



The Seventh Well: A Novel

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He grew up on the street, a high school dropout. In 1938 he left his mother and sister behind in Vienna and fled on foot to France, where later he was put on a train to Auschwitz. Transported from camp to camp, Fred Wander was haunted for twenty-five years by the crystalline, episodic stories that chronicle the plight of his fellow inmates. Only after the tragic death of his little daughter did these voices pour forth. The result was this novel, published in East Germany in 1970. Finally it appears in English in this masterful translation, its haunting cadences evoking Levi and Celan, its backstory as heartrending as *Suite Française*. Wander demonstrates that the survival of a single man is a collaborative enterprise. *The Seventh Well*, named after the well of truth, recalls Dante's *Inferno* with its mesmerizing descent into evil. Its existence is a miracle.

The Seventh Well: A Novel Details

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From Reader Review The Seventh Well: A Novel for online ebook

Elizabeth says

The Seventh Well: A Novel was not what I expected. It crept into me like a vine creeping up a wall, quietly, slowly, reminding me it's not what I imagined it would be. This book haunts you, its characters reminding of what you are and questioning you. Are you all you say you are? What is your commitment to your fellow man? This could be you, it cries... This could have been you.

"What does the forest make you think of?" it asks. "Of trees, of peace, of a return to nature," you innocently respond. No, you are wrong. It is reminiscent of torture, pain, the elements. It is nothing peaceful. It signifies loss and man's own ego. What can a man learn but what he knows at the hour of his death?

The Seventh Well: A Novel is slow, simple yet complex book. It will stick with you, as it should.

Gail says

This book is a fictionalized account of Fred Wander's experiences in the concentration camps. I found it a cross between Man's Search for Meaning and Hassidic Tales of the Holocaust. It was originally published in East Germany in the 1970's. Not a linear read- he introduces people then then comes back to them in later vignettes. Powerful book.

Colin says

It's a privilege to be enrolled through reading in the re-humanizing of the long dead and never remembered. True piety in prose.

Caroline says

Beautifully written fiction. Hard, spare prose.

Theджswife says

Is a book about a single man who had managed to survive WWII. The author provides 12 different stories about life in labor camps though out his years as a prisoner. The chapters are not in any sort of order and jump around from year and the camp he was imprisoned in at the time. I found that the book was a little hard to follow.

Stephanie says

I must qualify my 1 star review. When I first heard about the book, I thought it was going to be an actual story. Instead I realized that it is really more of a series of vignettes. I'm not particularly fond of that style so I gave up after two. They were interesting, I'm just not a vignette kind of girl.

Frank says

Questo libro appartiene alla letteratura che si occupa dell'Olocausto.

Non è mai facile leggere qualcosa del genere, però dovrebbe essere un obbligo morale farlo almeno ogni tanto.

Si dice sempre che la storia si ripete.

Si dice sempre che importante è il non dimenticare.

Beh, in questi tempi pare proprio che la storia, almeno una parte di essa, si stia ripetendo e che in molti abbiamo proprio dimenticato tante cose.

Oppure ancor peggio non le abbiano mai sentite o fatte loro.

Fred Wander, come ogni sopravvissuto che racconta le proprie vicissitudini, parla di quello che ha visto e di quello che ha sentito.

A differenza di molti altri suoi compagni però, affronta l'orrore con uno stile diverso.

Sembra quasi sdrammatizzare il tutto.

E' un termine ovviamente sbagliato in certi contesti, ma in questo caso serve per spiegare il clima dei suoi racconti.

Infatti le diverse cronache sono narrate in maniera abbastanza fredda.

Gli oppressori non hanno mai un nome, solamente in un caso c'è un'eccezione alla regola.

Questo metodo rappresenta una scelta ben precisa: quella di non dare una personalità agli aguzzini, di distinguerli, di tenerli da parte.

In sostanza lo scopo è non metterli sullo stesso piano delle loro vittime.

Già...le vittime.

Esse sì che sono presentate come persone: hanno nomi, nazionalità, storie, vite, sentimenti, emozioni.

Spesso le condizioni alle quali sono state sottoposte le hanno prosciugate di tutte le forze e alla fine si piegano alle violenze anche estreme senza più lottare.

