



### T4: A Novel in Verse

Written by Ann Clare LeZotte  
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In selecting a book related to the theme of the Holocaust, I was intrigued to encounter *T4: A Novel in Verse* by Ann Clare LeZotte. My interest was heightened when I discovered that the author, the main character of the story, and I share the experience of being deaf from early childhood.

The opening chapter, “Hear the Voice of the Poet,” set forth the author’s intent and purpose:

*Hear the Voice of the poet!  
I see the past, future and present,  
I am Deaf, but I have heard  
The beauty of song.  
And I wish to share it with  
Young readers.  
A poem can be simple,  
About a cat or a red  
Wheelbarrow.  
Or it can illuminate the lives  
Of people who lived, loved,  
And died. You can make  
People think or feel  
For other people, if you  
Write poetry. In T4 the facts  
About history are true, and  
My characters tell the story.*

*T4* is named for the location of Nazi headquarters, Tiergartenstrasse 4, in Berlin, where an “Action Plan” to kill mentally-ill and handicapped people was devised. The main character is Paula Blecker whose parents send her into hiding after they learn of the T4 Action Plan from a local priest. The priest takes Paula to the safety of a retired teacher’s farm. She lives there until the secret police arrive with questions about the presence of a Jewish child in the home. The teacher convinces them that a former student dropped by to visit and Paula is taken to another refuge. There she meets and befriends an older boy known as “Poor Kurt.” In 1941, after the dissolution of the T4 Action Plan, Paula and Kurt return to her home where she learns about his family and his true identity.

While I appreciate and commend the efforts of the author to create this book, I find the novel to be problematic for several reasons. As a whole, the story is essentially a melding of fiction and historical

fact onto the backdrop of the Holocaust. The frequent juxtaposition of story and facts results in two distinct voices in the narrative. The first being the voice of the young character and the second being the voice of a more mature “instructor” conveying information to the reader.

In some instances, verses were robbed of their impact by the inclusion of unnecessary explications. For example:

*I watched the lips  
Of my relatives  
When they told stories.  
I could see words  
Being formed on their mouths.  
It's called lipreading. [p. 6]*  
\*\*\*\*\*

*She made certain movements with her fingers  
And took my hand to do the same thing.  
She was trying to teach me  
The official sign language alphabet of the  
Deaf.  
I learned to make the letters on one hand;  
It's called fingerspelling. [p. 38]*

In other instances, concepts and words that are used in this day and time are incongruous within a text written for a different era. For example:

*[The Nazis] wanted perfect people  
To give birth to more perfect people.  
They imagined Germany as a master race  
Who would rule the world.  
They attacked Jews, people of color,  
Homosexuals, and Gypsies, among others. [p. 21]*  
\*\*\*\*\*

*We drove two hours  
To a church with a homeless shelter. [p.46]*  
\*\*\*\*\*

*Germany's Deaf  
Community  
Never completely recovered. [p. 93]*

The terms, “people of color,” “homeless shelters,” “Deaf Community,” and others used in this book do not fit the historical context of this story. Indeed, their inclusion negates the authenticity of the story and the character’s first-person voice in this time period and setting. Without authenticity, we are left with a simplistic, coming-of-age romance that is superimposed upon the notion of the Holocaust.

Author Ann Clare LeZotte is a 1991 graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, and became deaf as a young child. She has published several poems in various journals and this is her first novel. She credits the book, *Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany*, by Horst Biesold (Galludet University Press) as the catalyst for this work.

Possible companion books for this novel might include: *A Knock at the Door* by Eric Sonderling (1997), *A Picture Book of Anne Frank* by David A. Adler (1993), *Anne Frank* by Richard Tames (1989), *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti (1990), and *We Remember the Holocaust* by David Adler (1990).

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