

Comparison of night
by elie weisel and cry
of the beloved
country by paton
compar...



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Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* gives a thought provoking account of the ruthless maltreatment of his family during the Holocaust by Nazi Germany. Wiesel was brought up in the mountains of the present day Romania and in 1944, at fifteen years old, his family was captured as part of a mission by the Germans to torture the Jews. Thereafter, Wiesel and his dad were detached from his youngest sister and mum at Auschwitz.

All the family members died in different circumstances leaving the young Wiesel behind. Alan Paton's novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*, is a commanding, spare, poetic modern classic that protests against the structures of the South African society that would lead to apartheid in the 1940s. The novel tells the story of Reverend Stephen Kumalo who undertakes the difficult and expensive journey to Johannesburg from the remote village of Ndotsheni (Paton, 1).

He makes the journey in order to find his wayward son, Absalom, and assist her sick daughter, Gertrude. In as much as the two novels are distinct, they portray the same thematic link: good and evil in the society.

To begin with, both the two novels give a portrayal of social breakdown and racial injustice in the society. The society represented in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, is unjust, segregated along racial lines in which the white people have assumed ownership of the most profitable farmland from the black people.

For that reason, blacks have been compelled to migrate from their tribal villages to try to find work in cities like Johannesburg. In the cities, white

businesses rely so much on the labor provided by the blacks, for which they work for subsistence wages.

Since the blacks have been forced to leave their traditional social structures such as adherence to morals and reverence for the elderly in the society, social breakdown has inevitably followed. Because the blacks left the traditional social structures that lent stability to their lives, the crime rate among the blacks is increasing at a fast pace.

The novel *Night*, by Elie Wiesel, also portrays the theme of social breakdown and racial injustice in the society. The Nazi's captured and killed so many Jews after forcing them to endure treacherous situations. Wiesel notes, "Without passion, without haste, they slaughtered their prisoners" (4). Their oppressors did not even spare the weak among them.

The Nazis purposely withheld proper means of transport and forced the Jews to travel in cattle cars to the concentration camps. By doing this, they placed their voiceless prisoners on the same level as the animals. Therefore, this undermined the significance of the Jewish existence, dehumanized them, and belittled their self-esteem.

The novel depicts instances of the breakdown of the Jewish social structures. Wiesel witnessed occasions when sons turned against their fathers by abusing them, abandoning them, or fighting with them. The Jews themselves abandoned the traditional social structures that lent stability to their lives when they started turning against each other in the concentration camps. In addition to the kapos, who were also Jews, they never treated each other as brothers and sisters.

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Even though the two novels give an illustration of extreme social injustices, they also have a human heart. In *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the sense of despondency is envisaged by the likelihood of reunion amongst the races and the blacks coming together once again.

Even in the evil parts of the book, bright spots wherein individuals show human love to each other, not considering the race, are evident in the story. For instance, a white man offers free transport to blacks who were on foot because of a bus boycott. Another show of human heart is whereby Kumalo and Jarvis desperately search for their sons to reconcile with them. Although Kumalo finally discovered that his son had changed to an evil man, he endured the ordeal of the trial with him until he was sentenced to death.

Jarvis is depicted to have undergone a change of heart when he tried to reconcile with his dead son through his writings that he had left behind. In the book, Paton seems to imply that societal change is possible if it can start to be effected from people's heart. The novel upholds that such change is possible in the future.

In *Night*, instances of compassion, as depicted by the relationship between Elie and his father, are evident. In the concentration camps, Elie did not want to give up because he never wanted to leave his father alone since they had been separated from the other family members.

A number of kinships portrayed in the novel are very different from that of Elie and his father in that the sons abuse, abandon, mistreat or kill their fathers.

During the Holocaust, the Jews changed dramatically because there was scarcity of food and everyone was struggling for his or her own survival.

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Amidst the cruelty and selfishness that ruptured familial bonds, Elie showed compassion to his father. This strong bond between the father and the son illustrates that Eli's compassion and solidarity are stronger forces for his continued existence than his instinct for self-protection.

In *Night*, Eli seeks to find an answer to the questions he was having, but there is silence and he seems to get no answer. Eli asks, "Where is God?" but there is no divine response. He failed to understand why God could permit such a torture to be experienced by devout worshippers. Another type of silence in the book is seen when the Jews failed to resist the oppression that they underwent during the Holocaust.

On the other hand, in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Kumalo is able to get answers to the questions he was having. Even though he was going through tough times, his only solace came from faith in God. The trial of his son shook his faith but never broke it. He spent most of his time in prayer in order to get the answers from God. Unlike Eli's case, Kumalo was able to find comfort from fellow compatriots.

These two books are so rich, so proficient in describing the trouble, the dissatisfaction, and the unbelievable misery in a torn planet. Understanding the past is important when one wants to understand the future. Therefore, these novels remain relevant in our current society.

Currently, the world is full of various atrocities that parallel the situation in South Africa before apartheid and the oppression of the Jews during the Holocaust. In spite of these violence and gloom, the novels remind us that

we have the power to change the world. Everyone has the potential to do <https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-night-by-elie-weisel-and-cry-of-the-beloved-country-by-paton-compare-and-contrast-essay/>

good. Although the novels are set in different parts of the world, they indicate that at times good can prevail over evil or on the contrary, evil prevailing over good.

Paton, Alan. *Cry, the Beloved Country*. New York: Scribner, 1948. Print.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1960. Print.