Sample Response Paper

Elie Wiesel, Night.

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**A Devoured Soul**

Elie Wiesel’s book, Night, is haunting. Of course the book depicts one for the most haunting, horrific eras of human existence, but the Holocaust isn’t the real subject matter of Wiesel’s autobiography; it is actually his soul that becomes the main theme of his tragic story and it is that loss—that annihilation of a young adolescent boy’s very core existence—that left *me*, as a reader, haunted.

The troubled theme of Elie’s shattered soul is constant through the novel. It is as if we are slowly watching Elie’s soul being eaten away bit by bit until nothing is left but a hollowed “corpse” (115). Elie started as a bright eyed-bushy-tailed youth who was “deeply observant” (3) and who told us that “by day I studied Talmud and by night I would run to the synagogue to weep over the destruction of the Temple” (3). His soul was once full, bursting with passion for life and especially for his God; however, as the German Army took over his town, Wiesel’s tone towards God shifted dramatically.

I read in horror when Elie’s poem—a unique change of narration for the story and one I found more dynamic compared to his regular storytelling— revealed the true extent of his damaged soul. His repetition, NEVER SHALL I FORGET, repeats for eight lines and it’s the details of that poem that show us, as the readers, how much the Holocaust changed his life existence. He writes that “never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul” and “never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live” (34). *Wow*. It is astonishing to read how Elie believes his soul is “murdered,” dead, and lifeless. It makes me wonder how other Holocaust victims continued to live after their liberation.

Our souls are often depicted as a moral compass—they are our conscience and give us the ability to distinguish right and wrong. Along with stealing the ability for most humans (including Elie) to continue to live an optimistic life after liberation, the Nazis did a brilliant job destroying the ethical integrity of many Jewish people. Many Jews were willing to “kill for a crust of bread” (101), beat each other up (Mrs. Schatcher, 25-28), and betrayed their own family members in order to survive. It’s appalling. It was appalling, but Elie was a participant too. When his father was taken away and probably thrown into the “crematorium” (112), Elie had one horrible reaction. Elie said, “I did not weep…deep inside me, if I could have searched the recesses of my feeble conscience, I might have found something like: Free at last!...”(112). It appeared that Elie was, in a way, joyful for his father’s demise. He was free from the burden, worry, and effort he had to put into watching out for his father in the camps. It is awful, but this scene really shows Elie’s soul taking a tragic turn—in a way he lost his humanity and compassion, but at the same time, could you blame him? He was starved, beaten, and humiliated almost every hour of the day by the Nazi regime. His betrayal showed the Nazis’ true victory—not over the Jewish religion, but the Jews’ morality and minds.

I was hoping the victory and salvation of the novel would come at the end, with the liberation. I was hoping that Elie’s soul would rise up—despite all the pain and loss he had endured. Even with his liberation, I realized Elie was not resurrected. He ended the book with the most haunting image of all: his skeleton-like reflection. I realized his ending, although unsatisfying, was to show us as an audience the truth of the Holocaust. Liberation didn’t necessarily mean freedom. Liberation didn’t grant peace. Liberation was not even true liberty. The Holocaust destroyed millions of lives—and not just those who died. The survivors faced the emotional distress and mental anguish of what they experienced. Although I was angry with his last chapter, I realized why he did it. It taught me a lesson: humans can devour each other’s souls.

**Tips/Notes: This paper is focused on theme and the overall message of this book. Notice I don’t focus on summary, rather I discuss what the author did and WHY…**