

Doppelgänger

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Student comments on reading the novel.
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The most powerful scene in this book was near the end when it explained the conditions at the concentration camps. This scene was so powerful because I know that there is no way to fully describe even close to what happened there. The scenes in the book did a good job setting up a general idea of how bad things could have been and provided powerful images. CH

The biggest surprise for me was that Iris returned to Bavaria to witness Abe's glider competition. Abe knew that the glider competition was going to be in honor of his uncle Simon. However, when Abe spotted Iris amongst the crowd it was like a seeing a lost friend. Abe quickly rushed over and began to speak with her, and they eventually got down to what was really built up in their emotions. They both went into a state of catharsis, which I thought was a great moment. Iris's emotions clearly showed that she loved the Maxwell's, and I think she realized that she let her personal "constitution" (reasons for being against the idea of war) get in her way of being with her true love. "You never know what you got till it's gone".... SP

My favorite character would have to be the Red Baron. I like his attitude and his swagger, he knows what he wants and is willing to die for it. The Baron started off like anybody else would in the air force, and rose in the rankings. His comrades even gave him a nickname, which is another way of showing their awe of him. His way of thinking was hunt or be hunted, which is very closely related to "the survival of the fittest". SP

My favorite character was Rudy Styne, which may come off as a bit of a cliché as he is the main character. Rudy appealed to me for several reasons, aside from simply believing that he is an all around good guy. Rudy has a loving relationship with his wife, Chessie, and they are expecting their first child throughout the book. I respect Rudy for caring so much for his wife and taking the time to help her through her pregnancy. Another is that he struggles with computers quite a bit at the beginning of the book and appears to be a typical, average person. I have struggled with computers and technology for most of my life and I could identify with Rudy's plight. I also feel that he is brave for trying to find out who the hacker was that is trying to take over the internet. He travels around the country to figure this out, and although he may be way over his head, he still manages to keep up with people as they explain things to him and he never cowers from the information that he wants to know about. Another reason I respect Rudy is because he engages in a search for his biological mother. I believe that his search for the woman who gave birth to him is incredibly touching... a search [on some level] that goes on with everyone. We are all desperately trying to find ourselves and get to the bottom of our own existence, which I feel is symbolized in Rudy's quest. KA

My favorite character is Abe Maxwell. Abe's character is so brilliant with machinery and how he builds things even under the noses of the Nazis is remarkable. It is such a great accomplishment to have survived Auschwitz. But he is not my favorite character because of his talents, but rather for his compassion. Even at a young age he uses his skills and care for others to fix the relationship between his father, Elias, and his grandfather, the rabbi

Hillel. And then later, as a man, he risks everything to save his daughter. When he listens to his daughter play the piano, tears run down his face. KAA

My favorite character was Elias. Elias was constantly presented with challenges and time and time again was able to stand up to these challenges. It seemed that things never went his way, this was extremely relatable to me. The character of Elias is the kind of character who makes you feel a little better not only about yourself and your life, but also gives you the feeling that there is hope in the world. Elias' perseverance throughout the novel is commendable and touching. KKA

My favorite character was Elias because he reminded me of my mom. Similar to my mother, Elias has a true fighter's spirit. During the book, Elias is forced to make a sacrifice, his religion and fathers respect, in order to be the successful entrepreneur that he aspires to be. In my mother's case, she has lost all contact with her own mother due to a similar disagreement but is able to live without regretting not doing what she wanted to. Also like Elias, my mom is a complete optimist. Even when everyone else is worried and afraid for an outcome she is always there reminding us that things will work out either way. Throughout the book more and more examples present themselves to prove and show that Elias is the backbone of his family. MK

I admired many characters from the novel – Rudy and Abe, to name a couple good ones. However, I was fascinated with Rudy's nemesis as well, NTroodr. Now I didn't like the fact that NTroodr was a killer and the other serious crimes he was responsible for, but I thought he just made a perfect fictional villain. He was so dangerous, yet completely untraceable. I am a Computer Information Systems major, so I am interested with technology which might explain why I find NTroodr so appealing. His computer and internet skills were untouchable, and that kind of power, although illegal and dangerous, is sort of attracting. In the future I hope to prevent hackers like NTroodr from performing harm on the internet, and I wish to never face a threat as treacherous as him. Who knows though, maybe NTroodr is lurking deep in my unconscious... BR

