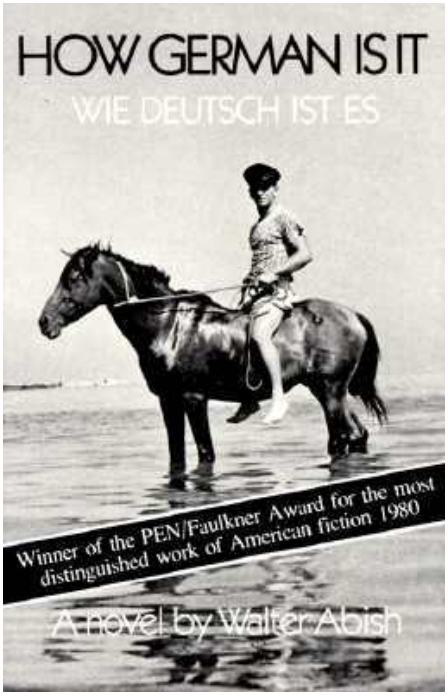


# How German Is It (Wie Deutsch ist es)

*Walter Abish*

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**How German Is It (Wie Deutsch ist es)** Walter Abish
The question HOW GERMAN IS IT underlies the conduct and actions of the characters in Walter Abish's new novel, an icy panorama of contemporary Germany, in which the tradition of order and obedience, the patrimony of the saber and the castle on the Rhine, give way to the present, indiscriminate fascination with all things American. On his return from Paris to his home city of Wurtenburg, Ulrich Hargenau, whose father was executed for his involvement in the 1944 plot against Hitler, is compelled to ask himself, "How German am I?"--as he compares his own recent attempt to save his life, and his wife Paula's, by testifying against fellow members of a terrorist group, with his father's selfless heroism.

## How German Is It (Wie Deutsch ist es) Details

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| Date | : | Published November 17th 1980 by New Directions (first published 1980) |
| ISBN | : | 9780811207768 |
| Author | : | Walter Abish |
| Format | : | Paperback 257 pages |
| Genre | : | Fiction, The United States Of America, Novels, Literature |

# From Reader Review How German Is It (Wie Deutsch ist es) for online ebook

### Rimas says

This is one of the more memorable novels I've read in the last five years.

There was one scene that blew me away: the protagonist visits his brother, who has another visitor, the mayor and his wife. While the brother and the mayor play tennis, it becomes clear (at least to me) that the brother and the mayor's wife are having an affair. Abish gets this across deftly, and with very few brushstrokes. And, until later in the book, we don't get confirmation of this, but when we do it's welcome and pleasing as a reading experience.

For me, as in much very good writing, there is an entire text that is never written, but is implied in this novel. It is one that has in it a great deal of anguish: for the German Jews, their identity was as much German as Jewish. And the author seems to argue with this novel that they shouldn't allow their German identity to be taken away from them by the fanatical actions of the Nazis. The question is "How German" was the holocaust? In the entire history of a culture, a culture in which Jews were a vital and important part, "How German" is one fifteen year period of time?

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### Ben Siems says

Although this book has simple German phrases peppered in here and there, it was written in English. I would not rank it among my all-time favorite novels, but I think it is a great read, especially for anyone of German heritage. The question posed by the title certainly captures the central dilemma of the characters in the story, caught between a tradition of order, emotional reserve, and cold analysis of facts, and the pervasive presence of American consumer culture in late-twentieth century Europe.

The central character's father was executed in the 1940s for plotting against Hitler. Decades later, he finds his life defined by his cowardice in testifying against members of a terrorist group with which he and his wife have strong ties. The discovery of a mass grave at the site of a former Nazi death camp encapsulates the struggle to come to terms with identity, legacy, and personal responsibility amidst events with global implications.

A very well written book that, as a bonus, explained for me a great deal about my family.

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### El says

Ah! Experimental fiction! Modernism!... or post-modernism? What*ever*!

