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Trauma, Memory and Timelessness in Elie Wiesel's Night (1958)

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I also owe particular thanks to all my teachers

Enclosed Declaration

I, Miss……..……..…., declare on my honour to have written this work without any external help nor to have taken it from any other resource than those cited within. All the texts, published or not, including the electronic versions, are referred to as such. This work is not submitted to any other board of exam in a similar form, whether in Algeria or abroad, at the university or at another institution, by myself or by another.

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Abstract

This dissertation is entitled *Trauma and Memory in Elie Wiesel's Night (1958).* It tackles the issue of timelessness as an outcome of both trauma and memory. It considers the way the characters in the novel endure timeless moments of trauma, failure and paralysis but also of awakening and self-revelation outside the boundaries of the chronological time. We have analyzed the theme of trauma with direct reference to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. We have examined the traumatic experiences witnessed by the characters in the novel. Our appropriation of the trauma theory enabled us to demonstrate how the state of experiencing trauma keeps its survivors prisoners of their past and to explain the characters' failure to understand and forget their trauma. Finally, we have elucidated both the importance and the danger of the integration of a traumatic memory into a narrative story. In addition, our study of memory focused on the way it is used as a medium for the creative act and how Wiesel uses it as a way to link between the internal suffering of the characters and the external chaos of the Second World War era in Germany. By referring to Henri Bergson's theories of Duration and Memory, we endeavored to demonstrate how Wiesel's narration of the past is conducted through images, remembrance and memory. Bergson's concept of Duration permitted us to discuss and justify the issue of timelessness. Our analysis of the novel's moments of duration elucidated on their fundamental role in shaping and redefining the real self of the narrator.

I. **Introduction**

The purpose of this dissertation is to study the idea of trauma and memory in Elie Wiesel's ***Night*** (1958). Trauma and memory are two of the most recurrent subjects of the postmodern era. They are evoked through works of psychology, literature, literary and cultural theory as well as memory and trauma studies. These multiple fields of study demonstrate and explain that traumatic experiences generally elicit intense psychological, physiological, emotional, spiritual and mental responses. Memories of these experiences usually come back through various forms, creating the same emotional intensity present at the moment of the trauma. Indeed, human history is sustained by many atrocities. At the heart of these atrocities, the events of the Holocaust brought trauma into the lives of the Jewish people and left an incredible mark on their memories.

The Holocaust made its victims face incredible dark moments. Over the last decades, the trauma and memory of the holocaust have been explored in a variety of ways in books, films, museums, memorials as well as cultural, social and historical documents. Since some literature is a reflection about history, the Holocaust has created a literary genre of its own known as the holocaust literature. The latter holds a common cultural consciousness shared by people all over the world. It is produced by a combination of a first, second and third generation survivor voices. Some of the major themes of this literary tradition are the desperate need to articulate **loss** and to testify events entirely out of control.

The Holocaust literature depicts the human rights violations in history. It portrays events which go back to sixty years ago when Hitler became a dictator of Germany. After Germany's defeat in the First World War, the country was left with a powerless government and a very limited army. The industrial and transportation systems were shattered which led to an economic depression. Its economy was also hunted and weakened by the debts of the war. In 1933, Hitler came into power and worked to restore German pride. As a leader of the

National Socialist German Workers Party, he targeted the non-German groups as the primary cause of the country's crisis. Accordingly, he identified the Jews as an inferior race that must be eliminated to ensure the evolution of the German race. And literature has served as a candle in the darkness to bear witness to these atrocities. Wiesel's name is associated with the first names of the holocaust writers. In ***Night,*** trauma and memory are directly present in the form of personal recollections of the narrator's experiences in the Nazi concentration camps.

Review of Literature

Night by Elie Wiesel is the center of interest for many critics. Criticism is carried under multiple angles. From a philosophical perspective, Sandu Frunza discusses the relationship between ethical and religious aspects in relation to the memory of the Holocaust. In her article entitled *Ethics, Religion and Memory in Elie Wiesel's* ***Night****,* she claims a complementary relationship between religion and ethics. She demonstrates this through her analysis of the way memory is used as a medium for action. She asserts that indifference is the main explanation for the presence and manifestation of total evil in the world. Therefore, she believes that keeping alive the memory of the Holocaust will oblige people to assume an ethic of responsibility.[1]

Another critic who studied Wiesel's ***Night*** is Sanford V. Sternlicht. The latter acknowledges Franz Kafka's influence on Elie Wiesel. He also notes that "*like the diary of Anne Frank, Night is a depiction of an aspect of the holocaust as seen and experienced by a youth*".[2] In addition, Sternlicht considers theodicy; the struggle to believe in God's justice and goodness in an immoral world, as the chief theme of ***Night***. Man's inhumanity to man and the father-son relationship comprise the two other major themes, he maintained.

In addition, David L. Vanderwerken provides an analysis of Wiesel's ***Night*** as an Anti-Bildungsroman novel. He argues that the narrative represents a perfect instance of a deconstructed Bildungsroman. He notes that *"in* ***Night****, Elie Wiesel inverts and reverses even*

shatters, the elements of the traditional paradigm." [3] He claims a reversal embodied in the title itself as a symbol of death and darkness instead of life and illumination. In addition, he writes: "*While in the traditional raw initiate grows out into richness, complexity, and multivariety of life,* ***Night*** *starts with a sense of richness in heritage and culture that is violently and quickly stripped away, denuded, impoverished"*. In fact, the protagonist's life turns into chaos and cynicism when it is supposed to grow and flourish. Vanderwerken concluded that "*instead of finding a self in the world, Eliezer begins with* ***a sense of self****, located in a* ***coherent, unified*** *community, and* ***ends up*** *when Buchenwald is liberated* ***alone, isolated*** *and* ***numb"***.[4]

Moreover, in his book entitled *A Thousand Darknesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction (2011)*, Ruth Franklin devotes a chapter to the analysis of Wiesel's ***Night***. He describes the novel as a devastating book because of its simplicity, which results from its *"exquisite construction"*. [5] In other words, he asserts that its simplicity comes from the clarity of its outline. Besides, Franklin elucidates that the book depicts Elieser's experience of the Holocaust through his plainspoken voice without inclusion of any "epiphanies", "ironies", "extraneous detail", "analysis" and "speculation". [6]

