

The Secret Speech Study Guide

The Secret Speech by Tom Rob Smith

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Plot Summary

NOTE: Due to the structure of the book, the summary and analysis sections for this novel are divided up according to page number. This study guide specifically refers to the 2010 Grand Central Publishing/Hachette Book Group Trade Paperback Edition. Quotes for chapters with identical titles are also noted by page number.

“The Secret Speech” is an historical crime novel by Tom Rob Smith, which continues to follow the life and work of former MGB operative-turned-homicide investigator Leo Demidov, as well as his efforts to keep his family together, three years after the events of novel “Child 44”. Leo works the homicide department of the Ministry of the Interior in Moscow, a department which does not officially exist, as the State has officially declared that there are no serious crimes like murder in a Communist state. While Leo is successful at work, he has difficulty at home with his adopted daughters, 14-year-old Zoya and 7-year-old Elena. Both girls were orphaned in “Child 44” when one of Leo’s men killed their parents in front of them. While both girls love Leo’s wife, Raisa, Zoya is full of nothing but hate for Leo, taking every opportunity to spite him, insult him, and hurt him, including contemplating his murder.

In March, what history comes to call the “Secret Speech”, a treatise delivered by Khrushchev, the new Soviet leader and head of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, is made public. The speech, though not intended for publication, is delivered to all schools, factories, shops, groups, organizations, and so on, across the Soviet Union. The speech admits to torture, wrongful imprisonments, forced confessions, and State-sponsored murder under the regime of Stalin. The doors are thrown open for reform – and for revenge. Thousands upon thousands of people who have been wrongfully locked up for years are now returning home, and many of them want revenge against the militia, soldiers, guards, State Security agents, and politicians who wronged them. A series of revenge killings are assigned to Leo to investigate. At the same time, Zoya is kidnapped. Leo meets the kidnappers, a gang of criminals headed up by a vicious woman named Fraera, once known as Anisya – a woman who was Leo’s first arrest in 1949 as a new MGB agent. Fraera is also responsible for the murders, and will stop at nothing to have her revenge against Leo, including the staged murder of his daughter.

When Leo learns the murder was staged, he receives permission from his superior, Panin, to travel to Hungary with Raisa and Karoly, a translator, to get Zoya back and kill Fraera. Panin explains that the situation is dire. The Secret Speech has brought about too much reform too fast to the point of loss of control. Fraera, in exchange for her life, is instigating an uprising in Budapest, which the Soviet military will crush, using it as proof of the dangers of reform. The incident will also provide evidence to oppose Khrushchev’s planned military cuts and nuclear proliferation. Leo, Raisa, and Karoly arrive in Budapest during the uprising, where they learn that Zoya has fallen into the criminal gang, wanting to turn her back on her former life with Leo. Karoly, while searching for Zoya, discovers that his son, a member of Hungary’s Secret Police, has been caught by the mobs. While trying to help his son, Karoly and his son are set on fire



and burned to death. Leo and Raisa find Zoya as the Soviet crackdown begins in earnest. Much of Zoya's anger and hatred have burned out in the time she has spent seeing so much death and heartache around her. Fraera, surprisingly, lets Leo, Raisa, Zoya, and Zoya's boyfriend, fellow gang member Malysh, go. She explains she wanted to make Leo suffer by thinking he had lost Zoya, and she has done so. She also explains that the uprising is her ultimate revenge against the Communists. She is running around with a camera, taking photos of Soviet barbarity, to distribute to the world so the world will turn against the Soviet Union. As Leo, Raisa, Zoya, and Malysh escape, Malysh is killed while taking out a Soviet tank. Leo, Raisa, and Zoya return home, where Elena is thrilled to see her older sister once more. By the end of the novel, Leo and Zoya have begun to build a real father-daughter relationship.



Pages 1 – 80

Summary

Soviet Union, Moscow, 3 June 1949 – Jekabs Duvakin, during the Great Patriotic War, helped to demolish factories, refineries, and villages, so they could not be taken by the Germans. Now in 1949, Jekabs, as leader of a demolition crew, must blow up a church – the massive and beautiful Church of Sancta Sophia, with five cupolas. He doesn't believe in God, and knows the Communist regime has officially declared that there is no God, but still, he feels unsure about blowing up a church. He tries to convince himself that the church is a relic of the past, and standing in the way of progress. Given the brutality of the Communist regime, Jekabs doesn't want to walk away from the job, for he has his wife and daughter to think of, as well as the promise of early retirement.

Outside, a film crew and large crowd gathers. Among them is Lazar. Lazar feels saddened that the church is being demolished, knowing the State's cover story – of structural instability from the war – is an excuse. He knows that, among the crowd, there will be people who are as sad as he is, and people who will be overjoyed. He also knows the State is blowing up the church to demonstrate not only its own power, but how ineffective religion is anymore.

Suddenly, there is an unexpected explosion. Dozens in the crowd are injured. The church, stunningly, remains standing. Lazar is thrilled. Many in the crowd begin to wonder if God does indeed exist, and has intervened to save the church. Lazar is approached by an incognito member of the MGB, who says there has obviously been a small accident, easily fixed. The church will come down before the end of the day, and a swimming pool will be put in its place. The MGB agent questions Lazar, asking him what his occupation is. Lazar is a priest, but he doesn't know what job he should give the agent.

Same Day – Maxim, a 24-year old graduate of Moscow's Theological Academy Seminary, is willing to give up his State-religious education in order to run away with beautiful, married 30-year-old Anisya. As he speaks to Anisya about it in a church, her husband of ten years, Lazar, comes rushing in to explain that he has just been questioned by an MGB agent. He explains he was followed, sought refuge in Natasha Niurina's apartment, and then left through the back. Anisya knows they only have a little time. She had warned him not to attend the demolition, but he'd done so anyways, holding his principles above his personal safety. Fifteen years older than Anisya, she has always admired and loved Lazar for it. She tells Maxim to leave and denounce them, to save himself. Maxim refuses to go. Lazar knows things will not go well for his wife and Maxim, but he worries about the members of his congregation at large.

Lazar then moves the stone altar to bring out from beneath it a steel trunk full of musical scores, who, along with their composer, were considered outlawed by the State for being anti-Soviet. Lazar explains that they are protecting the right of the papers to exist,



not necessarily what is on them. It was Anisya who first convinced Lazar to hide the musical papers. The trunk also contains religious icons and documents relating to the church. Each of them – Lazar, Anisya, and Maxim – will smuggle out a third of the papers, and new hiding places will be found. Maxim leaves first. Anisya leaves second.

Outside, Anisya is surprised to discover that Maxim has returned to the church. Maxim is an undercover MGB agent named Leo Demidov, who along with his superior officer, Nikolai Borisov, has returned with numerous MGB agents. Anisya suddenly realizes that she has been set up. Leo urges Anisya to denounce Lazar and run away with him, and explains that the MGB only wants Lazar. Anisya refuses, telling Leo he will never be loved, and Borisov slaps her. He tells Leo it is better this way. It is Leo's first arrest.

The MGB agents then bash their way through the church doors with axes to find Lazar, praying. Lazar is grabbed, and Leo punches him for refusing to look at the floor. Lazar now knows how many people has signed death warrants for, by having spoken freely about them in front of Leo as Maxim. Lazar is stunned, because he never suspected the highest religious figure in the land, Patriarch Krasikov, could have been an informer for the State. Lazar continues to look up at Leo, leading to Leo punching Lazar into unconsciousness. Leo then discovers a sheet of music missed by the MGB agents, and burns it.

Seven Years Later, Moscow, 12 March, 1956 – Suren Moskvina runs a small printing press whose books are known for being ill-produced, thanks to the resource allowance the State emplaces on him. The State is more concerned about the content of the books they order him to print, rather than the actual books themselves. Suren is openly mocked for his cheap books. A young man comes in with a copy of the newest State-revised edition of Lenin's "The State and Revolution", noting that the photo of the book's author bears the caption of Lenin, but the photo is not Lenin. It is of a man with wild white hair. Suren is angry, saying there is no way he would have printed a thousand copies of a book with the wrong photo.

Suren notices a tattoo on the man's neck – the kind that criminals have. The man rushes out, and Suren follows him, suspicious. Suren is a former 20-year member of the MGB, was once well-respected, avoided promotions, and retired peacefully. Suren did not enjoy retirement, and so he decided to go back to work. Suren wonders why such a bizarre thing had to happen on that day, for Suren is due to print a book of great importance to the State, with quality materials for once. Suren ultimately decides not to follow the man, and goes into his factory office, where a knock comes at the door. The knocking reminds him of a task he was forced to carry out during the war – eliminating hundreds of political prisoners in 20 cells in the face of the advancing Germans. The solution was for Suren to throw grenades into the cells – quick and efficient.

13 March – 55-year-old Suren's body is found with the throat mutilated by his sons, Vsevolod and Akvsenti, when they arrive at the printing press factory for work. Reporting the crime to the militia, the homicide department run by former MGB agent Leo Stepanovich Demidov is notified. Leo has formed the department three years before, following the successful conclusion to the mystery of 44 murdered children. The



State and the KGB tolerate, but do not like, Leo's homicide department, for they feel it is a criticism of the State, which has declared that there are no murders or serious crimes in a Communist society. Much of Leo's decision to form the homicide department does indeed have to do with his time as an MGB agent, when suspicion and politics alone were enough to get him to arrest innocent people, and the State turned a blind eye to various crimes – such as the 44 child murders. Leo runs the homicide department's investigations based on evidence, not suspicion or politics. He hopes that one day the number of guilty people will outweigh the number of innocent people he put away years before. The homicide department enjoys an immense amount of freedom, reporting directly to the Ministry of the Interior as a subsection of the Main Office for Criminal Investigations, and because officially, the homicide department does not exist.

Leo inspects the murder scene. There are no defensive wounds on Suren's body, propped in a sitting position against the front of his desk. The chair at the desk has been broken, but is made to look as if it is in perfect condition. There is barely anything of Suren's neck left from repeated slashes. Leo inspects the book in Suren's jacket pocket – Lenin's "The State and Revolution" – with an arrest photo glued into the book. Leo is joined by his adjutant, Timur Nesterov, formerly a general in the Voualsk militia, who had helped Leo's investigation of the 44 murdered children, having risked his own life and family in the process. Leo then questions Suren's sons, Vsevolod and Akvsenti, about the chair, telling them he believes their father has hanged himself by standing on the chair. Leo explains the suicide is what matters, not that the boys covered it up in order to protect their own lives and careers, for no one in the Communist State will take on the sons of a suicide. Like murder, suicide is not recognized in a Communist State. The boys admit they found their father hanging from a beam in the factory, and the broken chair nearby. It was Akvsenti who slashed his father's throat to make it appear like a murder. Leo assures them that times have changed, that suicides do not always reflect poorly on the families as they once did. The boys explain their father had been working on a State document, had been drinking, and had lately been depressed. The boys, after discovering their father's body, burned the document and the typeset. Leo discovers, however, that Suren was in the middle of composing a new sentence for the typeset, which was not cast or destroyed. A slug of the sentence is cast, and Leo prints it.

13 March, Same Day – At home, Leo considers the sentence Suren was working on before death. It reads, "Under torture, Eikhe". Leo goes over two classified files – one for Suren Moskvin, one for Robert Eikhe. In Suren's file is a list of denunciations made over the course of his career, from neighbors to colleagues to even a family member, a cousin named Iona Radek. Leo realizes the denunciations are strategic, meaning that Suren did what he needed to do to survive, making suicide improbable. Seven years ago, Suren had been an MGB guard while Leo himself had been an agent. Eikhe's file is far longer. Eikhe had been a Party member since 1905, more than a decade before the Revolution when Russia had outlawed the Party. Despite a stellar record where he even served as a candidate to for the Central Committee Politburo, Eikhe had been arrested on April 29, 1938, where he confessed to anti-Soviet activity in what Leo recognizes as the handiwork of an MGB agent. Leo then reads a statement of



innocence composed by Eikhe while in prison, protesting his imprisonment, and declaring love for the State. It chills Leo. Eikhe was later executed on February 4, 1940.

Leo's beautiful wife, Raisa, notices his troubled form over the files, and she soothingly places a hand on his back. Having married Leo out of fear years before, she has come to deeply love him. Raisa and Leo kiss, and Leo goes to read to his daughters, 14-year-old Zoya and 7-year-old Elena. Zoya doesn't want to hear the story Leo reads them, about a child honoring the State with a prize in memory of his miner father. Leo cautions Zoya about expressing her opinions outside of the home. Leo knows Zoya has never forgiven him for his part in the death of her parents during a previous investigation. Zoya reminds Leo again and again that she and her sister have merely allowed themselves to be adopted by Leo as a means to an end – to stay out of the orphanage. Zoya insists Leo invent a story to tell them, about two girls living on a farm in the winter with their parents, happily, until a man in a uniform one day showed up. It causes Elena to cry. Leo cuts Zoya off, promising to find better books, and says good night. He hopes that relations with Zoya will improve, sooner or later. Zoya, in bed, knows she will never forget what happened to her parents. She sneaks into the kitchen that night, and tests out the way a knife feels in her hands.

13 March, Same Day – For years, Zoya has believed that Leo and Raisa have been trying to steal the place of their parents. Zoya brings the knife into Leo's room, raises it over him, and imagines killing him. She has been doing this for years, one day intending to follow through. The phone rings, causing Zoya to drop the knife, and rush out of the room. Leo wakes up, notes that the door to his bedroom is slightly open, and then answers the phone. It is Nikolai Borisov, his old superior. Nikolai is drunk, and asks to meet Leo that night at his offices. Leo grudgingly agrees to meet him in thirty minutes. As he dresses, he finds the knife, hides it from Raisa, and realizes that Zoya is responsible, for she is pretending to be asleep, holding her breath, whereas Elena is truly asleep, breathing regularly.

14 March – Leo tries to rationalize the presence of the knife in his room, thinking that perhaps Zoya may not be responsible, but cannot shake the feeling that she is. Leo arrives at his offices in the factory district of Zamoskvareche south of the river. The offices are located above a bakery, and are disguised as Button Factory 14. Leo wonders what is going on with Nikolai, having not spoken to him in six years. Nikolai embraces Leo as Leo arrives, explaining he has been sent photos of all the men and women he has arrested. Leo's mind wanders, however, coming to realize that Zoya is indeed responsible for the knife. Nikolai admits he is ashamed, and is crying. Leo offers Nikolai a meeting in the morning, when both their minds are clear. Nikolai agrees. Leo thinks of Zoya again, realizing the knife is a cry for help, and he needs to act immediately to save his family.

Same Day – Leo considers that a man who prided himself on cruelty and pitilessness like Nikolai could feel ashamed. While Leo attempts to handle his past by a new career and purpose, Nikolai has been drinking himself into oblivion to forget. But someone will not allow Nikolai to forget, sending batches of photos Nikolai was responsible for arresting on a weekly basis, then on a daily basis. Nikolai begins to remember the



names of the people and the circumstances of their arrests. He refuses to tell his wife or his daughters what is going on. He feels the need to confess, to apologize for his past, but there are never any notes or letters with the photos. He realizes that either his wife or his daughters will eventually be too curious about the envelopes, and so he has decided to seek Leo's help. To Nikolai's mind, the State must protect him from the criminals he once protected the State from.

Returning home, Nikolai is sure he is being followed. He shouts out that millions had been involved in the arrests, and believes that all those in uniform are being targeted. He begins running toward home, slipping and falling, and rushing into his apartment. There, he finds a box with the words "Not for Press" printed on top, waiting for him. The box is full of printed pages, with a State-stamped letter on top reading "Innocent Victims Torture". The document in the box is a speech, appears to be State-sanctioned itself, and is directed by the letter to be distributed to every school and factory. Nikolai realizes the State conspiracy of silence must be over. Soon, everyone will know everything and be allowed to openly discuss things. He wonders how his wife and daughters will think of him once the truth is out. He then kills his wife, smothering her with his pillow, and then heads toward his daughters' bedroom.

Same Day – Leo has resolved that, no matter what happens, he must save his family. He wakes Zoya up, saying they need to talk, and puts his hands on her shoulders to stop her from turning away. He tells her he found the knife. He tells her he is not the same officer who came to her parents' farm. He reminds her that he at least attempted to save her parents, though he failed. He tells her that he can never bring them back, but he can give her opportunities in life, now, and is an opportunity for him. He asks her to at least try. She begs him to let her go. Leo is stunned, and pulls back. She has wet the bed. Elena wakes up. She watches as Leo offers to clean the sheets, but Zoya tells him she will do it herself. He tells Zoya he just wants to love her.

