

THE USE OF RELIGIOUS PLOTS AND IMAGES IN THE GERMAN EXILE NOVEL

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Abstract. *This paper deals with some specific features of religious plots and images in the German exile novel. The author analyses how they function in exiled novels by German exiled writers such as Erich Maria Remarque, Lion Feuchtwanger, Thomas Mann, Anna Seghers and Klaus Mann. These works are considered to have a particular organization of space and plot as well as subjective organization, and to belong to a specific literary genre.*

Religious images and plots are analysed in relation to the novels' organization of space and time. David and Goliath, and Noah's Ark are images taken from the Bible that can be found in the novels studied, and plots such as the history of Joseph and Exodus are harnessed by the authors. The story of the Israelite's exile to Egypt serves Thomas Mann as a thematic source, while he expresses emigrant consciousness in "Joseph and His Brothers". Other novels are devoted to the events of 1933 to 1945, and their authors add biblical plots and images to them to highlight axiological markers of the exile space and help the writers express their emigrant world view. It is also shown in this study that these images are used alongside and for similar purposes to mythological images.

Keywords: *space, plot, exile, exile novel, religion, Bible, Joseph of Genesis, Exodus, David and Goliath, Erich Maria Remarque, Lion Feuchtwanger, Thomas Mann, Anna Seghers, Klaus Mann*

The German exile novel is a literary genre that appeared in 1930s as a result of Hitler's takeover in the country. Substantial number of writers and other artists left the country, so literary reflection on exile was necessary. The leading genre of German literature in exile was the historical novel¹, which comprised a novel about historical events but that referred to contemporary problems². However, some of these authors published novels specifically about life of 1933–1945 German refugees in exile, a largely unexplored theme that acted as a starting point for the development of a new genre that had not previously existed in German literature.

This genre was described in my doctoral thesis³. I showed the German exile novel to have a particular space, plot and subjective organization, and to be a specific literary genre. The data used for that study were novels written by authors such as Erich Maria Remarque, Lion Feuchtwanger and Klaus Mann.

1. Religious plots in exile novels

Although the use of religious plots and images in exile novels was not an exact problem I had aimed to study in my doctoral thesis, they were discovered in almost every text I looked at in my research.

1.1. The story of David and Goliath

The story of David and Goliath is one such text. In Lion Feuchtwanger's "Exil", (1939) an exiled journalist named Friedrich Benjamin has been brought to the Third Reich because of his anti-Nazi newspaper articles. After that, Switzerland issued a letter of protest against Germany and the narrator comments on it using the following words: "Die Entrüstung der Welt hat die kleine Schweiz so mutig gemacht, dass sie gegen den mächtigen Nachbarn aufbegehrt. David hat sich Goliath gestellt"⁴. Benjamin's colleague Sepp Trautwein publishes articles appealing to the global community to act. Such major efforts by journalists and politicians result in Benjamin's release from a German prison. This fact is described by Erich Wiesener, a Nazi journalist working in Paris: "Er war der David, dieser Sepp Trautwein, und er selber der großmäulige Goliath"⁵.

Goliath is known as a giant in one of the biblical books, and David is much smaller in height. This metaphor shows refugees to be "smaller" than their enemies from the Third Reich, while Nazis are like giants. Moreover, emigrants are described as people who have sense and use their intelligence to fight against the Nazis – such as by issuing

- 1 Bannasch, B., Rochus, G. *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur: Von Heinrich Heine bis Herta Müller*. Berlin, 2013, p. 68.
- 2 Neuhaus-Koch, A. *Krisen des Exils. Anna Seghers' Exilroman Transit // Klassiker der deutschen Literatur: Epochen-Signaturen von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*. Würzburg, 1999, p. 233.
- 3 Поршнева, А.С. *Жанр эмигрантского романа в немецкой литературе 1930–1970-х годов: дис. ... д-ра филол. наук*. Екатеринбург, 2017, 481 с.
- 4 "The indignation throughout the world made the little Switzerland so courageous that it stated against its powerful neighbor. David challenged Goliath". Feuchtwanger, L. *Exil*. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag Berlin und Weimar, 1976, p. 154.
- 5 "He was David, that Sepp Trautwein, and he himself was the loudmouthed Goliath". *Ibid.*, p. 676.

political newspapers during their French exile to influence public attitudes. In contrast, the Nazis and their followers are “half beasts” (“Halbtiere”)⁶ who need to be re-educated and transformed back into people (“wieder zu Menschen zu machen”)⁷. The giant-like nature of the Nazis relates them to chaos and, according to Hans Biedermann, to “primitive nature” and “wilderness”⁸.

