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<https://doi.org/10.33989/pnpu.863.c3570>

PROBLEMS OF LONELINESS AND LOVE IN THE WORKS OF ULF STARK

In a vast sea of literature filled with stories of evil, war and loneliness, the works of Swedish writer Ulf Stark stand out as guiding lights of humanity and hope. His heartwarming stories have the power to touch the deepest strings of the soul, reminding us of the enduring power of kindness and love.

In his works, Ulf Stark skilfully combined joy and sadness, leaving his readers with the feeling that even in the darkest times there is always room for light. He wrote about wars that destroyed lives, about loneliness that torments hearts, but he always reminded us that each of us has the capacity for empathy and love.

Biography

Ulf Stark (1944-2017) was a famous Swedish writer, translator and screenwriter. He was born in Stockholm, where he lived all his life. Ulf Stark began his literary career in the late 1960s and wrote more than 30 works translated into dozens of languages. By the way, all of Stark's books have been translated and published in Japan.

He gained recognition in the 1980s and is a very popular writer in Ukraine. His works cover important topics such as friendship, family relationships, fear, love and sadness, particularly in adolescence, when children face many emotional experiences. One of Stark's most famous works is the book "Can You Whistle, Johanna?" which won him a number of literary awards, including the prestigious Augustus Prize in 1992. He has also written other popular books such as *My Friend Percy*, *Bofalo Bill and Me*, *Freaks and Geeks* and *A Little Book of Love*. Ulf Stark's works have been translated into various languages.

Ulf Stark is known for his special style, which combines simplicity and depth, making his works understandable and interesting for children, teenagers and adults as well. Stark has great compassion for his characters and conveys their emotions, fears and experiences. He talks openly about difficult feelings such as loss, loneliness, love and death, but he does so with gentleness and understanding, allowing readers to accept their emotions. His books are often filled with humour, which helps to ease the tension and makes the topics easier to understand.

Stark writes about real life without moralising. He does not give ready-made answers and does not try to teach the reader, instead allowing them to draw their own conclusions.

'CAN YOU WHISTLE, JOHANNA?' (1992)

Ulf Stark's novel "Can You Whistle, Johanna?" (1992) explores profound themes of loneliness, love, and intergenerational connection through the heart-warming story of a young boy, Berra, and an elderly man, Nils, living in a retirement home. Berra, longing

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for a grandfather to share his life with, sets out with his best friend Ulf to ‘find’ one. This leads them to Nils, who, despite being a stranger, becomes a surrogate grandfather for Berra. Together, they embark on a unique relationship that transforms their lives, bridging the gap between their generations and offering a poignant commentary on human needs for connection and care.

The novel delves deeply into the multifaceted nature of loneliness, presenting it as both a personal struggle and a societal issue. For Berra, loneliness stems from the absence of a grandfather – a figure of guidance and warmth. His sense of detachment is heightened by comparisons to Ulf, who enjoys fishing and coffee with his own grandfather. Berra’s melancholy for familial connection drives his quest to bring Nils into his life.

For Nils, loneliness manifests as a combination of isolation and irreparable loss. Living in a retirement home, he feels forgotten by his family and society. His wife Johanna has passed away, leaving him clinging to memories symbolized by the wistful melody of “Can You Whistle, Johanna?.” This song represents both loyalty to Johanna and the pain of a life lived without her. Nils’s loneliness is compounded by his alienation from a world that no longer seems to need him.

However, through their encounters, both Nils and Berra find relief. Nils rediscovers his value as he becomes an integral part of Berra’s life, while Berra gains the love and support he seeks. Their relationship underscores the healing power of companionship and the need for intergenerational dialogue, reminding readers of the importance of family ties and mutual care.

