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A good piece of literature is one that contains a deeper meaning behind the text, and by the language and literary terms that the author develops. Elie Wiesel’s memoir, Night, is a piece of good literature, despite what some critics may argue. Wiesel’s struggle with his faith is a dominant conflict in Night, and at the beginning of the memoir, his faith in God is absolute. However, through the use of conflict and irony, Elie Wiesel was able to show how his faith was irreparably shaken by the cruelty and evil that he witnesses during the Holocaust. Along with his excellent use of literary devices Wiesel shows the manifestation of his memoir, by utilizing thematic ideas, his own character’s realization of one’s self, and his strong voice as a witness, Wiesel successfully represents the messages intended for the audience.

Frequently used throughout Wiesel’s work is conflict and irony, which convey his messages to the reader. Irony is recurring throughout the concentration camps, as a “ doctor” is someone such as Dr. Mengele, who selects people for death rather than saving them from it. “ A son can kill, rather than respect, his father” (Dougherty). The irony in this idea is that it is meaningless to save someone from something that is bound to happen to them. Yet another form of irony was displayed throughout the concentration camps, “ This one had an iron gate with the overhead inscription: Arbeit Macht Frei. Work makes you free. Auschwitz” (Wiesel). These messages were clearly ironic, as work most certainly did not make a prisoner free. Moreover, these messages inflicted the conflict throughout the memoir, because the more the prisoners saw these words, the more they wondered if they ever were going to be free from these camps. The more the prisoners longed for their freedom, the more they took their frustration out on God, and worse, each other.

Aside from Wiesel’s use of literary devices, he shares with the audience the importance of communication. Wiesel’s final loss of faith is in his loss of faith in words itself. This causes him to withdraw into his silence and it disrupts his narrative self. Wiesel suggests that the only thing more dangerous than faith is disbelief. “ Similar to prayers, words can be altered in the universe of the concentration camps, and eventually, Wiesel loses faith in their ability to achieve communion with God, to communicate with others, or to bind people together in a community” (Sanderson). The type of silence operating through Night is silencing the prisoners, and it is what is causing the lack of resistance toward the Nazi threat. Wiesel implies through the text that silence and passivity are what allowed the Holocaust to continue. “ Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames, which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments, which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never” (Wiesel). In Elie Wiesel writing this memoir, is itself an attempt to break the silence that has plagued him and so many other all of these years. It is an attempt to tell loudly an boldly of the tragedies of the Holocaust, and in this way, he is trying to prevent anything as horrible as the Holocaust from ever happening again.

Another important thematic idea is that of a coming-of-age story; Wiesel progressively loses his identity throughout the course of the narrative. The most direct form of Wiesel losing his identity was when he first arrived at a German concentration camp, “ The three veteran prisoners, needles in hand, tattooed numbers on out left arms. I became A-7713. From then on, I had no other name” (Wiesel). Elie Wiesel uses the audience’s emotions to generate the understanding of the message that he is trying to send. This, in many critics’ opinions, is an excellent form of how Wiesel produced a good piece of literature. “ Throughout the course of the memoir, Wiesel uses a shift in which Elizier’s move toward adulthood in the camps becomes an image of how a man, as opposed to a boy, might act” (Winters). Wiesel finds himself in the role of a teacher during the book, desperately, but unsuccessfully, trying to show his father how to do the right things in camp. Along with the thematic idea of coming-of-age, Wiesel also adds the loss of innocence, as he no longer is the young, carefree boy he once was in Sighet. Elizier is now a man and he, along with the audience, recognize this change.

Although Wiesel succeeds in sharing his experiences with the voice of a witness, some critics believe he failed. “ Events in this book occur in chronological order, not for the purpose of interpreting the manifest theme which the book revolves around, but rather to trace the course of events of himself as a witness” (Fine). Coming from his own voice as a witness, Wiesel is able to write about his experiences in a way that the reader feels sympathetic, while also understanding the important points that he is trying to make. “ Wiesel writes his memories of life inside four different Nazi death camps with a straightforward style that critics say is journalistic. In many people’s eyes, Wiesel is more a witness to what he has seen rather than a literary writer. Though it is almost unbearably painful, and certainly beyond criticism, the book is still a failure as a work of art” (Winters). Despite the fact that Wiesel’s work failed to be a creation of art, his work succeeded in being a good piece of literature, and he succeeded in sending his messages to the reader.

Night is a memoir with a symbolic title, and I also think it carries symbolic messages, and information that we as a society need to know and value. Night is a symbolic title for this memoir because “ Night” always occurs when suffering is worst, and I believe its presence is a reflection of Wiesel’s beliefs that he lives in a world without a God. Wiesel feels that God’s silence demonstrates the absence of divine compassion, and a result of this, Wiesel questions the very existence of God, and how he can stay silent in these moments of terror. Through this memoir, Wiesel was able to demonstrate life without a faith, and living without a sense of identity. For these reasons, I think Wiesel did create a successful piece of work, which was good literature

Works Cited

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