Furthermore, Deborah Schizer Scott bases her analysis of Elie Wiesel's ***Night*** on the issue of "humanity". She asserts that Wiesel's novel highlights a contradiction between the Nazi and the Jewish conception of the "human". While the Jews believe in brotherhood and fraternity, the Nazi see them as inferior and a threat to the evolution of the German race. To clarify her opinion, Scott related ***Night*** to its socio-historical contexts. She traces the roots of the European anti-Semitist sentiment, which, according to her, has both religious and scientific dimensions. She argues that if the Jews of Europe were seen as the killers and enemies of the Christ in the previous centuries, the emergence of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection during the nineteenth century, and its deployment in the social realm by the

Nazi racial theory brought the demise of the Jewish race. Precisely, Scott maintains that the irrational application of Charles Darwin's theory on the Jews deprived them from their humanity and *"turned them into animals competing for survival"*. In her opinion, Wiesel's novel illustrates how depriving a population from its humanity results in its degeneration. Therefore, she believes that ***Night*** is a reminder of how the humanity of everyman, regardless of his skin and color, must be preserved.[7]

Issue and Working Hypothesis

From this review of literature about Wiesel's ***Night***, one can notice that many studies have already dealt with his novel. However, little attention has been devoted to the analysis of the themes of trauma and memory. This work attempts to add a new perspective in the analysis of Wiesel's book**.** It approaches it from both psychological and philosophical perspectives. Indeed, it analyses the notions of trauma and memory as they are articulated in the novel. Our intention throughout this dissertation is to demonstrate that both themes share the idea of present **Timelessness.** The latter reflects a moment of freedom from the boundaries of the chronological time; a moment of duration that holds, instead, a psychological dimension. It detaches characters from their present worlds bringing them back into moments, days and years back, to a certain point in time which permits them to endure, on the one hand, moments of trauma, failure and paralysis and on the other moments of revelation, awakening and self-discovery.

First, from a psychological perspective, we intend to demonstrate how the state of experiencing psychic trauma prevents **past memories** from being separate from the present ones. In this analysis, we will focus mainly on the study of three main aspects: first, the **process of experiencing trauma** and its **belated symptoms**. Second, the **inability of understanding** and **forgetting** the trauma and the **necessity of crying out** the trauma and the

risk of contamination will be explored. Additionally, from a philosophical perspective, we will show how the **power of memory** keeps both past and present experiences intermingled within an individual's psyche, transcending both space and time. In this analysis, we will concentrate on the study of three main ideas. First, we will consider the idea of **past perception** through **images**, **remembrance** and **memory**. Then, we will carry on with the idea of **duration and timelessness**, to finish up with the idea of the emergence of a "**new identical élan**".

Endnotes

[1] Sandu Frunza, "Ethics, Religion and Memory in Elie Wiesel's Night" in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* (Vol. 9, No. 26, Summer, 2010), 94.

[2] Sanford V. Sternlicht. *Student Companion to Elie Wiesel* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 29.

[3] David L. Vanderwerken. "Wiesel's Night as Anti-Bildungsroman" in Harold Bloom, edr. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Night- New Edition* (New York: InfoBase publishing, 2010), 40.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ruth Franklin, *A Thousand Darknesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 70.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Deborah Schizer Scott. "Of Stomachs and Gold Teeth: the Limits of Dehumanization in Elie Wiesel's Night" in Patrick T. Flynn et all, Edr. *Substance, Judgment, and Evaluation: Seeking the Worth of a Liberal Arts, Core Text Education* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2010), 62-63.

II. Methods and Materials

The materials selected to study and analyze the idea of trauma and memory concern Elie Wiesel's novel ***Night*** (1958). As for methodology, we will appeal to **Cathy Caruth**'s theory of Trauma and **Henri Bergson**'s theory of Memory and Duration.

Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory

Trauma theory is a literary theory which emerged during the 1990s with Cathy Caruth as its leading pioneer. It consists of works from a wide range of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, history, neurology and literature. In her edited collection ***Trauma: Explorations in Memory*** (1995) and ***Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*** (1996), Cathy Caruth defines psychic trauma and its various symptoms; she explains the victim's inability to understand a traumatic experience, and claims a possibility for cure and adjustment through an integration of the traumatic experience into a narrative speech which, in some cases, may lead to **inherence** i.e, the contamination of the listener.

Trauma can be defined as an experience of violence that is emotionally painful and distressing. It overwhelms an individual's ability to cope with his life after the trauma, to remember and articulate narratives. Various **forms** of trauma such as discrimination, death, and poverty build up serious long term effects on the health and life of its survivors. These people generally develop a pathology known as **"Post Traumatic Stress Disorder"**, which attempts to define a response, sometimes delayed, to the shocking experience. In this sense, Cathy Caruth asserted that *"the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images [hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares] and thoughts, the one who has lived through them"*.[1] Reading trauma begins with the recognition of something endless. Every reading contains the **compulsive repetition** of some words, phases, scenes and figures. Survivors of trauma are generally possessed by them, and feel defeated and powerless by their

incontrollable return. This phenomenon does **not** only serve as **a record** of the past but registers the **force** of the experience in its fragmentation. It unsettles the individual and forces him to rethink and feel the same suffering continuously.

In addition, another impact of trauma is the **inability** to **remember** and **understand** what has really occurred. Caruth noted that *"the truth of trauma may reside not only in its brutal facts but also in the way […] their occurrence defies simple comprehension"*.[2] Therefore, the essence of trauma lies in the fact that its **reoccurrence** is bound with a question of **truth**. What constitutes it comes precisely from its enigmatic nature. In her article entitled "*Truth and Testimony: the Process and the Struggle"*, Dori Laub suggested that the traumatic reenactment of the event carries with it the "*Collapse of Witnessing*"[3], which results in the impossibility of understanding the truth of the event. Caruth extends in her explanation that *"in its repeated imposition, the trauma seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence"* [4] What constitutes this incomprehensibility is the fact that the individual is not fully conscious at the moment, *"because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and memory are temporarily destroyed"*.[5] Thus, the event is not assimilated fully immediately but only "belatedly" in the repetitive unwilling symptoms. [6]

Trauma is an **isolated experience**. The understanding of its history in its belatedness can be achieved only through the listening of another. Caruth argued that *"the interpretation of [trauma] into a speech is […] a means of passing out from the isolation imposed by the event"*.[7] Furthermore, she added that "*The transformation of trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own and other's knowledge of the past may lose both the precision and the force that characterized traumatic recall.*[8] What Caruth implies here is that testimony may result in the elision and distortion of the event's true history, but the importance of its integration into another's

knowledge is the possibility of cure and forgetting. To quote her words, she affirmed that *"**beyond** the **loss** of **precision**, there is another more profound disappearance the **loss** precisely of **the event's essential incomprehensibility**"*.[9] While the survivor integrates his trauma into a speech, he may disfigure its original truth. This is not problematic according to Caruth because it is this loss of precision that will bring the loss of the enigma of the survivor's story, which constitutes the essence of his trauma.