I love Germany - I love the culture, I love most of the literature, I love the language and the history. But throw those things together into an experimental hodge-podge? Apparently not so much.

Ulrich is the son of a high-ranking military officer who had been executed for his part in the plot to

assassinate Hitler in 1944. And from there the plot and sub-plot becomes so multi-layered I wanted to hurt someone.

This isn't a bad book, but one to be read instead of reviewed. Float my boat, this one did not.

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### Jane says

Abish is amazing - this book unfolds so slowly and carefully, so much discipline and control. He's not like them, but if you like W.G. Sebald or The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion this may also crank your dial. It has that same awe-inspiring feeling of being planned down to the last letter, while still seeming to reveal itself completely organically. Anyway: tops. One of the best things I've read.

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### Ashley says

This is the kind of book you start reading, and you immediately get very excited about. So, you keep on plowing through the interesting and sad characters, and the interesting and sad data and information and history about Germans and Germany, and then, somewhere mid-way through or so, you go, "Oh, crap, I already read this book, and already thought these same exact things." The book is deja vu, the same thing every single time. Rather than coming back to a book you've read and loved once before and rediscovering why you loved it before and why you love it now, you completely forget about it and have the same experience the next time 'round. I think I must have read this book at least three times between 2005 and 2007 before I realized the loop I was in.

Now, I'm not saying don't read it. It's a compelling and entertaining and thoughtful take on the modern world, and the modern Germany, and asks a lot of questions about what the past is, and the present, and the future and all that. All I'm saying is, remember that you've read it so you don't get sucked into the vacuum that erases your memory of the thing.

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### Vit Babenco says

“…the mind is so created that it habitually sets up standards of perfection for everything: for marriage and for driving, for love affairs and for garden furniture, for table tennis and for gas ovens, for faces and for something as petty as the weather. And then, having established these standards, it sets up other standards of comparison, which serve, if nothing else, to confirm in the minds of most people that a great many things are less than perfect.”
**Walter Abish** may appear to be contemplatively distant and disinterestedly detached but actually he is murderously venomous.
Like an experienced and pitiless vivisector he dissects the respectable society of “The new democratic Germany, where people were no longer measured by class, upbringing, loyalties, but by their achievements as human beings,” and bares all its nerves and hidden tumours.
“*Is the only time we’re not standing at attention when we are asleep?*”
Pragmatism and hedonism, pretense and pose, spiritlessness and hypocrisy: it seems that living by double

standard has become a norm. Fornication and adultery are the best entertainment. Culture is just a façade.
“And now that odd-shaped building, the museum.
That’s different, said Franz, quick to jump to the defense of a Hargenau. After all, it’s a repository for culture. A warehouse, so to speak, of history.”
At the site of the former concentration camp the new fashionable and admirable town has been erected.
History did never happen.
But an old abandoned railroad station still stands like a rotten tooth…
“Fifteen endlessly long trains traveling at a pretty fast pace, given the age of the rails and other safety factors, clippedy-clop, clippedy-clop, clippedy-clop, on their way to or coming from the railroad juncture. The only evidence of life on the passing trains was an occasional scarecrow face framed in the tiny cutout window of a freight car.”
If you don’t like the past then pretend that there is no past.

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### S. says

Fantastic book, and strange I’d never heard of it until recently. I guess that the limited audience for such a book equals limited air time. If you are not German (and even if you are) or don’t have a particular interest in Germany, this book could bore you. But I ate it up. I am the target audience!

From the perspective of the 70’s, which are grotesque enough, the author takes on Germany, its culture and society and its heavy history. The weight of the past, the haunting and shame and guilt. The book has a lot of punch. I was worried the end would fizzle out stupidly but it did not. It was surprising and strong.

