



Max

Sarah Cohen-Scali

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"19 avril 1936. Bientôt minuit. Je vais naître dans une minute exactement. Je vais voir le jour le 20 avril. Date anniversaire de notre Führer. Je serai ainsi bénie des dieux germaniques et l'on verra en moi le premier-né de la race suprême. La race aryenne. Celle qui désormais régnera en maître sur le monde. Je suis l'enfant du futur. Conçu sans amour. Sans Dieu. Sans loi. Sans rien d'autre que la force et la rage. Je mordrai au lieu de téter. Je hurlerai au lieu de gazouiller. Je haïrai au lieu d'aimer. Heil Hitler!"

Max est le prototype parfait du programme "Lebensborn" initié par Himmler. Des femmes sélectionnées par les nazis mettent au monde de purs représentants de la race aryenne, jeunesse idéale destinée à régénérer l'Allemagne puis l'Europe occupée par le Reich.

Une fable historique fascinante et dérangeante qu'on ne peut pas lâcher. Une lecture choc, remarquablement documentée, dont on ne sort pas indemne

Max Details

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ISBN : 9782070643899

Author : Sarah Cohen-Scali

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From Reader Review Max for online ebook

Aoife says

3.5 stars

Text Publishing says

If you like your books to be challenging and thought provoking then Max is your kind of novel! Credit must go to the author Sarah Cohen-Scali and translator (Text's own Penny Hueston!) for crafting a character that despite the evil he embodies was able to invoke empathy in us as readers. We couldn't help but feel for Max as he tries desperately to navigate a world of bleak political control and indoctrination—the consequences of which are often devastating.

From the beginning of the book we were immersed in the world through Max's eyes and it was this gripping perspective that kept us reading. The haunting suspense that came—not just from the persistent propaganda that surrounds Max—but from the unlikely friendship that develops between Max and a Polish boy Lukas, is what makes this book an undeniable page-turner.

As one of our Text team members, Rights Coordinator, Alice Cottrell said:

'People tend to baulk when I explain that the first part of the story is narrated by a foetus—the shining star of the Nazi eugenics program—but Max is a fascinating and sensitive exploration of the power of propaganda and indoctrination.'

Bold, unsettling and confronting, it's not hard to see why this daring work of fiction has won twelve French literary prizes.

You can read a preview of the book here: www.textpublishing.com.au/prevIEWS/max

'A fascinating and disturbing journey...Max is highly original and moving in its depiction of both the bravery and resilience of children, and their ability to engage in acts of evil. Author Sarah Cohen-Scali has written a unique, sensitive and morally complex depiction of two lost and damaged boys.'

Readings

'One of the most unique and impactful books that I've read for a long time. Even though Max is a child of evil, it's tough not to love him and care for him..I challenge you all to not fall in love with Max and his story. Because it's impossible.'

Reading With Jenna

'A fascinating fictionalisation of a very real piece of World War II history...Provocative and confronting.'
Booktopia

'Cohen-Scali's research for the work is impeccable and her storytelling convincing. Max is a timely reminder of the tragedy of war.'

Magpies

'Compelling for young adult and adult readers alike...A must read.'

New Zealand Book Council

'A heartrending portrait of unlikely friendship and fierce defiance, and an impeccably researched glimpse into a deeply disturbing point in history. Unforgettable, bizarre, and brilliant.'

Booklist

*'Readers will find Max's story reminiscent of M.T. Anderson's National Book Award-winning *The Pox Party* (2006). Horrific atrocities—and the ghastly realities of any war—seen through the eyes of a child with heartbreakingly cognitive dissonance pack a wallop.'*

Kirkus Reviews

Valentina says

The second world war and nazism are probably the topics there are more books about, but I am always surprised by the originality of some.

I would classify Max as a coming of age story, but obviously it is very different from other books belonging to this category that you might have read, being essentially the coming of age story of a little nazi.

We follow Max's life from when he is still in his mother's belly to around the age of ten. He is the first baby produced by the Lebensborn program, initially ideated by Henrich Himmler whose aim was to pare people of pure aryan race to make them produce a pure aryan baby that they would donate to Hitler to replace the judish population.

This is a first person narration, it is always Max who speaks, even when he is just a fetus. Max has really evil thoughts, he does not think and act like a normal child at all, Max is a nazi even before being born. Obviously this is the hyperbole that the author decides to use to show that an ideology as rooted as nazism prescind individuality and age, sometimes there is no escape, especially if that is what you have always been taught.

