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## Elie Wiesel's Unique Journey to Redemption

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Julia Click

12/8/17

Honors Thesis

Advisor-Dr. Buric

## Wiesel's Unique Journey to Redemption

### Introduction

After World War II ended and the Holocaust survivors were freed a question arose; what happens next? Elie Wiesel followed a distinct path after the war. I will explore the very different path that this man took from other Holocaust survivors like Tadeusz Borowski and Primo Levi after he was freed. I will look extensively at what came next for Wiesel. Wiesel became a very important figure in the Jewish community after the Holocaust and his journey to redemption is a significant one. Elie Wiesel had a very spiritual upbringing before he was taken to Auschwitz and this allowed him to talk about the Holocaust from a different perspective than other survivors. The themes of his memoir, *Night*, are very different from themes in other Holocaust memoirs like Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* and Borowski's *This Way for the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen*.

Many academics have written about *Night*, and one of those academics was Naomi Seidman. She said about *Night* that it depicted "the survivor as a witness and as an expression of silence and death"<sup>1</sup> Seidman viewed Wiesel as expressing silence after his liberation from Auschwitz. Robert McAfee Brown was another academic that discussed Wiesel's work. He said

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<sup>1</sup> Naomi Seidman, *Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage*. Indiana University Press.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4467484.pdf>. (accessed November 8, 2017).

that Wiesel helped Jews “deal with the devastation we call the Holocaust”<sup>2</sup>. Both of these academics argued that Wiesel’s work was very relevant to Holocaust studies.

The author Robert McAfee Brown also pointed out that in Elie Wiesel’s books “light begins to penetrate a darkness”<sup>3</sup>. Elie Wiesel’s books are more redemptive than other Holocaust memoirs, and scholars like Mr. Brown agree on this. Wiesel had a more positive outlook on life than his contemporaries and that can be seen in his memoir. Wiesel managed to escape out of the darkness that enveloped other Holocaust survivors. Darkness is a prominent theme in other Holocaust memoirs such as *This Way for the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen* and *Survival in Auschwitz*.

In America the Holocaust, Hilene Flanzbaum argued, is not necessarily more important than any other historical event. Flanzbaum argued, “The event does not necessarily retain any special status among other historical events that Americans read about or see on television”<sup>4</sup>. Ms. Flanzbaum argued in her book that the Holocaust held no more importance than any other historical event, and obviously she had people who disagreed with this view. Elie Wiesel sought to change this culture in America of indifference to the Holocaust. Another academic that addressed Holocaust literature was James Young. He pointed out that Holocaust literature has to provide “testimonial proof of the events it embodies”<sup>5</sup>. This is exactly what Wiesel’s *Night* does.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, *Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, Introduction).

<sup>3</sup> Brown, *Messenger...* Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> Hilene Flanzbaum “The Americanization of the Holocaust”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, <http://ck8zf4yc8t.scholar.serialssolutions.com/?sid=google&aunit=H&aualast=Flanzbaum&atitle=The+americanization+of+the+Holocaust&id=doi:10.1080/14623529908413937&title=Journal+of+genocide+research&volume=1&issue=1&date=1999&spage=91&issn=1462-3528>. (accessed November 29, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Young, James E. "Interpreting Literary Testimony: A Preface to Rereading Holocaust Diaries and Memoirs." *New Literary History*. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1297371110?pg-origsite=gscholar>. (accessed November 29, 2017).

Another academic that talked extensively about Elie Wiesel's work was Ellen S. Fine. Ms. Fine felt Wiesel's work was very relevant to our times today. She argued that Wiesel bore "witness to an event which [touched] us all"<sup>6</sup>. It was Wiesel who brought this idea of memory and never forgetting the Holocaust into the American consciousness. Wiesel's work, as Ms. Fine points out, was ignored at first but today we as a society realize the relevance of his story.

Elie Wiesel witnessed the events of the Holocaust first-hand but, as Alan L. Berger pointed out, our generation is "commanded to witness"<sup>7</sup> the atrocities that Wiesel experienced firsthand. We are called to pay attention to what Wiesel has to say. Our generation must prevent the Holocaust from happening to future generations. Wiesel said that all Jews should bear witness to the Holocaust and I believe non-Jews should too. We must never forget what prejudice can lead humans to do.

It is also important to remember, as Steven T. Katz and Alan Rosen point out in their book, that Elie Wiesel's work had religious aspects to it. "Elie Wiesel published four books devoted partly or wholly to biblical retellings,"<sup>8</sup> and this shows just how devoted to his faith he was. Steven T. Katz and Alan Rosen talk about the significance Elie Wiesel's faith had in his writings in their book. Elie Wiesel explored themes of faith and spirituality in nearly all of his works. Elie Wiesel was a man who was inspired to write about his faith and the role it played in his life.

*Night* is a chronicle of Wiesel's life before and during his time in Auschwitz. Wiesel's work, *Night*, was received poorly at first. His book was considered to be too honest by a lot of

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen S. Fine, *Legacy of Night*, (Albany: State University of New York Press), xii.

<sup>7</sup> Alan L. Berger, "Bearing Witness: Second Generation Literature of the 'Shoah'. *Modern Judaism*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1396049>. (accessed November 28, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Steven T. Katz and Alan Rosen. *Elie Wiesel: Jewish, Literary, and Moral Perspectives*, (Indiana University Press), 9.

critics. Eventually however, his book was picked up by a publisher and it began to be widely read. Today it is one of the most widely read books about the Holocaust. *Night* is considered to be a seminal work on the Holocaust by many scholars. It was one of the first books to address the question of where God was during the ordeal of Auschwitz. Wiesel's work really hammered home the tragedies that were faced by the Jews during the Holocaust. Wiesel's memoirs are both horrific and dramatic.<sup>9</sup>

Wiesel's *Night* does offer a unique perspective on the Holocaust. Wiesel was a devout Jew from a small Transylvanian town [in Romania] who was caught up in one of the most horrific acts of violence the world has ever seen. Wiesel offers an insight into the Holocaust that other memoirs like Borowski's *This Way for the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen* and Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* do not. Wiesel kept his faith throughout his life unlike Borowski. Wiesel had this very strong relationship with God that is evident throughout *Night*.

Wiesel, Levi and Borowski all had very different upbringings. Wiesel pursued religious studies before he was rounded up by the Germans and was very inspired by the spiritual beliefs of his grandfather and mother. He studied Kabbalah with a man named Moishe before he was imprisoned in Auschwitz. Levi was raised Jewish but he was never a devout Jew like Wiesel. Borowski was raised as a Roman Catholic, but joined the Communist party as a young man which deterred him on religion.<sup>10</sup>

Elie Wiesel was impacted by his experience in Auschwitz in very different ways from Borowski and Levi. His experiences during the Holocaust taught him that you should appreciate life all the more when it is almost taken from you. Wiesel also believed in God and thanked him

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<sup>9</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1960). Xiv.

<sup>10</sup> Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen*. (London: Penguin Books, 1976). 20.

for his freedom. Wiesel worked hard to make sure people knew his experiences could not take away his humanity and dignity. His memoir, *Night* has a very redemptive quality to it whereas Borowski's and Levi's memoirs are very dark.

Wiesel's point of view on the Holocaust is divergent from other Holocaust survivors like Levi and Borowski. Wiesel was very spiritual. He reached out to God repeatedly. In his memoir *Night* he is constantly seeking God. He felt that God was in fact there for him and helped him survive the Holocaust. He was very grateful to God when he was liberated from Auschwitz.

One example that shows Wiesel did not reject God is in *Night* when he says, "I was not denying his existence"<sup>11</sup>. This shows that Wiesel still believed in God in his darkest hour whereas Borowski did not. He had faith and hope in God, unlike Borowski. Wiesel was God-fearing and this helped him overcome many difficulties. Wiesel seemed to have found peace in his life.

While Wiesel was in Auschwitz he received uplifting advice from a man in charge of his block. This man told him and his comrades "don't lose hope"<sup>12</sup>. Wiesel took this advice to heart and worked hard in the concentration camp to make sure he and his friends and family did not lose hope. He knew that to lose hope would signify death in Auschwitz. Wiesel was a strong man who did not let anyone destroy his faith in humanity.

Like Wiesel, Tadeusz Borowski was also interned in Auschwitz. Tadeusz Borowski was interned in Auschwitz from 1943 until 1944 and in 1944 was moved to Dautmergen then to Dachau. Borowski wrote to his fiancée while in Auschwitz. His fiancée was also imprisoned in

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<sup>11</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 41.

Auschwitz. Borowski was a commando who helped transport Jews to the gas chambers while interned at Auschwitz. He killed himself in 1951 by breathing in gas from his gas stove.<sup>13</sup>

Borowski, unlike Wiesel, felt extreme guilt over the Holocaust. Borowski was very affected by helping transport Jews to the gas chambers. He saw thousands of people heading to their deaths and this took a heavy toll on him. After his experiences, he turned inward. He could not reconcile himself to life after the Holocaust. He was tired and exhausted because of what he had seen. Borowski in a way suffered from survivor's guilt. He often wondered why all those people died and he did not. He felt sticky moisture on his eyelids and his throat got dry when he watched all of the Jews marching to their death.<sup>14</sup>

Primo Levi was a chemist and author. He spent a year in Auschwitz. Like Wiesel and Borowski his experiences at Auschwitz inspired him to write about what he went through. Levi felt that he owed it to the people who perished in the Holocaust to tell his story so the Holocaust was never forgotten. Levi was highly trained in chemistry and this actually saved him from performing lethal labor in Auschwitz. Because Levi was a chemist he was assigned to a group that did relatively easy work with chemicals in a warehouse.

Levi, unlike Wiesel, was not very religious. He did not seek God in his memoir like Elie Wiesel did. Wiesel talked in his memoir about asking God important questions, whereas Levi left the reader with the impression that he did not feel there was a God. Levi also experienced horrible things in Auschwitz and it is hard to judge him for not believing in God. Levi really did not feel that God was there for him in his darkest hour.

