



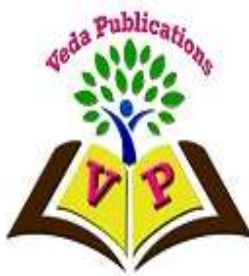
CONFRONTING HOLOCAUST LITERATURE – AN INSIGHT

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ABSTRACT



Literature is generally an expression of a fictitious event. Sometimes it may be a factual event upon which a novel or a biography is written by others and the realistic autobiography is written by the author himself. It may sometimes be magnified. But here is an exception in the form of Holocaust literature. According to Goethe, literature is the humanization of the whole world. But in Holocaust literature, the inhumanity of one race namely the Germans to the other, namely the Jews are brought to the limelight. But even now some of us refuse that such an event did not happen. At this juncture even an experienced writer should minimize the speed of his pen and start thinking. The words also should be measured. Even a drop of ink from the pen should bring a drop of tear from the reader's eyes. For that, the writer should possess a subjective outlook and see to it that nothing is magnified in words or it is not a make belief event. It is the agony of a race, a kind of unending trauma in the heart of each individual belonging to the First Generation. Each word should be mended in such a way that it reaches and touches the chord of the readers. Wiesel has made an effort towards it and has come out successfully.

Keywords: *Holocaust Literature, Jews, Nazi, Autobiography, Anti-Semitism*



The Holocaust universe is so weighty that it forces light back on itself. It provokes expression only to reveal the powers of articulation. This is so much the case that we are finally forced to ask: or is it one of those giant red stars whose gravity distorts the light of perception or is it a black hole into which all matter is swallowed into oblivion and from which no light can escape? Without exception those of us who bring ourselves to reflect on the Holocaust are met by the most wrenching of paradoxes: the events must be recorded and remembered, yet language, our primary medium for such tasks, fails us when we most need it. In the words of Elie Wiesel, who has struggled with this ambiguously revelatory nature of the Holocaust for more than a quarter of a century now, "How we can speak of it; how can we not speak of it"? There are no answers to this question, as any reader of Holocaust literature knows. Such readers know as well that these questions, while they present writers with the most formidable of obstacles, have not prevented the emergence of a considerable body of writing of the most compelling kind.

Within the precincts of this literature, Elie Wiesel occupies a position of preeminence, both for the sustained nature of his oeuvre and for its profundity. From the time of the publication of the autobiographical memoir "Night" (1960) to the latest collection of essays and short fictions, "A Jew Today" (1978), Wiesel has wrestled with the most disturbing and recalcitrant of historical, moral and theological problems. In doing he has, more than any other single writer of the post war years, educated this generation to the absolute need not only to remember but continually to confront the anguish and mystery of the Holocaust. His writings have come to embody the witness and the crisis of facing this event.

This article is an attempt to extend this confrontation by addressing Wiesel's works themselves and the manifold issues that arise out of them and the Holocaust Universe at large. Since it is by now clear that no single "approach" to this subject will carry inquiry far enough, the editors have attempted to assemble studies of a variety of kinds—philosophical, literary, theological, and psychiatric. These several disciplines begin to show us the presence in Wiesel's work of both a remarkable

phenomenology of the event and, at the same time, an unsettling and evocative commentary on its implications. Wiesel's own contribution to this volume, "Why I Write" adds what none of the other contributors could have provided—the most personal kind of reflection on what it means to be a writer after Auschwitz.

The growing interest in Wiesel's writings came to expression first in a conference on "The Work of Elie Wiesel and the Holocaust Universe", convened by the National Jewish Conference Center in New York in September 1976. This conference brought together three generations of writers and scholars from all over the world and made manifest Wiesel's far-reaching influence as an author whose sustained literary encounter with the Holocaust carries implications for every field of scholarly work. The article seeks to extend and deepen the exploration of Wiesel's corpus and the problematics of Holocaust literature. Through it, we hope to encourage others to enter into a similar engagement even at the risk of disturbing long-held beliefs, attitudes and methods. As Wiesel has taught us, anything less will be an inadequate response to living after this event.

