

Two Novellas of Emigration and Exile: A Comparative Analysis of Władysław Reymont's "The Promised Land" and Henryk Sienkiewicz's "On the Field of Glory"

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a mass exodus of Poles from their homeland due to political and economic factors. This phenomenon, known as the "Great Emigration," had a profound impact on Polish society and culture. Two novellas that explore the themes of emigration and exile from different perspectives are Władysław Reymont's "The Promised Land" (1899) and Henryk Sienkiewicz's "On the Field of Glory" (1906).



Testaments: Two Novellas of Emigration and Exile (Polish and Polish American Studies) by Danuta Mostwin

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This article provides a comparative analysis of these two novellas, examining their similarities and differences in terms of plot, characterization, and thematic concerns. By ng so, it aims to shed light on

the multifaceted experiences of Polish people who left their homeland in search of a better life.

Plot Summary

The Promised Land

Reymont's "The Promised Land" follows the story of four young men from different backgrounds who travel to the industrial city of Łódź in search of work. Jan, a peasant, dreams of becoming a wealthy landowner. Mateusz, a tailor, seeks employment in a factory. Andrzej, an artist, hopes to earn a living from his paintings. Tomasz, a former teacher, desires to escape the poverty and oppression he has faced in the countryside.

As the young men arrive in Łódź, they are confronted with the harsh realities of urban life. They find it difficult to find decent work and are forced to live in squalid conditions. Despite their struggles, they refuse to give up on their dreams and continue to work hard in the hope of achieving a better future.

On the Field of Glory

Sienkiewicz's "On the Field of Glory" tells the story of a group of Polish soldiers who are sent to fight in the Russo-Japanese War. The soldiers are led by Captain Stanisław Brzóska, a charismatic officer who believes that the war will be a chance for Poland to regain its independence from Russia.

As the soldiers march into Manchuria, they encounter the horrors of war firsthand. They witness the brutality of the fighting and the suffering of the civilian population. Despite their initial enthusiasm, they begin to lose hope as the war drags on and their chances of victory dwindle.

Characterization

The Promised Land

The characters in "The Promised Land" are complex and well-developed. Each of the four young men has his own unique personality and motivations. Jan is ambitious and driven, but he is also naive and self-destructive. Mateusz is hardworking and determined, but he is also prone to self-pity. Andrzej is talented and sensitive, but he is also impractical and idealistic. Tomasz is intelligent and idealistic, but he is also disillusioned and cynical.

Through these characters, Reymont explores the different ways in which people can respond to the challenges of emigration and exile. Some, like Jan, are able to adapt to their new surroundings and achieve their dreams. Others, like Andrzej, are unable to adjust and ultimately end up in tragedy.

On the Field of Glory

The characters in "On the Field of Glory" are more idealized and one-dimensional than those in "The Promised Land." Captain Brzóska is a noble and patriotic officer who embodies the best qualities of the Polish people. The soldiers are brave and loyal, even in the face of adversity. However, the characters in the novel lack the complexity and depth of those in "The Promised Land."

Thematic Concerns

The Promised Land

One of the central themes of "The Promised Land" is the pursuit of the American Dream. The young men who travel to Łódź are all hoping to find wealth and success in the city. However, they soon learn that the American

Dream is not always as easy to achieve as it seems. The city is a harsh and unforgiving place, and many of the young men end up disillusioned and defeated.

Another important theme of the novel is the loss of identity. As the young men become increasingly assimilated into Polish society, they begin to lose their sense of who they are. They adopt new values and customs, and they forget the traditions of their homeland. This loss of identity is a major source of pain and suffering for the characters.

On the Field of Glory

The central theme of "On the Field of Glory" is Polish patriotism. The soldiers who fight in the Russo-Japanese War are motivated by a deep love for their country. They believe that the war will be a chance for Poland to regain its independence from Russia. However, as the war drags on and their chances of victory dwindle, the soldiers begin to lose hope.

Another important theme of the novel is the futility of war. The soldiers witness the brutality of the fighting and the suffering of the civilian population. They come to realize that war is a senseless and destructive force. This realization leads to a profound disillusionment with the war and with the Polish cause.

Władysław Reymont's "The Promised Land" and Henryk Sienkiewicz's "On the Field of Glory" are two novellas that offer unique perspectives on the experiences of Polish people who left their homeland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "The Promised Land" is a more realistic and gritty portrayal of the challenges of emigration and exile, while "On the Field of

Glory" is a more idealized and patriotic account of the Polish struggle for independence.

Despite their differences, these two novellas share a common theme: the search for a better life. The characters in both novellas are driven by a desire to escape the poverty and oppression of their homeland and to find a place where they can live freely and pursue their dreams. While some of the characters are able to achieve their goals, others are not so fortunate. However, all of the characters in these novellas are ultimately shaped by their experiences of emigration and exile.



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