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<sup>13</sup> Borowski, *This Way for the Gas...*11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

Levi was much less devout than Wiesel. Primo Levi was not a spiritual person like Wiesel. He even said “There is Auschwitz. And so there cannot be God”<sup>15</sup>. This man because of the horrors he saw in Auschwitz did not believe in God. Levi did not have any faith that God was with the people in Auschwitz. He in fact believed that Auschwitz was proof that there was no God. He had a more atheistic view than Wiesel.

Borowski and Levi are very distinct from Wiesel. Neither Borowski nor Levi were religious. Borowski describes in his memoir how when he was in the concentration camp his will to survive ruled out over his compassion. Borowski felt very guilty about what he did to survive in the concentration camps. Levi also felt guilty for doing what he could to survive Auschwitz.

Borowski and Levi it seems never could move on after they were liberated from Auschwitz. They were forever prisoners in Auschwitz. Even though they were freed their horrifying experiences in Auschwitz stayed with them. They both seem to have been haunted by the camps until their deaths. These two men saw horrible atrocities in the camps and they also felt guilt for surviving the camps when so many did not.

Immediately following the Holocaust many people felt that reading Holocaust memoirs was simply too painful for people. Eventually though Wiesel’s and other Holocaust survivors’ books began to be read. Today Holocaust literature is considered an important part of many countries’ educational curriculums. It is important that people read *Night* and other works on the Holocaust so the past can never be forgotten.

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<sup>15</sup> “Holocaust Memorial Day – Primo Levi the unbeliever.” The O Project. <https://oproject.wordpress.com/2009/02/02/holocaust-memorial-day-primo-levi-the-unbeliever/>. (accessed November 15, 2017).



According to a study Holocaust survivors are three times more likely to commit suicide.

<sup>16</sup>This may be due to the fact that Holocaust survivors have experienced atrocities none of us could imagine. Holocaust survivors have seen the absolute worst of humanity, which makes it even more amazing when they, like Elie Wiesel, are able to lead full lives after what they endured. Even after they witnessed the horrors of the concentration camps they manage to find some good in the world that keeps them going.

According to a report by the Jerusalem Post, by 2035 only 43,700 Holocaust survivors will be left in Israel. It is our duty to make sure that we never forget the Holocaust, even after the survivors die out. Elie Wiesel talked about the importance of never forgetting the Holocaust. Wiesel was a brave survivor who chose not to forget but also chose to live his life meaningfully.

These three men, Borowski, Levi, and Wiesel, all took very different paths in life after they were liberated from Auschwitz. Borowski killed himself at 29 shortly after being liberated from Auschwitz. Levi died at 67 after he fell three stories. His death was officially ruled a suicide. Levi lived a life after Auschwitz though. He went on to write many books on different subjects like Chemistry. Wiesel went on with his life after Auschwitz too. He went on to do a lot of work for human rights. It seems that Borowski was the only one out of these three men who let his time in Auschwitz keep him from living his life.

Wiesel tried throughout his whole life to reconcile his sufferings in Auschwitz with his belief in God. In an interview with Professor Georg Klein in 2004, he even said, “I thought that

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<sup>16</sup> Tamara Traubmann, “Study: Holocaust Survivors 3 Times More Likely to Attempt Suicide”. Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/news/study-holocaust-survivors-3-times-more-likely-to-attempt-suicide-1.166386>. (accessed December 7, 2017).

God's world is only one world and here I see another world parallel to that world"<sup>17</sup>. This quote shows that Wiesel questioned God, but he never stopped believing in Him. Wiesel was always a spiritual person, unlike Borowski. Wiesel had faith and hope to help him through his suffering whereas Borowski did not.

Elie Wiesel is unlike other Holocaust survivors. He had complete faith in God during his ordeal in the concentration camps. He never lost hope. He found his purpose in life after the Holocaust, and that was to make sure nothing like it ever happened again. He worked hard throughout his life to make sure human's rights were not violated anywhere in the world. He even won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in 1986.

Wiesel did not let his experiences during the Holocaust keep him from living his life like other Holocaust survivors did. While some survivors like Borowski were so tormented by guilt over the Holocaust that they could not cope with it, Wiesel took his experience and turned it into something productive. Wiesel worked hard after he was freed from Auschwitz to make sure the Holocaust was never forgotten by the world. Wiesel became the voice for Holocaust survivors after being freed from Auschwitz.

Elie Wiesel grew to become a very important man in the Jewish community. President Obama even called him "the moral conscience of the world."<sup>18</sup> Some Holocaust survivors resented this though. Wiesel worked hard to make sure the story of the Holocaust was told, but his unique perspective on the Holocaust was not shared by everyone.

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<sup>17</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Interview Transcript*. Nobel Prize.

[https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-interview-transcript.html](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-interview-transcript.html). (accessed November 8, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Mary Rourke and Valerie J. Nelson, "Elie Wiesel dies at 87; Nobel Peace Prize laureate and renowned Holocaust survivor". LA Times. <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-elie-wiesel-20160702-snap-story.html>. (accessed November 8, 2017)

Levi died in 1987 from injuries sustained in a fall from a third-story building. His death was officially ruled a suicide but there is evidence to support that his death was accidental. There is a Primo Levi center in New York City that is dedicated to the studying of the culture of Italian Jewry. This center honors the memory of a man who told his story so that others would not suffer the same fate.

Primo Levi amazingly survived Auschwitz and went on to write about it. His memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*, is a remarkable piece of literature. In his memoir, he seems to grasp the hopelessness that his fellow inmates in Auschwitz felt. In his memoir, he writes, “Sooner or later in life everyone discovers that perfect happiness is unrealizable”<sup>19</sup>. Levi, like Borowski, lost all hope after he went through Auschwitz. He and Borowski too felt that there was no God who was listening to them after they suffered through the concentration camp, unlike Wiesel.

Primo Levi talked in an interview with the New Republic in 1986 about returning to Auschwitz after the war. While most places there did not stir up any emotion in him he did “experience a feeling of violent anguish”<sup>20</sup> when he went through Birkenau Camp. He said that was because nothing had changed there since the Holocaust. It is clear from this interview that Levi was still haunted years later by memories of the concentration camp. Levi’s memories of Auschwitz never left him. He always remembered what he had endured at the hands of the Nazis.

Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel all survived Auschwitz but their lives took very different paths after they were liberated. While Wiesel and Levi went on to live a

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<sup>19</sup> “Primo Levi Quotes”, good reads. [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/4187.Primo\\_Levi](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/4187.Primo_Levi). (accessed November 15, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Primo Levi, “Primo Levi's Heartbreaking, Heroic Answers to the Most Common Questions He Was Asked About 'Survival in Auschwitz'”. New Republic. <https://newrepublic.com/article/119959/interview-primo-levi-survival-auschwitz>. (accessed November 8, 2017).

normal life after the Holocaust, Borowski did not. He did get married and have a kid but he did not get over his guilt of what he did in Auschwitz. He killed himself at a very young age shortly after liberation.<sup>21</sup>

While Wiesel often talked about life after Auschwitz in his writings, Borowski talked about his outlook on the world in his writings. In his memoir, he wrote “The world is ruled by neither justice nor morality; crime is not punished nor virtue rewarded, one is forgotten as quickly as the other. The world is ruled by power and power is obtained with money”<sup>22</sup>. This is an example of how Borowski saw the world as a bleak, hopeless place. He saw the world as a dirty, corrupt place.

Borowski often talks about the hopelessness of life in the concentration camps in his memoir *This Way for the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen*. This is very different from *Night*. It is clear from Borowski’s writings that he thought a lot about death. In one of his poems he had the lines “neither poems nor prose just a length of rope”<sup>23</sup>. This shows how his writings conveyed this dark depression he was struggling with. Borowski was a troubled man after he was freed from the concentration camps and this quote shows just how troubled he was.

While Wiesel did not let the camps take away his faith, Borowski talks in his memoir about how the camps changed him. He mentions in his memoir that he “can now push through the liveliest crowd with total indifference”<sup>24</sup>. This quote shows that after the camps Borowski no longer enjoyed being around people. Before the Holocaust, he did love to socialize. He would go

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<sup>21</sup> Borowski. *This Way for the Gas...* 11.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 168.

<sup>23</sup> Tadeusz Borowski Quotes, good reads. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/476989-neither-poems-nor-prose-just-a-length-of-rope-just>. (accessed November 15, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Borowski, *This Way for the Gas...*, 178.

to parties and socialize with friends before the war, but afterwards he was changed and did not want to talk to people anymore.<sup>25</sup>

Borowski, Levi and Wiesel exemplify how different Holocaust survivors dealt with their experiences. As Levi mentioned in an interview with the New Republic in 1986 there are two different types of Holocaust survivors. There are those who want to move on and forget what happened to them and then there are those who vow never to forget what happened to them. Borowski, Levi and Wiesel never forgot what happened to them. Even though Levi and Wiesel were able to move on with their lives after the Holocaust they never forgot. Borowski also never forgot his experiences, and he likely wanted to.

In the upcoming chapters, you will hear about the specific path Wiesel took in his life. Wiesel never forgot his experiences in the concentration camps, but he did not let them destroy him either. Wiesel worked hard after he was liberated to make sure the world never forgot what happened during the Holocaust. He helped open the National Holocaust Museum in Washington DC for the purpose of educating others about the Holocaust. Wiesel was a tireless worker for human rights and won a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts.

Wiesel had a bright outlook on life. He knew his purpose in life was to work tirelessly for human's rights and he continued to do so throughout his life. He vowed to never forget what happened to him in the Holocaust, but he let his experiences in Auschwitz inspire him. Wiesel never gave up on life or God, and that makes him markedly different from Borowski and Levi. Wiesel has this unique perspective on his Holocaust experiences that other Holocaust survivors do not have.

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<sup>25</sup> Borowski, *This Way for the Gas...* 178.

