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SELECTED METAPHORS

IN

ELIE WIESEL

BY

JANE FRANCES SUNDAL

A thesis submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree Master of Arts  
Major in English  
South Dakota State University  
1987

SELECTED METAPHORS IN ELIE WIESEL

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

V    V    J. W. Yarbrough  
Thesis Advisor

'    Date

Paul Witherington  
Head, English Department

Date

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to my advisor, Dr. J. W. Yarbrough, for his editing, availability, knowledge of the Bible and scholarly advice.

I also wish to thank Dr. Murray Haar, member of the faculty of Augustana College, for his willingness to share his comprehensive library on Elie Wiesel and his understanding of the man.

JFS



## CHAPTER 1

### ELIE WIESEL: THE MAN AND HIS WRITING

Who is Elie Wiesel? Elie Wiesel, a Jewish writer, is the 1986 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. He was born on September 30, 1928 in Sighet, Rumania, a small village in the Carpathian Mountains. When he was a young boy he was a sensitive student who especially enjoyed studying the Talmud and other Jewish religious texts. In 1944 when he was fifteen, his father, a shopkeeper; his mother, an educated woman; his two older sisters, a baby sister and he were deported by cattle car to Auschwitz. The men and women were separated; he never saw his mother and baby sister again. He watched his father die from mistreatment, beatings, and starvation. After the war he and his older sisters were reunited. One sister is now deceased. When the war was over Wiesel was seventeen and quite sick. He was taken with other survivors of Buchenwald to France. Working and studying in Paris, he was eventually hired as a journalist. Wiesel vowed not to write about his Holocaust experience for ten years. After those years he was encouraged to write Night, his autobiography, followed by twenty other books in twenty years. Most of his books deal with the Holocaust.

Wiesel continues to study the Bible and the Talmud today. He writes from 6:00 to 10:00 each day. After he

completes many pages for a book he cuts and condenses into fewer pages (Cargas, "Messenger" 555). He has written Bible stories, stories of Russian Jews, retold old Jewish Hasidic tales and legends and written on other themes as well as his major theme of the Holocaust. Always bearing witness, Wiesel works with an end in view, that is, to prevent killers from killing again. He believes that the story of the Holocaust must be told so that such a catastrophe will never be repeated.

French is the language in which Elie Wiesel writes. He first writes in long hand. His wife, Marion, is his translator. They have one son, a teenager, who is the age of Elie Wiesel when he went to live in the concentration camp. New York is their home. Wiesel, a lecturer, traveler, storyteller, and witness, is the Andrew Mellon Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at Boston University.

Elie Wiesel's literary witness is supported historically and photographically by The Auschwitz Album, a book based upon an album discovered by a concentration camp survivor, Lili Meier. A fine text by Peter Hellman accompanies the many authentic photographs.

An S.S. man, who must have known his photographs would be unique, is considered to be responsible for the collection.

Lili left her hometown of Bilke, went to the Berehovo ghetto, and was taken by cattle car to Auschwitz. Later, as a survivor, Lili was in Germany working in an underground missile works. When she heard "The Americans are here!" she was in a clinic ill with typhus. She tried to get up, collapsed, and was taken by fellow prisoners to a vacated S.S. barracks where she was left on a bed. She became cold and found a pajama top in a nearby cupboard. Underneath the pajama top was the album. Imagine her surprise when she opened the album to find her rabbi on the first page followed by pictures of friends and neighbors from her hometown of Bilke! This was an amazing coincidence, and Lili considered it providential. The album helps to prove that the Holocaust really happened. The album can be seen in Jerusalem.

Elie Wiesel is an Hasidic Jew, and Hasidic Jews love to tell stories and old legends. Wiesel becomes inspired when he thinks of this story:

In days of old, a young Jew decided to go forth to see the world. His mother, a poor woman in ancient Palestine, had no parting gift except a pillow. "Take it my son," she said. "If you come to a strange city and find no bed at night, you can always go out to the fields and sleep on this pillow." So it came to pass: the young man arrived in Rome, and when evening fell, he



went outside the city and cushioned his head on his mother's pillow. That very night the Temple in Jerusalem was burned and destroyed. And the pillow under the boy's head burst into flames.

"I only write when the pillow burns," explains Wiesel (Jewish Heritage 27).

Wiesel is a tormented human being who writes from the depth of his soul. There is nothing phony or false about Elie Wiesel. His Jewish faith allows him to question God, to talk back to God in Job-Jeremiah fashion. Wiesel believes that Job gave in to the omnipotent God a little too quickly (Brown, Messenger 12). In a Washington Post article entitled "Surviving Auschwitz", Geoffrey Wolff says, "Job refused to curse God; Wiesel refuses to remain silent" (16).

According to Robert McAfee Brown, Wiesel is more like Jeremiah. Jeremiah . . . "kept hurling back new questions and challenges" (Messenger 12).

In an article about the Holocaust entitled "Then and Now: The Experiences of a Teacher" Elie Wiesel states:

. . . I love the prophet Jeremiah because he is the one who had lived the catastrophe before, during, and after, and knew how to speak about it. There is a beautiful legend in the Talmud in which God says to Jeremiah: "Go and call forth Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." And Jeremiah asks,

What for?" And God says, "They have to prevent a new catastrophe." "What can they do?" Jeremiah asks. And God says, "They can weep." Jeremiah did not know how to weep, but Isaac and Jacob did.

Elie Wiesel adds:

In Jeremiah I found two expressions which baffled me. One expression was "a shaky ground," which he used to describe Jerusalem. He did not use "earthquake" for which Hebrew has a perfectly good word. I did not understand what he meant until one day I was in Kiev and learned from eyewitnesses that 30,000, 40,000 or 50,000 Jews had been buried there in ten days, some while still alive, and for days and weeks the ground was shaky. And then I understood Jeremiah. The prophet uses another beautiful, baffling expression when he speaks about a deserted air space over Jerusalem. I understood what that meant only when I learned that somehow there were no birds to be seen above the streets of Treblinka or Buchenwald. There was a deserted space above those places (271).

Robert McAfee Brown, a Protestant theologian and professor of theology and ethics at the Pacific School of Religion who serves on the United States Holocaust

Memorial Council, calls Elie Wiesel a messenger to all humanity. In Dr. Brown's book, Elie Wiesel, Messenger to All Humanity, he states, "The story of Elie Wiesel is the story of his characters, and the story of his characters is Elie Wiesel" (12). Dr. Brown believes that as Elie Wiesel has developed his novels, he has grown to face the Holocaust in more worthy ways. Wiesel's changing responses to the Holocaust calamity are typified in the protagonist's reactions in the novels.

In an article written by Elie Wiesel entitled "Why I Write" he states:

Jewish children: they haunt my writings. I see them again and again. I shall always see them. Hounded, humiliated, bent like the 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. They are hungry, the children, but there is no one to give them a crust of bread. They are afraid, and there is no one to reassure them.

They walk in the middle of the road, like vagabonds. They are on the way to the station, and they will never return. In sealed cars, without air or food, they travel toward another world; they guess where they are going, they know it, and they keep silent. Tense, thoughtful,

they listen to the wind, the call of death in the distance. . . (203). °

Elie Wiesel, in an article entitled "A Personal Response" says:

. . . My goal is always the same: to invoke the past as a shield for the future; to show the invisible world of yesterday and through it, perhaps on it, erect a moral world where just men are not victims and children never starve and never run in fear.

Children occupy a special place in my universe. They could have saved the world but were killed. They were trapped, tormented and exterminated before they had a chance to grow and mature. And show the way. Those who might have been the scholars of today, the moralists of today, the philosophers, the poets, the spokesmen of today--all were killed at the age of four, five, seven (36).

When Elie Wiesel accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1986 in Oslo, Norway, his fourteen-year-old son, Shlomo Elisha, received the medal and diploma with him. Egil Aarvik noted in the presentation speech that Wiesel had remarked at the time of the birth of his son that he felt sorry for anyone being born into such a world as ours. Then Wiesel had added that he saw his son, named

for his grandfather, as a bridge between the past and the future.

Here are portions of Elie Wiesel's acceptance speech from the New York Times:

. . . the world did know and remained silent. And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, . . . national boundaries and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views, that place must--at that moment--become the center of the universe.

. . . Yes, I have faith. Faith in God and even in His creation. Without it no action would be possible . . . We know that every moment is a moment of grace, every hour an offering; not to share them would be to betray them. Our lives no longer belong to us alone; they belong to all those who need us desperately.

. . . Thank you, people of Norway, . . . for declaring on this singular occasion that our survival has meaning for mankind (A12).

In an March 18, 1985 article entitled "Author, Teacher, Witness" published in Time, Wiesel says: "Silence is the worst thing, worse than mere hate. . . ." and later he says, "Sometimes the gesture is a book, but often it is a journey to the side of the sufferers" (79). Indifference is silence in social or political terms . He is not silent or indifferent. In 1981 he went to the aid of Cambodian refugees. In 1984 he visited and helped Indians in Nicaragua. In 1985 he visited Ethiopia with food. According to Wiesel, "It is never enough but to save one life is to save the world . . ." (80).