In my opinion this novel is as harsh as brilliant. It breakes the mith that children are always innocent and good and at the same time highlights how important the atmosphere you grow in is. I really liked it, I recommend it to everyone, because this book is really brave and it carries really interesting concepts in a really interesting way.

Greta says

Non è difficile andare a smuovere corde particolarmente delicate, quando si parla di nazismo. È una tematica talmente delicata e sconvolgente, che non credo di essere mai rimasta indifferente alla lettura di un romanzo su questo argomento, anche quando il romanzo in sé non era nulla di che. Anche perché, spesso, è facile cadere in libri che in qualche modo - forse in buona fede, non lo so - si compiacciono di avere per le mani un argomento così sensibile, perché è facile fare retorica, perché è facile far commuovere, perché certi argomenti sono intoccabili, e quindi non si può criticare chi ne parla. Ecco, prima di cominciare a leggere "Max" avevo un po' di paura che mi sarei potuta trovare davanti ad un pietismo di questo tipo: si tratta pur sempre di un racconto in prima persona fatto da un bebè che si trova a vivere nel fulcro della Seconda Guerra

Mondiale, sarebbe stato facilissimo scadere in un tipo di narrazione simile. E invece no. "Max" è un romanzo estremamente cinico, cattivo, che non prova mai pietà, e proprio per questo arriva a colpire in maniera così forte (sia chiaro, si sta parlando pur sempre di fiction, non ha certo la forza del racconto di un sopravvissuto, ma è comunque estremamente efficace).

Il racconto si apre con la voce di Max che racconta in prima persona la sua nascita: Max non è ancora un bebè, eppure ha già una coscienza politica estremamente netta e del tutto formata. Max è un neonato ed è profondamente, radicalmente nazista. Perché Max è il primogenito di un agghiacciante progetto eugenetico, il Lebensborn, ed è figlio di genitori accuratamente scelti perché gli trasmettessero tutte le virtù e le caratteristiche del purissimo esemplare di razza ariana, Max è il futuro della Germania nazista, il primo di un esercito di bambini tedeschi e nazisti fin dentro le cellule, l'esercito che, nei disegni di Sollman ed Ebner, avrebbe dovuto ripopolare i territori tedeschi.

Questo coraggioso punto di vista è agghiacciante, perché se già non è facile guardare alle vicende della Seconda Guerra Mondiale ponendosi nella prospettiva dei prevaricatori, degli stupratori e degli assassini, quando questo punto di vista è affidato ad un bimbo di pochi anni allora il lettore si trova di fronte ad una necessaria *epoché*, ad una sospensione del giudizio morale.

"Max" è un libro che riflette in maniera estremamente efficace sull'indottrinamento politico, sulle conseguenze della propaganda senza confini, sulla mancanza di scrupoli che non si ferma nemmeno di fronte ad un bambino. Perché, sì, Max è nazista, pensa da nazista e si comporta da nazista, e alcune delle cose che fa sono agghiaccianti, ma Max non ha mai conosciuto null'altro che il nazismo. La figura di Max è veramente straziante, perché dietro il velo (un velo estremamente ingombrante e pericoloso) del credo politico - e mai come in questo caso si può parlare di politica come di religione, perché il nazismo è imposto a Max come una fede, senza alcuna alternativa, senza la richiesta di alcuna riflessione critica- c'è un bebé nato da uno stupro, strappato alle braccia della propria madre e sballottato fra missioni di "stanamento" di piccoli polacchi che possano dimenticare il loro passato per diventare perfetti esponenti della razza ariana e scuole di addestramento nazista, senza mai ricevere un abbraccio o anche solo l'ombra di un gesto affettuoso.

Si può dire che si tratti di un romanzo di formazione, perché la crescita di Max corrisponde ad una sconvolgente presa di coscienza di cui non vengono mostrati i risvolti finali, ma che si possono tranquillamente immaginare come devastanti. E in tutto questo la voce di Max, nonostante la parzialità della sua formazione politica e la faziosità delle sue concezioni, si rivela una voce estremamente limpida e sincera, perché Max parla di tutto in maniera chiara e cruda, senza filtri - che nessuno ha avuto filtri con lui - cinica e terribilmente realistica. Gli orrori della guerra e di un progetto folle e perverso emergono con una durezza e una semplicità sconcertanti, tanto che, per brevi tratti, il libro avrebbe potuto tranquillamente passare per una particolarmente perversa distopia. Ma, ahimè, non si tratta mai, nemmeno nei momenti più crudi, di finzione distopica, ma è tutto fin troppo storicamente documentato.

