

The Sojourn Study Guide

The Sojourn by Andrew Krivak

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Sojourn Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section 1: pages 9-27.....	5
Section 2: pages 27-40.....	8
Section 3: pages 41-54.....	10
Section 4: pages 54-73.....	12
Section 5: pages 73-89.....	15
Section 6: pages 90-103.....	17
Section 7: pages 104-116.....	19
Section 8: pages 116-130.....	21
Section 9: pages 131-144.....	23
Section 10: pages 144-162.....	25
Section 11: pages 162-171.....	27
Section 12: pages 172-192.....	29
Characters.....	31
Symbols and Symbolism.....	34
Settings.....	37
Themes and Motifs.....	39
Styles.....	42
Quotes.....	43



Plot Summary

"The Sojourn" by Andrew Krivak is a novel depicting the journey of a young man from anonymity to the horror of war, and back again to a life of peace and productivity.

Jozef Vinich is an American-born young man born to Slovak parents, living in the turn of the 20th century. Early in his life he loses his mother in a train accident and his father takes him east to Pennsylvania. There his father runs into trouble with the local citizenry and, fleeing the law, takes his young son back to the old country.

During a time when Austria-Hungary was still an empire filled with a variety of ethnicities and local identities, Jozef and his father Ondrej live the life of the shepherd, spending half the year perched in the Carpathian Mountains. It is a small existence, and quiet, but Jozef learns English and history and becomes a very good shot.

One spring when they are down in the village they add a new member to their family. Marian, or Zlee as they come to call him, is the son of a cousin of Ondrej. She is down on her luck and unable to care for her son anymore, so Ondrej and Jozef make Zlee their own.

Ondrej teaches the boys the ways of a hunter: patience, stillness, observance. He teaches them to respect their prey and the land. They love their life and their father, but the idyll can't last.

War comes to Eastern Europe and the boys sign up together. They are early on recognized for their skill and assigned to an elite sharpshooting unit. They experience good fortune in the war, as the snipers are too valuable to use in the trenches, until they are sent to the Italian border to find a sniper that has for six months been picking off the soldiers on the Austrian border. There, under the unfair command of an Austrian officer, they are sent to live in the woods until the sniper is killed; however, the sniper has a partner and traps Zlee and Jozef in their crosshairs. Zlee is killed and Jozef returns to his commander disgraced.

Rather than shoot him for his failure, the commander sends him to the trenches, where if the Italians don't kill him, dysentery or starvation will. Jozef is involved in the last major push of the Austrian army, and is captured by the Italians and sent to prison in Sardinia.

Faced with the loss of Zlee, the war, and probably his father, Jozef tries to regain strength and heal his broken spirit. When the war is over he is set free, and immediately attaches himself to a young Gypsy girl, pregnant and in need of a protector. For a short, idyllic time they live as a family; Jozef is so much in need of family that he believes he will be with her forever. However, when her baby is born she gently expires in loss of blood and expense of energy, but not before making Jozef promise to return her baby to her village. Blinded by grief, Jozef luckily stumbles into the girl's family, who take the baby as their own and send Jozef back to Czechoslovakia.



By the time he returns he has barely hope that Ondrej is still living, and he is right. His father has died a year or more before, but has left him a small fortune and a larger gift- his American birth certificate, which gives him the right to leave the country that has treated him so poorly and start over in the land of his birth. The story ends with Jozef watching the war-torn country slip away behind him as he travels to a new destiny.



Section 1: pages 9-27

Summary

The Sojourn opens with a prologue of sorts, a flashback to 1899 in Pueblo, Colorado, a mining town on the Arkansas river that was home to many Eastern European immigrants. Lizzie Vinich rises from her bed and starts the fire in her small shack. Her husband, Ondrej, and her infant son Josef still sleep. Ondrej wakes up and criticizes his wife for being so loud in the kitchen. Lizzie tells her husband that she wants to leave the house that day, to take the baby for a walk. Ondrej reflects on how hard the time has been for her- the pregnancy difficult, the birth worse, the recovery long.

They decide to go to church, then lunch at Ondrej's sister's house, and that Lizzie can go for a walk after lunch. When Lizzie asks Ondrej if he will join her, he says no, and his reasons are evasive. Life in Pueblo is not much better than life in the Slavic mountains- the immigrants have "exchanged one village for another." Ondrej had begun his time in America prospecting for gold, but when he married Lizzie he had to find steadier work. His life mining for coal in Pueblo is not what he'd expected or wished for, but it was important to do what was needed for his family.

At his sister's house, Lizzie decides to go for a walk. Her nephew, Tobias, begs to join her and Lizzie relents. She has baby Jozef strapped to her chest and walks holding Toby's hand. They walk out onto the railroad bridge over the Arkansas river, watching a group of young boys swimming in the rapids below. Lizzie has lost track of time; a train bears down on the bridge. Neither she nor Toby are fast enough to get off the trestle in time, and there is no room on the side. Furthermore, Toby's shoe is stuck in the rails. The boys below watch in horror as Lizzie unstraps baby Jozef from her chest and lets him fall into the river where he can be rescued, just moments before the train kills her and Toby.

The action jumps forward to March, 1972, where Jozef begins his reflection of his early life. He tells how a young boy in the river did save him and keep him from drowning, how the railroad paid his father an enormous amount of money for his grief, and how Ondrej immediately took the baby and moved them both to Pennsylvania. He finds mining work there and makes friends with the local hunters and buys an expensive Krag rifle. He and his new friends go hunting in the woods of Pennsylvania, and one of the men, a nameless character who "has means" approaches Ondrej in the woods and asks him for his rifle. They struggle, and fall, sliding down the mountain. The gun goes off and kills the man. Ondrej fears that the truth of the story won't be believed because the man is local and wealthy, and he is an immigrant, so he takes Jozef and moves them back to Pastivina, his home village in Austria-Hungary.



Analysis

The Sojourn is told as a reflection, which gives Jozef, the main character, the benefit of dropping hints to the readers about what will come. Thus, the narrative is heavy with foreshadowing. The events in Pueblo have the largest impact on Jozef's early life where he both loses his mother and the community of his extended family, and makes his first significant move. It is also important to note that Jozef, unlike his parents, was born in the United States, so he has rights to American citizenship. The opening section is told in third-person, because the events take place when Jozef is an infant; it gives the reader the benefit of seeing what kind of man Ondrej was before losing his wife and moving back to Europe. Here, the reader sees him as strong, almost cold, and not very sympathetic towards his wife. His character will change as the novel progresses.

When the action moves forward, to 1972 Pennsylvania, the reader knows that Jozef has lived 73 years at least, and the story changes to first-person as he continues the story where the prologue left off. Losing his mother was the first event that falls like a domino in Ondrej's life, routing him from the life he came to America for—a gold prospector—to what he will end up doing for the bulk of his life: being shepherd in the village in which he was raised. This idea of fate intervening and moving a person along without their consent is prevalent in this novel and begins here— the death of Jozef's mother causes Ondrej to take the baby and move away from the painful place of her death (along with a healthy settlement from the railroad company).

The second time fate intervenes is when Ondrej is forced to flee the United States after a hunting accident; a man is killed and he feels he will surely be blamed for his death. To avoid prosecution he takes up the life he left: shepherding, in his childhood village of Pastivinia. To note in the events of Pennsylvania is that the item at issue in the struggle with the unnamed man is the expensive Krag hunting rifle. This rifle will be woven throughout the narrative, showing up in important places and becoming a key part of Jozef's life.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Ondrej treat his wife so coldly in the opening scene?

Discussion Question 2

What are some key facets of an immigrant's life in this time period, that the author shows?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the impact of family connections on Ondrej's decisions when Jozef is a baby—how the network of immigrants and their families opens or closes doors for him.

Vocabulary

downstream, rivaled, indiscriminate, pneumonia, interspersed, vantage, negotiations, daguerreotype, valor, kindling, absentminded, somnolent,



Section 2: pages 27-40

Summary

It is 1901 when Ondrej and Jozef arrive in Pastvina, the village of Ondrej's youth. Jozef notes that the villagers are immediately afraid that Ondrej has come from gunfights and killing that seemed prevalent in the Wild West, but his demeanor showed him instead to be more of a broken recluse. Before leaving Pennsylvania, Ondrej had located a priest from the old country that found him a widow to marry, so that Jozef could have a stepmother. Jozef immediately describes her as a harridan, ranting and railing that Ondrej is worthless because he went all the way to America and came back with nothing.

Ondrej spends winter in the mountains hunting and tending sheep, leaving Jozef home with Borka and her sons. The first winter he's gone he returns to find Jozef sickly and undernourished; Ondrej threatens Borka to feed his son equal portions with her own. When Jozef is old enough, his father begins to take him into the mountains with him, for weeks or months at a time. He teaches him English and reads to him from American books about Civil War generals- he is particularly fond of US Grant. Jozef grows up seeing America as a symbol for a man making his own way.

