

World Literature Essay

A young boy who tries to survive the Holocaust, a king who sleeps with his mother and kills his father, and a brave man who is unable to reveal his love for a woman, these are the stories that three different books tell, written by authors coming from all over Europe. These works of literature namely are “Night”, “Oedipus the King” and “Cyrano de Bergerac”. All three of these stories appear to be rather dissimilar since they are written and take place during time periods which lie thousands of years apart. “Oedipus the King” is a legendary story which takes place hundreds before the birth of Christ and contrasting to this play are “Cyrano de Bergerac” and “Night” which in comparison to Oedipus are new, since they have only been published in roughly the last 100 years. Not only are the time periods and the topics of these pieces of literature varied but also the types of the works are different with Oedipus and Cyrano being plays and “Night” being written as a memoir. Nonetheless, these pieces have more similarities than one at first might imagine, due to the fact they deal with identical themes that have moved, inspired and provoked people to think over many millennia. “Oedipus the King”, “Cyrano de Bergerac” and “Night” all discuss the themes of fear, love and the limits of the free will, however, the themes are incorporated in a variety of different ways in each of these pieces, creating powerful emotions and a strong feeling of empathy in the reader.

Fear is one of the most commonly used themes in literature because the audience can easily identify with the characters since everyone at sometime has experienced this intense emotion and this is also one of the reasons for which all of these pieces of World Literature have used and included the theme of fear through out their stories. “Night” is the book in which fear plays the most important role of all the three pieces, since it is told by a Holocaust

survivor, who tells his horrible story about what unimaginably cruel events he and his family had to go through. There are three major fears that are discussed; fear of pain and death, fear of loss and fear of the unknown. The first actual signs of terror in Eliezer first appeared when his father is being told about the deportation of the Jews of Sighet and when Elie states that “night fell”. This night is a strong symbol and motif which constantly reappears throughout the course of the book. It symbolizes the terror and fear, and therefore night is also mentioned when Eliezer arrives at Auschwitz and when the Death March from Buna begins. Elie first suffers from not knowing of what is going to take place next: “Where are we being taken?” “What is going to happen?” These are the questions that are filling the minds of the people in Sighet. This passage of the book is filled with doubts and the search for answers, since the greatest terrors arose from people not being certain of what would happen next. When he arrives at the concentration camp, one can clearly notice how the fear of losing his father is what Eliezer is scared of since he repeatedly says, “At all costs we (Eliezer and his father) must keep together”.

Like Night, Oedipus also has fear incorporated into its story, however, “Oedipus the King” uses a different kind of fear because Oedipus is not, like the Jewish threatened by deaths but by the truth about his life. Oedipus fears that he is the one who killed King Laius, who later on turns out to be his father, therefore Jocasta, who is Oedipus’ wife, is also his mother. Oedipus tries to overlook all the clues, signs and evidence that are given to him throughout the play and which are pointing towards the truth. Even when the blind seer Tiresias tells him about how Oedipus is the one that has brought the plague to Thebes, since he is the murderer of the previous ruler, Oedipus does not want to believe this. The fear that he develops results in blaming the prophet and Creon for trying to overthrow him. “Oedipus: ‘Is this a plot of Creon, or thine own?’” His terror makes him lose his so often praised intelligence and ability to solve riddles. “Thou (Teiresias) in ear, wit, eye, in everything art blind”. However, with this he is actually describing himself as Tiresias notices. Then, when

there is no other possibility because the evidence is so damning, Oedipus finally admits to himself truth. Nonetheless, the theme of fear continues since Oedipus remains in terror of what other things might be discovered by his sight and because of this he pokes his eyes out since “sight brought no delight”.

Edmond Rostand, the author of “Cyrano de Bergerac”, has used fear like the two authors of the two other works of literature “Night” and “Oedipus the King” have; nonetheless, he uses the fears of not being loved and of being dejected in his work instead of the fears of deaths and the truth for example. There are two major characters who suffer from fear in Rostand’s work and these are Christian and Cyrano. They both fear that Roxane will not love them because they each have a significant handicap, which in Cyrano’s case is his ugly appearance with his large nose and Christian knows that he is unable to put his thoughts and feelings into the fitting words, for Roxane “an intellectual” to understand and fancy him. “Christian: ‘I’m one of those men- So tongue –tied in love I sometimes wish I could die...To a woman like Roxane I’m bound to be a terrible let-down.’” Cyrano does not feel much different about his nose, “What hope can I ever have...I watch young couples pass arm in arm; and dream of walking soon with one beside me... and then my damned eyes fall on my profile’s shadow against the garden wall.” However, then when the two meet they find a solution for their problem, which is that they form one “romantic hero” together, who has Christian’s appearance and Cyrano’s eloquence. Now both are able to express their love towards Roxane, nonetheless, Christian is the one who profits the most from this relationship at first since he is the one who gets to be together with Roxane because she thinks that Christian is the only part of the “romantic hero”. However, when Roxane tells Christian: “First loving your beauty...then your body and soul were inseparate...now, I love your inner self above all else”, Christian sees that she now actually loves Cyrano and therefore his fears of not being loved return.

