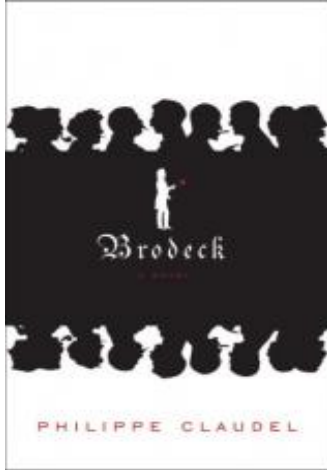


Brodeck: A Novel

by Philippe Claudel



About the Book

Forced into a brutal concentration camp during a great war, Brodeck returns to his village at the war's end and takes up his old job of writing reports for a governmental bureau. One day a stranger comes to live in the village. His odd manner and habits arouse suspicions: His speech is formal, he takes long, solitary walks, and although he is unfailingly friendly and polite, he reveals nothing about himself. When the stranger produces drawings of the village and its inhabitants that are both unflattering and insightful, the villagers murder him. The authorities who witnessed the killing tell Brodeck to write a report that is essentially a whitewash of the incident.

As Brodeck writes the official account, he sets down his version of the truth in a separate, parallel narrative. In measured, evocative prose, he weaves into the story of the stranger his own painful history and the dark secrets the villagers have vigilantly keep hidden.

Set in an unnamed time and place, **Brodeck** blends the familiar and unfamiliar, myth and history into a work of extraordinary power and resonance. Readers of J. M. Coetzee's **Disgrace**, Bernhard Schlink's **The Reader** and Kafka will be captivated by Brodeck.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel is set in an unidentified place and time. Why do you think the author chose to make the setting anonymous? Do you think he had a specific historical event in mind? Was this device effective or not? Can you think of another novel in which this is done?
2. The first lines of the novel are, "I'm Brodeck and I had nothing to do with it. I insist on that. I want everyone to know." How do you interpret Brodeck's tone? Why is he so adamant about this point? Is it true that he's innocent?

3. Brodeck takes it upon himself to assign names to the significant events in his life. *Kazerskwir*, or 'the crater,' refers to his two years in the death camp and the *Ereigniës*, or 'the thing that happened,' refers to the murder at Schloss's Inn. In your opinion, why does Brodeck name these events? Are these names fitting?
4. Brodeck's experience in the prison camp is revealed at intervals throughout the novel, rather than all at once. Why do you think the author chose to develop the story this way?
5. Father Peiper tells Brodeck, 'Fear is what governs the world.' How is this evidenced in the novel? Do you think this is true?
6. The novel frequently touches on the contrast between remembering vs. burying the past. Which characters or scenes exemplify this theme? Do you believe that a society can learn from past mistakes? What does the novel seem to say about the merit of a historical record?
7. Were you surprised by Diodemus's letter? How did you feel about Brodeck's admission that he doesn't feel hatred toward him? Do you think Diodemus' action is forgivable? Why do you think Brodeck doesn't turn over the letter to see the names of the other villagers who sent him away?
8. Do you agree with the *Anderer* when he tells Brodeck, 'talking is the best medicine'? Does talking about one's problems have any negative effects?
9. Why do you think the villagers murdered the *Anderer*? Why do you think they chose Brodeck to write the report?
10. In Brodeck's last flashback he tells what happened on the train ride to the prison camp. Why does he save this scene for the end of the story? Did this event change the way you felt about him? Can you think of another time in the book when Brodeck acted cruelly?
11. Why does Brodeck decide to leave the village? Is his departure cowardly, brave, or neither?

Author Bio

Philippe Claudel is a French writer and film director. Claudel was born in Dombasle-sur-Meurthe, Meurthe-et-Moselle. In addition to his writing, Claudel is a Professor of Literature at the University of Nancy.

Critical Praise

starred review 'Coming across as the love child of Bela Tarr's film *Werckmeister Harmóniák* and Gabriel García Márquez's 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,' this disconcerting and darkly atmospheric novel, set in an unnamed European town secluded high in the mountains, deals with the effects of collective guilt by examining the dark secrets of its residents as they recall the hardships of war and occupation. Following the end of an unspecified war that sounds very much like WWII, protagonist Brodeck, who survived the camps by literally becoming a guard's pet (Brodeck the Dog),

is reunited with his wife and daughter. After the murder of a mystical drifter, Brodeck is made to write a narrative of the events for the authorities absolving the village's inhabitants of any blame. Though there are no innocents, by the end some characters make tentative footsteps toward reclaiming their humanity. Claudel's style is very visual and evocative (he also wrote and directed the film *I've Loved You So Long*), and this novel, like the brothers Grimm fables, is full of terror, horror, and beauty and wonder.?

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