## Chapter I

Elie Wiesel had a very different background compared to other Holocaust survivors like Primo Levi and Tadeusz Borowski. Most Holocaust survivors were not raised as devout Jews and this is because many of them had assimilated to western European life before World War II started, but that is not the case with Elie Wiesel. He was raised in a very observant Jewish household. His family taught him to obey all the rules of the Jewish religion. He grew up in an environment that lead him to have a unique perspective on events in the world. He saw the world through a spiritual lens.

Elie Wiesel was born on September 30, 1928 in the town of Sighet in Romania. In his town, there was a thriving Jewish community while he was growing up. Wiesel spent a lot of his time studying the Talmud, which is the holy text in the Jewish religion. Wiesel while he was growing up constantly asked questions about his faith. When he was thirteen he begged a man by the name of Moishe to guide him in his studies of the Kabbalah. While he was growing up in Sighet he constantly tried to learn more about his faith.<sup>26</sup>

Wiesel learned from Moishe how to ask God the important questions. Moishe told Wiesel as a child “Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him”<sup>27</sup>. Throughout his memoir Wiesel is constantly asking God questions about the world around him. Wiesel was able to grow closer to God because he learned how to ask Him the tough questions. Wiesel, unlike other Holocaust survivors, grew in his faith because of the ordeals he went through during the Holocaust. He learned to question God and that can be seen in his memoir.

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<sup>26</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1960). 3.

<sup>27</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 5.

Wiesel in the Yiddish version of his memoir speaks about his belief that we are all reflections of God's image. Wiesel was able to forgive his captors because of this belief that he learned in childhood. Wiesel in his spiritual upbringing was endowed with the belief that all human life is sacred. It is also because of this belief that he wanted to try to protect the sanctity of human life after World War II by working to spread awareness of human rights violations all around the world. Wiesel was raised to respect people who were different.

Elie Wiesel's family was a prominent one. Wiesel said of his father "the Jewish community of Sighet held him in highest esteem"<sup>28</sup>. Wiesel's father was respected by people who knew him. The Jewish community of Sighet listened to Wiesel's father and followed the advice he gave them. Wiesel and his family were considered respectable by the surrounding community.<sup>29</sup>

Elie Wiesel cared a lot about his relationship with God. He would spend hours in the synagogue praying to God. He was very dedicated to his faith. He worked hard to study and learn all he could about his faith. This is very different from other Holocaust survivors like Levi. While Levi was raised Jewish he did not study or pray like Wiesel did. Levi was not a spiritual person and was not deeply observant like Wiesel.

When Wiesel was a child, his home was officially a part of Hungary. In Spring of 1944 the German army came in and took over Wiesel's hometown. At first Wiesel and the other Jews in town believed they might be safe. The Germans did not start killing right away. That however

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

was not the case. All Jews from Wiesel's hometown were eventually deported to concentration camps.

Wiesel's background was very different from Primo Levi's. Primo Levi was born in Italy to a Jewish family but he did not spend time praying and studying like Wiesel did. He went to college and got his degree in Chemistry before he was rounded up by the Germans. Levi was really interested in science and chemistry, not his Jewish faith. Levi did not consider his Jewishness to be such a singular part of him like Wiesel did.

Primo Levi was actually not originally arrested for being part of an anti-fascist movement. The reason the Germans arrested him was because he was Jewish. Levi believed that the Germans would treat him better if he told them he was Jewish.<sup>30</sup> This was a sad mistake though. The Germans treated Jews far worse than their other prisoners.

Primo Levi spent his time before World War II learning about chemistry, whereas Wiesel spent his time before the war studying his faith. Both men were Jewish, but they both placed a different importance on their faith. For Wiesel, his faith was his most important attribute. For Levi, his knowledge of scientific processes was his most important attribute. Wiesel took his faith very seriously and became devout whereas Levi did not necessarily show any growth in his faith in his writings.

Levi and Wiesel were also very different from Holocaust survivors like Tadeusz Borowski. Levi and Wiesel were raised in the Jewish religion, but Borowski was not. He was a Polish Catholic who threw off religion after joining the communist party as a young man. Borowski's parents were not around to instill faith in him like Wiesel's parents were. Borowski's

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<sup>30</sup> Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. (New York: Touchstone, 1958). 13, 14.



parents were sent by the Soviet government to labor camps and so they were not around to help raise Borowski.

Borowski had a very different childhood from Wiesel and Levi. While Wiesel and Levi spent their childhoods with their families being raised in the Jewish faith, that is not the case with Borowski. Borowski spent his childhood working on his aunt and uncle's farm and going to Catholic school. Borowski's parents were not around to raise him and instill him with their values like Wiesel and Levi's parents were. Borowski was not raised like Wiesel was to put faith above everything else.<sup>31</sup>

Tadeusz Borowski conducted this "desperate search for moral values that might withstand such realities as the horrors of the Nazi occupation."<sup>32</sup> While Wiesel learned these moral values that helped him cope with the Holocaust that is not the case with Borowski. Borowski spent his time after liberation trying to cope with his experiences in Auschwitz while Wiesel spent his time after liberation finding his purpose and working for human rights. Borowski spent his time after liberation trying to come up with a way to deal with the trauma he endured in Auschwitz. For Borowski writing was his way of escape.

Tadeusz Borowski started writing before he was interned in Auschwitz. In 1942 a collection of his poems was published. This collection of poems was called *Wherever the Earth*. Borowski always had a love of writing and studied writing before he was rounded up by the Germans. Borowski spent a lot of time writing and he used writing as a coping mechanism to deal with what was going on in the world around him.

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<sup>31</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 10.

<sup>32</sup> "Tadeusz Borowski," Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tadeusz-Borowski>. (accessed November 9, 2017)

Borowski grew up in a country that was under Soviet occupation, which is different from Wiesel and Levi. Wiesel and Levi grew up in countries that were not run by a brutal Communist regime. Borowski had his family locked up in gulags by Stalin. He grew up under a brutal regime that suppressed any dissent. Borowski saw the horrors of what men were capable of doing to fellow men at an early age.

Unlike Borowski, Wiesel was able to spend a lot of time with his family. Wiesel was raised by his parents and grew up with them and his siblings, but that is not the case with Borowski. Because Borowski's parents were sent to gulags he was raised by his aunt and did not have this family life like Wiesel did. Wiesel and his family were close. Wiesel and his family grew even closer after they were forced to live in this tiny house in the ghetto where they had no privacy.

Wiesel was inspired to grow in his faith by his family. Wiesel was especially inspired by his grandfather and mother. He was inspired to be spiritual like they were. Wiesel's father garnered respect from his community and that is what Wiesel wanted. Wiesel was especially inspired to grow in his faith though by Moishe. Moishe was this poor man who offered to teach Wiesel about the Jewish faith.

Wiesel was younger than Borowski was when the Germans came in and disrupted his life. While Wiesel was fifteen at the time he was deported to Auschwitz, Borowski was twenty-one at the time of his deportation. While Wiesel was a young teenager in Auschwitz, Borowski was practically a grown man. There is the possibility that because Wiesel was younger he was able to be more resilient and cope better with the trauma of the Holocaust. Wiesel and Borowski both spent time in Auschwitz and that affected them in very different ways.

The reader can see in Wiesel's *Night* that there is this moral urgency about Wiesel. Wiesel grew up with these moral values that were destroyed in Auschwitz and he had to reconcile himself with this fact. Wiesel, and others in his hometown, did not believe the Germans to be capable of such atrocities as were committed in Auschwitz. Wiesel believed that people lived by this moral code he was taught, but he was wrong there. Not everyone had Wiesel's upbringing.

Wiesel was a very positive man. He himself said "For me, every hour is grace. And I feel gratitude in my heart each time I can meet someone and look at his or her smile"<sup>33</sup>. He never took it for granted that he got a second chance at life after surviving the Holocaust. Wiesel was determined to not waste this chance that he was given and worked hard throughout his whole life to please God. Wiesel looked on life as a gift that should not be wasted.

Borowski was not a positive man like Wiesel. Borowski wanted justice for what had happened to him in Auschwitz. He said "I think that for those who have suffered unjustly, justice alone is not enough. They want the guilty to suffer unjustly too. Only this will they understand as justice"<sup>34</sup>. Borowski did not learn to forgive his oppressors, he wanted them to suffer like he did. Borowski spent his time after Auschwitz writing about what had happened to him.

Levi was also not a positive man like Wiesel. Levi himself grew very dark after being interned in Auschwitz. For Primo Levi, "the struggle to survive is without respite"<sup>35</sup>. He grew numb to all of the atrocities he experienced in Auschwitz, much like Borowski, because he felt

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<sup>33</sup> Elie Wiesel, Brainy Quote. [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/elie\\_wiesel\\_599769](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/elie_wiesel_599769). (accessed December 8, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas...*90.

<sup>35</sup> Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. 88.

that's what he had to do to survive. Levi spent his time after he was liberated writing about his experiences in Auschwitz. This was in a way therapeutic for him.

While Levi and Borowski lost hope in humanity because of their experiences in Auschwitz, Wiesel did not. Wiesel spent his whole life trying to make our society a better, more accepting place. Even when he was a child Wiesel worked to find out why God looked down on humanity. Wiesel was constantly asking questions about God and his relationship with mankind. Borowski and Levi never really cared to question God on things, but Wiesel did.

Wiesel was raised to respect people who are different from him. Wiesel had immense respect for the town pauper, Moishe. Wiesel had money when Moishe did not, but Wiesel respected Moishe enough to ask him for advice in his religious studies. Wiesel was taught to get not discriminate against anyone by his family and this translated in his later life into working to make sure people who were different from him did not have their rights violated. Wiesel's early belief in the dignity of all people shone through in his later work.

Wiesel "was influenced by the traditional spiritual beliefs of his grandfather and mother"<sup>36</sup>. Wiesel's grandfather and mother taught him about his religion and encouraged him in learning more about his faith. Wiesel's family saw he had a hunger to know more about God, but Wiesel's father was not exactly supportive. Wiesel said his father "wanted to drive the idea of studying Kabbalah from [his] mind"<sup>37</sup>. Wiesel persevered though and found a man, Moishe, who was willing to help him study the Kabbalah.