In 1987, Wiesel was in Lyons, France, where he testified at the trial of Klaus Barbie who was tried for crimes as the wartime Gestapo Chief of Lyons. He spoke to the defense lawyer . . . "I find it regrettable, deplorable, that the lawyer of the defense who defends a man accused of crimes against humanity, dares to accuse the Jewish people." [The lawyer had accused the Jews of not having any unusual atrocity compared to other atrocities in the world.] Wiesel continued . . . "The Holocaust was a case apart. For the first time, a plan was put into operation to kill all the Jews of the world wherever they were" (Bernstein A7).

## CHAPTER II

### REACTIONS TO THE BOOKS, THEMES BOOK FACTS

A reader who pursues Elie Wiesel and reads a few of his books will react. Wiesel produces effects such as sadness, feelings of nausea, sympathy and hope. Recently, Dr. Murray Haar in a Shalom course entitled "Suffering: Divine and Human" said, "A person can go mad reading Elie Wiesel." At times I thought I might be that person.

In Booklist for January 15, 1974 is written the following about The Oath: This book is called "demanding but rewarding reading" (518). This commentary seems appropriate for all of Wiesel's books studied for this paper. When a member of my family was in a car accident, doctors said that she would not walk, talk, or chew again. Elie Wiesel's books and Dr. Haar's course entitled "Suffering: Divine and Human" helped me cope with this trying experience. Both the shalom course and Ani Maamin reaffirm the belief in the suffering and presence of God.

Realizing that a short summary of such powerful literature is almost a sacrilege, I, nevertheless, will attempt for the sake of an overview, to summarize the themes of the books studied for this thesis.

Night, his autobiography, describes his experiences in the concentration camps where he suffered the deaths of half of his family, i.e., his parents and baby sister.

Dawn describes why more killing is not the answer. His protagonist kills his soul when he kills a man. The Jewish faith believes in divine justice. The Jew remembers, "Vengeance is mine . . ." (RSV Deuteronomy 32:35). The protagonist, having lost the Deuteronomic faith in divine justice, will never recover from killing his enemy.

The Accident describes how living in the past does not allow one to live productively.

The Town Beyond the Wall shows that fraternity can form even in conditions of Holocaust living. His protagonist finds reason for living by helping another.

Gates of the Forest increases the number of friendships. After more community and religious group experiences, the protagonist tries to forgive and mend a broken relationship.

The Oath, recounting an earlier pogrom, justifies breaking an oath of silence if it saves one life.

Ani Maamin means "I believe". When God does not do a miracle and save the oppressed of the Holocaust, God still suffers silently with tears when His people suffer. Formerly God was an omnipotent God of power; the Holocaust experience, for Wiesel, means that He is a God of presence. That means a God who is close to man, present with man, suffering for and with man. Wiesel's God is close to the



nineteenth century conception of Zeitgeist, i.e., Hegel's history as God's becoming conscious of Himself (74, 78, 82, 87, 95).

The books, Night, Dawn and The Accident are written in first person: The Town Beyond the Wall, Gates of the Forest, The Oath and Ani Maamin are written in third person. Also the important time frame--granted there are many flashbacks--is twenty-four hours, usually one night mostly in a closed location such as a camp (Night), cellar (Dawn), hospital room (The Accident), cell (The Town Beyond the Wall) and cave (The Gates of the Forest) (Cargas, In Conversation 108). The time frame appears to remain the same in The Oath and Ani Maamin. However the location is more open; The Oath has a walk by the river and Ani Maamin has the earth.

Names are important. Wiesel, having had no camp identity except a number on his arm, believes that nothing is as precious as a name (Cargas, In Conversation 51,52). According to Wiesel his protagonists have in their names some form of "el," which means God. Eliezer was Abraham's servant's name in the Bible. Eliezer is the name given to Wiesel's son, to Wiesel, to his father, to his grandfather, and all the way back. When Jacob fought the angel in the Bible, he was given the name Israel. So the

main characters in the books have "el" in their names--  
Elijah, Eliezer, Michael, Gavriel, Azriel and God (108).

CHAPTER III  
SELECTED METAPHORS

Metaphors which help us to understand our experience of reality more fully are characteristic of Elie Wiesel's style. C. Hugh Holman in A Handbook to Literature says:

"Metaphor is an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one object with another and ascribes to the first one or more of the qualities of the second or invests the first with emotional or imaginative qualities associated with the second (313, 314).

Harry Shaw in a Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms explains metaphor:

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to a person, idea, or object to which it is not literally applicable. A metaphor is an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one thing with another . . . For example, Martin Luther wrote, "A mighty fortress is our God/a bulwark never failing." Mighty fortress and bulwark are metaphors. Wordsworth wrote metaphorically when he said of England that 'she is a fen of stagnant waters' (171).

M.H. Abrams in A Glossary of Literary Terms describes metaphor: In a metaphor, a word or expression which in literal usage denotes one kind of thing or action is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing or action, without asserting a comparison (65). In his example of 'She was our queen, our rose, our star,' rose is used as a metaphor.

Four of Wiesel's major metaphors--night, madness, clouds and silences--from the seven following books will be explored: Night, Dawn, The Accident, The Town Beyond the Wall, The Gates of the Forest, The Oath, and Ani Mammin. The latter is a cantata. According to The American Heritage Dictionary, a cantata is a vocal and instrumental composition comprising choruses, solos, and recitative (235). Not every metaphor can be noted. Also, not every book will use every metaphor chosen for study.

### 1. Night

#### A. Dawn      B. Ashes

The symbol of night is present in all seven books. Night is the title of his first book, his only autobiography, from which all later books emerge. Night is a metaphor for the Holocaust. According to The American Heritage Dictionary, the Holocaust is a massive slaughter, especially the genocide of European Jews by the Nazis during World War II (617).

Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel is useful for the discussion of Night. During the course of the Cargas-Wiesel interview, Wiesel says:

When you think that one million . . . one million children . . . were killed, massacred, burned alive . . . The grown-ups--the Germans employed methods to fool them, to kill them without their being aware of it. But the children--they played with them as targets and they threw them in the air and shot them. Sometimes they tore a child, a baby, away from his Mother and tore him to pieces alive. Sometimes, in 1944, they threw them in flames, alive.

When I saw it, I was convinced that it wasn't true and I recorded it almost as a nightmare. Then I found the documents, the corroboration and it was true (39).

#### Wiesel's Meaning of "Night"

In another quote, Wiesel says "Whenever I say 'night,' I mean the Holocaust, that period. 'Night' has become the symbol for the Holocaust" (54). Further describing 'night' in the Cargas interview, Wiesel says:

As we have said, a night has descended upon mankind, not only in Europe, but everywhere.

Whoever was alive in those days has absorbed parts or fragments of that night. Night enveloped human destiny and human history. Night is a symbol of that period, a frightening symbol . . . It is strange but night, before that, would have meant different things: dreams, poetry, waiting for the Messiah, the lamentations over the destruction of the Temple. Night is a poetic image, a romantic one at that. Night has become the opposite of whatever we call creativity and creation. After all, night preceded day; night induces people to love each other, to give birth and life. Ironically, it has become the opposing symbol, anti-life, anti-man, anti-Messiah (54).

### Night in Night

Elie Wiesel's feelings of complete helplessness and despair are expressed in the book Night:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never (32).

At the end of the book Night when Buchenwald had been liberated, the young Wiesel who had been starving was very sick with food poisoning. When he managed to get out of bed and go look at himself in a mirror, his image looked to him like a corpse. When we think of death we think of a corpse. Wiesel reminds us that he was death.

#### Night in Dawn

One might expect that his next book called Dawn might offer more light and life. But this is not the case. For the protagonist Elisha killing another man is death to Elisha's soul. Dawn is a sub-topic under night. Both dawn and night refer to death. Elisha is a former Holocaust victim. He has been in the concentration camp. When he is asked to help fight in Israel, he is assigned to kill an English officer because Britain has executed a Jewish prisoner. He had received his assignment when he was in

Paris. His superior officer, Gad, talks to him at night, which is our first clue that the mood of the first book is continuing. Gad tells Elisha that the dawn in Palestine will not be grey like the dawn in Paris. The dawn in Palestine will be red like fire (19). At the end of the book after Elisha has killed an English officer named John Dawson, Elisha notices that the dawn in Palestine is a grayish light, the color of stagnant water (102). Thus even Dawn is a symbolic extension of Night. Both stand for death.

When Elisha was told that he must kill he said . . . "The earth yawned beneath my feet and I seemed to be falling into a bottomless pit, where existence was a nightmare". . . (10). Another time Elisha refers to himself as a living graveyard (35). The night before the execution was referred to as the longest night in the book Dawn (63).

Also, toward the beginning of the book, Elisha meets a beggar who tells him that the way to distinguish night is to look near a window; if he sees a face, night has arrived. Later, as Elisha looked near a window, he saw first the beggar's face, then his father's face with eyes grown large from being dead, then other dead men's faces. When he knew he was going to have to kill, he saw a face and knew it was his own. At the end of the book after killing, Elisha again sees his own face to signify night.



This symbolic act suggests that the book Dawn is really about death, not life. Also this act signifies that Elisha gained no life, but only more death by killing.