Leo then returns to the kitchen to consider Suren Moskvina's sentence, but his mind wanders. He wonders if breaking up the family is the only solution, if getting the girls readopted is right, and if he has merely been forcing his own family to stay together when it shouldn't. Raisa enters the kitchen, and Leo reveals that he had told a drunken Nikolai that they would speak in the morning. Raisa goes to wake the girls, and Leo imagines that Zoya will probably reveal the details of their conversation, but Zoya doesn't. She merely goes to the bathroom to clean the sheets. Leo pretends not to know what is going on, and Raisa explains that Zoya merely had an accident. Before the girls leave for school, Zoya says she feels sick, and finishes getting ready for school without touching breakfast. Raisa can see that something is bothering Leo as well, but Leo doesn't want to talk about it. At the door, Raisa discovers a brown parcel which she brings to Leo before escorting the girls out. The box inside the parcel reads "Not for Press".

Same Day – Raisa contemplates how quiet Zoya and Elena are, and wonders about Leo's mood as well. Raisa knows that Leo has changed from his days in the MGB, now renamed the KGB. Leo returns home from work each day, sharing stories and cases with his family, to demonstrate and prove how he has changed since his State Security



days, as well as to prove there are no more secrets between any of them. Raisa realizes that Leo is desperate for forgiveness and the words “I love you” from the girls. Raisa also knows that Leo longs for, but does not resent, the easy and intimate relationship Raisa herself has with the girls, and knows that Zoya exaggerates the relationship in front of Leo, to hurt him. Whereas Leo struggles to prove how important the girls are to him, Raisa, despite her love for the girls, treats them as normally as possible, even assigning household tasks and chores to make them feel as part of the family, and normal.

Raisa, like Leo, longs for a normal, happy, loving family. Raisa now teaches at Lycee 1535, a secondary school which Zoya attends, while Elena attends a separate primary school. Zoya worries Raisa, because she has isolated herself at school, and fallen behind academically, though she is very intelligent. Zoya, who excels at individual sports like swimming and running, refuses to compete. After dropping off Elena, Zoya and Raisa walk to Lycee 1535. Zoya tells Raisa she feels sad. Raisa asks what she can do for Zoya, saying, for the first time, that she loves Zoya very much. Zoya says she could be happy with Raisa, if Raisa will leave Leo. Raisa says that Leo has changed, and that they should all talk. Zoya says she doesn't want Raisa to talk, but to leave Leo. Raisa says she loves Leo, which causes Zoya to run ahead to school. Raisa regrets not handling the situation more smoothly.

In the staff room at the school, Raisa finds a package from the Ministry of Education waiting for her with the words “Not for Press” printed on top, which is full of printed pages. From time to time, she is required by the State as a politics teacher to do the exact same thing. She discovers that cover letters for the package fill the trashcan, meaning the other teachers must also have all received the package. She then heads to her class of 15 and 16 year-olds. The speech to be read is “Special report to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, By Nikita Sergeyevech Khrushchev, First Secretary, Communist Party of the Soviet Union”. Raisa is stunned by the speech she is reading. It condemns the cult-like status and adoration of Stalin in twisting Party principles, Party democracy, and revolutionary legality, and that Stalin abused his power. Raisa is baffled, for she has spent her entire life teaching that Stalin and the State are always right, and that Stalin and the State are to be idolized and adored. Suddenly, the teacher Iulia Pashkova bursts in, asking Raisa to come along. Iulia, while reading the speech, was interrupted by Zoya, who smashed the room's framed picture of Stalin entitled “Father to All Children”, cut her hands in the process, and is declaring over and over again that Stalin is not her father – scaring all of the other kids in class, causing them to huddle on the far side of the room.

Same Day – Leo and Nesterov draw their guns as they find a page of the speech torn to shreds in the hallway outside Nikolai's apartment. They find Nikolai in the bathtub, his wrists slit, as well as the bodies of his wife and two daughters. Nesterov says Nikolai was a coward. Leo agrees, knowing that Nikolai had been too scared to face disapproval. The KGB arrives moments later. Frol Panin, a handsome man of 50, and Leo's superior at the Interior Ministry, takes charge of things. Panin is well-cultured, a former ambassador who escaped Stalin's purges by being abroad. Panin is polite, soft-spoken, and takes pride in his appearance – the kind of person, Leo imagines, would



approve of Khrushchev's speech. Panin orders the KGB agents to interview residents, and not to threaten or intimidate them, but to stress that their patience has limits. Panin explains he wants no mention of murder, but that the family was taken away under suspicion of subversion. Panin then speaks with Leo about his meeting with Nikolai. Panin explains he was present when Khrushchev's speech was delivered at the congress without warning, and that it has stunned everyone. He explains that the speech is essentially an apology for the past, and that Khrushchev is the first man to criticize Stalin and not be killed for it – cementing his own place in history. While he does not want the press to print it, he wants people to read and hear it, so it has been distributed. Panin and Leo understand they are complicit in Stalin's reign of terror.

Leo shows Panin the clues he has gathered from Moskvina's printing press. The words "Under torture, Eikhe" form the first part of a sentence from the speech itself: "Under torture, Eikhe was forced to sign a protocol of his confession prepared in advance by the investigative judges". Leo says that whoever sent the speech to Suren to be typed up, and the photos to Nikolai, wanted them to kill themselves, knowing the effect the speech and photos would have. Leo believes the culprit is someone who connects himself, Nikolai, and Suren – either someone recently released from prison, or a relative of a victim. The people are no longer afraid of the State agencies; the State agencies are not afraid of the people. In the bathtub, an envelope of photos are discovered with Nikolai, including a photo of Lazar.

Analysis

"The Secret Speech" is a historical crime novel by Tom Rob Smith, which continues to follow the life and work of former MGB operative-turned-homicide investigator Leo Demidov, as well as his efforts to keep his family together, three years after the events of novel "Child 44". Much has changed in the time between the events of "Child 44" and the "Secret Speech". Stalin has been dead for three years, and the Soviet Union – Communist Russia, especially – is experiencing something of a hangover from the nightmare of Stalin's reign. The Soviet world is rocked in March, 1956, by the Secret Speech of new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. What history has come to refer to as the period of Khrushchev's Thaw – a brief period of Soviet reform that lasted until the early 1960s – becomes an important theme in the novel, and paves the way for the events of the novel itself. The Thaw is begun by Khrushchev's speech, which mentions all manners of wrong-doing, from torture to wrongful imprisonments, forced confessions, mass executions, and barbaric conditions in prison camps, all under the reign of Stalin. Khrushchev's speech has three primary purposes. First, it is an apology for Stalin's reign. Second, it is an admission of wrongdoing, and a signal for reform. Third, it cements Khrushchev's place in history as the first man to publicly criticize Stalin, and not be killed for it. As such, hundreds of thousands of prisoners are being returned home. Many are seeking revenge –and herein emerges the theme of justice and revenge.

Stalin's reign was brutal. Many of the men who worked under him did so out of fear for their own lives and careers. Others, like Leo, worked blindly for the greater good without



realizing what they were truly doing. As of “Child 44”, Leo has embarked on a journey of redemption, seeking to right the wrongs of the past by solving crimes in the present, helping the innocent receive justice, and putting away the guilty. Now, in the Thaw, the people who served under Stalin are exposed as accomplices to, and instruments of, Stalin’s cruelty. Numerous individuals who served under Stalin are murdered, and Leo is given the task of solving the murders. Leo comes to believe that a victim, or a relative of a victim during Stalin’s reign and Leo’s own past, connects him, Moskvina, and Nikolai. Leo can understand why anyone would want revenge after being treated so cruelly in the past, and so he finds himself in a difficult position of having to seek out who has murdered these people. Leo sympathizes with the people who have been killed, knowing that, despite their barbarity, there was another side to them as well, and they were all trying to put the past behind them. Men like Nikolai, for example, had loving families.

The theme of family also becomes incredibly important early in the novel. Leo’s own patchwork family – his wife and his two adopted daughters, orphaned when one of Leo’s men killed their parents in front of them in “Child 44” three years before – is hanging by a thread. Fourteen-year-old Zoya provides the perfect present example of an individual wronged severely during Stalin’s reign, who is seeking revenge for the deaths of her parents, and the destruction of her former life. Though Leo is not personally responsible for the death of her parents, Zoya holds him accountable for it, for he is a part of the Communist Party and the overall State. Every day, she lashes out at Leo in some form, hoping to hurt and wound him the way that she has been hurt and has been wounded – a campaign of revenge. Leo, on the other hand, believes that Zoya needs only time, and will come around. He is willing to do whatever he can in order to keep his family together. Not even discovering that Zoya has been contemplating his murder by actually holding a knife above him is enough to convince Leo that things will not work out. Leo’s redemption (and here, the theme of redemption comes to the fore) hasn’t only been to solve crimes, but to get Zoya and Elena a renewed shot at life, to make them feel loved, and to give them the best family life that he can – to return, however shoddily, that which was taken away from them three years before. It has not worked.

Discussion Question 1

Why is the Secret Speech so dangerous to men like Leo, Panin, Suren, and Nikolai? What does it mean for them?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe that men like Leo, Panin, Suren, and Nikolai can be held to account for their part in Stalin’s barbarity? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Do you believe that men like Leo, Panin, Suren, and Nikolai can ever find redemption for the things they have done in their past? If so, how? If not, why not?

Vocabulary

novice, temperament, quantifiable, archaic, pretext, congregation, ecclesiastical, subjugation, incongruous, remunerated, ferocity, disheveled, insinuated, languishing, impeccable, contemptuously, malicious, fabrication, apparatus, prerevolutionary, aristocratic, stoicism, brazenly, immaculate



Pages 81-165

Summary

Same Day – The envelope that 75-year-old patriarch-in-name-only Krasikov has been sent has an Orthodox cross drawn on it. This particular package of photos is full of priests that Krasikov, formerly the highest religious figure in the land under the State, had denounced long ago. Krasikov knows he had to sacrifice a few priests to save the Church from State destruction. Krasikov is not troubled by the denunciations, Khrushchev's speech, or the past, for he knows he has done what was needed in order to survive. Krasikov was made patriarch by the Council of Bishops because of his political flexibility. By working with the State, and sacrificing a few, the Church, and the many, survived. Krasikov now spends his days working in a children's sanctuary he has founded near the Church of the Conception of Saint Anna. The sanctuary is intended to house and cure children who are addicted to chaffir, a narcotic derived from tea leaves, in exchange for letting God into their lives. The sanctuary cares for a mere 100 of the some 800,000 estimated homeless children in the country. The sanctuary is under guard by men who also double as bodyguards for Krasikov. However, an orphan of about 14 named Sergei who carries a porcelain pig with him everywhere he goes, manages to get Krasikov alone, smashes the pig, from which a small flashlight appears. As Krasikov bends down to pick it up, Sergei slips a wire noose around the man's neck, telling him to answer correctly if he wants to live.

Leo and Nesterov arrive to speak the Patriarch just as things with Sergei are unfolding. They are stunned by Sergei, who demands that Krasikov apologize for the priests he betrayed. Krasikov, however, says he'd betray again whoever sent Sergei. By this time, Sergei has finished killing Krasikov and fled through a window. Leo and Nesterov rush out after Sergei, who uses his flashlight from the pig to run. Leo pursues the boy into the sewers with Nesterov, where they catch him. The boy has a tattoo of a cross on his neck, indicating he is in a gang, and that he would rather die than talk. The boy tells Leo he is in the sewers while his wife, Raisa, is above. The boy then leaps into rushing water. Leo is enraged and panicked, now knowing that Raisa is in danger.

Same Day – Raisa meets with Karl Enukidze, the school's director, and Iulia Peshkova, Zoya's teacher, to discuss what has happened. The situation is dangerous, at best. Zoya's life, as well as all of their lives, are in danger by her outburst. Raisa emphasizes how things have changed, however, based on Khrushchev's speech, and insists it would be better if the incident were never reported. Iulia counters that 30 other students saw the outburst, and they would surely tell their parents or the authorities. Raisa then makes the bold decision to suggest that she and Zoya simply disappear from school – an apparent punishment that will raise no more discussion from anyone. As she and Zoya leave school, two uniformed militia officers appear to escort Raisa and Zoya home, explaining Leo feared for their safety. Zoya whispers to Raisa that she doesn't trust the men. After they leave, Karl, though agreeing times have changed, picks up the phone to make a call to denounce Zoya.



Same Day – Zoya realizes the militia are not driving home the right way, and tries to jump out of the car. Raisa grabs her and pulls her back in. The militia explain they are doing as they have been told by Leo, and show her the address they are driving to. Raisa realizes the address given to the militia officers is in her husband's handwriting, and it is the address to an apartment where his parents, Stepan and Anna, live. There, the officers remain on guard outside, saying there have been reprisals against people who worked under Stalin. Anna asks if Leo is okay, which angers Zoya. Zoya hates them for loving Leo and pretending to be a normal family. Zoya begins spouting off the details of the speech, about how people like Leo arrested innocents, forced confessions, tortured, and killed. Zoya calls Leo a murderer, and Anna has had enough. She slaps Zoya, and tells Zoya she is ungrateful and spoiled, and only hates when people try to love her. Zoya then scratches at Anna, and bites Raisa's arm deeply, before Stepan throws her to the floor, knocking the fight out of her. There is a knock on the door. Rather than two militia officers, it is now two KGB agents. They demand that Zoya come with them for smashing a portrait of Stalin. Knowing it would take the KGB some time to organize an arrest, and seeing the tattoos on their necks, Raisa knows they are not real KGB agents. The impersonators then kill the militia guards. They demand Zoya or they will kill Elena. One of the impersonators picks up Zoya and carries her out. The other tells Raisa and her family to stay in the apartment. Elena is terrified into silence. Raisa sneaks out by way of the balcony to see where Zoya is being taken. She attempts to climb down one balcony to the next, only to hear a gunshot, and then fall.

Same Day – Leo rushes to Municipal Emergency Hospital 31, where his family is being treated. Raisa may die, having fallen from a great height. Anna's face is bandaged. Stepan seems unharmed. Elena is asleep, having become hysterical when Zoya was taken. Leo then goes to the hospital room commandeered by Panin and his men. Panin explains the situation clearly: State Security veterans and members are being targeted for reprisals. A wider pattern of reprisals could easily be triggered. Everyone in power is scared. Things could easily get out of hand. A letter with an Orthodox cross is then delivered to Leo, with the words "Church of Sancta Sophia, Midnight, Alone" on it.

15 March – Leo waits at what was once the Church of Sancta Sophia, now an abandoned construction site due to the unsuitability of the riverside land to feature a watersports complex. It is now past one in the morning. He worries about Zoya, feeling responsible for her, no matter how much she hates him. A gang of seven men and boys arrive from the sewers, including the one who killed the patriarch. They search Leo for weapons, and then give an all-clear call. Leo is stunned to then see Anisya come out of the sewers.

Anisya says she is now called "Fraera". She asks Leo how often he has thought of her. Leo is forced to admit he never has. She responds by saying that his victims think about him every day. Leo says Raisa, Zoya, and Elena have done nothing to them. Anisya wonders how innocence can mean anything to a man like Leo who has arrested so many innocent people. Anisya goes on to say that the patriarch was the man who enabled Leo to infiltrate their church – that she and her husband trusted the patriarch in sending them Leo disguised as Maxim, and Suren was a guard who curiously watched



Anisya's interrogation. She says that when the police are criminals, the criminals must become the police. Anisya insists she is turning the world right-side up. She goes on to say that when she was arrested, she was pregnant. She gave birth in prison, was allowed to nurse for three months, then had her baby taken away from her. She continues, saying that she knows Leo has made changes in his life, but that he still owes immense debts to her, and to all the men and women he has arrested, for his attempts at redemption – solving real crimes and adopting two beautiful young girls – mean nothing to Anisya.

She orders Leo to strip down to his pants, telling him the cold is nothing compared to where Lazar ended up in Kolyma. She then strips down herself, to reveal her torso and breasts covered in tattoos. They illustrate her life's story, from a pregnant woman on her stomach to a cross between her breasts symbolizing that she is the "Thief-in-Law" to a lion under her breast which signifies revenge. She tells Leo that he needs to free Lazar. She then kisses his cheek, which turns into a blood-drawing bite, and tells Leo that if he does not free Lazar, she will kill Zoya.

