

THE FUNDAMENTAL THEMES OF HOLOCAUST NARRATIVES

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ФУНДАМЕНТАЛЬНЫЕ ТЕМЫ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ О ХОЛОКОСТЕ

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Abstract. This article examines the fundamental themes that permeate Holocaust narratives, delving into the core concepts that shape these poignant and harrowing stories. Drawing from a rich tapestry of fiction, memoirs, and testimonials, this exploration sheds light on the enduring impact of the Holocaust on individuals, families, and societies. Key themes such as loss and survival, memory and trauma, identity and belonging, and moral and ethical dilemmas are analyzed in depth, illuminating the profound human experiences captured within Holocaust literature. Through an examination of these themes, this article seeks to deepen our understanding of the complexities of Holocaust narratives and underscore the importance of bearing witness to the atrocities of the past.

Аннотация. Рассматриваются произведения о Холокосте. Основываясь на богатом многообразии художественной литературы, мемуаров и свидетельств, это исследование проливает свет на действие Холокоста на индивидов, семьи и общество. Ключевые темы, такие как смерть и выживание, память и травма, идентичность и принадлежность, а также моральные и этические дилеммы, рассматриваются анализируются. Даны примеры произведений литературы о Холокосте.

Keywords: Holocaust, themes, trauma, memory, loss, survival.

Ключевые слова: Холокост, темы, исследование травмы, память, потеря, выживание,

Holocaust fiction encompasses a broad array of literary works that grapple with the historical tragedy of the Holocaust, exploring its impact on individuals, families, and societies. The key concept of Holocaust fiction is to bear witness to the atrocities committed during this dark period of history, to remember the victims, and to ensure that such horrors are never forgotten or repeated. The portrayal of subjective experience of horror in literature is unique and explicit, but this also makes it difficult to represent [6].

Literary criticism, which involves analyzing and interpreting written texts, has a long tradition in hermeneutics. However, it is the experimentation in structuring experience in different narrative forms that gives literary narrative its special status and brings us closer to rendering the strange familiar. Holocaust fiction encompasses a wide range of literary works that use the Holocaust as a backdrop or central theme. While the specific concepts and themes explored in Holocaust fiction may vary across different works, there are several key concepts and themes that are commonly addressed. Some of them identified by the researcher: for example, memory and trauma, as it reflects the enduring impact of the Holocaust on survivors, their families, and subsequent generations and its complex relationship with trauma. They explore how survivors and subsequent generations grapple with the haunting memories of the Holocaust and the long-lasting psychological impact it has on individuals and communities. Identity, memory, and trauma. To respond to one

crucial query, across generations analyzes various multi-generational frameworks of Holocaust trauma. How do these stories evolve to not only convey the Holocaust's trauma and, in the process, give meaning to what is by nature a meaningless event, but also to construct the trauma as a connector to a past that needs to be continued in the present. The trauma, in all its impossibilities and intractability, whether meaningless, unspeakable, or knowable, inspires extensive literary and scholarly engagement [11].

The primary link that organizes trauma for both the individual and the collective is narrative. In Elie Wiesel's *Night* the extent of one group of people's inhumanity toward other groups of people is one of the Holocaust's lasting effects. When it came to the Jews, the German government and society tried to redefine them as less than human, and then as beings that deserved to perish. The worst criminals imaginable include concentration camp doctors, who swear an oath to do no harm, but *Night* doesn't just concentrate on the Nazis and their seeming never-ending evil deeds. The book also explores what it's like for a teenager to live in a world where he and those around him are no longer treated as fellow humans. As they struggle to survive, the victims lose their humanity, which leads to all manner of cruelty and callousness among the prisoners—prisoners are violent towards one another, those with weaker positions abuse them, children abandon parents, and those in need of food kill one another for. Other invalids beat Eliezer's father because he smells bad as he lies in his bed, close to death. Elie Wiesel makes the point in *Night* that when people are treated as subhuman and live in constant fear of dying, they might lose the ability to act decently—even toward other people who are in the same situation. One of the best human traits is empathy, but it can be undermined [1-5].

