

## ‘Paradoxical Doubleness’ in Elie Wiesel’s Night

### *Elie Wiesel’in Gece Adlı Romanı’ndaki Paradoksal Çift Anlamlılık*

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**Abstract:** Elie Wiesel’s (1977) oft quoted statement “if the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the Epistle, the Renaissance the Sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony” (9) captures the centrality of the notion of bearing witness to key formal developments within twentieth century literature. Although this new genre underlines a range of issues, such as the importance of authorship or the author’s relationship to history, or the historical text, it problematizes the issue of “identification”. Yet the problem with the issue of identification in Holocaust testimonies is that the form encourages identification, as it is commonly written in realist style of the nineteenth century, while the content prohibits it, as otherwise it would generalize the experience of the protagonist. Robert Eaglestone calls this problem as “paradoxical doubleness” (119). This article takes the cue from Eaglestone’s proposition to suggest that in Wiesel’s memoir *Night*, the use of a child protagonist opens a path for the reader to identify with the protagonist, as his narrative voice lacks self-consciousness, and thus is characterized by its objectivity, observant and henceforth, didactic, imitating a 19<sup>th</sup> century realist discourse. Yet he intentionally disrupts the moments of reality with fantasy, which makes it his own personal experience thus avoiding any kind of identification. In consequence, this article will claim that Wiesel both encourages and discourages identification, so that he will both testify to the reality of the camps while creating a powerful personal story. By so doing, he is able to find a resolution to the fundamental debate of how to narrate camp experiences that are beyond language.

**Keywords:** Identification, Testimony Writing, Doubleness, Reality, Imagination

**Öz:** Tanıklık etme kavramının 20. yüzyıl edebiyatındaki temel gelişmeler içerisindeki önemini, Elie Wiesel’in (1977) sık alıntılanan “eğer trajediyi Hellenler; risaleyi Romalılar, soneyi Rönesans ortaya çıkardıysa, bizim kuşağımız ise yeni bir tür edebiyat icat etti: tanıklık edebiyatı” (9) ifadesi yansıtmaktadır. Her ne kadar bu yeni tür, yazarlığın önemi veya yazarın tarih gibi konularla ilişkisine vurgu yapsa da, aslında “özdeşim” konusunu irdelemektedir. Soykırım ifadeleri, biçim olarak 19. yüzyılın gerçekçi yazımıyla özdeşleşmiş olsa da; içerik kahramanın deneyimini genelleyeceği için bu özdeşleşmeyi engellemektedir. Dolayısıyla, özdeşim ile ilgili bir problem ortaya çıkmaktadır ve Robert Eaglestone bu durumu “paradoksal çift anlamlılık” olarak adlandırmaktadır. Bu makale, Eaglestone’un ifadesini örnek alarak, Wiesel’in anı yazısı olan *Gece* eserinde çocuk kahramanın yer almasının ve kahramanın öz bilince sahip olmamasının okuyucunun kahraman ile özdeşleşmesine yol açtığını tartışmaktadır. Bu yüzden de eser, objektif, gözlemci ve de öğretici özellikler taşıyan 19. yüzyıl gerçekçi söylemini andıran özelliklerle nitelendirilmiştir. Fakat kahraman, gerçeklik anlarını hayal gücü ile bölmektedir. Bu nedenle, bu makale yazarın bir anlatım aracı olarak “paradoksal çift anlamlılığı” kullanarak, hem kampların gerçekliğini tarihsel bir bakış açısı ile yansıttığını, aynı zamanda da kişisel bir hikâye yaratarak kendi tecrübesini genelleme yapmadan anlattığını savunacaktır. Bunu yaparak, yazar Soykırım edebiyatının temel sorunu olan, soykırımın dil ötesinde bir tecrübe olduğunu bu sebeple de anlatılmasının çok zor olmasını çözümlenmiştir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Özdeşim, Tanıklık Yazısı, Çift Anlamlılık, Gerçeklik, Hayal Gücü

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*If we stop remembering, we stop being.*

Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* is about a young survivor, mute and passive, who eventually turns himself into an articulate messenger. As a first generation writer of the Holocaust, Wiesel felt it his "moral obligation to try to prevent the enemy from enjoying one last victory by allowing his crimes to be erased from human memory" (1977, viii). So he writes to the world about the massive scale of the violence, horror and death the inmates experienced inside the camps. Thus, for him writing serves as a tribute to the dead in the camps, the fulfillment of the promise that they would never be forgotten and that the suffering of the Jews will never be erased from history. As a result, it also meant that by writing about the Holocaust, the brutalities of the Nazis would never be forgotten either. Thus, such literature is a protest against the inhumanity of the Nazis and expresses an ethical imperative to not allow humanity to drift into such degradation again. The Jews will not stop remembering the Holocaust for it is a part of their collective identity, but at the same time they will not allow the world forget about what the non-Jews were once blind to. In Wiesel's memoir, in addition to the relationship between the author and the subject that signals the author's determination in remembering, the reader's identification with the protagonist is also of great importance. Knowing that Holocaust testimonies are both subjective and objective, it is the writer's responsibility to make the world see what happened inside the camps while also preserving the uniqueness of the individual experience, as it is the survivor's belief that their experience should not be generalized and normalized through identification. Therefore, the writer aims at both getting the reader closer to the historical reality and distancing them from the personal struggle. Eaglestone calls this "paradoxical doubleness" (119) where "the form leads to identification while the content and the surrounding material lead away from it" (119) and he explains that the reason why the content prohibits identification is, as otherwise it would universalize the experience of the protagonist. This article will take the cue from Eaglestone's proposition to argue that in Wiesel's memoir *Night*, identity as a child mutes the identity as a Jew and it allows non-survivors as well as non-Jews to identify with the character. However, what the reader's witness in the memoir is that the child's authentic perspective is only available in the presentation of the pre-war time. Moving on to the period of ghettos and camps, the child's perspective is mediated by an adult view. Therefore, this article will conclude, the use of a child's view and how it is formed is in parallel with the reader's ability to identify and the author's strategy to keep this identification under control. Therefore, in this article the ways in which the author both encourages and discourages identification will be analyzed in order to conclude that the novel both testifies the reality of the camps while creating a powerful personal story, as a resolution to the dilemma of writing or not writing about the Holocaust.

The article will start with a brief description of Holocaust testimony as a genre. This section puts forward the dilemmas among the Holocaust literati with the purpose of suggesting that as a narrative strategy identification can be used to make the world acknowledge an event that is incomprehensible. Following the discussion of the genre, the analysis of the novel starts with an introduction to the history of the ghettos and concentration camps of Central and Eastern Europe to show how the language used by Hitler's government misled the population into believing that the camps were places for re-educating individuals. Their reintegration into society suggests that this perspective was able to cultivate a sense of optimism inside the ghettos that prevented the Jews from being able to foresee forthcoming events, as presented in the first part of the novel. The second part of this article will focus on the novel's demonstration of the camps, to show

that because of their optimism the Jews appeared defenseless to what lay ahead and were faced with various horrors. This section will suggest that lack of knowledge about the realities of life turned everybody into metaphorical children and that their growth into adulthood is only possible by opening one's eyes to the realities outside their homes, and that for Jews, the regime was working tirelessly to ensure that the only reality in their lives was death. Yet these brutalities were not only from the Nazis towards the Jews, but also from Jews to other Jews; Wiesel does not only testify to the brutality of the Nazi regime but also to that of those Jews who became embroiled within it, excoriating the fearful response that the only way of surviving is the destruction and elimination of the other. Therefore, the first and the second part of the memoir will be a presentation on Wiesel's way of allowing his readers to identify with the character through the historical content and the descriptive form that leads the reader to identify with the protagonist. Yet, when the last part of the memoir is analyzed, the reader faces a more emotional and less didactic style, which creates a less historical but a more personal experience, emphasizing the uniqueness of the writer's past.