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<sup>36</sup> "Elie Wiesel," Biography.com. <https://www.biography.com/people/elie-wiesel-9530714>. (accessed November 9, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 4.

Moishe sort of acted as Wiesel's spiritual guide before he was rounded up by the Germans. Moishe tried to save Wiesel's soul spiritually and physically too. Moishe tried Wiesel and his other fellow Jews that the Germans were trying to annihilate them but no one listened to him. Moishe tried desperately to save Wiesel and the other Sighet Jews from the Holocaust but it did not succeed because no one believed him. The Jews in Sighet found it inconceivable that the Germans would behave in that way.

Wiesel had a relatively large family. His family consisted of him, his mother, his father and his three sisters. Wiesel and his family were relatively close. Wiesel loved his parents and his siblings and had respect for them all. Wiesel's family suffered through living in the ghetto before being deported to Auschwitz which made them closer to each other.

Wiesel had this love for God and that translated into a love for all people. Wiesel did not hate. He said, "someone who hates one group will end up hating everyone-and, ultimately, hating himself or herself"<sup>38</sup>. Wiesel as a child was taught to not hate any group. Wiesel was taught to love all of God's creatures and he did this well.

Wiesel throughout his life never stopped having faith. Even though he suffered immensely in Auschwitz, he never stopped having faith. As Wiesel got older and went through Auschwitz he did question his faith, but this does not mean he gave up on his faith. He himself said, "I have faith, but I question it"<sup>39</sup>. Wiesel had this very open dialogue with God that can be seen in *Night*.

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<sup>38</sup> Elie Wiesel Quotes. BrainyQuote.com, Xplore Inc, 2017.  
<https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/e/eliewiesel599779.html>. (accessed November 9, 2017)

<sup>39</sup> Elie Wiesel Quotes...

Elie Wiesel in his childhood was able to develop this close relationship with God. This relationship with God that Wiesel developed helped him get through his suffering in Auschwitz. Because Wiesel never gave up on his faith, he never gave up on life and was able to survive Auschwitz. Wiesel after being freed from Auschwitz put his faith into action and helped other people who were being persecuted. Wiesel spent his whole life helping other people and this proved to people that he was truly a good, religious person.

Elie Wiesel did not grow to be depressed like Borowski and Levi. He said of himself “If I were immersed in constant melancholy, I would not be who I am”<sup>40</sup>. Wiesel was a positive man who strived to create good in the world. He loved people and strove to help them in any way he could. He did not grow to have this dark, cynical outlook on life like Borowski and Levi did. He had a positive outlook on life and saw the world as a place that he could help make better.

Wiesel grew to be a very observant Jew. When he was just thirteen he would study Talmud by day and weep over the destruction of the temple at night. Wiesel was a curious boy who wanted to learn all he could about his faith. Wiesel longed to understand God, and this is different from Borowski and Levi. They never longed for God like Wiesel did. They did not write about asking God important questions like Wiesel did.

Wiesel had very specific views about God. He believed that “God is love”<sup>41</sup>. He knew in his heart that to love people is to know God. Wiesel worked hard throughout his life to love everyone, even his Nazi persecutors. Wiesel was able to forgive his persecutors for what they

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<sup>40</sup> Elie Wiesel Quotes...

<sup>41</sup> Wiesel, *Nigh*. XXI

did, but that is not the case with Borowski and Levi. Both of these men hated their persecutors and had a more vengeful mindset than Wiesel did.

Wiesel wrote about his time in Auschwitz because he wanted to make sure Nazi crimes were not forgotten by people. Wiesel felt a moral obligation to write about Auschwitz so that the world would not forget there was an Auschwitz. Wiesel talks a lot about memory in his memoir because for him it is most important that the memory of the Holocaust never leave our consciousness. Wiesel helped the world understand the crimes of the Nazis with his memoir and that brought him fulfillment. Wiesel's purpose of writing *Night* was realized because he brought the Holocaust into the consciousness of the world with his writing.

Elie Wiesel was a very important man who worked throughout his life, even in his childhood, to follow God, and this makes him markedly different from other Holocaust survivors. Other Holocaust survivors like Borowski and Levi gave up on their faith in God but Wiesel never did. He may have questioned his faith, but it never went away. Wiesel's love for God marked everything he did in life. He strove to follow what he believed God wanted and that led him to do incredible things.

## Chapter II

Elie Wiesel endured a lot at the hands of the Nazis. His experiences in Auschwitz inspired him, like other Holocaust survivors, to write about what he went through. Wiesel wrote a slim but powerful memoir about his time in Auschwitz because he wanted others to learn from the Holocaust and not make the same mistakes that were made during the Second World War. Wiesel's memoir is a compelling story of redemption. It is unique from other Holocaust memoirs. Elie Wiesel's memoir is different from others because he was more spiritual than other

Holocaust survivors. He talked to God repeatedly in *Night* and asked him questions like why the Holocaust was happening. Wiesel infused the nature of his relationship with God into his memoir and that is clearly seen.

Wiesel was ruthlessly taken from his childhood home and suffered immensely at the hands of the Nazis, and he felt numb at this. He said when he left his home that he “felt little sadness”<sup>42</sup>. His “mind was empty”<sup>43</sup>. Wiesel felt nothing when he was forced to leave the world he knew behind. Wiesel was changed into this unfeeling person because of what he endured in the concentration camps.

Elie Wiesel’s *Night* has vastly different themes from other Holocaust memoirs. While other Holocaust memoirs talk mainly about death and destruction, *Night* in some instances talks about the renewal of life after the Holocaust. *Night* also in some instances talks about hope for what happens after the Holocaust. That is something that *This Way for the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen* and *Survival in Auschwitz* do not discuss. *Night* does discuss the death and destruction surrounding the Holocaust but it is done in a unique and more redemptive way.

*Night* also contains this spiritual component that other Holocaust memoirs lack. In *Night* Wiesel reveals he had these in-depth conversations about what was going on in his life with God. He had this very open dialogue with God in *Night*. Wiesel believed and had faith in God and that is seen in his memoir. Elie Wiesel, unlike Borowski and other Holocaust survivors, reinterpreted his experiences during the Holocaust using the lens of his faith. Even in his darkest moments he never gave up on his belief in God.

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<sup>42</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



Wiesel, throughout *Night*, prays to God. At one point after arriving at the ghetto where he and his family were forced to live, Wiesel prayed “O God, Master of the Universe, in your infinite compassion, have mercy on us....”<sup>44</sup>. This type of praying was common for Wiesel. He spent his time, before the Germans captured him, learning all he could about the holy texts in Judaism and praying in the temple.<sup>45</sup> Wiesel had a respect for God and all of His creation that shines through in *Night*.

Wiesel, unlike Borowski and Levi, held on to hope in Auschwitz. Wiesel and his father at least pretended to hope in better days. When Wiesel and his father were separated from his mother and sister they both pretended to believe that they were alive and well.<sup>46</sup> This kind of hope helped Wiesel survive Auschwitz. Wiesel would have given up on life had it not been for his hopeful attitude.

Wiesel received uplifting advice from those around him. One young woman advised him to “clench his teeth and wait”<sup>47</sup> for the day when he would be free. Wiesel was helped by those around him and without this support he might have lost his will to survive. Wiesel was a strong character who believed in God and was comforted by God’s existence. If Wiesel did not have people around him to restore his faith he might have given up on this faith and lost all hope.

Wiesel dreamed of a better universe. While he was interned in Auschwitz he dreamed of a world that was not regulated by the sound of a bell. Wiesel hated the structured world of Auschwitz and longed for liberation. Wiesel worked hard after he was liberated to make sure people had the freedom he did not have in Auschwitz to go where they pleased and do what they

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 53

wanted to do. Wiesel fought to make sure the world never forgot the Holocaust throughout his entire life. He helped to open the National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. for this express purpose.

Elie Wiesel and his fellow inmates did hope for a favorable outcome to the war. Wiesel and his friends hoped that the Russians would defeat the Germans and liberate Auschwitz before they all perished. This in fact did happen. The Russians liberated Auschwitz in the Spring of 1945. Elie Wiesel himself was liberated by the American Army from Buchenwald in April of 1945.<sup>48</sup>

Wiesel also had a very different experience in Auschwitz than Borowski or Levi because his father was interned along with him. Throughout the memoir Wiesel recounts how he tried to keep his father alive. When his father was dying he tried to get him to eat his soup so that he could live. Unfortunately, Wiesel was not successful in this. His father died on the night of January 28, 1945. This devastated Wiesel. He claimed that after his father died “nothing mattered to [him] anymore”<sup>49</sup>.

Wiesel found his will to live again though. After liberation Wiesel discovered that his purpose in life was to make sure people did not forget what happened during the Holocaust. He accomplished this by publishing his memoir and helping open the National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. Wiesel was a hopeful man who worked his whole life to make the world a better place. His memory is honored today as it rightly should be.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 115.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 113.

Wiesel was an upright person who had this strict moral compass that cannot be seen in Borowski or Levi. He struggled with trying to take care of his father while at the same time trying to keep himself alive. He felt guilty sometimes because he at points did think about how his life would be easier if he did not have to take care of his father. Wiesel hated the fact that the camps had made him into this morally bankrupt person and he fought after liberation to get his morality back. Wiesel spent his life trying to do what was morally right. He spoke up for those who were most vulnerable in society.

Elie Wiesel did have vengeful thoughts while interned in Auschwitz. About the bombing of a German factory he said, "To watch that factory go up in flames- what revenge!"<sup>50</sup>. Wiesel was happy to see the Germans brought low by the Allied forces. Wiesel was only human and wished to see his captors humbled like he was. In this he was similar to other Holocaust survivors like Borowski and Levi. All of these men wanted Hitler to fail in his murderous endeavors and relished in the pleasure of watching Germany fall.