Clearly we are not dealing with a physical impossibility here, but rather a moral prohibition, which Thomas Tresize further characterizes a taboo (2001. P.43). Part of the inspiration behind this taboo is a moral problem of representation. As Lang notes: 'by definition there must be a difference between a representation and its object unrepresented with the former adding its own version to the "original" it represents. (2000 p.51.). In other words, any representation of the Holocaust in literature or art can never adequately convey the reality of the lived experience; it will always be bound to convey a representation of that experience particular to the situation in which the representation was produced. Lang goes on to qualify any form of representation as essentially a 'representation-as' in which case we can see that any representation is subjective: whereas a survivor of Auschwitz might represent the holocaust as a living hell, a surviving SS officer might represent the same experience as an excellent career opportunity. All representation-as for Lang, imply the possibility of other representations-as. The question



thus arises: if no form of representation is adequate to convey the extreme pain and suffering experienced by the Holocaust survivor (that experience itself is the mediation of the original object. (van Alphen, 1999 p 27). Is it morally and /or ethically correct to attempt representation at all? As a corollary to this question, who precisely should make that decision? Arguably that choice may fall to the survivors themselves, but in making this supposition we forget that although linked by collective memory, each survivor of the holocaust is an individual and has his/her own idea of what is/is not appropriate. Adorno in some cases believe that the very question of the representation of the holocaust is an offence. He certainly believes so whilst he argues that representation in art and literature is a necessity, in that it is preferable to forgetting or revising what happened, it is also by its very nature abhorrent:

The so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it. The morality that forbids art to forget this for a second slides off into the abyss of its opposite. By this alone the injustice done to the victims, yet no art that avoided the victims could stand up to the demands of justice. (Adorno, 1997, p252). To render the Holocaust experience, a work of literature, to express it through written language, necessarily imports some meaning to it, which it arguably does not warrant.

The 'Holocaust' is the term that generally describes the genocide of European Jews during the World War II. Between 1941 and 1945, six million Jews were systematically murdered by the Nazis and their allies. Holocaust is unique in terms of its extraordinary scale and intensity. In regards to other groups which were persecuted and killed by the Nazis (e.g. Roma, Soviet soldiers, and Communists, disabled people, gays, Jehovah's Witness), some scholars include them in the definition of the Holocaust but some others define it only as a genocide of Jews. The phenomenon of Holocaust denial is mainly associated with the Jewish Holocaust. Holocaust denial is the most extreme form of "historical revisionism" as regards World War II. Soon after the War there were the first attempts to deny

the fact of the Holocaust. Holocaust denial or negationism is the most extreme form of so called "historical revisionism" as regarding World War II. Soon after the War, there were the first attempts to deny the fact of the Holocaust.

The phenomenon of Holocaust denial won some popularity especially among former supporters and participants of the Nazi regime and European collaborationist movements who refused to accept responsibility for the crime of the genocide by denying them. Holocaust denial was as a set of historical claims presenting the Nazi regime in a favorable light. It was created as a result of political needs of neo-Nazi movements. Nevertheless, Holocaust denial as a phenomenon has developed and received much more attention since the 1990s when it became more widespread and sophisticated. Arguably, two aspects are crucial here. One is the gradual disappearance of the generation of the witnesses of Nazi crimes. Second one is the collapse of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern and the international tendency to re-write those parts of history that were previously suppressed or manipulated by them. Some Holocaust deniers use this context in order to pose as 'independent' researchers who uncover some hitherto hidden aspects of history.