Le ultime pagine del libro sono un pugno nello stomaco dietro l'altro - e non avrebbe potuto essere che così, non avrei voluto consolazioni o finali lieti, perché la guerra non ha mai un finale lieto - e anche a due settimane dalla fine della lettura mi risuonano in testa continuamente. Mai come in questo periodo storico, quando una parte del mondo si riempie la bocca di retorica e poi va a letto serena, come se l'orrore che dista solo pochi passi non lo riguardasse minimamente, le ultime parole di Max dovrebbero smuovere qualcosa dentro chiunque.

Non avevo capito perché Lukas avesse pianto ascoltando la mia storia. Non avevo nemmeno capito il significato della parola "testimoniare".

Adesso sì. Normale. Sono cresciuto, ho nove anni e mezzo.

E credo proprio che in tempo di guerra, per un bambino gli anni contino il doppio.

Youstra & Books says

MAGNIFIQUE ! MAGNIFIQUE !

J'ai adoré ce livre. Cette petite pépite.

Grande fan que je suis, des livres racontant des histoires de l'époque nazie, je n'ai pas pu me retenir durant cette lecture, entre chaudes larmes, moment de dégoût total (où il m'arrivait de lâcher le livre le temps d'une journée avant d'y replonger) et fous rires (oui, quoique très rares); j'ai plus qu'apprécié cette lecture, j'irai jusqu'à employer un mot que je trouve très fort "J'ai savouré cette lecture" ! Un pur nectar, un condensé de plaisir. Ce livre est merveilleux : en 30 pages, il a réussi à gravir les échelons et arriver en haut de ma liste de livres préférés.

Au tout début, j'ai pensé qu'un livre raconté du point de vu d'un bébé allait être une mauvaise idée, mais j'ai avancé dans ma lecture et à fur et à mesure, cette idée que je croyais mauvaise s'est avéré être ingénieuse.

Sarah Cohen-Scali a réussi à m'engloutir dans une facette de l'histoire nazie, dont j'ignorais totalement les détails et je ne peux lui en être que vivement reconnaissante, ce livre me donne envie d'en savoir plus sur le programme "Lebensborn" et je ne manquerais pas d'ajouter les livres cités comme références par l'auteur, à ma liste de prochaine lecture.

Clarabel says

Cette lecture est saisissante, mais fait aussi effet de douche froide tant la démonstration de l'embrigadement est rendue à la perfection, via la voix d'un enfant, même bébé, tellement fier d'être un rouage du système, dont il admire les codes et leurs bien-fondés.

C'est parfois dur à encaisser, raconté sans état d'âme, mais le procédé est remarquable. On reste scotché aux pages du livre, tiraillé entre la fascination et l'horreur (Konrad a grandi dans le culte du Führer et la certitude de son appartenance à la classe supérieure, son jugement est glaçant, son but : servir au mieux les intérêts du IIIe Reich).

C'est très bien écrit, exécuté avec intelligence et à-propos, richement documenté (Lebensborn, Kalish, Napola, germanisation des enfants polonais kidnappés...). On en prend peut-être plein la tête, mais c'est une lecture indispensable, à lire sans limite d'âge.

Cynthia says

Quelle lecture difficile! Pas dans la façon d'écrire qui est exceptionnelle mais dans le sujet en lui-même. Raconté à la première personne, Max est l'histoire du premier né du Lebensborn et on le suit tout au long de la guerre. Cet enfant est tellement endoctriné que déjà dans le ventre de sa mère, il parle comme un parfait petit nazi.

On pourrait détester Max (et parfois je l'ai vraiment détesté) mais Sarah Cohen-Scali l'a tellement bien écrit que Max devient attachant et on peut le comprendre. Ce livre est une vraie leçon d'histoire (et on peut vraiment voir que l'auteur a fait beaucoup de recherches pour écrire le roman) mais d'un point de vue peu

utilisé : celui de "l'ennemi".

J'ai souvent dû poser le livre et m'en éloigner pour un temps car il est "dur" et il me fallait un petit temps pour digérer ce qui se passe mais c'est une lecture absolument prenant et on veut absolument savoir ce qui va se passer pour Max une fois la guerre finie.

Je ne peux que recommander ce livre qui est un petit chef d'oeuvre!