Love in “Can You Whistle, Johanna?” is portrayed as an active, selfless force that overcomes differences and promotes growth. For Berra and Ulf, their efforts to bring Nils into their lives demonstrate love as trust, friendship, and respect. Berra’s decision to call Nils his grandfather reflects his desire for warmth and care, while Ulf supports him in this journey, proving himself a loyal and empathetic friend. Together, they plan a memorable birthday celebration for Nils, further bonding them together.

Nils, in turn, experiences love as a rebirth. Through his connection with Berra, he finds joy in life again, participating in activities together and reliving cherished memories. The boys’ small actions – tying their shoes, carrying a bag, or shaving – are small but powerful expressions of respect and attention, reflecting Stark’s ability to capture the way children relate to the elderly without being moralistic.

At its core, “Can You Whistle, Johanna?” is a story about overcoming loneliness through love and connection. It emphasizes the importance of intergenerational relationships, showing how people from different walks of life can bring profound meaning to each other’s existence. Stark’s depiction of these themes is subtle yet impactful, encouraging readers to consider their own roles in fostering understanding and care within their communities.

‘A LITTLE BOOK OF LOVE (2015)

The protagonist of the story is a boy named Fred, who was named after the American actor, dancer, choreographer and singer **Fred Astaire (1899-1987)**. His career took off between the two wars of the First and Second World Wars. His (pre-war) roles are a kind of symbol of happiness and love. He sang and danced, telling people about the best human feelings.

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At the outbreak of the Second World War, the boy Fred's father went to defend his country. Sweden, like other European countries, was under military occupation. Food was issued by cards. At night, it was necessary to make blackouts. Everyone lived in a state of anxiety and expectation of something unknown and terrible.

Ulf Stark also depicts loneliness in this work, but not irresistible, not tragic. Because all the characters are connected by invisible strong chains. And this connection between them was caused by the war and severe trials.

Fred and Oskar go to school, adults and children go about their daily routines, but no one forgets that the war is still going on. However, in this story, no one is alone, all Swedes unite to wait for the victory and the return of their loved ones in this spiritual unity.

Familiar and unfamiliar people help each other. Fred sells Christmas trees to earn some money and help his mother. The strange lady gives the boy her perfume, which he likes very much, evoking associations with a peaceful life, summer, flowers and herbs, and boundless happiness. Fred kept this bottle of perfume to give to his mother for Christmas.

School and school relationships are a special theme of the novel. There is the mischief of children, but there is also a wise teacher who understands everything and who, during the war, tried to give at least a little compassion and joy to children and their mothers.

The story also depicts the enduring power of family love despite the hardships of war. Fred's deep affection for his parents, especially his father, becomes a source of both comfort and challenge. The war forces Fred's father to leave, creating a gap filled with fear and uncertainty. Despite this, Fred remains a support for his mother, demonstrating stability and unshakable loyalty. This aspect of love emphasises the crucial role of family in overcoming hardship, highlighting themes of hope, patience and emotional solidarity.

Through Fred's perspective, the novel captures the resilience of the human spirit during challenging times. It highlights the importance of compassion, loyalty, and connection – values cultivated in both the classroom and the home. By intertwining personal growth with historical context, the story serves as a sharp reminder of the enduring power of love and the role of community in overcoming life's challenges.

Through the story of *A Little Book of Love*, Stark shows how loneliness is linked to the sense of insecurity that often accompanies war, loss, and other hardships in life. However, he also shows that even in difficult circumstances, people can find ways to cope with loneliness – through dreams, ideals and feelings for other people.

Conclusion

In his works, Ulf Stark carefully reveals the depths of the human soul, touching the most delicate strings of our existence. His paradigms of loneliness and love remind us that even in the most difficult moments, we can always find hope and support in human relationships. This thought resonates with us especially during the war in Ukraine, when every day is filled with pain and loss, but also with manifestations of extraordinary human solidarity and love.

Stark's work reminds us that even in the darkest of times, we can find the light in each other, supporting and inspiring each other. This light is especially important today, when Ukraine is fighting for its independence and peace, when every act of kindness and love is of great importance.

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