Wiesel also felt hatred for his oppressors, like Borowski and Levi did. He said of the Hungarian police who rounded his family up "my hatred remains our only link today"<sup>51</sup>. Wiesel took this hatred and turned it into something productive that could help the world. Wiesel took his hatred and wrote about it and this was in a way very therapeutic for him. He produced his memoir out of hatred for his captors but this memoir helped the world to not forget what had happened to the Jews under the Nazis.

Elie Wiesel was influenced in his life by his hatred of his oppressors. He did grow, just like Borowski and Levi, to despise the Nazis for what they did to him and his family. While

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 19.

Wiesel did learn to grow in his faith, his idea of loving all of God's people was challenged by the atrocities he witnessed during the Holocaust. Elie Wiesel worked after he was liberated to reconcile his idea of a loving God with what happened in the Holocaust. Wiesel did struggle to understand why God could let something like the Holocaust happen.

Wiesel mentioned thinking of revenge while he was interned in Auschwitz, but after his liberation he said he had no "thought of revenge"<sup>52</sup>. Wiesel realized to hold on to these ideas of revenge would just cause him pain and suffering, so he let them go. Wiesel focused, after liberation, not on revenge but on making the world a better place by speaking out for vulnerable people like minorities. Wiesel strove to sow goodness in the world. He helped move the world closer towards peace and that is why he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

Elie Wiesel was helped by several different people in Auschwitz. There was this kindly doctor who saved Wiesel's foot from being amputated<sup>53</sup>, and Wiesel very much appreciated this. If it was not for the kindly doctor, Wiesel likely would have died there in Auschwitz. While Wiesel had people helping him in the camps like this doctor and his father, Borowski and Levi did not have that. Borowski and Levi had no one to care for them and help them survive, and this may be a part of the reason why the camps had such a negative impact on their lives.

Elie Wiesel was a complex man who had this complex reaction to being put in Auschwitz. Wiesel had this very spiritual reaction to being placed in the concentration camps. He in a way "concurred with Job".<sup>54</sup> Wiesel grew to believe in Auschwitz that God was not just. He

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 115.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 45.

felt that God was allowing the Jewish people to suffer for seemingly no reason and he had a hard time finding his faith in a just God after being liberated.

Wiesel because of his internment in Auschwitz stopped praying to God<sup>55</sup>. This halt in Wiesel's praying lasted until he was liberated from the concentration camps and regained his faith. Before he was sent to Auschwitz Wiesel prayed to God regularly and believed He was a loving and just God. Being in Auschwitz changed Wiesel's faith though. It challenged Wiesel's notion of a merciful and loving God. Wiesel's belief in God grew and developed during his time in Auschwitz, and this is markedly different from Borowski and Levi.

Wiesel was influenced by his fellow prisoners. There was one prisoner in particular, Akiba Drumer, who had a great impact on Wiesel. Drumer while interned in Auschwitz predicted "Redemption in the weeks to come"<sup>56</sup>. Wiesel also believed that redemption was possible. Wiesel had begun to lose hope at this point in Auschwitz, but his fellow prisoner Akiba Drumer helped him retain hope.

Elie Wiesel also learned from Akiba Drumer that to lose faith was to give up on life. Akiba Drumer lost his faith in God and was selected to die in the gas chambers. Of Drumer Wiesel said, "if only he could have kept his faith in God, if only he could have considered this suffering a divine test, he would not have been swept away by the selection"<sup>57</sup>. Wiesel believed that because he kept his faith in God he managed to survive in the concentration camps. This is a unique view that is not held by other Holocaust survivors like Levi and Borowski.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 77.

Elie Wiesel struggled throughout his time in the concentration camps to keep his faith in God. At one point he did believe that “The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent”<sup>58</sup>. Wiesel felt like God was not listening to His peoples’ prayers and just letting them suffer. Wiesel never doubted the existence of God, but at one point he did doubt His goodness. Wiesel struggled after his liberation to believe once again in a good and loving God.

Elie Wiesel experienced great atrocities in Auschwitz. At one point he witnessed the hanging of a young child, and this greatly challenged his faith. He answered a man’s question of where was God with “This is where, hanging from the gallows”<sup>59</sup>. Wiesel felt that God let this poor child die a terrible death and he could not understand why. Wiesel struggled to understand why a God who he had once believed to be merciful would let a child die like this.

Wiesel did grow to despair in Auschwitz. At one point he did consider committing suicide by breaking rank while marching and having the Germans shoot him. He did not do this though because of his father. He felt he “had no right to let [himself] die”<sup>60</sup>. He felt he could not let himself die because he had to be there to take care of his father.

Throughout *Night* Wiesel does discuss the optimism of those around him. As Wiesel said “there were those who even voiced optimism”<sup>61</sup>. The people around Wiesel encouraged him and helped him survive the Holocaust. Many people around Wiesel helped him by giving him encouraging advice and reassuring him everything would be fine. This is something Borowski

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 87.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 20.

and Levi did not talk about. Borowski especially did not have people encouraging and helping him like Wiesel did.

Elie Wiesel received brutal treatment in the camp. He was once whipped because he walked in on a commando and a girl<sup>62</sup>. Wiesel was definitely affected by all of these horrible things that happened to him during the Holocaust. He learned the brutality of the human race and it almost destroyed him. Wiesel learned after liberation though how to turn his horrific experiences into something positive.

Elie Wiesel once said about *Night* 'If in my lifetime I was to write only one book, this would be the one'<sup>63</sup>. Wiesel knew he had to write *Night* in order to bear witness to the Holocaust. Wiesel felt it was very important that the Holocaust never be forgotten by the world, and he helped this goal be achieved by writing down his story of the Holocaust. Wiesel felt that the world would commit another Holocaust if lessons from the Nazis were not learned. The Nazis attempted to eradicate Jewish culture, but they did not succeed. Today Jewish culture thrives.

Elie Wiesel continuously asked difficult questions of God throughout *Night*. At one point Wiesel asked "what does Your grandeur mean, Master of the Universe, in the face of all this cowardice, this decay, and this misery"<sup>64</sup>? Other Holocaust survivors like Borowski and Levi did not consider these questions. Wiesel was a spiritual person, unlike Borowski and Levi, and he made an attempt to understand God and His ways. This is something Borowski and Levi did not do.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 56,57.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. vii.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 66.

Elie Wiesel struggled to deal with the world around him. He worked to keep this faith in God that had sustained him his whole life. After he was liberated Wiesel knew he could not keep silent about what had happened to him. He “swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation”<sup>65</sup>. Wiesel found after he was freed from the concentration camps that his purpose in life was to speak up for those vulnerable people who could not speak for themselves.

Elie Wiesel was reduced to an unfeeling person by the Nazis. He said after his father’s death that he had “only one desire: to eat”<sup>66</sup>. He said he “no longer thought of [his] father or [his] mother”<sup>67</sup>. Wiesel was reduced to only thinking about where his next meal would come from. His captors had made him into this unfeeling person and he did hate them for this. Wiesel, much like Borowski and Levi, was made into this inhumane person who he did not like. The difference between Wiesel and these other men is that Wiesel worked to get back to the person he was by relying on his faith in God.

Many Holocaust survivors like Wiesel, Borowski and Levi wrote about their experiences. Writing about what they went through helped these men cope in a way with the trauma they endured as a result of the Holocaust. Wiesel, Borowski and Levi all had very unique stories that they felt needed to be told. Most Holocaust survivors, like Wiesel, felt they owed it to the victims of the Nazis to bear witness to the Holocaust. Wiesel felt like it was his duty to talk about the Holocaust because he survived it.

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<sup>65</sup> Elie Wiesel, “Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech”. Nobel Prize. [https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-acceptance\\_en.html](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-acceptance_en.html). (accessed November 10, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 113.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*.



Elie Wiesel never forgot what he had endured at the hands of the Nazis. He said about his reflection after being liberated from Buchenwald “From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me”<sup>68</sup>. The Holocaust had changed Wiesel from a studious schoolboy to a man who had the soul ripped out of him. Wiesel endured much during his time in the concentration camps, and he let these experiences inspire him. Living through the Holocaust inspired him to work on behalf of those whose rights were trampled upon.

Elie Wiesel let his experiences in the concentration camps transform his faith. Instead of giving up his faith Elie Wiesel’s faith was made more complex and stronger after his liberation from Buchenwald. Wiesel was even able to say after his liberation that “every moment is a moment of grace”<sup>69</sup>. Wiesel truly believed that God let him live through the Holocaust so he could speak out for those being persecuted against. Elie Wiesel was very different from other Holocaust survivors like Borowski and Levi because he never gave up his faith like they did.

Throughout *Night* the evolution of Elie Wiesel’s faith can be clearly seen. Wiesel goes from being a studious spiritual young man to doubting God’s mercy to relishing in the life God granted him. Wiesel’s faith is a complex thing that developed immensely during his time in the concentration camps. Wiesel after liberation knew God let him live for a reason and he worked to find the reason for his being alive. Eventually Wiesel came to the conclusion that his reason for being alive was to bear witness to what the Nazis did during the Holocaust. Wiesel felt he had a purpose in life that could not be taken away from him.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 115.

<sup>69</sup> Wiesel, “Nobel Peace Prize...”

### Chapter III

Elie Wiesel was a unique Holocaust survivor. He had a different point of view on the Holocaust than other Holocaust survivors like Borowski and Levi. He viewed the Holocaust from a spiritual perspective. This spiritual perspective allowed Wiesel to not only survive the Holocaust but to thrive after the war in his role as witness to Nazi atrocities. While Borowski, Levi and Wiesel were all Holocaust survivors their experiences and reactions to the Holocaust were all very different. Wiesel was more spiritual and because of his religiosity he had a different reaction to the Holocaust.