Refugees who appear in this novel rely on their sense, while the Nazis have no sense – whereupon the whole of Germany becomes insane. The refugees are people who are limited in their physical strength, whereas the Nazis are strong but wild and devoid of humanity. Examples can be found not only in Feuchtwanger’s work, but also those of other writers – for example, in the following lines in Klaus Mann’s “The Volcano”:

- “Wenn die Deutschen verrückt werden – ich habe keine Lust, da mitzumachen”⁹;
- “...für Deutschland wie für einen nah Verwandten, der irrsinnig wird”¹⁰;
- “der obszöne Chorus der Idiotie; das Triumph-Geheul der Verblendeten”¹¹.

Nazis are strong, aggressive and have no sense and, according to Mann, refugees are small but sane and intellectual. This position is therefore common between both him and Feuchtwanger.

1.2. The biblical story of Exodus

Another biblical story referred to in the German exile novel is that of Exodus. The main function of this relates to spatial zones and boundaries. As I showed earlier¹², the artistic space in the German exile novel is based on the spatial conceptualizations of refugees, and it is important that the novel’s author, narrator and main characters are refugees and bearers of emigrant consciousness. Their world view is based on the opposition between centre and periphery.

The centre of the world, as refugees imagine it in these novels, is Germany. For refugees, the totalitarian state of the Third Reich is a dark world that is a zone of chaos, unlawful actions and violence. Other European countries constitute the periphery, while (totally or partly) non-European countries, such as the USA, China, Mexico and the USSR, make up the borderlands. The further a character is from Germany, the more chance he or she has of having normal life and realizing their talents. A refugee’s typical journey is from the centre to the borderlands, where he or she starts a new post-refugee life. The space structure in a refugee’s consciousness is therefore the same as in classical mythological forms, although its axiology is inverted compared to that in mythology.

6 Feuchtwanger, L., *supra* note 4, p.706.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 707.

8 Бидерманн, Г. *Великаны* // Бидерманн, Г. *Энциклопедия символов*. М., 1996, с. 35.

9 “When the Germans get insane, I have no wish to participate in it”. Mann, K. *Der Vulkan: Roman unter Emigranten*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999, p. 20.

10 “...for Germany as much as for a near relative of mine who’s getting insane”. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

11 “obscene chorus of idiocy; triumphant howl of blinds”. *Ibid.*, p. 502.

12 Поршнева, А.С. *Пространство наци и пространство эмиграции в романе Лиона Фейхтвангера «Изгнание»* // Известия Уральского федерального университета. Сер. 2. Гуманитарные науки. 2012. № 3 (105), с. 188–203; Поршнева, А.С. *Жанр эмигрантского романа в немецкой литературе 1930–1970-х годов*.

The theme of Exodus is used particularly in later novels by Remarque, namely “The Night in Lisbon”, “Shadows in Paradise” and “The Promised Land”. Let’s consider some quotations from these works where the theme is referred to:

- “Ich ließ mich durch die anonyme Stadt treiben, deren heller Rauch zum Himmel stieg. Eine düstere Feuersäule bei Nacht und eine Wolkensäule bei Tag – hatte nicht Gott auf ähnliche Weise dem ersten Volk der Emigranten in der Wüste den Weg gewiesen?”¹³ (“Shadows in Paradise”).
- “ ‘Die Wanderung durch die Wüste nähert sich dem Ende’, erklärte er [Vriesländer]. – ‘Wo ist das Gelobte Land?’ fragte Kahn ironisch. – ‘Hier!’ erwiderte Vriesländer erstaunt, ‘wo sonst?’ ”¹⁴ (“Shadows in Paradise”).
- “Wir leben wie die Juden beim Auszug aus Ägypten. Hinter uns die deutsche Armee und die Gestapo, zu beiden Seiten das Meer der französischen und spanischen Polizei, und vor uns das Gelobte Land Portugal mit dem Hafen von Lissabon zum noch gelobteren Lande Amerika”¹⁵ (“The Night in Lisbon”).
- “Die Odyssee begann. Die Wanderung durch die Wüste. Der Zug durch das Rote Meer”¹⁶ (“The Night in Lisbon”).

Remarque draws a parallel between 20th century emigrants and ancient Jews, enabling him to highlight specific value orientations of space in the refugees’ consciousness: the world’s central zone, the Third Reich, is equated with Egypt, where Jews were in slavery. As for the United States and other borderland countries, these are defined as the Promised Land. In classical mythology as well as biblical texts, this sacred territory (Canaan in the Bible) is located at the centre of the world, while Egypt constitutes the barbarian borderlands. The writer specifically chooses a variant whereby the USA equates to Israel and Germany to Egypt (though it could also be hypothetically possible to equate Germany as a lost motherland with Israel). Drawing the biblical parallel, Remarque points out the inverted axiology of the space, whereby his emigrant characters move from the centre across the periphery towards the borderlands.