B. Ashes, (Smoke, Shawl) in The Accident

Eliezer, the protagonist, like Elisha in Dawn is a former member of a concentration camp. The Accident's Eliezer lives in the past and cannot seem to live in the present. He is an example of the survivor of the death camps who feels almost guilty for surviving when others did not. Eliezer is not ready to accept a new life even though he verbally agrees to love a girl, Kathleen, who desperately wishes to help him.

The night before the accident, Eliezer and Kathleen are naked and in bed together. The reader is allowed to enter Eliezer's mind as he is silently thinking:

. . . You speak of happiness, Kathleen, as if happiness were possible. It isn't even a dream. It too is dead. It too is up above. Everything has taken refuge above. And what emptiness here below! Real life is there. Here, we have nothing. Nothing, Kathleen. Here, we have an arid desert. A desert without even a mirage. It's a station where the child left on the platform sees his parents carried off by the train. And there is only black smoke where

they stood. They are the smoke. Happiness? Happiness for the child would be for the train to move backward. But you know how trains are, they always go forward. Only the smoke moves backward. Yes, ours is a horrible station! Men like me who are in it should stay there alone, Kathleen. Not let the suffering in us come in contact with other men. We must not give them the sour taste, the smoke-cloud taste, that we have in our mouth. We must not, Kathleen. You say "love." And you don't know that love too has taken the train which went straight to heaven. Now everything has been transferred there. Love, happiness, truth, purity, children with happy smiles, women with mysterious eyes, old people who walk slowly, and little children whose prayers are filled with anguish. That's the true exodus. The exodus from one world to the other. Ancient people had a limited imagination. Our dead take with them to the hereafter not only clothes and food but also the future of their descendants. Nothing remains below. And you speak of love, Kathleen? And you speak of happiness? Others speak of justice, universal or not, of freedom, of brotherhood, of progress.

They don't know that the planet is drained and that an enormous train has carried everything off to heaven (106-7).

The next morning Eliezer has the accident. The reader realizes that the accident was not really an accident. Eliezer apparently allowed it to happen. Eliezer's act borders on suicide.

A painter friend, Gyula, does a portrait of Eliezer hoping to help free Eliezer to live. When Eliezer looks at the portrait he sees Grandmother in its eyes. He imagines Grandmother saying,

"Fear nothing. I'll be wherever you are. Never again shall I leave you alone on a station platform. Or alone on a street corner of a foreign town. I'll take you with me. In the train that goes to heaven. And you won't see the earth any more. I'll hide it from you. With my black shawl" (119).

When Gyula realizes that Eliezer will not rid himself of the past, Gyula grabs the portrait and burns it. A predominant metaphor in The Accident is ashes which stand for the remains, memories, specifically the grandmother, in the case of the protagonist of The Accident.

Both smoke and ashes are metaphors that stand for the past including parents and grandmother. At another point Eliezer uses the Grandmother's shawl as a metaphor for the

past. "The past is Grandmother's shawl, as black as the cloud above the cemetery" (106). Dr. Brown says that Wiesel told him that the entire book, The Accident, was written for the sake of that last line (70). "He [meaning Gyula] had forgotten to take along the ashes" (120).

#### Night in The Town Beyond the Wall

The Town Beyond the Wall is a more hopeful book than the first three books mentioned.

Eugene Startzman says this about the book:

The Town Beyond the Wall is about all the walls (physical, psychological, spiritual) that exist to separate one person from another, and about the breaching of those walls, about reaching the city where real human beings meet face to face, recognize their common humanity, love, affirm one another in themselves. Embracing insanity, we find, like murder, like suicide, is evil (99).

In another review Calhoun Ancrun remarks . . . "His [Elie Wiesel's] symbolism and metaphor are rich and poetic; his writing is informed with vigorous Hasidic mysticism" (3-D).

An example of the night motif in The Town Beyond the Wall is the romance of Michael and Milika when they meet years later in Paris. Theirs had been a youthful love in

their hometown of Szerencsevaros. Michael says about his childhood, his boyhood, ". . . (that little boy) is dead. I deny him. Never saw him, never knew him. A stranger. An unidentified corpse. I have nothing in common with him . . ." (80). ". . . He did not telephone. He had never intended to. The little boy is dead, the love is a dead love. Szerencsevaros is a city of the dead. There is no loving in a graveyard. Love is for those who can forget, for those who seek to forget" (81). The above romance is described as dead in a town that is dead. Michael describes Szerencsevaros, "I don't like graveyards. And the city of luck is just that: a great cemetery" (12).

#### Night in Gates of the Forest

Gates of the Forest has a scene of night. The scene of the townspeople attacking Gregory enacting Judas is a scene of almost death:

. . . Death was somewhere in the room, preceding the men and drawing them forward; death was the black light that gleamed in their eyes . . .

Death has not one face but a thousand faces, he thought to himself, not one hand but a thousand hands (112).

Webster Schott wrote an article which is entitled "Anger at a God that Failed." He calls Gates of the

Forest a metaphor for the escape from blackness and a search for light (17).

When Gregor and Gavriel are hiding in the cave and Gavriel is almost caught, the metaphor of night is used: "Night came out of its hiding place and occupied the earth like a conquering enemy." Night refers to death and slaughter as the Nazis are approaching (38).

#### Night in The Oath

The Oath also uses "night" as a metaphor when the villagers know that destruction and terror are imminent. The situation of darkness, fear and confusion in the villagers is expressed in the word "night" in The Oath. The darkness it evokes is especially poignant.

In The Oath, the horror of pogrom is ironically and painfully described as carousel because of its repetition and constancy in human and divine experience. The horror of pogrom relates to night which describes the worst pogrom, the Holocaust.

#### Night in Ani Maamin

Ani Maamin uses many metaphors for the Holocaust or "night". Some examples are a forest turned to ashes, the barren universe, bloody images of men already defeated and a nightmare. Abraham tells of a baby being killed which symbolizes the tragedy of the Holocaust. Isaac tells of a

boy and his father approaching death, the death that Isaac did not have. The boy and his father's deaths symbolize the male deaths in the Holocaust. The narrator says. . . "How many victims? A thousand times a thousand--and more. A thousand times a thousand innocent children in a guilty world. A thousand times a thousand mothers--and more--in a barren universe" (51). Six million dead refers to the Holocaust.

Towards the end, "night," as a metaphor for Holocaust, is expressed again: "Let night come, Night with its evil shadows: Let night come, Night and its bloodstained reign" (81). Yes, Ani Maamin describes night as judgment, as existential experience, challenge to faith, humanization with the help of God's presence.

## 2. Madness

Wiesel believes that the ones who are believed mad are often the sane ones. He isn't afraid of madness in himself or others. When Cargas interviewed Elie Wiesel, he asked him why he wasn't mad. Here is Wiesel's answer:

Maybe I am and I don't know it. If I am, I try to know it. When I see the world, the way it is; when I watch the events, the way they unfold; when I think of what is going to happen to our generation, then I have the feeling that I am haunted by that madness--that we all are. Then in order to save myself from that madness,

I go back to another madness--a holy madness--the one that became a victim, the one that kept us alive for so many centuries, for thousands of years. No, I wouldn't say that I am not mad (2).

Perhaps Wiesel is bordering on madness as the way to understand the Holocaust. Some form of madness is present in all seven books.

#### Madness in Night

Among the eighty deportees in each railroad car leaving Sighet was Madame Schacter (in Night), who, though mad, would recurrently see fire images and flames everywhere. Later, when the car stopped at Auschwitz, real flames were seen. These flames were the Jewish people being burned. It seems that Madame Schacter's mad visions of fire were symbolic of the real human fires to come. It is as if Madame were a prophet who sees merely the literal horror, but not the echo of the Exodus metaphor of God's presence in the pillar of fire. It seems as if an ironic tension is being set up. Is God absent or is He fellow sufferer, fellow reject from the culture of power?

Many readers have indicated a fondness for Moche the Beadle, the first person described by Wiesel. Moche, who starts the story of Night, lived in Sighet and was the



beadle, a sort of caretaker at the synagogue. Wiesel remembers Moche as being as awkward as a clown. Wiesel says, "He made people smile with his waiflike timidity. I loved his great, dreaming eyes, their gaze lost in the distance. He spoke little. He used to sing, or rather, to chant" (1). One night when Wiesel was twelve, he and Moche were having their usual chat sitting in the gloom of the synagogue. Wiesel confided to Moche that he (Wiesel) did not have anyone to teach him in the Zohar, the cabbalistic books. After that they studied together.

Then came the word that all foreign Jews were to be deported. That ended the lessons. Moche went. After over three months Moche returned. After his train had reached Poland, the Gestapo made all the Jews get out and dig their own graves. All were slaughtered. He escaped by being wounded in the leg and pretending death. Moche went all over the village telling everyone about what happened. He told about babies being thrown in the air and used as targets. He told about a little girl who had taken three days to die. He told about a tailor that begged to be killed before his sons. He was trying to warn everyone to prepare themselves while there was still time. He was considered a madman. No one would listen to him.

### Madness in The Oath

Moche reappears in the novels as a mystical mad person who has decided not to live with the world's madness. The Moches seem right with God. In the story The Oath Moshe has one of the leading parts. He appears mad at times but always in the prophetic hasidic tradition. Moshe is echoic of the Moche of Night. He warns. He threatens. He appears mad but it is a prophetic kind of madness. Both achieve the watchman role. They both seem to be watching over the humanity closest to them. According to Wiesel, "Moshe comes back all the time as a warning, a reminder, an echo, and often as an inspiration" (Cargas, In Conversation 3).