Wiesel had a very different experience in Auschwitz than Tadeusz Borowski. Wiesel performed labor in a factory while interned in Auschwitz while Borowski's job in Auschwitz was to transport Jews from the train to the gas chambers. This heavily affected Borowski. Borowski felt guilty about what he did as a Commando in Auschwitz. One of the ways Borowski dealt with his guilt was by writing about these experiences in his memoir. Guilt is a theme that Wiesel and Levi did not go into in depth like Borowski did.

Elie Wiesel was moved to feel great pity for his fellow prisoners in Auschwitz. This is not the case with Tadeusz Borowski. Borowski said himself in his memoir "I feel no pity. I am not sorry they're going to the gas chamber."<sup>70</sup> Borowski's time in Auschwitz changed the way he viewed people. He tried to convince himself he did not feel compassion for people anymore after he was sent to Auschwitz.

Borowski also had different views on the punishment of evil than Wiesel did. Wiesel believed God would punish those who did evil like the Nazis, but Borowski did not necessarily

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<sup>70</sup>Borowski, *This Way for the Gas...* 40.

believe this. Borowski said, about the punishment of Nazis in his memoir, “Can a crime committed on one level be punishable on a different one?”<sup>71</sup>. Borowski believed that the Nazis would answer for their crimes here on Earth, but doubted if they’d be punished for their crimes by God after death. Borowski doubted in life after death.<sup>72</sup>

Borowski, like Wiesel, talked to his fellow inmates about existential problems. He mentions a conversation he had with his friend Henri about whether or not they were good people. He also mentions in his memoir that he talked about justice with a block elder. Borowski often asked his fellow inmates about the problems of the world. He formed his thinking and beliefs around his experiences and the people he met during the Holocaust.

One thing that both Borowski and Wiesel do in their memoirs is discuss the power structure in the concentration camps. In Borowski’s memoir he says explicitly “whoever has grub, has power”<sup>73</sup>. In Borowski’s experience the prisoners who had food in Auschwitz held the power of life or death. In Wiesel’s and Borowski’s experience, it was the Nazi commandants in Auschwitz who held the power of life or death over prisoners. For Wiesel, it was the Nazis who hung and killed in other ways his fellow prisoners that terrified him with their power. Wiesel felt that the Nazi Commandants were assassins.<sup>74</sup>Wiesel saw them kill children and this heavily affected him. Wiesel grew to hate this fact that the Nazis exploited their power in murderous ways.

Borowski’s conditions managed to improve in Auschwitz, but this was not the case for Wiesel. Borowski said in his memoir “At the beginning, beating and killing were the rule, but

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 90.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>74</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 92.

later this became only sporadic”<sup>75</sup>. Borowski’s life became bearable in Auschwitz. As time went on the Nazis stopped beating him, but this was not true for Wiesel. Wiesel and his fellow Jewish inmates were constantly beat and tortured by the Nazis and towards the end of World War II when Germany figured out they were going to lose, they tried to kill as many prisoners as they could. As Wiesel pointed out in his memoir “every day, a few thousand inmates passed the camp’s gate and did not return.”<sup>76</sup>

Borowski and Wiesel were inspired to tell their stories because they both wanted the world to know what had happened during the Holocaust. Borowski and Wiesel both wanted to bear witness to the events of the Holocaust. Borowski tried to “have the courage to tell the world the whole truth and call it by its proper name”<sup>77</sup>. Borowski wanted to let the world know how the Nazis had stripped him of his soul in the concentration camps. Wiesel also wanted to let the world know what the Nazis had done to him and his family. He and Borowski both wrote memoirs for the purpose of making sure people did not forget what happened during the Holocaust. While Borowski and Wiesel’s experiences were different, they both felt their experiences needed to be talked about.

Borowski talked extensively about how he acted selfishly in the concentration camps. He mentioned at one point his friend Kurt who said that no one spoke up for each other. Kurt said, “everyone began thinking of his own problems”<sup>78</sup>. This is how it went in the concentration camps. Many people, like Borowski, did not help others. They just simply focused on themselves.

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<sup>75</sup> Borowski, *This Way for the Gas...* 92.

<sup>76</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 114.

<sup>77</sup> Borowski, *This Way for the Gas...* 122.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*. 130.

Borowski, in the camps, acted horribly toward the Jews, because he was forced to. He took possessions from them and he called them swine. The guards made him act this way. The guards at one point even encouraged prisoners to kill Jews.<sup>79</sup> Borowski was forced to be this terrible person because he felt, like Levi, that this behavior was the way to survive Auschwitz. Borowski gave up his morality in the concentration camps in order to survive.

Borowski was given a lot more freedom in the death camps than Wiesel and Levi. This is due to the fact that he was not a Jew. While Wiesel and Levi did back-breaking labor all day long Borowski was able to relax and play soccer. Borowski also managed to get a lot of good food while Wiesel and Levi nearly starved to death. Borowski had certain privileges that other prisoners did not have simply because he was a non-Jew.

Borowski and his fellow prisoners exhibited this hate for their captors not seen in Levi and Wiesel. Borowski's entire bunk actually trampled their camp guard to death.<sup>80</sup> Borowski and his fellow captors had a thirst for vengeance that cannot be seen in Levi's and Wiesel's cases. While all of these men hated their captors, only Borowski went so far as to help in the killing of one. Wiesel and Levi both in a way were too demoralized by the camps to care about seeking revenge on their captors.

Wiesel also had a very different experience in Auschwitz from Primo Levi. Levi worked with chemicals in a warehouse while Elie Wiesel hauled heavy slabs of stone while imprisoned in Auschwitz. Primo Levi's job was relatively easy compared to the hard labor Wiesel was

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 163.

forced to do. Levi's training in chemistry really saved him from performing hard labor. Elie Wiesel suffered through back-breaking work in Auschwitz and this affected him.

Levi spoke, like Borowski, about how being interned in Auschwitz changed him. Both Levi and Borowski developed a cynical outlook on life because of their imprisonment in Auschwitz. Levi said in his memoir that because of Auschwitz he experienced "obtuse and cynical indifference to the suffering of others"<sup>81</sup>. Levi felt numb when he noticed people suffering in Auschwitz. He was made numb to the suffering of others because of what the Nazis had done to him.

Levi also discussed in his memoir the lowly state he and his fellow prisoners were brought to. He said of his and his fellow prisoners' condition "It is not possible to sink lower than this; no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so"<sup>82</sup>. The Nazis made men like Levi feel like they were not men anymore. They stripped these Holocaust victims of their humanity. Levi and his fellow prisoners were made miserable and brought low by the Nazis.

Primo Levi, unlike Borowski, did speak of hope in his memoir. He said, "in some way one always has the impression of being fortunate"<sup>83</sup>. Levi always found some way to keep himself going, much like Wiesel. Even if it was raining, he'd think positive thoughts like "at least it's not windy"<sup>84</sup>. Levi found the strength to survive Auschwitz, like Wiesel and Borowski, and the fact that these three men survived is a miracle.

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<sup>81</sup> "Primo Levi Quotes." Goodreads. [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/4187.Primo\\_Levi](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/4187.Primo_Levi). (accessed November 12, 2017).

<sup>82</sup> Levi Quotes

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

For Levi, being imprisoned in Auschwitz took away all meaning of life. He said in his memoir “everything is nothing down here”<sup>85</sup>. Levi felt nothing mattered anymore after being put in Auschwitz. The Nazis took away Levi’s meaning of life.

Primo Levi also talked in his memoir about how in Auschwitz there were no criminals or madmen. He said there were no criminals because there was no moral law in Auschwitz and “no madmen because we are wholly devoid of free will”<sup>86</sup>. Levi and his fellow prisoners did not choose to do anything in Auschwitz, they were forced to do everything by the Nazis. Levi and his fellow prisoners were stripped of all freedom, and this affected Levi. He felt like he was no longer human because he was not treated like one.

Levi also, like Wiesel, rejoiced in the downfall of the Germans. He said in his memoir that he and his fellow inmates “drew new strength and hope from the bombardments”<sup>87</sup>. The fact that the Allied forces were bombing Germany brought great joy to the inmates of Auschwitz. Levi and Wiesel both felt hope that one day the allies would succeed and free them from the Nazi death camps. Levi, Borowski and Wiesel were in fact freed by Allied forces.

Levi rejected God in Auschwitz. He said in his memoir “No Sacred face will help thee here”<sup>88</sup>. Levi did not believe like Wiesel did that God was hearing his fellow inmates’ prayers. Levi did not believe there was a God who could allow such horrors like what happened in Auschwitz to take place. Levi was not faithful like Wiesel and did not hold on to his Jewish faith in Auschwitz like Wiesel did.

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<sup>85</sup> Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. (New York: Touchstone, 1995). 135.

<sup>86</sup> Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. 98.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 29.

Primo Levi spends most of his memoir discussing how his time spent in concentration camps stripped him and those around him of their humanity. Levi talks about a particular boy known only as Null Achtzen (018), which were the last three figures of his entry number. Levi says of that it is as if “everyone was aware that only a man is worthy of a name, and that Null Achtzen is no longer a man”<sup>89</sup>. Primo Levi felt that the Nazis had stripped him and his fellow prisoners of all dignity and humanity and reduced them to mere numbers. This is an idea that Wiesel did not discuss at length in his memoir.

Primo Levi also had a darker outlook on his situation than Wiesel did. Levi talked in his memoir about the Nazis stripping him of his will to live. He said at one point “I am not even alive enough to know how to kill myself”<sup>90</sup>. Primo Levi was affected by what he saw in the concentration camps, as was Wiesel. Levi was affected in different ways from Elie Wiesel; however; and this can be explained by the two men’s different backgrounds.

Primo Levi also felt ashamed about what happened in the concentration camps. One incident he in particular felt embarrassed about was when a young man was hung and not one person spoke up<sup>91</sup>. The Nazis had demoralized these prisoners. They broke them until they had no more fight in them. The Nazis forced Levi and his fellow prisoners into silence and obedience and Levi hated this.