Moreover, trauma requires integration for both **testimony** and **cure**, but this process may lead to inherence. In her introductory essay of the second chapter to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* Caruth quoted Van Der Kolk's and Van Der Hart's words claiming that *"the amnesiac reenactment is a story that is difficult to tell and to hear"*.[10] Inherent in Caruth's theory is the belief that the trauma experienced by someone may be transferred to another. To explain this idea, one can refer to Ruth Leys' statement in which she stated that "*the basic model for [the] transmission [of trauma]is the face to face encounter between the victim, who enacts or performs his or her traumatic experience, and a witness who listens and is in tern contaminated by the catastrophe.*[11] Accordingly, the danger of listening to the "unspeakable" is the "traumatazation" of the listener. Additionally, Caruth claimed that in case the listener is at the same time a witness of the other's trauma, the reenactment of his trauma will be a double telling of the unspeakable truth. The trauma here is made of the repeated suffering the survivor recognizes through the voice of the other. This voice ties the listener to its own trauma. Therefore, the wound that speaks is not precisely that of the listener, *"but the wound, the trauma of another"*.[12]

The explosion of trauma work in literary studies is largely due to the path breaking works of Cathy Caruth. However, many other scholars have been of a great help to the advance of this field of study. Shoshana Felman has been working creatively on the borders of trauma, literature and psychoanalysis. Her engagement with trauma studies began with her

book *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, written with collaboration in the psychoanalysis Dori Laub. The latter portrayed how victims of the Second World War and the Holocaust work with their after war trauma through their testimonies. Besides, she explained the importance of testimony in opening the possibility for a new life after trauma.[13] In addition, Judith Lewis Herman changed the way people think about and treat traumatic events and trauma victims thanks to her book *Trauma and Recovery*. Her analysis focused on the study of the vast literature of combat veterans and victims of political terror, as well as domestic violence, to demonstrate the parallels between private terrors such as rape and public traumas such as terrorism. [14]

Henri Bergson's Theory of Memory and Duration

In his multiple philosophical texts, Henri Bergson created a variety of theories associated with memory. In ***Time and Free Will (1889)***, he pioneered the concept of **Duration** which comes as a reaction against scientific time. To explain the difference between time and space, he invented the notion of **Images** in his book entitled ***Matter and Memory (1896)***. An Image holds in its essence an essential character, that of being psychological and subjective. He pointed out that an actual act of **perception** always occurs in the flow of time which automatically involves one's **Memory**.

Bergson introduced two ways of capturing reality: intellectual and intuitive. The former refers to the chronological way of conceiving time while the latter defines the psychological way of perceiving it, which is Duration. **Duration** resides in the present. In this respect, he asserted that *"[it] is the form which the succession of our conscious state assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former"*.[15] It is also the preservation and **prolongation** of the **past into the present** moment. He added that *"Duration can be defined as the dynamic temporality of one's psychic experience that exists within the self in relation and in response to temporality in general."* [16] It is the coexistence

of the past, present and future times within one single moment in the human mind, apart from the external linear time. While the **intellect** tries to specialize time by separating it into its artificial units, such as hours, minutes and seconds, **intuition** tends to connect different moments of one's consciousness into one single entity. **Psychological time** does not function as a linear pattern but as **one simultaneous pattern**. The past affects the present, and the present functions with the future. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf provides one of the best instances of how psychological time functions in this way.

In addition, Duration consists of qualitative sensations rather than of numerical aspects. Bergson stated that

> *Time loses its nature as a mathematical quantity and becomes a quality in which our experiences become inseparable from how we perceive them: our emotions, values and past experiences color our present experience. It is only in the moments of real duration, of immediate experience that the self experiences reality, yet this reality is not one of permanent or eternal forms, but one of immanent flow"*[17]

In the continuous flow of duration, one minute can be felt as if it was longer than that, because it has some sort of particular significance in one's consciousness. Bergson also mentioned that the circular dimension of duration results in the continuous interaction and manipulation of the three times all together. It becomes a **moment of transcendence** which creates a moment of awakening, epiphany, self realization and spiritual fulfillment.

Along with his notion of Duration, Bergson introduced the **concept of Images**. He related this word Image to the senses. In this respect, he wrote "*Here, I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are opened to them, unperceived when they are closed. All these images act and react upon one another.*"[18] This idea of images is highlighted to clarify the distinction he makes between soul and body. The body is a performer which is placed between objects which influence it and upon which it

reacts. It receives movements from the external world, and transmits them to internal motor mechanisms. This process is related to the existence of an independent memory which gathers images as they successively occur along the course of time. The body is only a mere image among other images. It coexists with them without being the center or the end of the universe. However, what differentiates the body from other images is its ability to react or no. Bergson asserted that an individual comes to know about his body as an image not only from without by "perception", but only from within by "affections"[19.] These affections are the product of a mixture between external excitations and the movements of the body. Each of them invites the body to act with at the same time a will to wait and do nothing.

Furthermore, Bergson gave an unconventional meaning to memory. He argued that memory is not only a faculty of repetition or reproduction. Accordingly, he suggested that the past survives under two distinct forms: in motor mechanisms and in independent recollections. The first implies that the recognition of a past action lies in the action itself. It is related to a certain kind of automatic behavior that humans acquired through repetition. It will be imprinted on the memory after passing through different successive phases. It can be characterized as a habit since it is learned by the repetition of the same effort. This type of memory is rare and exceptional. It depends of people's will to recollect it or not. However, the independent recollections or personal memory is spontaneous. It records images and events of the daily life as they occur in time and space without neglecting any detail. Regardless of utility or practical application, it stores the past by the mere necessity of its own nature.[20] It simply takes place at every moment of duration, and pictures the past with its outline shape and color. While the first one is build up by repetition, the second is no, but it recalls an image.

