

Book Discussion Questions The Women in the Castle - Tracy Shattuck

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1. What does the novel reveal about the method and degree of Hitler's appeal to the German populace? In what way does it address the most problematic question of the War: how the German people allowed themselves to be swept away by Hitler and Nazi propaganda. Just as important, how much—and at what point—did ordinary citizens truly know about the impoundment and murder of Europe's Jewish population.
2. Describe each of the three women—Marianne, Ania, and Benita. Talk about their different views of the Hitler regime as it unfolded and their various reasons for supporting it. What was each woman's role, or position, in German society, and how did each experience the war? What about the years after the war?
3. (*Follow-up to Question 2*) Which woman's story do you find most compelling, frightening, or horrifying? Are you more sympathetic toward one than the other two?
4. Most of the recent books about World War II focus on the horrors of the holocaust, and for good reason. Yet ordinary Germans also suffered, especially as the war neared the end. What was it like for the country as Nazism collapsed? Consider the population at large, but most particularly the women at Burg Lingenfels. How are the three of them luckier than most survivors?
5. What roles do hope...denial...and forgiveness play in this novel? Is Jessica Shattuck's book an attempt to somehow exonerate the citizens who supported Hitler's rise to power?
6. Has reading *The Women in the Castle*, changed in any way your understanding of WWII?

Rebecca's additions (Baldwin Library, WI):

7. Was Marianne right to interfere in Benita's romance with Muller? Do you think that relationship would have saved her, or was it doomed by his feelings of guilt?
8. What about World War I helped cause World War II?
9. There was much debate about whether assassination was the right thing to do with Hitler. How do you feel? Are you aware of the Bonhoeffer et al attempt?
10. How are America and American soldiers seen in the eyes of the characters?
11. Many characters in the story say they don't believe in God or are not sure. How is our

belief tested in times of war or tragedies like the Holocaust?

12. Are you glad you found out at the end where the characters ended up years later?

13. Hitler is used as the definition of evil since. What other world situations have been compared to the Holocaust? Has there been anything as bad in your opinion? Do you see any situations today that cause concern?

14. Can history repeat itself? What needs to be done to ensure there are no more Nazis?

Quotes that jumped out: what are your reflections?

“The Nazis were not deterred by complex facts.” P. 1

“ {They} had known Hitler was a lunatic, a leader whose low-brow appeal to people’s most selfish, self-pitying emotions and ignorance was an embarrassment for their country. They had watched him make a masterwork of scapegoating Jews for Germany’s fall for power and persuade his followers that enlightenment, humanity, and tolerance were weaknesses that led to defeat.” p.74

“Only when we prove that international law and the human rights of all mankind are greater than any villain can we vanquish evil.” P. 75

“What’s frostbite compared to being eaten by a hungry Russian? They’re suggestible masses, used to basing beliefs and actions on ideology rather than experience.” P. 107

“All over Germany people were starving.....It was the first time Martin thought of enemy children – not just soldiers but boys and girls.” P. 139

Christmas service music brought them to tears: “..the power of togetherness....evidence that music, and art in general, are basic requirements of the human soul.” P. 149

Franz Muller: “There are always choices.” ..“You have no shame, Benita, and for me, shame is the only right way to live.” P. 208

“That’s why we have children even tho world’s going to hell, in hopes of being understood.” p.337

Clotilde: “...she tries to think of the varied beauties of life: the sight of crocus heads pushing through the melting snow; the fact that human beings are compelled to construct cathedrals and sing lullabies and create art; that they devote themselves to obscure causes and esoteric fields of knowledge; that the world population grows by 80 million people each year....she conjures these things in her mind and hopes they have meaning.” P. 354