

WAR THEME IN E. STRITTMATTER'S LATE PROSE

The article analyzes the thematically-problematic complex of war in E. Strittmatter's late prose. Turning to war theme is based on the Germans' feeling of guilt before the World community, and on tries for further development while regarding WW II as past events. The war theme is revealed by the writer in the context of evolving of German literature in the second part of the XXth century.

Keywords. E. Strittmatter, novel, short stories, theme, war.

Erwin Strittmatter (1912–1994) occupies a substantial place in the range of such prominent German XX century writers as Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf, Heinrich Böll etc. Strittmatter's writing has been studied by both native and foreign scholars, e.g. S. Lvov, L. Kopelev, K. Shakhova, L. Simonyan, L. Markelova, G. Agaltsev, K. Werner, G. Gaspar, H. Plavius, M. Rezo, R. Hillig, M. Schmidt, K. Berger, H. Schubert, E. Zack, F. Meyer-Gosau, H. Pankoke, B. Heimberger, H. Drommer etc. The novels short stories collections that arose the greatest interest among the scholars were «Ochsenkutscher» (1951), «Tinko» (1955), «Der Wundertäter I-III» (1957/1973/1980), «Ole Bienkopp» (1963), «Der Laden I» (1983), «Pony Pedro» (1959), «Schulzenhofer Kramkalender» (1966), «3/4hundert Kleingeschichten» (1971), «Die blaue Nachtigall, oder Der Anfang von etwas» (1972). The specialists in literature remarked Erwin Strittmatter's works' genre diversity, their wide ideological and thematic range, attention to everyday life of an ordinary person, philosophizing, poetical narration and the writer's experiments in image creating.

However, some of the author's oeuvres were hardly noticed by German critics. Among them we could name the stories collections «Vorder Verwandlung» and «Geschichten ohne Heimat» (published after the author's death), and the trilogy «Der Laden». These works are still not translated into Ukrainian or Russian (except for the Russian translation of «Der Laden I») and are hence force scarcely known for our readers.

So the aim of this research is to analyze the thematically-problematic complex of war in E. Strittmatter's late prose, basically in «Vorder Verwandlung», «Geschichten ohne Heimat», and «Der Laden I-III». A research of this kind needs to define the peculiarities of war theme revealing and historical events estimation in the mentioned oeuvres.

E. Strittmatter's late prose embraces a wide theme range. Socially-historical theme comprises depicting of different strata (rural area predominantly), researching interrelation of a personality and the society in war circumstances, upbringing and routine conditions, finance, personal relationships etc.

The thematic variety of «Der Laden» trilogy can be regarded as profound, diverse and detailed. In «Geschichten ohne Heimat» collection and «Vorder Verwandlung» cycle the thematic component is, in accordance with genre demands, situational, monotonous and subtextual.

The war theme is tightly connected with interrelation of a personality and society or history, especially in «Der Laden» trilogy, where WW I and II, as well as aftermath time are the background for all the events. In German literature the events of WW II occupy a special place (“the war ruined morals and ethics”)[5, 53]. The Germans' feeling of guilt before the World community caused and active developing of the topic by the writers (A. Seghers, L. Fürnberg, F. Fühmann, J. Becker, J. Bobrowski etc.) As D. Chugunov admits, the process of redefining of the past in German literature has two tendencies: the first one is the traditional conviction that German people are to feel even in future guilty for murderous existence of Nazi regime; the second one is the Germans' right to regard Nazism as past events, with a right for further development [2].

In the last quarter of the XXth century the second tendency was mainly being developed, which can be observed in E. Strittmatter's late prose. Giving the principal place to depicting war theme in «Der Laden» trilogy, the author describes the events that are directly connected with his own experience the way he knows and remembers them, even though the writer deserted at the end of the war, which is depicted in the novel. E. Strittmatter realizes the true reason for war. He writes: “hysterical Adolf started the war” [5, 6], “the Germans

invaded their country (the USSR – N. Zh.) to exterminate their ideology”[8, 90]. Such examples of E.Strittmatter’s negative attitude towards those “dear Germans”, “adolfians” who became the initiators of WW II are frequent in the novel. The author, in his «Der Laden» trilogy, also proposes a number of facts about concentration camps, crematory, prisons and horrible conditions for both Russian prisoners of war and Germans who did not support Hitler and perished in anti-nazist struggle. The writer has not overlooked, however, the shameful deed of Soviet soldiers on German territory: robbery, rape, and lawlessness. Although, the author admits that the Germans have themselves made them “their enemies”[5, 140].

E.Strittmatter’s attitude to the reasons, events, and consequences of WW II was not univocal. Admitting the Germans’ guilt before the USSR in this war events (“every German got drabbed in Nazism [5, 259]), the writer claims that the real guilty ones are a circle headed by Adolf Hitler. For example, the author asks in his novel what his grandmother’s fault is, as she had no attitude to the war, yet the society considers her guilty as well.

E.Strittmatter acknowledges the right of the Germans for a further independent development as a nation and state (“Russians <...> captured half of Germany to improve political ideology here. They have not succeeded in it <...> at all” [8, 90–91]). In a short story called “Frosty Night” winter, cold, and night became war symbols. At the same time, a frosty night is associated with motherland in Soviet soldiers’ minds. The writer reproduces the general atmosphere of war events as inevitable evil. At the beginning of short stories cycle E. Strittmatter wrote: “Wars for humanity the way it is now and it will stay for a long time will never come to end” [8, 5].

A problem directly connected with the events of WW II is the one of dividing Germany into two states with different political systems: FRG and GDR. This issue is raised both in «Der Laden» trilogy (with the help of the characters who know life both in the East and in the West of the country: “all which is white here gets black there” [4, 93] etc.), and in short stories. In a concentrated short story “New Window” this “new window” [7, 58] symbolizes the barrier which has separated Germany. A lonely man came across a house with a new window while wandering in the winter wood. The inhabitants saw him but they did not care whether the man could freeze: “a hardly seen self-care surrounded the house” [7, 59]. The attitude of the narrator, who embodies the author’s idea, is both sad and skeptical: not only a political, but also a spiritual barrier emerged between Germans. A distanced view at the events gives the writer an opportunity to reproduce truthfully everything happening in the state and people’s lives.

Modern redefining of cultural and historical development of both states during a long time shows two set images of GDR: the first one is an official image of the state prosperous in all the spheres of social life; the second one, existing in the West, is connected with recognizing the Eastern state as a “defective” one [3]. E. Strittmatter did not share any of these opinions (I’m happy to have stood the war alive [5, 397]). He did not move to a new place during the country’s splitting into two separate states because of the idea that “a writer <...> has his roots and <...> if he had torn them out, it would have been equal to his literary death”[8, 109].

To sum up, we would like to admit that E. Strittmatter’s «Der Laden» trilogy, «Geschichten ohne Heimat» collection, and «Vorder Verwandlung» cycle have become one of his books telling about human life whose peacefulness and balance was interfered by war. I. Gladkov assures that everyday life theme has always occupied a substantial place in GDR fiction and was developed by a plenty of writers: G. Kunert, G. Kant, G. de Bruyn etc.[1]. Different sides of real life connected with war and its consequences embodied in E.Strittmatter’s late prose are multilaterally depicted, including philosophical context. A mix of every day and ontological spheres defines the peculiarities of thematic war complex in E. Strittmatter’s «Der Laden» trilogy, «Geschichten ohne Heimat» collection, and «Vorder Verwandlung» cycle. The perspective studying of thematically-problematic summation of war may be realized in interpreting E.Strittmatter’s late prose from the viewpoint of linguopoetics.