An Author’s Impact

The characters and events of a novel are represented in a variety of ways, depending upon the historical and personal experiences of the author. This is evident in Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, a fictional recount of a young Jewish boy and his life during the holocaust. The novel is written from the protagonist, Elie’s, point of view and follows his psychological and historical journey through this time period. It is based upon the author, Elie’s, own experiences in the holocaust, although it is partly fictionalised. *Night* provides many examples of events and characters that are written uniquely as a result of Elie’s historical and personal context. Elie also uses a variety of literature techniques including parataxis, juxtaposition, symbolism and tone to illustrate the social, political, personal and emotional issues he endured.

The events of the novel *Night* are a representation of Wiesel's own historical relations to the political conditions and the roles and rights of Jewish people during the second world war. This is illustrated specifically through the actions of the Kapo, Idek, a Jewish leader of the orchestral kommando in the novel, who lashes out and physically beats Elie’s character. A French Jewess who witnessed this event comforts Elie in saying ‘Bite your lip, little brother...Don’t cry. Keep your anger, your hate, for another day, for later.’ In this dialogue Elie uses parataxis, or short, simple sentences, to create a sense of urgency and haste, in contrast to the usual compound, slow paced sentences present in *Night*. The tension of the event motivates the otherwise quietly spoken Jewess, who encourages Elie to not react but rather suppress his emotions. This is representative of the political relationship between the Jews and their leaders during world war II, and that the rights of Jewish people were immensely smaller than that of their superiors.

In addition to the events mentioned above is Elie Wiesel’s personal connection to the various characters in his novel, *Night*, which greatly influence the ways in which they are represented. This is prominent in the description of his closest companions, such as his youngest sister, Tzipora, who is portrayed as innocent and pitiful. For instance, in chapter one of the novel, as the Jewish people of Sighet are led out of their homes and towards Auschwitz, a concentration camp. Tzipora is specified in the quote ‘Tzipora, her blonde hair neatly combed, her red coat over her arm, a little girl of seven.’ The juxtaposition of the way in which the harsh surroundings are depicted against Tzipora’s neatness and tranquility, show the personal anguish Elie suffered when losing his own sister and his attempts to honour her life through his novel. Her dramatic red coat adds to this, while also representing her passionate and loving relationship with Elie, and the anger he shared about her circumstances. The red coat also foreshadows the danger Tzipora would encounter in future events of the novel.

The events which take place in the novel *Night* are also indicative of the personal context of Elie Wiesel and his struggles, resulting in depersonalization and loss of compassion for those considered the enemy during his time in World War II. This lack of empathy is slightly exaggerated for the fictionalised version of Elie. An example of this is shown in Elie’s reaction to the news that a dentist, who had previously attempted to remove and sell Elie’s golden crown, was to be hung for his crimes. ‘I felt no pity for him. In fact, I was pleased with what was happening to him: my gold crown was safe. At that moment all that mattered to me was my daily bowl of soup, my crust of stale bread.’ In this quote Elie hears of a
person being murdered for attempting to steal a little gold, yet, could think only of food and his survival. The tone in which this opinion is stated is very pitiless and matter-of-fact. The author’s emotionless reaction to death is indicative of the psychological impacts the Jewish people suffered, due to the extremely harsh conditions. This is a raw, honest and tragic aspect of the holocaust that many authors disregard, but, due to Elie’s personal context and past, he chose to include.

As demonstrated, an author’s personal and historical context influences the characters and events in their novel. This is evident in the novel Night, which is a fictionalised recount of the author, Elie Wiesel’s experiences in the holocaust. The novel illustrates the impact of an author’s contextual relationship to a novel, through events such as the abuse from Jewish leaders and the execution of a dentist; and by characters such as Elie’s sister, Tzipora whom he aspires to remember as a beautiful contrast to the devastation experienced in this time period. Elie uses techniques including fast-paced narrative voice, juxtaposition, representation of colour, and tone in dialogue to reinforce his personal view of a variety of topics, both personal and historical.