Jessica says

This is a story that needs to be told. The Lebensborn program, where the Nazis literally bred people with superior Aryan characteristics in order to create a master race, is not something that you hear a lot about. At least, not in fiction, and certainly not in fiction presented to teens. So when I heard about this book, a book narrated by a Lebensborn beginning at his birth, I thought, Finally. This will be a striking, important book! What would it be like to be raised, from birth, on a diet of Nazi propaganda? And not just that Germans are a master race, but that you, specifically, have been born a superior being? The Lebensborn did not know their fathers. They were taken from their mothers and adopted out to high-ranking Nazi officers as a reward. I have never come across a story about what happened to any of them, and my degree is basically in German literature, I am married to a man with a degree in German, and we met when we were both in a bizarre post-WWII German play.

Needless to say, as soon as I heard about it, I had to read this book.

And now I am angry. Not that such a thing happened, not the sort of anger that reading about WWII, or the Holocaust, causes. Not that righteous anger. No, I'm angry because the first book I've ever found about the Lebensborn program is a FREAKING HOT MESS and I want to know how anyone thought this would be okay.

I suspect part of the problem is that it is translated from French. A lot of my issues stem from what I shall call word choice in this book. Let's give the benefit of the doubt to Ms. Cohen-Scali and say that she had a very clumsy translator. Much of the slang and several of the idioms are jarringly modern, pulling me out of the story repeatedly to frown and think, would they have known what that was in 1936? In war-torn 1941 Berlin?

Annnnd then there's the swearing. So many swears! Now, bear with me. I'm no shrinking flower when it comes to swearing in literature (just ask my easily shocked book club.) And yes, I know that the F-word was not unknown in the 1940's. I'd just like to know how a four-year-old, raised in an environment where pure thoughts were held to such a high standard, would hear that word enough to use it constantly. Also, calling all women bitches. Let's think about this. He knows, even before he is born, that he is special. His mother is one of the finest examples of Aryan womanhood. All the women there are. They have been carefully examined and vetted, their pedigrees checked and rechecked, they are revered as goddesses doing their sacred duty. And running the Lebensborn home are a bevy of nunlike women, all of whom nearly faint at the sound of Hitler's voice on the radio. They speak constantly of higher thoughts, of taking care of beautiful Aryan bodies for the purity of the homeland, nobility of purpose for men and women, etc. etc. How then is this child then born thinking (and later speaking) not only a constant stream of venomous f-words, but also referring to all women as bitches and whores? Where did he learn this? Not one other person in the book is

depicted as talking this way, so who is he modeling his speech after?

And that's really where I have a huge problem with this book. Not the swearing, not the fact that the main character is a little jerk (which I expected), but the fact that he is so inconsistent. Inconsistent to the time period, to his upbringing, and inconsistent with his own past behavior. He will say that he forgets his real mother, or this person, or that event. Then later he will describe the person or the event in detail for someone, with no explanation of whether he was lying about forgetting, or something made the memory return. He has seen soldiers having sex with both prostitutes and prisoners at one house where he lives, and talks about how boring it is and how uninterested he is in girls' bodies, then a chapter later he naughtily sneaks off to spy on some naked girls. (He is also way too young at this time to know or care about what he is seeing.) (And actually that's the point where I nearly had to DNF this book. I don't know about you, but reading page after page of excruciating details about young girls being kidnaped, beaten, and then given a highly invasive gynecological exam is about my limit for gratuitous anything in a book. Ditto the descriptions of young boys' penises which seemed entirely exploitative.)

There is a large chunk of the book where he is four years old, which made me wonder if the author had ever met a four year old. Not only does he speak and think in long, eloquent sentences, but his physical behavior is well above and beyond even an eight-year-old. He's supposed to be smart and physically "perfect" but not preternaturally smart and strong. At this time he also knows exactly what happens at concentration camps, and works for a time with a collaborator. She defies her handlers, and he is confused when he doesn't see her again and thinks perhaps she has been sent back to the camp. Years later he thinks about exactly how she was executed, as though he knew. Also, having talked since the day he was born about inferior people being killed, having spent years at a special school training to be a good Nazi, and having learned that he is using soap made from the fat of murdered Jews, when someone tells him that the Jews in concentration camps are being killed, he freaks out like he's never heard such a horrible thing. Okay, seriously?