The practical function of memory is the use of past experience for present action. Bergson said that the primary function of memory,

> *is to evoke all those past perceptions which are analogous to the present perception, to recall to us what preceded and followed them, and so to suggest to us that decision which is the most useful. But this is not all. By allowing us to grasp in a single intuition multiple moments of duration, it frees us from the movement of the flow of things, that is to say, from the rhythm of necessity. The more of these moments memory can contract into one, the firmer is the hold which it gives to us on matter: so the memory of a living being appears indeed to measure, above all, its powers of action upon things and to be only the intellectual reverberations of this power*.[21]

The recognition of an experienced perception needs the association of the past with the present action. Indeed, the images stored by the spontaneous memory or what Bergson called a memory by excellence, tend always to associate the past with the present perception. As Bergson confirmed that *"every perception is prolonged into a nascent action, while the images taking their place and order in memory, the movement which continue them modify the organism and create in the body new dispositions towards action."*[22] What makes of this memory a specific of its own is the fact that it always accumulates within the body a certain type of mechanism which stands it ready to react to external present objects.

The relevance of Caruth's theory of Trauma and Bergson's of Memory and Duration on the following research is based on different points. On the one hand, the theory of trauma offers the possibility of identifying and analyzing the theme of trauma within Elie Wiesel's novel. This echoes the main subject of his book which centers upon the terrific experiences witnessed / lived by the young boy Elizer and his Jewish com0munity. To illustrate this view, we shall refer to ***Night's*** characters that are witnessing distressful moments of fear and despair in the concentration camps of the Nazi in Germany. Moreover, Caruth explained both the importance and the danger of telling about the terrific experience in healing the survivor but also in contaminating the listener. To justify this argument, we should focus on the analysis of the narrative stories of the novel's characters and on their impact on the ones who tell about them and the ones who listen to them.

On the other hand, a Bergsonian study of Wiesel's ***Night*** favors three major aspects. First, by reference to his concept of Images, of how internal and external images of a Bergsonian universe interact, this study will demonstrate how Wiesel uses the characters' internal chaos to reflect the chaos of the external world around them. In addition, it will analyze the way memory and remembrances are used to recall a specific period in the life of the narrator, which is his experience in the concentration camp. Second, it will focus on the examination of the moments of duration to demonstrate the timelessness of the narrator's story. At the end, this analysis will consider the narrator's identity crisis and how duration and memory play a fundamental role in reconstructing and remaking his real self.

Endnotes:

[1] Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction," *Trauma*: *Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 151.

[2] Ibid., 153.

[3] Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.* ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York:Routledge,1991).

[4] Caruth, "Recapturing the Past, 153.
[5] Ruth Leys, "The Pathos of the Literal and the Crisis of Representation" in *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2000), 268.

[6] Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in *Trauma*: *Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4.

[7] Ibid., 10.

[8] Caruth, Recapturing the Past, 153.

[9] Ibid., 154.

[10] Ibid., 153.

[11] Ruth Leys, "The Pathos of the Literal", 268.
[12] Cathy Caruth, "Introduction: The Wound and the Voice" in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 8.

[13] Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.* ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York:Routledge,1991).

[14] Judith L Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

[15] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the immediate Data of Consciousness.* February 1888, 100.

[16] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory, 1896.* Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Allen and Unwin, 1911), 125.

[17] Bergson, *Time and Free Will,* 168.

[18] Bergson, *Matter and Memory,* 1.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] Bergson, *Matter and Memory,* 92.

[21] Ibid., 228.

[22] Ibid., 93.

III. Results and Discussion

Our work takes into account the notion of trauma in ***Night*** in relation to Cathy Caruth's theory of **trauma**, and the idea of **memory** as it is elaborated by the philosopher Henri Bergson. After discussion, we reached the following results.

The characters of Elie Wiesel's ***Night*** live states of **present timelessness** because of a **traumatic past** that comes repeatedly to hunt them. These characters are victims of severe psychological **trauma** because of their unexpected confrontation with extermination, hunger as well as physical and psychological violence in the concentration camps of the Nazi. Cathy Caruth explained that trauma defines a state of psychological disturbance as an outcome of a sudden confrontation with unusual shocking events.

In addition, the characters of the novel are prisoners of their past. They live a **timeless present** through the power of **memory** which merge their present and past times into single moments of **pure duration.** The past according to Bergson is not recalled according to the rules of logical time, but psychologically where past, present and future times are not divided according to the clock time but mixed into one single whole.

At the end of our discussion, we have concluded that Elie Wiesel's ***Night*** is a reflection of the chaos of the modern world in the concentration camps of Germany during the Second World War. As of work of the traumatic, enacted through the power of memory it highlights well the issue of timelessness.

Chapter One: the Idea of Trauma in Elie Wiesel's *Night*

Our intention in the following chapter is to study Trauma. This chapter will analyze the trauma as experienced by the characters of Wiesel's novel specifically Eliezer, Moishe the Beadle, Mrs. Schächter as well as other minor Jewish characters. We intend to demonstrate that experiencing trauma keeps the characters' past continuously haunting their present. They live a state of loss and despair as a result of the shocking events they experienced in the Nazi concentration camps. A trauma they revive frequently in the form of enigmatic, disguised behaviors, images and thoughts. Then, we will explain the characters' agony because of their inability to fully understand and forget the trauma. We will focus mainly on the analysis of the narrative stories of the characters: Moishe, Schächter and Eliezer. Finally, we will elucidate both the importance and the danger of narrating the traumatic experience.

Experiencing Trauma and its Belated Symptoms

A trauma interpretation of ***Night*** highlights the psychological trauma of the Jewish people who witness terrific moments of fear and madness, while they face their own deaths and that of their beloved in the Nazi concentration camps. The novel's characters stand as perfect examples of traumatized individuals. Sticking to Cathy Caruth's definition, trauma refers to the intrusion of an unexpected event into someone's consciousness. It is a sudden confrontation with violence or death which leaves the survivor emotionally and intellectually confused, frightened, and disturbed. In this regard, one can argue that Moishe the Beadle, Mrs. Schächter, Eliezer and other minor Jewish characters are victims of severe psychological traumas because of their unexpected confrontation with extermination, hunger as well as physical and psychological violence.

