

To destroy a man is
difficult



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

To destroy a man is difficult, almost as difficult as to create one:' pg 156 ch. 16(The last one). Evaluate this quote in terms of language of the text and importance to the novel ' If this is a man' by Primo Levi. Primo Levi's book " If this is a Man" is a novel based on the topic of the Nazi Germany concentration camps.

While there are many novels about this period in history " If this is a Man" is set aside from the rest of these books by the way in which Primo Levi retells the events. His chosen style of language is scientific likely due to his background as a Chemist and the significance of this style of writing is evident in the text. It also allows for the break down (to a certain extent) of the vocabulary used to highlight the above quote contrasting language. This quote holds meaning to the text as a whole, it exudes many topics, the ones that will be explored are; how those who survive survived, the conflicting meaning of the quote and the concept of barriers set. The language used by Primo Levi is quite detached and scientific making this topic which is subjective to be told with an objective manner, he never lapses into a moment of judgment or raises his ' voice'. This language type draws the text into an analytical novel not a confession of his times there. However this sets a tone that gives greater significance to the horrifying details expressed factually and the analysis's done upon himself and his fellow captives. " Thousands of individuals.

.. are enclosed within barbed wire: there they live a regular, controlled life which is identical for all and inadequate to all needs." Pg 102, This quote can be used as an example of the analytical style increasing the responsiveness readers would have. The language used is clear cut and basic, Levi does not

complain he states “ inadequate to all needs” instead, this use of basic vocabulary and terms allows for readers to be touched on a more subliminal level mainly due to how well understood the terminology used is by the readers. While the language used brings its horrifying message across with greater impact the break down, to a certain extent, of Primo’s retelling becomes significantly highlighted. The quote being analysed in this essay shows this break down of moral stand point. Levi’s usual unique talent of approaching the situation in an analysed manner; analysing the reasons, the methods, and the effects of the concentration camp usually draws a sharp contradiction to the context of this report and in this situation he lets the language used contain a bit more personal response than the rest of the text but he also manages to use this to strike up a cutting contrast between the language.

He uses words such as; destroy, difficult, create in an almost ‘ how to’ way when not placed in context but he’s talking about the destruction of a human being which implies the expansive concept of what makes a human, and when one is destroyed how do you create one? This amazing contextual description completely baffles readers by the exact and contradiction meaning of it.” To destroy a man is difficult, almost as difficult as to create one: it has not been easy, nor quick, but you Germans have succeeded. Here we are, docile under your gaze; from our side you have nothing more to fear; no acts of violence, no words of defiance, not even a look of judgement.” Pg 156. This paragraph holds contradicting meaning to Levi. The first response we have as readers is to note the tone; it sounds not Levi like, we note that in the whole novel this is the closest that Primo comes to giving out a

judgement. Levi says 'you Germans', always he refrains from using this ad he notes not all Germans were part of the Nazi regime, he usually uses words such as 'the Lager', them, and they to define who he is referring to. The first part of the quote "To destroy a man is difficult.

.." this when read with the later part "It has not been easy, nor quick,..." brings about the concept that you have succeeded, you have managed, through your actions, to destroy a man or many a man (it is important to note that this paragraph is directly after the Lager hang 'Der Letzt' the last man to openly defy them, which morally crushes the remaining captives.). You have hung the last of us that will openly retort to you.

This statement gives significant meaning to the book because it remains a low point in Levi's and other prisoners outlook. However the next part of the quote "...almost as difficult as to create one:..." this part brings about a whole other meaning.

No longer is it the lowest reaches Levi will drop to in his fight for survival. It is meant as; you have completed a task most difficult, to destroy a man, but you have another task you have set yourself, to create one, this is even more difficult. This is truly significant because it brings in the meaning of what it is to be a man. This idea of a man is never defined like the rest of the text defines the situations because of the importance of being a man. So when the 'Germans' destroy a man it is brought along with the fact that they don't even know what they have destroyed so how can they possibly create a man in the model they want it to be? The answer to this is that Levi stands off here. Levi manages to take this situation and admit to something,

men have been broken here, but almost reinforce his conduct, there are more difficult times for you ' Germans', but this also heeds true for Levi there will be more difficult times for you as well as you endeavour to survive. Here is a turning point in Levi's assessment of how to survive the Lager, he notes that what they Lager are doing (destroying what it is to be a man) but also notes to himself that he knows what it is to be a man and therefore can make the statement it is more difficult to create one. Even if this recognition is not a conscious one it is sub-conscious and allows for him to assess how to live.

This assessment brings about the conclusion that to survive the trial of being destroyed as a man one must suppress what it is to be a man. Levi does this as well as the other survivors. They suppress their human so as to avoid destruction, so as to avoid being classified as one of the ' drowned' (the broken men). Therefore from Levi's recognition of both difficulty to create men and suppress your ' human' he manages to set a barrier between himself and ' the Lager', this is as low as I will sink, I will not be destroyed then be recreated, I have and will take the necessary sacrifice to suppress my human and survive, ' the Lager will not succeed. This powerful realisation is never expressed in Primo's own words but is contained in his scientific, horribly confronting sharp contrasts.