

DISASTERS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIONS IN THE ARTS

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THE THEME OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN MODERN LITERATURE

At the beginning of the 21st century, the world came face-to-face with a horrible armed aggression against Ukraine. There are no logical explanations for the horrible events and crimes experienced by Ukrainians. This cannot be forgotten. But it must be understood in order for us to survive and protect our freedom and independence.

Modern writers often refer to the theme of the Second World War. Their works about the war do not contain fantasy or fun adventures, but they are worth reading in order to understand the value of human life and the means of opposing violence. The stories about the Second World War make us realise that war can be overcome not only physically with weapons, but also spiritually if we save and preserve the culture and people around us.

On May 10, Germany annually celebrates Book Day. This date reminds us of the horrors of fascism. It was on May 10, 1933, that inhumane book burning took place in Berlin and some other German cities. On March 20, 1995, the memorial “The Drowned Library” was presented to the public in Berlin. In the center of the square, under the thick glass, there is a white room with empty shelves. The words by Heinrich Heine are inscribed on the memorial board: “Where books are burned, people will be burned.”

Poetry by Mykola Nehoda

We would like to introduce you to a famous Ukrainian poet who wrote about the Second World War in his poems. This is Mykola Negoda. When the Second World War came to the land of Ukraine, M. Negoda was 13 years old, but he actively joined the fight against the enemy.

The peak of Mykola Negoda’s works was the poem “Steppe, steppe...,” which was set to music by the composer Anatolij Pashkevich. This song became a requiem of the Ukrainian people for the soldiers who died during the Second World War and is still relevant today. It is still performed to honor Ukrainian heroes who defend Ukraine. It is interesting that this poem contrasts war and peaceful life – the steppe, wheat fields, the native village, where a mother is waiting for her son. The author writes that people should work, harvest, and not fight. But war takes away the best...

“The Boy in the Striped Pajamas” by John Boyne

John Boyne is an Irish writer, winner of numerous literary awards, who touches the topic of the Holocaust.

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War is always terrible. Especially when children suffer. John Boyne's novel "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas" is one of the most heartbreaking representations of the Second World War. This work is unique in illustrating the conflict from the point of view of children.

Bruno, a nine-year-old German boy, lives happily in a beautiful five-storey house in Berlin with his father, mother and sister. However, his father's job requires them to move to a new location known as Auschwitz.

One of the largest Nazi concentration camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau, was located in the city of Auschwitz (Poland), where more than 1.1 million people were tortured during World War II.

Nine-year-old Bruno, the son of the concentration camp commandant, was unaware of the tragedy that was happening nearby.

With a bright and curious mind, the boy, who dreamed of being an explorer, became interested in a place where people wore the same "striped pyjamas." Bruno quickly found his way to the camp.

Near the fence, he met a Jewish boy named Shmuel, with whom he became friends. Little Bruno did not understand why people in the camp were wearing "striped pyjamas," "who Jews are" and "what they do there." When Bruno learned that Shmuel could not find his father, he climbed over the camp fence, put on the "striped pajamas" brought by a friend, and disappeared forever...

In his works, John Boyne addresses some of the most painful issues of the twentieth century: Nazism, equality and human rights. John Boyne writes simply, showing the history of the 20th century through the eyes of children.

There are no long descriptions, author's remarks or "complicated" terminology in this book. It is important to note that the language of the novel is not dramatic, and there are no scenes of violence in the book. The author avoids them, but the reader is aware of their existence and understands the injustice and tragedy of these events.

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, which tells the story of the Holocaust, is very relevant today, particularly in the context of the new escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Gaza Strip and the attack on Israel. Today, Jews around the world are once again in danger. In the words of John Boyne, "Nothing like this can happen again. Not in our time."

"Noah's Child" by Erik-Emmanuel Schmitt:

The French writer Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt also addressed the topic of the Second World War.

Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt is a prominent writer and dramatist, a doctor of philosophy, and the creator of several plays and performances that are now being staged in theatres around the world.

"Noah's Child" is a narrative which consists of numerous elements. This is a puzzle story. Everything is there: the terrible battle, the nation's sense of oppression, the formation of a religious worldview, and simple human actions.