The general aim of the Holocaust denial is to challenge and ridicule the history of Jewish suffering during the war. The deniers want to rehabilitate fascism by denying its past. Holocaust denial is the most extreme form of anti-Semitism and it shows how the system of anti-Semitic thought functions. Holocaust denial is therefore a result of classical anti-Semitism. As Ken Stern writes in his book *Anti-Semitism Today* "Holocaust denial is about Jews, not about Holocaust" (2006). Is there such a thing as Holocaust literature? By that Alvin H. Rosenfeld meant a literature that is more than topical, as, say, a literature of the sea or a literature of warfare might be considered mere topical. For if by Holocaust literature all we have in mind is a large but loosely arranged collection of novels, poems, essays, and plays about a subject, even one so enormous and unnerving as the Nazi genocide against the Jews, then our concerns while interesting and legitimate enough are not truly compelling. Topical studies of all



kinds – of the family, of slavery, of the environment of World War I or World War II—abound today, and while they can be individually engaging, their value does not and cannot transcend the limitations inherent in their definitions as topical literatures.

By contrast and it must be conceived of as being one of the first degree – Holocaust literature occupies another sphere of study, one that is not only topical in interest but that extends so far as to force us to contemplate what may be fundamental changes in our modes of perception and expression, our altered way of being in the world. What needs to be stressed is this: the nature and magnitude of the Holocaust were such as to mark, almost certainly, the end of one era of consciousness and the beginning of another. And just as we designate and give validity to such concepts as “the Renaissance mind” and “romantic sensibility” and “the Victorian temper” to indicate earlier shifts in awareness and expression, so too, should we begin to see that Holocaust literature is striving to express a new order of consciousness, a recognizable shift in being. The human imagination after Auschwitz is simply not the same as it was before. Put another way, the addition to our vocabulary of the very word Auschwitz means that today we know things that before could not even be imagined. How we are to live with such knowledge is another matter, but there is no denying that possessed with it or by it, we are, in some basic ways, different from what we might have been before.

Different because we have been compelled to occupy a realm of experience—acknowledge a realism – that previously was understood as that of private invention alone, a realm conceived of as being entirely separate from and of another kind than that which might ever cross with historical event. With the advent of Auschwitz, the necessary distance that once prevailed between even the most extreme imaginings and human occurrences closes. Following upon that closure, the eye opens to gaze unbelievably on scenes of life and death, death and life, which the mind cannot rationally accept or the imagination take in and adequately record. Stunned by the awesomeness and pressure of event, the imagination comes to one of its periodic endings; undoubtedly it also stands at the threshold of new and more difficult beginnings. Holocaust literature,

situated at this point of threshold, is a chronicle of the human spirit's most turbulent strivings with an immense historical and metaphysical weight.

It is all too strange but, at the same time, it is powerfully affecting. The poem, as we come to realize, is an assertion about a negation, a double negation: that of man and that of God. Both in this poem are not. Is there a triple negation implied, the third loss being that of poetry itself? For what kind of poetry can we have that eschews the metaphorical use of language? The answer to this question compels us to recognize one of the deepest and most distinguishing characteristics of Holocaust literature and to state what may be one of its abiding laws: there are no metaphors for Auschwitz, just as Auschwitz is not a metaphor for anything else. Why is that the case? Because the flames were real flames, the ashes only ashes, the smoke always and only smoke. If one wants “meaning” out of that, it can only be this: at Auschwitz humanity incinerated its own heart. Otherwise the burnings do not lend themselves to metaphor, simile, or symbol – to likeness or association with anything else. They can only “be” or “mean” what they in fact were: the death of the Jews.

Wiesel hurls at his readers some unpalatable truths, which a world raised on a different diet has difficulty digesting. According to Wiesel, Auschwitz signifies not only the failure of two thousand years of Christian civilization, but also the defeat of the intellect that wants to find a meaning. What Auschwitz embodied has nothing. The executioner killed for nothing, the victim died for nothing. No God ordered the one to prepare the stake, nor the other to mount it. During the Middle Ages, the Jews, when they chose death, were convinced that by their sacrifice they were glorifying and sanctifying God's name. At Auschwitz the sacrifices were without point, without faith, without divine inspiration. If the suffering of one human being has any meaning, that of six million has none.