There's no moment of clarity where he discovers that all he knows is wrong, nor is there a moment when he decides that, no matter the evidence, the Nazi way is always right. There's no consistency to what he does and doesn't know, or how he will react. He seems to have few emotions at all, unless being arrogant counts as an emotion. Even when no praise is given, he believes himself to be superior, and it's all he thinks about. Yet he never seems to come "down" because of his hubris. The book is just a recitation of what happened in the war, as told by an arrogant little brat who keeps contradicting himself. For contrast, the one person he actually likes and looks up to is a fine Aryan specimen who is secretly Jewish. He is based on the very real Solomon Perel, a young Jewish man who attended an elite Nazi school as the ultimate cover story. (His story is told in "Europa, Europa," which is both a book and a superb movie.) This story would have been equally interesting, except he is also a jerk who does things with no rhyme or reason, therefore he is impossible to understand or root for.

Can you see why I'm angry? The premise of this book is gold. Her research seems to have been impeccable. There's a bibliography and notes at the end. It has all the earmarks of an important book for the WWII fiction shelves. And then she drops the ball so hard it's painful to read.

Jacki (Julia Flyte) says

This is the story of a child born under the Nazi "Lebensborn" program, which was essentially a program to breed pure Aryan babies who would be the future leaders of the Third Reich. Max is born on April 20, 1936, making him the first baby to roll off the production line. He is also the narrator of this story which covers not

just the Lebensborn program but also the abduction and "germanification" of suitably Ayran children from other countries and the lives of ordinary Germans as the war drew to a close. Real people and events are woven into the story.

Max is a lively narrator who is initially very euphoric about all things Nazi and who can't wait to grow up and fight for the Fatherland. While he never knows his mother, he understands that she was selected and rigorously examined to ensure that she was a perfect Ayran specimen. He is indoctrinated in all things Nazi from infancy and therefore is very matter of fact about the abduction of Polish children - in his eyes they are lucky to be receiving a German upbringing. However things become murkier when he befriends Lukas, a blonde and blue eyed Pole who is secretly Jewish. Gradually his enthusiasm will wane and his disenchantment will grow over the course of the war.

My central issue with the story is Max's youth. He has only just turned nine when the war ends. Essentially, his narration is a device and you have to suspend disbelief that a child would think the things that he does and just go with the story - which he starts telling us when he's still a foetus in the womb.

Originally published in France in 2012, Max has only recently been translated into English.

Mélina.g says

Let me tell you one thing about this book. I won't consider it as a masterpiece, I won't call it a life changing novel (that's why I only gave 3 stars by the way) but I would say without any hesitation that "Max" is a book that will make you think. A lot.

First of all, it's the story of Max, actually Konrad, who is a boy born to represent the aryen race at its best, during WWII. Basically, Hitler wanted to create an army of nazis pupets. So, our main character is one of them. We follow his story from his birth to the end of WWII.

I found it a little bit too long to start, and I actually started to enjoy it more with the arrival of a new character: Lukas. The main character being made to be the perfect little nazi, isn't one you can relate to easily. He isn't one of those characters that you love from the first moment. But eventually, considering the fact that you know all of his life since his birth, you're able to understand why he acts like he does, why he thinks what he thinks...

It's also rough as a story, obviously it's about WWII, but some scenes can be quite explicit and the language can be crude. It's not a story for young children.

Beside that, the story itself is one of those that really leave you thinking. I actually finished the second half of the book in one sitting, at 1:30 am. Because you find yourself caring about the characters, you find yourself wanting a happy ending for them. Cause they're not evil. They're just products of the Nazi's government. They're victims of it. And even though I had some problems with this book, I finished it thinking differently about WWII. You can only admire the research and the effort of the author, who reveals the Nazi regime's horror, way more than what you learn in school can teach you, in a very deeper way. You end up being able to see how far they were ready to go, and what the world could have been if the Nazis hadn't been defeated.

I will end up on this note: if you love history, you should read this book. But expect it to be different from what you think it is, and expect to learn a lot from it. Actually, even if you don't love history, you should read it. Because I think everyone should be aware of what happened.

Marine says

Roman très dur à lire au premier abord car il traite d'un sujet réel de la seconde guerre mondiale, le projet lebensborn. Max est très bien documenté et allie personnage fictif (max) et personnage réel (lukas). Ce roman est très touchant, on y découvre un petit garçon qui semble formaté dès sa naissance, mais qui se pose tout de même les bonnes questions.

Très touchant, il m'a retourné.

A lire absolument, malgré quelques longueurs car peu de dialogue, on se trouve dans la tête de Max tout le long du livre, un roman qui se digère.

Kirsty says

Hits all my issues re fictional nazis in novels. No thanks.