When Jozef is nine he is forced to attend the village school. He goes for one year, spending most of that time fighting, before his father removes him and begins taking him on his mountain trips with more regularity. At age ten his father teaches him how to handle the Krag rifle and how to shoot. The lessons continue; Jozef isn't successful with the rifle early on, and has to learn through humility. At age eleven, Ondrej leaves Jozef halfway up the mountain and tells him he must find his own way to their lodge at the top. He does, and after a while, doubles back to check on his father. Ondrej calls this "predictable" and goes on to tell Jozef that a good hunter is never predictable.

Ondrej continues to train Jozef the ways of outside: being observant, quiet, flexible, and fluid, anticipating the moves of your quarry and staying two moves ahead. At this stage, he kills his first deer.

Analysis

In this section the reader sees the early training and passing of knowledge from father to son. There is early mention of Ondrej's second wife, mentioned by name only twice in this section, but for the rest of the narrative is simply "stepmother," a sign that Jozef gives little credit to her for anything in his life. To be sure, she mistreats him early on until Ondrej threatens her with bodily injury. For the remainder of the story she proves herself to be short-sighted and cruel, favoring her own sons over Jozef. It is a marriage in name only; the reader feels that Ondrej is done with love, except that for his son.



The training Jozef receives in the woods from Ondrej is important and will take up the early part of the story. The author spends so much time describing the skills learned in hunting, shooting, patience, and observation foreshadow that Jozef will need these skills later in the story. Ondrej favors lessons over sentimentality, not minding if Jozef's feelings are hurt as long as he learns the lesson at hand.

The Krag rifle features heavily in these lessons, as does "the mountain" to which father and son return year after year to tend the flock and become one with the outdoors. This place is vital to Jozef's upbringing.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Ondrej marry Borka?

Discussion Question 2

What does Ondrej mean that Jozef is "predictable"? Why is this not a compliment?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Ondrej take Jozef out of school?

Vocabulary

consequence, seclusion, tubercular, amazement, magistrate, betrayed, corporal, shrewish, bantam, pendulum, terrain, predictable, stationary, anticipate, prone



Section 3: pages 41-54

Summary

In the autumn when Jozef is twelve, when they have returned to Pastvina for the season, a woman comes to the house with a boy Jozef's age. She is a distant cousin of Ondrej who has fallen on hard times, and asks if Ondrej will take her son for a while. His name is Marian Pes, but he will quickly gain the nickname "Zlee." He is reticent and withdrawn, and immediately draws the ire of Borka's two sons, who make fun of him for his street-urchin appearance. One day Zlee snaps and punches the older of the two, and then steals his coat; the event seems to help Zlee grow from his reticence, and he is ready to take on 'the mountain' with Jozef and Ondrej.

Zlee fits well into their life on the mountain. Jozef notes that he seems more like a seasoned shepherd who had taken a break, rather than a novice that had never spent life outdoors before. It is the first of many times he will note Zlee's skills, which will eventually become finely honed. He is especially natural with the rifle, needing very little instruction. As the two boys become more and more accomplished at their tasks in shepherding and animal husbandry, Ondrej seems to start slipping, becoming more casual and willing to let the boys do the bulk of the work. He sleeps late, he leaves the important decisions and tasks to the boys, and his eye on the herd begins to waver. While Ondrej's departure certainly increases and hones the boys' skills in the woods, it also breeds discontent in Jozef.

The spring of Jozef's fifteenth year, a lioness (a puma) begins hunting the periphery of the village, picking off animals one by one and causing fear in the village and on the mountain. Ondrej becomes almost obsessed with the idea of killing her, and he and the boys spend the summer hunting the lioness. For many weeks she eludes them, until Jozef realizes that she's hunting for sport and not for food; she has tired of the ewes and is interested in a more challenging prey: them. Without his father knowing, Jozef uses his father as bait, hiding himself in a crag in the mountain and watching for the puma to appear when his father is first waking, unsuspecting that she's near. In this way, he kills the puma as she is preparing to attack his father.

Analysis

The key events in this section that drive the novel's action is first of all the arrival of Zlee, Jozef's would-be brother. They are only distantly related, but will be raised as brothers and will feel like brothers for the duration of the story. He initially doesn't get along with anyone in the family, but like Jozef did in the schoolyard, he must fight off the bullying of his stepbrother in order to gain respect from them and for himself.

One thing to note about Jozef's character is his admiration of how quickly Zlee takes to the rifle, that he immediately hunts well with unshakable stillness and patience, and that



Jozef never resents him for it. The skill is so highly prized that Jozef is able to respect it rather than be envious of it. It is Zlee's reverence for the outdoor life that bonds him to Jozef. They will spend the next handful of years together, doing the same thing, brothers in stillness and patience.

Jozef foreshadows not necessarily Ondrej's decline, but a decline in Jozef's respect for him, because as the boys become more skilled, he becomes less disciplined. This will lead to Jozef's desire to leave his mountain and do other things, which will come to the story sooner rather than later. The section ends with a long narrative description of the hunt for the lioness, a hunt in which Jozef makes his kill by using his father as bait, which will cement Jozef's move from boyhood towards manhood with the realization that he may have eclipsed his father in some ways. In the moment before he kills the puma he wishes himself a boy again, in a time where his father was everything in the world to him.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Zlee so good at hunting?

Discussion Question 2

How does Jozef know that the lion will come after his father?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does Jozef notice his father's "decline"?

Vocabulary

gangly, nonplussed, dis-edified, conjured, aloof, obliquely, ventured, antagonistic, scythe, blunderbuss, switchback, adversary



Section 4: pages 54-73

Summary

When Ondrej and the boys return to Pastvina in the fall of 1914, World War I has begun. Jozef catches the fever of the boys his age: war is coming, an adventure, a chance to leave home. Jozef dislikes village life; he feels the village people criticize his father and he wants to bring pride to their name. Jozef sees the townspeople's view of him and wishes to see his father fight back somehow, but in his eyes as well, Ondrej has retreated inside himself. Jozef's stepbrothers head off to war, with a kind of recklessness that characterizes all men of age. Before they leave, Jozef gets into a massive fight with them; they almost get the best of him, but Zlee steps in and beats them both to a pulp. Zlee has to stop Jozef from killing them.

Jozef is too young to sign up for the army, and he is restless and disillusioned with his father and village life. He develops a temper, constantly arguing with his father about the war. Ondrej develops his English by reading newspapers from New York and London, which not only helps his skills but breed certain politics in him. Like the Republican West, Ondrej begins to desire the end of the Austrian-Hungarian empire, while Jozef is still loyal to the emperor.

In 1916, Zlee turns eighteen, and Jozef pays a man in the city to alter the birthdate on his ID card so they can register for the war together. The army is so desperate for fighting men they overlook his obvious age gap. The night before he leaves, Ondrej tells Jozef about how his mother died, and why he left Pennsylvania; and that he felt that if he didn't atone for the man's death by submitting to a life of drudgery, he would lose Jozef, the only person he'd ever loved.

Zlee and Jozef, having been bred on patience, commitment, stillness, and hard work, take easily to basic training. Early on they distinguish themselves as good soldiers. When they show their marksman skills, however, they are noticed. Their Basic Training commander, Kray, sends them to another captain, an Austrian, who asks them of their loyalty to the emperor, and then sends them to an elite squad of sharpshooters. They would train to defend the southern borders, were expected to be silent and perfect; if not they would be dumped into a trench and most likely killed. They were needed not just for marksmanship, but for their skills as hunters. Their leader is Sergeant Major Bucher. He trains them not only to care for their rifles, but to hide and move through the woods quietly, the most prized skill. Early in the training, Jozef and Zlee are ignored, because they are not Austrian. The empire is made of many ethnicities, but Austrian is preferred. However, by the end of training, they distinguish themselves and are assigned to stay together being called "the twins"



Analysis

These pages move the story in a new direction. The boys, now teens, have shown themselves tough, intelligent, capable hunters and fighters; the onset of World War I renders them impatient and twitchy. Likewise, Ondrej Vinich is declining in the world's eyes, which causes a recklessness in Jozef, a need to distinguish himself on his father's behalf. He is equal parts angry at how the village sees his father and angry that their opinion may be true. This discontent leads him to fake his age and sign up for emperor's army.

Before he leaves, Ondrej tells him his life history of Colorado, or Pennsylvania, of why he brought them home to a small life, to atone for what happened in Pennsylvania, to protect Jozef, the one thing he loved. Their bittersweet parting is a hint to the reader that it's the last time they'll see each other. Jozef is so keyed up to fight he barely notices the care with which his father tells him goodbye.