This is a bizarre challenge for a reader nurtured on life, hope, and the future. “Stebespieler sind wir”, says Nelly Sachs in a moving poem. “Those who had no papers entitling them to live lined up to die,” begins “Soul of Wood”, Jakov Lind's most famous short story. “Dead though they be, the dead



do not immediately becomes ageless”, begins Pierre Gascar’s “Season of the Dead”. And we all know the final lines from Elie Wiesel’s first and still one of his finest works *Night*: “From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes as they stared back into mine has never left me”. Multiply that corpse a hundred, a thousand, a million fold, and we will understand more clearly what is implied when we are told that because of the Holocaust, “the imagination has come to one of its periodic endings and stands at the threshold of new and more difficult beginnings”.

The burden of the dead, of such dead, which the Holocaust has bequeathed to us and which is present on nearly every page Elie Wiesel has written, was anticipated before the invention of the extermination camp. In an essay unpretentiously called “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death”, published in 1915 shortly after the outbreak of World War I, Sigmund Freud recognized how a conflict of such dimensions would disfigure conventional assumptions about dying. We “cannot maintain our former attitude towards death,” Freud insisted, “and we have not yet discovered a new one”. Thirty years later the Holocaust confirmed Freud’s intuition, for he had also argued that until men found a way of absorbing into their cultural assumptions the phenomenon of mass dying for no justifiable reason, they would continue to live psychologically beyond their means. One of the main problems of the Holocaust writer is to find a secure place, somewhere between memory and imagination, for all those corpses who, like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, cry out against the injustice of their end, but for whom no act of vengeance or ritual of remembrance exist sufficient to bring them to a peaceful place to rest. So their choruses of voices continue to haunt Wiesel’s pages from “*Night*” to “*Ani Maamin*”, and thus the minds of his readers. “Our dead take with them to the hereafter not only clothes and food” says the narrator in *The Accident* “but also the future of their descendants. Nothing remains below”. In their frozen world the dead have nothing to do but judge”, says the narrator in *Dawn*, “and because they have no sense of past or future they judge without pity. It’s very heavy work carrying the dead on your back”. “To live is to betray the dead”, thinks Gregor in *The Gates*

of the Forest, expressing one of Wiesel’s favorite themes.

Reading back through Elie Wiesel’s work, Terrence Des Pres was reminded anew how much and how diversely he has written. In addition to the novels there are the essays, the dialogues, the pieces of personal testimony, and more recently, the finely crafted parables, portraits, and legends. Wiesel’s output in other words, is considerable yet from a critical point of view he continues to occupy an odd position. As a survivor and a witness he is accorded with a respect bordered on reverence. But as an artist Wiesel has received little recognition, especially when compared with contemporaries like Malamud and Bellow. Neither the author’s life nor the import of actual events, from this point of view, should be allowed to matter when judging a work of art.

One of the special characteristics of Wiesel’s writings is his wisdom, and wisdom as T.S. Eliot pointed out in his essay on Goethe, is something very few of us possess, something not to be confused with intelligence or mere worldly knowing. In Wiesel’s case moreover it is a wisdom born out of silence and despair. He who speaks does not know, he who knows does not speak. Certainly Wiesel knows this and by trying to transform silence into a mode of utterance he has revealed to us one of the most striking consequences of the Holocaust. Another important aspect of his work is his tone. We actually hear the silence from which he speaks, and we cannot avoid the sense of words uttered in despair even while, by the very act of speaking, this despair even while, by the very act of speaking, this despair is made to join with, if not hope, then something beyond hope, which survives and persists and is all the more convincing because there is no false comfort.

Speaking on “the impact of the Holocaust” in his *Legends of Our Time*, Wiesel says that those who lived through holocaust lack objectivity; they will always take the side of man confronted with the Absolute. As for the scholars and philosophers of every genre who had the opportunity to observe the tragedy, they will – if they are capable of sincerity and humility—withdraw without daring to enter into the heart of the matter; and if they are not, well, who cares about their grandiloquent conclusions?