1.3. The biblical image of the Ark

The biblical image of the Ark appears in several novels by German writers in exile. The narrator in Remarque’s “The Night in Lisbon” spends time watching a ship that will soon leave for America and thinks about it as the Ark: “Man konnte auf Lissabon hinabsehen, auf die Kirchen im blassen Licht, die erleuchteten Straßen, den Hafen,

13 “I let carry me through the anonymous city where bright smoke rose to the sky. Pillar of fire in the night and pillar of smoke in the daylight – God showed the way across the desert to the first nation of refugees in a similar way, didn’t he?”. Remarque, E.M. *Schatten im Paradies*. Stuttgart; Hamburg; München: Deutscher Bücherbund Stuttgart, 1971, p. 13.

14 “ ‘The journey through the desert is nearing its end’, he said. – ‘Where is the Promised Land?’ Kahn asked ironically. – ‘Here!’ Vriesländer replied astonished, ‘Where else?’ ” *Ibid.*, p. 436–437.

15 “We live like the Jews during the Exodus. There are the German army and the Gestapo behind us, the seas of French and Spanish police on both sides, and the Promised Land Portugal with the Lisbon harbour leading to even more promised land America ahead”. Remarque, E.M. *Die Nacht von Lissabon*. Sankt-Petersburg: KARO, 2005, p. 283–284.

16 “The Odyssee began. The journey across the desert. The crossing of the Red Sea”. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

die Docks und auf das Schiff, das eine Arche war"¹⁷. Noah's Ark also appears in Anna Seghers's "Transit", in which ships going to Central and South America from the harbour of Marseille are equated with it¹⁸.

In the biblical story, Noah's Ark is a symbol of rescue because it allows Noah and his relatives to escape from a global catastrophe. For refugees in Seghers's story, the rescue is leaving Europe for the Americas, where there is no war and they will not be persecuted. Remarque and Seghers therefore use the image of the Ark to connect the idea of rescue with the borderlands – namely, American countries.

2. Stories of ancient mythology

In general, German exile writers use biblical stories and images as actively as those from ancient mythology, as well as ancient history and literature. I would like to now present some examples of ancient inclusions in the novels examined.

2.1. In one scene of Feuchtwanger's "Exil", the emigrant Ringseis says: "Wer seinen Äschylus in sich aufgenommen hat, weiß, dass immer die Gesittung die Barbarei besiegt. Auch wir werden unsere Perser besiegen"¹⁹. Another German emigrant, Harry Meisel, replies: " 'Barbaren', sagen Sie, 'unsere Perser', sagen Sie. Da muss ich die wirklichen Barbaren und die wirklichen Perser doch in Schutz nehmen. Die Perser, die Barbaren, mit denen Ihre Griechen zu tun hatten, das waren Menschen, das waren vollwertige Völker mit langsam gewachsenen, organischen Meinungen und Sitten. Schänden Sie nicht das Wort 'Barbaren', verehrter Herr Geheimrat, indem Sie es auf unsere Nazis anwenden. Glauben Sie wirklich, dass ein Dichter wie Äschylus solche Halbtiere ernst genommen hätte, dass er solchen Pöbel zum Helden einer Tragödie gemacht hätte?"²⁰. "Halbtiere", or "half beasts", inhabit the borderlands and underworld – that is, enemy territories – while the secular zones between the enemy and sacred lands are populated by barbarians. Feuchtwanger describes an inverted world, in which the enemy lands are in the centre, surrounded by secular lands, with the sacred territory as far as possible from the middle. Ancient allusions enable him to express the emigrant vision of the world.

2.2 In Exil, there is another ancient parallel to consider. Among the characters is an unusual coupling, Lea de Chassefierre and Erich Wiesener. Lea is a Frenchwoman with one-quarter Jew ancestry, while Erich is chief of the Parisian department of "Westdeutsche Zeitung" newspaper, so is a Nazi agent. In spite of this, they have

17 "One could look down at Lisbon, at the churches in pale light, the enlightened streets, the harbour, the docks and at the ship which was an Arc". Remarque, E.M. *Die Nacht von Lissabon*. Sankt-Petersburg: KARO, 2005, p. 13.

18 Зергерс, А. *Транзит* // Зергерс, А. Восстание рыбаков в Санта-Барбаре. Транзит. Через океан / пер. с нем. М., 1974, с. 143.