The boys go to war. Here the reader learns about the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, which in 1914 comprised a large chunk of Eastern Europe of several different people groups—Slavs, Czechs, and Slovaks, mainly. However, the emperor is Austrian, so Austrian is the prime ethnicity to be in the army. The mix of people groups is an important theme for the author: the war happens at a time when the empire is a mix of people that are all fighting together for the same empire, and this commitment will unravel as the war goes on. Jozef and Zlee distinguish themselves as exactly what the army is looking for in terms of a squad of hunter/sharpshooters that would be highly trained and sent to the southern front. The way Ondrej raised them matches perfectly with the squad, and it's far better than being sent to certain death in a trench. Jozef and Zlee are even assigned to a team together, at first ignored because they're not Austrian but eventually distinguished for their skill.

Discussion Question 1

Why are the Austrians preferred in the army?

Discussion Question 2

How does Jozef react to the village's treatment of his father?

Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't Zlee allow Jozef to kill his stepbrother?

Vocabulary

conscription, intractable, disdainful, subversive, obscenities, doggedly, prosthetic, demoralized, affectation, aphoristically, insular, derisive



Section 5: pages 73-89

Summary

The men are sent to a holding place for a time, where trains come and go and leave and take soldiers. They are falsely jovial; none of them have seen battle yet and are anxious. They see many wounded, which does little for their morale; plus they are stuck in the same place for a long time. They are placed in the Soca River valley in modern-day Slovenia, and early on Jozef marvels at how different war looks—one expects neat lines of soldiers facing off in gentlemanly columns. Instead there are deep trenches hiding thousands of soldiers, ready to pop up and attack by surprise.

The sight of the sharpshooter group tended to give confidence where they went. Their plans were unspoken and unspecific other than picking off Italian soldiers one at a time when it's unexpected to the enemy. Jozef and Zlee are excited to finally "see some action," and they begin this period with full bellies, warm uniforms, and the confidence that comes from inexperience. They are sent on their first assignment; Jozef kills a member of the Italian sharpshooter. It doesn't bother him at the time; he is fully convinced that those men are his enemy, and he would kill because he was told to do so. They alternated scouts by the week— a week to patrol, hide, and shoot, staying up for hours on end and only resting in shifts; and a week to rest. One week their captain tells them that they suspect their men are deserting due to talk that the English and Americans were set to join the war and abolish the monarchy. Zlee and Jozef have one of the highest kill rates in their company, and they are assigned, with a raiding party, to set up a hide near the troops that are suspected of running and kill them as they run.

One night Zlee and Jozef are watching the wall and see two men go over. The first one Jozef hits between the shoulder blades. The second one, wise to the snipers in the area, threw up his arm in defense, so Jozef's shot wounded him but didn't kill him. They are forced to leave cover to finish the kill, and it unnerves Jozef. After the kill, he dreams of his mother, who appears before him, but won't let him follow.

Jozef and Zlee report back to the Major with reports of troop movement and Italian fortifications, indicating that battle was coming. It came suddenly, one day when Zlee and Jozef happened to shoot a man from 500 yards away, and the Italians open fired on them. It's a long and ugly battle with no victor.

Analysis

These pages describe the bulk of Jozef's and Zlee's task in the army, elite sharpshooters tasked with killing the Italians on the southern border. Jozef narrates how confident and war-thirsty they are in the beginning, setting up a contrast for later in the story, when they are all ready to lay down arms no matter the consequence. He also says something that's noteworthy in the context of the history of World War I. Jozef



remarks that he expected war to be open and neat, with each army dressed in different colors and faced off in neat rows across an open field. In truth, WWI is the first "modern" war, characterized by machines and sneak attacks and trenches, barbed wire fences, and chemical warfare. The reader can see through Jozef's eyes the different and more sinister look of this war.

He and Zlee are truly part of a revered group. Because their job is to take out the Italians one by one, they inspire confidence. Jozef kills without reservation; he is sold to the cause of his emperor without question. This too will change as the war progresses. They enjoy notoriety and success as sharpshooters for a while; soon, their luck changes. They are called "cold bastards" by one of the other officers, and it is an interesting commentary on the job Zlee and Jozef do: they are revered for sitting still and watching an encampment until a soldier strays into their crosshairs, when he is shot. As the story progresses, and the hard side of war intrudes on their small existence, the hardness breaks down for Jozef.

Jozef dreams of his mother; three times in the first half of the story. The dreams are never the same; she always appears filmy, in a mist, as a dead dream-figure would. Her appearance in his dreams stands out, because later in the story, Jozef will dream of the men he has killed, or the men he has failed. His mother's appearance seems to represent moving him down his predestined path. He is always trying to follow her, and she is always pushing him down a different path.

Discussion Question 1

How are Jozef and Zlee perfectly suited to their work?

Discussion Question 2

Why are the commanders always suspicious of Zlee's nationality?

Discussion Question 3

Why do the soldiers start to desert?

Vocabulary

unscathed, elite, lethal, sovereign, attrition, discernible, escarpment



Section 6: pages 90-103

Summary

A battle with the Italians rages for days; Jozef begins to doubt all that he has put his hope in. The emperor, the empire, God; he feels they've all abandoned his cause. The sharpshooters are so useful alive that they are kept out of the battle, in fact they are ordered north, away from the battle, to join a new sharpshooter regiment. From the heights in the mountains, they can look back across the Soca river and watch the Italians advance on the emperor's troops, successful in their last push. Their new regiment is peppered with Austrians and Germans, very well prepared and well-outfitted. Their positive attitude and belief in success encourages the young men that victory may be in their grasp. They experience a break in the action. In the fall they are summoned to their old trainer, Major Bucher.

Until this point in time, Zlee and Jozef have obeyed orders fairly blindly, feeling destiny pull them to their tasks, but the sight of the Major reminds them of people and faces and a reality apart from theirs. He tells them that they are requested to move into the mountains near Italy, where an Italian sniper has been taking his toll on the Austrians stationed there. They have to walk over the Alps to get there, in late fall. Two days later, the boys set out, on skis and snowshoes, across the mountains, towards the Italian sniper. The Alps prove a more difficult challenge than the Carpathian mountains. They come in contact with men along the way, missing fingers from frostbite and their skin tight from the cold. While crossing a crevasse they lose two of their crew and almost fall themselves. It was a long, cold hike to their next outpost at Fort Cherle.

They arrive at Fort Cherle to the command of Commander Prosch, who is hard and cold and unyielding. The fort is cold and the Italians begin to barrage it almost immediately. After two solid months of trekking across the snows and crags of the Alps, Jozef and Zlee are sent to man guns and defend against the latest attack. They see men killed before their eyes and wonder where is God in this war. Jozef begins to lose hope in the war, in the empire, in victory, and for the first time admits to himself that he is only fighting for the chance to go home and see Ondrej one more time.

Analysis

These pages are kind of a slow increase to the first tragedy to strike Jozef in the war, a fact to which he alludes numerous times. He references the great cold, the ascents and descents of their mountain traverse, the lack of God in the horrors of war. He is beginning to feel disillusioned in his purpose there. He wants to feel as if God is pulling him along, controlling his circumstances, but when he looks around and sees the death and destruction of the war he isn't sure.



The plot moves along as Jozef and Zlee are transferred to a new regiment, one even more elite and well-trained than their previous, stocked with well-armed and outfitted Germans and Austrians. He mentions that the Germans appear to be elite supersoldiers, and they all feel more confident in their presence, as if it's really possible to win the war again. And even though their last sight of the Soca was the Italians advancing on the emperor's troops, they feel hope spring again. Major Bucher sends them over the mountains, south towards Italy, to stop an Italian sniper that has been depleting their ranks one by one and damaging the men's morale. He tells them by the time they cross the mountains the war may be over, which is a hint to the reader of how things are going for the Central powers, but it's not a soldier's job to give up.

The trek over the Alps is cold and difficult; they see men disfigured from the cold, they lose friends in the crevasses, they toast their fate to an unknown God. When they reach Fort Cherle, the empire is advancing, but they are losing soldiers to the artillery. As this section closes, the reader feels Jozef's bleakness, and his last thought is desperation to see Ondrej again. The low spirits in which this section ends foretells something bad coming in the next pages.

Discussion Question 1

Why are the sharpshooters kept out of the battle?

Discussion Question 2

How could it help the soldiers to feel like God is in control of the war?

Discussion Question 3

What makes Jozef feel like his father might be dead?