Maurice Blanchot (1997) notes that the testimony of Holocaust survivors are "not read and consumed in the same way as other books" (110). That is why Elie Wiesel states (1977) "if the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the Epistle, the Renaissance the Sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony" (9), and it captures the centrality of the notion of bearing witness in key formal developments within twentieth century literature. As Robert Eaglestone suggests, this genre of literature is new, not because there were no personal accounts prior to his generation, but as Alvin H. Rosenfeld (1988) claims "the human imagination after Auschwitz is simply not the same before" (13). Gerald Levin (1982) also points that "Holocaust literature does possess characteristics and form as well as subject and can be described as a genre" (52), and therefore, "it is to be read with specific range of questions, responses, demands and issues in mind" (52). Furthermore "the more we look closely at [Holocaust] texts, the more they show us that, unwittingly, we do not even know what testimony is and that, in any case, it is not simply what we thought we knew it was" (Young 1998, 16).

Behind Wiesel's comment that Holocaust literature is a new genre that the Jews invented, is the horror of the Holocaust and the compulsive need of a generation of survivors to tell their personal stories of these events. Thus they were the pioneers, specifically, of Holocaust testimony, not only to twentieth century history, but to twentieth century literary history as well. This new sub-genre of literature is the outcome of the survivors' responses to the ordeal that they experienced and a morally inspired commitment to remember, believing that "[t]o forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time" (Wiesel 2006, xv). Although they strongly believe in the necessity of remembering and transferring their experience to the next generation, they still want to keep the story of their survival as their personal experience, as they believe that no one can understand what the camp means and what it entails.

Raul Hilberg (1992) points out that the survivors have a special kind of knowledge about the Holocaust and

*[h]ave referred to it in expressions like 'planet Auschwitz' and in such sentences as 'Those who were not there cannot imagine what it was like'. Clearly, they were there, and thus they are set apart or set themselves apart from anyone who did not share their fate The outsider can never cross this divide ad can never grasp their experience (187).*

This experience is unique to the survivors because as Wiesel (1990) comments they “speak in code, we survivors, and this code cannot be broken, cannot be deciphered, not by you no matter how much you try” (7). As an example Jorge Semprun (1997), a survivor, explains an incident after his liberation. He meets three allied officers and comments that

*[t]hey can't really understand. They probably know what the words mean. Smoke: you know what it is, you think you know. Throughout historic memory, there have been smoking chimneys. Sometimes country hearths, domestic firesides, the smoke of household gods. This smoke, however, is beyond them. And they will never really understand. Not these people, that day. Nor all the others, afterward. They will never know- they cannot imagine, whatever their good intentions may be (10-11).*

What is acknowledged through this example is that the essence of the evil the survivors faced in the camps are incomprehensible but should nevertheless be told to the following generation, so that it will not be forgotten. Therefore, holocaust memoir writing carries a problem about how to write about it. The problem is about the uniqueness of the experience and the seemingly incompatible desire of wishing and detesting to write about it. Norma Rosen (1992) proposes that “we are analogy-making species, with minds that learn via connection” (50) and therefore, writing about the Holocaust “is not universalizing, it is Judaizing” (5). As a result, identification as a narrative strategy bring the reader close to the subject, by encouraging the reader to imitate the relationship between the author and the subject.

Although Holocaust testimony as a genre underlines a range of issues, such as the importance of authorship or the author’s relationship to history, or the historical text, it problematizes the issue of “identification” both for the reader and for the author. In “Identification and the Genre of Testimony,” Robert Eaglestone (2002) outlines a taxonomy of Holocaust testimony and claims “identification” to be one of the most important tenets as it “is the ‘human interest’ in the news story, the character in the novel with whom the reader feels most ‘at home’” (118). John Berryman (1976) explains that identification is “learning what it is like to be, or pretend to be, another person” (126). Diana Fuss (1955) also considers identification as “the origin of some of our most powerful, enduring and deeply felt pleasures” (2). Yet the issue of identification in Holocaust testimonies is problematic both for the reader and the author. In the case of the reader, the traditional understanding of identification as Fuss previously claimed is never elating, as their identification is with a survivor who is physically alive but psychologically dead. On the other hand, for the author this identification is necessary but should also be avoided. As a result, it can be concluded that, in Holocaust testimonies, more than the author’s relationship, the reader’s connection with the events and how this connection is established, controlled and limited by the author, is significant. Additionally, this limitation is not achieved through the subject, but through the way it is narrated. Looking at Holocaust testimonies, the plotline is always the same, the story opens with the presentation of the prewar period, then moves on to the period of ghettos and concentration camps and finishes with the victim’s survival.