Basically the theme is on p. 190: “Sooner or later, every German, young or old, male or female, will come across some description in a book, or newspaper, or magazine of those grim events …. “

And “those grim events” may be too much for the individual to carry. He’ll want to deny or forget or rewrite, or at least question them. When a collapsed sewer reveals a mass burial site folks are particular about doing the right thing. And yet there’s the wishful question “can anyone really rule out the possibility, remote as it may appear, that these people were not inmates of the camp but Germans killed in air raids, or killed by Americans, or killed by the inmates after they had been released, or killed by fanatic Germans…” and wouldn’t it be nice if for once the Germans were not the perpetrators but the victims and they didn’t have to go on committing this ghastly crime forever and ever? Ach, if only!

For all its seriousness the book is also very funny. I laughed through all the talk about the weather, and the German words used to describe it. The story takes place in “a glorious German summer,” the best one in 33 years! That’s the beginning of the book and the glorious summer is mentioned over and over. It’s meant to be ironic, and it is, and it’s funny.

Then there are the titles of the book the main character has written: “Now or Never,” “What Else?” and finally “Exactly,” which strikes me as particularly German and hilarious. (Genau!)

And then the family as a metaphor for heritage: “In the garden Erika, laughing wildly, was chasing Gisela. In comparison to her, Gisela was by far more agile, more inventive. He found his daughter’s laughter vaguely disturbing, as if it spelled out a possible future derangement. Erika, he called from the window. Erika, stop it immediately.” (p. 101)

Finally, every German will have to deal with being German, and living with that history. The protagonist, recently back from Paris, spends some time where he’s settled, and is asked if he’s beginning to feel at home: “More and more, he replied. And when he thought about it later, he concluded that it was true. He did feel more at home, but that did not mean that he liked it.” (p. 168)

It’s a sad fate. Here the house as nation stripped of everything it could be proud of, art, culture and ideals: “I grew up in a large house in the country. A house that after the war was gradually emptied of its contents, its furniture, its paintings, its silverware, its carpets, anything that was of value. People from all over came to see what we had to sell.” (P. 249)

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### Margaux Tatin Blanc says

How German Is it -- one of these books you read when you are young and don't understand at all... I had read when i was in my last twenties and thought it was "good", ok good... not much more than that...
Now I reread it years and years later and I find it devastating... reaching deep in your body and grabbing your heart out!
A German who might have been part of a terrorist group, or not, who might have been a "yellow" who denounced a terrorist group to save his girlfriend, or maybe to save himself, returns to Germany and wonders from the first encounter at the airport HOW GERMAN IS IT
He has lived in other places, disappeared anonymously in other worlds, and now he is back in a place where everyone knows about his father (who had been killed at dawn after trying to kill Hitler in 42) and himself (because of the terrorist group trial) and his famous brother (an architect who built the police station and thinks highly of himself and of how German HE is)
The writing seems simple but it takes the reader in a series of circles akin to Dante's Hellish circles, and soon it manipulates you the reader to react a certain way, to think certain things, and they might not be pleasant... Even the way the writer deals with the fact that there was not a more beautiful summer since 1939 will trap you, snare you and hurt you..
The simplicity of the writing is deceptive. It is like a trap in the dark forest that is always around you, around the city where our "hero" stays... and before you know you are falling, falling, falling... and like a new Alice you are wondering about memories, secrets and history. How does it trap YOU and how does it destroy your life... enhance your life... is your life...
What makes you belong to this or that country... to this or that group... to this or that dark history... is the country's history your dark life, the unconscious drama of your soul, or is it just a cultural reference...
And if you don't get it, I will just let you know that the city where he is staying is a modern place built with all the positive styles of the 50's, 60's and 70's on top of a destroyed concentration camp. So HOW GERMAN IS IT
you answer...

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### Maia says

How German is 'it' -- meaning: life, existence and/or Germanness itself? Well, from the book's POV plus my own epxerience after 3 years as a foreigner in Germany I'd say thay 'it' is very, very German indeed. And probably the irony and the power of the very essence of Germanness is that it can be both a fascinating and a

terrifying thing.