Vocabulary

paragons, subordinates, whimsical, peregrinated, acedia, harassing, hubris, ort



Section 7: pages 104-116

Summary

January, 1918. Commander Prosch shows Zlee and Jozef the work of the sniper-bullets placed in the head, same place every time, of random men that don't return from lookout or a hunting party. There is no rhyme or reason to his killing, no pattern they can discern. He is taking his toll on the men in morale and numbers. For five months Prosch had been sending his own sharpshooters to search for the killer, and they'd thus far failed. This sniper is the reason Zlee and Jozef were demanded by Prosch. After sitting at Fort Cherle for a month, Prosch finally sends the boys out to find the sniper, or pray he kills them, because they better not come back empty handed. Jozef and Zlee outfit themselves for the hide. They spend a week scouting good hides and zig-zagging across the mountain before reporting back to Prosch, who is surprised and angry they haven't returned with a kill. He threatens them with death, striking fear in Jozef; Zlee explains that the sniper is using the mist from the warm mornings as cover, so when it's too cold to shoot they are scouting where he may be hiding.

Zlee proposes to set a mannequin at the guard post the next morning the temperature climbs above freezing, so they can see from which direction he's shooting. It's a month before the weather warms up; the trap is set, the boys go into hiding, and the sniper strikes without their knowledge, destroying the mannequin and his attending guard. They are caught on the mountain, missing their prey yet unable to go back to Prosch, who will surely be angry. They decide to stay another day to see if they can get another crack at the sniper. Early in the morning, Jozef spots the sniper and Zlee prepares to fire on him. Jozef sights him in the stock and realizes that he's an Austrian they trained with, and just as Zlee exhales to squeeze the trigger, he is shot himself. Jozef has seconds before the second shot comes, the one for him; he rolls out of the way and realizes that the enemy had two snipers, positioned opposite him and Zlee. They were lured into their own trap.

Jozef returns to Zlee's body and uses it as cover, hefting it over his shoulders as he tries to descend the mountain. The weight proves too much and he loses everything in the ravine: his rifle and glasses, and Zlee's body. Jozef considers dropping down into the ravine as well, ending his life rather than face what's coming to him, but he eventually hefts himself off the ledge. He waits until nightfall and goes back to Fort Cherle. Commander Prosch is, as predicted, angry at Jozef's failure. For punishment, Jozef is stripped of his sharpshooter rank and sent to the front lines to prepare for a looming battle, almost certain death.

Analysis

These are certainly the hardest pages to read, for the reader to learn that for all of the hard work and training that have kept Jozef and Zlee alive for three years, that they are



killed by a simple dupe. The hard times foreshadowed in the previous pages have come, as Jozef has lost his brother and his honor, failed to kill his quarry, and is sent to death in the trenches.

The author uses his themes of cold and ebb and sway in these pages, as Jozef and Zlee wait in Fort Cherle with the cold coming and then retreating; they make their plans to kill the Italian sniper under threat of the Austrian Commander Prosch. Jozef says with fear he realizes Prosch has the ability to kill him; the commander is weak and wields power poorly, but because it is war and the army Jozef is required to obey him.

As Jozef and Zlee sit on the mountain and wait for their prey, the pages seem long, pregnant with the action that must come. Jozef suggests leaving, deserting the army and moving back north to the Carpathian mountains; Zlee says, "it's a shame to end this way, Jozef," as if he knows that this is their last hide together. After Zlee is killed and Jozef uses his body as a shield, the author describes how Jozef talks to the body as he heaves him over the boulders, telling him that yes, the enemy got them good with their ruse. It is a shocking way to move the plot forward, but very realistic; it is war, and the reader can't expect that Jozef will go the length of the war without being touched by its horrors. Perhaps the worst part is watching Jozef descend empty handed back to the fort, having lost his kit and his brother, and to take the wrath of the commander, who has sat safely behind stone walls the entire time. If Jozef hadn't felt the sting of disillusion yet, he certainly did now, as he is stripped of his rank and sent to die on the front lines, in the Austrian army's last push against the Italians.

Perhaps the biggest irony in these events, and employing one of the author's themes of nationality and ethnicity, is that the Italian snipers of which they've been so afraid are actually Austrian deserters. When Jozef sees the one sniper—the bait—through his crosshairs, he recognizes him from their training together.

Discussion Question 1

Is Zlee's death unexpected?

Discussion Question 2

Is it fair for Jozef to be punished as he is?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the irony of Jozef and Zlee being bested by their own kind.

Vocabulary

sniper, random, frequency, deter, artillery, morale, feigned, intermittent, mercury

Section 8: pages 116-130

Summary

Jozef moves closer to the heart of the action, running lower on food as they walk. Many of them died from starvation, dehydration, or worse. They reach the edge of the Italian trenches at Easter, and Jozef falls ill with a fever. The medic is kind and capable and gives him a brew of herbs to ease his fever, and Jozef dreams of his mother again. When he wakes up, he finds he's been asleep for three days, and that the British have attacked. They both realize the irony that they lived through such an attack only to be killed on another day. He tells Jozef to hide his sharpshooter lanyard, because if he is captured with it he will be tortured.

May arrives with new supplies and promises for another battle. The trenches are filled with sick and dirty men that wonder why they have been made to survive as long as they have. However, they still believe in the divine guidance of the emperor, and their natural elitism causes a disdain for the abilities of the Italians, and so hope springs again that they will survive the last push. The battle comes in June; Jozef pushes forth with his fellow soldiers through muck and battle. Through many advances and fall-backs, Jozef finds himself nearly alone, lying on the ground with his machine gun trained on the advancing enemy, picking them off one by one as he could. He is surrounded, and has one more round in his gun. He considers allowing himself to die once more, realizing that all of those he loves are probably dead. However, he specifically decides he doesn't want to be another nameless dead soldier, and so he throws his hands up in surrender. At that moment he is shot in the hand, and nearly killed by an Italian, but he is saved by an Englishman, and taken captive. The Englishmen compliments Jozef's shooting and searches him for signs that he's in the sniper unit, but of course Jozef had lost most of those things and had burned his lanyard before the battle.

He begins to march at riflepoint out of the trench.

Analysis

These pages deftly and in detail describe the horror of WWI trench warfare. Most of this section describes the last push of the Austrian offensive in detail: the move of the enemy, the fall of artillery fire, soldiers dropping to their death to Jozef's right and left.

To note in these pages is Jozef thinking about his father, realizing that he'd mistaken his father's weakness for caution and wisdom, and wishing that he could live long enough to learn the difference, as Ondrej had. Ebb and flow are at work again in these pages, as the army pushes forward, only to be pushed back. The troops are on the brink of starvation, when a supply truck arrives. Jozef is surrounded by the enemy and prepared



to give up his life, only to decide to grasp life and try to stay alive, if only to live well as his father taught him.

The reader mourns for Jozef and his losses: Zlee and maybe his father, his rank, his success, but the story is moving forward still.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the medic suggest that Jozef get rid of his sharpshooter credentials?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jozef see Zlee's ghost, in the last battle?

Discussion Question 3

Did Jozef's fellow soldiers 'die well'?

Vocabulary

beseeking, forbearance, execution, full-scale, trench, scorn



Section 9: pages 131-144

Summary

Jozef and other prisoners walk to Italy, passing thousands of dead along the way, sustaining abuse from the Italians as they go. Jozef notes that he'd never felt the Italians were his enemy until then. Jozef was shot in the final battle before he was captured, and his arm is in bad shape. When they reach the prison in Italy they are separated by nationality—Jozef is placed with the Czechs and Slovaks although he speaks German to them. They are visited by a Czech-Slovak legion, a new army being formed out of the Austrian-Hungarian army, which is all but defunct. They offer to take them from prison, feed them and clothe them well, if they fight again. Jozef refuses, his background mottled enough to not feel the pull of patriotism.

The next day, he is barely able to move and is finally sent to a doctor, who amputates two of his fingers. After staying in the medic tent for a few days, he is shipped off with the rest of the prisoners. They journey by train to somewhere—he can't tell where—and are bathed, clothed, and put in cells, fed very little and given poor conditions. The first night, one of the men in his cell dies, and this is the trend for several nights. As his fellow prisoners are dying, Jozef slowly feels life seep back in, and he sleeps well and feels his strength return.

He is moved to a new, cleaner cell, and goes outside day by day as his strength returns. He knows he is somewhere in Italy, where he can see mountains and smell the Mediterranean Sea. Prison life held little to distinguish day to day; in prison he notes that there is no hope of victory to keep a young man going, so in prison men died quietly out of boredom and sadness.

