

= Night (book) =

Night (1960) is a work by Elie Wiesel about his experience with his father in the Nazi German concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald in 1944 ? 1945 , at the height of the Holocaust toward the end of the Second World War . In just over 100 pages of sparse and fragmented narrative , Wiesel writes about the death of God and his own increasing disgust with humanity , reflected in the inversion of the parent ? child relationship , as his father declines to a helpless state and Wiesel becomes his resentful teenage caregiver . " If only I could get rid of this dead weight ... Immediately I felt ashamed of myself , ashamed forever . " In Night everything is inverted , every value destroyed . " Here there are no fathers , no brothers , no friends , " a kapo tells him . " Everyone lives and dies for himself alone . "

Wiesel was 16 when Buchenwald was liberated by the United States Army in April 1945 , too late for his father , who died after a beating while Wiesel lay silently on the bunk above for fear of being beaten too . He moved to Paris after the war and in 1954 completed an 862 @-@ page manuscript in Yiddish about his experiences , published in Argentina as the 245 @-@ page *Un di velt hot geshvign* (" And the World Remained Silent ") . The novelist François Mauriac helped him find a French publisher . Les Éditions de Minuit published 178 pages as *La Nuit* in 1958 , and in 1960 Hill & Wang in New York published a 116 @-@ page translation as *Night* .

Fifty years later the book had been translated into 30 languages , and now ranks as one of the bedrocks of Holocaust literature . It remains unclear how much of *Night* is memoir . Wiesel has called it his deposition , but scholars have had difficulty approaching it as an unvarnished account . The literary critic Ruth Franklin writes that the pruning of the text from Yiddish to French transformed an angry historical account into a work of art .

Night is the first in a trilogy ? *Night* , *Dawn* , *Day* ? marking Wiesel 's transition during and after the Holocaust from darkness to light , according to the Jewish tradition of beginning a new day at nightfall . " In *Night* , " he said , " I wanted to show the end , the finality of the event . Everything came to an end ? man , history , literature , religion , God . There was nothing left . And yet we begin again with night . "

= = Background = =

Elie Wiesel was born on 30 September 1928 in Sighet , a town in the Carpathian mountains of northern Transylvania , to Chlomo Wiesel , a shopkeeper , and his wife , Sarah , née Feig . The family lived in a community of 10 @,@ 000 ? 20 @,@ 000 mostly Orthodox Jews . Northern Transylvania had been annexed by Hungary in 1940 , and restrictions on Jews were already in place , but the period Wiesel discusses at the beginning of the book , 1941 ? 1943 , was a relatively calm one for the Jewish population .

That changed at midnight on Sunday , 18 March 1944 , with the invasion of Hungary by Nazi Germany , and the arrival in Budapest of SS @-@ Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann to oversee the deportation of the country 's Jews . From 5 April Jews over the age of six had to wear a 10 x 10 cm (3 @.@ 8 x 3 @.@ 8 in) yellow badge on the upper @-@ left side of their coats or jackets . Jews had to declare the value of their property , and were forbidden from moving home , travelling , owning cars or radios , listening to foreign radio stations , or using the telephone . Jewish authors could no longer be published , their books were removed from libraries , and Jewish civil servants , journalists and lawyers were sacked .

As the Allies prepared for the liberation of Europe , the mass deportations began at a rate of four trains a day from Hungary to the Auschwitz concentration camp in Nazi @-@ occupied Poland , each train carrying around 3 @,@ 000 people . Between 15 May and 8 July 1944 , 437 @,@ 402 Hungarian Jews are recorded as having been sent there on 147 trains , most gassed on arrival . The transports comprised most of the Jewish population outside Budapest , the Hungarian capital .