Allora l'unica cosa che può distinguere una vittima dal suo carnefice è proprio il riconoscimento come individuo.

Wander identifica come individui solamente le vittime.

Sono loro le vere protagoniste della storia, i carnefici non meritano attenzione.

Il male non deve elevarsi al ruolo di protagonista assoluto.

Ecco allora questi racconti che danno la sensazione di una lettura quasi narrativa e non di una denuncia forte.

Mentre si sta leggendo quasi non ci si rende conto del contesto e del terrore quotidiano.

Solo quando le vicende stanno andando verso le loro tragiche conclusioni si avverte uno scatto di attenzione che riporta alla realtà vera.

Paradossalmente è proprio questo scatto improvviso che rende i racconti di Wander più incisivi e più facili da ricordare rispetto ad altri più crudi e drammaticamente realistici.

In questo libro continuamente si viene sbalzati da una realtà apparente alla realtà vera.

Ecco ciò che rende *Il settimo pozzo* importante e degno di essere letto.

Tempo di lettura: 3h 53m

Maurizio Manco says

"La maledizione che grava su di noi è come l'acqua del settimo pozzo. Che cosa diceva il grande Rabbi Löw? Il settimo pozzo laverà via ciò che hai accumulato, i candelabri d'oro, la casa e i tuoi figli. Resterai nudo, come appena uscito dal grembo di tua madre. E l'acqua pura del settimo pozzo ti monderà, e tu diverrai trasparente, tu stesso pozzo, pronto per le future generazioni, perché riemergano dall'oscurità, limpido e puro lo sguardo, sommamente leggero il cuore." (p. 49)

"Sconfitti eravamo, e vittoriosi." (p. 133)

Vilma says

I wanted to give at least 3 stars but I can't. I felt really difficult reading this book. It wasn't effortless and I had to push myself through too many pages. I didn't understand everything Wander wanted to tell me even though the book was very beautifully written. I've never read a book about the holocaust this beautifully written even that's even possible to say. Unfortunately it was the last words in the end of the book which opened the whole story and the whole idea. of the book for me. I definitely have to read this again in my life when I'm older. Maybe then I can get more from this.

Papalodge says

In the summer of 1948 my aunt and I drove to a chicken farm on the Blackhorse Pike, between Peasantville and the Atlantic City Racecourse. She bought a few dozen eggs, which we took back to Ventnor, and gave some to friends. The man who sold the eggs was a happy man, he laughed and joked a lot.

My aunt asked him to show me the numbers which were tattooed on his arm. She explained he had been in a concentration camp, came to America, and was just starting his farm. She told me we were helping his business grow by buying eggs from him and not at the big market in Ventnor. We went there often during the summer.

At that time I thought he was at a camp to think and concentrate a lot. I thought it must have been a nice camp because he laughed a lot.

Jennifer says

Fred Wander wrote this when he was 70 years old, the memories triggered by the death of his daughter. Recently published in an English edition, this holocaust memoir is written in the format of linked short stories, which makes it more endurable to the reader, but at the same time more profound. Absolutely eloquent, poignant and with exquisite character delineation... the protagonist is more observer of those around him, he is secondary to individuals he remembers and places them in striking context. He successfully reconciles fatalism with love of life. He has made his characters immortal with this wonderful series of tales. I could not put it down until it was done. Marvelous.

Bill says

A harrowing holocaust novel based on the author's own experiences in Nazi concentration camps. While I don't think anyone can really imagine what it was like to be in one of those camps, Wander does a pretty

good job of portraying the horror of it all, especially the almost complete indifference to death.

Jack says

A beautifully written book, though whether you want a Holocaust novel to be beautiful is a different matter. Banksy, a graffiti artist did some work on the wall separating Palestine and Israel and an elderly Palestinian man commented that he didn't want the wall to be beautiful. That was kind of what this book brought to my mind too that it felt wrong to describe something so horrible so beautifully. But, as a Holocaust survivor I appreciate that he had a right to describe it any way he liked.

Thomas Hübner says

<http://www.mytwostotinki.com/?p=3445>

The Seventh Well by Fred Wander is a book in the tradition of the works of Primo Levi, Imre Kertész, Elie Wiesel or Julius Fučík about the Holocaust. Although it's a novel, it is an only slightly fictionalized account of experiences of its author as an inmate in no less than twenty Nazi concentration camps in France, Poland and Germany.