Consider what I experienced about 2 months ago. I need to apply for a drivers' license because there is no recirpocity between Germany and my home US state, despite the fact that I have been driving for 25 years. I can take the written test in English but I also need to attend a compulsory First Aid class--which is only given in German! So in effect, through the law allows me to take the written driving test in my own language even if I know no German at all, the law also demands that I spend an entire day listening to First Aid info in German, even when the law knows (and accepts) that I don't understand German! Typical Teutonian comtradiction.

So I went to the First Aid class--8 hours straight in a tiny room with about 30 other people, mostly teens. Eight hours with only two 15 minutes breaks. The 'teacher' was this tall, slim, incredibly attractive--in a German sort of way--twentysomething guy whose intensity was both fascinati and grotesque. The guy gave his all to this First Aid stuff as if his life depended on it--which maybe it did since Germans have to do everything with intensity, no matter how banal. We got thousands of slides and so much information you'd think we were being trained as Medics! A d every ten mins he'd break off with exercises.

So, during one of these, which I could only half follow with my very weak German, I was supposed to show how I'd lW down a fainting person on the ground. I did so, and he stopped me because, he said in English, I'd forgotten to first tell 'someone' (who?) to run off and call the ambulance. I told him, im English, that I'd missed that part--due to my weak German. So one of the kids in the class offered to be the one I sent off to call the ambulance and assured me, 'you always have to tell someone to call the ambulance.' At which point I, with what I consider to be perfect logic, asked: 'OK, but what if I'm alone? What if I don't have someone send off for the ambulance? Do i then leave the fainting person there and do it myself, or do I take care of the fainting person first?'

They all looked very, very confused. Clearly, no one had thought of that! It just wasn't in the script, you see. 'There's always someone,' the kid insisted. And I replied,'Really? How could you know?'

The point is, you can't know. There are a million things that you don't know and simply cannot know but this state of affairs drive Germans CRAZY! They have this obsessive, compulsive, at times all-consuming need go control everything. It stems from theif infamous ANGST-- an all-pervasivd anguish and anxiety for and about life, of what cannot be controlled in life. In German, 'angst' actually means fear but, like with many other German words, it's travelled to all other languages.

Anyway--from 'how German is it.?' we could move to 'what is German?' and pretty much arrive at the same point.

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### Sean says

It took me much longer than expected to finish this book. Not because it was dull or even particularly slow-moving. It was more due to the lifestyles of the characters and the meandering nature of the narrative. Abish writes here of the 'New Germany' and its generation that was born during or at the close of WWII. The plot focuses on the two sons of Ulrich von Hargenau, an anti-Nazi activist executed for his role in the 1944 plot

to assassinate Hitler. Helmuth is a prosperous architect and Ulrich is a writer of popular autobiographical fiction. They have discarded the elitist *von* from their aristocratic last name, much to the disapproval of the residents of Brumholdstein—the chic, uber-modern community in which they live. Helmuth has designed many of the town's civic landmarks, regularly lunches with the mayor, and revels in the deference given him by his fellow citizens. Ulrich, recently returned from living abroad, is recovering from legal trouble surrounding his association with a group of artists/social activists known for terrorist acts, as well as nursing some tender emotions over a split with his wife, also a member of the group.

An ominous cloud hangs over much of the narrative, generating an expectation of something terrible about to occur, and there is enough mild intrigue to keep the plot afloat and the pages turning, but the clouds frequently part to reveal domestic scenes indicative of the free-wheeling, libertine 1970s lifestyle, as enjoyed by two wealthy, good-looking German brothers with plenty of spare time to burn. During these often soap-operatic jaunts, a sense of complacency settled over me, though not enough to fully squelch my nagging awareness of the *bad thing* possibly lurking around the corner. Throughout the book, staggered exposition on the Hargenau family also serves to distract from the sense of doom.

Nazi ghosts swirl around the characters, and it's clear that the members of this generation have mixed emotions about their country's recent past, representing a wide spectrum from vague sympathy to full condemnation. The book captures so well a snapshot of one community's struggle to progress in democratic style while still hampered by entrenched class issues and lingering fascist mindsets. It is chiefly a character-driven story, and it's through his skilled characterization that Abish is able to present such a layered portrait of post-war Germany. His postmodern flourishes serve to accentuate the newness and uncertainty of the moments in time he writes about, while also raising larger questions about humanity and the Holocaust.