Between 16 May and 27 June , 131 @,@ 641 Jews were deported from northern Transylvania . Wiesel , his parents and sisters ? older sisters Hilda and Beatrice and seven @-@ year @-@ old Tzipora ? were among them . On arrival Jews were " selected " for the gas chamber or forced labour

; to be sent to the left meant work , to the right , the gas chamber . Sarah and Tzipora were sent to the gas chamber . Hilda and Beatrice survived , separated from the rest of the family . Wiesel and Chlomo managed to stay together , surviving forced labour and a death march to another concentration camp , Buchenwald , near Weimar in Thuringia . Chlomo died there in January 1945 , three months before the 6th Armored Division of the United States Army arrived to liberate the camp .

= = Synopsis = =

= = = Moshe the Beadle = = =

Night opens in Sighet in 1941 . The book 's narrator is Eliezer , an Orthodox Jewish teenager who studies the Talmud by day , and by night " weep [s] over the destruction of the Temple " . To the disapproval of his father , Eliezer spends time discussing the Kabbalah with Moshe the Beadle , caretaker of the Hasidic shtiebel (house of prayer) .

In June 1941 the Hungarian government expelled Jews unable to prove their citizenship . Moshe is crammed onto a cattle train and taken to Poland . He manages to escape , saved by God , he believes , so that he might save the Jews of Sighet . He returns to the village to tell what he calls the " story of his own death , " running from one house to the next : " Jews , listen to me ! It 's all I ask of you . No money . No pity . Just listen to me ! " .

When the train crossed into Poland , he tells them , it was taken over by the Gestapo , the German secret police . The Jews were transferred to trucks , then driven to a forest in Galicia , near Kolomaye , where they were forced to dig pits . When they had finished , each prisoner had to approach the hole , present his neck , and was shot . Babies were thrown into the air and used as targets by machine gunners . He tells them about Malka , the young girl who took three days to die , and Tobias , the tailor who begged to be killed before his sons ; and how he , Moshe , was shot in the leg and taken for dead . But the Jews of Sighet would not listen , making Moshe Night 's first unheeded witness .

= = = Sighet ghettos = = =

The Germans arrived in Sighet around 21 March 1944 , and shortly after Passover (8 ? 14 April that year) arrested the community leaders . Jews had to hand over their valuables , were not allowed to visit restaurants or leave home after six in the evening , and had to wear the yellow star at all times . Eliezer 's father makes light of it :

The SS transfer the Jews to one of two ghettos , each with its own council or Judenrat . Eliezer 's house on a corner of Serpent Street was in the larger ghetto in the town centre , so his family was able to stay at home , though the windows on the non @-@ ghetto side had to be boarded up .

In May 1944 the Judenrat is told the ghettos will be closed with immediate effect and the residents deported . Eliezer 's family is first moved to the smaller ghetto , but they are not told their final destination , only that they may each take a few personal belongings . The Hungarian police , wielding truncheons and rifle butts , march Eliezer 's neighbours through the streets . " It was from that moment that I began to hate them , and my hate is still the only link between us today . " .

= = = Auschwitz = = =

Eliezer and his family are crammed into a closed cattle wagon with 80 others . On the third night one woman , Madame Schächter ? Night 's second unheeded witness ? becomes hysterical , screaming that she can see flames , until the others beat her . Men and women are separated on arrival at Auschwitz @-@ Birkenau , the reception and extermination camp within the Auschwitz complex . Eliezer and his father are " selected " to go to the left , which meant forced labour ; his mother , Hilda , Beatrice and Tzipora to the right , the gas chamber . Hilda and Beatrice managed to

survive .

The remainder of Night describes Eliezer 's efforts not to be parted from his father , not even to lose sight of him ; his grief and shame at witnessing his father 's decline into helplessness ; and as their relationship changes and the young man becomes the older man 's caregiver , his resentment and guilt , because his father 's existence threatens his own . The stronger Eliezer 's need to survive , the weaker the bonds that tie him to other people .

His loss of faith in human relationships is mirrored in his loss of faith in God . During the first night , as he and his father wait in line , he watches a lorry deliver its load of children into the fire . While his father recites the Kaddish , the Jewish prayer for the dead ? Wiesel writes that in the long history of the Jews , he does not know whether people have ever recited the prayer for the dead for themselves ? Eliezer considers throwing himself against the electric fence .