The book consists of twelve comparatively short chapters. The chapters as well as the events reported in them are not always in chronological order. The book – and this was a wise decision in my opinion – does not aim at being an exhaustive report of all the sufferings of its author/narrator; it rather focuses in each chapter on one or a small group of inmates, their characteristics, background, bits of information about their life “before” – when they were just ordinary people with all their strengths and defaults, dreams and obsessions, family life, political convictions, religious creeds, with their love of money, sex, alcohol, or literature and story-telling. And indeed, the title of the opening chapter is How to Tell a Story, and I must quote the very first sentences here:

“In the beginning was a conversation. Three weeks after the conversation, Mendel died.”

What follows this almost Biblical entry is a portrait of the above-mentioned man, Mendel Teichmann, a middle-aged Jew who would tell every other Sunday afternoon stories to the other inmates who gathered to listen to him. These first eight pages set the tune for the whole book. The other vignettes in the book are similarly impressive.

While the SS guards and their willing local helpers are indiscriminately called “jackboots” throughout the whole book and almost none of them is identified by a name or some individual characteristics (contrary to many recent books and movies about the Holocaust that are indulgent in their portrayal of sadistic, demonic and somehow charismatic Nazis, while the victims don't play an important role; the most extreme case that I know of is Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*, a book that I find highly problematic – but I digress...), the prisoners of the camp in these approximately 150 pages gain an individual stature and profile. While many things we know about the camps - the selections, the arbitrary violence and killings, the role of the Prominenten and Kapos, prisoners who made themselves useful to the SS guards and became part of the system that kept the work in the camps going, the hasty evacuation and Todesmarsch (death march) from one KZ to the next, the slow physical and psychological decline of the inmates, the permanent exhaustion and starvation to name just a few -, there are several reasons why *The Seventh Well* stands out in comparison to other works.

The Holocaust was such a monstrous crime, the number of victims so huge, and the extermination was organized in such a bureaucratic, industrialized and cunning manner that there is a danger that the individual victims are easily forgotten. By remembering a few of them, the author/narrator gives them a face, a fate, a story to remember. These are not anonymous victims, these are people from different countries, Jews, Christians, Jehova's Witnesses, Atheists; there are communists or other leftists; homosexuals and Russian POW's; people with a working-class background and intellectuals. And they all struggle to keep their human dignity against all odds by acts of resistance: for example by forming a literature club, by singing an Italian opera aria or Spanish songs from the Civil War, by protecting a fellow prisoner who is in bad physical shape from discovery, by not committing suicide, by fighting to keep their younger brothers alive (the last chapter Joschko and his Brothers is particularly touching), or – by telling stories.

The episodic character of the chapters makes it easier for the reader not to get overwhelmed by the subject matter. While some of the chapters could be stand-alone stories, others have more the character of essays. The translation of Wander's sparse, but beautiful prose by Michael Hofmann is excellent.

I cannot say that I “enjoyed” this book – for obvious reasons. But I am very glad that I read it. The Seventh Well is a truly humanistic book, because it helps us to remember the humanity of at least some of those who perished and suffered in the Holocaust.

A post-scriptum: In Germany, Fred Wander is probably less well-known than his (second) wife Maxie Wander, author of the celebrated interview book *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* (Good Morning, Beautiful), and her posthumously published diaries. He wrote also an autobiography *Das gute Leben* (The Good Life), which I plan to read as well – maybe for next years' German Literature Month, who knows?

Juliana Jura says

It's hard to say that you really 'liked' a book about the horrors of the Holocaust. However, this book allows the reader to feel the emotions and dreams of some of the prisoners. The author, Fred Wander, doesn't dwell upon his own sad tale about life in the camps but looks to the stories of others and sympathetically tells their tale, aiming to try and develop the skill of story telling through the experiences of others. It works. Fred demonstrates the ability to omit his own personal feelings and portray those of his fellow prisoners. The tale moves through time, back and forth, illustrating that everyone in the camps had lives prior to incarceration and possible death. It's a moving tribute to those who died at the hands of the Nazis.