Wiesel’s memoir follows the same journey. It opens in 1941, just prior to when its Jewish protagonists were confined within a small ghetto in Sighet, Transylvania, and continues with their deportation to Auschwitz in 1944 ending on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945, when the American tanks “stood at the gates of Buchenwald” (115). The book recounts the brutal murdering of many Jews, including his father. Most of the commentary on the book focuses upon the theme of silence in its theological dimension, in other words God’s silence in the face of the evil suffered by the Jews. The central character is profoundly religious at the start, yet he undergoes a sea

change in his religious faith over the course of events. Thus, Mark M. Anderson (2007) associates "the death of Wiesel's father to the death of God and the protagonist's loss of belief in a divinely ordered universe" (6). Likewise, Naomi Seidman (1996) suggests that "[i]n the felt absence of divine justice or compassion, silence becomes the agency of an immense, murderous power that permanently transforms the protagonist" (1). David Roskies (1989) goes further to claim that Wiesel is "presenting his experiences as a countercommentary on the Biblical texts" (515) and Isabel Wollaston explains (1992) "the emphasis in the Exodus narratives on the presence of God with his Chosen People is juxtaposed against the victim/survivor's experience of God's silence or absence" (52).

When the story begins in 1941 Eliezer is a 13 year-old Talmud student who spends much of his time praying. He has little conception of an outside world, of history or politics. He describes his hometown and family who run a store and that he has 3 siblings. Life was "normal", until he met Moishe the Beadle, who "had mastered the art of rendering himself insignificant, invisible" (3). He helped Eliezer to understand Kabbalah's mysteries. Then one day, all the foreign Jews were expelled from Sighet, and Moishe the Beadle was one of them. They were transported to the Galician forest, outside the Hungarian border, taken over by the Gestapo and were shot. Yet, he miraculously survived. Upon his return, he stopped talking about either God or Kaballah, instead he only talked about what he had seen in the forest. Nobody listened to him, saying that "he had gone mad" (7). No longer the messenger of God as he was at the beginning, Moishe is now a messenger of mass killings in the forest, of the Gestapo and, indeed "the story of his own death" (7). Yet nobody, including Eliezer, wants to listen to him and thinks he is mad regardless of his vexing outcry, "Jews, listen to me. It's all I ask of you, I don't want money or pity. Only listen to me" (7).

The function of Moishe the Beadle is significant. As Daniel Schwartz (1998) suggests, "Wiesel is using him as metonymy for himself in his present role as a protagonist" (225). Just like Moishe the Beadle, Wiesel the author is now the survivor who believes that "the witness has forced himself to testify. For the youth of today, for the children who will be born tomorrow. He does not want his past to become their future" (2006, xv). As a survivor, Wiesel feels that his testimony is not a response to what he experienced, but his responsibility for the Jewish memory (2006, xv), and consequently he presents Moishe as feeling the same responsibility to tell his story to his smaller, but highly vulnerable, Jewish community. Thus, at the beginning, Moishe the Beadle serves as a storyteller, who feels it his responsibility to warn people, as Wiesel himself. He is the messenger to bear witness for the dead. Yet, he acts as a poignant figure signaling an example of how unheeded warnings exacerbate the fate of the entire Jewish community. The fate of the Jews was partly sealed through their disbelief or a desire not to believe the shocking realities that were taking place. This human tendency left the population highly vulnerable and culminated in the historical fact that Jews were trapped into the camps entirely through the manipulations of the Nazi Regime.