Auschwitz, by definition, is beyond their vocabulary. Wiesel means that in this special case, our traditional categories of value and interpretation have been demolished by the very event they would seek to explain. The negativity of the Holocaust was so total, the event so massive and complete in itself, that concepts drawn from tradition and civilized experience—in short, the key terms of our world—become, if not useless, then extremely problematic. Reading certain books by survivors who do not know each other, one wonders: they describe the same scenes, the same partings. It all begins and it all ends the same way. It has all been said, yet all remains to be said.

Elie Wiesel has said “I write in order to understand as much as to be understood” (www.chicagonow.com). A full understanding of Wiesel’s authorship would entail a full understanding of the Holocaust. The latter, however, is not to be found. To do so would be to confer meaning on events so as to falsify them, so as to make them even more horrible and thus even less understandable. That point is one of the messages that Wiesel wants to drive home, and so a single explanation of his works will not do. Neither will a thousand. Every explanation is too little and too much, and yet we should try to tell a tale that cannot be told.

Many stories live in Wiesel’s thought as it stands recorded in the books that move from *Night* (1960) to *Messengers of God* (1976). Each story has its own integrity. At the same time all of them are aspects of a single tale that Wiesel wants to share. That single tale could be described by focusing on the repetition of characters met in the pages of his books: the Zalmens, Moshes, the young men trying to find out who they are and what they can become, and the strange teachers they encounter as if by fated appointment. The tale could be summarized by analyzing events where human bodies and souls are stretched to the breaking point even as there is affirmed: fathers and sons embracing, one person saving another’s life by sharing words, silences, songs, tears, tears, laughter, and bread; executions and madness; acts of rebellion and violence, the drama of faith made persistent and passionate, even as its very possibility is threatened by God. John K. Roth’s point of view on Wiesel’s writings then, does

not entail the thesis that they undergo some systematic evolution from one perspective to the other. Roth finds no clearly delineated stages—early middle and late- in his (Wiesel’s) works to date. He detects no master plan that the author might explain in detail if he chose to do so. Instead there is one story told in hundred different ways.

On the other hand, it is important to note that there are many books now written by Wiesel and that they are different. There is change of emphasis, perspective, and content as one piece follows another. The journey has taken Wiesel from the despair of *Night* where God dies at Auschwitz, to the theodicy of *Messengers of God* has been long: all the way from Sighet to New York City, all the way from smoke and ashes to best selling editions and rave reviews. Still it is also a journey within the same Holocaust Universe, and the development in terms of dialectical elaboration and paradoxical continuity is more striking than are the sharp breaks or turnings in his thoughts. Dividing Wiesel’s writings into four categories which in some cases mix and overlap the works chronologically.

Once Rossette C. Lamont asked Wiesel how he learnt French and Wiesel spontaneously replied that it was through silence. Wiesel added that when he left the camp and was taken with other surviving children and adolescents to a special home for them in France, he simply listened to this language. A French philosopher five years older than Wiesel would visit the home. Wiesel taught him Judaism to him and he taught French to Wiesel. The Jewish tradition by its very essence prepares only to coincide spiritually with the past suffering of the nation, making the tragedy of the past one’s own present pain. Wiesel implies, both in his works and in his life, that for the Jew the ever- renewed need for transmission is a natural function, even when it addresses itself to the unnatural, the barbaric. In “The Story of a Promise” one of the numerous inspired madmen and prophetic seers who haunt the recent oeuvre of Wiesel exclaims:

“Jews, my brothers heed my words. I ask nothing else of you: do not reject my words. We do not have the right to survive. Who would testify for us, if not ourselves? One day all will have to be told, and no one will speak in our place. We will have to raise a



howl against the madmen of death for no one will howl for us".

In an open letter to "A Young Jew of Today" one of the young "liberals" in France and in Western Europe who feels guilty in regard to the fate of the camp confined Arabs, Wiesel equates the Jew with the act of questioning. The Jew must not only continue to posit questions but to posit the ultimate question by being. His presence is a single question: "Why and how does one survive in a universe which negates you?" Although an answer to this interrogation does not exist, it could perhaps be sought in the very vitality of questioning. Thus, if God has chosen to question man through the Holocaust, as some theologians seek to affirm, it is the privilege of man not to stop questioning God. "To be a Jew is to work for the survival of a people who has entrusted you with a collective memory", says Wiesel. Thus a Jew who has survived the Holocaust is bound to become a writer in order to establish his solidarity with those who inhabit his very being.