Love is the second theme that is present through out all three books, therefore also in “Night”. In this memoir the relationship between father and son plays a big role since they are the only members of the family that are still alive and together. Therefore, the bond between the two is tight.

In “Cyrano de Bergerac” love is the major theme of the entire play since two of the main characters are fighting for the love of Roxane. Cyrano, a distant cousin of Roxane, is one of them, however, he is disfigured by a gigantic nose, but nonetheless he is a brilliant poet. His rival for Roxane’s love is Christian, a handsome noble man, who is not as eloquent as Cyrano and has trouble talking to women. None of them could win her heart on his own and this why they make an allegiance and form the perfect man for Roxane. “Christian: ‘I need eloquence’ Cyrano: ‘I’ll lend you mine, if, in return, you lend to me what you possess... of youth and charm. ...We’d make a romantic hero.’” Together they are now able to make her fall in love with the man they have created. At first she is only interested in Christian because of his looks but later on the soul and mind gain importance for her, until they have more value than the appearance. “Roxane: ‘I’d love him even-’... Cyrano: ‘I don’t mind it – Even ugly?’ Roxane: ‘Even ugly!’” This is when Cyrano becomes the person Roxane actually loves. When Cyrano then finally admits his love to Roxane after having kept quiet for over 14 years due to his moral, one can see that Roxane really said the truth about loving the “romantic hero’s” inner self. “Cyrano: ‘Mourn me a little too. Roxane: ‘You know I will! I swear it Cyrano!’”

In Oedipus, love is highly controversial and tragic because here Oedipus unknowingly marries and sleeps with his mother Jocasta. Love in “Oedipus the King” is not as strongly expressed as it is in the two other stories. However, love is clearly shown when Jocasta is trying to tell Oedipus that he should not trust the prophet Teiresias, since, the prophets are not telling the truth in any case. It is also clear that Oedipus loves and respects Jocasta, “for thou

(Jocasta) art more to me than these (Creon, Teiresias)". With this statement Oedipus makes it evident that he trusts and loves Jocasta and vice versa.

The theme that is discussed as one of the strongest in each of the three works "Night", "Cyrano de Bergerac" and "Oedipus the King" is the limits to the free will. In Elie Wiesel's novel "Night" the form in which it is used and incorporated is rather obvious, since the whole story of this book deals with the suppression of all the Jews and their culture. The limits to the free will of Eliezer, his family and of all the people belonging to his religion appears on almost each page and paragraph of this story. First, they are not allowed to go outside their houses after particular times, then they have to go to the ghetto, and then finally to the concentration camp. During this time, they are forced and they have no other option because they are constantly threatened with death. The people who were not strong enough to work were killed. Some of the characters in the book want to revolt however, but they are either convinced or are just too scared to do this and this is why "the wind of revolt quickly died down." Therefore, there is no way of escaping this situation for Eliezer and his father and so the only thing they could do was try to survive.

In "Cyrano de Bergerac", Cyrano has also clear limits which are set and which prevent him from telling Roxane that he loves her. He is not only prevented to do this because of his own fear but also by his morals. This moral comes into play when he is about to tell Roxane what he feels for her; however, at exactly this instant, Christian, Cyrano's partner and opponent in winning Roxane's heart, is shot and killed. Roxane even admits to Cyrano that she values inner beauty more than physical beauty and this seems like the moment in which Cyrano is on the verge of winning the "battle of love" against Christian. Nevertheless, when Christian dies, Cyrano does not want to slander his reputation in death, and in order to give Christian one glorious moment before his death he tells Christian that Roxane loves him. This shows what a grand nobleman Cyrano actually is; however, it is still somewhat a mistake

since Christian is dead in any case. Nevertheless, Cyrano denies his love until nearly the end of the play.

Oedipus is one of the best examples, where there are clear boundaries which prevent you from achieving and doing certain things. The limits and boundaries that are set for Oedipus are due to fate. The more Oedipus and his parents try to escape from their fate the closer they get towards making it become true. When Oedipus fled from Corinth he tried to prevent himself killing his father, however, this actually brings him closer to fore filling the prophecy.