### Madness in Dawn

If war symbolizes madness, then the whole book Dawn is about madness. "This is war" is a statement repeated many times in the book. When Gad trains his terrorists in war he says:

. . . We don't like to be bearers of death; heretofore we've chosen to be victims rather than executioners. The commandment "Thou shalt not kill" was given from the summit of one of the mountains here in Palestine, and we were the only ones to obey it. But that's all over; we must be like everybody else. Murder will not be our

profession but our duty. In the days and weeks and months to come you will have only one purpose: to kill those who have made us killers . . . (26).

Joab, who has an innocent, tormented face, is one of Ilana's (the broadcaster's) bodyguards. He is known as Madman.

#### Madness in The Accident

If suicide is an act of madness, then Michael probably committed an act of madness. When he had his accident we are never quite certain that it was an accident. He probably tried to commit suicide. Madness is symbolized by suicidal attempt.

In one of the conversations between the dedicated doctor and Eliezer, the doctor declares, "To refuse life is a sin; it's stupid and mad" (76).

When Eliezer thinks of what his mother would say to him when he is conversing with the prostitute Sarah, his mother says:

Have you gone mad? Have you forgotten that I too am called Sarah? . . . Then, have you forgotten that a man has no right to marry a woman who bears his own mother's name? Have you forgotten that that brings bad luck? . . . (90)

This episode implies that madness is marrying a girl with your mother's name.

Sarah the prostitute calls Eliezer mad, really mad when he calls her a saint (95). She had been taken sexually by a drunken officer for his birthday present. She was only twelve years of age. She became a concentration camp prostitute, and now has been a Parisian prostitute for years. Eliezer was saying to her that he considered her a saint because she had suffered as a victim, and not from choice, from violence, not lust. These two descriptions of saints had been brought out in earlier pages of the book. A prostitute is a victim, which in Holocaust terms is to be a saint. Madness is non-belief of this notion of Holocaust victimization.

#### Madness in The Town Beyond the Wall

Elie Wiesel told Harry James Cargas that madness is the theme of The Town Beyond the Wall (86). Wiesel begins the book with a quotation from Dostoyevski: "I have a plan to go mad." But of course, Dostoyevski's protagonist in Notes from the Underground is really saner than the established social structure. It is quite clear that quite a few of the characters do go mad. Michael, the protagonist in The Town Beyond the Wall, almost goes mad more than once. In Wiesel's books there are two interrelated kinds of madness according to Robert McAfee

Brown (Messenger 74). One type of madness is called mystical madness. In Wiesel's novels those who are afflicted with mystical madness may be more sane than the madness of the world because "they live by a different vision and challenge the existing order . . . They are spokespersons for the divine and purveyors of a truth all persons need to hear" (Messenger 75). Wiesel's many references to people who are mad is a method of associating his characters with the prophetic tradition. In the Bible the prophets such as Hosea, Elisha, and Jeremiah were considered mad (Hosea 9:7 RSV, 2 Kings 9:11 RSV, Jeremiah 29:26 RSV). Brown says that prophets see things differently from their contemporaries and "insist on calling attention to the discrepancy" (Messenger 209).

Clinical madness also appears in Wiesel's books, the kind of madness in which a person is "so out of touch with one's surroundings as to be unable to function within them . . ." (Messenger 75). We see Michael wishing to do this sometimes, to employ the option of just denying what he wishes not to face and going a way of his own choosing. One example of this is when Michael is being tortured and thinks of memories that make him feel mad. Moishe the Madman appears, and the reader is left with the impression that Moishe is not crazy; the world is crazy. Mad Martha attempts to scare eight-year old Michael to make love to

her. She is ugly, she sleeps with Satan in the world. The reader begins to feel that the world is not rational. Another rather crazy character is old Varady, who ends up killing himself. The townspeople do not respect old Varady because he utters lies such as that he is stronger than God. Yet his age is respected. Then there are the two friends of Michael who as young men pray and go to the Temple to hasten the coming of the Messiah. They get so carried away with their prayers and religious thoughts that they cannot understand why the Messiah does not come. In the waiting they go mad and so does their teacher. Michael is the only one of the three young students to not go mad.

The yellow bearded teacher, Kalman, is described as a "mad teacher who teaches his mad disciples a life of folly and the folly of life. He is a teacher who renounces reason at the start in order to find it later, embellished and vigorous, at the heart of madness" (41).

When Michael tells Pedro about the student friends he says:

"Yes, Pedro, . . . they were mad. In those years, nineteen forty-three, nineteen forty-four, you had to be crazy to believe that man has any control over his fate. You had to be crazy to hope for a victory of the spirit over the forces of evil, to imagine any possibility of

redemption, of consolation; you had to have lost your reason, or sacrificed it, to believe in God, to believe in man, to believe in a reconciliation between them. Yes. They were mad. Out of their minds. Raving mad."

Pedro puffed at his pipe, took a few steps, came back to stand in front of me. "What became of them?"

"Wood," I said. "They turned into wood. When I saw them for the last time they were on their way to death. The madmen were the first to go. Kalman walked in front, as if he were guiding them; he was the master. Hersch-Leib and Menashe--they'd taken him out of the asylum--followed on stretchers. That same night they rode into the sky on flames that fed the grief of a whole people . . ." (47, 48).

When Pedro prays that he will be given strength to deny, ridicule and reject God, Michael responds, "I like it. . . . It's a madman's prayer" (48).

Later, Pedro asks Michael if the reason he wishes to return to Szerencsevaros is to see if Kalman left his madness behind, so Michael could take it on himself. Michael said . . . "No, Pedro. It has nothing to do with my master and his madness. With mine maybe . . ." (48).  
Madness symbolizes mystical madness.

When the Germans come and take over the Jews there is no way that Michael can believe in God and the redemption of God. Michael remains sane. The world appears mad. At one point in The Town Beyond the Wall the protagonist Michael tells his friend Pedro that he felt he was going mad. The occasion was the death of a friend, a childhood friend. Michael grieves that Yankel is dying, feeling that a part of himself is dying. He starts to choke Yankel, but fortunately, a doctor enters the room. Michael acknowledges that if he had chosen madness, it could not have been done more than once. If he had chosen to have gone mad, freedom would have been destroyed. The temptation to go mad recurs to Michael. When Michael and his good friend Pedro are walking together one night along the waterfront in Algiers, Pedro tells of his lover dying after being raped thirty seven times. Michael is so overcome with this story that he wishes to dig up all the graves in Spain and allow his friend to make love to a corpse. Michael wishes life to be different; he never succumbs to madness. Yankel had been a friend and a foe in the concentration camp. When Yankel died Michael stayed with him day and night for a week. Michael confessed that he was on the verge of madness to Pedro. At one point Michael says . . . "The man who chooses death is following an impulse of liberation from the self; so is the man who



chooses madness" (93). Here madness symbolizes freedom from self.

Another time Michael is in a prison cell with insane men. One of the madmen believes that there is a letter for him being held by one of the cellmates. He is called the Impatient One. The other cellmate is called the Silent One. Another madman, Menachem, eventually is put in a different cell block. He appears mad, but he has a most stubborn belief in God. His type of madness makes sense. Menachem says, "Why does God insist that we come to Him by the hardest road?" (146). At this point Michael again wishes to slip consciously into madness as an escape from life. Michael does not accept that Menachem may have the right idea that God will help him get over his madness. Michael saves life twice in the cell. Once is when the Impatient One tries to choke Menachem. Then he saves the Silent One when the Impatient One tries to choke him. At this point in the story the Impatient One is moved to another cell. Pedro comes as if in a dream and tells Michael: "Cure him [the Silent One]. He'll save you" (172). Michael starts on that road. This last part of the book indicates that Michael has recovered and understands that he had a friend in Pedro and a restoration possibility in helping the Silent One come out of his solitary existence, his madness.

### Madness in Gates of the Forest

When Gregor, an escapee from the concentration camp, is hiding in a forest cave, he is joined by a Yiddish fellow. They converse. Gregor is reminded of his grandfather who said, "Don't be afraid, my child. Madmen are just wandering messengers, and without them the world could not endure" (14). Grandfather is describing mystical madmen who are metaphors for messengers.

Gavriel says, "Madmen--unconscious and conscious--are preparing to kill them [Jewish people] in cold blood; indeed, they have already begun" (32). The Nazi killers are the madmen destroying their own humanness.

Referring to sexual passion, Constantine Stefan suggests, "Life wouldn't be worth living if it didn't include a bit of madness" (82). Constantine Stefan had run away from the sexy Ileana, and he was sorry ever after. In this instance passion is seen as a kind of mystical madness.

"It's madness," he (Leib the Lion) murmured, "sheer madness." "Of course," said Gregor. "A madman's story."

"I can't believe it. You can't kill a whole people. It's unthinkable" (129). The madness is a metaphor for the Holocaust.