Aside from Simon being one of my favorite characters, I would have to say that I also grew fond of Abe. I found Abe to be a breath of fresh air. He started off playing a small role in the novel, but you knew that as the book went on he would grow to have a bigger role, because of the potential he possessed. I found it really interesting how he became involved with the family business when he was only 15, but I was not surprised seeing as how smart he was, which was clearly displayed in the scene with his grandfather, where Abe was doing mental math. I think I found Abe to be one of my favorite characters because we were able to watch him grow up. We saw him grow from a young boy into a man, and I feel that when you get to see a character grow you can relate to them on a higher level than a character who is always the same. Abe is just one of those characters in a novel that you can never get enough of. When you think he is gone and out of the picture he always finds a way to sneak back in. MT

Subconsciously, I was drawn to the character Rose, and my favorite parts were of course when she was playing the piano. In any reading, it is always better when more than just one sense of the imagination is being used, and being a musical person, I heard the keys being hit with very little descriptive aid; the words like "rich," "cascading," "organ music," were enough, and proof of musical beauty was apparent, judging by the way the audience reacted to the prodigy's playing, so these sections were very enjoyable. RP

Simon was my favorite character because he is always an active character even after his death. While he was alive he was totally different than his brother. He looked towards the future, didn't take life too seriously, and he always did what he felt was right regardless of what everyone else was doing.

After his death, most of the major characters continue to mention and think of Simon in a positive light. I believe that one of the reasons the Maxwells were able to survive in Germany so long under Nazi rule was because of Simon's connection with so many important people from the first world war. Simon's memory is also responsible for saving Elias' marriage to Debora. Simon continues to save the lives of his family both mentally and physically even after he is gone. DE

Choosing a favorite character for the novel is tough. My favorite part of the book dealing with characters was reading about the Maxwell family as a whole. It was very interesting to learn about the different generations and to see how they influenced one another. The family web that was created allowed the reader to understand individual characters from different angles and to get a real sense of how the family evolved. However, there was an individual that stuck out in my mind as being very interesting. This was the MIT professor Dr. Ashley LaPolla. I thought the description of her was very well done. She seemed superficial because of the amount of jewelry and make-up she was wearing. I also like the fact that she was wearing an overshirt with a leopard skin print. The image of her stood vividly in my mind. I think this was because I thought of her as a cunning, sneaky and clever woman who was aggressive underneath it all. The fact that she was wearing a wild cat's print fit her character very nicely. She intrigued me because of how intelligent she seemed. It gave her a sort of confidence that made me feel like she could get away with anything. I also was interested in how she bribed one of her students. All and all, her character was very well thought out. JS

To me, the most powerful scene was in the chamber of the dying rabbi. Hillel is astonished by his young grandson's intelligence able to multiply three and four digit numbers in his head. While calculating these numbers are almost unfathomable, what happens next is really the most amazing. Hillel asks Abe to describe everything in the room and tells him to remember this day for the rest of his life. Instead of answering with a generic, "OK, grandpa," like most his age would, Abe takes command of the situation. Although Hillel was one of the most prominent rabbis of his time, he was now powerless in the hands of a child when Abe quickly rebuttals with, "I could only do such a thing if my Papa were in the room with me." Abe knows the turmoil between his father and grandfather and is doing his best to resolve it. Abe, in his childhood genius, somehow knew that if his father did not make amends with Hillel, he would regret it after his passing. How Abe knows this, I have no idea. His feelings could very well be innate, sensing a tension between his fatherly relatives and having an amazing drive to fix it. SJ

The most powerful scene would have to be Hitler's speech. His speech was not only motivating, but it was a powerful statement. He was able to unite the German people by blaming those who were wealthy and prosperous, and they just happened to be Jews. How the Nazi's affected the Jews were also very powerful scenes. The Maxwell's couldn't even buy food for their loved ones because the shop owners were supposed to boycott any Jewish activity. I learned a little bit about how Jews could have felt after denouncing their religion and God. Elias, even though he converted and practiced churchgoing, could not change his "core self" (who he really was) as mentioned in the book. He and other Jews alike felt the same way that they couldn't assimilate with gentiles and their religious beliefs. On the other side it amazed me how a German Jew could attain Aryan status. According to the book important individuals with Jewish heritages like Otto Warburg or Melitta Schiller were given Aryan status for their aid in the Nazi effort. In other cases Aryan status could simply be achieved by bribery or creating false histories. SP

