



## The Pact

**Amanda West Lewis**

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*This historical novel is perfectly relevant in this period of international instability.*

Amanda West Lewis's *The Pact* is intriguing historical fiction from the memorable point of view of a German boy who comes of age during World War II.

Peter's mother works as a housekeeper, and they often have little to eat and face social prejudice. But Peter is intelligent, sometimes seeming to relate to his mother as a fellow adult, and earns a scholarship to a gymnasium, a prestigious education track.

Chapters open with Peter in the hospital with diphtheria and remembering snatches of dreams, most often about his best friend's drowning death. He and his contemporaries are in the Hitler Youth, through which they take field trips, experience Allied bombing, and head off for preliminary officer training in Denmark, late in the war.

They are a varied cast, including a bully, an empathetic youngster, and Otto, a half-Jewish boy who disappears midwar. Peter's growing sophistication—and doubts about Germany's course—are revealed first when his mother gives him classic Russian novels. Later, Peter and his friends see images of Josephine Baker and hear a recording of the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

*The Pact* confronts questions of evil, including slave labor in German industry and the death camps. As Peter sees these horrors—and learns of Otto's disappearance—the novel examines moral issues in an appreciable way. The moral conundrum of the wholesale bombing of German cities is also present.

Affecting descriptions of bombing and firestorms draw Hamburg out. Tension increases during a raid on an aircraft engine factory where Peter briefly works. Locations in rural Germany and Hungary are well drawn. In Hungary, Peter shares a youthful infatuation, and the anecdote is described to perfection. Later, as Peter and his contemporaries are sent to Denmark, every setting increases the somber mood.

With its basis in history, *The Pact* is particularly relevant in this period of international instability, especially as it depicts a bloodthirsty dictator seizing power while a nation struggles.

GARY PRESLEY (Winter 2017)

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