Three Weeks Later, Western Pacific Ocean, Soviet Territorial Waters, Sea of Okhotsk, Stary Bolshevik Prison Ship, 7 April, 1956 – 27-year-old Officer Genrikh Duvkin stands on the deck of the Dutch steamer-turned-prison ship, Stary Bolshevik. Though Gerinkh has not read the so-called Secret Speech, he is aware of major changes taking place since Stalin's death – of thousands of prisoners freed, and others intended for prison, promptly turned back home. His current load of prisoners, some 500, bound for Kolyma, is four times less than what it had been under Stalin. Only the most violent and dangerous criminals are not sent to places like Kolyma. Among those prisoners below deck is Leo.

Same Day – Leo considers the knowledge that the wife of a priest could rise to be the leader of a gang, and lose her morality and soul in the process. A few weeks ago, Anisya's demand could have been met, but following the Secret Speech, and Fraera's gang's murder of numerous officials, such a possibility is now impossible. Her actions are considered counterrevolutionary. Khrushchev, though he lets up on political dissent, does not let up on religious dissent, needing to control religious institutions to help control the people. The priest-husband of a counterrevolutionary gang leader and terrorist could never be released. No matter what happens to Zoya, Fraera must die. The largest manhunt in history is underway for her and her gang. Panin realizes that Lazar is their only leverage against Fraera, and that, while he cannot be released officially, a breakout could be staged under the protection of those higher up in power. Getting Leo into prison will be easy. Getting him out will be difficult. The ship then stalls, having run into ice.

Same Day – Genrikh rushes to inspect the hull after colliding with a mass of ice, but there appears to be no damage. Gerinkh is not worried about the ice, but was once worried about the other guards on the ship. The guards arranged deals with criminal gangs on the ships: political information on prisoners below in exchange for women. Sometimes the women went willingly in exchange for food; other times, they refused – but they are always raped in the end. The criminals and the guards both took turns with



the women. Only Gerinkh ever refused to participate, leading to seven years of chilly relations between him and the guards. All of these guards have since been replaced, and Gerinkh no longer worries about being turned on. He tries to become friendly with the new guards, sharing a cigarette with Iakov Messing, a hulk of a man. It is Nesterov in disguise. Gerinkh pretends he took part in the rapes of women in order to be accepted by Messing, but Nesterov looks at Gerinkh as nothing more than a cruel child. Overhead, Gerinkh and Nesterov see a storm coming on.

Same Day – Leo hears rain slamming against the deck above. One of the criminal prisoners asks about who Leo is, knowing that he is not a political prisoner, but owing to his exercising, knows he is not a criminal gang member, either. The man threatens to know at the point of a knife. The ship begins to rock violently in the storm, and the prisoners, including Leo, are all knocked to the floor. It is during this time that the criminal prisoners break apart the wooden partition that separates them from the engine room, from which the crew's quarters and the captain's deck could be reached. The man who had attempted to stab Leo, the leader of the mutiny, orders his men to take the ship.

Same Day – Nesterov, along with the other guards, scramble to keep the mutinous prisoners below deck. They battle the prisoners with fists and guns to lock access doors and keep the prisoners confined. In the scuffle, a door to the sea is opened, and much water floods the ship before the door is shut by Nesterov.

Same Day – Leo stands in ankle-deep water. He knows the coal must be kept dry and the engines running to make sure the ship continues moving, to avoid capsizing. The leader of the mutiny, however, has a different idea. He takes the coal shovel and begins wailing away at the deck hatch, causing the steel to buckle. Leo tries to explain that if the deck is torn open, nothing can seal it, and the ship will sink. However, the criminal is shot to death as he attempts to break through. Leo knows then that he must act, or the ship will be lost.

Same Day – Having originally hidden during the attempted mutiny, Genrikh redeems himself by killing the prisoner who tried to break through the hatch. Genrikh considers himself a hero, but Nesterov knows that holes in the deck cannot be repaired, and water will continue to flood in. He shakes Genrikh and takes away his ammunition. Genrikh is then washed overboard.

Ten Kilometers North of Moscow, 8 April – Zoya is blindfolded, gagged, and bound with wire coil in a truck. Zoya wonders who has kidnapped her and why, but is not concerned with her situation. She had felt a prisoner before with Leo, and now merely feels a prisoner with someone else. No matter what she does, she cannot cry, and wonders why. She hopes Raisa and Elena are okay, but feels emotionally detached in this thinking. The truck stops, and Zoya is brought out, and her blindfold and coil removed to see woodland and stretch. Her two captors watch her. The natural world reminds her of her childhood on the farm, which she desperately wants to forget. She wants to die so that she will forget. One of the two captors, short and fat, approaches her, intending to rape her, telling her that submission is what young girls do best. Zoya runs and tries to



start the truck, but the man chases her. His ankle is slashed by the other captor, an older boy, rendering the fat man useless. Zoya thanks the boy, but the boy says he would have killed Zoya if Fraera had ordered it. She asks his name, and he hesitatingly gives it as Malysh. The wounded man on the ground tells Malysh he'll be killed by the others when they hear what he has done. Malysh then decides to continue escorting Zoya, saying that if she lets go of his hand, he will slit her throat.

Pacific Coast, Kolyma, The Port of Magadan, Stary Bolshevik Prison Ship, Same Day – His body numb from icy water, Leo continues to feed the coal engine to keep the ship running. In port, the prisoners are rounded up on deck. Leo is relieved to see Nesterov has survived. Leo sees the prisoners who have been freed, waiting on the docks to be sent home. They look like diseased skeletons. Nesterov, meanwhile, learns from Regional Director Abel Present that he will be replacing Gerinkh for two to three weeks while a replacement guard is found, rather than becoming the second-in-command at Gulag 57.

Analysis

The dual theme of justice and revenge comes center stage as the thousands of people returning home from the camps daily increase the threat level against people like Leo and Panin, as well as the State itself. One such individual seeking revenge against Leo for his past sins is Fraera, a woman he himself put away as his first arrest. Zoya is a part of her revenge scheme. Zoya's kidnapping affects Leo tremendously, and on a very personal level. He has come to love Zoya like a father, and will do anything to see about her safety and her care. The problem, however, comes in the fact that Zoya wants nothing to do with him or the family he is trying to keep together. Even being kidnapped is something Zoya seems to prefer over having to remain with Leo. Indeed, Zoya's demand that Raisa leaves Leo is staggering – but Raisa's loyal and loving defense of her husband is equally as staggering to Raisa. Zoya's kidnapping also has far greater repercussions for the State at large. Panin explains that reprisals and revenge run the day, and the people in power are scared of the masses. The situation could easily get worse, and expand, with reprisals becoming widespread if Zoya's kidnapping and the murders Leo is tasked with solving are left unchecked. There is great irony, here, in Leo having to defend the indefensible, that should not be missed by the reader.

Here, redemption also comes back to the fore. Leo, meeting with Fraera, is told by Fraera that she knows he has changed his life, and made efforts to right the wrongs of the past – but that it will never be enough. Fraera has been subsumed by hatred and a desire for revenge that far exceeds even cruelty. She wants to make people, including Leo, suffer for all they have done. Leo realizes – as does Panin – that even a handful of people like Fraera will be enough to destabilize the system, or to incite similar acts on a wider basis. Fraera, however, has a condition for Leo: She will release Zoya if Leo will release Lazar – Fraera's husband, also put away by Leo seven years before. Leo is stunned by the request, but has no choice but to accede to it. Leo is desperate to protect Zoya, and nothing will stop him from at least trying to save her, no matter how much she hates him. Here, the theme of family can again be glimpsed in the strength of



Leo's love for Zoya, and the theme of redemption can be glimpsed in that same struggle to make things right for her – as right as they can possibly be given the situation.

It is through the events of the novel so far, as well as through the themes of justice and revenge, family, and redemption, that the theme of morality can be seen. Leo, once a legal absolutist, meaning that the State and the law reigned supreme and were always right even if the law or the acts Leo carried out under the law to protect the State were immoral, has become a moral absolutist. This means that there is right and wrong, and there is good and evil, and just because something is legal doesn't make it morally right. Leo now seeks to do the right thing no matter what the law says, and no matter if it will cost him his own life. His journey to redemption is a moral transformation, while Fraera's journey for revenge is a moral disfiguration. Fraera was once a sweet, kind, and moral woman who, through her wrongful imprisonment, gave in to hate and anger and the desire for revenge. She will stop at nothing for revenge. The reader should give note to the irony here, of the wife of a priest – the most morally-driven character aside from Lazar, the priest – has become the most immoral of all. And therein is the issue: she is driven not by seeking genuine justice, but crass vengeance. She has become like her enemies, and in so doing, no longer holds the moral high ground against the State. She has lost her soul.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it so important to Panin that Leo solves the murders and deals with Fraera appropriately? What consequences could failure have?

Discussion Question 2

Fraera is motivated by a need for revenge against all those who have harmed her. Do you believe she is right in doing so, especially given how she has gone about seeking revenge? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

For what reasons is Leo so determined to save Zoya, despite Zoya's hatred toward Leo?

Vocabulary

engender, ironically, authoritative, resilience, reconstituted, primeval, feral, excruciating, stupefied, autonomous, indifferent, subterranean



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Summary

Moscow, Same Day – A court-like hearing is held between Malysh and Likhoi, the fat man, with Fraera presiding, and the other gang members observing. Likhoi says all he wanted was sex, and asks for Malysh's death. Malysh says that he was told to keep Zoya safe, which he did. Malysh wonders if Fraera has the power to overrule the majority who want him dead. He knows it will be a risky thing to do, since he is a common street criminal, not a hardened criminal who has spent time in the gulags with the other members of the gang, brought on because he was the only pickpocket to have ever given Fraera the slip.

Fraera explains to all assembled that punishment for harming another gang member is death. Death here means exile, and a tattoo of an open vagina or anus forced onto the guilty party's face or hands, exposing him to physical and sexual torment from any gangs that came across him. Fraera herself has become a hardened woman, the first descending step being the forcible taking of her infant son, Aleksy, from her. Deciding to exact revenge on the State and Leo, she used her body to her advantage, getting in good with the gang at her Gulag, and then seducing the Gulag commander to transfer the entire gang so she could start her own. Her plan was to then use her gang against the State – a rival and more powerful gang, in her mind. Leo is one of many that must suffer as she has suffered. Released early from prison following Stalin's death, and reborn as Fraera, Fraera had hunted down hidden icons to secretly sell to the West for money to run her criminal group, and killing to cement her power. Now presiding over a trial that endangers her plans, Likhoi challenges her leadership. Fraera reminds them that she is the one who brought them together and gave them food, shelter, and work. She leaves it up to the gang to decide what to do. They turn on Likhoi, burning him, and Malysh himself cuts the tattoos off of Likhoi – injuries which will assure his literal death. Zoya is relieved to hear Likhoi screaming from her cell, rather than Malysh.

Kolyma, Fifty Kilometers North of the Port of Magadan, Seven Kilometers South of Gulag 57, 9 April – Leo and the convoy of prisoners drive up into the mountains toward Kolyma. He sees how superior the guards act, knowing they are working for the State handling prisoners of the State. Leo knows Nesterov is not among them, or he would have made contact sooner. Leo can only imagine Nesterov has been delayed by some circumstance. Leo wonders how Lazar will react to him. Lazar might kill Leo himself, or tell the other prisoners who Leo was – and let them kill him. The convoy of trucks then enters Kolyma.

Same Day – Leo and the prisoners are herded along for inspection. Leo then sees the camp's commander, Zhores Sinyavksy, known for cruelty and efficiency. He hands out purple flowers to the prisoners, and insists that Leo himself will grow a patch. Leo is stunned. This does not seem to be the same man he has heard and read about. Sinyavksy then offers each of the prisoners small tin cups full of khoya, made from pine



needle and rose water, a healthy tonic rich in vitamins. Sinyavksy says that his job is to help the prisoners become productive citizens. Their welfare is his welfare. Leo then recognizes the prisoner handing out cups of khoya.

Same Day – Lazar is the prisoner handing out cups of khoya. He is a thin, gaunt version of his former self. The prisoners, after their drinks, are then herded into the prisoner barracks.

Same Day – Leo is knocked to the ground by a crowd, and sees a red-bearded man of about 30 watching with Lazar. Lazar, barely able to speak, calls Leo “Maxim”, and Leo begins to cry. Lazar has the bearded man translate into words his whispers, telling Leo he had been trusted. Leo explains that he has no defense for his actions, but says Lazar’s wife has sent him to free Lazar. Leo explains Anisya’s transformation, the kidnapping of Zoya, and needing to escape with Lazar. A crowd gathers around ready to further beat up Leo, but Lazar gestures them to stay back. It is explained by the red-bearded man that Lazar will not be fooled again. Leo says that Lazar has a son, and Lazar is unbelieving. The red-bearded man introduces himself as Georgi Vavilov, Lazar’s voice, and says that Lazar is his mentor. He serves as the camp’s priest, free to talk about God without fear from the State. Leo says he can get Georgi out, too, but Georgi does not believe him. Georgi says that men like Leo thrive on people’s weakness, and that Lazar believes it is divine justice that Leo has been sent to the camps, that judgment shall be passed on Leo by the men he once passed judgment on. An elderly man is brought forward who explains that three years before, he met the man who interrogated him. The prisoners decide that the man will be allowed to live, if he can survive all the tortures inflicted on the prisoners. By the thirtieth torture, the man ran towards the guards, causing them to shoot him. The elderly man explains Leo will face his first torture that night.

Kolyma, Thirty Kilometers North of the Port of Magadan, Seventeen Kilometers South of Gulag 57, 10 April – Nesterov pretends to be an incognito member of the MVD, seeking out how changes are being implemented following Khrushchev’s speech, and the captain of the Stary Bolshevik believes it. He then goes to see Regional Director Abel Present, playing the same card. Present immediately becomes submissive. He arranges a ride for Nesterov to Kolyma. While guiding the truck along through a foggy pass over a bridge, the guards attempt to run over Nesterov, but merely clip him with the truck, sending him crashing down below onto the ice. The guards shout down that they did what they were told to do, and they won’t have any reports jeopardizing their lives or their careers. One of the guards then pushes Nesterov into the exposed part of the river, and takes his smashed-up watch as a souvenir.

Moscow, Same Day – Elena asks every day when Zoya is coming home, and Raisa always responds that it will be soon. Raisa is slowly recovering, and Leo’s parents tend to her and to Elena. In the time that Leo and Zoya have been gone, Raisa has taken to sleeping in Zoya’s bed. While Elena is out with Stepan and Anna, Fraera comes to see Raisa. Raisa asks about Zoya, and Fraera says that Zoya is fine. She criticizes the attempts of Leo and Raisa to cobble together a family based on murder and lies. Raisa explains she has come to love Leo because he is not the same man who once arrested



her. Raisa says she will not defend the things that Leo once did. Fraera then kisses Raisa, and says that she can taste Raisa's love for Leo – and Raisa's hatred of Fraera. Raisa says this is because her child has been stolen. Fraera says Zoya is not her child. Fraera goes on to say that Zoya has held a knife above Leo while he has slept – something Raisa did not know, but then realizes this is why he must have been so shaken around the time he dealt with Nikolai. Fraera repeats Zoya's offer: if Zoya is returned, Raisa and the girls must never see Leo again. It is Leo or the girls.

Kolyma, Gulag 57, Same Day – Leo struggles to work the next day after torture of being forced to spend the night on his kneecaps, leaving them swollen and bruised horrendously. Leo clings to hope that Nesterov will arrive sooner rather than later. That night, he is stripped naked and tied up with wet towels, including around his ribs, which when dry, shrink and exert tremendous pressure on him. While this occurs, Lazar personally speaks to Leo, his voice nothing more than a faint whisper. The next morning, knowing he is running out of time, Leo shouts out at the camp commander, Sinyavksy, that he knows about Khrushchev's Secret Speech. Sinyavksy orders the guards to bring him Leo.