Historically speaking, Hitler's dictatorship, and thus the establishment of the concentration camps can be traced in three phases. In the first phase, which begins with Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933, concentration camps were established so as to stop a Communist coup. Through the media coverage, the camps were regarded as "legitimate, necessary institution, in which aliens of the community would have to be re-educated" (Gellately 2001, 53). These aforementioned aliens were then, initially, the Communists; yet the meaning of aliens gradually expanded and eventually became more abstract and unlimited. Therefore, "for a long while the dominant opinion was that it was quite proper that 'enemies of state' be confined in a

concentration camp” (Gellately 2001, 53) as, in the expressed logic of the government, their function was to protect the population from criminals. However, by 1939, with the beginning of the war, the police state became more powerful and more murderous, and by the end of the war in 1944 and into 1945, “the dictatorship became more openly terroristic in effort to stave off the inevitable” (Gellately 2001, 3). Although the brutality of Hitler’s dictatorship increased tremendously, the social consensus that was held by the media, and thus by the majority of the German people, was in favor of Hitler; specifically, Nazism was never in doubt as a political system. Therefore, the horrors of the Final Solution were able to be implemented primarily through “[d]eception, diversion, and euphemism [which] shrouded Hitler’s true intent” (Koonz 1987, 347).

In addition to the language used by Hitler, the press was also deceptive about the realities inside the camps. As Christopher Isherwood (1954) claims, the newspapers were “becoming like copies of a school magazine” (203). State control of the media was total in Nazi Germany. Since the police was the determiner of what was to be announced or banned, camps were illustrated as places of order, spotlessly clean and as places which were disciplining individuals so that they could be reintegrated into society. As Hitler declared in his speech on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1937, “we hinder the continuation of the ruinous work of destruction in so far as, likely for the first time in their life, we hold them to useful tasks” (as cited in Gellately 2001, 64). Therefore, for a long time, concentration camps were seen as disciplinary institutions and as a place of education, or re-education since as Heinrich Mann claims “Everything is prefabricated, paid for, distorted” (as cited in Hartman, 2003, p. 19).

These historical details are imbedded in the novel through Wiesel’s use of a child protagonist as emblematic of the state of childish innocence many were under in the face of the intensifying pressure on the Jewish population. Just as Eliezer is cocooned in his immediate personal domestic environment, similarly the Jewish population in Sighet is closed to anything that is not immediately evident within the confines of their local community. Therefore, the Sighet population can be seen to be as naïve to reality as a child. Although their blindness is threatened by the Moishe character, they refuse to listen to or believe him, convinced that life around them seemed very normal. What is more, the author’s choice of a child protagonist reflects his intention of keeping the events as pure as possible, as the objectivity and the didactic form of his narrative can easily be visualized through a child’s vision. Wiesel’s preference of a child protagonist allows readers to easily see the events, but without the luggage of historical understanding. In the memoir, the reason why the child protagonist has such an important didactic role is that he is unable to make sense of the events occurring and to rationalize them. In “Children’s Voices and Viewpoints in Holocaust Literature” Sue Vice (2005) explains that “representing a child’s viewpoint usually means that an adult narrator describes how events seemed to his or her younger self” (11), therefore, she claims that the child perception is paraphrased by an adult narrator and the voice we hear is not an authentic child’s voice but mediated by an adult view. In parallel with Vice’s argument, what we see in *Night* is the existence of a child’s voice settled in an adult perspective. Thus, the emphasis is not on how the child Eliezer perceives the events, as the idea that a child may not be able to completely comprehend what happens around him due to the lack of luggage of historical understanding, but on the adult community which is as naïve as a child. This lack in comprehension of the community has an important ethical function for the reader as it conveys the crucial human message that one may not understand exactly the threat they face, or alternatively the horror they are helping to facilitate, until it is too late. This is what occurred inside the concentration camps, and this is the reason why it is not possible to write exactly what happened there. It was

time where everything was governed by irrationality, and nothing made sense. Thus, the memoir does not specifically present Eliezer as being naive but the whole community. Their political ignorance turns them into metaphorical children in the face of a new reality of the world whose true horror is only now being revealed to them through Moishe, which is subsequently dismissed as impossible.