Olethros says

-Una mirada peculiar al Lebensborn, a otros proyectos monstruosos y a sus consecuencias.-

Género. Novela.

Lo que nos cuenta. En el libro Max (publicación original: Max, 2012) conoceremos al bebé Max, que se resiste al parto de su madre hasta el 20 de abril de 1936 para que su cumpleaños coincida con el del Führer. Además de haber sido concebido mediante el proyecto Lebensborn, su psique y su cuerpo corresponden con el ideal ario. Le llamarán Konrad, un nombre que a él le gusta más, e irá creciendo con el objetivo de servir a la gran Alemania de la mejor forma que pueda, mientras observa su entorno y lo interpreta como puede.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...>

Drew says

3 1/2 stars. I can see why a lot of readers would hate this book. It's easy to despise the plot, to feel disgusted by the narrator, and the writing style takes a different turn than most historical fiction books. Yet this **appalling story was so fascinating to me.** I found the main character intriguing and couldn't seem to stop turning the pages.

This book follows Max, who literally starts his narration from the womb. Nearly ready to be born in 1936 in Nazi Germany, Max tells us in an "adult" voice that he is part of the Lebensborn program and was carefully selected to be created from the Aryan race, which the Nazis consider to be the "purest" race.

The Lebensborn program was an important part of history, where thousands of children were created to start a genetically "perfect" and "undefiled" race. Thousands of unmarried women believed it was their duty to have these children for Hitler, to be "bred" with Aryan or German strangers and give their babies up shortly after they were born to orphanages and German homes.

When Max is born, he grows up in an orphanage under the Nazi Party and openly brags about the gruesome details of his life. He is quickly taken away from his mother after he is born, and Max tells us that it's hard to let her go, but he must be tough for the Führer. At an incredibly young age, Max witnesses the cruelty of the Nazis - and, of course, he is brainwashed into thinking they are the good guys - including racism and physical violence against the Jews.

I feel like I have to issue a warning that this book is **incredibly graphic**. Max doesn't shy away from giving detailed descriptions about prostitutes he sees with German soldiers at parties, the horrible treatment of Jews (the "inspection" scene of Jewish girls sent chills down my spine), or the rough treatment of young children. The shock of Max using words like "whore" to describe women - and much worse - quickly wore off, or else I wouldn't have been able to read on.

When Max befriends an older boy, Lukas, the two quickly become close, and Max admires Lukas's bravado and rebellious spirit. But when Max discovers Lukas is a Jew hiding in plain sight, pretending to be a Polish boy, Max is torn - he isn't sure whether he should turn Lukas in to the Nazi soldiers he's trusted his whole life, or if he should stay loyal to his friend and help Lukas escape.

I hugely appreciated the gritty tone Max used to tell this story - he didn't sugarcoat anything that was happening around him but told it like it was - **a horrible time in history**. The fact that such young children really *were* in this awful environment in Nazi Germany hit me hard. I can't imagine how hard this book was to write, and the author told it in the most **revolting, sickening manner possible**, while still making it a fast-paced and intriguing read. And I'm grateful to her for that.

Erikka says

I just couldn't get into this. I think the narrating baby is what I can't deal with--he's obnoxious and, in case you missed it, he's a baby. I don't understand babies when they can't talk, let alone this one that only talks about Hitler and breastfeeding. I'm sure it's good, as it won a ton of awards, but it was just too dry for me and really weird.

Thehappymeerkat says

I received this book for free from the publisher Walker Books in return for a review.

Max is the perfect Nazi baby. Born as part of the eugenics programme his blond hair, blue eyes and entire body are perfect. But raised with Nazi ideology and living through the brutality of war, how long can Max cope before reality questions his own beliefs?

'Max' is such an amazing and powerful novel it had me gripped, shocked, horrified and even had me crying! Told in the first person perspective throughout, Max tells us his story. It starts with him talking to us from

inside the womb. This may seem odd but I got into the story straight away and I'm surprised how gripped I was from just the first few lines. As Max is born and begins to grow up he tells us his story though his own Nazi ideology. Although children may have not been born with that mindset, they were conditioned to think a certain way, and this is how Max thinks from the first moment we read. His attitude and opinions are full of hatred and are offensive, but it's the way the Nazis thought and this is what makes this novel so powerful.