Same Day – Sinyavsky confronts Leo, saying he knows that Leo is a spy sent to report on the progress of camp reforms, like his friend, who has been executed. Leo is stunned. Sinyavksy explains that the guards would never allow themselves to be judged, and so made sure Leo's friend could never write the report. Leo realizes that he has thought little about Nesterov's safety in his own pursuit of getting Zoya back, and realizes that Nesterov – a good man dearly loved by his family – is dead. Leo begins to cry. He is amazed to look up and see that Sinyavksy is also crying. Leo realizes that Sinyavksy is also a man tormented by guilt, and is no longer truly in command of the camp. While the State has ordered reforms, the guards do not wish to be held accountable for what they were ordered to do. Leo asks if the loudspeaker to the camp can be turned on.

Same Day – Lazar considers everything that Leo has told him – from Anisya to his son – but determines that Leo is a liar and cannot be trusted again. Suddenly, the speakers in the camp come on, and Khrushchev's Secret Speech is read aloud by the camp commander. The entire prison population stops to listen to the criticisms of Stalin, and the crimes of the State committed against the people. Lazar notices the guards becoming nervous. They then move against the commander's room, firing at the door. The reading stops, and the prisoners begin stomping their feet, demanding more. Sinyavksy and Leo hear the commotion. Sinyavsky then begins giving his own speech, admitting his own mistakes and crimes of the past. Sinyavsky asks directly for forgiveness. Outside, one of the guards moves to cut the wire to end the speech. The prisons bar his way. Warning shots are fired, and the prisoners drop to the knees, refusing to move. The prisoners then surge forward, and all-out battle for the camp commences. It is do or die. The camp commander moves from his own confessional back to the Speech, while Leo grabs the commander's hunting rifle and fires it to distract the machine gunners in the guard towers. This allows the prisoners to light them on fire. Sinyavksy is shot in the shoulder, and then prisoners break into the room,



bringing Leo and Sinyavksy outside. They watch as smoke billows up from the burning guard towers, a physical sign of what has occurred at the camp to anyone miles around.

Same Day – Though Malysh cannot read, he looks over a list of names of people Fraera has singled out for murder, their addresses, and descriptions of their crimes. He then goes to watch Zoya sleep in her cell. Malysh has never before had sex. Fraera approaches, and asks Zoya if she wishes to accompany Malysh on his next murder job. Malysh thinks Zoya will be useless, however, because she is just a girl.

Kolyma, Gulag 57, Same Day – The surviving guards and personnel, some 50 men, are rounded up and forced to sit in a group. Leo is forced to sit with them. Leo can see there are three groups of prisoners, and three leaders. There is Lazar and his contingent of older prisoners. There is a young, handsome man who leads the younger prisoners. And there is the third leader, a criminal gang member, who leads the thieves and murderers. Georgi speaks for Lazar, addressing the prisoners, saying that they must protect and ration food supplies and establish armed lookout positions. The young group of prisoners disagreed, saying they are entitled to whatever they want, as compensation for all they have lost and suffered. The criminal group insists disobedience must be tolerated. A fourth, scattered group also emerges, of prisoners running amok from building to building, drinking vodka, taking morphine, and behaving as anarchists. Lazar argues that survival is key, and that they must keep order. The young man in charge of the young prisoners agrees to cooperate in exchange for justice against the guards. They, and Leo, are to be placed on trial. One of Lazar's followers, a lawyer, establishes procedures. Camp medical staff and former prisoners who work for the camp administration are exempt. The steps to the commander's office will serve as a degree of the severity of the crimes. For each valid crime a guard commits, he will take one step up. If he reaches the top, he is to be executed. There are thirteen steps.

Commander Sinyavksy is called first. A chorus of crimes rises up. Sinyavsky agrees that he should take a step up for every crime –but also should be allowed to take a step down for the good things he has done. For example, he takes a step up for a prisoner who lost his toe to frostbite for working in inhumane conditions, but takes a step down for making sure to supplement the man's own wages to send back to his wife so she had enough money for their family. The prisoner admits this is true. However, most prisoners refuse to agree to allow people to take steps down, so Sinyavksy heads to the top of the stairs. He takes out a purple flower, and is summarily executed by the prisoners who are armed. Leo is then called next. At the top of the stairs, Lazar shouts for things to stop. Georgi brings Leo a letter stripped from a guard. The letter is written by Fraera, and was previously carried by Nesterov. The letter, Leo realizes, must have been stripped from Leo's body. Leo confirms that Fraera is alive. Lazar asks that Leo be spared.

Moscow, Same Day – Zoya and Malysh sit side-by-side on the roof of Apartment Block 424. Malysh has orders to kill Marina Niurina. Zoya asks what the woman's crimes are, but Malysh says he doesn't know, but they were written down on a list. Zoya realizes Malysh can't read. They sneak into the apartment, where Marina confronts Malysh with a gun. Zoya hides as Marina forces Malysh back at gunpoint. Zoya then attacks, and



she and Malysh overpower the woman, who fires a shot into the wall. Guards come rushing up the stairs. Malysh digs his fingers into Marina's eyes, and then he and Zoya rush to escape by leaping onto the roof of the next apartment building. Below them, dozens of uniformed men have surrounded Marina's building – a trap. The run through the hallways shouting "Fire!" which causes all of the residents to come swarming out in a panic. Along with the people, Malysh and Zoya are able to bypass the soldiers, and make into the sewers. There, Zoya uses some of her shirt to bandage Malysh's finger, which has become bloodied in the escape from Marina. Both of them begin to laugh.

Kolyma, Gulag 57, 12 April – Leo and other prisoners watch as some 500 soldiers, along with tanks, set up a temporary military encampment to rival the prison camp. Leo knows they cannot hold out against such strength. Leo cautions them that even though things have changed in Moscow, authorities elsewhere are desperate to retain control and suppress their crimes, thereby protecting themselves. The military camp contacts the prison camp by radio. The leader of the young group responds, demanding justice as pertains to the Secret Speech. At Leo's insistence, the young leader reveals that the guards are alive, and are being treated humanely. Leo insists the injured guards be sent over for medical attention as a sign of proof of life. Leo and Lazar will go with them. Lazar explains that Leo is the only person who can reunite him with his wife. As Leo helps to load the six most seriously injured guards into a truck, he notices one of them is wearing Nesterov's old watch – a family heirloom meant for his sons. Leo takes the watch, and presses his knee down onto the man's stomach, causing blood to appear at his nose and mouth, and killing him. The man is replaced with another guard who has faked his injuries. Leo allows the man to pass. Leo, Lazar, and Georgi then change into guard uniforms and drive toward the military camp. Unknown to Leo and the others, the young group commander has refused to send word that a shipment of sick and wounded are coming across the field. He intends to make an example out of Lazar, for not having the stomach for a fight.

Same Day – Leo drives toward the military encampment slowly. He, Lazar, and Georgi are stunned when the military encampment begins firing mortar shells at them. None hit the truck. Two tanks then roll into position, aiming for the truck. Leo stops the truck, jumps out, climbs onto the roof of the truck, and begins waving his uniform jacket. The tanks do not destroy the truck. One of the tank operators asks why a radio message was not sent. Leo, realizing what must have happened, invents the story that the prisoners deliberately wanted the military encampment to fire at, and kill their own men. Leo then meets with Abel Present, who recognizes having briefly met Leo before. Present explains there was never any choice in negotiating with the prisoners. They must die, or similar uprisings will happen at other camps. A plane drops a crate of poisoned food for the prisoners. The poison doesn't show immediate symptoms, but takes six hours to drug a person into unconsciousness, and ten hours to death. Present explains this must be done without Moscow's knowledge. Leo then realizes that Present must have been the man to order Nesterov's death. Leo pretends it is an excellent plan, and tells Present just that. Leo wants revenge on Present, but Lazar tells him that people don't always get what they deserve.



Same Day – The plan is for the military to storm the prison after the poison has taken effect. The antidote will be administered to any guards who have eaten the food, and some of the prisoners, in order to avoid accusations of a massacre should word get out. After Leo, Lazar, and Georgi leave, the guard who faked his injuries to get on the truck goes and seeks out Present.

Same Day – Leo drives toward Magadan, exhausted. Suddenly, flares light up the night sky, and headlights appear along the road in both directions. Leo knows they are being searched for. Georgi says he long ago accepted the fact that he would never leave Kolyma, and now instructs Leo and Lazar to run away while Georgi causes a distraction. Leo and Lazar make a beeline for the nearby airstrip, where they commandeer a twin engine Ilyushin Il-12 – a plane prearranged to wait for Leo on Frol Panin's orders. They cannot wait for the pilot and copilot, who are eating dinner in town. Leo instead orders a young guard named Konstantin ordered to wait with the plane to become his pilot. Konstantin only has a rough knowledge of planes, but agrees when he realizes that he, too, will be killed unless he gets them out of there. Miraculously, the plane manages to take off successfully as soldiers begin rushing for it.

Moscow, Same Day – Panin calls Raisa to explain that Leo is on his way back with Lazar. Panin says they will be back in Moscow in five hours, and that Fraera has been contacted to set up an exchange. Raisa lights a red candle so it can be seen from the street – a sign that Raisa has accepted Zoya's offer to leave Leo.

Same Day – Fraera asks Malysh if he will do anything she orders him to do. She tells him about how the Nartian people will spend their lives seeking to avenge wrongs committed against them and their families, no matter how ancient the issue. One such Nartian epic story has to do with a man named Soslan who seeks revenge his entire life. Fraera says that she had hoped Malysh's new name, when he came of age, would be Soslan. She then puts Malysh in Zoya's cell, and pulls Zoya out of the cell, locking Malysh in.

Analysis

The time that Leo spends in the Kalyma camp gives him firsthand experience to the atrocities that were once carried out there, as Lazar and the other prisoners seek to impose the same kinds of torture that Leo and his kind once imposed on them. Lazar, though hardened, has not become cruel the way that Fraera has. Ultimately, he decides to save Leo – an act of genuineness, and of irony, of the victim saving the perpetrator. Lazar recognizes that there is good in Leo, and realizes, as a Christian, that all men are deserving of forgiveness if they genuinely seek it. Leo's journey to find Lazar, including risking his life in doing so, moves Lazar deeply. If there is anyone who can understand the seeking of redemption and forgiveness, it is a priest like Lazar. However, this does not stop the prisoners from seeking to exact revenge on the camp commander and the camp guards.



It is through the prisoners and their appetite for revenge that the line between genuine justice and revenge becomes blurred. Leo has been spared by Lazar, who knows that he, himself, has found justice in Leo's suffering and search for redemption. The rest of the prisoners are not as forgiving. Their decision to summarily try and execute the camp commander, and several other guards, speaks to their becoming like their enemies, and like Fraera, losing their souls. The camp commander, Sinyavksy, has long been hated by the prisoners for committing unspeakable acts of cruelty against them. The prisoners are justified in their anger and their desire that just desserts be meted out; but they descend to the level of their enemies in their treatment of the guards. Leo recognizes in Sinyavksy, as he did in Suren, Panin, and Nikolai, a kindred spirit who was forced to act in desperate ways in desperate times. Sinyavksy is well aware of his sins, but does not bother trying to excuse them. As the regimes change, so does he. While he does not seek to excuse himself, he does seek forgiveness. In the past few years, Sinyavksy has done everything within his power to change things, to make the camp better, to treat the prisoners humanely, but it is not enough. Even his personal acts of kindness and his request for forgiveness is not enough to spare him from being executed. The prisoners further show their barbarity when they refuse to radio in to the military encampment to let them know that wounded guards are on their way over, hoping that Leo, Lazar, Georgi, and the injured soldiers will all be killed.

Here again, the question of the theme of morality comes to the fore. While Sinyavksy has been seeking forgiveness, the guards and regional political apparatus as sought to protect itself from the reform, knowing that they did as they were instructed under Stalin, and now, with the Secret Speech, are themselves exposed to reprisals. In so doing, Nesterov is executed, for he is believed to be a spy for Moscow. The guards know it is do or die. If they admit to wrongdoing, they will become the victims of the prisoners' acts of revenge. If they continue to keep a tight control on the situation, they will be safe. They have created a fire, and now are doing whatever they can to contain it. However, the prisoners refuse to accept their present circumstances, and so they rebel. While Lazar shows a strong sense of morality in sparing Leo, the prisoners themselves show that they, like Fraera, have ceded the moral high ground by descending to the level of the State to deal with the guards. A question of genuine, moral justice has become an issue of wanton cruelty and chaos. While neither the guards, nor the prisoners are without fault, it is the overall system of Communism which has enabled such barbarity and cruelty that is ultimately to blame. Communism has taken away the freedom of all citizens – soldiers and prisoners – to behave freely and responsibly, and made them utterly servile to the State and its aspects.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Lazar grant Leo mercy? If you were Lazar, would you have granted Leo mercy? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Sinyavksy seek forgiveness from the prisoners? Why is he so haunted by the past?

Discussion Question 3

How does Present respond to the Kolyma camp uprising? Why? Do you believe he is justified in doing so? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

abidance, meekly, perilously, gelatinous, edifice, perpetuate, obsequiously, meditative, melancholic, deluded, vigor, incrementally, emaciated, ambiguous, anarchy, insurrection, trajectory, involuntarily, ingenuity, adamant, rudimentary



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Summary

Same Day – The plane comes down in a crash landing. Leo hits his forehead and, bleeding, is a little dazed, but waves away medical attention as Frol Panin approaches. He introduces himself to Lazar, shakes his hand, and explains the situation. A map with an inked Crucifix is shown to Leo, having been given to the State Security by Fraera, but the State Security forces could not find anything at the location. Raisa, who was supposed to meet the plane, has instead gone out on her own. Leo is alarmed, believing Fraera to be involved with Raisa's disappearance. The car in which they drive stops in the middle of the Moskvoretskaya Naberezhnaya Road, as indicated on the map. Leo realizes the Crucifix indicates the position of a manhole cover. Leo and Lazar descend into the sewers. Panin wishes them luck. Leo and Lazar move through the sewers, moving through a door marked with a hanging lantern. They are searched by a gang member before continuing on, with the gang member explaining the tunnels they are in are part of the spetztunnel, which runs from the Kremlin to Ramenkoye, an underground town fifty kilometers away, to be used by the Soviet leaders in the event of a Western attack. Leo and Lazar are then sent up into Taganskaya metro station, where Lazar spots a woman standing in the middle of a bridge over the river. It is Raisa.

Raisa immediately wants to know why Leo never told her about Zoya and the knife. Leo says he panicked and wanted a chance to put things right before telling her. Raisa tells Leo there is no way that Fraera will allow Zoya to be handed over to him. A car appears, out of which Fraera steps. She and Lazar walk toward each other. Lazar is stunned at her transformation. She tells Lazar that his wife is dead, and that their son is dead. She then shoots Lazar in the stomach, killing him. Leo is incredulous. She then orders Leo and Raisa to get in the car. The backseat is blocked by a grate, behind which a gagged and tied-up Zoya. Zoya is then pulled out of the car, put into a weighted grain sack, and pushed into the river. Two motorcycles then arrive, and Fraera gets onto the back of one and taking off. Leo then hotwires the car, crashes into the side of the bridge to tear open the door. Both Leo and Raisa jump into the river after Zoya. But the current is too strong, and the river is too dark to find Zoya.

Five Months Later, Moscow, 20 October – Filipp is a 47-year-old baker who cannot eat solid food due to his stomach being pock-marked with ulcers formed from fear during Stalin's reign. Filipp's conscience is clear: he has never denounced anyone, his family is safe, and he is alive. His talents have been recognized by the State, and his bakery is being expanded to the entire building, including the floor designated as a button factory. Going upstairs, Filipp meets Leo, who now very thin, is slumped against the far wall. Everything related to Leo's homicide department has been taken away and burned. Filipp gives Leo a loaf of bread, and shakes his hand, apologizing for having never spoken to him before. Leo explains the truth of the button factory guise to Filipp. The department has been closed down, and Leo has been designated to join the KGB.



Same Day – Raisa brings Elena to the Serbsky Institute, a psychiatric center, seeking help for Elena who has been withdrawn, unresponsive, desolate, and has refused to talk after Zoya's death. Love has not been enough to help Elena cope. Raisa fears Elena is dying. Leo opposes seeking out help, his experience with places like the Serbsky Institute having to do more with politics and putting people away rather than genuine medical help. Raisa, however, has been bringing Elena to regular meetings with Dr. Stavsky without Leo's knowledge. Stavsky, recommended by friends, has agreed to see Elena without creating an official record. However, without improvement, Elena, made a ward of Raisa by the State, is now being taken back by the State. She will be admitted to a hospital in the city of Kazan. Stavsky explains the situation to Elena with one final chance at avoiding what is to come. All it will take is for Elena to say "no", but Elena says nothing at all.

