
Critical Analysis 2

EN 2760

Escape these Hardships

Literary works like “This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen”, “Matryona’s Home”, and “Candide” all create a wide variety of emotion to the reader. Upon close analyzation of these three very different literary works we are able to find one strong commonality. The idea of overcoming hardships is what is really brought forth to the reader. In “Matryona’s Home” by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Matryona is an elderly woman who faces oppression and hardship until the day she dies. In “This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen” by Tadeusz Borowski, Borowski is in a Nazi work camp and faces enormous amounts of oppression and hardship; the difference between him and Matryona is that he finds happiness with the little things in life, despite his oppression. Lastly, “Candide”, by Voltaire, has a man who faces nothing but (although satirical) hardships in life, but is able to overcome oppression and countless obstacles. In life there is always going to be struggle. All three of these stories have characters who face mental and physical suffering, but the ones who set out with a positive outlook are the ones who can escape the struggle which is tossed their way.

The short story “Candide” is a wild tale with many twists and turns. Candide is taken on a wild journey in search for the woman, Miss Cunegonde, who he loves. At one point in the story, Candide, kills his lover’s brother and afterwards finds himself kidnapped by a group of wild people who were prepared to boil him and his partner and eat them because Candide had killed two of their monkeys. In relation to the matter Candide says, “What a people! What men!

What customs! If I had not had the good luck to run a sword through the body of Miss Cunegonde's brother, I would have been eaten on the spot! But, after all, it seems that uncorrupted nature is good..." (125). What seems to be a hopeless journey for Candide is always met with some positivity at the end, but why? Candide always tries to keep a positive outlook for the future because he realizes that being down in the dumps will get him nowhere.

A prime example of the mindset Candide has is when he says, "What's optimism? said Cacambo. Alas, said Candide, it is a mania for saying things are well when one is in hell" (132). Candide is off on a terrible, long journey and is constantly facing adversity. The way he is able to get through these obstacles is by keeping a sense of optimism. When faced with hardship, Candide is able to keep a positive outlook on his life to get through these struggles. Candide openly is saying that his situation is very unfortunate and hectic, but he tells himself everything will be okay. Candide's behavior really shows that keeping a positive outlook during hard times will lessen the mania of the situation.

Candide had been faced with many sufferings that just seem to keep piling on. In chapter 7 it says, "Candide, still completely astonished by everything he had seen and suffered, and even more by the old woman's kindness, offered to kiss her hand... In spite of his many sufferings, Candide ate and slept" (110). Candide has been banished from his home land, lost the woman who he loves, seen one of his friends drift away in the ocean to his death, and witness half a city die in an earthquake, but yet, Candide is still able to keep his wits and will to survive. Candide has experienced nothing, but struggle lately. Most people would give up in a situation like Candide's, but he refuses to give up. He eats and sleeps to regain his strength, so that he is able to regain the energy he will need to fight off his sufferings.

In the story "Matryona's Home" we read of an elderly Russian woman named Matryona who works on a farm for a very little amount of money. She is not well liked in her community and is often times looked very down upon. The irony of this is that she lives in a communistic society, but it doesn't seem as though she is an equal in the eyes of her town. Solzhenitsyn is Matryona's son who comes to live with her after 8 years in prison. When he comes to live with his mother, the reader really starts to get a good look on Matryona's sad, struggling life that she leads.

Matryona appeared to have many hardships going on in the winter and it seemed very hard for her to keep an optimistic view. Solzhenitsyn exclaimed, "Matryona had a lot of worries that winter. Her neighbors put it into her head to try to get a pension. She was all alone in the world, and when she began to be seriously ill she had been dismissed from the Kolkhoz as well. Injustices had piled, one on top of another" (1575). Matryona is a sick, elderly woman who is basically all alone in the world. Not only was she a widow of 12 years; she also had 6 of her own children die. Matryona, on top of all this grief, has now just lost the job which is keeping her alive. Instead of trying to find the good in her situation, she dwells on the harsh reality. If she could set out with an optimistic mindset, her neighbors and townspeople may have reached out to her and helped her through these hard times.

It always seemed as though Matryona was a tenderhearted woman, which in the end could have led her to her own demise. After she had passed, people around her even said, "Everything she said about Matryona was disapproving. She was slovenly, she made no effort to get a few things about her. She wasn't the saving kind...Matryona's sister-in-law admitted that she was warmhearted and straightforward, but pitied and despised her for it" (1595). Matryona

was said to be too nice of a woman to others which oddly led to her being despised by those who should be closest to her. Unfortunately, Matryona was not able to overcome the mental suffering of this awful ridicule.

Towards the end of this short story, Solzhenitsyn says, "She was misunderstood and abandoned even by her husband. She had lost six children, but not her sociable ways. She was a stranger to her sister and sisters-in-law, a ridiculous creature who stupidly worked for others without pay" (1595). Matryona is constantly looked down upon by others for her misfortune. The sad thing is, she never stood up for herself. She never tried to fight back or explain herself which allowed people to walk all over her. Her life is really an example of the sad side of hardships. Some people are able to fight through their suffering, but Matryona is someone who allowed the suffering to get the best of her.

Another work of literature that was assigned is, "This way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen." This is a true story about a man named Tadeusz Borowski. Borowski was sent by Nazi's to one of the most dangerous German concentration camps, Auschwitz. The holocaust was one of the most gruesome events in modern times and Borowski was able to give a full account of his experience in Auschwitz and how he was able to get through his time there.

Borowski was in charge of bringing incoming prisoners from the trains to the gas chambers. In regard to his terrible job he says, "I am not sorry they're going to the gas chamber. Damn them all! I could throw myself at them, beat them with my fists. It must be pathological, I just can't understand..." (1461). Borowski is extremely upset with his actions and choices he must make in this concentration camp, but realizes it is what he must do in order to survive. Borowski is able to lead these innocent people to their deaths because he is able to see

some hope for himself. With all of the misfortune Borowski faces, he is still somehow able to keep a sense of positivity. Borowski chooses to push on with a positive attitude instead of turning over, giving up on life, and dying; this is why he was able to survive his time at Auschwitz.

“Candide”, “This way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen”, and “Matryona’s Home” all have a commonality because they are constantly facing mental and physical suffering. “Candide” and “This way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen” are perfect examples of the underlying theme. These stories show a character who faces all sorts of adversity, hardship, and struggle, but they keep a positive outlook and are available to overcome it. On the flip side, in “Matryona’s Home” there is a woman who experiences the theme from the opposite side of the spectrum. She experiences similar suffering, but does not keep an optimistic view. She can find no good in her situation which ends up leading to her depressing downfall. All in all, we must remember that we are not the only ones experiencing hardships in life. Find the good and push through your struggles or life will end in peril.