The novel does not stop with Moishe's distress at his unheeded message of impending disaster but continues with the population's surprisingly naïve attitude towards the German soldiers. This implies that the success of Nazi propaganda was not limited to the more benign representations of the ghettos and camps but also included that of their soldiers. When a German officer arrives and lodges in one of the houses, he brings with him a box of chocolate as a gift for the owners of the house, with the host community finding him "charming, calm, likable, and polite" (10). Yet the intervention of the adult narrator makes the childish illusion of the town members reverberate loudly in the historically informed ears of the readers: "The Germans were already in our town, the Fascists were already in power, the verdict was already out -- and the Jews of Sighet were still smiling" (10). A further example of the same phenomena of self-deception occurs when the Jews of Sighet were made to wear the yellow star, and the reaction towards this verdict is the same: "The yellow star? So what? It's not lethal" (11). Even after the creation of two ghettos in Sighet, they did not see the barbed wire as hazardous, on the contrary they "felt this was not a bad thing; [they] were entirely among [themselves]" (11), hoping that by living together they would help each other to cope with the struggle until their country could be free from the Nazi dictatorship. That is why the adult narrator claims "the ghetto was ruled by neither German nor Jew, it was ruled by delusion" (12). What the reader knows is what such delusion signaled, because the likelihood of their survival was slowly eliminated purely by the hope of it ending soon.

As indicated above, two distinct narrative voices exist in *Night*: the child Eliezer, and the adult Eliezer. The function of the adult Eliezer's voice is to break the flow of the child narrator's story in order to insert his critical approach towards the childish optimism of the Jewish community in Sighet, and also to open a gap between the reader and the character. This interruption is also indicative of an irony inherent within the text's narrative genre. This irony stems from the paradoxical relationship between memory and history. In a nutshell, testimony is writing about the past as it is remembered, and as a sub-genre, Holocaust testimony is writing about the holocaust. So in a way, testimony is writing about a historical past in a way that it is witnessed and remembered. Therefore, memory intertwines with history and as Paul Ricoeur (2006, 147) argues;

*[...] we must not forget that everything starts, not from the archives, but from testimony, and that, whatever may be our lack of confidence in principle in such testimony, we have nothing better than testimony, in the final analysis, to assure ourselves that something did happen in the past, which someone attests having witnessed in person, and that the principal, and at times our only, recourse, when we lack other types of documentation, remains the confrontation among testimonies.*

In the light of Ricoeur's suggestion, one can claim that testimony is a genre that combines history with memory. Dominik LaCapra (1998) also claims that although memory and history are not the same "neither is it [memory] the opposite of history. Their relationship over time may vary, but not as a function of a categorical opposition between 'us' and 'them'" (p.19) According to Horace Engdahl (2002), testimony as a genre is "the most profound change in literature since the breakthrough of modernism" (6) because the approach to writing history

changed. It is no longer solely what happened that matters, but also how it is remembered and narrated. Testimony writers especially focus on the responsibility of remembering because they see remembering as in danger first due to the intention of “negat[ing] the reality of Auschwitz” (Bachmann 2009, 79), since there is a risk of forgetting the event with the passing of time, and their experience was so very unreal that it is difficult to render it in language. As Imre Kertez (1999) states “[the] concentration camp is imaginable only and exclusively as literature, never as reality” (253).

Holocaust testimony as a sub-genre is indeed preoccupied with the relationship between history and memory. According to Saul Friedländer (1979), “Memories are important because they can help bridge the gap between the abstract academic account, on the one hand, and the intensely painful and fragmented personal experience, on the other” (219). What is special about holocaust memory is that it does not belong to the past, but as Aleida Assman (2006) notes, it “is still very much of presence” (263). Holocaust testimonies are both factual and imaginative because it is the writers’ responsibility to make the world aware of what happened in the camps. This is the paradoxical relationship at the heart of this sub-genre: the compulsion to document and the compulsion to imagine. Only by imagining can both reader and writer come close to the reality of this unreal historical horror.

