afforded through their ration cards.

Zionism

The Zionist movement is a Jewish faction that believes young Jews of the Diaspora - or scattering across the globe - should return to Israel and live in Israeli settlements, eventually reclaiming the land, which they believe God promised to them. Zionists also believe that Jewish people should live in removed communities, with some factions even believing that all Jews should dress alike, raise their children together, and share all meals.

Kibbutz

A kibbutz is a small community or farm where Zionist Jews gather - typically in Israel - to work with the land. Zionist Jews live as a community, sharing meals, responsibilities, and all decisions regarding other Zionist Jews' lives.

The Ecole Normale School

The Ecole Normale School is the school Judt attended after completing his studies at Cambridge University. Founded in 1774 to train secondary education teachers in France, it soon became the breeding ground for French intellectuals. Famous graduates of Ecole Normale included Pasteur, Sartre, Durkheim, and Pompidou, among many others.

Postwar

Postwar is the book Tony Judt wrote after studying Czechoslovakian during his midlife crisis. The book documents the history of Europe since 1945, determined to integrate the two halves of Europe into a single story.

Krasnogruda

Krasnogruda is the restored manor house of famed Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz.. The manor house, with the name that means "red soil" was called Milosz's "native realm." For Judt, the house represented many of the controversial Polish writers he'd grown up

admiring, particularly due to the house's placement in an area once occupied by the Nazis.

Themes

Self-Identity

Perhaps the most important theme of the collection is the theme of self-identity. Judt has penned this collection to record his thoughts and insights about the world and how he has fit into it. In order to do so, Judt must have a strong sense of self, particularly when discussing religion and culture. Judt went through many transitions when discovering his cultural identity. As a child, he was drawn to his father's European spirit, and mirrored his fanciful desires for Camembert, good wine, and French cars, despite the rationing during wartime. As a teenager, Judt, who was born Jewish, moved to Israel and joined a kibbutz hoping to get back to his cultural background. He quickly learned that extreme Zionism did not appeal to him and he moved to Cambridge, England, to complete his studies in Eastern European history. While going through his "midlife crisis," Judt learned to speak Czech and contemplated moving to Czechoslovakia. As a professor, he moved to New York City and became an Americanized Jew who appreciated the world culture present in the city. Throughout the collection, Judt's belief that individuals should give careful study to their cultural and religious backgrounds shines through. He criticizes many of the youth generation for blindly defining themselves by their grandparents' struggles: if their grandparents were affected by the Holocaust, it somehow made them "more" Jewish. Judt's critique is that if individuals don't study history and culture for themselves, each generation will fall further and further away from their history, adding further cloud to their self-identity. In the end, Judt defines himself, and encourages others to define themselves, as an "edge person" living where the borders of two states meet. Such definition allows Judt to jump from one side to the other - he is neither fully American nor fully Jewish, neither fully conservative nor fully communist. Judt admits that it is somewhat self-indulgent to live on the edges: most people would rather not stick out in society, but recognizing what lives on the other side of the border (both figuratively and metaphorically) provides insight and sympathies that greatly benefit society as a whole.

Preservation

For many aging people, it becomes increasingly important to record one's personal memories for further generations. For Judt, however, recording memories becomes the final way through which he can interact with the world. When Judt became paralyzed due to his disease, he passed the night hours by collecting his memories. He never intended to publish a collection of his preserved thoughts, but soon realized the importance. For Judt, preserving his memories in essay form is his way of preserving his life, at least the way he wants his life to be remembered: he wants to preserve the train travel and bus schedules and Putney adventures far more than he wants to preserve the paralyzed limbs and paralytic dependence on the nurse. Many readers may find Judt's memories to be self-involved and boring, but Judt inserts his disclaimer in the prologue: "The essays in this little book were never intended for publication."

Judt's collection was published, however, and he was able to preserve his memories not only for himself (to help while away the night hours), but for the rest of society to reflect on their own beliefs, morals, and self-identity.

