

SECTION 5. COMPARATIVE LITERATURE STUDIES

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COMMON MOTIFS IN JAPANESE AND GERMAN LITERATURE OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES: ISOLATION, WAR, SOCIAL CRITIQUE

СПІЛЬНІ МОТИВИ В ЯПОНСЬКІЙ ТА НІМЕЦЬКІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРАХ XX–XXI СТ.: ІЗОЛЯЦІЯ, ВІЙНА, СОЦІАЛЬНА КРИТИКА

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Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, both Japanese and German literatures underwent significant transformations, reflecting complex historical events and social changes. Despite cultural and geographical differences, common motifs such as isolation, war, and social criticism are evident in both literary traditions [1–3]. These themes not only mirror individuals' internal experiences but also serve as reflections of societal transformations and challenges. The motif of isolation is frequently employed to explore human solitude and alienation amid rapid social changes. War, as a central theme, unveils the tragedies and moral dilemmas individuals face during conflicts. Social criticism enables authors to highlight societal flaws and advocate for reforms.

Examining these shared motifs in Japanese and German literatures provides deeper insight into how different cultures respond to similar challenges and how literature becomes a means of interpreting and reinterpreting reality.

Isolation is a central theme in many literary works, allowing exploration into the depths of human psychology and the individual's interaction with the world. The novels "Die Wand" ("The Wall") by Austrian writer Marlen Haushofer (1963) and "Snow Country" by Japanese author Yasunari Kawabata (川端 康成, 1947) are prominent examples of exploring isolation in varying contexts.

In "Die Wand", the protagonist finds herself in a state of absolute physical isolation. An invisible wall separates her from the rest of the world, compelling her to adapt to a new reality and survive in the wilderness. This external, enforced isolation emphasizes the hostility of the environment and the necessity of survival. Conversely, in "Snow Country", the isolation is internal. The main character, Shimamura, experiences profound loneliness despite the presence of others. His emotional detachment and inability to form genuine connections highlight an inner emptiness and isolation independent of external circumstances.

Both works place significant emphasis on nature. In "Die Wand", nature becomes the protagonist's sole companion, reflecting her struggle and adaptation to new conditions. In "Snow Country", nature symbolizes the transience and coldness of the world, underscoring the characters' emotional detachment. Minimalism in narrative style is a shared trait of both novels. The authors avoid dynamic plots, focusing instead on the characters' internal experiences. This approach allows readers to delve deeper into the protagonists' worldviews and feel their isolation.

However, notable differences exist. In "Die Wand", nature acts as an adversarial force that the protagonist must combat for survival. In "Snow Country", nature serves as a reflection of the protagonist's emotional state, emphasizing his internal isolation. Haushofer concentrates on solitude induced by external conditions, whereas Kawabata explores solitude as an intrinsic human condition.

Thus, both novels present diverse facets of isolation: physical and emotional. They illustrate how individuals react to isolation, whether through external circumstances or internal reflections, and how these experiences influence their perception of the world and self.

The novels "All Quiet on the Western Front" (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque and "Black Rain" (1965) by Masuji Ibuse (井伏 鱒二) are significant works that explore the horrors of war and its impact on humanity. Both authors aim to depict war not as a heroic endeavor but as an absurd and destructive force that devastates the lives of ordinary people.

In "All Quiet on the Western Front", Remarque presents World War I through the eyes of young soldier Paul Bäumer. The narrative immerses readers in the trenches, highlighting the pain, filth, and death experienced on the front lines. Remarque meticulously details the realities of military life,

emphasizing the senselessness and brutality of war. The novel centralizes the loss of youth and the futility of war, introducing the concept of the “lost generation”.

Conversely, “Black Rain” by Ibuse examines the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The story is told from the perspective of civilians dealing with radiation sickness and social ostracism. Ibuse focuses on the long-term trauma following the catastrophe, illustrating how the effects of war persist even after its end. While both novels portray the atrocities of war, they differ in focus. Remarque centers on the immediate experiences of soldiers in combat, whereas Ibuse delves into the post-war survival and social alienation of the victims. Remarque presents war as a senseless loss of youth, while Ibuse depicts it as a source of enduring trauma and the destruction of social bonds. Both works underscore the importance of historical memory and the need to recognize the consequences of war for future generations. They serve as poignant reminders of the fragility of human life and advocate for the preservation of peace to prevent the recurrence of such tragedies.

In 20th and 21st-century literature, themes of social criticism and societal conflict hold a significant place, reflecting authors' desires to explore and question existing social norms and structures. The novels “Tschick” (2010) by Wolfgang Herrndorf and “Norwegian Wood” (ノルウェイの森, 1987) by Haruki Murakami exemplify such works, though their approaches and emphases differ markedly.

“Tschick” narrates the story of two teenagers, Maik Klingenberg and Tschick (Andrej Tschichatschow), who embark on an impromptu road trip across eastern Germany in a stolen car. Both protagonists are societal misfits: Maik feels isolated due to family issues and a lack of friends, while Tschick, a Russian émigré, struggles to conform to social expectations. Their journey becomes a rebellion against societal norms and a quest for freedom and self-discovery. Herrndorf employs humor and a light narrative style to address serious issues such as social isolation, friendship, and the search for one's path in life.

In contrast, Murakami’s “Norwegian Wood” immerses readers in the dark world of Tokyo's underground scene. The novel follows Toru Watanabe, a university student who becomes involved with two women, Naoko and Midori, each grappling with their own emotional struggles. The story delves into themes of love, loss, and mental health, portraying a generation's sense of alienation and disillusionment. Murakami utilizes a more somber and introspective tone, highlighting the complexities of human relationships and the challenges of finding meaning in a chaotic world.

Both novels utilize the motif of a journey as a metaphor for self-exploration and finding one's place in the world. In "Tschick", the physical journey through Germany symbolizes freedom and an escape from monotony. In "Norwegian Wood", the journey is more internal, delving into the depths of the human psyche and the darker aspects of society.

Despite shared themes, the tonalities of the works differ significantly. "Tschick" maintains an optimistic mood, emphasizing the potential for change and personal growth through friendship and adventure. In contrast, "Norwegian Wood" is permeated by pessimism, depicting the despair and destruction that can await those who feel out of place in society.

These observations highlight the cultural and literary distinctions between German and Japanese literature, while also revealing universal themes explored in their respective works.

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