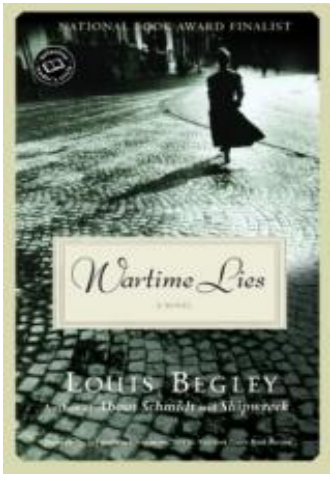
Wartime

by Louis Begley



About the Book

As the world slips into the throes of war in 1939, young Maciek's once closetted existence outside Warsaw is no more. When Warsaw falls, Maciek escapes with his aunt Tania. Together they endure the war, running, hiding, changing their names, forging documents to secure their temporary lives --- as the insistent drum of the Nazi march moves ever closer to them and to their secret wartime lies.

Discussion Guide

1. In **Wartime Lies**, the religious tension is evident from the very beginning as Maciek tells his tale. What events occur that mark the increasing tension from Maciek's perspective?

2. The passages from the perspective of "the man with sad eyes" are meticulously placed throughout the novel. Using your "sympathy and imagination," what links can you draw between the content of these passages and the moment in Maciek's life they interrupt?

3. In chapter four, Maciek punches Pan Wladek in the chest. Why does he react so violently to the accusation (made most likely as a partial jest) that he has been "evil" by cheating?

4. Louis Begley mentioned that Dante could be considered "the greatest connoisseur of evil." In what ways does Dante and his **Inferno** relate to the experiences described in **Wartime Lies** ?

5. Seemingly more than most young children, Maciek is somewhat obsessed with being liked. Why do you think this is? And how does this conflict with the "show" that he and Tania are constantly putting on?

6. At one point, Maciek tells us, "Tania thought she loved Reinhard, probably as much as she ever loved anybody" (page

68). Throughout the novel, how does Tania relate to men and love?

7. There are several ways in which the title, **Wartime Lies**, relates to the principal characters in the novel. What are some of those ways? And how have these lies forever changed Tania and Mayciek's sense of ethics and morality?

8. If the world of **Wartime Lies** is one where everyone bears a burden of guilt, what guilt do Maciek, Tania, Grandfather, and Reinhard carry?

9. When Maciek must attend catechism classes, something in his perception shifts. How does Maciek feel about this experience?

10. How does **Wartime Lies** compare to other novels about the Holocaust you may have read?

Author Bio

Louis Begley?s novels include KILLER'S CHOICE, KILL AND BE KILLED, MEMORIES OF A MARRIAGE, SCHMIDT STEPS BACK, MATTERS OF HONOR, SHIPWRECK, SCHMIDT DELIVERED, MISTLER'S EXIT, ABOUT SCHMIDT, AS MAX SAW IT, THE MAN WHO WAS LATE, and WARTIME LIES, which won the PEN/Hemingway Award and the Irish Times/Aer Lingus International Fiction Prize. His latest novel, THE NEW LIFE OF HUGO GARDNER, was published in 2020. His work has been translated into 14 languages. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Critical Praise

"Extraordinary...Rich in irony and regret...[the] people and settings are vividly realized and his prose [is] compelling in its simplicity."

Wartime
by Louis Begley

Publication Date: October 15, 1997
Paperback: 240 pages
Publisher: Ballantine Books
ISBN-10: 0449001172
ISBN-13: 9780449001172