Same Day – Leo visits Nesterov's widow, Inessa, regularly. He brings her a loaf of bread. Nesterov's sons, Efim and Vadim, are always happy to see Leo, understanding that Nesterov and Leo had been good friends, though they do not know all the details of how Nesterov had died trying to right the wrongs of Leo's past. Leo knows that eventually, Nesterov's sons will find out, and stop being happy to see him. At home, Leo is surprised to find that Raisa and Elena are not home. The security guards there have seen nothing out of the ordinary. Leo does not worry that Fraera is involved, for she hasn't been heard from since Zoya's murder. Leo has been hurt exactly as Fraera intended. Raisa then returns home, and explains what has happened to Elena. Raisa is recovering from having been sedated while trying to fight Stavsky and his men from taking away Elena. Leo smashes a mirror in anger. He knows that the charade of family is over, that he and Raisa will not last, and that he will once again become an instrument of the State. He has never been a hero, a father, or a husband, as he had hoped.

Same Day – Stepan and Anna arrive to help Leo and Raisa get themselves together. Leo then tells Raisa he needs her help. With Panin out of the city on business, Leo turns to his former commander, Major Grachev, for help. Leo and Raisa are stunned to discover that Grachev, a man for moderate reform, has been exiled to a small town without explanation. His wife and son have left him out of mutual agreement and practicality so Grachev's exile will not harm his son's ambitions. Nevertheless, Grachev hears Leo and Raisa out about Zoya and Fraera, and the entire situation. Grachev reveals that Zoya's death not only mattered to Leo and Raisa, but to the State. With hundreds of thousands of prisoners returning home, the penchant for reprisal, revenge, and Fraera-like situations has already begun to grind the wheels of reform to a halt. People are now openly criticizing the government, challenging authority, and seeking revenge. A civil war may erupt. Countries under Communist control, such as Poland and in Eastern Europe, are simmering in anti-Soviet sentiments, having learned of the Secret Speech. The Americans are printing the speech in their newspapers as proof of Soviet-Communist atrocities. Following Zoya's murder, all those pressing for reform within the State have now been silenced in one way or another, including Grachev. The State must crack down or risk open war and revenge attacks. The Speech has been rewritten to gloss over the past. For example, Stalin is no longer referred to as a murderer, but as a man who simply made errors. Major mistakes are minor, and not the



fault of the Communist State, but Stalin. Passages relating to murder and torture have been removed entirely. Grachev argues that he and Leo, and the reformists, moved too far too fast, and underestimated the State and the establishment. Leo explains that he is being forced to rejoin the KGB. Grachev explains that this is a potent act of symbolism – the reformer returning to the traditional State. Grachev warns Leo to be careful, and to play along. Outside the apartment, Leo takes Raisa's hand and tells her he has been blind.

Blizhnya Dacha, Kuntsevo, Twenty Kilometers West of Moscow, 21 October – It Panin's second visit to Blizhnya Dacha, one of Stalin's former residences opened up as a retreat to members of the ruling elite. To Panin, the Dacha is a symbol of the horrors of the past, and making it a vacation spot will not change the fact. Panin's two sons are asleep, but Nina is awake, unharmed but unnerved, with Leo sitting beside her. Leo had realized that Fraera is working with Panin –and Panin admits this. He explains that Fraera had approached him seeking revenge on Leo, and knowing about the struggle between traditionalists and reformists in the Party. Fraera agreed to allow her use of murder to create fear, while she would be granted the freedom to exact revenge. Lazar was merely a pretext to getting Leo to suffer and to get both Leo and Nesterov out of the city. They were too good at what they did. Panin and his circles worked to make sure the KGB never got close to Fraera. Panin himself removed Grachev and arranged it so that he became Leo's closest advisor and friend. The plan was only put into effect when the Secret Speech was put out in the public. Panin argues that the reforms went too far, too fast, and were too hasty for comfort or for safety. The ruling Party members would be massacred. But what has occurred so far in the way of reform has been dangerous, and so Panin has shifted to favoring a return to rule with an iron fist. Mistakes cannot be admitted, and the State will never be loved, so it must be feared.

Leo wants revenge on Fraera, now that Panin has what he wanted. Panin says that he will arrange to have Elena returned to Leo and Raisa, and that he will give Leo whatever job Leo wants wherever he wants to go. He explains that Fraera is now in charge of a KGB cell in Eastern Europe, which will design and incite a manufactured uprising, which the Communist State will then crush. There will be numerous such uprisings that will be crushed, symbolizing Soviet rule and power. Panin warns against revenge on Fraera, because Fraera can still hurt Leo even more. Zoya is alive.

Soviet-Controlled Eastern Europe, Hungary, Budapest, 22 October – Zoya carries ammunition to the drop point of the Operahaz, dressed like a college-age student rather than a 14-year-old girl. She reflects on events of months before. The night that Zoya and Malysh were swapped in her cell, Zoya believed she would be executed. Having come to like Malysh, she called out his name, saying she had romantic feelings for him. Fraera then offered Zoya the chance to remain alive and be together with Malysh, if she could pass a test. Zoya pretended to be terrified the night at the exchange on the bridge. Inside the grain sack, made waterproof with wax, Malysh had been waiting with a knife. At the bottom of the river, Malysh had cut open the sack, and he and Zoya swam to shore to meet Fraera, while Leo and Raisa screamed in search of Zoya. Now a member of the KGB cell helping to manufacture an uprising, Zoya delivers her payload of bullets to an individual waiting with a bag at the Operahaz. Zoya has learned that all



countries under Soviet control, like Hungary, were witness to the same Communist brutality as Russia, and that these countries are pressing for independence. Russia had the KGB; Hungary had the AVH. While returning, Zoya is caught up in a pro-Hungarian demonstration, which is then targeted by members of the AVH. A trapped, forgotten bullet falls out of Zoya's jacket, leading the AVH officers to target her. A woman gets in between Zoya and the officers, waving a Hungarian flag with the Soviet hammer and sickle cut out of it. Zoya dashes away to the apartments kept by Fraera and the members of the uprising. Only four of them are original gang members who have remained with Fraera out of loyalty, the rest having decided to remain in Russia. Zoya explains what has happened to Fraera. Fraera recognizes the cut flag as a sign. She orders her Hungarian translator, a student named Zsolt Polgar, to gather up as many Hungarian flags as possible, and to cut the hammer and sickle out of all of them. Zoya then stops Malysh from smoking a cigarette, saying it makes him smell. Fraera recognizes that Zoya is unhappy. Zoya explains that the woman with the flag had saved her life. Fraera tells Zoya to prepare, that many innocent people are about to lose their lives.

Same Day – Fraera leaves the apartment, picking up a leaflet in the gutter which advocates for reform based on 16 points for change. It had been formulated yesterday at Fraera's instigation at the student meeting at the Technological University. Among the points is the demand for Soviet military withdrawal. Her closest ally outside her gang is Zsolt, an engineering student, whom she sleeps with and regales with tales of her cruelty. Zsolt is a member of a wealthy family, destined for power in exchange for submission to Soviet rule, but Zsolt rebels against his father and the Soviets, making him an idealist, and easy to manipulate by Fraera. She continues away from the apartment to the Astoria Hotel, where she meets with Frol Panin. Fraera is happy knowing that her revenge against Leo is complete, but also knows she is too tangled up to be let go. She must comply with Panin's demands now in order to survive. Panin asks how things are going, explaining that Soviet military forces have been drawn up along the border, waiting for the rebellion to begin. Several other uprisings have already been crushed. The plan to reestablish Soviet dominance is not merely a power play, but a demonstration of the necessary nature of conventional Soviet military forces, which Khrushchev is seeking to scale back in favor of nuclear weapons and deterrent. A handful of scientists and engineers cannot do what the military can do, Panin knows. The military keeps the Soviet bloc together. A massive uprising a place like Hungary will prove it once and for all. Fraera insists that the Hungarians must be fired on to become violent, to be provoked. Panin says he will do what he can.

Soviet Union, Hungarian Border, The Town of Berehowe, 23 October – Leo and Raisa are the only civilians on a train full of soldiers being transferred for an uprising which they know nothing about. They are determined to bring Zoya home. Raisa can understand why Panin, a member of the State, would lie about Zoya, betray Leo, and allow thousands of innocents to be killed in an uprising, but Raisa cannot understand why Fraera, who suffered so at the hands of the State, should now be working for them. Leo and Raisa are accompanied by a Panin-hired translator, the overweight Hungarian-born operative and advisor, Karoly Teglas. Raisa asks Karoly why Panin would allow them to travel to Budapest when Fraera is working for Panin. Karoly says he has no



idea, that he has no control over the movements of Leo and Raisa. He warns them that Russians are not loved in Hungary, and to be prepared for hatred. Karoly does, however, secretly know Panin's plan. He is to delay Leo and Raisa as long as possible for the uprising to begin. Once it is begun, Leo is to be turned loose against Fraera.

Soviet-Controlled Eastern Europe, Hungary, Budapest, Same Day – Zoya, Fraera, and Malysh move among the tens of thousands of people gathered in Parliament Square to protest Soviet occupation and cruelty. Fraera lifts Zoya up onto her shoulders to see. The Parliament lights are shut off, and the crowd raises up torches and cheers. Zoya then kisses Fraera on the cheek. Fraera recoils, having succumbed to the affection of her old life, of Anisya, and forces it away by scraping her cheek with her knife. She then provokes a charge against the radio station, which has refused to allow students the right to broadcast the sixteen points. AVH agents are defending the station, and fire warning shots. With bayonets fixed to their rifles, they begin to drive back the crowd. Zoya links arms with an eighteen year-old girl in defiance of the AVH. Zoya throws a rock at the advancing AVH members, who in turn open fire, killing the 18-year-old girl. Fraera collects the dead girl, and screams out in anguish. She then pulls out her gun and begins shooting at the AVH, which is a sign for all of her gang and cell members to do the same. The uprising has begun. Zoya cries for the dead girl, but Fraera tells her that only children cry. She gives Zoya a gun, who then uses it to shoot at the AVH members in the radio station.

24 October – While the radio station falls at dawn, Zoya and Malysh head to the city's main park, the Varosliget, to find the massive statue of Stalin has been torn down and dragged away. It thrills Zoya, who shouts out in Russian that Stalin is dead. Malysh clamps her mouth shut, for no one can find out that they are Russian. Zoya then kisses Malysh. They then race to where the statue has been dragged, and mangled. Zoya spits in Stalin's eye. The crowd around her cheers and gets her to climb on Stalin with a Hungarian flag as the statue is dragged further along through the streets. Suddenly, the truck stops, confronted by a tank, which fires at the statue and truck, knocking them aside. Zoya leaps off just in time. Rebels attack the tank, and destroy it. Malysh runs and collects Zoya, telling her it is time to go.

Soviet-Controlled Eastern Europe, Hungary, Budapest, Buda Hill, 27 October – Leo is annoyed that Karoly has been taking his time in Hungary while traveling to Budapest, only picking up speed as the uprising becomes larger. Leo asks how Karoly can stomach working for the Soviets. Karoly says his people's dreams of freedom will only get them killed. Karoly wants to live in peace, and so works for the dominant power. They travel to Karoly's apartment, where his twenty-three year-old son, Victor, a member of the AVH, is nowhere to be found. Karoly keeps weapons in his apartment, and hands some out to Leo and Raisa. They travel through the chaos-engulfed city. At one point, they find the mutilated body of an AVH officer hanging upside-down from a tree. Karoly is terrified for his son's safety. An angry crowd gathers around them, suspecting them of being Russian sympathizers, but Karoly holds up photos of Fraera and Zoya. The crowd instantly changes their mood, saying that Zoya has killed many Russians.



Same Day – Karoly leads Leo and Raisa toward the last known whereabouts of Zoya, the district of Ulloi ut. The Soviet crackdown has begun, as more tanks and armored personnel carriers begin flooding the city. Scrambling before an approaching tank, Raisa is separated from Leo and Karoly, and kills a Russian soldier who is about to kill Zoya. She takes Zoya's hands, and tells Zoya that they must leave. Raisa then sees Fraera, and raises her pistol to kill Fraera. Zoya then stops Raisa by aiming a pistol at Raisa's heart.

Same Day – Leo realizes that Raisa must have continued searching for Zoya after the arrival of the tank, and he sets off after her to find her, leaving Karoly far behind.

Same Day – Raisa is taken prisoner by Fraera's goons to their apartments, where she is locked in a small room. Thinking about all that has happened, and killing the young Russian soldier, Raisa begins to cry. Fraera comes in. She knows Leo must be nearby. Raisa demands that Fraera let Zoya go. Fraera says she rescued Zoya from Leo and Raisa. Raisa tells Fraera that if she stays there, she and Zoya will die at the hands of the Russians. Fraera says that Raisa's concern for Zoya no more makes Raisa Zoya's mother than Fraera. A short time later, Raisa meets Malysh, offering him safety if he helps her get Zoya out.

Analysis

The theme of family becomes central to the plot again as Leo returns to Moscow with Lazar, determined to right the wrongs of the past by securing not only Lazar's freedom, but his reuniting with Fraera. Here, Leo is seeking to restore two families. First, he seeks to reunited husband and wife in the form of Lazar and Fraera, a family he himself broke up some seven years before. Second, Leo seeks to restore his own family, by securing Zoya's freedom and returning her to their home with Raisa. Even though Leo knows that Zoya will never again have her biological family back, he is still willing, despite everything, to do what he can to give Zoya a sense of family, and to make a better life for her possible, as any real father would do, blood-related or not. Zoya, however, rejects these overtures as she conspires to with Fraera against Leo by faking her own death in order to hurt Leo even more, by making him suffer believing he has lost the girl who has become his daughter. At the same time, Fraera turns her back not only on her past, but on her husband as well – by shooting him and killing him.

The most stunning act committed by Fraera thus far in the novel has not been the kidnapping of Zoya, or the murder of State-associated individuals, but the coldblooded murder of her husband. Everything Fraera has done up until this point has been in the guise of seeking not only her revenge on Leo, but to get her husband back as well. Leo is stunned by what appears to be a senseless murder of a man he has just risked his life to bring back in order to save his daughter. As it will later turn out, Fraera has in part killed Lazar because he is a part of her old life, and is a part of who she no longer is. Here, the theme of morality returns –both in Leo's continuing moral transformation to redemption, and the twisted, continued disfiguration of Fraera's own morality into revenge, and ultimately, nothingness. Her soul, already long gone, has only herself left



to corrode – and is corroding her very being now by thriving on hatred and brutality. She has truly become a monster.

Just as it seems that the events of the novel shift back in favor of the State, seeking reform, the reader is upended again as, in typical Soviet-Communist fashion, a greater plot for control undergirds everything occurring. Fraera is now working for the State to sow an uprising in Hungary, which the State will then crush as a means to demonstrate that reforms are not practical. The State fears large-scale incidents like Kolyma, as well as individual acts of reprisal. Panin explains that too much is happening too fast, and it has had the effect of chaos. Already, the Secret Speech is being redacted and amended, in typical Soviet-Communist fashion, as the gears of reform grind to a halt, and the hardline traditionalists seek to re-exert their influence. Even individuals like Panin, who have not necessarily been opposed to change, see what hasty reform has done. Just as Stalin was a monster out of control, those the State has wronged are becoming a monster that is nearly out of control. If the State does not crack down somewhere in order to demonstrate its power, a civil war could erupt. The State is thus relying on manufactured uprisings to crush as a symbolic demonstration of power. What Khrushchev had originally intended as a return of justice, and a delivery of justice, has transmogrified into revenge-driven chaos, blurring the line between justice and revenge, and requiring a heavy-handed response from the State.

The reader should note the incredibly irony here. In seeking justice for past barbarism, the State has exposed itself to barbaric revenge. In seeking revenge for past barbarism by committing to barbarism, the people who have been wronged are now being set up for what the State is calling justice. In seeking reform, the State has lost control. In seeking reform by revenge, the people have lost their chance at real justice and real reform. Rather than seeking justice under reformed law, the people have taken the law into their own hands, to their own detriment. Cooler heads have not prevailed. While the people cannot be blamed for their anger or their hatred, they have ceded the moral high ground to the State, and have become just like their enemy. The State still monopolizes true power, and is still corrupt – and will not hesitate now to use it to crush dissent.

Discussion Question 1

What ironies emerge in this section of the novel as they relate to the theme of justice and revenge? Choose one and fully explain it.