Changing Society

The main focus of many of Judt's early essays (in part one of the collection) is his childhood. Despite the fact that Judt didn't intend to have his essays published, he still attempts to connect with the audience through each individual essay, giving them a moral to walk away with. In these early essays, which run the risk of being self-indulgent due to their personal, introspective style, the only way Judt connects to the audience is through his societal comparisons. Overall, Judt is deeply disappointed in the way society has changed - bus drivers no longer interact with their passengers, children no longer understand the joys of treats because their food isn't rationed, and Jews no longer have a connection to their cultural heritage because they are too far removed from seminal events (like the Holocaust). The theme of changing society, which factors into many of Judt's essays, also ties into the theme of preservation: because society is constantly changing, it becomes increasingly important for individuals to document the way things used to be, on both a personal and societal level, so future generations can have the depth and perspective needed to understand their personal identity (theme #1). It is interesting to note that while Judt's success increased as he aged - and he utilized many modern technologies to expand his success: airline travel, internet research, online publication, he still views society as "better" in the past. This could be due to Judt's self-proclaimed nostalgia, or it could be due to the fact that as Judt aged, he became sicker and sicker from ALS. When Judt looks back on his personal history, he sees not only a different society, but a different self.

Style

Perspective

This collection is written from the perspective of Tony Judt, in his mid-sixties, looking back on his life in what he knows are the final years before his death. The fact that Judt suffers from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) greatly impacts his perspective on his memories. The disease has nearly paralyzed him - at the time of publication Judt had lost all movement except in his face (including vocal chords), which allowed him to document his thoughts only through the use of a transcriber. For a writer, having to dictate one's essays rather than write them with a pen and paper would have a profound impact on the creation and editing of thoughts. Judt admits to the reader that these essays were never meant to be published and that he compiled them without the hindrance (or benefit) of an internal editor. Essentially, these essays are highly styled but written with a nod to stream-of-consciousness style.

Also adding depth to Judt's perspective on his life is his struggle with self-identity. Judt was born into Judaism but was never able to define himself fully as a Jew, even during the time he lived in a Zionist kibbutz. It is clear that Judt has a bias toward the elite - his writing style is highly academic - particularly French intellectualism. It is also clear that Judt is well-traveled and quite liberal politically. Therefore, it is safe to assume that Judt's intended audience is over the age of fifty (with at least peripheral understanding of the 1950s and 1960s), liberal, and holds a bachelors' degree (at the very least) from an accredited university. In short, Judt is an elitist, academic snob, unattractive attributes Judt includes for himself in his self-definition.

Tone

The tone of Judt's essay collection is extremely academic mixed with hints of nostalgia. Judt is a highly educated man, is proud of this, and does not want to hide it from his audience. He uses an advanced vocabulary that may be off-putting or pretentious to some readers. It is clear that Judt is addressing an equally educated audience and that he has no intention of "dumbing down" his thoughts to reach a broader, more mainstream audience. Judt makes a habit of introducing large concepts and political movements without the benefit of context, suggesting that he assumes his audience benefits from an equal - or superior - educational background to his own. Because these are Judt's personal memoirs, he makes no effort toward objectivity. These essays are Judt's legacy, the preservation of his morals and ideals. Had Judt been worried about objectivity, political correctness, or any other internal censors, he would have undermined the very purpose of this project.

Because Judt has not attempted objectivity, many of his essays could be perceived as political in nature. Judt is very vocal about his disdain for extremism in any form, and his apprehension to align with any organization - secular or religious. Because Judt is so

steadfast, some readers may find his opinions judgmental, even condemning of those who do choose to align with specific organizations or mantras. Judt appreciates those who live "on the edges," between definition, and he doesn't hide his disdain for single-minded people concerned only with their own causes.

Structure

The Memory Chalet is a collection of 25 short essays ranging in length from 7 - 12 pages, and a short preface explaining that the essays in this collection were never meant for publication. The collection is broken down into three parts: One, Two, and Three, which seem to be divided by Judt's age. Part One focuses on Judt's childhood growing up in Putney, England. He collects tiny memories of the food he ate, the neighborhood he walked through, and, with startling detail, the train and bus lines he frequented as a child. He discusses his parents and their backgrounds, which greatly affected him as an adult discovering his self-identity. Part Two focuses on Judt's educational years, focusing primarily on Judt's time at University. After finishing high school - where he met a strict teacher, Joe, who truly taught Judt to speak German - Judt moved to Israel and joined a kibbutz. The final section of the collection focuses loosely on Judt's work life. This is when Judt mentions his three marriages, his personal struggles with Judaism, and his move to New York City. Judt views New York as one of the last remaining "world cities" where people like him, people who reside on the boundaries of society - Judt himself struggled to define himself as solely British, solely American, or solely Jewish - can thrive. In each of the sections, Judt attempts to understand a deeper layer of his self-identity, society, and the education of future generations.