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### Nathan says

Very, as it turns out.

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### Ben Dutton says

Literary trickster, Walter Abish, was a late bloomer. His first novel, Duel Site (1970), did not appear until Abish was turning forty. His second novel, Alphabetical Africa (1974), cemented his reputation. Each chapter of that book played pseudo-alliterative rules: the first chapter began with each word beginning with the letter a, the second would add the letter b, the third c and so on, until chapter 27 when a letter was taken away until chapter 52. A brief flurry of publishing through the 1970s was followed with relative silence through to the present day. So far Abish has only published three novels, three collections of short stories, one book of poetry and one autobiography.

How German Is It is perhaps his most celebrated novel, and certainly his most complex. It is a novel that probes Germany’s recent past through the brothers Ulrich and Helmuth Hargenau, whose father defected against Hitler in the last days of the Second World War and was killed by firing squad. As the title infers, Abish is interested in the question of how uniquely German the Holocaust was, and how its people could have committed such an act. But this is not a novel wholly interested in Germany’s past – it is interested in its present, with the rise of a terrorist group, whose activities mirror the Red Army Faction.

As in Abish's former works, How German Is It is enamoured with verbal tomfoolery, of which the cumulative effect is to constantly wrong-foot the reader, making us as wary of modern German as both Abish and his characters seem to be. Ulrich Hargenau, the novels 'hero', is a successful writer, estranged from his wife, Paula, a female terrorist, whom he saved from prison by testifying against the other members of her group. Ulrich, returned to Brumholdstein (named after Ernst Brumhold, a Heidegger-type philosopher), begins to suffer occasional death threats and attempts are made on his life. His brother, Helmuth, a successful architect who designed the police station in Brumholdstein (only to see it blown up by the terrorist group operating in the area), begins to suffer from similar concerns. The Hargenau's – a very Americanised family – represent modern Germany, in a very old German town. Brumholdstein was the site of a notorious gas chamber and concentration camp, now buried beneath the modern facade.

About half way through this novel teacher Anna Heller is discussing with her primary school students the concept of familiarity. What is familiar? What qualities is it that makes something familiar? This is a question Abish's novel returns to frequently, with the word 'familiar' a recurring motif. In the end it seems that nothing is what it seems and that the familiar can pave over deep secrets – just as the paving stones outside the familiar bakery conceal a mass grave – and just as the familiarity of marriage can hide seething resentments.

"Sunday: This is the introduction to the German Sontag. This is an introduction to the German tranquillity and decorum. People out for a stroll, affably greeting their neighbours. Guten Morgen. Guten Tag. Schönes Wetter, nicht wahr? Ja, hervorragend. A day of pleasant exchanges. A day of picnics, leisurely meals, newspapers on the sofa. Franz sitting in their small garden, reading his Sunday paper, his back to the noisy neighbours next door, his back to the familiar scene of the neighbours playing cards, his back deliberately turned to their Sunday." (P.156-157)

Only those who have embraced knowledge of Germany's past and reached some form of reconciliation with it – as Franz the waiter, who is building a scale model of the concentration camp has – can see the hypocrisy under the surface of the familiar. Their only reaction is to turn their back on it. Only the present will not let them.

Ulrich, the subject of death threats, is shot in the arm, but has the mayor of Brumholdstein tell him to "forget it." The mayor also panics that there will be bad publicity for his town when news of the bodies breaks, and wishes he could simply forget they were there. Towards the end of the novel Ulrich is witness to the terrorists biggest act to date – the blowing up of a bridge (the second bridge blowing in the Penguin Classics so far, and I'm only eight books in!) that connects the mainland with the island town of Gänzlich (or the two faces of Germany, the modern mainland and the remote islands that still cling to a past, wary of strangers, united against them. This act forces Ulrich to face up to his responsibility and to himself, and leads to the devastatingly satirical end.