Wiesel's ***Night*** recounts the tragic story of a Jewish teenage boy, Eliezer, who survives the Nazi concentration camps, during the Second World War. It stresses the experiences of

terror that he witnesses with his community. Narrated through Eliezer's subjective voice, the book holds a privileged relationship with the traumatic.

From its very beginning, ***Night*** introduces to the reader the first character who bears witness to a tragedy; the first one who experiences the trauma of the Nazi crimes, Moishe the Beadle. The latter is introduced as Elieser's master of Jewish mysticism. His values about life and spirituality frame Elieser's struggle for faith and survival. However, because of his foreign origins, he finishes expelled from Sighet by the German police to the polish borders. There, he has been subjected to the mass massacre of his Jewish fellows, from which he escapes miraculously. Months later, he returns petrified and tells their story; they have been shot and thrown into mass graves, which they were forced to dig for themselves. Ironically, the horrific truth of Moishe's story makes the town's people disregard him and take him for a lunatic.

Trauma accumulates serious long term effects on the health and life of its survivors. Therefore, it is not surprising that Moishe possesses and embodies a post traumatic psychology. Eliezer asserts that after his homecoming, "*Moishe was not the same. The joy in his eyes was gone. He no longer sang. He no longer mentioned either god or kabalah. He spoke only of what he had seen*".[1] Indeed, Moishe's behavior shows signs of what is known as **"post traumatic stress disorder"**. The latter constitutes a natural consequence of his trauma, which overwhelms his ordinary adaptation to life and utterly changes him. It keeps him thinking about it and acting it continuously. Eliezer stated that: "*day after day, night after night, [Moishe] went from one Jewish house to the next, telling his story, and that of Malka, the young girl who lay dying for three days and that of Tobie, the tailor who begged to die before his sons were killed.*[2]

According to Judith Herman, the author of *Trauma and Recovery*, "*traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary system of care that gives people a sense of control, connection and*

meaning".[3] Without doubt, this explains Moishe's post traumatic pathology. In fact, the experience he lives shatters his sense of control and leaves him hopeless with no interest in life. *"I came back to describe to you my death",* Moishe proclaims as if his life ended with his Jewish fellows. *"Life? I no longer care to live"* he added hopelessly.[4]

Repetition is one of the fundamental features of a post traumatic pathology. The most moving picture of repetitive unwilling traumatic symptoms can be found in the story of Mrs. Schächter. The latter is transported in the same cattle car with Eliezer during the deportation to Auschwitz. She is separated mistakenly from her husband and two sons who are transported in earlier convoys. The separation shatters her completely.

> *Mrs. Schächter had lost her mind. On the first day of the journey, she had already begun to moan. She* ***kept asking why she had been separated from her family.*** *Later, her sobs and screams became hysterical. On the third night, as we were sleeping, some of us sitting, huddled against each other, some of us standing, a piercing cry broke the silence: "****Fire****! I see a fire!* ***I see a fire****!" […] She was howling, pointing through the window: "Look! Look at this fire! This terrible fire! Have mercy on me!" Some pressed against the bars to see. There was nothing, only the darkness of night. […] "She is hallucinating because she is thirsty, poor woman…* [5]

Schächter's hallucinations persist repeatedly throughout the journey. Her screams and cries evocatively represent the way that the experience of her traumatic separation repeats itself. But exactly, through her unknowing, enigmatic acts and against her will. Caruth explained that *"[…] the repetition at the heart of catastrophe […] emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot leave behind"*.[6] What is striking and uncanny in Schächter's behavior, however, is the unconscious and uncontrollable repetition of her screams.

Thus, Schächter's story frames the post traumatic stress disorder which comes in reaction to the separation she endures. According to Cathy Caruth,

> *the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested [as] a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which take the form of* ***hallucinations****,* ***dreams****, thoughts or behavior* ***stemming from*** *the* ***event,*** *along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, […]. This simple pathology belies a very peculiar fact: the pathology cannot be*

> *defined […] by the event itself, which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally […].*[7]

Then, Schächter's cries represent a natural response to the overwhelming separation which takes the form of repeated hallucinations. However, as Caruth elucidated, her hallucinations of seeing fire in the distance cannot be defined by, or associated to the incident of the separation. They are absolutely true, but unassimilated to associative chains of meaning. It is their accuracy which produces the deep uncertainty as to the very truth of her story, and it is their unwitting return that possesses her and resists her cure.

Furthermore, Wiesel embodies another pattern of "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder" in both characters of Mrs. Schächter and Moishe the Beadle, which is silence. **Psychological trauma** often results in helplessness, segregation and silence. After being taken for lunatics, **Moishe** and **Schächter** fall into **isolation** and **deep stillness**. Wiesel wrote: *Even Moishe the beadle had fallen **silent**. He was weary of talking. He would drift through synagogue or through the streets, hunched over, eyes cast down, avoiding people's gaze.*[8] After he tells his story times successively, Moishe's words become inadequate for communication. He finishes up lonely as all his attempts to stop the tragedy were ineffective. In addition, Mrs. Schächter assumes the same attitude once she arrives to Auschwitz. *"[She] had fallen on her own. Mute again, indifferent, absent, she had returned to her corner"*.[9] However, Schächter's silence is a permanent one, for her post-traumatic pathology is basically bound up with her lack of self control.

Post traumatic stress disorder is essentially the past which is continually intruding into the present, in both intrusive and constrictive ways. While Moishe is able to fully recollect his entire story and construct a slightly coherent narrative, Schächter remains trapped between the truth of her traumatic memory and her enigmatic intrusive hallucinations. Notably, Eliezer, like Moishe and Schächter, undergoes multiple traumas which make of him a prisoner of his past. His trauma is made of a chain of series of disastrous events which begins from the first

day of the deportation until the day of their liberation. Hence, throughout the book, he shows signs of fear, restlessness, depression, intellectual and spiritual doubt; all signs defining the "post traumatic stress disorder" pathology. Indeed, his experience constitutes the entire substance of Wiesel's novel.