Discussion Question 2

What is the truth behind Fraera's kidnapping of Zoya as it pertains to Leo himself? Why?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Panin seek to manufacture uprisings against his own country? How does Leo respond to this? Why?

Vocabulary

synchronization, disorientation, exacerbated, deprivation, grotesquely, elitist, supernaturally, amends, abruptness, improvisation, tenacity, exhilarated, prudence



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Summary

28 October – Leo has counted at least 30 Soviet tanks moving into the city. Karoly shows Leo a leaflet he has found. The leaflet has Leo's picture on it, and lists him as a Soviet spy that is to be brought to the nearest revolutionary stronghold. Karoly says it is no longer safe for Leo to go outside. Leo refuses to listen.

Same Day – Raisa is led to the balcony where below, Leo and Karoly are surrounded by a group of rebels, Fraera and Zoya among them. Leo tells Fraera about the tanks, saying that the rebels don't stand a chance. Fraera says she disagrees. Leo says Panin is exploiting her; she says she is exploiting Panin. Fraera announces she is using what was supposed to be a sham uprising to actually hurt the State of Russia. Karoly admits that either he, or Leo, was intended to kill Panin after the uprising began – stunning Leo, but confirming Fraera's suspicions. Leo looks at Zoya, who is bruised, her clothes torn from fighting, and her eyes full of hatred for Leo. Leo tells her that if she fights, she will die. Zoya declares she will fight.

Same Day – Leo, Raisa, and Karoly all await in the room that doubles as a cell. Leo apologizes to Raisa for not having told her about Zoya and the knife. Karoly is in disbelief that the girl they are trying to rescue has been plotting to kill Leo. Raisa reveals that Malysh, a boy of about Zoya's age, is in love with her, and he may be their ticket out.

Same Day – Zoya, though she has fired her machine gun numerous times that day, does not know if she has actually killed anyone or not. She mans a post at the bridge near Parliament, where numerous tanks are preparing to advance, just as Leo explained. She uses the bathroom, throws up, and then returns to her post, unable to concentrate after having seen Leo again. Zoya considers killing an injured Soviet officer head toward his lines, but is saved from having to decide by Malysh, who interrupts her. He points out that the tanks are now moving away from the city, rather than deeper in.

Same Day – Fraera brings a radio into the cell room so Leo, Raisa, and Karoly can hear that Soviet forces have agreed to a cease-fire, and are withdrawing.

Same Day – Fraera and her four gang members bring Leo, Raisa, and Karoly back out into the city to see for themselves that the Soviets had withdrawn. Leo knows it can only be temporary, that Communist Russia will never allow the loss of a country as important as Hungary, no matter how costly and bloody the fight for it will be. She brings them all down into the basement prison cells of the AVH headquarters, declaring they should drink to the end of torture and repression. Fraera later hosts a victory party in the courtyard of her apartment complex. Alcohol is brought out. Leo asks Fraera what is to become of him, Raisa, and Karoly. Fraera responds that she hasn't decided yet. Zoya gets Malysh to dance.



30 October – Fraera leads Leo, Raisa, Karoly, Zoya, Malysh, and the other members of her gang to the lush villas on the Buda slopes across the Danube River. There, Fraera allows the armed guards to leave peacefully, saying the villas now belong to the people. Along the way, Fraera smokes cigarettes laced with amphetamines, which Leo guesses are how she remains energetic and bloodthirsty. The first villa they arrive at belongs to Rakosi, Karoly's former boss, removed after Stalin died. Fraera calls for Zoya to destroy a portrait of Stalin, that he killed her parents, but Zoya cannot bring herself to do so, explaining she doesn't feel like it, that she doesn't always want to remember bad things and feel hatred. Fraera slaps Zoya, angering Leo. Fraera draws a pistol on Leo and continues talking to Zoya, asking her what has changed. She asks if kissing Malysh has changed things. She then kisses Malysh, and says it was nice, but it doesn't change her anger. She then empties her pistol into Stalin's portrait. She then announces it is bedtime, and forces Malysh and Zoya together. A few hours later, Fraera and her group return to the city, proper, where insurgent-controlled tanks are attacking the Communist Party Headquarters building, where the AVH members have gathered to make a stand. As Fraera and her group arrive, the building is finally stormed, and the AVH members are dragged out as international press members watch, photograph, and record. The first several that are dragged out are killed summarily. The next to be brought out is Victor, Karoly's son, who is dragged forward. Karoly rushes to embrace his son, but his son is pulled away, stripped, and is prepared for hanging upside down from a tree. Zoya pleads for Viktor's life. Fraera tells Zoya that this is anger. Karoly rushes to help his son, but he is smashed with a rifle. He returns once more to help his son, but the two are doused with gasoline and set on fire. The crowd's anger simmers at the sight of a father dying trying to protect his son. A bystander shoots Karoly in the back of the head, putting him out of his misery. The crowd breaks up soon after.

Same Day – Back in the apartment, Malysh whispers to Zoya that they are going to run away that night when everyone is supposed to attend a city-wide party. However, Fraera stops them before they do, telling them that if they draw blood, they will be free to go. She then herds them into the prison room. Fraera tells Leo and Raisa that Malysh and Zoya were planning to run away together without so much as a good-bye to them. Raisa says it doesn't matter, that she still loves Zoya. Fraera laughs this off, saying that Raisa is sentimentally fanatic, hoping there is a chance that Fraera will love her. Fraera then tells Rasia that Malysh is her son.

Same Day – Everyone is stunned. Zoya declares that it doesn't matter if Malysh was ever Raisa's son or not, because she gave him up to an orphanage long ago – the result of repeated rapes during World War II. Malysh believes he must be Raisa's son, but Raisa knows this cannot be so, for her son died during a typhus epidemic, and she returned to her son before he died. She quietly explains this to Leo while Zoya talks to Malysh. Fraera, who has locked them all in the room, brings them stew to eat. During this time, Raisa says she can teach Malysh how to read and write. Leo tells Zoya that Elena misses her, loves her, and wants her to come home. This causes Zoya to head off on her own. Malysh follows and sits beside her. A day later, snow begins to fall, but the city is very quiet, no longer celebrating.



4 November – The Soviet military returns in force with tanks and planes. Every building is being targeted, including the building in which Fraera, Leo, Raisa, Zoya, Malysh, and the insurgents have used as their headquarters. Malysh helps Leo, Raisa, and Zoya break out into the courtyard. Above, they are confronted by Fraera, who wields a machine gun and a camera. Leo tells her it is all over. Fraera reveals the camera is full of photos of the cruelty of the Soviet regime, and the film will be sent all over the world to show the barbarity of Communism, turning the whole world against the Soviet Union. This, she says, is her revenge. Leo tells her to let them go. Fraera tells him that she could have killed him a hundred times, but his life is more a punishment than murder, for he will never have a real family, with a son wanted for murder and a daughter who hates him. Fraera tells Leo that she was nothing until she hated him. Leo and the others then quickly leave, expecting to be killed. But when Leo turns back, Fraera is gone.

Same Day – Leo, Raisa, Zoya, and Malysh travel through the city slowly. The Soviet military is brutally destroying everything in their path. Leo also realizes that Panin's plan is in full effect: the tanks, vehicles, and planes being used to quell the city are new, elite models such as the T-54 tank, demonstrating the flaws in cutting military spending and relying on fewer troops and cheaper, older equipment. Leo and the others travel by rooftop. Returning to the ground, Malysh is injured while taking out an enemy tank with a grenade.

Same Day – Leo rushes Malysh to the Second Medical Clinic, but it is no use. He is dying. Zoya begs Leo to save Malysh, saying she will even be Leo's daughter if he does. Malysh asks to be removed from the hospital. Malysh tells Raisa he knows he is not her son, but he would have liked to have been. Raisa tells him she would have liked it as well. As Malysh dies, Zoya holds him, telling him about the farm they will one day own together, near a river.

Two Weeks Later, Soviet Union, Moscow, 19 November – Leo has gone to work as a baker at Filipp's shop. Panin comes to visit. Leo offers him some bread, which Panin tries, saying it tastes very good. Panin explains that reforms are going forward in secrecy. There will be no return to Stalinism, no mass arrests, interrogation cells are being ripped out, camps are closing, and so on –all without any admission of wrongdoing. Panin has allowed Leo to live, knowing Leo to be irrelevant to things, now. Panin asks Leo to come back to work. Leo says he will one day, if the homicide department reopens. Panin accepts this, and says that he hopes he can one day be of help to Leo. Leo realizes it is Panin's way of apologizing. Leo says there is one thing that can be done for him.

Same Day – At the Moscow Conservatory, Leo meets with Piotr Orlov, a promising young violinist, arranged by Panin. He brings Orlov the charred music hidden away years ago by Lazar. Orlov plays the music, and reveals the composer is alive. Leo meets with the composer, Robert Meshik, Meshik reveals that he is not the real composer, merely the conduit for the real composer, a man named Kirill, who was arrested and sent to the camps. Leo says he is not there to arrest Meshik. Meshik announces he will tell the world the truth.



Same Day – Zoya takes time to herself everyday up on the roof of the apartment building. Elena is thrilled to have Zoya back, and life has returned to Elena. When Leo gets home, Zoya asks to speak to him and Raisa together. She wants to tell Elena the truth about her disappearance, but doesn't know if Elena will forgive her. Leo tells her that Elena loves her very much. Zoya then tells Elena that she has something to tell her. Leo says he'll tell them a bedtime story, first, one that he made up. Zoya dries her own tears and takes Leo's hand in hers.

Analysis

The themes of morality, and justice and revenge, can be seen by way of the Hungarian uprising. Hungary is a nation that has been wrongfully occupied and absorbed into the Soviet Union by Communist Russia, against Hungary's will. While the citizens of Russia themselves have a right to rise up against the State, they have gone too far, ceding the moral high ground to descend to the level of their enemy, and have lost much of their merit. Hungarian citizens, too, have every right to rise up against Communist Russia in an armed revolution, but they ultimately descend to the level of Communist Russia's barbarity when they burn prisoners alive. Many of the Hungarian citizens who witness the brutal burning of Viktor and Karoly cannot stomach the site, knowing that this is not the justice they have been seeking, because it is not moral. They know they cannot claim the moral mantle, and have right and justice on their side, if they behave like their enemies. While most Hungarians understand this, Fraera does not. Right up until the end of the novel, her barbarity and cruelty reign supreme, even down to the mere treatment of people. For example, she slaps Zoya for not wanting to be angry all the time. However, Fraera reveals that her ultimate revenge is not against Leo, but against the State itself. Fraera plans to expose the world to Soviet-Communist barbarity, but there is great irony in the fact that a person as immoral as Fraera should be exposing immorality in the Soviet Union. Such a role is better left to someone like Leo, who has found the light, and found morality amidst a greater sea of chaos. Fraera's letting go of Leo and the others should not be considered an act of morality, however, as her true purpose – to expose Soviet barbarity to the world – is built on a lie: she doesn't care how many innocent people will die as a result of what she has instigated, so long as she has her revenge against the State.

Leo, himself, becomes something of a Christ-like figure at the end of the novel as well. He now works in a bakery for a man who has never committed any wrongdoings. Leo is especially fond of baking bread. The reader will remember that, in the Christian faith, Jesus broke bread with his disciples – the Last Supper – before being Crucified and Resurrected. The act of eating together, or offering another food, is a very intimate act usually done only among those one can trust, or is friendly towards. The eating of broken bread at the Last Supper is intended to memorialize Jesus, and the sacrifice He is about to make on behalf of all humankind – in order that all of mankind might be saved through Him. The bread becomes symbolic not only then of Jesus and His sacrifice, but of redemption and forgiveness – of mercy. Leo, now doing something absolutely peaceful for a living – breaking bread – has achieved, at long last, some sort of redemption and forgiveness. In offering Panin the bread, Leo is communing with



Panin, forgiving Panin for his underhanded plotting, and extending friendship to Panin, as well as the ideas of redemption, forgiveness, and mercy. Panin says the bread is good, but whether he truly understands the ideas of redemption, mercy, and forgiveness, is unclear.

The end of the novel also brings the theme of family to a close, as Leo returns Zoya safely to their home. Zoya has been shaken by all that she has seen, and her witnessing of cruelty and barbarism on such a wide scale has contextualized things for her, and made her come to appreciate that Leo is truly seeking forgiveness and redemption, as well as to give her a better life. She also comes to recognize how hard Leo has fought to give her that life, and to get her back from the criminal gang that she has been running with. She is now approaching Leo with an open mind, and is approaching him like a daughter. Her final act of the book is to place her hand on Leo's hand –a human touch that signifies forgiveness, mercy, and acceptance – and it is more than Leo could have ever hoped for.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Zoya ultimately come around to Leo? What is signified by her laying of her hand on Leo's?

Discussion Question 2

Throughout the novel, those wronged by the Soviet Union have reacted against the State. Do you believe they have gone too far at any point? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Fraera willingly let Leo and the others go? Is this an act of morality, or an act of selfishness on Fraera's part? Explain.

Vocabulary

interjected, indistinguishable, boisterous, fanaticism, adjacent, benevolence, disproportionate, collaborated, rejuvenated



Characters

Leo Demidov

Leo Demidov is the main character and principle protagonist in the novel “The Secret Speech” by Tom Rob Smith. In his late-thirties, Leo is married to Raisa, and is the adoptive father to Zoya and Elena, the orphaned daughters of a man one of Leo’s subordinates murdered in “Child 44”. Leo, a former member of the MGB, and ashamed of his past, has been living his life the past few years in search of redemption by heading up a homicide department to solve real crimes, and to making sure Zoya and Elena have as much of a family life as possible, as well as any opportunity possible as well. Leo’s goals in life are thus twofold: to provide for Zoya and Elena, and to put truly-guilty criminals away. Zoya, however, will not let Leo forget the past, and takes every opportunity to emotionally wound and insult Leo. Leo, like a patient father, loves Zoya and believes she only needs time.

The publication of the Secret Speech brings about acts of reprisals against current and former members of the State who served under Stalin, which Leo is tasked with solving in order to prevent similar acts on a wider scale. Things become even more desperate for Leo when Zoya is kidnapped by Fraera, who had been Leo’s first arrest in the MGB back in 1949. Fraera demands the return of her husband, Lazar, in exchange for Zoya’s life and freedom. Leo then travels to Kolyma prison to find Lazar, who, though angry at Leo for what he has done to so many, forgives him, and agrees to return to Moscow to see Fraera again. Leo is stunned when Fraera kills Lazar instead. He is horrified when Fraera then murders Zoya – a murder later revealed to have been staged in order to make Leo suffer.

Leo ultimately tracks down Fraera to Budapest, Hungary, where she is working for the KGB to stage an uprising in exchange for her life. Leo secures the release of Zoya, and Fraera disappears. At home, having experienced so much pain, terror, and brutality, Zoya realizes how much Leo truly does love her, and decides to give him a chance as her father. Rather than returning to work for the KGB, Leo opts to become a humble baker instead, more concerned with baking bread for life than working for the State for death.

Raisa Demidov

Raisa Demidov is the beautiful wife of Leo, and the adoptive mother of Zoya and Elena. Raisa is in her mid-thirties, and unable to conceive children due to repeated rapes suffered at the hands of Soviet soldiers during World War II, loves Zoya and Elena all the more dearly. She gets along with Zoya infinitely better than Leo, for Zoya blames Leo for the death of her parents, for his part in the State system in the past. Raisa does her best to keep the peace, and is horrified when Zoya is kidnapped. She knows her husband has changed, and is a good man – but she struggles to convince both Zoya



and Fraera of this as the novel progresses. When Zoya is tracked down to Hungary, Raisa travels with Leo to find Zoya. When they successfully return to Moscow, Raisa is deeply thankful that Zoya is willing to give Leo a chance.

Zoya Demidov

Zoya is the adopted daughter of Leo and Raisa, and the biological sister of Elena. At 14 years old, Zoya is deeply beautiful, and deeply scarred, having seen one of Leo's MGB agents murder her parents in front of her and her sister in the novel "Child 44". Zoya knows Leo adopting her and Elena was some form of redemption, but while Zoya loves Raisa, she cannot forgive Leo, no matter how much he has changed. She is angry and full of hate, spiting him and insulting him whenever she can. When she is kidnapped, she falls in with Fraera's criminal gang, and becomes a part of the revolution in Hungary. She falls in love with fellow gang member Malysh, who is later killed while destroying a tank. During the revolution, Zoya sees terror and pain on a large scale, and her own hated and anger subsides as she comes to value just how much Leo is seeking to make up for the past, and how Fraera is only making the past worse. At the end of the novel, Zoya has returned home with Leo and Raisa, and is determined to give Leo a chance.