At that moment he and his father are ordered to go to their barracks . But Eliezer is already destroyed . " [T] he student of the Talmud , the child that I was , had been consumed in the flames . There remained only a shape that looked like me . " There follows a passage that Ellen Fine writes contains the main themes of Night ? the death of God and innocence , and the *défaite du moi* , or dissolution of the self , a recurring motif in Holocaust literature :

With the loss of self goes Eliezer 's sense of time : " I glanced at my father . How he had changed ! ... So much had happened within such a few hours that I had lost all sense of time . When had we left our houses ? And the ghetto ? And the train ? Was it only a week ? One night ? one single night ? "

= = = Buna = = =

In or around August 1944 Eliezer and his father are transferred from Birkenau to the work camp at Monowitz (also known as Buna and Auschwitz III) , their lives reduced to the avoidance of violence and the search for food . " Bread , soup ? these were my whole life . I was a body . Perhaps less than that even : a starved stomach . " Their only joy is when the Americans bomb the camp .

God is not lost to Eliezer entirely . During the hanging of a child , which the camp is forced to watch , he hears someone ask : Where is God ? Where is he ? Not heavy enough for the weight of his body to break his neck , the boy dies slowly . Wiesel files past him , sees his tongue still pink and his eyes clear .

Fine writes that this is the central event in Night , a religious sacrifice ? the binding of Isaac and crucifixion of Jesus ? described by Alfred Kazin as the literal death of God . Afterwards the inmates celebrate Rosh Hashanah , the Jewish new year , but Eliezer cannot take part .

= = = Death march = = =

In January 1945 , with the Soviet army approaching , the Germans decide to flee , taking 60 @, @ 000 inmates on a death march to concentration camps in Germany . Eliezer and his father are marched to Gleiwitz to be put on a freight train to Buchenwald , a camp near Weimar , 350 miles (563 km) from Auschwitz .

Resting in a shed after marching 50 miles (80 km) , Rabbi Eliahou asks if anyone has seen his son . They had stuck together for three years , " always near each other , for suffering , for blows , for the ration of bread , for prayer , " but the rabbi had lost sight of him in the crowd and was now scratching through the snow looking for his son 's corpse . " I hadn 't any strength left for running . And my son didn 't notice . That 's all I know . " Eliezer does not tell the man that his son had indeed noticed his father limping , and had run faster , letting the distance between them grow .

The inmates spend two days and nights in Gleiwitz locked inside cramped barracks without food , water or heat , sleeping on top of one another , so that each morning the living wake with the dead underneath them . There is more marching to the train station and onto a cattle wagon with no roof . They travel for ten days and nights , with only the snow falling on them for water . Of the 100 in Eliezer 's wagon , 12 survive the journey . The living make space by throwing the dead onto the tracks :

= = = Buchenwald , liberation = = =

The Germans are waiting with loudhailers and orders to head for a hot bath . Wiesel is desperate for the heat of the water , but his father sinks into the snow . " I could have wept with rage ... I showed him the corpses all around him ; they too had wanted to rest here ... I yelled against the wind ... I felt I was not arguing with him , but with death itself , with the death he had already chosen . " An alert sounds , the camp lights go out , and Eliezer , exhausted , follows the crowd to the barracks , leaving his father behind . He wakes at dawn on a wooden bunk , remembering that he has a father , and goes in search of him .

His father is in another block , sick with dysentery . The other men in his bunk , a Frenchman and a Pole , attack him because he can no longer go outside to relieve himself . Eliezer is unable to protect him . " Another wound to the heart , another hate , another reason for living lost . "

Begging for water one night from his bunk , where he has lain for a week , Chlomo is beaten on the head with a truncheon by an SS officer for making too much noise . Eliezer lies in the bunk above and does nothing for fear of being beaten too . He hears his father make a rattling noise , " Eliezer . " In the morning , 29 January 1945 , he finds another man in his father 's place . The Kapos had come before dawn and taken Chlomo to the crematorium .