The most powerful scene for me was between Hershel Grynzpan and vom Rath. I was captivated by the entire concept of a homosexual relationship between a Jew and a German who was in the Nazi party. I was completely immersed in the book during this scene; I felt like I was watching the story unfold. The internal conflict in such a relationship is compelling to think about, and the fact that it was homosexual made the situation even more gripping because it only added to the disapproval from society causing the relationship to become even more complex. The scene ended with Hershel Grynzpan taking vom Rath's life. I was not prepared for this to happen. The anger that Hershel felt is impossible to grasp. Also to contemplate was the ramifications of a Jew rising up against a Nazi. JS

I believe the most powerful scene in the book was the civil trial on ownership of MB Airways between the Maxwell's and the Linzman's. It was a huge turning point in the story. It was a scene of great vindication and closure for the Maxwell family who had suffered through the Holocaust. BR

The most powerful scene for me was when Rose was playing the piano in the church. I think that the description of her music and her joy for playing was very moving. The idea that music evokes so much meaning and can make people have such reactions is very compelling. I like the idea that art can change the way we are thinking and can be manipulated to evoke certain emotions. How Rose makes her audience have strong reactions, it is amazing. It is also awful and I think important to the book to realize that no matter how good someone is, or the talents they have, the Nazis were able to ruin it. The people had so much fear that they were willing to give up something as magical as Rose's music and condemn a 16 year old girl to a concentration camp. KAA

The most powerful scene for me comes later on in the novel when Rolf is in prison. Not only does the experience seem completely believable and utterly disturbing it also seems unbearable. I would never want to go through such a thing. Rolf was physically assaulted, witnessed other horrors and goes through what I'd call a living hell. I think many people who read this part of the novel would agree. KKA

One of the biggest surprises is when Simon is in his home contemplating suicide while holding his gun fully loaded in his hand. Simon, in his own mind is depressed for several reasons all of them because of the war [WWI]. The first main reason is that Simon views himself as more of a murderer than a soldier. He was given the Iron Cross as one of the best fighter pilots in the German fleet, two victories away from being an ace. He now feels guilty that he has killed so many other people, most of them innocent in his mind. The other reason is that he believes he cannot live without Iris and she threatens to leave him. He now fears God rather than embraces him because he feels that he is condemned to hell for murder. The only reason that he wasn't successful in killing himself was his brother Elias. Simon comes to see Elias needs him and so decides not to kill himself. SS

The biggest surprise in the book was the discovery that Rudy's mother was not his actual mother. This discovery seemed to cement his link with the past. This turn of events took me by surprise because when a child hears that their parent is sick, not being able to help is one of the worst feelings they can experience. The discovery that the person who raised you is not actually your biological parent must also have been traumatizing to Rudy, yet he manages to use the discovery to his advantage to track down his biological parents to help solve the mystery behind MB Airways. Not only was this a big surprise, it was a major turning point and helped bring together a lot of loose ends that had never connected before. DE

All of the characters were very believable for the most part and would have fit in their respective time period very well. Elias and his family were most believable because of their constant conflict and

resolution over the war that was happening all around them. Each member of the family has a different idea of how the war will end up and each deals with it in an entirely different way while trying to get the others to see it their way just like a real family. DE

Power was definitely a theme in the book because many of the characters fought over it throughout the book. NTrooder was attempting to gain complete control of the internet; Simon joined in war efforts because he was talented flyer and wanted to feel successful at something. MIT professor Ashley Lapolla stole Wilfred's idea for time management software in order to become more "powerful"/recognized. Also World War II was occurring throughout the book and war is a power struggle. MW

