Kyle Fitzsimmons

Mr. Macleod

English 2 Honors

4 January 2012

A Good Day literary analysis

A story that doesn’t contain literary elements is like a human with no bones.  They both give structure, and without them they would fall apart. Literary elements give the story meaning; it helps give the story a theme. They are critical to a superior piece of literature.  In the story, “A Good Day,” the author -- Primo Levi-- uses three different literary elements to develop a better understanding of the story.  He uses irony to show the theme -- the theme being that the little things in life are often the most valued.  He also uses personification to give human-like qualities to emphasize inanimate objects.  Imagery is also used in the story to paint a picture in the readers mind.

The author uses ironic context clues to reveal the theme of the story.  One of the major themes in this story is how the little things in life matter the most. The following passage shows that the narrator appreciates the minor things in life. “What more can we want? Even our work seems light, with the prosper of four hot, dense pints waiting for us in the hut”(Levi 910). The situational irony in this is that he is enslaved in a concentration camp, torn from his family, and forced to work every day, but instead of showing despair he says “what more could one want?” showing his deepest appreciation for the extra rations of food he was give.  Another passage in this story shows that the narrator greatly appreciates the sunlight that shines over him. “Today is a good day.  We look around like blind people who have recovered their sight, and we look at each other.  We have never seen each other in the sunlight: someone smiles” (Levi908). The irony in this is when the narrator says, “It is a good day.”  As before, the author is held captive in a concentration camp, yet he greatly appreciates the sunlight from above. Without irony there would not be enough context clues for the reader to assume the theme of this story. The irony throughout the story helps prove the authors message, teaching the reader to not take the smallest things in life for granted.

Personification is used various times throughout the story to show importance to inanimate objects. One inanimate object that is personified in this story is the steam shovel.“On the other side of the road a steam-shovel is working.  Its mouth, hanging from its cables, opens wide its steel jaw, balances a moment as if uncertain in its choice, then rushes upon the soft, clayey soil and snaps it up voraciously, while a satisfied snort of thick white smoke rises from the control cabin.  Then it rises, turns half around, vomits backwards it mouthful and begins again. Leaning on our shovels, we stop to watch, fascinated.  At every bite of its mouth our mouths also open, our Adam’s apples dance up and down, wretchedly visible under our flaccid skin. we are unable to tear ourselves away from the steam shovels meal”( Levi 908).  The author gives human traits to the steam shovel to show how starved the men are in the camp by saying things like, “our Adam’s apples dance up and down”, and, “We are unable to tear ourselves away from the steam shovel’s meal”.  He compares the steam-shovel and dirt to the men and their food.  Using personification helps intensify the story, while helping the reader understand the terrible conditions in the camp.

The last literary device used by the author is imagery.  Imagery is used to paint a picture in the reader’s mind to vividly portray the events that occur. One passage in this story is used to show the importance of the sun. “But today the eternal puddles, on which a rain-bow veil of petroleum trembles, reflect the serene sun.  Pipes, rails, boilers, still cold from the freezing of the night, are dripping with dew.  The earth dug up from the pits, the piles of coal ,the blocks of concrete ,exhale in light vapors the humidity of the winter”(Levi 908).  The purpose of this passage is to show the importance of the sun to them.  He first paints a dull picture by saying” on which the rain bow veil of petroleum trembles.”  Then he says “reflect the serene sun”.  What he is doing is emphasizing the importance of the sun, so the readers understand how important it is to them.  Imagery in this story is used to show the importance of objects, and without it readers would not fully comprehend what the sun truly means to all of the men.

Great pieces of literature contain numerous literary elements that help the reader comprehend the story.  In “A Good Day”, Primo Levi uses irony, personification, and imagery to enhance his writing and interest the audience.  Using irony helps give context clues to fully understand the central theme of the story.  By using personification the author gives unrealistic objects human characteristics in order to show the harsh conditions that all of the men lived in.  Finally the author uses imagery to emphasize the importance of the sun to all of the people in the concentration camp. Primo Levi's literary piece, “A Good Day” has taught a universal theme that can be used and appreciated in everyday life.

Work Cited

Levi, Primo. "A Good Day." Holt Elements of Liturature. NC ed. Austin: Beers. 906-10. Print.