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AP Literature and Composition

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Thoughts Through the Diary of Rudy Steiner

The following are entries from Rudy Steiner's diary. They show his growth and understanding of the world as he matures.

"Jesse Owens had just completed the 4 x 100m relay and won his fourth gold medal. Talk that he was subhuman because he was black and Hitler's refusal to shake his hand were touted around the world. Even the most racist Germans were amazed with the efforts of Owens, and word of his feat slipped through the cracks. No one was more impressed than Rudy Steiner," (The Book Thief, 56)

The entire passage "The Jesse Owens Incident) 56-61.

Why does any of this matter? -1936

Today I did what I've wanted to do since I listened to the Olympics on the radio. Today I was Jesse Owens. Today I was the fastest man alive and it was incredible.

Then Papa showed up at the track. That saukerl dragged me home by my ear. He said that I "...shouldn't want to want to be like black people or Jewish people or anyone who is... not us," (Zusak, 60). I think that he was *actually* bothered by the fact that I covered myself in charcoal and made a mess. That's the only thing that makes sense to me.

Someday I want to be the best, just like Jesse Owens. I think it's dangerous if I say that though, but I'm not sure why. Papa said that if they saw me painted black, they'd take me away. Who are *they*? I don't understand why any of this stuff matters.

Why would it be bad to strive to accomplish greatness like the best athlete in the world? What is wrong with being a Jew? What is so great about my blonde hair?

"That was when Rudy stepped forward. He faced Franz Deutscher, looking up at him.

"He's got a problem, sir--"

"I can see that!"

"With his ears," Rudy finished. "He can't--" (Zusak, 268).

I will protect the weak. -1941

Franz Deutscher is the worst. He is everything that I hate about Hitler Youth.

Today as we were marching, Tommy messed up once again. It gets very frustrating because when he ruins the line, we all get in trouble. I can't hold anything against him though, I mean the kid can hardly hear. Tommy tries his best, but it's like expecting a blind man succeed at riding a bike and then punishing him when he crashes.

While Franz Deutscher was giving Tommy the third degree, I made a decision. You see it's not fair to punish a person for something they can't control. I tried to explain Tommy's lack of hearing and twitching face. That just made our leader even more irate and he made us run six lap *and* do endless drills.

It reminds me of how the way things are today. Some things aren't accepted by the Party even though people can't control them. They're taking away the Jews and punishing those who try to stand up to them, no matter how they go about it. What is happening to Germany?

I guess I'm saying that I will stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves, even if I get hurt in the process.

"Which leaves us only with stupid act number three-- skipping the Hitler Youth meetings.

He didn't stop going right away, purely to show Deutscher that he wasn't afraid of him, but after another few weeks, Rudy ceased his involvement altogether.

Dressed proudly in his uniform, he exited Himmel Street and kept wading, his loyal subject, Tommy, by his side.

Instead of the Hitler Youth, they walked out of town and along the Amper... He made sure to get the uniform dirty enough to fool his mother, at least until the first letter arrived," (Zusak, 299).

The Quitter -1941

The day I've dreaded finally came today. My parents now know that I've stopped going to Hitler Youth meetings. On the outside, one might think that the sole reason is to avoid my arch nemesis, Franz Deutscher, but while he is a factor there's something else.

A pit is growing inside of me and I hate it. I'm just not ready to grow up. Everything about my division is strict and serious. I just want to be able to be a kid. It's not too much to ask for, but during war, everything is taken away from you, even your childhood.

I have decided that I will not go back to Deutscher because I demand to keep one thing in my life. With everything changing that's only fair. I crave to be able to run around, play in the woods, and skip rocks on the creek. I demand it. There is not a chance I'm letting this dream go.

A quick side note: Kurt mentioned something about joining the Flieger Division. They mostly build model airplanes which isn't all that bad. Maybe Hitler Youth *can* be beneficial.

"...I think I'll find the Fuhrer instead...I want to kill the Fuhrer," (Zusak, 425)

I want to KILL the Fuhrer -1942

I miss Papa so much. If I would have just gone to the Nazi school none of this would have happened. Sure what little freedom I have would be taken away, but my father would still be at home with my family.

I feel guilty, but this is not my fault. This all falls on Hitler. My father is gone because *the* Fuhrer didn't get his way. I hate that Papa is being punished for protecting me. I hate that we have no say in what happens to our family. I hate this war. Most importantly, however, I hate Adolf Hitler. I will find him and kill him myself. Tomorrow I

am leaving to find my father and kill the evil one. I don't have a plan or know how to do it, but it has to be done. I have to do the impossible.

This final letter was written after Rudy's death but never sent. The entire book can be seen throughout.

Dear Liesel,

Don't be sad because I'm gone. Though I was only fourteen years old, I lived a full life. I found ways to fill my empty stomach by learning to become a thief with you. Overtime I came to understand the full power of Hitler and the Nazis which planted a seed of hatred in my brain. I was an excellent athlete and marvelous student. Through it all though, only one thing mattered to me. As I was growing up, I was also falling in love with you. Even if you didn't feel the same way towards me, it was the most valuable part of my life. For that I say thank you.

Yours Always,

Rudy