Religion and how much influence a person should allow to it to have over their lives was also a theme in the book. Religious differences were the reason Hitler was able to persecute the Jewish population and Elias and his family was constantly fighting about how much religion should affect their lives. Elias maintained the belief that religion should not play a large factor in decisions because he does not believe that God has an effect on anything and is just a "human invention" throughout the book. Meanwhile his family believes that God is in everything and that God is watching over them. Hillel disowns his son, Elias, when he states his intentions not to move from Germany because he does not want to wait for God to "work things out." Hillel says that Elias will be dead inside without God. The conflict comes up within the family multiple times throughout the book, and highlights the theme of religion and how much power it actually holds. MW

One major theme in the novel was self-discovery. This can be seen in Simon's dilemma as to whether he should fight in the war or remain on the sidelines.... Another theme in the novel is faith. Faith in one's heritage and faith in one's God. This was a constant battle because it was literally dangerous for the Jews to have this kind of faith in Hitler's regime... This kind of conflict and theme runs throughout the entire novel. JS

The most powerful scene was when the Nazis came to search for Abe and Rose and Karl had to cover up any trace of them while they hid in the basement wine cellar... It was quick and intense. This story made me see the connection between all oppressed people. It showed me how Jewish people had to hide like slaves did in the U.S. on the "underground railroad".... When Karl showed the Nazis the wine cellar he had to hide the door's skid marks with crates of wine by moving stuff around the room. One mistake and they all would have been given away.... The novel made me realize how much oppression there is in the world, how terrible people can be to each other, and how far some have to go just to survive. AI

Conclusion: This book helped me understand the viewpoint of a person who is dealing with the emotional consequences of being Jewish during the war along with the dangers of being persecuted. Elias shows these emotional consequences to the reader because he becomes an atheist and rejects Judaism throughout the war. His family also shows the strain that Jewish families went through during the war. Simon's ruined marriage because of the war also showed the strain those on the "bad side" with Germany felt because of the war. Overall I enjoyed the fact that this book showed the emotional aspects of the war and how it affected people on both sides who disagreed with the war. I have not read any other book that seemed to place as much focus on the emotional damage along with the casualties and destruction from the war. MW

In terms of history, the novel showed me that the Nazis didn't just take over in a day and have the country eating out of their hands. It took a long period of building support throughout the country and even a few

major failures before Hitler could rise. The expulsion of Jews from places of power was also a much slower process than I had realized. Hitler also only prosecuted the Jews when it was advantageous for him to do so. When he wanted the world to see him in a better light such as during the 1936 Olympics, he would simply ease off of the Jews for a while and lull the world back into a false sense of security. Then, while everyone was calming back down, Hitler would tighten up his restrictions and resume his persecution. DE

Before I read this book I did not realize that Jews, like Elias, denied the fact that they were Jewish to avoid being persecuted. Now, it completely makes sense why some may have done this. The conflict between the Jews and Germans caused many to become confused about their identity. Were German Jews considered Germans or Jewish? I also did not realize how conniving the Nazis were. I had never heard of how they destroyed the Jews economically by imprisoning a family member to be able to purchase their property at a much cheaper price. Furthermore, before I read this novel I had only learned an overview of World War II. I enjoyed learning about the Miracle of Dunkirk and contemplating why Hitler had ordered his army to stop the attack. This novel gave me a better inside perspective to the war than I previously had. JS

... I really enjoyed this book! I liked how it mixed the two different time periods and then linked the two. KrA

After reading *Doppelganger*, I felt immersed in the Maxwell family's struggle to build an empire while fighting against the evils of persecution. Until now, I have never learned about the military scheming behind a war. However, this story provides a perspective, in which a family is thrust into a conflict between family obligations, business obligations, and an individual's obligation to his country. The novel follows the lives of these individuals and the actions and difficult decisions they make. KM

What I really enjoyed about this novel, were the different perspectives from which we saw the war. Throughout my education, the war and Holocaust were always presented the same way and with the same facts every time. At first, I didn't understand how reading this book would be any different than the rest I have read that all say how horrible of a person Adolf Hitler was and emphasize the struggles of the Jewish population. However, this book showed a lot more. We saw the personal conflicts and family conflicts that were happening amidst the large scale catastrophes. The book also points out the fact that Hitler himself was not just a mass murderer but a brilliant and charismatic person that people simply obeyed either out of fear or because of group think.