He finds kindness in unexpected quarters—the prison is run by Sardinians, not Italians, and they treat the prisoners with smiles, as if they hope they will survive well. Jozef begins to dream of the men he's killed, along with Zlee and his mother and all the men he'd seen die in the previous years. He feels like he will go mad with the ghosts if not for the kindness of the jailers and the changes in his routine. One day he sits outside and meets an old man, a Corsican named Banquo who had been in jail for a very long time. They begin to meet daily and talk. He tells Banquo of the men he's killed and that he's destined to see them for his crimes. Banquo encourages him to forgive himself, as in war they are all tasked with killing one another. Banquo tells him that the real crime is in not living the life he has, being courageous and realizing that Jozef has learned and grown in the struggle of the war. Jozef tells the ghosts that his fighting is over, and they disappear. Not long after, Banquo dies.



Analysis

These pages do much to describe the drudgery of prison life, but they also take care to display a few of the author's pet themes.

As Jozef is marched to prison, he is asked to take up arms for his own ethnicity—the Slavs, rather than the Austrians—and he can honestly say he feels no pull from nationalism, no need to defend his own people. He is spent from war, spent from humanity, and has no energy left for a cause. From three years of fighting and keeping faith in an unseen emperor and a dying empire, Jozef has removed himself from nationality, and prefers prison to singling himself out.

Like the other men in prison, Jozef has the option of dying from despair, but as his hand feels his strength returns, and he smells the sea in the air and wants to live just for the daily chance to feel the sea air clean his body out. He deals nightly with Zlee and the ghosts of the men he's killed, but the author introduces a wise sage of a character, in the form of an old prisoner named Banquo, who ironically (for a man who has spent decades in prison), cautions Jozef to live life and not allow the ghosts to pull him into the past. In some of the finest writing in the novel, Banquo says that life itself, with its struggles and ebbs and flows and loves, is the worthiest thing to grasp, not courage or country. He says not to disregard the fact that he has been granted life to live, and not killed as his brother and others were.

Banquo's words help Jozef to forgive himself and dismiss his ghosts one by one, and as quickly as Banquo enters his life, he dies in his sleep.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the Italians separate the prisoners by nationality?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jozef see the ghosts of the soldiers he's killed?

Discussion Question 3

In seeing Zlee at his bed at night, what does Jozef show that he fears?

Vocabulary

column, ornamental, puttee, tarpaulin, bombastic, distracted, reckoned, vanquished, litany



Section 10: pages 144-162

Summary

December, 1918- the jailers open the doors and encourage all of the prisoners to leave. Jozef feels trepidation at the world unknown, and a longing for home, whichever home would have him. The Italians warn them not to stay, and Jozef and others walk towards the mountains, towards the countries they came from. He walks towards the east, towards what was once Hungary. One day he happens upon an old shack and sees two soldiers sexually assaulting a young girl, a Gypsy, pregnant, and only fourteen or so. After a few minutes of biding his time, he kills one of the men, and in the confusion she kills the other. After rifling through the dead men's pockets and taking measure of Jozef, he commands him to help her bury her husband. They bury a young man in the field, not long dead, and she weeps over him and calls him "Bexhet."

The next morning, he begins traveling with the girl. She is bossy and abusive, but she seems to accept his presence, and after so long being alone, he welcomes the company and her own strange brand of strength. They make slow progress; it's winter and she is pregnant, but they stay together, and after a few days Jozef realizes he is her caretaker and protector, and will see her and her unborn baby to safety. As cold as it was and treacherous was the road, there was a lightness that came with the knowledge that the war had passed. Eventually they come upon a farmhouse; the girl seems to know it and moves in seamlessly. They set up house and begin the task of living out her pregnancy there.

They stay a month, communicating little but still living in harmony. Jozef passes the days readying the home for winter and for the baby, refurbishing an old cradle, cutting firewood, and finding food, while the girl does the same inside. She tells him her story, that the army had come to her village and she'd fallen in love with a young soldier. They made love one time only, and he promised himself to her before he disappeared. Her brother tried to take her to where the army had gone, but they were set upon and her brother was killed, the Bexhet that they buried. They grow into a companionable friendship. Not a romance, but Jozef in his loneliness feels so attached to her strength and vitality that he vows never to leave her.

Analysis

The reader learns later that the Gypsy girl's name is Aishe, and in these pages hope returns to Jozef's life. With the war over in November 1918, the prisoners are set free and warned to leave Italy. What is striking about Jozef's behavior in this section is how quickly he attaches himself to the girl. He rescues her from assault and certain death, and she immediately abuses him and bosses him about. And yet, whether he feels attracted to her vitality or is just longing for family, he immediately throws in his lot with her. He does begin his freedom noting that he longs for home, "wherever that home



may be." This wandering foreshadows the fact that Ondrej has probably passed on by now, and Jozef mostly likely has no family left in Pastvina. The thought is enough to keep him from walking directly home, instead staying with the young Gypsy girl for as long as he can.

Banquo spoke of purpose at their last meeting, and with Aishe Jozef has purpose. He has someone to take care of, to look after; the baby's safe birth is a goal to which he can attain. Unlike fighting for the empire in some nameless cause, he has found something pure and undefiled that he can call his purpose for the time being, and it is a worthwhile bridge from captivity into normal life.

If the reader hopes that Jozef will find forever happiness with Aishe and her baby, there is enough foreshadowing to the contrary. Based solely on Jozef's devotion to her, the reader can surmise that she will not last her childbirth; and besides, the author's theme of destiny has been pulling Jozef home to seek after his father.

Discussion Question 1

Who are the Romany people?

Discussion Question 2

How is Aishe useful to Jozef?

Discussion Question 3

Why does he think Aishe is familiar with the farmhouse?

Vocabulary

migratory, swaggered, insular, fatigue, symmetrical, loess, rampart



Section 11: pages 162-171

Summary

Jozef and Aishe see a horse in the woods and bring it back to the house. He is skeptical of taking a horse that isn't theirs, but she thinks it's fine. However, a few days later he comes back to the house to see it ransacked and Aishe beaten. When he asks her what happened she says, "the boy." He tends to her wounds and runs into the woods, a loaded rifle in hand. In the woods he happens a young boy leading their horse, age thirteen at most. He challenges Jozef on the ownership of the horse and says he beat Aishe in self-defense. The two young men have a standoff in the woods, the boy challenging Jozef to shoot him for the horse, but Jozef can't do it. The boy leaves with the horse and Jozef returns to Aishe in the house.

She goes into labor when he returns. She is so young, and he had birthed many animals so he knew it would be hard on her. He words with her for hours; after a day of labor she makes him promise that he will take her baby to her village across the river and deliver him to her people. He knows they will both die if the baby isn't born soon. For another hour she pushes, the baby is born, and she bleeds to death after nursing the baby for just a little while.

Jozef takes the baby from the dead girl and they both weep from the loss. He makes a pack for the child and straps him to his chest, and sets the house on fire before leaving it and her behind. It is dark and late, but he travels toward the river to find care for the baby. As he walks he talks to Aishe, mourning the time he felt like he belonged to someone, and for a time the baby's life is his quest.

Analysis

The foreshadowing of the previous section is realized. Jozef was in a good place, a mountaintop, feeling belonging and family and purpose, and then his circumstances plummet again as he finds himself alone and tasked with finding care for the baby.

The presence of the horse is a tease—Jozef knows it's not good to take the wandering mare but Aishe is so headstrong he submits to her, and the horse is probably their undoing. The beating Aishe took from the teenage boy who took the horse is most likely the cause of her labor, although she is so young and undernourished the reader can't surmise how good her chances of living through the birth may have been. To note in the standoff with the boy is that Jozef literally can't find it in himself to kill him, although he hurt Aishe and would hurt Jozef if he could. The boy's simple submission to death is too much for Jozef and he can't pull the trigger. Not only that—he unloads the cartridge and tosses the rifle into the woods, symbolically hurling his urge to kill away from himself for good.



When Aishe dies, he weeps for the first time. To this point, the reader hasn't seen him weep for anything that he's lost—not Zlee, his commission, the friends and lives he's seen destroyed in the war. Only when Aishe, a girl he's known for a month, dies giving life to her son does Jozef finally break down and realize the grief that's plagued him. As he dives into the dark woods with the baby strapped to him, he sees that the safe delivery of the child is his new purpose, the direction he must walk in for now.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the teenage boy beat Aishe so savagely?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Jozef hurt or shoot the boy to keep the horse?

Discussion Question 3

How can Jozef be so attached to a girl he just met, and barely knew?

Vocabulary

afterthought, virtues, netted, divined, carbine, ashen, intensified, resistance, breech, coaxed, bellows, mews



Section 12: pages 172-192

Summary

Jozef moves through the woods until he can't move any longer, and is eventually found by an old man. He is a Rom, and hides Jozef in his wagon from soldiers, handing the baby to the woman that is with him. The cart lumbers off, lulling Jozef to sleep. When he wakes up he's on the edge of a Romany village and the old man is telling him to leave. Jozef sees that the baby is being nursed by a woman. Jozef thanks them but says he must get the baby to the village across the river because he promised the mother. The old man tells him he is in the village across the river, and asks for the story.