Most of the European literature of the Holocaust focuses on the individual in his struggle for survival, or in degrees of his acquiescence in the conventional system. The self in its anomy is, then, the primary reference, personal survival is the ultimate goal, and death, disintegration of self, or submission to the system is the ultimate defeat. In this context certain writers appear unique in that they rely not on biography but on Jewish history to infuse their work with the structural continuity between past present and a possible future. Not unlike the writers for whom the self is the primary arbiter of experience, the Holocaust survivors writing with the Hebraic tradition are motivated at least in part by the need to convey and legitimate their own sufferings and to commemorate the lives and deaths of their companions. Additionally, they are responding to the imperative to link their own fate to the destiny of Israel, wherein the self, even in death, is submerged and retained in the collective consciousness – to locate the Holocaust along the spectrum of Jewish suffering. In some cases, they also commemorate the way of life and the cultural values that were extinguished along with those who held them. Those European writers who share this perspective, such as Elie Wiesel, Nelly Sachs, and Paul

Celan, should be read with reference to Hebrew and Yiddish writers all of whom draw upon a vocabulary that has been incorporated into the lexicon of Jewish martyrology.

As Wiesel writes in one essay: Without God the attempted annihilation of European Jewry would be relevant only on the level of history –another episode in another inhumane war and what war is not inhumane? and would not require a total revision of seemingly axiomatic values and concepts. Remove its Jewish aspects and Auschwitz appears devoid of mystery. The topic "being a psychiatrist and a survivor" allows L. Eitinger to start with a few personal remarks. Any person who has been exposed to extraordinary events in his life and at the same time has been used to working systematically will feel the need to see these experiences in a more general context and in the total frame of reference of his life. It was true in Eitinger's case. He studied medicine and made plans for a future in a milieu that could be considered safe, but suddenly he found himself refugee in a foreign country where he did not know anybody and where nobody was interested in knowing him or anything about him. Without any psychological preparation, Eitinger was confronted with the problems of the prewar refugee, i.e. a person who was considered with suspicion because nobody would believe what he had to tell about the persecutions he had escaped from.

After a few months, however the Nazis were in Norway too, and Eitinger was on the run again. Eventually he was caught. In the beginning Eitinger went through several Norwegian prisons, which at the time he considered terrible, but which later on he remembered almost as convalescent homes. Afterwards there were prisons in Norway administered by German police, then several concentration camps in Norway, and at the end Auschwitz. Here one lived literally in the shadow of the chimneys of the crematoria and their steady stream of smoke, which became fatter and darker and more threatening every time a new transport of prisoners arrived, which happened nearly every day. But everyday one could see hundreds of killed and thousands of maltreated prisoners in the most hopeless conditions and situations. Even here there were some who were able to keep their fighting



spirit, inspite of everything. Others gave in, overwhelmed by the seemingly a desperate situation. Brutality, under nourishment, disease, vermin, the prisoner's recklessness toward each other, but also their nearly infinite readiness to help each other, were impressions one could not avoid observing and registering psychiatrist, there was one problem that was nearly always considered when it was possible to raise oneself over daily worries and over the despair: What will the future be—if there will be one – how will one and all those people who have suffered so incredibly, who were humiliated to a degree never heard of before, how will they be able to adjust themselves again in the new world to come?

That it would be a new and better world—there was no doubt about this in their hearts. After the war was over, many former prisoners felt a deep urge to tell the world what really had been going on in the camps. Eitinger has read many of the reports and accounts but most of them have been of little value to him. Nearly all were ego centric and only very few had a wider horizon. The two main questions of the camp remained unanswered and unsolved. How could those people live again under “normal circumstances”, and what actually was the meaning of this holocaust they had been through?