This theme is also important in *Diary of Anne Frank*. While Ann's diary is a remarkable evocation of a growing teenage girl under any circumstances, this is the narrative of a Jewish girl in the grips of World War II and the Holocaust. Anne is a girl forced to go into hiding with her family, and a girl terrified that she and everyone she loves will be killed. With every stray ring of the doorbell and knock on the wall, Anne is overcome with fear that her family will be discovered and sent away to concentration camps. The war forces her family to suffer unbelievable hardships: they starve, they suffer illnesses, they undergo incredible psychological strain and trauma. In the novel *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer, the value and restrictions of memory are explored. As Jonathan discovers when he discovers forgotten memories of his grandfather's life, memory can be instructive. He believes that memories hold the secret to his family's history. He discovers more about himself by studying the history of his family. Memory can be limiting as well. The people of Trachimbrod are unable to accomplish anything when they become fixated on memories. They soon lose the ability to differentiate between memories and current events as each memory breeds another. Like the elderly woman Lista, they are rendered immobile by memory. Lista sees her role as the keeper of Trachimbrod's memory as a punishment rather than an honor. She explains to Jonathan that those who survive are not fortunate because, like herself, they are burdened by their memories. She is unable to pursue new opportunities because, like the residents of the town, she is confined to the agony and confusion of memory for the rest of her life. For Grandfather, memory is limiting in a different way. He is unwilling to acknowledge his memories of the war because they are so painful. He is constantly afraid of his memories. Recalling is a chance to find peace, but it also involves risking danger [7].

Another crucial central theme is loss and survival, since Holocaust fiction often portrays the immense loss experienced by victims and survivors, including the loss of family, identity, community, and innocence. It also explores the incredible resilience and determination displayed by those who managed to survive the atrocities. Exploring memories of the Holocaust would involve testimonies about death and how one was able to survive the various events in the German killings,

whereas autobiographical narratives are frequently associated with how a certain person has lived his or her life. Such Holocaust testimonies convey a subtext that seems to be somewhat challenging to understand and articulate: how many people were going through terrible sufferings and how many were dying. Therefore, in this context, the concept of survival is not viewed negatively as a means of avoiding death, but rather positively as a means of actively attempting to live. In Auschwitz, there is very little time between life and death. The only ways the author, Levi, in *Survival in Auschwitz* stays alive are by using cunning reasoning combined with luck [10].

Although even the most resourceful person can be killed by bad luck, this precarious combination of chance and skill suggests that one's meager chances of survival are largely determined by their capacity for ingenuity and adaptation to the new hellish environment they find themselves in. Any prisoner who does not learn to adapt and develop new resources will perish within months because the conditions of Auschwitz are designed to cause a high number of natural deaths among its inmates. It is to the Germans' advantage that their Jewish subjects frequently perish to make room for new arrivals because new prisoners arrive frequently, and the Lager can only hold so many. As a result, the Jewish prisoners are only provided with a small amount of watery soup and pieces of bread each day, which is hardly enough for one to survive even if they weren't subjected to brutal forced labor [8, 9].

The prisoners are forced to march and work outside while only wearing a thin shirt or a worn-out jacket, despite the bitterly cold winters in Poland. Many prisoners pass away within the first three months, as is predictable. Even if one is strong enough to endure the physical toll, the appearance of weakness is hazardous because it makes one a prime candidate for the "selection," which is the annual culling of weak prisoners to be sent to the nearby death camp to make room for new arrivals. Therefore, to survive, a prisoner must guard not only their physical health but also their reputation as someone who is robust and healthy enough to be continuously useful as labor. The most likely outcome for any Jewish prisoner who enters Auschwitz is death, which makes it seem as though one can only survive by taking extraordinary measures under such lethal circumstances. In addition to arguing that adaptability is essential for survival, Levi divides the Jewish prisoners into two groups, showing how one group survives while the other perishes. Levi refers to such men as "the drowned," indicating the way in which they will be swallowed by the lethality of the camp, even though this is the most common response among prisoners. "To sink is the simplest of things; it suffices to carry out all orders one receives, to eat only the ration, and to observe the discipline of the work and the camp." Such men, according to Levi, are "overcome before they can adapt themselves" by developing advantageous connections, finding ways to get more food, or mastering just enough German to placate the camp guards.