The book is separated into four parts. Each one a different time period in Max's life. As the book spans the timeframe of 1936 to 1945 Max doesn't grow up much in age but what he goes through and the experiences he has are far more mature than any nine year old should have gone through. The story is Max's and we learn about his life, growing up without love, conditioned to be the perfect future soldier, but as we read on other characters sometimes relay stories, or Max is able to see something happening which gives a greater insight into what was happening not only with the eugenics, titled the 'Lebensborn' programme, but we see other things that the Nazis did during the war.

The horrors of war get more and more dark and shocking the further you read into the book. This may be a YA novel but it doesn't hold back from describing what really happened. You read about sickening and bloody deaths, sex, rape and many of the horrors including some of the details of the holocaust. This book is designed to shock and horrify and it really does. I've known a lot about the horrors of the Nazis in world war II both from what I learned at school and my various Polish extended family, but reading this stuff in a novel, when you feel you are part of the story was just all the more shocking and brutal. I liked the fact that towards the end, the story didn't hold back from telling the truth of what happened in the end of the war and didn't just focus on the brutality from the Nazis.

Despite all the horrors I was so gripped by the novel that I only put it down when real life got in the way. The ending is a satisfying one but the whole book isn't a happy one. Apart from some quite graphic descriptions and mentions of deaths, there is use of the f and s swear words (as well as some milder ones) though this isn't too frequent. I usually don't enjoy too much swearing in novels but this felt so right and it made the story all the more intense.

At the end of reading this novel I feel exhausted, I felt like crying too, but I'm glad I read this. Not only do you feel for this character Max as he's just a young child, and what he goes through isn't anything a child should go through, but at the same time you find yourself shocked at hearing the Nazi ideology come from him. It was really chilling to read at times but you still feel for this character and it really makes it all the harder to put this book down as you want to see what happens to him.

I'd give this book a hundred stars if I could. It deserves them. It's so well written and you feel such emotions when reading it. It's a book that should be read by everyone, young and old, and it's the sort of book I wish I'd had when learning about the holocaust and war at school. It's endorsed by Amnesty International which isn't surprising. The authors notes at the end show how most of the characters are based on real people, making this again more chilling and dark. This book is sold as a YA novel but given the content I'd say older teens should read this and not anyone younger, the details are just too dark, but a book I'd recommend everyone around the world to pick up and read.

Bogi Takács says

Review coming. Actually a solid book, creepy and awful, but creepy and awful in the same ways as the historical setting it describes. There is a fine balance in how explicit to make such descriptions (Octavia

Butler talked a lot about this related to her novel Kindred, about African-American slavery) and I think especially toward the end, Max wobbled in this respect, but I still got through it very fast. It might be too explicit for an American YA audience, I have to think about that. It's not perfect, and I do have some issues with it - as I'm planning on discussing in detail, G-d willing -, but it's one of the stronger YA books I read this year.

I have to say that now I am even more upset that so many American Jewish authors trashed this book unread. Racism against Mizrahi Jews + Jews of color in general (the author is a Moroccan Jewish woman from France) is a huge intra-community issue and should NOT be perpetuated. Discussing the book as if it wasn't even written by a Jewish author is outright vile. Sure, non-Jews might not know that "Cohen" is a Jewish name, but to play into that... :(((

Detailed warnings also coming, but this is a book just as brutal as its subject matter and has depictions of violence, sexual assault, murder and also descriptions of post-traumatic stress.

Source of the book: Lawrence Public Library

Melainebooks says

Epoustouflant et magistral sont les deux adjectifs qui me viennent concernant ce lire. Cette lecture est gênante car "on aime le détester et on déteste l'aimer". J'avais éprouvé le même sentiment à la lecture de "La mort est mon métier" de Robert Merle. En tout cas, c'est un livre à lire.

Dolceluna says

Lebensborn.

Letteralmente, dal tedesco, "fonte di vita".

E' stato un folle programma genetico nazista, consistente nel fare accoppiare una donna di puro sangue tedesco con un SS, al fine di procreare un ariano perfetto dal punto di vista fisico (secondo i canoni dei nazisti, ovviamente), da allevare come figlio della Germania e del Führer.

E' tutto vero, è accaduto realmente. Un piano atroce e del tutto folle.

Max, in realtà battezzato Konrad (Max è il nomignolo che gli dà inizialmente la donna che l'ha partorito), è uno di questi figli ariani concepiti senza amore, il primo, a dire il vero, del progetto Lebensborn: viene infatti alla luce il 20 Aprile 1938, lo stesso giorno del Führer, e da lui verrà battezzato.