Frol Panin

Frol Panin is Leo's superior officer – and sort-of-friend – at the Ministry of the Interior, and allows Leo great freedom in his work in the homicide department. Panin is courteous and polite, and though a traditionalist, is not opposed to gradual reforms of certain kinds. Panin is married and has children, and ensures that his agents operate with respect towards civilians. He is emblematic of the post-Stalin era. Panin assigns Leo to investigate the murders of numerous former and current State-associated individuals who served under Stalin.

Panin's openness to change is later shut down completely when he learns the murders are reprisals from released prisoners inspired by Khrushchev's Speech, and seeking revenge. Panin then actively becomes a hardliner, seeking a return to rule by an iron fist in order to avoid a civil war or widespread acts of reprisal. Panin orchestrates a series of uprisings designed to be symbolically crushed by the Soviet military in order to demonstrate the dangers of hasty reform, and the need for greater numbers of military personnel and advanced technology. To this end, he employs Fraera to stage an uprising in Hungary in exchange for her life. Panin ultimately arranges it so that Leo can travel to Hungary to find Zoya. When the novel ends, Panin does not have Leo killed, or even arrested – but parts ways amicably with him.

Fraera

Fraera is the head of a criminal gang that murders former and current State-associated individuals who served under Stalin and committed heinous acts and crimes, and



fomenting a manipulated uprising in Hungary. Formerly known as Anisya, the beautiful wife of the priest Lazar, Fraera is Leo's first arrest. Fraera emerges from prison a changed woman, taking on the name of Fraera and coming to lead a criminal gang with revenge on her mind. Fraera loses her soul as she commits to immoral acts, ceding the moral high ground and descending to the level of her enemies to defeat them. She kidnaps Zoya to make Leo suffer, and stages Zoya's death to cause him even more grief. When Leo and Raisa come for Zoya in Hungary, Fraera lets them go not out of kindness, but because she has other things to do. She is photodocumenting the Soviet crackdown in Hungary, and intends to send the film around the world to turn the whole world against the Soviet Union. There is great irony in a woman as immoral as Fraera decrying the immorality of the Communist regime. Neither Fraera, nor the Communist State, has the right to claim the moral high ground.

Elena Demidov

Elena is the younger biological sister of Zoya, and the adopted daughter of Leo and Raisa. At 7 years old, she has come to love Leo and Raisa, and is devoted to her sister, the only part of her family left. She and Zoya have been adopted by Leo and Raisa following the murder of her parents in front of her and her sister in the novel "Child 44". When Zoya is kidnapped, Elena becomes unresponsive and despondent, and is ultimately taken away by the State to be treated, and is only later returned. Elena is thrilled to see Zoya is alive and back, and her health and happiness return.

Malysh

Malysh is a 14-year-old member of the criminal gang headed up by Fraera. An orphan, he is discovered by Fraera while pickpocketing her. Malysh is responsible for the murder of Krasikov, and later defends Zoya's sexual purity against another gang member. Zoya and Malysh end up in a relationship, and when Leo and Raisa come for Zoya in Hungary, Malysh decides to go along, too. As they escape, Malysh is killed while knocking a Soviet tank out of commission.

Karoly

Karoly is an Hungarian advisor and informant to the Soviet State. He acts as a translator and guide for Leo and Raisa in their quest to find Zoya. Karoly's son, Viktor, is a member of the pro-Soviet Hungarian secret police, and is later dragged out to be killed by a mob in Budapest during the uprising. When Karoly tries to help his son, he and his son are both doused with gasoline, set on fire, and killed. The barbarity of this act turns the stomach of many onlookers and rebels, who turn away, not wanting to become like their enemies.



Nikita Khrushchev

Nikita Khrushchev is the frequently-referenced but never-seen Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the current leader of the Soviet Union, and the successor of the deceased Joseph Stalin. Khrushchev writes and delivers the Secret Speech, which criticizes the Stalinist regime, acknowledges and seeks forgiveness for crimes of the State, and promises a future of reform. Khrushchev's reforms include nuclear proliferation, military reductions, the freeing of hundreds of thousands of wrongfully imprisoned people, loosening censorship regulations, and so on. However, Khrushchev's reforms – known as Khrushchev's Thaw – ultimately lead to too much too soon too fast, causing a resurgence in the power of traditionalists, and even Khrushchev having to walk back much of what he has said and done.

Lazar

Lazar is a State-approved priest in Moscow, where he runs a small church and is married to a beautiful woman 15 years his junior named Anisya. Lazar takes on an apprentice named Maxim, who is Leo in disguise, who arrests Lazar and Anisya for crimes against the State. Lazar is sent to Kolyma prison, where he spends the next seven years, undergoing heinous torture and deplorable living conditions. When Leo shows up, Lazar ultimately forgives him, seeing that Leo is seeking redemption, and returns to Moscow with Leo. Lazar is stunned by Anisya's transformation into Fraera, and is equally as perplexed when she shoots and kills him.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Secret Speech

The Secret Speech is a report written by Nikita Khrushchev, delivered to the Communist Party Central Committee, and released to the public directly by the State rather than through the newspapers. It outlines the crimes, wrongdoings, and mistakes of Stalin's reign, and promises a return to the roots of Communism. The Speech becomes a catalyst for much of the novel, as hundreds of thousands of wrongfully imprisoned people are released and seek revenge against the State, including Fraera. Hoping for reform, Khrushchev and his reformers are stunned to see that the move unleashes widespread hatred, and numerous acts of reprisal. Khrushchev and the reformers ultimately walk back much of what they have proclaimed in a redacted version of the speech.

The redacted Secret Speech

The Redacted Secret Speech is a heavily-edited version of Khrushchev's original Secret Speech, with the intent of damage control. The redacted version omits evidence of crimes committed by the State, refers to wrongful actions merely as "mistakes", and heaps most of the blame on Stalin himself rather than the State, proper.

Arrest photos

Arrest photos are taken of all individuals arrested by the MGB-turned-KGB. These are mailed to former and current members of the State Security, and other State-associated individuals as harbingers for their coming deaths. Nikolai receives numerous photographs, for example, and commits suicide as a result.

Knife

A knife is wielded by Zoya early in the novel as she imagines plunging it into Leo's neck while he is asleep. She has practiced this ritual many times before. On one such evening, Zoya's ritual is interrupted by a phone call, which causes her to drop the knife and flee as Leo awakens. Leo discovers the knife, and realizes that Zoya is to blame.

Bread

Bread is baked by Leo at the bakery at the end of the novel. When Panin visits Leo, Leo gives him a loaf of bread. In the Christian faith, Jesus broke bread with his disciples in the Last Supper before being Crucified and Resurrected. The act of eating together, or offering another food, is an incredibly personal act usually done only among those one



can trust, or is friendly towards. The eating of broken bread at the Last Supper is meant to memorialize Jesus, and the sacrifice He is about to make on behalf of all humankind – in order that all of mankind might be saved through Him. The bread becomes symbolic not only then of Jesus and His sacrifice, but of redemption and forgiveness, and of mercy. Leo, now doing something absolutely peaceful for a living – breaking bread – has achieved, at long last, some sort of redemption and forgiveness. In offering Panin the bread, Leo is communing with Panin, forgiving Panin for his underhanded plotting, and extending friendship to Panin, as well as the ideas of redemption, forgiveness, and mercy. He is offering Panin a measure of peace. Panin says the bread is good, but whether he truly understands the ideas of redemption, mercy, and forgiveness, is unclear.

T-54 Tanks

T-54s are brand new, cutting-edge technology tanks recently unveiled by the Soviet Union. They are used in the Soviet crackdown on Budapest, in order to demonstrate two things: First, the conventional military should not be drawn down; and second, that military spending must also not be cut in order to design and provide new weapons like the T-54 if the Soviet Union is to survive in the modern age.

Gasoline

Gasoline is used to douse Soviet-allied Hungarian agents and Secret Police members, and to light them on fire and kill them. Gasoline is used to douse and burn Victor and his father, Karoly, as the two struggle for survival amidst the Hungarian insurgency.

Camera

A camera is worn and used by Fraera in order to photodocument the Soviet crackdown on Budapest. The camera's film is then intended to be sent to the world at large to demonstrate Soviet immorality and brutality.

Watch

A watch worn by Nesterov is taken from Nesterov's body by Kolyma guards when they kill him in order to protect themselves. The watch is later found on one of the murderous guards by Leo, who takes it back, and kills the guard.

Purple flowers

Purple flowers of an unidentified kind grow in the Kolyma region and serve as a reminder of beauty against a stark landscape. Their growing season is very short. Under the reformed prison system, they are grown by prisoners, and given to new

arrivals by Sinyavsky – as signs of peace, gentleness, and hope. Sinyavsky himself always carries around the flowers, perhaps as a reminder to himself of beauty and hope in a barren, desolate, and violent place.



Settings

Moscow

Moscow is the large, capital city of Communist Russia, and the capital of the Soviet Union at large. Moscow is where Leo and Raisa live and work, and where Zoya and Elena live with them and attend school. Moscow becomes the scene of various murders committed as acts of reprisal against former and current State officials and State-associated individuals who served under Stalin. Leo is called upon to investigate these murders in Moscow. Moscow is also home to the criminal gang headed up by Fraera, having once been her home as Anisya. It is to Moscow that Leo brings Lazar to reunite with Fraera, and it is in Moscow that Fraera kills Lazar. It is also in Moscow that Zoya is kidnapped and helps to stage her own death. It is later back to Moscow, and home, that Zoya returns to live with Leo and Raisa.

Kolyma

Kolyma refers to both a region and a set of prison camps on the Eastern coast of Russia. The region is desolate, barren, and dangerous in the winter, and is known for its inhospitable climate. The prison camps mirror the region in which they exist. They are run by thug-like guards who brutalize their prisoners until Khrushchev's Thaw, when the guards – and their commander, Sinyavksy – scramble for damage control. Sinyavksy apologizes to the prisoners for the past, who order his death. Leo travels to Kolyma with Nesterov in order to return with Lazar, Fraera's husband and Kolyma camp inmate. Nesterov is killed by Kolyma's guards seeking to protect themselves against retribution from Moscow for carrying out Stalin's orders. Leo and Lazar manage to escape Kolyma.

Budapest

Budapest is the capital of Hungary, and is the city in which Fraera operates a KGB cell set to incite and manipulate an uprising against the Soviet Union. Leo and Raisa travel to Budapest in order to retrieve Zoya, and bring her home. As Budapest erupts into a warzone, Leo, Raisa, and their guide, Karoly, navigate the battle-torn streets as average citizens take up arms against the Soviets. Some of the Hungarians go to extremes by burning surrendered Soviets alive, including Karoly and his son. It is in Budapest that Malysk is killed while taking out a Soviet tank, and is in Budapest that Fraera reveals her true plan for ultimate revenge – to photodocument the Soviet crackdown and expose the brutality to the world.

Bakery

A bakery is owned and operated below Leo's homicide department offices by Filipp, a genuinely good and decent man. With the closing of Leo's homicide department, the



bakery is expanded to the entire building, and Leo is hired on to be a baker by Filipp at the end of the novel. Panin visits Leo in the bakery to part ways with Leo on friendly terms. Leo offers Panin bread, symbolizing peace, friendship, redemption, mercy, and forgiveness – which Panin accepts.

The Church of Sancta Sophia

The Church of Sancta Sophia is located in Moscow, and targeted by the Communist State for demolition to build a watersport complex in its place. The first attempted demolition fails, and is watched by a crowd of people, including Lazar. When the church is demolished, construction gets underway for the complex, but the ground, beside a river, proves to be too unstable for a watersport complex, and the plan is abandoned mid-construction. The church comes to be symbolic of the razing of morality through religion by the State. Without a moral footing – a stable foundation – the State has nothing to build on. As such, the abandoned complex is representative of the State – a ruinous, unstable, and ultimately doomed system of government.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “The Secret Speech” by Tom Rob Smith. Family, thematically, involves the mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and even physical support of, individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who behave in the way of the traditional family unit. In the novel, Leo struggles to maintain and protect his family, consisting of his wife, Raisa, and his two adopted daughters, Zoya and Elena. This proves to be a task which consumes the past three years of Leo’s life, and will last through most of the novel.

Zoya and Elena are orphaned children who have lost their parents to assassination at the hands of one of Leo’s MGB agents in the previous novel (“Child 44”). While Elena has come to accept Leo and love Raisa, Zoya has come to love Raisa but hates Leo, blaming him for the murder of her parents, and blaming him for his past. Leo accepts responsibility for his past and seeks redemption by putting away truly guilty people and providing for his family by giving Zoya and Elena the opportunities they would have otherwise missed out on, but even Leo’s change does not endear him to Zoya. Zoya is full of nothing but hatred for Leo, his idea of family, and for the State. Indeed, Zoya takes every opportunity to insult and emotionally wound Leo, who takes it all in patiently, believing Zoya just needs time and love. Even when Leo learns that Zoya has been ritualizing the act of his murder, Leo cannot bring himself to come against Zoya.

Leo’s love for Zoya and Elena as a father-figure is limitless. When Zoya is kidnapped, Leo goes to the ends of the country to free Lazar, undergoes torture, is beaten, bloodied, and nearly killed numerous times to return Lazar; and then navigates war-torn revolutionary Budapest in order to seek Zoya out with Raisa and return her home, risking his life – and Raisa’s life – again in the process. The act of reuniting his own family is contingent upon the act of reuniting Fraera’s family by returning Lazar to her so that Zoya will be returned to Leo. The theme of family can also be seen in other ways as well. Raisa’s love for her husband wins out over Fraera’s offer of returning Zoya in exchange for Raisa’s leaving Leo. Raisa goes to great lengths to love her daughters, and even risks her own life along with Leo to save Zoya from Fraera. Ultimately, having experienced war and the true scope of Soviet barbarity, and having seen what Leo has done to secure her freedom. Zoya realizes that there is something good in Leo, and decides, in the end, to give him a chance.

Family can also be seen in one other heartbreaking way. When Victor is dragged out of the Communist Party headquarters in Budapest to be killed, Karoly rushes through the crowd to save his son. Politics, risk to his own life, and the revolution are all a distant second to Karoly’s utter love for his son. As Karoly tries to save his son, he and his son are both set on fire and killed by extremists in the Hungarian insurgency. Most of the people in the crowd are turned off by this level of immoral extremism, having seen in



that instant not the death of a hated Secret Policeman, but the love and death of a father and a son.

Redemption and Forgiveness

Redemption and forgiveness form an important dual theme in the novel “The Secret Speech” by Tom Rob Smith. Redemption – the act of seeking to atone for, and right past sins and wrongs in the present – is a journey that is undertaken in pursuit of forgiveness. In “Child 44”, Leo began his redemption by solving 44 child murders, and for the past three years through the present novel, continues on his path of redemption by solving real crimes, putting away the truly guilty, and helping the innocent. Leo heads up the secret homicide department to do so, working directly for the Ministry of the Interior rather than the KGB itself.

Leo is not only seeking redemption for his past as an MGB officer responsible for countless wrongful arrests, forced confessions, torture, and deaths by solving real crimes, but by giving a life to Zoya and Elena, whose parents were slaughtered by one of Leo’s MGB agents during the events of the novel “Child 44”. For Leo, redemption will come through giving the girls love and every opportunity they never would have otherwise had, and he seeks forgiveness from them through their love and affection for him –which is not given at all by Zoya until the end of the novel. Leo’s quest for Zoya’s freedom also becomes an extension of his own quest for redemption and forgiveness, granted at the end by Zoya.

With the onset of Khrushchev’s Thaw, and the delivery of the Secret Speech, the push for reform in the Communist world is in full swing. Hundreds of thousands of wrongfully imprisoned people are returning home –and seeking revenge against their oppressors. The sins of the past, already nagging at the souls of many, now come back in force. Nikolai has hoped to put the past behind him with the death of Stalin, and tend to his own family. Rather than face reprisal or public disapproval for what his past has been, Nikolai kills his wife and children, and commits suicide, believing there is no chance for redemption or forgiveness. Others, like Patriarch Krasikov, have no regrets at all – even in death – and do not seek redemption and forgiveness.