Chlomo missed his freedom by three months . The Soviets had liberated Auschwitz 11 days earlier , and the Americans were making their way towards Buchenwald . Eliezer is transferred to the children 's block where he stays with 600 others , dreaming of soup . On 5 April 1945 the inmates are told the camp is to be liquidated and they are to be moved ? another death march . On 11 April , with 20 @, @ 000 inmates still inside , a resistance movement inside the camp attacks the remaining SS officers and takes control . At six o 'clock that evening , an American tank arrives at the gates , and behind it the Sixth Armored Division of the United States Third Army .

= = Writing and publishing = =

= = = Move to France = = =

Wiesel wanted to move to Palestine after his release , but because of British immigration restrictions was sent instead by the Oeuvre au Secours aux Enfants (Children 's Rescue Service) to Belgium , then Normandy . In Normandy he learned that his two older sisters , Hilda and Beatrice , had survived .

From 1947 to 1950 he studied the Talmud , philosophy and literature at the Sorbonne , where he was influenced by the existentialists , attending lectures by Jean @-@ Paul Sartre and Martin Buber . He also taught Hebrew , and worked as a translator for the Yiddish weekly Zion in Kamf . In 1948 , when he was 19 , he was sent to Israel as a war correspondent by the French newspaper L 'arche , and after the Sorbonne became chief foreign correspondent of the Tel Aviv newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth .

= = = 1954 : Un di Velt Hot Geshvign = = =

Wiesel wrote in 1979 that he kept his story to himself for ten years . In 1954 he wanted to interview the French prime minister , Pierre Mendès @-@ France , and approached the novelist François Mauriac , a friend of Mendès @-@ France , for an introduction . He writes : " The problem was that [Mauriac] was in love with Jesus . He was the most decent person I ever met in that field ... and he was in love with Jesus Whatever I would ask ? Jesus . Finally , I said , ' What about Mendès @-@ France ? ' He said that Mendès @-@ France , like Jesus , was suffering ... "

Wiesel started writing on board a ship to Brazil , where he had been assigned to cover Christian missionaries within Jewish communities , and by the end of the journey had completed an 862 @-@ page manuscript . He was introduced on the ship to Yehudit Moretzka , a Yiddish singer travelling

with Mark Turkov , a publisher of Yiddish texts . Turkov asked if he could read Wiesel 's manuscript . It is unclear who edited the text for publication . Wiesel wrote in *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (1995) that he handed Turkov his only copy and that it was never returned , but also that he (Wiesel) " cut down the original manuscript from 862 pages to the 245 of the published Yiddish edition . "

Turkov 's Tzentral Varband fun Polische Yidn in Argentina (Central Union of Polish Jews in Argentina) published the book in 1956 in Buenos Aires as the 245 @-@ page *Un di velt hot geshvign* (" And the World Remained Silent ") . It was the 117th book in a 176 @-@ volume series of Yiddish memoirs of Poland and the war , *Dos poylishe yidntum* (Polish Jewry , 1946 ? 1966) . Ruth Wisse writes that *Un di Velt Hot Geshvign* stood out from the rest of the series , which survivors wrote as memorials to their dead , as a " highly selective and isolating literary narrative . "

== 1958 : *La Nuit* ==

Wiesel translated *Un di Velt Hot Geshvign* into French and in 1955 sent it to Mauriac . Even with Mauriac 's help they had difficulty finding a publisher ; Wiesel said they found it too morbid . Jérôme Lindon of *Les Éditions de Minuit* , Samuel Beckett 's publisher , agreed to handle it . Lindon edited the text down to 178 pages . Published as *La Nuit* , a title chosen by Lindon , it had a preface by Mauriac and was dedicated to Chlomo , Sarah and Tzipora .