Jozef does his best to tell of the girl, although he can't remember her name. The old man doesn't believe him until Jozef remembers that the young man they buried was named Bexhet. He decides to leave them, seeing that the baby is being loved and fed, and what does it matter who raises him if he is loved? Only then does the old man tell Jozef that Aishe and Bexhet were his children. The Romanys feed and clothe Jozef and send him with a caravan heading towards the new nation of Czechoslovakia.

He arrives in Pastvina and sees Borka, his stepmother. She weeps when she sees him, for her sons are dead as well. He tries to comfort her. She brings him a thick letter, the only thing Ondrej left for Jozef when he died, over a year ago. It's a long letter, most of it rambling, but at the very end, so far into the letter that Borka wouldn't have taken the time to translate that much of it, Ondrej says there is five ounces of gold hidden in a cave at the top of the mountain. He urges Jozef to take it and buy passage to America, where he is a citizen, and start over.

Jozef climbs the mountain and fetches the gold, after which he weeps for his father and Zlee and the life he loved before the war.

He returns, sells his father rifle, and travels to Prague. There he gets an American passport and changes some money, even sends a little to Borka for her trouble, and buys passage to America. The book ends with the boat leaving Germany for the Atlantic.

Analysis

It is fitting and an encouraging close to the story of Aishe that Jozef sees the baby safely, by accident, too, to her family's village. With so many sad things thrown in his path, it is the first good news Jozef has. The Romanys treat him well in return for his care of Aishe, and set him on the path towards home.

By this time the reader along with Jozef can surmise that Ondrej has probably passed, and when Borka tells Jozef so plainly and without care, it happens so quickly that there's no time to mourn. There is only a long letter, odd for its rambling, that ends in a



promise of riches, hidden from Borka years ago, riches that will see Jozef safely to America.

These last pages are time for Jozef and the reader to fully grieve for the life that was taken from him by the war: Zlee, Ondrej, the perfect days in the mountains, the lessons that made Jozef a man. It is time for him to turn his back on the country that used his skills as a sharpshooter, and then abandoned him to prison and starvation. With all of his sadness, he realizes that it's time to leave for a new start. The reader can smile that Ondrej had the foresight and the patience to keep that money hidden for so long.

Jozef sells his father's rifle, the last of the old part of his life, and starts his journey west, to a new land. From the boat that will take him to America he sees a man, a dockworker, and Jozef's mind starts to calculate the distance between them, as a sniper would, but he becomes disoriented and has to look away. Then, he waves at the man, as if trying to leave his impact on his homeland, for all of the things he did during the time he was there, nobody remains to remember him. The man waves back and the boat turns him towards America.

Discussion Question 1

How is it ironic that Borka is the only one left alive?

Discussion Question 2

How does Jozef finding Aishe's family affect the tone of the narrative?

Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't the old Romany man believe him, at first?

Vocabulary

derision, conjuring, terrain, deliverance, unfazed, indiscretion, insolence, rogue, crepuscular



Characters

Ondrej Vinich

Ondrej is the father of the narrator, and yet is as much of a main character as his son. He is a man who tries throughout his life to take control of his own fate, and yet in his early life, fate deals him such harsh blows as to drive him from America, the land of promise, back to the old country of the Slavic empire. He imposes his thirst for life on his son, teaching him important life lessons and instilling character values in him that will shape him for time in the war. For Jozef's part, he goes through a phase where he wishes the most to be unlike his father, and yet his character is firmly molded by his father's influence. Ondrej is patient and contemplative and thorough.

Jozef Vinich

Jozef is Ondrej's son and the narrator of the story. He is a son, a brother, a shepherd, and a soldier, in that order. His journey to the end of WWI makes up the bulk of the story, and yet at the war's end he is only twenty years old. As a teen, he experiences the common surge to be away from his father and do things as differently from him as possible. Yet as he goes through the war he finds himself returning to his father's lessons and wishing for his comforting presence. He is patient, quiet, and contemplative like Ondrej, but he is also passionate and empathetic, traits the reader sees in the brief glimpse of his mother, Elizabeth.

Lizzie Vinich

The reader only gets a few pages' glimpse into the life of Lizzie Vinich. The author shares that she is an immigrant like her husband, and that she is sympathetic and kind to her sister in law, and that she is violently protective of her son Josef. However, her life is cut short in the first chapter by a terrible train accident. She visits Josef in his dreams throughout the story, particularly during the war when his life is at his lowest.

Her death sets the men's lives on a new path, taking them from Colorado to Pennsylvania and then, back to Europe. Although she passes away early in the story, she is yet a persistent presence in both of their thoughts throughout the rest of the narrative.

Marian Pes, "Zlee"

Zlee is the daughter of a childhood friend of Ondrej. When Jozef is a teenager, the woman finds herself on hard times and brings Zlee to their house in Pastvinia, asking Ondrej if they will take Zlee into their home. Jozef and Zlee grow up as brothers, learning the same tricks as sharpshooters, trackers, and shepherds, becoming as close



as brothers can be. When the war begins they join together, are promoted together, and fight together. Zlee is the steadier, less passionate side of Josef's personality, and as they shoot together in the way they seem to mesh well. He is a vital part of Josef's life.

Borka

Before leaving the United States for the old country, Ondrej remarries, seeking to find a suitable stepmother for Josef. The woman is far from suitable, however, spending the entire marriage mistreating Josef and trying to swindle Ondrej out of what money he may possess. She has two sons of her own, and they are rotten, spoiled boys who consistently pick at either Zlee or Josef. She is important to the story because she provides such a sharp contrast from the gentle, compassionate Lizzie Vinich in the beginning of the story, and also because his stepmother's meanness drives Josef closer to his mother.

Aishe

Aishe is a Gypsy girl that Josef meets after he is freed from prison. He saves her from sexual abuse by two Austrian soldiers and helps her find her way to an abandoned house so she can have her baby. At this stage in the story, Josef is sad and lonely and doesn't understand what purpose his life may have. He attaches himself to her, hoping to help her have the baby and later, to help her raise the infant. Aishe provides a place for him, which is desperately needed. However, she dies in childbirth, killing his purpose.

Banquo

Banquo is an old Italian man being held in the same prison as Josef. As the war draws to a close and their captors become more lax with their prisoners, the two men begin to meet daily and talk about their experiences. Banquo is an important character because he encourages Josef to forgive himself for the men he killed in the war, and to "set free" the ghosts of his mother and Zlee, whom he begins to see often while he's in prison. Although Josef is still a broken man at the war's end, his load is lighter because of his time with Banquo.

General Kray

General Kray is Josef's first commander in Basic Training. His influence in Josef's life shows itself in his recognition of both Josef's and Zlee's talent- he is the one who recommends them for the elite sharpshooter unit. This recommendation provides a new direction for Josef's life.



Sergeant Major Bucher

Sergeant Major Bucher is the officer in charge of the sharpshooter unit. He molds Jozef's skills and forms him into a well-trained killing machine. He has high expectations of Jozef and Zlee and places them in dangerous situations, training them well and eventually moving them across the Alps to a new command.

General Prosch

General Prosch is the commander of a unit on the Italian border that is experiencing an infiltration of sniper fire. He sends the boys out into the mountains to watch and wait for the sniper and see that he is killed. It is during this operation that Zlee is killed and Jozef is punished for his failure.



Symbols and Symbolism

Mountains

The author mentions mountains often in his narrative- especially traversing them. For this story, mountains are tied to the highs and lows of following one's path and destiny. As Jozef is traversing the path laid out for him, he is experiencing high points and low points. For Jozef, the mountains are also where he has always felt safe, able to hide and be at peace during the winters with his father. From all of his vantage points in central Europe during the war, he is staring into the mountains and thinking of Ondrej.

Dreams

Jozef has many dreams in this novel. For a while, they are dreams of his mother; later, towards the end of the war, he begins to have dreams of the men he's killed, and also of Zlee after his death. It's only at the end of the war, in prison, when he forgives himself for his killing, that he is able to stop dreaming of these departed souls.

The Krag Rifle

Ondrej owned an expensive German Krag rifle early in the story. He says it helps him "feel in control of his destiny"—however, it is the Krag that leads Ondrej into trouble in Pennsylvania. Jozef and Zlee learn how to shoot on the Krag rifle, a path which leads them into an elite sniper unit in the Austrian army. In the end of the story, after Jozef has loved and lost and seen so many awful things, he sells the rifle to help pay for his passage to America.