Another metaphor of madness is Clara in The Gates of the Forest. She is married to one man and dreaming of her dead lover when she is making love with her husband. This

may not be the act of a madwoman, but she is so steeped in her fantasy that she is not able to function in a real life way. At one time she had told her husband that he was mad. Before they were married, Gregor told Clara:

. . . "And you must know this as well: there is more of eternity in the instant which unites two people than in the memory of God, more peace in a gaze into a beloved's heart than in the kingdom of heaven. How to discover this instant, to recognize this gaze, that's the problem, I agree. It requires patience, much abandon. I wish you such abandon, such patience" (214).

After this declaration which suggests that Gregor saw clearly the love that could be between them, Gregor almost left Clara who was in such turmoil. But Gregor recognized that Clara would be in even greater turmoil if he left. At the end of Gates of the Forest, Gregor decides to try and help Clara to fight her way back into reality:

. . . "Know then that all of us have our ghosts  
. . . The struggle to survive will begin here, in this room, where we are sitting. Whether or not the Messiah comes doesn't matter; we'll manage without him. It is because it is too late that we are commanded to hope. We shall be

honest and humble and strong, and then he will come, he will come every day. He will have no face, because he will have a thousand faces. The Messiah isn't one man, Clara, he's all men. As long as there are men there will be a Messiah. One day you'll sing, and he will sing in you. Then for the last time, I'll want to cry. I shall cry. Without shame" (225). Whether Clara ever works out of her madness is not definite, but Gregor recites the Kaddish for Leib the Lion, her former lover and his old friend.

#### Comparing Outcomes of Madness in Town Beyond the Wall and Gates of the Forest

In The Town Beyond the Wall Michael assumed the helping of another mad human being, the mad Silent One. Before that book ended, the Silent One was coming out of his madness. It seems as if Gregor in Gates of the Forest will have a harder role as husband of Clara, who may be even more strongly entrenched in a stain of clinical madness. If Clara's trouble is not clinical madness, it appears to be a strong neurosis that might prove to be as hard to treat as psychotic illness. At any rate, if Dr. Brown's suppositions are correct and Elie Wiesel takes on or has taken on the roles of his characters in attempting

to understand his reason for being in the post-Holocaust world, then Elie Wiesel, the Jewish survivor, has indeed traveled a long way. Through madness and mental anguish, Elie Wiesel seems to be telling us that no human task of helping another is too great a burden. The prophetic conception of service (Is. 53, et. al,.) is the way. Becoming involved. Caring. Service is the antithesis of indifference. The fact that Gregor is attempting to help a marriage, his own marriage, is hard stuff indeed. This is especially true when we consider Clara's deep-seated problem. An interesting aspect pointed out by Dr. Brown in his book Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity is that Gregor got to the position of trying to stick with Clara, forgiving her and loving her and helping her after he had the support of a community of friends, his Rebbe's counsel and his participation in the Hasidic ritual (99). Wiesel has arrived at his belief in the servant role as exemplified in Joseph and Isaiah. Wiesel recovers the ethical faith in servanthood common in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

#### Madness in Ani Maamin

Madness is a metaphor in Ani Maamin when Abraham describes a madman's actions:

Of the bunker,  
Anxious, angry whispers  
Reach the mother;  
Keep him quiet!  
That woman,  
Her throat parched,  
Caresses the frail head  
Of the last of her five sons.  
She would like to soothe him,  
Save him.  
In vain.  
He cries and cries.  
And then,  
In the dark,  
A hand is raised.  
An arm inches forward,  
Closer--  
The hand, the arm  
Of a madman perhaps,  
Surely desperate.  
Then  
There is silence,  
Total, absolute silence.  
Yet--the death of the child  
Fails to save the others.  
It is simply the first of many.

But I saw the mother.  
The shudder that went through her.  
I offer you that shudder.  
I offer you that madness  
As I offer you her gaze (39-41).

. . . . .

Jacob tells of a madman's actions:

A camp.  
Night.  
A man, desperate,  
Invokes death  
To free him.  
He has lost everything,  
Even his solitude.  
Even his "I,"  
His name,  
His death,  
Revolted by life  
Revolted by the world,  
He refuses to wait,  
To wait for the new day.  
Moving noiselessly  
Through the dark,  
From block to block,  
With what remains of his strength.  
He runs, runs toward the barbed wire,

But he is weak.  
And then, too, he is limping,  
And his sight is failing,  
So he does not see  
The killer  
Who pushes him down,  
Sneering;  
You want to die?  
But you are already dead,  
You were dead  
And you did not know it.  
Do you know who killed you?  
The angel of night,  
The angel of dreams,  
The angel of long ago.  
Do you hear,  
God of my father and my father's father?  
My struggle with the angel  
Ended in defeat.  
Israel lost--  
And I did not know it (45-47).

These two instances from Ani Maamin show clinical madness on the part of both the executioners and victims.



## Clouds

Clouds are the third metaphor to be discussed. Three of the seven books describe clouds as cemeteries. In the Cargas conversation Wiesel states:

They took a people and turned them into flames and the flames, in turn, turned them into clouds. The only way for the Jews to come back and haunt our memories is as clouds. Whenever I see clouds, I remember them. Here, too, it's ironic because in Scripture, the clouds were meant to protect the Jews. In the desert, after the Exodus, there were clouds and they protected the Hebrews. But now they did not protect them. How could they? They were the clouds (56).

Wiesel clearly states that the clouds are symbols of Jews. Instead of earthly cemeteries, the dead of the concentration camp have final resting places in the clouds. Wiesel says to Cargas:

Clouds are symbols, especially in The Gates of the Forest. I see in the clouds all those Jews who left and returned, the only way for them to return was in the clouds. For the first time in history so many victims perished and had no cemeteries. Even the cemeteries were locked from them, from us. Heaven became their cemetery; the clouds became their cemetery. In

a weird, strange way, it is symbolic, too, because cemeteries are impure and as Jews we should not dwell in cemeteries. . . (55).

#### Clouds in The Gates of the Forest

In Gates of the Forest we read:

It was a moonless night. It had rained the day before and, because they felt at ease there, the clouds refused to leave the patch of sky above the houses huddled together in the town below. Later Gregor understood why; they were not clouds, properly speaking, but Jews driven from their homes and transformed into clouds. In this disguise they were able to return to their homes where strangers now lived (3).

Many references to clouds are made. Here are some of them. Gregor asks if the clouds are noisy. . . . "Gregor loved the clouds which weighed upon the night" (4). "His voice echoed first in the cave and then in the forest leaping from tree to tree, from cloud to cloud. . ." (6). "Suddenly the clouds seemed thicker--undoubtedly a transport of Jews coming back from far away to light the fires in their homes" (7). Gregor refers to his friend as: "A Jew who refused to disguise himself as a cloud!" (7) He means that his friend refused to die. "The events of the night were just the prelude to some new development whose

sequel was lost in the clouds" (15). If we believe with Wiesel that the clouds are graveyards of the Jews of the Holocaust, then we recognize the implication that death is forthcoming. "The clouds hanging over the town grew thicker and thicker, and when the sun came through in the morning, it was surrounded by a violent red halo, as if it were emerging from a bath of blood" (36). Here the sun being close to the clouds gets tainted from the blood of the dead coming to the clouds from the Holocaust.

Referring to Maria's not being Jewish, Gregor said, "Maria had not changed; she was not a Jew, only Jews change. Only Jews change into clouds. This is no more than justice: they wanted to change the world, and instead the world changed them" (55). This refers to the clouds being the Jewish graveyards. Gregor says to his old servant Maria, "Father went. Mother went. They all went. I stayed. Are you sure you're proud of me? They all went away and came back masters of the universe, riding the clouds. But I'm earth bound" (56). Gregor is saying he is alive.

Continuing talking to Maria, Gregor says, "Let Him [Jesus] be. He, too, has been changed into a cloud. He, too, was exhausted; he let himself be killed one day and since then there's been no end to the killing" (58). And in another place Gregor cautions, "Don't tell them [the little children] that invisible clouds are darkening the sky"

(83). The clouds appear dark apparently from the blood of the Holocaust survivors.

#### Clouds in Night

In Night Wiesel implies clouds as he often refers to non-burial. One example is when a few hundred dead, deprived of a burial, are thrown out in a Polish snow field (94).

#### Clouds in The Accident

The Accident mentions the clouds as cemeteries when Eliezer is thinking in the bed beside Kathleen on the night before the accident.

. . .The black cloud which is Grandmother, her son, my mother. What a stupid time we live in! Everything is upside down. The cemeteries are up above, hanging from the sky, instead of being dug in the moist earth. We are lying in bed, my naked body against your naked body, and we are thinking about black clouds, about floating cemeteries, and the snickering of death and fate which are one and the same (106).

#### Clouds in Ani Maamin

A reference is made to clouds as a metaphor for cemeteries in Ani Maamin. The narrator says, "The victims, spurning the cemeteries, rise to the highest palace

if not higher. Below, there are no more cemeteries. Our cemetery is in heaven" (61). This is an extension or resolution to ideas of exile, exodus.

### Silence

David Stern, in his article entitled "The Word Testifies for the Dead," says the following about Elie Wiesel:

. . . [The Oath] presents an imagined event. . . The artistic journey from Night to The Oath is the journey from autobiography to myth; from experience to metaphor . . . and its author has, once again, broken silence to bear witness (24).