19 "Those who absorbed their Aeschylus know that the civilization always defeats the barbarity. We will defeat our Persians too". Feuchtwanger, L., p. 371.

20 " 'Barbarians', you say, 'our Persians', you say. Here I must speak however for the real barbarians and the real Persians. The Persians, the barbarians, which your Greeks had to deal with, they were people, they were genuine nations with slowly grown, organic opinions and customs. Do not shame the word 'barbarians', honourable privy councillor, applying it to our Nazis. Do you really believe such poet as Aeschylus to take those half-beasts seriously, to portray such rabble in a tragedy?". Feuchtwanger, L., p. 372.

an affair lasting many years – on which their son Raoul comments: “In letzter Zeit, Liebling, ...wenn ich dich mit unserm Nazi zusammen sehe, dann habe ich immer das Gefühl, als seist du eine Patriziertochter des verfallenen Rom, die sich mit einem Barbarenhäuptling zusammengetan hat”²¹. For Raoul, his father’s identity as a Nazi makes him a “Barbarenhäuptling”, or “barbarian leader”. In contrast, Raoul accepts emigrant views and symbolically joins German refugees by becoming a literary successor of perished exile writer Harry Meisel²². That’s why he, as a bearer of emigrant consciousness, describes German Nazis living in the centre of the world as barbarians and his mother living on the periphery as a Roman – a member of a civilized nation.

Ancient parallels are therefore drawn by such authors for the same reasons as biblical ones, being designed to highlight axiological markers of the emigrant world view inverted against the traditional one.

3. Stories in Thomas Mann’s exile novels

Another emigrant writer, Thomas Mann, wrote “Joseph and His Brothers” (finished in exile in America in 1943). In a previous study I showed this set of myth novels to have the most important features of the exile novel, except for a thematic relationship to the events between 1933 and 1945²³. Mann focuses on the biblical story of Joseph, who appealed the Jews to move to Egypt, and we showed how this helped him to organize his four novels into an emigrant history. In the paper mentioned, Joseph is considered as an emigrant hero who moves to the borderlands (Egypt) and has to choose between a traditional and inverted world view.

In general, although the tetralogy “Joseph and His Brothers” is not about the events of 1933 to 1945, it is marked by the following features of the exile novel:

3.1 The authors of such novels often show two opposing world views – namely the Nazi and emigrant ones. The latter is a world view that is spatially based on the idea of chaos at the centre and sacred borderlands. The Nazi perspective appears when the novel contains one or more Nazi characters whose consciousness is shown. In contrast to the emigrant perspective, this represents a world view that is based on a sacred centre and an enemy periphery.

Such opposite world views are reflected in Thomas Mann’s Joseph novels, in relation to the spatial conceptualizations of Joseph’s father Jacob compared with those of the Egyptians. Jacob is proud to live in Canaan and considers it a sacred territory located at the centre of the world. People living in the neighbourhood of this land – that is, on the nearest periphery – bow their knee to Baal (Middle-East pagan deity) and are therefore perceived as barbarians. The borderland of Jacob’s world is Egypt, where the divinities are represented by animal form – viewed as even worse than Baal – and people

21 “Recently, darling, ...when I see you with our Nazi, I always feel like you are a daughter of a patrician in fallen Rome who has an affair with a barbarian chieftain”. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

22 Поршнева, А.С. Сюжетный комплекс жертвоприношения в романе Лиона Фейхтвангера «Изгнание»: Гарри Майзель и Рауль де Шассефьер // Современные коммуникации: Язык. Человек. Общество. Культура: сб. ст. Екатеринбург, 2012, с. 121–129.

23 Поршнева, А.С. «Иосиф и его братья» Томаса Манна в контексте немецкого эмигрантского романа // Вестник Томского государственного университета. 2017. № 414, с. 20–28.

sink into vice. For Jacob, Egypt is also equated with the underworld, yet the Egyptians are convinced their country is sacred and the other countries, including Canaan, are barbarian. These two spatial world views are opposed with each other.

3.2 Joseph's route is one from the centre to the periphery. He successfully puts his plans into practice and becomes a high-ranking official²⁴ in Egypt. According to Mann, Joseph suits Egypt because it is "country of grandchildren"²⁵ and he belongs to the "grandchildren"²⁶. Similar mechanisms can be observed when looking at other characters in German exile novels who are persecuted in Germany and feel unnecessary and like outsiders in Europe, but "suit" borderland countries and are welcomed there – such as the "futuristic" America of Remarque and Klaus Mann.