Sawatch Mountain Range

Ondrej often refers to his dream of mining gold in Leadville, Colorado, a city at the top of the Sawatch range in Colorado. Likewise, their faithful sheepdog is named Sawatch. Much of Ondrej's existence is about what he has missed in atoning for his mistakes, and he longs for the promise of gold mining in Leadville.

Youth

The novel starts when Jozef is an infant, and is largely a telling of his idyllic youth on the mountainside with his father. Only when he moves on to war and maturity is his life shattered by reality. When Aishe's baby is born in the end, Jozef is desperate to save him, even raise him as his own, so that he can somehow recapture his own useful innocence. In the end of the novel, Jozef is healthy and provided for and on his way to a new life, but he has left something precious behind.



Cold

Jozef is constantly mentioning how cold it is. While the story does take place in central Europe, he is also away at war for over three years, so in that time there were breaks in the weather. However, the cold seeps into Jozef's circumstances and it is always present. The author never mentions a time when it's hot or even warm. Cold makes hard times seem harder, and Jozef's time in the war is characterized by one challenge after another with only very short periods of good in between.

Romany farmhouse

When Jozef and Aishe, the Gypsy girl, are nearly at their limit of cold and hungry when they come upon a farmhouse at the edge of a wood. Later it becomes clear that Aishe is familiar with the house, as it becomes clear that they are just over the river from her village. However, in this phase of the narrative Jozef is so lost that he is desperate to belong somewhere, and with her he feels like family, like home. The farmhouse beckons to them as a home ready to be inhabited. For a short time they live as a family there and are happy.

Authority

Most figures of authority or leadership in this story are not well represented. Jozef and Zlee fight for an unseen, unknown emperor, with whom they don't even share ethnicity. The schoolmaster is a poor teacher and a poor disciplinarian. All of Jozef's and Zlee's commanders except for one are hard taskmasters that don't understand the job they're doing. Jozef remarks at one point that the men running the war and making decisions to send men to their death were probably trainmasters or bakers before the war. And when Jozef toys with the idea of deserting the army, he dreams of never being sent into battle by an "unfeeling master" again. Only Ondrej is a loving, kind father, very near infallible, particularly in Jozef's memory.

Banquo

Banquo is the Corsican that Jozef meets in prison, a man who has been in prison so long that nobody can remember what he did to get there. He and Jozef begin to talk daily, and after Jozef tells him of his nightly visions of Zlee and his mother and all of the men he killed in the war, Banquo urges him to forgive himself and stop heaping guilt upon his head. Later, when Jozef thinks of Banquo he thinks, "he freed me."

Austro-Hungarian Empire

The Empire in 1914 was a mishmash of different ethnicities, all hailing from different villages and corners of the mountains that zigzag central Europe. Under every new



command, Jozef and Zlee are asked if they are loyal despite their non-Austrian blood. As the war progresses the soldiers lose sight of who they are fighting for. The empire, like the war, and its participants, begins to unravel. In the end, the empire is broken into chunks and the divine right of Hapsburgs has ended.



Settings

Pueblo, Colorado

This small mining town is an important place because it is where the first of Ondrej Vinich's piece of bad luck happens to him. One of the themes of this book is fate or destiny, and it seems that the events of June 1899 in Pueblo Colorado set Ondrej on a path that seriously diverts his life and those of his then-infant son, Josef. It is also the place of Josef's birth, and the place where he loses his mother to a terrible train accident. Although his time in Colorado is short-lived, and the time of the Colorado setting is short, it is important because the author chooses to begin the story there.

Dardan, Pennsylvania

The German corner of Pennsylvania is Ondrej and Josef's next stop on their life's new trajectory. Early in the narrative, Josef tells the reader that he lives there in the year 1972, so the span of his life can already be seen. After the train accident that took his wife and made him a wealthy man, Ondrej takes his son to Pennsylvania to live among other immigrants. There life throws him another curve ball that sets his life in a third direction, again one that will affect his and Josef's live gravely. It is important because it is where Josef remembers his young childhood, and also where he chooses to retire in his older age.

Pastivina, Hungary

One of the most interesting details of this novel is the many places the author mentions in the former Austria-Hungarian empire, which has since been carved into several new countries. Pastivina is a village in the Carpathian Mountains. A small house in Pastivina is where Ondrej takes his son next. During half the year, they live in the village with Ondrej's second wife. The remainder of the year they spend in the mountains tending sheep. The mountains are key because there Josef learns the most vital lessons his father has to teach him- concentration, patience, hard work, tracking, orienteering, marksmanship. It is too these mountains Josef's mind turns during the years he is away at war, and to these mountains he returns when he finally finds his way home.

Klagenfort, Austria

When WWI dawns, Josef and his adopted brother, Zlee are sent to Klagenfort for sharpshooter training. Here they become an elite group of marskmen that the Emperor uses at will to pick off Italian soldiers bit by bit. There he becomes even close to Zlee, as they draw together to face the horrors of war together. They are promoted through the ranks and given opportunities to excel in the sharpshooter army. Many months are spent here, forming their early impressions of serving in the war.

Italian prison

Josef is sent to prison in Italy after he is captured by the Allies late in the war. It is an important place for his healing. He meets another prisoner who cautions him to let go of his ghosts, release them one by one when they visit him in his dreams: his mother, Zlee, the young men he remembers killing for the war... through his time in Italy and his conversations with the old man, he is better able to transition from the war back into the rest of his life.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Much of this story is about a journey back to family. In the beginning, Ondrej is forced to leave his family in Colorado when he loses his wife. He takes his young son to Pennsylvania, where an accident forces him back to his Slovakian village. There the reader sees his son, Jozef, grow up in idyllic mountain setting, bonding on the mountainside with his father and his adopted brother, Zlee.

The stillness is broken when Jozef feels the need to fight in WWI. He is able to stay with Zlee for the bulk of his time there, until Zlee is shot. Jozef, who had been remarkably calm and level-headed to this point, even in the face of the brutality of war, falls apart when he loses his brother. He realizes that all he really has to live for is the possibility of seeing his father again. It is only this that keeps him focusing on living through his last stand in the war, through his imprisonment in Italy, and through his journey back home.

There is a slight detour in this homeward journey, when he meets and attaches himself to a pregnant Gypsy girl, but even in that case he is ready to completely devote himself to her and her unborn child so that he can belong to a family unit again. When she dies in childbirth, he is undone, almost unusually so because he barely knew her. More than the loss of her as a person, he feels the loss of a settled family existence, one he feels he's lost in the war.

After Aishe dies, he takes the long walk back to his father's home in Pastvina, and finds him dead. The reader knows from the beginning that Jozef eventually goes back to Pennsylvania, where his father's story derailed in the first place.

Nationality

This story takes place before and during WWI, when the Austria-Hungarian Empire was a large area that comprised the homes of several different nationalities—Czecks, Slovaks, Slavs, Austrians... When the Empire went to war, these disparate ethnicities fought side by side in service to their emperor, an Austrian. The author makes mention of these varied people groups several times, each of their commanders noted what language they spoke best and what ethnicity they were, to determine their loyalty to their emperor.

When Zlee and Jozef first go off to war, they are overlooked because they are Slovaks, and preferential treatment was given to the Austrians. They have to prove themselves through their abilities as marksmen before they are regarded as good soldiers. Zlee's loyalty is questioned until Jozef reassures the commanding officer that he and Zlee were raised as brothers, as common sons to his father.



This theme is borne out when Jozef is sent to jail in Italy, and the prisoners are a mishmash of the former empire, which disassembles after WWI. In prison, it doesn't matter who is Austrian and who is Czech, German, or Slovak. They are all prisoners of war. Jozef is shown the most kindness in his postwar existence by an old Romany (Gypsy) man. The Romanys were the most hated of the Eastern European ethnicities, and yet, because Jozef saves the life of a Romany girl and her child, the Gypsies return the favor and nurse him back to health before sending him back to Pastvina.

War

Comprising at least 60% of the narrative, war is a hugely prevalent piece of this novel. Just as the reader can surmise that the few years Jozef spent in the war will have an affect on the remainder of his life (although he is only twenty at the war's conclusion), war and its motivations and effects are of major concern to the author.

War invaded the idyllic life Ondrej had built for Jozef and Zlee, and lured them both away from Pastvina with its promise of glory, adventure, travel, and seeing something outside the common way. Zlee wanted nothing more than to live on the mountain with Ondrej and the sheep, and so he may have had he not gone to war and been eventually killed. Jozef wasn't certain what he wanted, but the war stirred something rebellious in him, something that desired anything "other" than what he had, enough to make him sign on for the army a year early. Both boys were fighting for a cause they didn't understand and an emperor that didn't even represent their on people. But such is war.