Eliezer's traumatic encounters start from the day of their exclusion from Sighet toward an unknown destination. The thought of being excluded is stressing. However, Schächter's fire hallucinations worsen his psychological state and those of other Jews in the train. The complication of their state of mind is demonstrated through Eliezer's words when he says,

> *There was a moment of **panic**. Who had screamed? It was Mrs.Schächter […] It took us a long time to recover from this harsh awakening. We were still **trembling**, and with every screech of the wheels, we felt the **abyss** opening beneath us. Unable to still our anguish, we tried to reassure each other: "She is mad, poor woman…" […]We tried to reason with her, more to calm ourselves, to catch our breath, than to soothe her: But it was all in vain. Our **terror** could no longer be contained. Our nerves had reached a breaking point. Our very skin was aching. It was as though madness had infected all of us. We gave up. A few young men forced her to sit down, then bound and gagged her […] The heat, the thirst, the stench, the lack of air, were suffocating us. Yet all that was nothing compared to her screams, which tore us apart. A few more days and **all of us** would have started **to scream**.*[10]

This quotation indicates the extreme feelings of fear that Schächter's screams create among the Jewish people in the train. Speaking through the voice of others, Eliezer describes both his panic and that of the ones who are exposed to the woman's cries. Actually, their terror results much more from the nature of her sight; the fire she affirms to witness. Her cries seem to define the unknown future which is waiting for them, which makes them terribly scared. In fact, **shock** is one of the main characteristics of trauma, but **fear** makes its essence.

Once in Birkenau, Eliezer experiences one of the first brutal atrocities of the Nazi army. He submits to a "selection"; an examination process to determine the utility and strength of prisoners. When the SS officers direct them throughout the camp, they pass by an open pit furnace where babies are burned by the truckload:

> *Not far from us, flames, huge flames, were rising from a ditch. Something was being burned there. A truck drew close and unloaded its hold: small children. Babies! Yes, I did see this, with my own eyes […] children thrown into the flames. (Is it any wonder that ever since then, sleep tends to elude me?) So that was where we were going. A little farther on, there was another, larger pit for adults.*[11]

Eliezer's words, describing his sight of burning children bodies, are not telling the sight of death itself but rather, and more terribly, the shock of his encounter with such kind of massacre. Since that, he suffers from insomnia. It is a matter of fact that **sleep disturbance** defines another pattern of post traumatic stress disorder. Eliezer, then, presumes that the selection declares them good for the crematorium. As a result, he thinks of **suicide** by running to the electrified barbed wire, seeing *"that [it] would be easier than a slow death in the flames"*.[12] Two steps from the pit, his rank is diverted and directed towards the barracks. Although he escapes the flames of that night,, his soul burns by a shock that transforms him forever.

Indeed, the first night Eliezer experiences in the camp results in destructive effects on his personality. It engraves the Nazi atrocity within his mind eternally. He becomes possessed by the images of fire, burned children along with the cruelty of the German army. That night condemns him to a life of despair and misery. *"[It turns his] life into one long night seven times sealed. […][It deprives him] for all eternity of the desire to live. […][It murders his] God and [his] soul and [turns] his dreams to ashes"*.[13] At that moment, Eliezer experiences the beginning of his spiritual doubt. Basically, he develops a natural psychological turmoil in response to such unusual shocking events.

Another instance of Eliezer's traumatic experiences is when he witnesses the hanging of two prisoners and a young boy, who are suspected of being involved in some resisting groups. Now, although accustomed to the frequent deaths of the camp, the execution of that "little *pipel*" pained him much. This time, like all the prisoners, he cries the boy's death. A painful demonstration he, with other prisoners, is forced to witness for more than half an hour while

the boy struggles between life and death. Eliezer concludes the incident of that day with the following sentence: “that night, the soup tasted of corpses.”[14] These words mirror the physiological effect he develops in response to the witnessed hanging. Indeed, the outcomes of trauma may be experienced through various symptoms, including somatic sensations. This is because traumatic memories tend to be experienced as fragments of the sensory components, including the visual images, the auditory and the smells of that moment. This explains Eliezer’s unusual taste of that particular night. This state, among other symptoms, continues his feelings of chaos and keeps his past always tied to his present.

In Brief, the alienation and the deportation of the Jews of Sighet by the Nazi into concentration camps lead to their traumatazation. The latter also comes from the violence, hunger and humiliation they have been subjected to. The peculiarity of such violent events affects them psychologically and turns them into powerless and disoriented individuals. Consequently, they remain bound to their past through the traumatic symptoms they develop in response.

The Failure to Understand and Forget the Trauma

The characters of Wiesel’s ***Night*** experience moments of timelessness because of the chock and pain that they endure under the Nazi’s oppression. One basic reason which leaves them bound to their pasts is their inability to understand what has really occurred to them. According to Cathy Caruth, a traumatic event is not assimilated immediately at the time of its occurrence but only belatedly through its recurrent repetitive symptoms. Indeed, the constant repetition of the traumatic symptoms of Moishe, Schächter and Eliezer justifies their unconscious search for a clear truth they failed to assimilate in the first place. Accordingly, their narrative stories feature the development of their trauma into a failure of a fully comprehensible and forgettable truth.

After escaping the Gestapo in Poland, Moishe has no other purpose but to convince the people of Sighet to believe and listen to his story. His trauma is demonstrated through his permanent telling of what the Gestapo did to his Jewish fellows in the polish territory. Indeed, at the heart of his repetitive testimony is the brutality of the Nazi massacre, but more importantly, the enigma that constitutes the experience he has witnessed. Willingly or unwillingly, Moishe's actions represent his desperate quest for a truth that he failed to understand at the moment of its occurrence. It is a revival of a tale that both him and the people of Sighet fail to understand.

The incomprehensibility of Moishe's story is illustrated through his words. When Eliezer asks him why he wants so much the people of Sighet to believe him, Moishe responds tearfully "**you don't understand, you cannot understand".**[15] Indeed, Moishe's cries evoke the unbearable trauma he has experienced. Coming from a man who escapes death miraculously, the denial of Eliezer's understanding is a powerful assertion of what he, in effect, saw. It also suggests his inability to understand the unspeakable truth which is evoked through his narrow sentence. Moishe's sentence acknowledges the limited power of his words as it does not convey much more than the enigma and incomprehensibility of his terrific story.

