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# Otto, the Autobiography of a Teddy Bear

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~~Editors Choice:~~

Editors Choice

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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In 1940 Ungerer's native Alsace was annexed by the Nazis and the then 8-year-old Tomi subjected to Nazi indoctrination in school. This powerfully moving picture book tale of Otto the teddy bear is perhaps a riposte to that experience.

Told in the first person by Otto, we hear about the games he plays with his owner David and David's friend Oscar ? one of which results in the indelible ink stain on the bear's head. Nazi occupation leads to David being obliged to wear a yellow star and then he and his family are deported. Otto, left behind with Oscar, then witnesses another farewell when Oscar's father has to leave for the front. When the bombing starts Otto saves a black GI's life by deflecting a bullet, is taken back to the US with him and given to his daughter. Eventually, battered and caked in mud he ends up in an antique shop and is bought by the now elderly Oscar ? who is then reunited with David. Both survived terrifying experiences and will now stay united with each other and with Otto.

Ungerer writes of the terrible events of war, pitching his account clearly and accessibly for younger readers. His use of a teddy bear as the central character (he is a well known collector of antique toys) helps to make events that could be too overwhelming manageable. His dynamic pencil line, the positioning of his figures and his consummate use of inks and watercolour wash convey the emotional resonance of happy times (the boys absorbed in their games with Otto) as well as painful and terrifying ones. This is a story of loss (both boys lose their parents in the war) but also of the constancy of love as represented by the faithful Otto. The book is handsomely produced on matt stock which adds to its period feel.

Running Order:

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