In *Night*, we have seen that the didactic 19<sup>th</sup> century realist form that is used at the beginning to give the historical background of the Holocaust makes it easier for the reader to identify himself with the child narrator. Moreover, the narrative flow is faithful to the unfolding of the historical events. However, Moishe the Beadle works as a device that allows history and fantasy to combine. In addition to its historical implication, the inclusion of Moishe the Beadle as a character also distances the reader from the novel’s historical, factual concern, as it distances the reader from identifying with the protagonist. In his autobiography *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (1995) Wiesel points out that Moishe “represents the first survivor. Sometimes he is confused- or I confuse him- with Moishe the drunkard or Moishe the madman” (14). In her article “Trauma, Postmodernism and Descent: Contemporary Holocaust Criticism in Britain, Holocaust Studies”, Sue Vice (2005) argues that Wiesel’s use of “I confuse him” suggests “both the leeway of fiction, but also the conflation and omission inevitable in testimony which can amount to fantasy” (102). This overlapping of memory and fantasy reminds the reader of the aesthetic peculiarity of this genre in being an example of the literature of testimony.

Use of historical evidence, as seen in the first part of the novel, allows the reader to follow the character’s experience. Most holocaust testimonies start with the pre-war period, a move which has the effect of depersonalizing the testimony by creating a strong sense of an objective generalized historical setting. Shaped by 19<sup>th</sup> century realist fiction, documenting the background allows the reader to situate the character within a setting easily, thereby bringing the reader close to the protagonist, yet at the same time the immediately accessible historical setting distances the reader from the character because s/he already knows what is going to happen. This opens a gap between the character, who is naïve to oncoming events, and the reader who knows what is to come; in Holocaust testimonial, perhaps uniquely in the Testimonial genre, the reader starts out knowing more than the characters. Thus, irony ensues and complicates the basic mechanisms of identification, which, as Diana Fuss has previously mentioned, is considered to be the origins of pleasures.

This readerly knowingness greatly overdetermines the reading experience. Thus, when missed chances for the Jews to escape their impending fate are presented, the reader is vexed more because s/he sees that if those chances had been taken, the narrator’s life would have been



different. The first of these missed chances comes when the characters are confined to the ghettos but still have the opportunity to buy emigration certificates. Eliezer's father refused this opportunity because he thinks that he is "too old to start a new life. Too old to start from scratch in some distant land" (9). What the reader knows and the character does not is that his family is too young to die. The experience for the reader is one of both bitter irony and a resignation to historical reality. A similar missed chance comes when they are living in the ghetto but it is still possible to enter and leave. Their former maid begged them to leave with her, but again the father refused saying "If you wish, go there. I shall stay here with your mother and the little one". In response, they "refused to be separated" (20). The reader already knows that such separation is inevitable.

If irony distances the reader from the character as a strategy to avoid the reader's identification with the character, the use of epiphanies also serves a similar purpose. Epiphanic moments, which in a modernist understanding are the moments of "showing forth" or "revealing" something, unveil the truth. According to Eaglestone (2002), "in testimonies, this trope serves to focus the horror in a specific, revealing, incident" (127). One of the first and most powerful of these moments in *Night* comes when the child Eliezer is suddenly faced with the horror of the concentration camp and realizes that this is a place of routine extermination. At this moment of revelation for the child Eliezer, the adult narrator intervenes to take over the narrative:

*NEVER SHALL I FORGET that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.*

*Never shall I forget that smoke.*

*Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.*

*Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.*

*Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.*

*Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.*

*Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.*

*Never* (34).