Il romanzo si apre quando Max è ancora un feto, ma già osserva la realtà circostante che non vede l'ora di esplorare, con un fanatismo e un orgoglio malato appartenente solo ai Nazisti. E così, nasce, cresce, viene staccato dalla donna che l'ha partorito, viene istruito in una scuola per piccoli ariani in cui gli vengono inculcati i "principi" del Nazismo (dal rigore della disciplina all'Antisemitismo) e infine conoscerà un ragazzino polacco germanizzato (ma sorpresa, è ebreo!) che rischierà di mettere in crisi tali principi e col quale condividerà la fine della guerra, la disfatta dei Nazisti e l'orizzonte di un futuro incerto e vacillante.

Il lettore segue sbalordito la narrazione in prima persona di questo bambino concepito senza amore (ma in realtà anche senza odio), simbolo del fanatismo, dell'illogicità razzista e di tutto il male che il Nazismo si è portato dietro. La sua voce intrisa talvolta di rabbia pare non vacillare mai, sino alla fine, quando le domande che si pone vengono accompagnate da un pianto (doloroso? Liberatorio?) di cui lui è perfettamente consapevole, tanto che ce ne rende partecipi. Attorno a lui si muovono altri personaggi, infermieri, dottori,

militari, altri piccoli ariani, che contribuiscono a loro modo alla creazione di questo umano-automa, che cresce senza conoscere l'amore materno, l'affetto di una famiglia e principi fondamentali per la base di qualsiasi società, come l'uguaglianza. La scena in cui, ancora neonato, viene "rapito" e allattato da una prigioniera di guerra, il cui calore gli ricorda quello che, appena nato gli aveva trasmesso qualcun'altro (ma non si ricorda chi! Chi era? La madre!) ci lascia in bocca un po' di amarezza e ci conferma che Max, come tutti, è stato una vittima e non carnefice di quel sistema malato che ha investito la Germania e il mondo intero durante la seconda guerra mondiale. Tutti, tutti sono state vittime, consapevoli o meno di esserlo, sobillate, tradite, contagiate.

Nonostante questo, e nonostante quanto la storia di Max-vittima inconsapevole ci possa far credere, la scrittura della Cohen-Scali non ha toccato le corde più alte della mia emotività (l'autrice tenta un colpo di scena finale con il personaggio della madre, ma si sente che è forzato e poco credibile).

Ciò non toglie che il libro (copertina compresa!) è godibilissimo. Leggerlo è stato per me, che da sempre adoro leggere romanzi ambientati in questo periodo storico, scoprire il Nazismo da un punto di vista inedito. Mi mancava, ci voleva... al mio avviso è una lettura necessaria, ci fa spostare l'obiettivo della telecamera, ci fa sorgere interrogativi e riflessioni.

Mélanie Lacroix says

Je connaissais vaguement le programme « Lebensborn » initié par Himmler. Des bébés, conçus de parents sélectionnées selon des critères extrêmement précis afin de créer des purs représentants de la race aryenne. Mais je ne savais pas vraiment comment ça se passait, qui étaient ces femmes, ce que devenaient ces enfants.

Dans ce livre, on plonge dans le programme, on apprend comment ça s'est passé. Rien n'est caché. La lecture est très dure parfois. (C'est un roman jeunesse mais attention pas avant 15-16 bien sonnés – et encore, une lecture accompagnée me semble nécessaire).

Le ton du livre est dérangeant car le bébé a un ton d'adulte. Et surtout il est endoctriné avant même sa naissance. Il aime Hitler, il déteste les Juifs et les homosexuels et il approuve les tortures et les mauvais traitements. Tout ça lui paraît normal puisqu'il n'a jamais rien connu d'autre, dès sa naissance, il n'a servi que le Reich, n'a pas connu l'amour, même celui de sa mère qu'on lui retire bien vite.

On le suit au fil des années, dans le Heim où il est né, puis dans le camp où il suit un entraînement militaire, au son des discours d'Adolphe Hitler. C'est là qu'il se lie (autant que faire se peut) avec un jeune polonais, arraché à sa famille pour grossir les rangs des futurs troupes.

C'est une lecture dont on ne sort pas indemne et qui pose de nombreuses questions. Si le personnage de Max/Konrad est inventé, des milliers d'enfants comme lui ont été créés. Une quarantaine de centres de Lebensborn ont été ouverts en Europe et un existait même en France. On estime à entre 9 000 et 12 000 le nombre d'enfants nés dans ces centres...