In addition, the obscurity of Moishe's story evokes an unspeakable truth that the people of Sighet fail to understand as well. In fact, his stories are equated with madness. People assume him to be mad when he tells about the deported Jews who have been forced to dig mass graves or how they were shot cruelly while infants were thrown into the air and used as targets for the machine guns. They ignore him thinking that he just wants their pity. Moishe's encounter with the people of Sighet does not emerge as a transmission of a story but as a disruption of knowledge shown through their assumed behavior. From this perspective, their vision of him as a madman asserts both their failure and fear to grasp what he has endured.

As all the people of Sighet, Eliezer affirms that he does not believe his tale. He listens to his stories and tries to understand his sorrow but in vein. *"I often sat with him, after services, and listened to his tales, trying to understand his grief. But all I felt was pity"* Eliezer narrated.[16] Indeed, this demonstrates his inability to understand Moishe's experience. Moishe's story echoes the incomprehensibility of his experience but also an unspeakable truth that the Jews of Sighet disregard. Through it, Wiesel laments the typical human inability to acknowledge the cruelty of Hitler's death camps. In this context, Caruth claims that " *in its repeated imposition, the trauma seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence."*[17]

The obscurity of understanding the truth of trauma manifests itself through the figure of Mrs. Schächter as well. Her hysterical hallucinations point to her traumatic experience which occupies a space to which willed access is denied. On their way to Auschwitz, Schächter screams repeatedly and unconsciously about furnaces that she sees in the distance. Caruth explained that "*The trauma […] in its unexpectedness or horror cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge that cannot […] become a matter of intelligence and thus continually returns at a later time"*.[18] In this case, Schechter's hallucinations are constituted by her failure to control and integrate her traumatic memories into consciousness.

Schächter's post traumatic pathology is a pathology of history. It is characterized by a "collapse of witnessing", by a crisis of truth. Her suffering is a result of her inability to witness her trauma through its integration into a coherent narrative story. Theoretically, it is not logical to relate her fire hallucinations to the separation she endures during the deportation. However, one can refer to Caruth's words that *"for history to be a history of trauma means that it is not referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs."*[19] Clearly, Schächter's hallucinations point out to a trauma she witnessed but not precisely to the moment of the separation. In this sense, Dauri Laub suggests that massive

trauma precludes its registration. It is a record that has yet to be made. Very often, survivors of trauma fail to remember the shocking events they experienced. It is only through its later reenactment in dreams, flashback or hallucinations that he may be able to reconstruct the history of his trauma. In fact, Schächter's traumatic history can be reintegrated only through the belated symptoms she develops, including her hallucinations. Therefore, the collapse of her witnessing engenders the comprehensibility of her story.

Schächter's hysterical shrikes of flames are received like Moishe's stories, as an obvious consequence of madness. Wiesel implies through this character that it is only the mad who can imagine the brutal truths told by Moishe earlier in the novel. One of the results of trauma is that it leads to extremes retention or forgetting. Terrifying experiences maybe remembered with extreme vividness, or may completely resist integration. Obviously, the character of Mrs. Schächter is unable to locate and testify her true story that would permit her to reconcile herself to her new traumatic awareness.

In contrast, Eliezer's testimony is the core of Wiesel's novel. It is characterized by its vivid remembrance and painfully detailed descriptions of the cruelty with which the Jews are treated during their deportation as well as in the concentration camps. While his story demonstrates a well structured speech throughout the novel, instances of fragmentary traumatic memories resurface to disrupt his linear narrative. The words he employs for narration clearly demonstrate his post traumatic state as it is reflected in the following passage:

> *NEVER SHALL I FORGET that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.*
> *Never shall I forget that smoke.*
> *Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.*
> *Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.*

> *Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.*
> *Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.*
> *Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.*
> ***Never.*** [20]

Eliezer's inability to forget is enacted in his use of the word negation "never" eight times repeatedly, as an outcome of his failure to understand the nature of such crimes. As it is mentioned earlier, remembering the trauma means remembering the obscurity that constructs it, thus leading to its incomprehensibility. The smoke, the faces of children, the flames and the silence of that night in Birkenau remain engraved within his memory because he cannot understand how such horrors can be committed in the middle of the twentieth century, while the world remains silent. Obviously, his insistence on his inability to forget does not so much reassert the clarity of his sight as it addresses what is not simple about seeing.

Likewise, his inability to forget embodies his faithfulness to the ones who perished in the flames. After narrating what he has seen, he affirms his commitment to those horrific images. Indeed, his devotion to a never forgetting truth keeps the events of death in the continuous history of his life. It is a result of his fear of betraying the memory of the dead, in his act of telling a story that can erase the specificity of his sight. Caruth explained that traumatized people very often resist and fear to forget because they consider it as an act of betrayal. She stated that "*telling the story of…death is a betrayal of the loved one…a betrayal of the one who died…a betrayal precisely in the act of telling, in the very transmission of an understanding that erases the specificity of a death.*"[21] Thus, telling the traumatic story means betraying the ones lost in the dramatic event because it may lead to forgetfulness. However, through an act of telling that transmits his clear remembrance and which may erase his memory of it, Eliezer's testimony holds a deeply ethical dilemma; his commitment to not betray his past.

Through a very limited linguistic usage for expression, Wiesel tended to reflect the enigma of Eliezer's traumatic memories. He used short, incoherent and incomplete sentences with a very narrow vocabulary to testify the unspeakable truth that Eliezer endures. Such kind of improper linguistic construction occurs, for example, when he narrated how they were treated as inhuman in Birkenau,

> *A barrel of foul-smelling liquid stood by the door. Disinfection. Everybody soaked in it. Then came a hot shower. All very fast. As we left the showers, we were chased outside. And ordered to run some more. Another barrack: the storeroom. Very long tables. Mountains of prison garb. As we ran, they threw the clothes at us: pants, jackets, shirt […] In a few seconds, we had ceased to be men. Had the situation not been so tragic, […] I glanced over at my father. How changed he looked! His eyes were veiled. I wanted to tell him something, but I didn't know what.* [22]

The specificity of this quotation lies in Eliezer's inability to enact a proper language for narration like he did earlier in the novel. The literary critic Dauri Laub acknowledged the limitation of language in communicating trauma. According to her, trauma is beyond representation, for *"there are never enough words or right words to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory and speech"*.[23] The trauma embodied through Eliezer's limited words and sentences shows how it is difficult to articulate a story about trauma. This failure of a proper narration also demonstrates the state of paralysis that this past memory engenders on him.