#### A. Wiesel Talks about Silence in Interviews and Lectures

Elie Wiesel says in the Cargas interview: "If I could, to use a poetic image, communicate a silence through silence, I would do so." He believes that God and man are two solitudes that meet. Wiesel describes two kinds of silences. If someone knows that another is suffering and the one who knows remains silent, that is destructive silence. But if someone suffers and he is silent, that is good silence (In Conversation 7). It appears that good silence is living creatively in the face of the despair, the Holocaust, according to Wiesel: creative living is, however paradoxical, to live in, with suffering.

Continuing in the Cargas interview, Wiesel says that he is obsessed with silence. He continues:

. . . As a child I studied the Talmud, and also mysticism. My master was a mystic. And silence, in mysticism is extremely important; it's the essential. What you don't say carries weight. For instance, I wondered many times: Within our tradition we know what God said at Sinai. But there are certain silences between word and word. How was this silence transmitted? This is the silence that I tried to put in my work, and I tried to link it to that silence, the silence of Sinai. There is a healthy silence, Sinai, and an unhealthy silence, that of chaos before Creation. There is a political silence which is criminal; today to be silent when so many injustices are being performed and perpetuated--in Russia against the Jews; in Vietnam against the Vietnamese; in all kinds of countries against minorities. To be silent today is criminal (45-46).

On the other hand, there is a different silence which is penetrated, inspired. When you want to say something and you don't say it, it is still there. When I hear a beautiful trio by Beethoven or Mozart, I feel gratitude toward

Beethoven and Mozart, and I keep quiet, and then I feel that I share, I participate in the playing with my silence. So silence is . . . the universe of silence. And you can say about it what you can say about life and about death and about God. And the totality of what you say will not make up completely what there is to be said about it (46).

In another part of the Cargas interview Wiesel goes on with his explanation of silence:

. . . God's voice is heard in silence--in true silence--and sometimes is silence. We say, for instance, that one way of purifying man is to purify his language, his word. How does one purify it? Through silence. What is prayer if not the entrance of silence into language? What is prayer if not the exclusion of certain words, the protection of others, the creation of a certain zone of silence between one word and another (48).

Wiesel believes that there are different shades of silences. He says:

. . . It's inspiring. In general, you can recognize a poet by the way he speaks of silence. I think that every poet, at one time or another, must come to speak about silence.

This is not the ascetic silence that means the withdrawal from language. On the contrary, the emphasis is on language; the emphasis is on transmission. Certain words carry their silence with them. They have the weight of silence and you can judge a text: The Biblical text is great and eternal because it has eternal silence in it; the text written in the last century has only one century of silence in it (49).

In a symposium entitled "Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future," one speaker says that the Holocaust is so agonizing that the proper response is silence. Yet, because the story must be told, speech is required (267). Another member of the symposium suggested that the Jew must not despair of God's recognizing that Hitler was successful in murdering five million Jews (272). Another aspect of the Holocaust was the indifference shown by the world to what the Nazis were doing. Elie Wiesel said that language is poor and inadequate (284). Perhaps the experience of the Holocaust can't be told. Wiesel believes that the Holocaust has nothing to do with words, but he does think that there is a way to transmit the Holocaust. That way is silence. Wiesel says, "Today we know that all roads and all words lead to the Holocaust" (285). One of the members said that the uniqueness of Auschwitz lies in its radical



absurdity (289). And later the statement was made that the Nazis believed in murdering Jews as an end in itself (289). Elie Wiesel says that he does not know why Jews kept silent. He doesn't know how one can talk about the Holocaust (298). That implies silence. Wiesel says that he talks about God in his books (298). The symposium concluded that Jews must have faith in God and relieve suffering wherever it is in the world.

In an interview with Cargas called "Messenger for the Ten Thousandth," Cargas asked Wiesel about the year Wiesel spent in India in absolute silence. Wiesel said he had to leave India because of the indifference he witnessed to suffering (556). Silence is ethically untenable.

In an interview with L. Eugene Startzman entitled "Elie Wiesel Poses Hard Questions from the Holocaust," Startzman ends by saying:

Wiesel's fiction explores human responses to evil, yet in the final analysis Wiesel is a contemporary Job, demanding a hearing, a contemporary Jacob, wrestling with God to understand, in the face of monstrous evil, the meaning of God's apparent silence. . . . (99).

So silence of God is another aspect of silence for Elie Wiesel.

Robert McAfee Brown in his book Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity has a chapter entitled, "The Silence of God." He says that the silence of God is the absence of God (144). Wiesel has written a play entitled "The Trial of God." In the play one of the characters said, "Only the Jew knows that he may oppose God as long as he does so in defense of His creation" (154). Wiesel notes in his introduction that the play is about three rabbis who indict God for allowing His children to be massacred. This play exemplifies his probing of the relevance of the topic of silence, God's silence.

In a series of lectures presented at Northwestern University entitled "Dimensions of the Holocaust", Wiesel said, ". . . this time we wrote not with words but against words. Often we told less so as to make the truth more credible" (8). Also he said, "One cannot write about the Holocaust" (9). Toward the end of the lecture, Wiesel says, "But then, is silence the answer? It never was" (19).

At the end of Ellen S. Fine's "Dialogue with Elie Wiesel", he says, "The Holocaust is a sacred realm. One cannot enter this realm without realizing that only those who were there can know. But the outsider can come close to the gates" (25). He means that word, language, i.e., his art, brings the outsider to the gate, by metaphorically preserving the experience of Holocaust.

Elie Wiesel, in a article entitled "Why I Write" says that he entered literature through silence. He continues:

It was by seeking, by probing silence that I began to discover the perils and power of the word . . . We all knew that we could never, never say what had to be said, that we could never express in words, coherent, intelligible words, our experience of madness on an absolute scale. The walk through flaming night, the silence before and after the selection, the monotonous praying of the condemned, the Kaddish of the dying, the fear and hunger of the sick, the shame and suffering, the haunted eyes, the demented stares. I thought that I would never be able to speak of them. All words seemed inadequate, worn, foolish, lifeless, whereas I wanted them to be searing. Where was I to discover a fresh vocabulary, a primeval language? (200)

He concludes, "What matters is to struggle . . . with words, or through another form of silence . . . a smile . . . , a tear . . . , a word . . . and thus justify the faith placed in you, a long time ago by so many victims (206).

Here Wiesel is struggling against silence with words and without words.

When Elie Wiesel wrote an article entitled "Then and Now: The Experiences of a Teacher," he said:

Something that haunts me is the nocturnal processions in the thousands, in the hundreds of thousands, those silent processions in which very few victims cried, very few shouted--we know from their documents--as they were led to the grave, to be shot by the Einsatz commandos. Something in that silence breaks you . . . (270).

In an article called "Recalling Swallowed-Up Worlds" Wiesel states:

A need for communication? For community perhaps? I evoke memories that precede my own: I sing the song of ancient kingdoms: I describe swallowed-up worlds: I exist by what I say as much as by what I keep silent. To protect my silent universe, I speak of the worlds of others. To avoid painful subjects, I explore others: biblical, Talmudic, Hasidic or contemporary. I evoke Abraham and Isaac so as not to uncover the mystery of my relations with my father. I recount the adventures of the Besht so as not to dwell on the end of his descendants. In other descendants. In other words, literature has become for me a way of making you look away. The

tales that I recount are never those that I would like to, or ought to, tell.

The problem is that the essential will never be said or understood. Perhaps I should express my thought more clearly: it's not because I don't speak that you won't understand me; it's because you won't understand me that I don't speak (611).

Another article by Wiesel entitled "Art and Culture After the Holocaust" discusses silence:

The difficulty lies in the transmission. Not all tales can be, should be communicated in language. Some, according to Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, can be transmitted only in silence, and others, more profound, not even in silence. What, then, is one to do? What does one do with one's secret and one's silence? That is the question of . . . that most writers had to confront when they decided to turn the fire of the Holocaust into words (403).

In "Talking and Writing and Keeping Silent", Elie Wiesel writes:

. . . I still remember the dream I thought I had: I was with my father and for three days and three nights the child I was kept saying to his father over and over, "It's not true; it cannot

be. It is impossible that Jews could be killed in such a manner and the world remain silent?" That was my question: Could the world remain silent? Later I found out that the world was silent and that the things which I thought happened did indeed occur (270).

Later in the same article, Wiesel states:

. . . Today, twenty-five years after the event, I wonder whether we shouldn't have chosen silence then. For some reason, I believe that had all the survivors gathered in a secret conclave, somewhere in a forest, and decided together--I know it's a poetic image, unfeasible, but I feel this sense of loss of this opportunity--if we had then all of us decided never to say a word about it, I think we could have changed man by the very weight of our silence. But then I also believe that mankind wouldn't have been able to bear it. It would have driven man and peoples to madness. That is why, I think, we spoke (275).

Silence is present in all seven books because Wiesel loves solitude and silence. Silence is the fourth and final metaphor to be discussed in this thesis.

## Silence in Night

Silence is mentioned at least fourteen times in the book Night. It would be difficult in this short paper to discuss every instance; four usages of silence in Night will be noted.