This moment of horror distances the reader from the character, as the character invites the reader to see the unbearable and unthinkable event, but through the adult's perspective; at this moment, the reader loses access to child Eliezer's subjectivity. Charlotte Delbo (1995) argues that this is because "only those who enter the camp find out what happened to the others" (48). This time, the gap between the character and the reader is not the result of irony, but the consequence of the difference between seeing and knowing. In other words, it is the difference between being inside the camp and outside of it. The readers are thus treated as bystanders who can only see but can never know. What is also implied with this example of the character's epiphany is that finally they acknowledge the fact that there is no going back, nor any hope for the future. It is this moment when childish naivety and innocence is destroyed and replaced by adult maturity and experience. Therefore, it can be suggested that the epiphany is placed somewhat off-stage, as it happens for the child Eliezer and is not narrated, but rather reflected on by the adult Eliezer. Suddenly the luggage of all the life that came after that moment is in the narrative - and the repeated "Never Shall I forget" takes the place of religious observance, like a psalm. According to Eaglestone (2004), this repetition is what the novel presents as

incomprehensible because the experience is “beyond language” (19), and that through this incomprehensibility the identification between the reader and the character is avoided. On the other hand, the reason for this sudden change in language can be the result of the difficulty of remembering and reconstructing the painful experience and risky for the human imagination. Therefore, the adult authorial intervention is crucial at this moment.

A further epiphanic moment takes place later in Eliezer’s night journey, where he is confronted with the slow murder of a child.

*Then came the march past the victims. The two men were no longer alive. Their tongues were hanging out, swollen and bluish. But the third rope was still moving, the child, too light, was still breathing.*

*And so he remained for more than half an hour, lingering between life and death, writhing before our eyes. And we were forced to look at him at close range. He was still alive when I passed him. His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet extinguished.*

*Behind me, I heard the same man asking:*

*“For God’s sake, where is God?”*

*And from within me, I heard a voice answer:*

*“Where He is? This is where--hanging here from this gallows...” (64-65).*

This time, the reader is with the child Eliezer, walking past the victims, and through him the readers witness the painful senseless murder of a child. In doing so, any innocence itself is murdered within Eliezer and he loses his faith, ceases to worship and instead deep inside “felt a great void opening” (69). For the reader, the moment is so awful that as Eaglestone (2001) suggests, “identifying with the character seems impossible. Indeed even commenting on and quoting them, here, seems to be questionable” (128). Yet in some ways, the child Eliezer’s epiphany acts as the grim reality of what the knowing reader knew and the child protagonist at the beginning had yet to learn, is confirmed. Another moment which disdains reader identification is the lack of closure after the camp inmates are rescued and freed. As it is presented in the book, after they were saved Eliezer spent two weeks at the hospital; he poignantly calls this period “two weeks between life and death” (115). The first time he looks in a mirror during this period, Eliezer suffers his own moment of misrecognition and inability to identify with himself, as he sees not his own reflection but “a corpse” and he says “the look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me” (115). Any reader’s naïve expectation of closure and comprehension is shattered, as the character continues with his life but marred by the only memory that is left--the memory of dying faces. His life thus does not turn back to “normal” but rather moves on to become a life full of memories and the continuing inescapable compulsion to retell the same story. As Wiesel (1995) points out, the “teller of tales still lives in the shadow of flames that once had illuminated and blinded them” (130). By retelling the same story, the testimony writer hopes to “find in it some hidden truth, some vague hope of salvation” (Wiesel 1995, 134). In other words, they will keep on telling their stories with the impossible hope of finding a meaning for what once they had to cope with.

In conclusion, Elie Wiesel’s memoir presents that identification, which is the crucial point in holocaust testimonies that hangs on the paradoxical doubleness of the narrative perspective. When one perspective leads to identification, presented in the book as the child Eliezer who knows nothing of what to come, the other, the adult Eliezer who can be both identified for the readers because he knows what is to come but also dis-identified. Since he bears witness and the assumed readership is essentially the court of humanity, to which the evidence can be seen, but perhaps not known, which distances the reader from forming any kind of link with the character. By doing so, he ensures a link between the reader and himself and makes the incomprehensible fairly comprehensible.

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