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Essay Assignment #2

In the short story “Change of Perspective” by Christa Wolf, the main character seems to struggle with the realization that who or what that she once assumed to be “right” or “wrong” is not that clear cut. The main character in Change of Perspective struggled with confusion of if the German solider were in the right of liberation or if the allied forces were in the right of liberation which ultimately messes with her emotions. As the short story progresses, the main character’s growth and development through experiences allows her to come to terms with what she believes is liberation and to understand which side is enacting liberation. The main character eventually become more enact with her emotions and allows herself to truly feel how she wants to feel.

Change of Perspective by Christa Wolf is a short story narrated by the main character, who she and her family are living in Germany during the war. The main character and her family have been going through many hardships during there travels that have impacted her and left thoughts that she can’t forget. The main character is 16 years old and the short story starts by taking place during May/June 1945. The main character at the beginning of the short story recalled when a German Officer from the Waffen SS had an interaction with her grandmother. The German soldier said “ tired of living? You want too fall into the hands of the Asiatic Hordes?” (94). The German soldier was trying to warn the Grandmother of the supposedly horrible things the Russians would do to her if they had captured her. This made the the main character’s grandmother feel fear and desperation towards God. The main character might have felt confusion from this because it could have been a good thing to to warn their family about what could happen to them or it have had been said to install fear into them to manipulate them into doing what they say. The main character also would notice her mother, Herr Volk, start to look sicker and skinner each week. This shows that she was in tune with their situation and understand the hardships that her family was facing. This makes it hard for her to express her feelings in ways that she may feel naturally. For example, in the story it said “ most unbelievable irreality, so that I vent a laugh whose impropriety I feel strong.” (95) . Then after also saying “Except that I can’t make it plain to anyone that I’m not laughing at us, God forbid, not at us settled, ordinary people in the two-story house next to the popular tree.” (95). This shows that she is careful at reacting in ways because she feels confused on if what she does could be seen in a different way than what she interprets it as. This makes the main character feel awkwardly about herself and what she does. Another example showing how the main character can’t express her true emotions freely is when her uncle starts yelling at the main character and her brother when traveling on the cart. The main character said “ Even when I realize how disappointing it is that fear at being laughed at doesn’t even stop when finally the proxy is in your pocket, even though I would gladly have done him the favor of assuring him that I was laughing at myself: I couldn’t lie easily, and I felt clearly that I wasn’t here, although one of the figures that leaned in the darkness against the wind could easily have been confused with me.” (95). The main character was in fear that the reason why she was laughing wouldn’t be justified considering the hardships her family was facing. It almost like laughter and happiness were not allowed just because of the time and situation they were in. There was a feeling of disassociation from the main character in relation to with society. She almost felt as if she wasn’t in touch with what everybody else was going through. A lot of this could be from the effects of the traumatic experiences she had lived through.

25 years later, the main character is now a writer that rights about “liberation”. However, she is struggling with the idea of what liberation actually is. This confusion may also be because of the traumatic events she thoroughly remembers. The traumatic event that stands out to her was when she was young was when see witnessed the death of the foreman Wilhiem Grund by strafing planes. This traumatized her so much because by coincidence it could have been her. In the story she said “ As chance would have it, the foreman Wilhiem Grund lay there in place of me, for nothing by pure chance had kept my uncle in the shed that morning with a sick horse, instead of our preceding the others together on the road with Grund’s ox cart as usual.” (97). Herr Volk told Wilhiem Grund’s son, Gerhard Grund that his father had died a soldier’s death. She said this to comfort and make Wilhiem death death seem respectful and honorable. However, the main character didn’t believe that and said “I didn’t really believe that. A soldier’s death was not depicted like that in school readers and newspapers, and I informed the court of last resort with which I kept a steady contact and which-even though with scruples and reservations.” (97). She felt very strong about this even also saying “I designated with the name God, that no husband and father of four children, and, in accordance with my conviction, no other human being, should have to perish in this way.” (97). This shows that as she grew older she is becoming more intact with what she believes because even when her mother was trying to write off Wilheim Grund’s death as honorable, the main character felt that it was not and that no one should have to go through that. Another way the main character showed that she had come to term with what she thought was right was when she said “ You mustn’t be afraid when everybody’s afraid.” (98). When she was 16 she probably would have been afraid because everyone was. She wouldn’t follow her feelings but rather go with what would be accepted by others, but now through her growth from her experiences she follows what she believes in. She also said after that “ Knowing this is definitely liberating” (98) , proving that she is going about idea based on what she thinks is right. Then at the end of the story when she heard of Hitler’s death and encountered the American soldiers, she had a sense of relief as if the dark days that her family had to live through during the war will finally come to an end. She then realized that the Americans were in fact the one liberating for justice. This caused her to become very emotional knowing she has now finally removed all confusion which has effected her since her younger days, saying “ I finally had reason to turn away a bit and to bawl.” (100). This also proved that she had finally came to terms and was able to feel for what she wanted for. She felt this was what she always believed in but didn’t have the clarification to act on it.

In the short story “Change of Perspective” by Christa Wolf, the main character when she was 16 faced confusion on what was right and what was wrong. The confusion was caused from traumatic events she witnessed and the place and time she had to live through that influenced her. She didn’t understand if the German soldier were liberating for the right cause even though she witnessed herself of the horrific events from war. Then as she grew older she used those same feelings and experiences to look back at what she truly felt about it to then get rid of her confusion to start making her feelings more genuine and honest. She then realized the American soldiers were in fact the one liberating for justice. This cleared up her confusion and finally gave her peace in mind.