Perhaps one of the most famous quotations of Night uses the word "silence". "Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live" (32). The American Heritage Dictionary defines "nocturnal," as that which occurs in night. "Night" means not only the period between sunset and sunrise, especially the hours of darkness, but also a time or condition of gloom. In this sentence "silence" is deepest gloom. Silence is a depressive state with no desire to live.

Dr. Robert McAfee Brown mentions different kinds of silence in his book Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity: a silence born of frustration, a silence born of respect, and a silence of communicative power. There are two forms of communicative silence, silence within speech and silence that negates speech. An example of a silence within speech is when, in music, there is a rest, a silence. The nocturnal silence mentioned above is almost a pause to tell us more by not telling it in more words (30-32). We get an idea of complete horror, silence

that partly seems to say, "I don't know how to say it", and partly, "I will just rest in the horror of the moment."

Another use of the word "silence" in Night was in the hanging of a child who was silent when the other two victims shout, "'Long live liberty!' . . . Total silence throughout the camp" (61) follows. Here we get another use of silence, almost a negation of speech. It is as if an understatement, i.e., fewer words, will convey more feeling, a feeling already too horrible to bear. That evening, Wiesel recalls, the soup tasted of corpses (62). He had described an earlier hanging and that evening the soup had been excellent. This later hanging was more horrible with the child not dying for more than an hour. Wiesel tried to convey the feeling by using understatement, fewer words for more powerful effect.

A third mention of silence in the book Night is when Wiesel says, "I no longer accepted God's silence" (66). Many times in Wiesel's philosophy there is mention made of the Jewish notion that it is all right to feel rebellious toward God. In this part of the story, Wiesel is explaining why he does not fast in the camp. So, silence here means an act of passionate rebellion.

When Mengele was separating the prisoners into the ones who would die and the ones who would live by writing down the numbers of those chosen to die, some were weeping in silence (69). Silence in this context makes the grief



more intense. We are reminded of the weeping God in Ani Maamin.

The fourth and last reference to the many silences mentioned in Night is the scene when men were dropping dead; and finally, dead men were covering dead men, all exhausted, starving, and struggling for air. Somehow Elie Wiesel managed to get a little air and squeeze out from under the dying men. The dead and near dead are in a little shed. Just as Elie is going to sleep he hears his friend Juliek play a Beethoven concerto before he (Juliek) dies. In the morning Wiesel sees Juliek slumped over dead with a trampled violin by his side. When Elie heard the violin play he said that he never heard notes so pure as those played "In such a silence" (90-91). This silence seems to be a silence of respect. Juliek loved his violin and may be respecting his instrument and his music. Juliek may also be respecting his own death. His audience, the dead and near dead, are silent. The emphasis in this silence is a feeling of reverence for the dead, dying; for the human nature, the movement toward freedom and fulfillment which Beethoven's art expresses. Silence is the response of all, reverence for the authentically human in the face of Holocaust power.

### Silence in Dawn

"Silence" in Dawn continues as a metaphor for a response to man's existential possibility.

. . . We were both silent. And the crowd behind me, the crowd of petrified silences, whose shadows absorbed the light and turned it into something sad, funereal, hostile, was silent as well. The sum of these silences filled me with fear. Their differences were different from mine; they were hard, cold, immobile, lifeless, incapable of change (70).

In this scene Elisha is talking to Ilana. As she is stroking his neck, he has told her that he does not wish to become a killer. He is in awe of what he is about to do, yet he knows that he will have to kill. The sum of the silences symbolize these emotions and decisions.

. . . But Yerachmiel and his hands were silent. And somewhere in the universe of time The Messiah was silent as well. I left him and went over to the little boy I used to be (75).

Elisha is still struggling with the realization that he will kill. He thinks of his friend Yerachmiel, who had been deported to a different camp where he died. Elisha had pictured his dead friend as a saint because he had died without living to kill. When Elisha thought of his friend, he thought of God also. In the depths of Elisha's despair

at the upcoming act of killing he feels he is cornered. The silence of Yermachiel and Messiah reminds us of the Exodus faith.

Later when Elisha is talking to himself as a little boy, he hears the little boy part of him speak:

. . . Why are we silent? Because silence is not only our dwelling-place but our very being as well. We are silence. And your silence is us. You carry us with you. Occasionally you may see us, but most of the time we are invisible to you. When you see us you imagine that we are sitting in judgment upon you. You are wrong. Your silence is your judge (75-76).

Elisha seems to be wishing to get rid of the guilt of killing. He tries putting it on someone else, even his little boy self, but he will have to accept the guilt of killing with his present adult self, says his little boy self. Since he is deeply disturbed, the silences all are accentuating his own guilt over the upcoming killing.

#### Silence in The Accident

When Eliezer and Kathleen decide to end their affair, they do not sleep. "Stretched out next to each other, frightened, in silence, we waited for daybreak. . . An hour later still silent, I got up, dressed, and left the room

without saying goodbye, without even turning around"  
(63-64).

Here again it seems Wiesel is using no words to convey more meaning than if he had used words. We are faced with the sadness of the moment by sadness.

When Dr. Sreter is checking Eliezer, Eliezer had just awakened from a dream. In his dream Eliezer had been saying:

. . . I found myself face to face with God. . .  
What is the meaning of suffering? . . . When will  
the hour of deliverance come?. . . When will Good  
conquer Evil, thus allowing chaos to be forever  
dispelled? . . . Then God talked to me. The  
silence had become so total, so pure, that my  
heart was ashamed of its beating. The silence  
was still as absolute, when I heard the words of  
God. With Him the word and the silence were not  
contradictory. God answered all my questions and  
many others (71-72).

This again is a silence in respect for God, a silence which permits hearing the Divine, the authentic word.

The last reference to silence in The Accident is when Kathleen says to Eliezer, "You think your silence is capable of hiding the hell you carry within you? (104) The silence here is referring to Eliezer's obsession with the past. Silence goes beyond describing the hurt; it is

more effective than mere words. Language corrupts, removes the experience of history, even of Holocaust.

### Silence in The Town Beyond the Wall

In this book Wiesel is exploring the silence of the spectator, the indifferent person whom he considers the greatest sinner. Wiesel believes that anyone who is silent and indifferent to the Holocaust is on the side of the executioners. Michael returns to his hometown after he has been in a concentration camp. He doesn't know quite why, but when he gets there, he knows why. He remembers that on the day of deportation, he saw a man looking out his window watching the proceedings as an outsider with no interest. Michael decides to confront him with his actions on that day so long ago. Recurrently, as he confronts the spectator, the following sentence is spoken: "'I am thirsty,' my little sister said." Repetition of this sentence builds up the reader's feeling for the victim. At the same time, the spectator is repeating his indifference in the observance of the deportation proceedings. The reader feels more intensely the contempt toward the spectator. After Michael throws two glasses of wine in the face of the spectator, Michael tells him he cannot hate him. Hate would give the spectator more pleasure than feeling contempt which does not even dignify Michael's

response. The spectator wants hate, and so he turns Michael in to the police.

In the above story, when Michael went to the room that faced the street, his heart was pounding. Michael said, "In absolute silence I stepped that way" (153). Once inside the room, Michael "watched him in silence" (153). Later, "We stared at each other silently". . . "The silence grew heavier" (155). . . . The silence speaks of the development of contempt in Michael; the building of indifference in the spectator is also shown in silence.

In the prison Michael recalls conversations with Pedro, his friend. Michael thinks "If his [Pedro's] voice falls silent his life will end, I repeated. For me, it's different. It's when I'm silent that I live; in silence I define myself" (96). Silence as a metaphor means here that Michael comes to terms with himself when he is silently introspective.

Michael tells a legend in which the mode of the hero is silence. A Jewish woman and her child are hidden in a hay wagon by a peasant. Border gendarmes knife the hay; the peasant moans. When they discover the mother and the boy, Mendele, the boy says:

"Mama," Mendele wept, "It wasn't me who called out! It wasn't me!"

The gendarmes ordered him off the wagon, but he couldn't move. His body was run through.

"Mama," he said again, while bloody tears ran into his mouth, "it wasn't me, it wasn't me!" The widow, a crown of hay about her head, did not answer. Dead. She, too, had kept silence (112).

It is interesting to note that Wiesel likes silence so much that he makes silence the hero of the story. The whole point of the story is the power of silence, a power of survival of integrity, faith, dignity.

When the two friends take long walks, they especially enjoy night walks. "Sometimes they walked in silence side by side. Michael discovered the texture of silence, its depths, its music . . . Michael realized that silence was not an emptiness but a presence. The presence of God when one is alone against the world . . . Do you hear our steps in silence, friend? The steps are us; the silence is Mendele. It is the silence that sets off our steps" (115). Mendele was the boy in the legend whose hero was silence. The silence in this episode is the silence of friendship and loyalty.

When Pedro and Michael are in a train compartment, and Pedro is talking too much, Michael thinks "When you can't stand silence, it's usually because you want to stifle a voice" (125). Silence means maintaining integrity and dignity and refusal to participate in one's own degradation in the reference above.

The metaphor of silence is extended in another passage from the book:

So Paris, that year, had become an echo chamber in which converged all the sounds and vibrations of those who were afraid of silence (which they confused with emptiness), who were afraid of fear (which they took for cowardice), and who chattered only to reassure themselves (67).