Quotes

"I, admittedly from within the unusual constraints of my physical imprisonment, have come to see this as the easiest of devices - almost too mechanical, inviting me as it does to arrange examples and sequences and paradoxes in tiny ways which may misleadingly reorder the original and far more suggestive confusion of impressions and recollections" (Page 8).

"It might be thought the height of poor taste to ascribe good fortune to a healthy man with a young family struck down at the age of sixty by an incurable degenerative disorder from which he must shortly die. But there is more than one sort of luck" (Page 13).

"Loss is loss, and nothing is gained by calling it by a nicer name. My nights are intriguing; but I could do without them" (Page 21).

"Love, it seems to me, is that condition in which one is most contentedly oneself. If this sounds paradoxical, remember Rilke's admonition: love consists in leaving the loved one space to be themselves while providing the security within which that self may flourish" (Page 66).

"But proximity can be delusory: sometimes it is better to share with your neighbors a mutually articulated sense of the foreign. For this we require a journey: a passage in time and space in which to register symbols and intimations of change and difference" (Page 80).

"I knew what it meant to be a 'believer' - but I also knew what sort of price one pays for such intensity of identification and unquestioning allegiance" (Page 98).

"For all his brilliance he could not see that even though having fun is not the same as making a revolution, many revolutions really did begin playfully and with laughter" (Page 122).

"Modern life will offer ever more opportunities for self-definition through leisure and avocation. Mere employment will occupy a thankfully diminished role" (Page 134).

"Articulacy is typically regarded as an aggressive talent. But for me its functions were substantially defensive: rhetorical flexibility allows for a certain feigned closeness - conveying proximity while maintaining distance" (Page 150).

"When words lose their integrity so do the ideas they express. If we privilege personal expression over formal convention, then we are privatizing language no less than we have privatized so much else" (Pages 152 - 153).

"But what of our debt to the past? Except in crassly practical ways - we can only service that debt to the full by remembering and conveying beyond ourselves the duty to remember" (Page 216).

Topics for Discussion

Describe the effects ALS had on Tony Judt. How did this disease change Judt's life - both physically and mentally? How has ALS made Judt's life more difficult? How has the disease improved his life? Which aspect of his former life do you think Judt misses the most? How can you tell? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Growing up, would you consider Judt to have lived in an economically fortunate family? How did finances affect Judt's childhood? Why do you think Judt claims to have grown up in "genteel poverty"? Do you agree with Judt's assessment of his family's financial standing, particularly given the era of Judt's childhood? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What is a memory chalet? How did Judt come up with this metaphor? How was this metaphor inspired? How does a memory chalet work, particularly for Judt given his medical condition? When considering this, do you think The Memory Chalet is an appropriate title for this collection? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Growing up, Judt experienced many different academic environments that shaped his beliefs - both academic and political. First, create a timeline of Judt's educational experiences. Then, explain which experience you believe had the greatest impact on Judt as an intellectual. How did this experience shape his beliefs throughout life? How do you see this reflected in the collection? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

In the opening prologue of the collection, Judt states that he has been married three times. What reasons, if any, does Judt give in the collection for his failed marriages? Based on the information in the text, why do you think Judt had three different marriages? What does this tell you about Judt's personality that his essays do not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Judt has very strong opinions about formal education and the acquisition of information. What does Judt believe is the best way for students to learn? How does formal education feed into Judt's beliefs about society and class structure? How do you see Judt's personal success reflected in his beliefs about education? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does Judt describe his relationship to Judaism, both religiously and culturally? In Judt's opinion, what struggles do modern Jews face regarding their cultural history? How have these struggles affected Judt personally? Do you agree with Judt's arguments about the youth generation and their cultural self-identities? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.