The Jewish child Joseph tells the story from the first-person perspective. Little Joseph found himself in the middle of a violent and devastating time, on the eve of a huge flood. This was only possible since he was born in a Jewish family.

Father Pons is an important figure in this novel. He is a priest who put his own life at danger

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by sheltering Jewish children in an orphanage. Father Pons is an example of a priest who has never pushed his beliefs or religion on others. On the contrary, he attempted to develop in Jewish children a love for their parents' faith. According to Schmitt's perspective, the figure of Father Pons is the personification of an ideal priest.

The father kept a Torah scroll under precious embroidered fabrics, and a picture of Jerusalem showed where to turn during the prayer. Father's collection included prayer books, mystical poetry, and rabbinic commentaries from the seventh and ninth centuries.

According to Father Pons, Noah was the first collector in history: he found the male and female of every living creature to preserve and rescue from the flood on his massive ship. God created humans with the instinct and intellect to save themselves. As a result, Noah acted as a model for his father.

Six million Jews were murdered during that time. The father convinced Joseph to speak about the Jews who were no longer alive. To take care about the Jews, now there is Joseph, who will be known as Noah from now on.

Schmitt's characters are real and honest people who represent a specific place in their life while yet feeling extremely close to the reader, as if they are great friends. The heroes have doubts, but they listen to the voice of their inner world and heart. Goodness always triumphs because it is deep, diverse, and genuine!

“The Book Thief” by Markus Zusak

The modern literary process cannot be imagined without the Australian writer Markus Zusak. Markus Zusak was born in 1975 in Sydney, Australia, as the youngest of four children of German and Austrian immigrants.

His novel “The Book Thief” is the tale of orphan Liesel Meminger, who finds companionship and a new family in a tiny village in Germany during World War II. Zusak picked the topic in part to relate the experiences his parents told him about growing up during the war in Austria and Germany.

Language, reading, and writing are presented as metaphorical components of expression of freedom throughout the story. Zusak's characters have or achieve the power of literacy, individuality and personal liberation.

Books are nearly like characters in the narrative. Each of the novels is linked to a tale of the girl's life.

Liesel's adventure begins with “The Gravedigger's Handbook.” She grabbed it from the snow near her brother's grave which marked the first gloomy point in the novel.

Liesel rescued “The Shoulder Shrug” from the ashes of a flaming celebration of Hitler's birthday. The novel is about a Jewish man who is depicted positively, which is why it was condemned.

In the bomb shelter, Liesel reads “The Whistler.” It represents her complicated connection with Frau Hermann as well as a significant point in her personal development.

“Mein Kampf” is a book about the hate-filled ideals of Hitler and his supporters. Despite the fears, Liesel's family conceal Max in their basement, where he records his own struggles and experiences on the pages of Hitler's writings.

“The Book Thief” is the title of the book Liesel writes for months leading up to the Himmel

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Street explosion. It is the book that Death retrieves from the ashes and gives it to Liesel after she dies. "I have hated the words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right." Books are more than simply an occupation for the girl; they are her salvation and her heart.

This novel shows us the frightening example of war, violence and Nazism. Here we can see how little Liesel go through her horrible reality. If only it happens in books and books only. But, nowadays, Ukrainians have to face the same problems. The terrorist state has been trying to deprive our culture, our freedom of speech and our lives. They destroy our museums and steal our cultural heritage. They burn books written by Ukrainian authors. Our children have to spend their childhood in the bomb shelters because russia is shelling Ukrainian territory. For us, "The Book Thief" is more than just a novel. It is the portrait of our reality.

Prominent Ukrainian Poet Lina Kostenko about the War

The writer Lina Kostenko is one of the most prominent figures in Ukraine today. She saw the Second World War and wrote poems about it. But now she writes poems about the war that began on February 24, 2022 in Ukraine. Her poems are spiritual support for all Ukrainians who are fighting for the right to live and work freely on their land.

Lina Kostenko said: "Whoever stands for anything, we stand for independence. That's why it's so hard for us." We absolutely agree with this writer. It is hard for us, but we will stand it, because we do not want to be slaves to the empire. Ukraine will definitely be a free and peaceful country! This is the biggest Ukrainian dream.

References:

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