For Abish, How German Is It is a novel that questions the very identity of a nation in transition, trying to face up to its troubled past. As Abish writes of the naming of the town:

"Without access to the intricacy, the nuances, the shades of meaning in our language, the visitor's ability to understand and appreciate the complexities of our customs or the manifestations of our creative impulse will be severely limited…. In adopting the name of Brumhold we have also, in all seriousness, embraced his lifelong claim to the questions: What is being? What is thinking?" (P.170)

The answers Abish finds to these questions are not always satisfactory, if only because Abish himself was uncertain of them. In 2004 he published Double Vision: A Self Portrait which speaks of his time in Germany

following the publication of How German Is It. He asks himself, “At what stage in the reconstruction of Germany, at what point in this tremendous effort will the turbulent past fade, enabling the visitor to Germany to once again view the society with that credulous gaze of a nineteenth-century traveller?”[1] If Abish, with the novelists gaze, cannot reconcile the two faces of twentieth century Germany, what hope has the country of rebuilding the familiar? More recent novelists have turned their attention to this question with equally unsure conclusions: Christa Wolf with Das Bleibt (1990) Rachel Seiffert in The Dark Room (2001), or Bernhard Schlink with The Reader (1995). But then questions of how to comprehend the atrocities of the Third Reich will trouble novelists for eternity. To this conundrum Abish adds much with his cinematic prose, prefigured by the quote from Jean-Luc Godard that opens his book: “What is really at stake is one’s image of oneself.” The very image of a nation is at the heart of this work.

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### Nick says

3.5/5 - a terrific last line.

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### Bob says

A young Walter Abish and his parents fled Austria in the late 1930s and after the better part of two decades first in Shanghai, then Israel, he came to America, finally beginning to publish English fiction and poetry in his early 40s.
This is probably his most famous novel, set in Germany in the 70s where the Nazi past sits uneasily and the left-wing terrorist present has grabbed center stage. The former is illustrated by a town renamed after a contemporary philosopher where the past is literally covered up by concrete (a sewer pipe collapse revels a mass grave from a former prison camp) and figuratively (all library card catalog entries for the town's prior name redirect to the new one and nothing else).
Abish is plainly a bit uneasy with the concept of some sort of essential German-ness and the central character is a writer with all the uncertainty of perspective that can bring and, as is revealed, an identity crisis of his own. The other salient plot element is his former (unwitting?) engagement with a Baader-Meinhof-styled terrorist group via his ex-wife.
For all the turbulent subject matter, the writing is witty and moves quickly and the cast of characters well-differentiated and memorable.

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### Nick Scandy says

I am absolutely in love with this book and probably wouldn't have picked it up if I wasn't hi-jacking a friend's reading list for my own selfish gains (thanks Eric). Even after reading the back summary, trying to process the cover photo, and attempting to understand where Abish fit into literature (somewhere in the '70s Barthelme burn-all-the-rules-down-in-a-weird-humorous-way slice of things, I believe), I still may have taken my time starting this one.

What I found was a calmly sinister, subtly ironic tone lurking beneath the novel's narrative. And much like the sinkhole that opens up beneath Brumholdstein, the toxic vibes (terrorism, rampant infidelity and other types of popular upper class play, an infinite level of post-war emotion for Germany to deal with—if ever) deftly erode from within. The prose is brilliant—at times fluid and long-reaching, but mostly abiding by a

stark, matter-of-factness that is delivered in short, standalone paragraphs throughout the novel's entirety. And it's somehow very funny.

But what I *think* might be the real topic at hand here is not Germany, but America. How German is It? No idea, since this all feels like a late '70s American suburban existence transposed into a Germany only a few decades into democratic structure (and still very much trying to figure it out). I also read somewhere that Abish hadn't even been to Germany when he wrote this, though his Austrian descent probably helped. But it's also late 2016 and facts on the internet don't exist anymore.