This implies that trying to survive the Lager is tantamount to inviting one's own demise. Levi, on the other hand, refers to those who quickly pick up on the Lager's new rules and adjust to the harsh surroundings as "the saved" people who successfully scheme or manipulate their way into the good graces of the camp commanders and, as a result, live. This is best illustrated by the oldest prisoners in the camp who have survived for several years — a very small number of people — and not one of whom did so by "subsisting on a normal ration," but who instead quickly became indispensable camp doctors, tailors, or overseers by "organizing" favorable relationships with the Germans. The difference between "the saved" and "the drowned" shows that the few who manage to survive Auschwitz for any length of time are those who have a higher-than-average level of resourcefulness and resilience, suggesting that such adaptability is key to survival in such an environment. In Auschwitz, luck and chance play nearly as significant a role as one's adaptability. The Germans process many prisoners and make each decision on whom to condemn and whom to save in less than a second, with only a glance at each man. This suggests that in such a lethal

environment, everyone is ultimately at the mercy of luck and chance. The extraordinary story of Levi's survival in the Auschwitz labor camp demonstrates the precarious balance between life and death for him and his fellow Jewish prisoners. It is a terrifying tale of resourcefulness, adaptability, and chance.

The theme of survival and loss is vividly represented in *Anne Frank's Diary*. Despite her terrifying situation, Anne seems to have a steadfast faith in her ability to survive. She imagines herself working as a journalist, meeting the love of her life, attending lavish parties, and seeing the world [12]. She longs fervently to be given the opportunity to experience a "normal" adolescence, but she holds onto the hope that, despite being imprisoned for another year, her former life will soon be hers once again. Although many times these adults also seem to be plagued by fears that they won't live to see their dreams come true, the adults around her struggle with their own hopes and desires for life after the war [13, 14].

A Survivor's Tale is the subtitle of the graphic novel *Maus*, which also demonstrate vibrant example of the theme of survival. It previously details Vladek's journey through the Holocaust and World War II. Vladek was frequently fortunate, showing up at the right time and place, but he was also incredibly resourceful. He traded on the black market, repeatedly passed for a Pole, and saved everything he had—including bread and cigarettes—for emergencies. He moved with assurance, believing he could handle any challenge. Despite having only observed these trades in the past, he was able to work successfully as a cobbler and a tinsmith, which allowed him to remain safe in Auschwitz. He repeatedly assisted Mandelbaum in Auschwitz and his wife Anja, and others reciprocated by showing him kindness. His experience demonstrates that surviving such a situation necessitates a combination of good fortune, the kindness of others, and quick thinking. However,

Maus undermines Vladek's bravery by also mentioning the numerous people he knew who perished simply because they weren't as fortunate. The characters like Artie and his therapist Pavel have an important conversation in which they come to the important conclusion that since there is no shame in not having survived, there is also no need for survival to be heroic in and of itself. Vladek was aware of how survival was a random process. He is aware of the numerous times he came dangerously close to dying, and this trauma has left him anxious and unkind in the present. Despite having survived the Holocaust and the war, Anja's suicide suggests that she was too damaged to survive afterward. These themes are not exhaustive and has many varieties through the individual works of Holocaust fiction, and they may address additional or specific aspects. However, it is important to acknowledge that priorly mentioned and widely represented are the theme memory, trauma, loss, and survival. The memory and trauma are recurrent themes in Holocaust fiction since they reflect the ongoing struggle of survivors to make sense of their experiences and the profound impact of the Holocaust on individual and collective identity.

Through literature, readers are invited to bear witness to the enduring legacy of trauma and to confront the ethical complexities of representing this dark chapter in history. On the other hand, the theme of loss and survival is also considered as a central to Holocaust fiction, reflecting the profound human tragedy of the Holocaust and the enduring resilience of those who survived it. Through literature, readers are invited to bear witness to the stories of loss and survival, honoring the memory of those who perished and celebrating the resilience of those who endured.

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