

Night: Rejoice or Rebel?

Night can be seen in two contrasting ways. The first can be summarized as a time for celebration and love. The second, and most commonly associated with night, is a time of darkness and horror. Two shining examples of the different emotions and reactions brought on by darkness are the books *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *Romeo and Juliet* by well-known author, William Shakespeare. In *Romeo and Juliet* night has a positive image, a welcomed time for love, protection and exchanging of covenants, while in *Night* the image is portrayed in a negative way, a time for fear, suffering, and death.

Night in the great romances is a greeted time of romance and in Shakespeare's *Romeo and*

*Juliet* a time to hide from the harsh reality of the outside world. Juliet greatly yearns for the coming of night. "And bring in cloudy night immediately. Spread thy close curtain..."

(Shakespeare Act III Scene ii:4-5) Juliet is very eager for night to come as she uses the word

"immediately," which is very strong and demanding. Her true love, Romeo, is also associated

with night. "Come, night, come Romeo, come thou day in night." (Shakespeare Act III Scene ii:17)

Shakespeare uses night also as a time for exchanging of vows. "Lady, by yonder, blessed moon I vow, That tips with silver all these fruit tree tops ---". (Shakespeare Act II Scene ii:106-

107) After Romeo's vow Juliet later promises during the welcomed night to be loyal to him

throughout his life. Under the cloak of darkness she is unafraid to pledge, "And all my fortunes

at thy foot I'll lay, And follow thee my lord throughout the world." (Shakespeare Act II Scene ii:146-147)

Night has a third important role of protecting Romeo at first when he trespasses to the

Capulet Mansion and later when Romeo, then banished, meets Juliet for the final time. "I have

night's cloak to hide me from their eyes..." (Shakespeare Act II Scene ii:74)

Night, although it can be a time of love and happiness, can also be the complete

opposite --- fear, suffering, and death. Elie Wiesel uses stunning, vivid descriptions to show the readers the negative side of night, the side probably most metaphorically associated with night.

Night can bring on great fear, whether on a lesser scale during Halloween or on a greater scale

the horror of the Holocaust. The fear starts early in the book, when the Fascists are slowly

taking control of Elie's town. Elie's family and their fellow townsfolk did not dare go out on the

streets after six o'clock for fear of death. Later in the book there is a lot of

fear leading up to the selection, determining who would keep on strenuously working and who would be sent to the crematories. "It was my turn..... My head was spinning: you're too thin, you're weak, you're too thin, you're good for the furnace....." (Wiesel 68) In the stillness of the night they Jews could not help but relive the fears and horrors of the day over and over again in their minds.

A lot of the book's suffering occurs after the sun has gone down. For example, during the first day of Elie's stay at the concentration camp as is seen when Elie says, "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night." (Wiesel 32)

The nights soon became unendurable, just the opposite of the all too brief nights seen in Romeo and Juliet. "The days were short, and the nights had become almost unbearable." (Wiesel 73)

Later, on the brink of freedom, the prisoner are forced to run forty-two miles without the slightest rest through the night's bitter cold conditions. To make it worse, Elie's foot is bleeding throughout the run as a result of a result of his resent operation.

To everybody's life there must come an end, but this end was often brutally cut short in concentration camps during the wickedness of night. The Germans killed uncountable numbers of Jewish people during the darkening skies, nights coming, through hangings. An example that stands out particularly well transpires in night's darkness when a child is being hanged with two adults for destroying an electric power station. "For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony before our eyes." (Wiesel 62) Elie almost succumbs to death during the long march in the cold and bitter night, but doesn't give in to death's beckoning because of his father. "Death wrapped itself around me till I was stifled." (Wiesel 82) But Elie's father, his condition gradually declining because of dysentery, is eventually taken off to the crematories during night's unforgiving harshness, while possibly still alive.

In conclusion, I think we should have more of a open mind when thinking about the meaning of night and not just look upon it with a one-sided point of view. These two books are excellent examples of how night can be both full of passion and full of fear.