Wiesel and Levi were both very studious young men. While Wiesel preferred to study religion, Levi studied chemistry. Levi was also older than Wiesel was when he was deported to Auschwitz. Levi felt he had his masculinity taken from him, while this is an idea Wiesel did not

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.149.



explore. It may be though that Wiesel did not feel this way because he was a young teenager when he was sent to Auschwitz and not in his 20's like Levi.

Levi, like Wiesel, wanted readers to look at his story as a warning. He said that “the story of the death camps should be understood by everyone as a sinister alarm-signal”<sup>92</sup>. Primo Levi wanted readers to understand that genocide could happen to anyone, anywhere in the world. Levi understood that there was a lesson to be gained from the Holocaust. That lesson was that hate can lead ordinary men to do extraordinarily evil things.

Primo Levi, much like Borowski, felt guilt about surviving the death camps. Levi said that “survival without renunciation of any part of one’s own moral world- apart from powerful and direct interventions by fortune- was conceded only to very few superior individuals”<sup>93</sup>. Levi felt that the only way to survive the camps to put aside your moral convictions. This is very different from what Wiesel believes. Wiesel talked about surviving the camps by the grace of God.

Primo Levi believed that the moral world could not survive in the concentration camps. Levi believed an unjust law was openly in force in the concentration camps.<sup>94</sup> The Nazis often made it so that the inmates would turn against each other and thus the morale of the prisoners was destroyed. The Nazis made the prisoners feel like they were not human, and this is something that Levi talked about extensively. Primo Levi was made to feel like just a number and this affected him greatly. Levi hated the Nazis for what they did to him.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 92.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 88.

Both Tadeusz Borowski and Primo Levi were full of despair where Wiesel was hopeful. While Wiesel tried to hold on to his faith, Borowski and Levi did not. Borowski and Levi did not believe like Wiesel did that God would help them in any way. Borowski and Levi were not raised to be spiritual like Wiesel was. Borowski and Levi both were men who grew up without faith in God.

Levi and Borowski also both discuss dark themes like whether or not there's a Hell, and the complicity of the inmates in killing their fellow prisoners. These things are not things Wiesel discusses in *Night*. In *Night* Wiesel discusses redemption and hope for a better future. He is more positive than Borowski and Levi are in their memoirs. Borowski and Levi both have very bleak outlooks on life which can be seen in their respective memoirs.

Levi and Borowski both discuss in depth how their humanity was taken away in the camps. This is something Wiesel does not necessarily discuss. While Levi and Borowski both talk about the guilt they feel over what they did to survive in the concentration camps, Wiesel does not talk about the guilt or shame he felt because of the concentration camps. Wiesel was very grateful to have survived the concentration camps. Wiesel did not think about guilt after he was liberated, all he thought about was food.<sup>95</sup>

Levi and Borowski both felt numb because of the concentration camps. As Levi himself said "everything is nothing down here"<sup>96</sup>. While all three men felt that nothing mattered at one point or another, Wiesel was able to find meaning in his life again. He went on to work for those

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<sup>95</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 115.

<sup>96</sup> Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. 135.

whose rights were being trampled on. Wiesel knew he was meant to help others who were in a vulnerable position like he and his family were during World War II.

Levi and Borowski both had different, somewhat easier jobs than Wiesel did. While Wiesel performed back-breaking labor outdoors from sunup to sundown, Borowski had free time when he was not helping transport people to the gas chambers to play soccer and Levi worked in a sheltered chemical warehouse. These three men had very different experiences even though they all spent time in Auschwitz. Levi and Borowski's experiences shattered them while Wiesel's experiences inspired him to work for peace. Wiesel grew in his faith while Borowski and Levi lost theirs.

Levi and Borowski were both very different men from Elie Wiesel. They did not gain fame for speaking out on human rights issues like Wiesel did. Levi and Borowski both really kept to themselves and lead private, quiet lives after liberation. Levi spent his days in his childhood apartment in Italy with his family, while Borowski spent his short life after liberation working for the Communist party in Poland. He mainly wrote a lot of articles for them. Levi and Borowski did not gain prominence like Wiesel did in America. They stayed in their home countries.

Levi, Borowski and Wiesel all took very different paths in life. Borowski, unlike Wiesel and Levi, wrote before he was arrested by the Nazis. He actually had a collection of his poems published in 1942. Levi and Wiesel both did not begin their writing careers until after they were liberated from the concentration camps. Wiesel was the only one out of these survivors, however, whose book gained him fame in America.

Elie Wiesel was a unique man. His experiences as a Holocaust survivor were different from those experiences of other Holocaust survivors. Although there were many differences between Wiesel, Levi and Borowski like age and jobs, all three of these men wrote about their specific Holocaust experiences. Levi and Borowski's memoirs are very dark and cynical compared to Wiesel's *Night*. Wiesel's *Night* has a redemptive quality to it which Levi and Borowski's memoirs lack.

Tadeusz Borowski and Primo Levi were both men who rejected God and his teachings. Elie Wiesel never doubted the presence of God, however. He grew up in a spiritual home with a devout Jewish family and this greatly influenced his outlook on the world. Wiesel spent time asking experts about God and His teachings and this makes him different from Levi and Borowski. Wiesel spent a lot of time arguing with God in his memoir, which is something other Holocaust survivors did not do.

### Conclusion

In the previous chapters I have attempted to analyze Elie Wiesel's seminal work *Night* and compare and contrast it to other Holocaust memoirs. Elie Wiesel's work contained vastly different themes from other Holocaust memoirs. It featured redemption and spirituality which other Holocaust memoirs did not. This look at Elie Wiesel's work is different from previous scholarly work. Past scholars like Ms. Fine and Mr. Brown have analyzed Wiesel's work, but none have compared and contrasted it to other Holocaust memoirs like this work has.

Elie Wiesel is a very important man in the field of Holocaust studies. His work, *Night*, has been studied by millions of students around the world. His work also had serious implications in the academic world. Before Wiesel's *Night* was published, many scholars avoided the Holocaust because they did not know how to deal with such atrocities. Wiesel really opened up the world's eyes to the fact that the Holocaust should be read about and studied. Wiesel believed it was important that he act as a witness to what happened to Jews under the Nazi regime.

Other Holocaust survivors followed Wiesel's example. Borowski and Levi were just two other Holocaust survivors who I decided to study, but there are many more memoirs about the Holocaust out there. Borowski and Levi both wrote about their experiences because, like Wiesel, they felt it was important for the world to know what happened to them. Borowski and Levi had unique points of view from Wiesel, which made their memoirs very different from Wiesel's *Night*. While Wiesel discussed God and justice and mercy, Levi and Borowski discussed how life held no meaning for them anymore.

Throughout this work I have attempted to show that different memoirs give different insights into how people viewed one historical event. Wiesel had a very religious background, and so he viewed the Holocaust from a spiritual perspective. Other Holocaust survivors like Levi and Borowski did not have a religious upbringing and so they came at the Holocaust from a more secular perspective. Wiesel viewed the Holocaust as a spiritual struggle Jews faced, while Borowski felt it had nothing to do with religion. Borowski was not a Jew and he felt his suffering he endured in Auschwitz was in no way connected to God.

*Night* helped create the Holocaust memoir genre.<sup>97</sup> Wiesel's memoir was rejected by more than 15 publishers before it was finally published by Hill & Wang in 1959. Many publishers rejected Wiesel's work because they felt people did not want to read about what went on in the concentration camps. *The Diary of Anne Frank* was a bestseller at this time, people believed, because she did not take her readers in to the concentration camps with her. After Hill & Wang published *Night* reviews were very positive. People found Wiesel's work to be very moving.

Wiesel's *Night* really helped pave the way for other authors of Holocaust memoirs like Primo Levi and Tadeusz Borowski. Wiesel was the first person to bring the atrocities of the Holocaust into the American consciousness. Wiesel's book has been read by millions of Americans and is today considered a classic. This is because Americans today realize the importance of preserving the memory of what happened to the Jews during the Holocaust. Elie Wiesel worked very hard to convince people that his story was one worth telling.

Elie Wiesel is in many ways considered the seminal Holocaust survivor. He gained a lot of importance in his field of Holocaust studies because of his work as a witness to the Holocaust. In many ways Wiesel is considered the face of the Holocaust here in America. Americans recognize Wiesel as the man who survived Auschwitz and lived to tell his tale. Elie Wiesel worked hard throughout his life to educate the public on the Holocaust. He felt it was the utmost importance that we as Americans learn from the mistakes that were made during World War II. Elie Wiesel grew to be more famous than other Holocaust survivors like Levi and Borowski.

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<sup>97</sup> Rachel Donadio. "The Story of Night," The New York Times. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). (accessed October 17, 2017).

Tadeusz Borowski became well-known in his home country of Poland, but he never became famous in America for his work like Wiesel did. Borowski's works never made it into the mainstream of American consciousness. Tadeusz Borowski did not move to America seeking to gain a place of importance in his field like Wiesel did. Borowski did not get the chance to publicly promote his works as he died soon after he was liberated. Borowski had a short career as a writer for the Communist party, but he never made a living off of selling his Holocaust memoirs to publishers like both Wiesel and Levi did.

Primo Levi, like Wiesel and Borowski, also felt the need to tell the world his story. Like Wiesel, Levi's story was largely ignored at first. Around the same time that Wiesel got his memoir published, Levi's work garnered new interest and was translated into English. Primo Levi, much like Wiesel, experienced a measure of success with his memoir in English-speaking parts of the world. Primo Levi was able to make a living as a writer, just like his fellow Holocaust survivor Wiesel.

Elie Wiesel's work was dramatically different from Primo Levi's and Tadeusz Borowski's. Wiesel's work was very spiritual while the other two author's works were very secular. Wiesel made it clear in his memoir that he was a spiritual man, while Borowski and Levi made it clear in their memoirs that they rejected God's existence. Wiesel repeatedly talked to God in his memoir while Levi in his memoir said there could be no God because Auschwitz existed. Borowski and Levi did not support the idea that God was there for them. They rejected the fact that God cared about them at all.

Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel all wrote about their experiences in Auschwitz, and this in a way was therapeutic for all of the men. These men all wrote about their experiences to help them cope with their trauma. Borowski and Levi experienced a lot of internal

emotional trauma, as did Wiesel. Wiesel handled his emotional trauma in a different way from Borowski and Levi though. Wiesel took his emotional trauma and turned it into educating others.

Wiesel wrote *Night* for very specific reasons. Wiesel wrote *Night* because he felt it was his duty to serve as a witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust. Wiesel wanted to make sure people never forgot what happened during the Holocaust, and he felt he could achieve this by writing his memoir. Wiesel welcomed the attention he garnered with his work. He felt like the more people that read his memoir, the more people he could educate about the Holocaust and this was a great thing to him.

Wiesel was very proud of *Night*. He even said if he wrote one book, *Night* would be it. He felt like his purpose in life was to write about and educate people on the Holocaust. That is why it was so important to him to write about his experiences in Auschwitz. Wiesel knew that his experiences in Auschwitz could teach people about compassion and humanity.

Tadeusz Borowski did not necessarily have the reasons Wiesel did for writing his memoir. In the case of Tadeusz Borowski, he wrote about his experiences in Auschwitz because he was a writer who loved to write. Primo Levi wrote about his time in Auschwitz because, like Wiesel, he had a “will to bear witness.”<sup>98</sup> Levi wanted to make sure people knew what went on in the concentration camps. Primo Levi, like Elie Wiesel, wanted to make sure people never forgot the Holocaust.

Elie Wiesel was very different from Primo Levi and Tadeusz Borowski. While Borowski and Levi both rejected the idea of their being a God, Wiesel embraced God and accepted His

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<sup>98</sup> William Deresiewicz, “Why Primo Levi Survives,” The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/12/why-primo-levi-survives/413134/>. (accessed November 8, 2017).



presence. Wiesel never stopped believing that God made redemption possible for himself and his fellow Holocaust survivors. Wiesel spent most of his memoir talking about spiritual issues, while Levi and Borowski never discussed spirituality in their memoirs. Both Levi and Borowski felt that the existence of Auschwitz meant that God did not exist.

As Ruth Franklin pointed out in her book *A Thousand Darknenses*, the “testimonial memoir, rather than the novel, has become the dominant form of Holocaust writing”<sup>99</sup>. After the Holocaust occurred survivors cared about providing people with facts. They did not want to provide an entertaining story like a novel, they just wanted people to know what happened. It was very important to many Holocaust survivors, including Levi, Borowski and Wiesel, that the Holocaust be remembered by people. Wiesel in particular adhered to this idea that the Holocaust be in the memory of people.

Elie Wiesel, Tadeusz Borowski and Primo Levi all formed careers around their writing. Wiesel in particular grew to be renowned for his writing. He was applauded for his Holocaust memoir and today his memoir has been read by millions of people. Wiesel was the most well-known out of these three Holocaust survivors. Wiesel made his mark on the American conscience with his book, while Primo Levi and Tadeusz Borowski’s books have made somewhat less of an impact here in America.

One of the major themes in *Night* is redemption. Elie Wiesel went into this very dark place emotionally in his memoir, and yet at the end he makes it clear to the reader that redemption of his soul is possible. Wiesel makes it clear in his work that redemption is something him and his fellow prisoners think about a lot. Levi and Borowski do not have the

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<sup>99</sup> Ruth Franklin, *A Thousand Darknenses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

theme of redemption in their memoirs. Both of those men did not believe in the redemption of the soul like Wiesel did.

Another theme that Wiesel's *Night* contains is that of morality. Wiesel discusses at length in his memoir the morality of different actions he took. One example of this is whenever he feels guilt and shame for thinking the immoral thought that his life would be easier without caring for his father. Morality is something Levi and Borowski discuss also. Both of these men talk at length in their respective memoirs about how they acted in immoral ways in the concentration camps.

Elie Wiesel redeemed himself for thinking immoral thoughts by helping his father survive and acting in moral ways in the concentration camps. Wiesel spent a lot of time caring for his father, and while he may have felt it'd be easier without his Dad to take care of, he never stopped caring for his father. When Wiesel's father was dying and his fellow prisoners told him to stop feeding his father, Wiesel refused. Wiesel loved his father and this love influenced his experience in the concentration camps. Levi and Borowski had no one to take care of whom they loved in the concentration camps and so their experiences were radically different from Wiesel's.

Elie Wiesel's *Night* explores spirituality in a way neither Levi's nor Borowski's memoirs do. While Levi and Borowski's memoirs look at their experiences in the concentration camps from a secular perspective, Wiesel's *Night* looks at his Holocaust experience from a Jewish perspective. Wiesel makes it clear in his memoir that his devout faith in the Jewish religion had a significant impact on his life. Wiesel formed his decisions around his faith and this can be seen in *Night*. Elie Wiesel looked at his life as something that belongs to God. This is evident with Wiesel because he devoted his life to Kabbalistic studies, before he was sent to Auschwitz.

Elie Wiesel became a significant figure in the world because of his writings on the Holocaust. He was actually called a “messenger to mankind.” By the chairman of the Norwegian Nobel committee<sup>100</sup>. Wiesel took it upon himself to bring his message of redemption to as many people around the world as he could. Levi and Borowski did not garner worldwide attention for their message like Wiesel did. Wiesel was seen as the seminal Holocaust survivor by the world.

Elie Wiesel stood apart from other Holocaust survivors like Levi and Borowski. His message was one of redemption and love for everybody, while Levi and Borowski’s messages were ones filled with bitterness and hatred. Wiesel is a remarkable figure because he, unlike other Holocaust survivors, was able to keep his faith and morality throughout the ordeal of the concentration camps. Wiesel discussed how the Holocaust impacted his faith, which is something not a lot of other Holocaust survivors did. Wiesel was able to make his mark on the world by taking action against prejudice and standing up for minorities.

Elie Wiesel worked very hard throughout his life to make sure something like the Holocaust never happened again. He used his position of importance to advocate for those people who were being discriminated against. Elie Wiesel in *Night* mentions that he “swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering”<sup>101</sup> Elie Wiesel made it his goal in life to fight injustice around the world. This is something that Levi and Borowski never did. They were never advocates for the oppressed like Wiesel was.

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<sup>100</sup> “Elie Wiesel, Nobel laureate and memory keeper of the Holocaust, dies at 87.” Washington Post. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/elie-wiesel-nobel-laureate-and-memory-keeper-of-the-holocaust-dies-at-87/2016/07/02/4a2d2472-50b5-11e5-8c19-0b6825aa4a3a\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.82588632d0ab](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/elie-wiesel-nobel-laureate-and-memory-keeper-of-the-holocaust-dies-at-87/2016/07/02/4a2d2472-50b5-11e5-8c19-0b6825aa4a3a_story.html?utm_term=.82588632d0ab). (accessed November 10, 2017).

<sup>101</sup> Wiesel, *Night*. 118.

Not everyone held Wiesel's *Night* in high regard when it first came out. In fact, some people believed it was a failure at literature. It took time for people to accept Wiesel's work. Many people when it first came out did not like it because it took you into the concentration camps, which is something no book had ever done before. Wiesel's *Night* was one of the first books that introduced the public to the horrors of the concentration camps.

Wiesel's *Night* was written for the express purpose of providing the public with facts. Wiesel simply wanted to tell people what had happened. He did not write *Night* for the purpose of entertaining people with his story. He wanted to tell people his story so that others could learn from it. Elie Wiesel wrote *Night* to sear the Holocaust into the memory of people. Wiesel hoped with his work that he could influence others to stand up for those who are most vulnerable in our society.

Elie Wiesel talks extensively in *Night* about how the Holocaust impacted his faith and the faith of those around him. While the Holocaust made some people like Wiesel cling to God even more, others lost their faith in God because of the Holocaust. One of Wiesel's fellow inmates even said at one point "I have more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He alone has kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people"<sup>102</sup>. This man believed based on his experiences in the concentration camps that God did not keep His promises to the Jewish people, but Hitler did. Elie Wiesel, however, disagreed with this man. He believed that God was in fact there for the Jewish people, just not in the expected ways. Elie Wiesel never let his experiences in the concentration camps affect his faith like this man did.

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<sup>102</sup> Wiesel, *Night*, 81.

Borowski, Levi and Wiesel all contributed significantly to the discussion around the Holocaust. Borowski brought to the discussion the issue of guilt survivors of the Holocaust felt, Levi brought to the discussion the issue of the humanity of Holocaust survivors and Wiesel brought the issue of spirituality into the discussion. All of these men impacted the way we think about the Holocaust, but Elie Wiesel out of all of these men had the greatest impact on our consciousness here in America. His book is a standard part of our educational curriculum here in America while Borowski's and Levi's books are not. Borowski and Levi's works are not read widely by people like Wiesel's *Night* is.

Wiesel's work has become popular here in America for several reasons. The biggest reason it made such an impact here in America though is because Americans can relate to the religiousness of Wiesel. Elie Wiesel resonates with us as a society because as a society we as Americans are spiritual like Wiesel. Wiesel found great success here in America because we can respect his faith and his religious background. A majority of Americans belong to the Christian religion and think in a Judeo-Christian way, much like Wiesel.

Elie Wiesel's *Night* goes into depth on how Wiesel survived the Holocaust and kept his faith. This memoir is very powerful. It resonates still today with millions of people. Just like Wiesel hoped, *Night* has started this important discussion on what our role is as witnesses to atrocities like the Holocaust. Elie Wiesel would be proud to know people are still discussing his book today.

Elie Wiesel changed Holocaust literature with his memoir. Before he published his memoir, Holocaust literature did not take readers into the concentration camps. In the *Diary of Anne Frank*, for example, readers do not experience the horrors she went through before her death in Bergen-Belsen of typhus. They just know about her life before she was sent off to the

concentration camps. With *Night*, readers actually experience what it was like in the concentration camps for the first time.

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