3.3 Moving to Egypt makes Joseph change his values and spatial conceptualizations. He becomes an Egyptian to a large extent and sees the country in a positive light, in spite of his father hating it – with Joseph made to choose between a Jewish and an Egyptian world view. Emigrant characters also have to decide between a "centripetal" and "centrifugal" outlook; they can choose the borderlands and give up everything related to Germany or be homesick. This is a decision to be made both by Joseph and other emigrant characters.

3.4 To move to Egypt, Joseph has to die symbolically and be born again, getting a new name Osarseph and personality²⁷. This happens when he spends three days in a well after been thrown in by his brothers. From that moment, Joseph thinks about himself as being dead. Similar motifs can be found in the works of other exile writers whose characters are also "dead" until they get to the borderlands and start a new life there. Some of these, such as professor Samuel in Klaus Mann's "The Volcano", also have to experience a symbolic death before going to the borderland country they have chosen.

In this tetralogy Thomas Mann did not describe actual events in German and European history, but wrote novels set in the past – with his use of mythology rather untypical for the German exile novel. The story of the Jews moving to Egypt serves as a thematic source, but Mann expresses the emigrant consciousness in his "Joseph" novels and draws explicit parallels between Joseph going to Egypt and his own departure to the USA²⁸.

Conclusions

Using ancient and biblical stories and images, German writers in exile create a special world that exists in the consciousness of emigrant characters. This world view is based on an opposition between the centre and periphery, whereby the centre is related to chaos and populated by barbarians and beasts while the periphery is the Promised Land. This is expressed by the means of biblical images like Goliath and stories such as Exodus with the Third Reich equated to Egypt. The image of the Ark also shows the main axiological direction of the emigrant spatial view, from the centre to the periphery.

24 Mann T. Иосиф-кормилец / Томас Манн // Манн Т. Иосиф и его братья. Т. 2. М., 1991. с. 285–701.

25 Mann T. *Иосиф и его братья. Доклад* // Манн Т. Иосиф и его братья. Т. 2. М., 1991, с. 713.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Поршнева, А.С. «Иосиф и его братья» Томаса Манна в контексте немецкого эмигрантского романа, с. 20–28.

28 Mann T. *Иосиф и его братья. Доклад* // Манн Т. Иосиф и его братья. Т. 2. М., 1991, с. 707–709.

A particular case is Thomas Mann's tetralogy "Joseph and His Brothers", in which the biblical story creates a background in which the protagonist faces emigrant problems and becomes a bearer of an emigrant consciousness. But the Joseph novels are rather an exception. According to the general trend in the German exile novel, the inclusion of biblical stories and images is a writer's trick to point out the inverted axiology of the exile space.

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RELIGINIŲ SIUŽETŲ IR ĮVAIZDŽIŲ KAITA VOKIEČIŲ EGZILIO ROMANE

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Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje apžvelgiami kelios išskirtinės religinių siužetų ir įvaizdžių savybės vokiečių egzilio romane. Straipsnio autorė tiria šių element funkciją egzilio literatūroje sukurtoje vokiečių rašytojų tremtinių, pavyzdžiui: Ericho Maria Remarque, Liono Feuchtwangerio, Thomas Manno, Annos Seghers and Klausio Manno. Manoma, jog šiai literatūrai būdinga ypatinga erdvės ir siužeto sąranga bei temos struktūravimas. Kūriniai priskiriami atskiram literatūros žanrui. Religinių įvaizdžių ir siužetų įtaka romanų erdvės ir laiko sąrangai – tyrimo objektas. Dovyda sir Galijotas, Nojaus arka – bibliniai įvaizdžiai, kuriuos galima aptikti tiriamuose romanuose, o tokie siužetai kaip Juozapo istorija, egzodas autorių gausiai eksploatuojami. Israelitų tremtis į Egiptą rodo Thomas Mann siužeto ištakas susitelkiant ties emigrant sąmonės analize romane “Juozapas ir jo broliai”. Kiti romanai atsigręžia į 1933-ųjų ir 1945-ųjų metų įvykius, romanų autoriai ir jų pasitelkti bibliniai motyvai ir vaizdiniai išryškina aksiologinę egzilio erdvės ašį ir leidžia rašytojams išreikšti savo emigracinį požiūrį į pasaulį. Šiame straipsnyje atskleidžiama, kad religiniai motyvai naudojami šalia mitologinių siekiant panašių struktūravimo tikslų.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: erdvė, siužetas, egzilis, egzilio romanas, religija, Biblija, Juozapas, Genezės knyga, egzodas, Dovydas ir Galijotas, Erichas Maria Remarque'as, Lionas Feuchtwangeris, Thomas Mannas, Anna Seghers, Klausas Mannas.

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