The war drove the young men to take the skills that Ondrej had taught them, skills of an accomplished man such as stillness, patience, animal husbandry, tracking, and turned them into something they didn't understand—killing, enemies, battle—and they did so without question. It is safe to say, although the novel only glimpses a bit past the end of the war, that the experience changed Jozef for life, as it did everybody in the novel. Zlee, who lost his life. Borka, who lost her sons. Ondrej, who died waiting for his sons to come back. Aishe, who was raped by the soldiers and lost her baby because she was too young to be pregnant.

The horrors of war are not new to readers, but this novel demonstrates how it touches each life personally.

Ebb and Flow

Jozef's circumstances move in a pattern of ascents and descents, and ebb and flow. He and Zlee experience great success as snipers, and then the unthinkable happens. He is promoted to lance corporal, and then is stripped of his rank. The company travels to the brink of starvation, and then supplies arrive. He and Aishe experience a short time of happiness before tragedy strikes.

The entire narrative swells and shrinks with this pattern, of positive things happening, only to have them pull back and leave Jozef abused somehow. For most people, life is



this same way, moving in seasons of prosperity and want, of happiness and need, of gift and loss. In the very end of the story Jozef has reached a middle ground. He is neither high nor low. He has lost all of his people, but hope lies ahead in the form of a journey to a new land. He is neither wealthy nor poor, neither lonely nor in need of solitude.

Jozef's story takes the reader to the highest and lowest points imaginable, and leaves with a hero that is battered, bruised, and war torn, yet has specifically chosen life time and again. Several times in the story Jozef describes a choice to live or to die, and every time he chooses to expend the bit of effort that lifts him towards life.

In prison, his friend Banquo describes this struggle, this push and pull, as the only thing worth living for. He says that the struggle of living is a gift, and not to curse Nature by wishing it had been taken from you.

Destiny

Early in the story, Ondrej Vinich is a man in charge of his own destiny, when his life is radically changed by circumstances beyond his control. He moves to a new town, where a second set of circumstances once again drive him back to Europe. A man with abilities and dreams, reduced to a life of shepherd by things out of his own hands. He tells Jozef that he loves his powerful German rifle because it makes him feel "in charge of his own destiny."

This idea-or hope, of our path being laid out for us to follow is prevalent in the novel. Sometimes it takes the forms of soldiers discussing God, or the divine right of the Austrian emperor to rule, and therefore win the war; it even shows up when Zlee says, moments before he dies, that it was "terrible to end like this" as if he knows his path there for him and was about to end.

Jozef feels like a young man in charge of his own destiny when he leaves Pastvina to join the war. However, like his father, his dreams seem to slip away from him as well. His upbringing lands him in the elite group of sharpshooters, held safe from trench life but with a longer fall if they fail, which he does. His fall, and losing his officer stars, keeps him from certain torture when he is captured by the Italians. When Aishe dies, the first village he stumbles into with her baby is her own. The man who finds and rescues him is her father.

Although the author plots these points for the reader to see from a distance, connected like dots on a map, time and again Jozef has to make the choice to follow the steps with purpose. In a key point in the story, his fellow prisoner Banquo tells him he must make the choice to live and follow the path, because it is the greatest gift we are given.

Styles

Point of View

The prologue of the novel is written in third-person, because Jozef is an infant and can't tell of the events of the day. It also zooms out and gives the reader a wide-angle view of the day that really changed the trajectory of Ondrej's life. After that, the point of view changes to first-person, so that Jozef can discuss the events of his life from an eyewitness perspective. While this gives the reader a closer glimpse of what's happening to Jozef, the reader is unable to discern what's happening in Ondrej's mind, especially in the months before Jozef goes off to war.

Language and Meaning

The author uses a lyrical style of writing, spare in dialogue, with a wide range of vocabulary. The sentences are almost stark at times, which mirrors the skills that Josef and Zlee come to prize in their lives as soldiers: stillness, patience, reserve. The high level of vocabulary mirrors the high level of Jozef's and Zlee's skills—early on they are recognized for their marksman skills and are promoted to an elite group of sharpshooters.

Structure

This novel has no chapter divisions, only a few breaks that coincide with the biggest events in the story: Jozef going off the war, and over one hundred pages later, Jozef being freed from prison. This serves to give the narrative some realism. Breaking the story into chapters would perhaps halt the momentum of the story.



Quotes

...(his rifle) made me feel as though I was maker of my own fate.
-- Ondrej (Section 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: The rifle is the beginning of how Ondrej teaches the boys to shoot. The rifle is also very valuable. The fact that Ondrej says this is key because much of the story is focused on controlling one's fate, or trying to mold destiny to one's will.

Anything but the son of a shepherd, because shepherd was all that my father—once he returned to Pastivnia—wanted to be, and I wanted to become what he was not.
-- Josef (Section 1 paragraph 3)

Importance: Josef's character is so highly molded by Ondrej, and it is the sentiment in this quote that leads him to join the war. However, at the end of the war he finds that his most heartfelt wish is to see his father again.

The waiting and silence that came with shepherding and shooting both seemed to appeal to a natural discipline in Zlee that made him...not part of a man's world, but God's so that as we worked and spoke and rested in silence, day after day and month after month, he became more like some contemplative seraph than a mere shepherd, a being at once willing and capable of defending what is good and beautiful and so moves easily and without disturbance from blithe to fearsome when time comes to act.
-- Josef (Section 3 paragraph 2)

Importance: This description of Zlee demonstrates how almost monkish his adopted brother is. How focused and sharp he was either with the sheep or with the rifle.

I felt as though I had already gone through a rite of passage, and that on the other side there waited for me my first portion of the kind of strength my father possessed, as though it were a gift he had carved and prepared for me, and I felt a consoling peace in that, and pride.
-- Josef (Section 2 paragraph 4)

Importance: Josef's devotion to his father is a changing thing, and by the end of the war he finds that his father's characteristics really are something worth clinging to.

Young men, as always, sensed a chance to leave the boredom of their villages and see to the borders of their empire and beyond, but this time their departure was imminent, and so they lived and worked and moved in a tension between excitement and rage.
-- Josef (Section 4 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote discusses the reasons the young men move off to war, Josef and Zlee included, and the war is a turning point in Josef's life.



Zlee was as indomitable as he was bereft of guile.

-- Josef (Section 4 paragraph 3)

Importance: Josef's obvious admiration of Zlee, particularly as a soldier, provides him a relevant dose of humility which helps him depend on his brother in moments when their working together is crucial.

What he meant was that he and I were as close as brothers because of the life my father had given us both.

-- Josef (Section 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: Josef is speaking of Zlee here, and specifically notes how much effort Ondrej poured into both of them without cease in order to build their characters; and that the experience bonded them.

They were the enemy, and they would stand and fight and try to kill as many men as I might pass in the night to and from the trenches that separated us not just in battle but—we were told—by the will of God, and so I killed as I had been instructed and believed that death and death alone would save me.

-- Josef (Section 5 paragraph 5)

Importance: War is another prevalent theme in this story, and in this quote Josef shows how he and his fellow soldiers are trained to kill for the sake of God and the emperor, and that the boys on the other side of the border are their enemy.

Perhaps, though, they had their scouts too, who might have witnessed what we were becoming, old soldiers who seemed to have marched into a new war.

-- Josef (Section 6 paragraph 1)

Importance: World War I is historically the turning point in the history of warfare, the first "modern war," with war machines and chemical warfare and fences and trenches and an overall lack of the gentlemanly conduct that had thus characterized past wars. The author uses Josef's discernment of this truth as a way to insert history into the story.

That fort was the remnant of wars no country would ever see again, and I quickly came to despise it, even before I knew what awaited when it came time for me to climb down off that mountain with the will to fight for the only hope left—to see my father again."

-- Josef (Section 6 paragraph 4)

Importance: He says this just after Zlee is killed and he realizes he has failed his General, failed to kill the Italian sniper that had been wreaking havoc on the Austrian army. Josef has a moment where he has a choice to fall to his death in the ravine below, after Zlee's body and his father's beloved rifle; but he ponders his choice and he finds that the chance of seeing his father again is worth living for.



I realized that I had no desire and no drive to fight anymore, no rage at having been wronged somehow, no belief in the right purpose of Kings.

-- Josef (Section 7 paragraph 3)

Importance: The moment arrives in Josef's life, as it did for many young men in WWI and the wars that followed, why and for whom he was fighting. And the question that inevitably followed: what to do with the answer.

I held hard to life, a life that needed me to move on this road, in this direction.

-- Josef (Section 12 paragraph 4)

Importance: This sentiment happens after Aishe passes away, and Josef has lost his last thread of what to do with his life. The direction he speaks of here is to ensure that her son is safely with her people, and after that, Josef will have to turn his feet towards home.