Overall, I'm just left with the astonished feeling that Abish totally out-White Noise'd DeLillo five years in advance.

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### Ron says

Not sure if this book is devilishly funny or just devilish. Anyway, it got me laughing out loud. Don't know what that says about me, because the novel seems to be an attempt to account for the excesses of German fascism. Set 34 years after the fall of the Third Reich, it follows the lives of a number of hateful characters, during a period of several months, as they do their best to appear "perfect" to the rest of the world while behaving despicably to each other.

The plot, if there is one, is a rambling affair, likely to spin off in any direction and shifting focus at will - following whatever happens to catch the eye and ear of the narrator: an architect separated from his wife, his brother a novelist now divorced and drifting through affairs with other women, a glamorously wealthy and utterly vicious young couple, a waiter in a high-class restaurant who is contemptuous of the customers he meticulously serves, an annoyingly narcissistic ten-year-old girl, a town mayor and his faithless wife, who berates her hapless husband and her aging house-painter father, and so on.

Abish's narration is so thick with irony you couldn't cut it with a buzzsaw. His narrator punctuates the narrative with persistent questions and is constantly shifting perspective - sometimes intimately aware of what characters are thinking (though seldom what they are feeling, if anything), then turning speculative and gossipy, like a chorus of prying neighbors, then repetitive like a gossip who can't resist telling something over and over, or a camera blankly recording what happens to fall within the range of the viewfinder. Meanwhile, the satire in the novel is dark and relentless, events taking place against a backdrop of terrorist cells, social stratification, the burgeoning post-war economy, an influx of "guest workers," and the discovery of a mass grave under the main street of a new town built over the site of a "small" and therefore insignificant concentration camp. The unpleasantness of the Nazi years lurks everywhere under the surface, seemingly ready to pop out again at the next opportunity. Not a book for every taste, but definitely for anyone who appreciates Brecht and enjoys watching and rewatching "Dr. Strangelove."

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### MJ Nicholls says

Wie deutsch ist dieser Roman? Sehr Deutsch, Sir! A mesmeric peep into the postwar German psyche.

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### Cerisaye says

How German is it? As others have said, perhaps too much? I fear I lack deeper understanding of its political, cultural and philosophical nuances. I was a young adult in the late seventies when the novel is set so it isn't that I am too young to remember when Germany was still run by the generation that came of age during or immediately after the Nazi era. I remember Baader-Meinhof and other radical left militant groups, the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall and Cold War paranoia, the West German 'economic miracle' vs Britain 'basket case of Europe'. I know about 'collective guilt' and 'the Sins of the Fathers'. British tabloid headlines involving anything to do with Germany still referring to 'Huns' and 'Krauts' and a goose-stepping Basil Fawlty doing a Hitler impersonation could be played for (slightly awkward) laughs, *"Don't mention the war"*. In the seventies and eighties there remained a certain hostility towards German and Germany and not just among the older generations, so a novel centred on present day (well, 1970s) Germans' relationship to Germany's Nazi past interested me from the POV of gaining insight from the 'other side' although we are talking about more than a generation ago now, which matters more in Germany than most nations, I suspect. Trouble is I kind of get what Abish is doing in his book but not quite and feel frustrated by it, in consequence. Anyway, I am not giving up and will update when done.

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### Cody says

One of the best experimental-procedural novels, full stop. All the more amazing for Abish having never been to Germany (yet) so as to not color his titular question one way or another. Well? *Vie Deutsch Ist Es*?

There will be a quiz. Bring your Blue Books.

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### Hans says

With a title like this (and a last name like mine), how could I not read this book?

Abish both creates a unique narrative and explores the nature of being German. Some part of the human condition is finding a way to live through and past difficult events. How does a person do this? How can a town or a people live past events that are infamous and unforgivable? The larger questions of German's history and future are explored through the nature and history of the novel's characters.

Part of the book's structure reminded me of *Life: A User Manual* by Perec.

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