This excerpt is typical of the high esteem Wiesel has for meaningful, reflective silence as an ethical response, even a heroic response as in the story of the mother and child in the hay wagon.

Upon his arrival in Paris, Michael's situation is described:

. . . To keep from stumbling he needed much solitude, silence, and concentration. He was seeking his God, tracking Him down. He would find Him yet And then He wouldn't get off as lightly as He did with Job (52).

The quest of faith, finding God, is the metaphor, silence.

While Yankel, a friend who was not always a friend in the concentration camp, dies, Michael stayed with him a whole week, day and night. Michael clutched his head and prayed after Yankel was dead, "Oh, God! Make me be silence! Make me be! Be . . ." (95).



What Michael is saying is that he accepted that part of Yankel that was a good friend, and he [Michael] honored God and friendship through silence. Fraternity and faith are expressed, not betrayed, in silence.

#### Silence in Gates of the Forest

"Silence. Nothing. Night, clouds, the forest. And his pounding heart" (6).

In this book, "silence" is described as being a quality of the forest. Gregor is frightened and knows someone is near his cave. Wiesel often uses silence to build suspense: "There was a lengthy silence" (7). "The silence became crushingly heavy" (15). At this point something is going to happen, Gregor feels certain. There is a wind, and it is cold in the forest. Silence expresses a mood.

. . . "This is the end, Gregor thought, even he admits that the last of the gates is closed. The silence was heavy, weighed down by the passage of time. Silence was everywhere, in the trees, the bushes, and the eyes of the dogs. It even had a smell, the smell of torture, and it spit blood, the odor of a prisoner who had been jeered and beaten and left to die" (43).

Here silence becomes alive. Silence is personified. This is before Gavriel gives himself up to the Nazis.

Silence symbolizes what the future will hold for the victim. After Moche the Mute has his tongue cut out by the Nazis, "He took with him his silence, his secret, his shadow" (48). Moche had been asked by Gavriel to confront God with the question of why the Jews had to suffer in the Holocaust. Here silence is used to describe why Moche could no longer speak to God.

Gregor has escaped to the home of the old servant, Maria. He is exhausted. "He [Gregor] began to talk at random, about anything and everything, fighting against silence, the way a drowning man fights the force that keeps him conscious" (58). Silence, by antithesis, suggests the method a man would use who was not tired and exhausted.

One time Gavriel told Gregor, ". . . Men talk because they're afraid, they're trying to convince themselves that they're still alive. It's in the silence after the storm that God reveals Himself to man. God is silence" (63).

In this instance silence is a metaphor for the situation in which revelation comes from God, i.e., in which God can be heard. Sometimes men don't take time to listen to God.

On another occasion it was said that "Gregor spent much time with them, listening to their joys and sorrows, the forbidden dreams, that lay, hidden under seven layers of silence, among their memories" (70). Gregor was posing

as a deaf mute, and the townspeople were telling him their secrets since he could not talk, or at least, they did not think so. "Silence" stands for the situation in which very deep memories can be confronted, in which repressed knowledge can be made conscious.

Gregor was able to be a successful deaf mute because "Gregor hid himself behind Gavriel's face, beneath Gavriel's star, and this was why he was almost without an effort to keep silent (83).

Gregor is in the forest with a band of prisoners who are hiding.

. . . What silence! The forest is listening, Gregor reflected, his head hanging, as they walked side by side in the darkness. We speak of the forest as having a soul; it has a memory as well. It listens and remembers (119).

Here again silence is alive, and silence is personified. And in the same vein, . . . "It was different in the forest, Gavriel. The forest meditates; it listens to voices instead of stifling them. The forest has ears, a heart, and a soul" (220).

At the end of the book when the Rebbe was going to talk, "Silence hung over the assembly" (201). Here, again, silence symbolizes respect.

### Silence in The Oath

Perhaps because Wiesel had entertained the idea of all the Jews remaining silent as a way to break the silence of the world toward the Holocaust, Wiesel takes the same idea for this novel, The Oath. Moshe requests the townspeople to take a vow of silence at a town meeting which is the high point of the book. When Moshe puts the vow under the sign of "Herem," people are afraid because "Herem" has to do with the occult (242). "Herem" is a metaphor for involvement with the mystical, the supernatural.

As Edward Fiske notes in his review of The Oath, "Having agonized over whether to speak about the Holocaust, he [Wiesel] turns the tables and experiments with the other option--silence--and finds it unworkable" (37). The reason that it fails is that Azriel, the only survivor of the town, breaks the silence to keep a younger man from committing suicide. According to Alan Friedman, . . . "Moshe is a traditional figure, too, the wiseman as madman, but the author has done wonderful things with the tradition and tender things with Moshe. Moshe is unpredictable but coherent, understandable but finally quite mysterious, so that he is, all by himself, a person, an achievement, the great achievement of this book" (528).

When Azriel recalls the last days of the destruction of the town, he remembers how the Rebbe acted to him:

. . . He listened in silence, listened to the silence welling up inside me with every image as though to stifle it; ultimate total silence suffused with twilight, the deadly kind that rises from wilderness at dusk. And then came the black and luminous hour that marked the last convulsions of the last night, the wedding by fire and the end of Kolvillag (43).

Here silence intensifies the deep trouble of the pogrom. Silence symbolizes in the town's sole survivor the whole horror better than long descriptive passages that fail to give meaning.

#### Silence in Ani Maamin

Through the voices of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Ani Maamin is a song, a cantata, a hymn of thanksgiving which is eloquent, impassioned and powerful verse according to Eli Obeler (1842).

Music for the cantata was composed by Darius Milhaud.

Robert McAfee Brown refers to Ani Maamin as "Eli Wiesel's Song: Lost and Found Again." The reason the song is referred to as a lost song is that people could not believe it during and after the Holocaust. Wiesel, who had sung the song as a boy, had heard it sung in death camps. Now, years later, he hoped to revive it (385).

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob wander the earth at the time of the Holocaust and plead the cause of the Jews. There is a chorus, a narrator, pleaders, and a voice. The plea is not only for the dead but also for the survivors. When God is silent, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob return to the earth. Israel invokes a blessing and decides to continue to believe in the coming of the Messiah.

Robert McAfee Brown says in his review of Ani Maamin:

. . . After each of these recitals of an indomitable willingness to go on waiting, to refuse to succumb fully to despair, the Narrator informs us that God is being moved. The first time "a tear clouds his eyes," then "a tear streams down God's somber countenance," and finally, "God, surprised by his people, weeps for the third time--and this time without restraint, and with--yes--love." No one sees this weeping. It is veiled from the sight of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But his children's faith has moved him, deeply. Moved him, indeed, in the most liberal sense of the word for as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob go away, the Narrator informs us that although they do not know it, "They are no longer alone: God accompanies them, weeping, smiling, whispering." So finally God does speak, and "The

word of God continues to be heard. So does the silence of his dead children" (386).

This beautiful scene from the cantata reassures us that God does not remain silent, and there is a spirit of hope. Still, God was a God of silence in most of Ani Maamin. In Ani Maamin Isaac says, "A true Jew is He who gives himself to silence" (61). There are many references to silence in Ani Maamin.

Isaac says, "Even my father's silence . . . I silenced my questions" . . . (21). In this passage Isaac is referring to Abraham. Isaac is about to be killed, and he is accepting his fate. " . . . all the heavens joined in their weeping. But not God. He alone remained calm. Unmoved. Silent" (25). Jacob, Abraham, Isaac, all the angels and seraphim had started to weep. That God appears not moved is implied in this silence.

The chorus is speaking: "God of silence, ani maamin" (27). This means that even though God is not explaining the Holocaust, we, the Jews, will believe in Him.

"Heavenly silence, human silence, you oppress the soul crying its hunger--Ani maamin" (27). Silence is showing the need, the deep need for God's answer to why He is allowing the Jews to suffer.

The chorus says that "The witnesses testify and celestial tribunal listens in silence" (29). At least, the tribunal is listening in silence! Later, the chorus says

"Our fathers speak and God is silent--Pray, shout, Since God does not" (29). Here silence has a rather angry ring to it. Much later, the narrator declares, "But heaven is silent, and its silence is a wall" (47). This portion of the cantata is silence at its peak of disillusionment.

"Abraham speaks and God is silent," says the narrator, and the chorus echoes, "God is silent, God looks on" (57). Silence infers that there is no action going on, just more of same.

Toward the end of the cantata the Narrator says "God knows--and remains silent" (75). "And the silence of God is God" (87). This statement seems to infer that if God is silence, we will still continue to believe in Him.

These are samples of how silence is used in Ani Maamin. But they are not the only examples of silence in Ani Maamin. As in the other books, these examples are typical of the silence references.

Elie Wiesel's works abound with many metaphors.

After studying some of Wiesel's writings, it seems that Robert McAfee Brown is correct when he believes Wiesel's spiritual journey is apparent in his books.

Perhaps his use of metaphors helped his search for God. From the feeling of his faith being dead forever (in Night) to expressing the presence of a God crying for and with His people (in Ani Maamin), Elie Wiesel has made a religious leap of giant proportion. The frosting



(goodness) of the cake (life) is when Elie Wiesel said in accepting the Peace Prize, "Yes, I have faith, faith in God and even in his creation."

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