

MISREPRESENTATIONS WITHIN HISTORICAL FICTION

By: Indigo Ward



GENRE OF HISTORICAL FICTION

- Issues defining the genre as the time frame for an event to be considered ‘historical’ is open to interpretation.
- Historical fiction impacts youth and is often used in teaching curriculums to supplement literature courses
 - Readers are not necessarily aware of the historic misrepresentations and inaccuracies within the books.
 - This is concerning when used in a school setting as novels have more credibility when read in an academic setting
- (Brown, 1998)



GENRE OF HISTORICAL FICTION

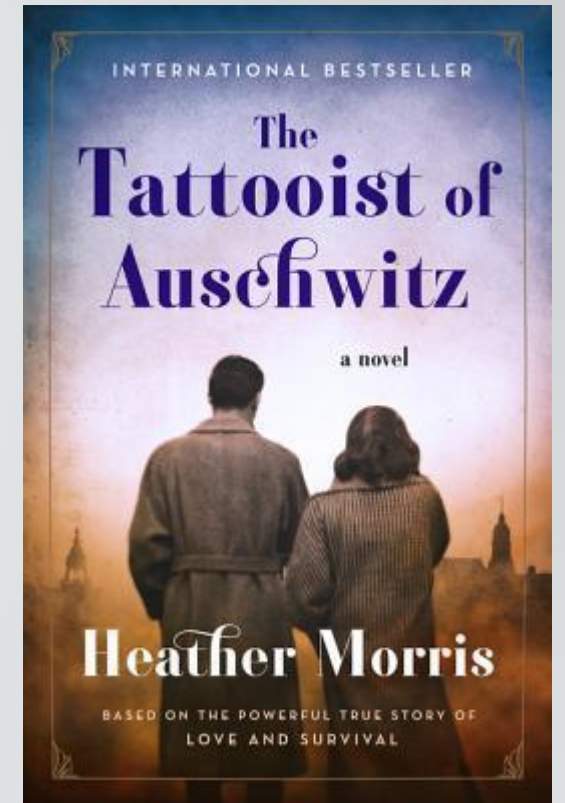


- Historicizing fiction vs fictionalizing history
- Generally accepted definitions of historical fiction: elements of the past such as settings and events
 - Characters and monologue details are typically fabricated
- For the purpose of this presentation historical fiction should be considered more similar to the fantasy genre
- (Brown, 1998)
- (Schlee)

THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ

BY: HEATHER MORRIS

- Written by Heather Morris in 2003
- Based on Lale Sokolov's stories and experiences
 - The inside cover writes "She was introduced to Lale Sokolov, who entrusted her with the innermost details of his life during the Holocaust"
 - The dedication is, "To the memory of Lale Sokolov. Thank you for trusting me to tell your and Gita's story"
 - Despite these excerpts, the book remains a work of fiction (fantasy) and should not be considered indicative of the survivors true experience or those of others.
- (Morris, 2003)



HISTORICAL AUTHENTICITY IN THE CASE STUDY

- Unrealistic expectations and representation of life in camp and survivors
- Beginning in cattle car without established context or gradual persecution of Jewish individuals
- Generally focused on trivial aspects rather than the development of the camps and real conditions within them
 - Privileged prisoner position, flashbacks to pre-war, fewer hardships and emphasis on romantic interest
- Brief touches on important concepts, however, without explanation or depth
 - Gray zone, Sonderkommando revolt, Red Cross visit, soccer game against SS

EXAMPLES IN THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ

This Way for the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen – Tadeusz Borowski

“I have been given the choice of participating in the destruction of our people, and I have chosen to do so in order to survive. I can only hope I am not one day judged a perpetrator or a collaborator” (pg. 156-157)

“He sees the Sonderkommando standing by, defeated, ready to do a job no one on earth would volunteer for: removing corpses from the gas chambers and putting them in ovens. He tries to make eye contact with them, to let them know he, too, works for the enemy. He, too, has chosen to stay alive for as long as he can, by performing an act of defilement on people of his own faith.” (pg. 139)

“the privileged position they occupy – they are housed separately, receive extra rations and have warm clothing and blankets to sleep under” (pg. 139)

Concept of a gray zone – Primo Levi

“Somehow you lose your appetite when they cut your balls off” (pg. 136)

Romanian youth ‘Baretski’ as SS officer and minder

“This is one doctor you don’t want to be introduced to, trust me. I’m scared of him. The guy’s a creep” & “Herr Doktor has made it known that he will be at many of the selections, as he is looking for particular patients” (pg. 110)

“Mengele, beside him now, stares him down, his eyes black as coal, devoid of compassion. A strange smile stretches across his face” (pg. 111)

“You are all going to be given extra rations and blankets next week for a few days. The Red Cross are coming to inspect your holiday camp.” (pg. 130)

“A massive explosion rings out, shaking the ground beneath them.” & “Lale looks up and sees Sonderkommando up there, shooting wildly. The SS fire heavy machine guns in retaliation. Within minutes, they have put an end to the shooting.” (pg. 202)

REPRESENTATIONAL ISSUES IN QUOTES

- The previous quotes reflect the judgements or bias of the author
- As a proxy witness it is not our place to pass judgement or our feelings about the events. The book influences the readers interpretation of the events with leading language and framing.
- Often times, the quotes showed how events were misrepresented in the book such as the feelings regarding the Sonderkommando
 - They were not given agency or a choice in their involvement and thus the repeated use of the word 'choice' is inaccurate and does not reflect the conditions and situations within the camp.
- While these quotes are based on historical events they are not representative of the whole picture or the conditions and lack of agency within the camp.

HISTORICAL FICTION: IS IT WORTH IT?

- Potential to reach new audiences and get people more aware of events although it also misinforms many and they may not know that what they read was inaccurate
- Can inspire interest in subject matter and lead to further research
- Somewhat covers many aspects but without full coverage or context of topics
- The genre can be counterproductive to the recollection and witnessing of events
 - Depending on the reader it may reach the exception and encourage true academic interest and further their quest for knowledge and learning on the subject matter.

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