== 1960 : *Night* ==

Wiesel 's New York agent , Georges Borchardt , encountered the same difficulty finding a publisher in the United States . In 1960 Arthur Wang of Hill & Wang in New York ? who Wiesel writes " believed in literature as others believe in God " ? paid a \$ 100 pro @-@ forma advance and published that year a 116 @-@ page English translation by Stella Rodway as *Night* . The first 18 months saw 1 @, @ 046 copies sell at \$ 3 each , and it took three years to sell the first print run of 3 @, @ 000 copies , but the book attracted interest from reviewers , leading to television interviews and meetings with literary figures like Saul Bellow .

By 1997 *Night* was selling 300 @, @ 000 copies a year in the United States . By 2011 it had sold six million copies in that country , and was available in 30 languages . Sales increased in January 2006 when it was chosen for Oprah 's Book Club . Republished with a new translation by Marion Wiesel , Wiesel 's wife , and a new preface by Wiesel , it sat at no . 1 in *The New York Times* bestseller list for paperback non @-@ fiction for 18 months from 13 February 2006 , until the newspaper decided to remove it . It became the club 's third bestseller to date , with over two million sales of the Book Club edition by May 2011 .

== Reception ==

Reviewers have had difficulty reading *Night* as an eyewitness account . It has been categorized as a novel , autobiography , autobiographical novel , non @-@ fictional novel , semi @-@ fictional memoir , fictional @-@ autobiographical novel , fictionalized autobiographical memoir and memoir @-@ novel . Ellen Fine described it as *témoignage* (testimony) . Wiesel called it his deposition .

Literary critic Ruth Franklin writes that *Night* 's impact stems from its minimalist construction . The 1956 Yiddish version , at 865 pages , was a long and angry historical work . In preparation for the French edition , Wiesel 's editors pruned without mercy . Franklin argues that the power of the narrative was achieved at the cost of literal truth , and that to insist that the work is purely factual is to ignore its literary sophistication . Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer argues similarly that Wiesel evokes , rather than describes :

Franklin writes that *Night* is the account of the 15 @-@ year @-@ old Eliezer , a " semi @-@ fictional construct , " told by the 25 @-@ year @-@ old Elie Wiesel . This allows the 15 @-@ year @-@ old to tell his story from " the post @-@ Holocaust vantage point " of *Night* 's readers . In a comparative analysis of the Yiddish and French texts , Naomi Seidman , professor of Jewish culture , concludes that there are two survivors in Wiesel 's writing , a Yiddish and French . In re @-@

writing rather than simply translating *Un di Velt Hot Geshvign* , Wiesel replaced an angry survivor who regards " testimony as a refutation of what the Nazis did to the Jews , " with one " haunted by death , whose primary complaint is directed against God ... " *Night* transformed the Holocaust into a religious event .

Seidman argues that the Yiddish version was for Jewish readers , who wanted to hear about revenge , but the anger was removed for the largely Christian readership of the French translation . In the Yiddish edition , for example , when Buchenwald was liberated : " Early the next day Jewish boys ran off to Weimar to steal clothing and potatoes . And to rape German shikshas [*un tsu fargvaldikn daytshe shikses*] . " In the 1958 French and 1960 English editions : " On the following morning , some of the young men went to Weimar to get some potatoes and clothes ? and to sleep with girls [*coucher avec des filles*] . But of revenge , not a sign . "

Franklin writes that Oprah Winfrey 's promotion of *Night* came at a difficult time for the genre of memoir , after a previous book @-@ club author , James Frey , was found to have fabricated parts of his autobiography , *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) . She argues that Winfrey 's choice of *Night* may have been intended to restore the book club 's credibility . *Night* has a useful lesson to teach , Franklin writes , about the complexities of memoir and memory .

Wiesel tells a story about a visit to a Rebbe , a Hasidic rabbi , he had not seen for 20 years . The Rebbe is upset to learn that Wiesel has become a writer , and wants to know what he writes . " Stories , " Wiesel tells him , " ... true stories " :