

The light that defies the darkness

In the bible there is a verse that tells us, "do not fear, for the evil's destruction will come." The word "destruction" that is used in this verse is the same word used for Holocaust in Hebrew. It can be interpreted as a prophecy for the Holocaust, but it can also be an inkling that the nations enemies will fall to destruction themselves. By reading literature of all kinds, we can find hidden meanings among them which brings me to analyse Holocaust survivor literature. The word 'Holocaust' itself is synonymous for great pain and loss to the Jewish people. It is something we carry with us, but the way we carry it is up to each and everyone one of us. It is a defining feature that either makes us weak or actually empowers us. Three generations later and it is still part of who we are. For a defining moment, "Look at how a single candle can both define and defy darkness," - Anne Frank's diary. This specific genre of literature is part of the Jewish people's defiance to the darkness inflicted by the Nazis, and is a tribute to each and every victims suffering, and that's why it is so important to keep Holocaust literature alive.

Maus, authored by Art Spiegelman is a powerful insight into the relationships of survivors and survivors' demeanor. While it shows us a story depicting trauma, it is parallel with a story set in the present which focuses on the aftermath of the Holocaust. What our parents, grandparents and great grandparents went through was so extreme and traumatic that it has been engraved in our minds forever and might as well be a genetic quality we all inherit. In this work, Jews are depicted as mice throughout the entire thing which holds a layer of symbolism for us to analyse. Mice are animals that will always avoid danger at any cost, and that is an underlying theme in a lot of survivor literature. These extreme circumstances brought out our human tendency to want to survive, just like mice. Mice are also relatively weak and are depicted as prey to the Nazis who are illustrated as cats. Another powerful insight in this work is the manner of how relationships have evolved between parent and child to a new dynamic. We see, like many other survivors, Vladek, the father of the main characters, displays qualities of clinginess that drives him to 'waste not, want not, mindset while also treating his relationships in the same manner. Despite this idea among survivors' psyche, many find it hard to share their experience in fear of reliving it. So when Vladek chooses to share his experience with his son we can imagine the tremendous strength it must have taken. Vladek showed resilience by telling his own story to his son and in doing so he passed on these qualities. When evaluating Vladek's motives, we can link this back to the evolved dynamic of their relationship and it can be explained by the need to protect one's own children from harm. This new dynamic isn't completely shattered, contrary to our assumptions. It is simply cracked but healed by victims' enlightenment about the value of family and the need to prevent any such thing from happening again.

Holocaust literature stems out of the exigency to protect anyone else from such danger. We must read it and never forget. While the symbolism is mostly about tragedy and trauma, we can find an underlying theme of vengeance and regrowth in survivor literature. 'The Watch,' by Elie Wiesel is a powerful short story accompanied with powerful phrases that evoke the audience to feel the underlying tone of sorrow. "Feverishly, furiously, my hands claw the earth impervious to the cold, fatigue and pain." The trauma Elie Wiesel experienced during the Holocaust lead him to feel eccentric about the injustice he experienced, and builds up the narrative with the idea of desperately needing something to be done. "Here it is, in the palm of my hand: the last relic, the only remaining symbol..." when Wiesel was 'feverishly digging,

we can find a hidden meaning that he wasn't looking for just a watch he was looking for a way to restore the dignity he had lost. "I want to transform my watch into an instrument of delayed vengeance." since you can't make a simple gold watch an instrument of vengeance the author is actually positioning us to think about the meaning behind it, and to think about the vengeance every survivor warrants. Survivor literature is in a way delayed vengeance. Out of pain and sorrow they grew and used their rage to fuel themselves, their literature, and their accomplishments. Ellie endured, survived and showed resilience in order to avenge himself and his fellow victims. Holocaust survivors built a Jewish home and told their stories so that a thing like this will never happen again, and that is a quality I hope we all inherited.

Anne Frank did not survive, but she has a lot to teach about surviving. A survivor can be defined as someone who lives on while others have died, and therefore the people who are left are always responsible to fix the injustice, and that includes us. Her diary is admirable since she is constantly showing resilience while constantly trying to find meaning and hope in a world that offers very little. "In the eyes of the world we are doomed. But if there is Jewish people left, they will be held up as an example... maybe we will teach the world about goodness, and this is the only reason we have to suffer." Perhaps when talking about inherent human nature and the Holocaust we should talk less about the brutality of the Nazis and more about the human nature to relentlessly find purpose, and by finding a purpose we find hope. Anne Frank's strength throughout her life in hiding gave not only the people she hid with hope and strength of their own but millions of her readers.

As a Jew I find purpose in keeping this memory alive. Holocaust literature is a testament to all survivors resilience and eagerness to survive and one day again, flourish. The essential idea of Holocaust literature being eternal should give us all hope that we will never forget their pain and suffering, and if we were to repeat our mistakes, we would have hope to rise above it, like Holocaust survivors. Without resilience survivors would not have had the chance to tell us their stories and we would be one step closer to repeating such heinous mistakes. And in that I find hope: that the Holocaust shall never happen again. "For the dead and living, we must bear witness," - Elie Wiesel.