Indeed, the entire point of Khrushchev’s speech is not merely to criticize Stalin and the wrongs of his regime, but to offer a public apology for them. Many of the people living under fear of Stalin, like Suren, Nikolai, Sinyavsky, and Krasikov, did what they had to do in order to survive. Leo, who was himself a legal absolutist and idealist, did what he did because he believed it was necessary to ensure the survival of the State. Nevertheless, Leo and all of these people are now being held to account for their part in Stalin’s reign of terror. For some, like Leo, redemption and forgiveness are found. But for others, like Sinyavsky, there are no reprieves. Sinyavsky quickly changes his brutal camps in Kolyma upon the death of Stalin, knowing that his days will be numbered one way or another. When Sinyavsky asks for forgiveness from the prisoners at the camp, noting the past three years as a redemptive effort to right the wrongs he has committed



against them in the past, the prisoners choose not to forgive, and to execute him on the spot.

Khrushchev's Thaw

Khrushchev's thaw provides an important motif and backdrop to the novel "The Secret Speech" by Tom Rob Smith. Khrushchev's Thaw is an historical period in the Soviet Union between the mid-1950s and early-1960s which rolls back much of the overbearing savagery and brutal control that made up Stalin's reign. During that time, millions are butchered in genocide, hundreds of thousands of innocent people are imprisoned, tortured, forced into signing false confessions, sent to barbaric prison camps, and are executed. Censorship is high; no criticism of the State is tolerated at all. People live in fear every day of their lives.

When Stalin dies, things begin changing almost overnight. Thousands sentenced to execution, torture, and imprisonment have stays imposed, and are released. Though the State still holds a gun to the heads of its citizens, the hand is kinder and gentler, like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Things change even more, however, with what has been come to be known as the Secret Speech. It is an address delivered to the Communist Party, and later distributed to the public by the State. Written by new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, a reformist, the Speech recognizes and criticizes the brutality of Stalin's regime and reign, noting the forced confessions, wrongful imprisonments, and uncalled-for executions. The Speech promises to return to the roots of Communism, and acts as an apology for crimes committed under Stalin.

Khrushchev is a reformer, and makes good on his promises. Hundreds of thousands of wrongfully imprisoned people are released from prison. Censorship is rolled back. Camps are shut down and interrogation cells are ripped out. Khrushchev also advocates for a scaled-down military as well as a cut in military spending, with an emphasis on nuclear armament and deterrent instead – which becomes too much for too many in the Communist Party, even for people open to change like Panin. Panin comes to see that the reforms are too much, too fast, and have led to a string of reprisals against former and current members of the State who served under Stalin – and could have wider consequences, such as civil war and dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is among the reasons why Panin orders Leo to investigate the murders. The manufactured uprisings across Eastern Europe serve as proof that cutting back the military is not good for the State, especially when the uprising in Budapest really does get out of control. The thaw also means a struggle for survival between those who served under Stalin, and those seeking revenge. Most of the people in the novel serving under Stalin did what they had to do in order to survive. With the thaw, they have become targets for reprisal, and many, like the Kolyma prison guards, do what they must once more in order to survive.

Ultimately, even Khrushchev himself realizes the reforms have moved too far too fast, and he oversees a redacted version of the original Speech which cuts out admissions of wrongdoing, and glosses over much of the past to save the power structure of the



present. Announcing reforms to the public ceases, and the work is carried on in secrecy, from the release of prisoners to the tearing out of torture chambers. As things settle down after the initial wave of reforms, Panin explains to Leo that there will be no reprisals, no arrests, and no action taken as a result of the wildness of the early stages of the thaw.

Morality

Morality is an important theme in the novel “The Secret Speech” by Tom Rob Smith. Morality has to do with what is ethically right or wrong, good or evil, permissible or impermissible. Morality – or the lack of morality – is a defining force in how people conduct their lives and why they do the things that they do. Morality in the novel appears in various ways and affects various people in different ways, all adding to the overall plot of the novel.

Leo, formerly a legal absolutist and extreme utilitarian, has become a moral absolutist in the truest sense of the word by the events of “The Secret Speech”. Having once believed that anything legal was moral, and that the ends justified the means, Leo now knows that just because the State says something is legal, doesn’t make it moral, and the means are just as important as the ends. As a moral absolutist, Leo seeks to right the wrongs of his past – the wrongful arrests, the tortures, the interrogations, the forced false confessions, and so on. As a moral absolutist, Leo now endeavors to solve real crimes, to help the truly innocent, and to put away the truly guilty in the process. He also struggles to preserve and provide for his family, having come to love his stepdaughters and wanting to give them the life they were denied by the State and by one of Leo’s MGB agents. Leo’s moral quest for redemption and forgiveness will drive his journey to find and return Zoya safely home.

Whereas Leo’s journey to redemption and forgiveness transfigures him morally, Fraera’s journey for revenge is motivated by hatred, and morally disfigures her. Fraera’s fall from grace is especially poignant given that she is the loyal wife of a priest, and like her husband, considered to be an incredibly moral human being prior to her arrest, always doing the right thing. The arrest, however, changes her. She becomes fueled by hatred and the desire for revenge against Leo and the State. In the process, she uses sex to her advantage, brutally kills people, betrays others, stages murders, arranges murders, manipulates uprisings at the behest of the State, and does whatever she must to come out on top – including pretending to still love her husband. Fraera, in her efforts to defeat the State, surrenders the moral high ground, descending to the level of her enemies, and becoming indistinguishable from them. Many others in the novel do the same in the desire for their revenge against the Soviets – from prisoners at Kolyma to insurgents in Budapest. The last time Fraera is seen, she is headed out to photodocument Soviet immorality and barbarity in the Hungarian crackdown. There is great irony and hypocrisy in such an immoral woman seeking to expose the immorality of others.



The other subtle appearance of morality appears in the destruction of the Church of the Sancta Sophia. Marked by the Communist State for demolition in order to build a watersport complex in its place, the church symbolizes the moral footing of society and culture at large, and is something very important and very sacred to many people. That State seeking to destroy the church does not sit well with many, especially because the church is to give way to so secular and crass a purpose. The first attempted demolition fails, and is watched by a crowd of people, including Lazar. When the church is finally demolished, construction gets underway for the complex, but the ground, beside a river, proves to be too unstable for the watersport complex. The plan is abandoned mid-construction. The church here comes to be symbolic of the razing of morality through religion by the State. Without a moral footing – a stable foundation – the State (or any society or culture) has nothing to build on. As such, the abandoned complex is representative of the State – a ruinous, unstable, and ultimately doomed system of government.

Justice and Revenge

Justice and revenge form an important dual theme in the novel “The Secret Speech” by Tom Rob Smith. Justice involves the pursuit of that which is morally, ethically, and legally right, and the administering of right punishments for injustice, or that which is immoral, unethical, and illegal. Revenge involves an often harmful action committed against one or more individuals by one or more individuals as a response to committed past sins or wrongs – those sins and wrongs being those which are immoral, unethical, and/or illegal. The revenging act and process itself may not always be moral, ethical, or legal. Revenge and justice are therefore not always the same thing, and are very often opposed to one another. In the novel, Khrushchev’s Thaw brings about the clamor not only for reform, but for justice, and revenge.

Khrushchev’s reforms serve many purposes, including the pursuit of justice for all those wronged under Stalin’s regime. As such, hundreds of thousands of wrongfully imprisoned people are given justice by being freed, and returned home to their families. In order to achieve justice in the present, mass arrests, midnight arrests, State reprisals, denunciations, interrogation cells, torture chambers, and forced confessions are done away with. Even the admission of past sins and crimes is seen as a measure of justice for those sins and crimes, for they are publicly acknowledged and condemned. Leo himself pursues justice for the past, including his own, by seeking to do right in the present by helping the innocent find justice against serious crimes, and by solving serious crimes and putting away the guilty parties.

However, not everyone is satisfied with how things have turned out. Fraera freely admits her hatred and desire for revenge against Leo and the State, and will do whatever she must in order to achieve it. Fraera has been hideously, morally wronged, but her pursuit of revenge rather than genuine justice, as well as her commission of immoral and unethical acts (including murder) to achieve revenge causes her to lose the moral high ground, and to become identical to her enemy. Fraera’s revenge knows no moral limits – from promiscuity to kidnapping to coldblooded murder, including the murder of her



own husband – and as such, presents irony and hypocrisy in seeking to expose the barbarity of the Soviet-Communists by their Hungarian crackdown. Interestingly enough, Fraera doesn't care that thousands of innocent people will be killed in the crackdown, so long as she herself has her revenge.

The other notable examples of the seeking of revenge rather than genuine justice comes by way of the prisoners at Kolyma, and a handful of Hungarian rebels. Having staged an uprising, the Kolyma prisoners hold show trials to accuse guards of crimes and execute them on the spot, including the prison commander, who asks for forgiveness based on his improved record the past three years. The prisoners will not allow his good deeds to count for anything, and so ensure his execution based on the desire for revenge rather than genuine justice. In Budapest, the most extreme Hungarian insurgents burn AVH members alive – including Karoly as he tries to save his son. This barbaric pursuit of revenge rather than justice undermines the moral integrity of the Hungarian insurgency, and indeed, ends up disgusting many of the ordinary members of the insurgency has something having gone too far.



Styles

Point of View

Tom Rob Smith tells his novel “The Secret Speech” in the third person limited-omniscient narrative mode. The third-person narrative mode allows Smith to trace the movements of multiple character sin multiple places, tying together disparate and distant events and actions with a single unifying voice by way of a singular, third person narrator. The limited-omniscience aspect of the narration provides for suspense, urgency, and realism, in that characters in the novel do not know everything that is going on at every moment, and come to learn and discover things only as the reader comes to learn and discover them as well. This also allows Smith to provide contextual detail, vis-à-vis the Communist world, Communist politics, and the effects the Secret Speech has on the Soviet empire.

Language and Meaning

Tom Rob Smith tells his novel “The Secret Speech” in language that is simple and straightforward. Given the vast scope in places in which the novel takes place, the time in which it takes place, and the number of characters involved, the simple and straightforward language allows the reader to remain focused on the plot, and allows the plot to move at a brisk pace. This also allows Smith to contextualize events in the novel against the backdrop of the Secret Speech itself. Additionally, urgency is given to the plot by the use of straightforward language, as Leo races against the clock to save Zoya, and get out of war-torn Hungary alive.

Structure

Tom Rob Smith divides his novel “The Secret Speech” into 76 consecutive, unnumbered, titled, chronological chapters spanning a time period of seven years, from 1949 to 1956. . Each chapter is given a title according to the date and place in which the chapter takes place. For example, the chapter “Soviet-Controlled Eastern Europe, Hungary, Budapest, Buda Hill, 27 October” takes place on October 27, as Leo, Raisa, and Karoly arrive in Budapest, Hungary, which is under the control of the Soviet Union. The chapter thus deals with the beginning of the search that Leo, Raisa, and Karoly undertake for Zoya. This simple, straight-to-the-point handling of the chapters reflects the simple, straightforward language used in the novel, and helps to transition the reader immediately to the time and place in which the events of that particular chapter take place.



Quotes

Doubts surfaced. Had some unearthly power intervened and stopped this crime?
-- Narrator (Soviet Union, Moscow, 3 June 1949 paragraph 30)

Importance: The first attempt to raze the Sancta Sophia fails. Some people believe it is the work of God, and that the Communists have gone too far in seeking to destroy the church to build a watersport complex. Symbolically, the razing of the church is more than just the razing of a religious place, but the razing of morality itself. This causes many people to question as well just what the State can be like if it destroys something as sacred as a church without care.

Principles were more important than their lives.
-- Narrator (Soviet Union, Moscow, 3 June 1949, Same Day paragraph 19)

Importance: At the beginning of the novel, Anisya knows, along with her husband, Lazar, that righteousness matters more than anything else, including their lives. It is a statement of extreme irony made to describe Anisya, for by the end of the novel, nothing will be more important to her than outright revenge – and revenge is not a moral principle.

Leo's private hope was that one day he'd balance his arrest ledger, the guilty outweighing the innocent.
-- Narrator (13 March paragraph 3)

Importance: Leo continues his quest for redemption and forgiveness by working in the homicide department he has founded. He hopes that one day he will be able to say that he has helped and saved more lives than he has destroyed – but he knows he has a long way to go.

He wants people to know that he was the first person to say sorry. He's taken his place in history. He's the first man to criticize Stalin and not be executed.
-- Frol Panin (Chapter 35 paragraph 14 March, Same Day)

Importance: The Communist world is stunned at Khrushchev's Secret Speech. Panin explains that Khrushchev is signaling a period of reform and an attempt a justice and redemption on behalf of the State. As such, Khrushchev has put himself on the side of the people rather than the traditionalists in the Party, and has become an incredibly powerful figure.

What if this triggers a pattern of reprisals? What if everyone wronged seeks revenge? Leo, nothing like this has ever happened before: the execution and persecution of members of our State Security services. We simply don't know what to expect next.
-- Frol Panin (14 March, Same Day (page 110) paragraph 12)

Importance: The Secret Speech later leads to a slew of local murders in Moscow that



Leo is assigned to handle. It turns out that for many, reform means revenge against those who have wronged them. With hundreds of thousands of wronged prisoners returning home, the propensity for revenge and reprisal is staggering, and the Party and the State are actually scared of what may come.

When the police are criminals, the criminals must become the police.

-- Fraera (15 March paragraph 45)

Importance: Anisya-turned-Fraera here reveals succinctly the consequences of reform: the criminals will seek their revenge against the State. The State is criminal, and must be torn down. Nothing will stand in Fraera's way.

If she couldn't see the point of life, she could certainly see the point of death. Death would mean the end of all these sad memories, the end of regrets. Death would feel less empty than life.

-- Narrator (Ten Kilometers North of Moscow, 8 April paragraph 16)

Importance: Zoya, kidnapped, begins to long for death. She has felt dead for so long without her parents that has forgotten what it is like to live. Her despondency leads her to suicidal thoughts, and makes her easy prey for Fraera to manipulate into assisting her gang.

Before I die I would like to see my wife and son. Leo took them from me. He is the only person who can reunite us.

-- Lazar (Kolyma, Gulag 57, 12 April paragraph 40)

Importance: Here, Lazar presses the prisoners to spare Leo, which they do. Lazar here indicates his forgiveness of Leo, and his willingness to allow Leo to make things right. Lazar demonstrates in this instance his pursuit of genuine justice, rather than mere, petty revenge.

Love simply wasn't enough.

-- Narrator (Moscow, 20 October, Same Day (page 291) paragraph 1)

Importance: Raisa has done all she can to help Elena handle the loss of Zoya. Raisa gives Elena all the love she can muster, but it is not enough. The loss for Elena after the loss of her parents is too great a burden to bear. As such, Raisa seeks psychiatric treatment for Elena's condition of despondency and unresponsiveness. This will ultimately lead to the State taking away custody of Elena.

Many hundreds of thousands of prisoners are coming home; how will we govern if even a fraction of their numbers behave like her? Will her revenge start a chain reaction culminating in the collapse of rule and order? There will be civil war once more. Our country will be ripped down the middle. This is the new fear. Steps have been taken to prevent this from happening.

-- Grachev (Moscow, 20 October, Same Day (page 301) paragraph 49)



Importance: As the time passes, the dangerous aspects of reform come to the fore. Grachev explains them clearly and to the point. Hundreds of thousands of discontents could easily begin a war that would rip apart Russia, and shatter the Soviet Union. He also reveals that steps have been taken to prevent this – which Leo will soon come to discover.

We must behave as we have always behaved: with an iron rule.

-- Frol Panin (Blizhnyya Dacha, Kuntsevo, Twenty Kilometers West of Moscow, 21 October paragraph 50)

Importance: With the reform situation getting worse for the Party and for the State, the hardline traditionalists are gaining traction again. Panin, once unopposed to change, has moved in line with them. He explains to Leo that too much has happened too fast, and the results have been dangerous. To survive, the State must return to rule with an iron fist.

That's my revenge.

-- Fraera (4 November paragraph 30)

Importance: Fraera here reveals her ultimate revenge. It is not against Leo, but the Communist State. She has orchestrated the Budapest uprising to revolutionary fervor, knowing the Soviets will brutally crack down on the movement – and Fraera will be there to photograph it all, and provide the photos to the world so the world will turn against the Soviet Union.