The reason for Wiesel's writing was not to go mad. Or, on the contrary, to touch the bottom of madness. Speaking of the solitude of the survivor, the great Yiddish and Hebrew poet and thinker Aaron Zeitlin addresses those who have left him: his father dead; his brother dead; his friends dead: He says that the whole family abandoned him and they all joined together without him. He was all alone making words. So did Wiesel like Aaron said and wrote words reluctantly. There are easier occupations, far more pleasant ones. But for the survivor, writing is not a profession, but an occupation, a duty. Camus calls it “an honor”. As he puts it: “I entered literature through worship”. Other writers said: “Through anger, through love”. Wiesel says that he speaks through silence.

Wiesel never intended to be a philosopher, or a theologian. The only role he sought was that of witness. He believed that, having survived by chance, Wiesel was duty bound to give meaning to his

survival, to justify each moment of his life. He knew the story had to be told. Not to transmit an experience was to betray it; this is what Jewish tradition teaches the Jews. “When Israel is in exile, so is the word,” says the Zohar. All words seemed inadequate, worn, foolish, lifeless, whereas he wanted them to be searing. Wiesel was searching a fresh vocabulary a primeval language. The language of Night was not human; it was primitive, almost animal—hoarse shouting, screams, muffled moaning, savage howling, the sound of beating. A brute striking wildly, a body falling, an officer raises his arm and a whole community walks toward a common grave; a soldier shrugs his shoulders, and a thousand families are torn apart, to be reunited only by death. This is the concentration camp language. It negated all other languages and took its place.

The fear of forgetting: the main obsession of all those who have passed through the universe of the damned. The enemy counted on people's disbelief and forgetfulness. How could one foil this plot? And if memory grew hollow, empty of substance, what would happen to all they had accumulated along the way? This was why Wiesel writes certain things rather than others: to remain faithful. Of course, there are times of doubt for the survivor, times when one would give in to weakness, or long for comfort. Wiesel hears a voice within him telling him to stop mourning the past. He too wants to sing of love and of its magic. He also wanted to celebrate the sun, and the dawn that heralds the sun. He likes to shout well that he was open to laughter and joy, capable of victory. One must make a choice; he must remain faithful. Wiesel says that the writer in him wants to remain loyal, it is because, it is true. This sentiment moves all survivors; they owe nothing to anyone, but everything to the dead. Wiesel owes them his roots and memory. He is duty bound to serve as their emissary, transmitting the history of their disappearance, even if it disturbs, even if it brings pain. Not to do so would be to betray them, and thus Wiesel himself. And since Wiesel feels incapable of communicating their cry by shouting, he simply looks at them and he writes. While writing he questions them as he questions himself. He writes to understand as much as to be understood.



Jewish children haunt Wiesel's writings. He sees them again and again. He will always see them. Hounded, humiliated, bent like old men who surround them as though to protect them, unable to do so. They are thirsty, the children, and there is no one to give them water. There is none to give a crust of bread to the hungry children. He thinks that he belongs to them. People tend to think that a murderer weakens when facing a child. The child reawakens the killer's lost humanity. The killer can no longer kill the child before him, the child inside him. It's not the case with Jewish children. They had no effect upon the killers, or upon the world, or upon God. Apart from all that Auschwitz and Treblinka cannot be told. Wiesel had tried enough to tell. After the liberation, illusion shaped one's hopes. The Jews were convinced that a new world would be built upon the ruins of Europe. A new civilization was to see the light. No more wars, no more hate, no more intolerance, no fanaticism anywhere. And all this is because the witness would speak. They will continue, for they cannot do otherwise. When man, in his grief falls silent, Goethe says, and then God gives him the strength to sing his sorrows.

From that moment on, he may no longer choose not to sing, whether his song is heard or not. What matters is to struggle against silence with words, or through another form of silence. What matters is to gather smile here and there, a tear here and there, a word here and there, and thus justify the faith placed in the readers, a long time ago by so many victims. Wiesel writes to wrench those victims from oblivion and to help the dead vanquish death (*Why I Write*).

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