Eliezer's discourse is a one spoken on the site of a catastrophe. Within the context of his story, his descriptive words, such as *"I saw bodies of children burning"* or *"we witnessed several hangings"*, are not simply a claim that he knows everything about Auschwitz, but a claim that he faithfully remembers its horrors. However, the fragmentary nature of some of his memories and the frequent shifts between past and present tenses that his narration embodies assert the weight of his horrifying past which would never be past as long as he is alive.

The enigma of the traumatic stories of ***Night'***s characters creates an incomprehensible truth that all of Eliezer, Schächter and Moishe can understand only through their belated, conscious or unconscious, symptoms, including Moishe's repetitive testimony, Schächter's unwilling hallucinations and Eliezer's unforgettable experiences. It keeps them always thinking about what they have experienced and trying endlessly to find explanations and justifications to what happened to them. However, their narrative stories are characterized by their obvious demand for a listening by the other. All of them, through their proper ways, try to address a listener.

Integration of Trauma into a Narrative Speech

Night's characters witness nearly the same traumatic experiences within the same context. Each of them, in his subjective world, reacts differently to a violent deportation that involved later separations, tortures and deaths. All of Eliezer, Moishe and Schächter tend to integrate their traumas into a testimonial behavior, whether narrative as in the case of Eliezer and Moishe or hysterical as in Schächter's behavior. Indeed, their testimonies hold their desperate demand for the listening of the other, who would bear witness to the reality of the unspeakable and unbelievable truths they have been through. As it is implied in Caruth's view, their testimonies may provide clarity to the enigma that characterizes their experiences and may help them to heal and forget.

Moishe's return to Sighet in order to tell his story constitutes his initial departure from his trauma. First, he seeks survival through **narration**, although he soon falls into a deep silence and isolation. Dauri Laub commented on the necessity of testimony for survival. She claimed that the survivors *"[do] not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories, they also need to tell their stories in order to survive."*[24] Articulating the traumatic emotions into a speech is fundamental for the survival of the victim. This may be an initiation of a

healing process. Caruth also claimed that the trauma requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure."[25] Although Moishe asserts that he no longer cares about living, [26] his traumatic speech constitutes his unconscious try to distance himself from the massacre so as to be able to distinguish between his past and present lives.

Furthermore, Moishe' story is not only a testimony but an address through his words "Jews listen to me." [27] Within this address, the retelling of his experience repeatedly is a claim to a discovered truth that the Jews must know. He claimed that,

> *You don't understand," [Moishe] said in despair. "You cannot understand. I was saved miraculously. I succeeded in coming back. Where did I get my strength? I wanted to return to Sighet to describe to you my death so that you might ready yourselves while there is still time. Life? I no longer care to live. I am alone. But I wanted to come back to warn you. Only no one is listening to me* [28]

Talking out the trauma in Moishe's case is also his own strategy to resist the reoccurrence of the traumatic event to other people. His aim is to inform the Jews of Sighet about a trauma which is probably waiting for them.

Moreover, his words spoken in the context of such disaster clearly demand a listening. They do not state the banal truth of his story as they call for the people of Sighet to listen. More importantly, this act of telling suggests the possibility of erasing the nature of his trauma through the act of listening that the people of Sighet refuse to offer. Such kind of testimony is called the 'talking cure'. According to Judith Herman, "the talking cure provides relief for many of the major symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder."[29] This testimony helps the traumatized to cry out the unconscious emotion and tension of his experience. In effect, Moishe lamented that *"only no one is listening to me."*[30] In view of that, one can argue that his testimony is an attempt to reconcile and overcome his trauma through his search for an empathetic listening in the people of Sighet.

Similarly, Mrs. Schächter's hysterical testimony seems to address the Jews who were with her in the train. Wiesel wrote that *"[Schächter] continued to scream and sob fitfully. "Jews listen to me" she cried "I see a fire! I see flames, huge flames."*[31] In this context, those people act as the addressed others; the listeners who would bear witness to her traumatic testimony. Still, she is deprived of an act of listening in their violent condemnation of her as a mad woman; the only act that can, in fact, provide her relief and assistance.

The interpretation of trauma into a narrative speech is very important for the survivor to detach himself from it. Caruth explained that the listening of another helps the traumatized to reconstruct the history of his traumatic experience. His narration may not be necessarily faithful to the original experience, but it will help him to heal and possibly forget.[32] It is important to emphasis that both of Moishe and Schächter are not given the chance to properly translate their traumatic history into **a narrative memory**. They are not given an empathetic listening attitude by their Jewish community that would help them to grasp and understand the enigmas that characterize their trauma. While testimony may provide relief and some sense of clarity, the transformation of their traumas into a speech worsens their psychological states. They find no cure since the enigma that constructs their experiences can be erased only through the listening of their people that would open a possibility for their histories to finally take shape.

Nevertheless, the integration of trauma into a narrative story in Eliezer's case seems to be a successful move. His testimony is the central story of the novel. Transmitted through his personal view, it assumes a highly subjective stance. As stated earlier, his story depicts his experience as a teenage boy before, during and after Auschwitz. Basically, it highlights the terrific moments of humiliation, violence and death that he, with other Jews, had experienced in the camps. It is important to mention that the author, Elie Wiesel, used Eliezer as a character to testify his own personal experience of the Holocaust. Indeed, ***Night*** has been

regarded by some critics as an autobiographical novel. Still, some differences between Wiesel as a survivor and Eliezer as a narrator have been acknowledged by critics.

What is particular in Eliezer's testimony is the fact that it embodies both testimonies of Schächter and Moishe. Through this character, Wiesel managed to integrate years of pain and suffering into a narrative story, which enables Eliezer to situate himself between the limits of his life in Auschwitz and after. Throughout his narration, he reflects different phases of his personal development that are highly determined and shaped by the trauma he endured in the camps. He starts his story as a devoted Jewish believer, ambitious to know all about the mysteries of Jewish theology. At the end, he emerges as a lonely, hopeless walking dead, amidst the ruins of God's indifference.

Thus, Eliezer embodies different states of being within one single character. His narration reflects his change from a normal individual to a traumatized one and from a believer to a disbeliever. However, his testimony clearly demonstrates that he, as a witness of the cruelty of the Nazi crime, succeeds to cry out his trauma into a narrative speech. This does not mean that he has necessarily achieved complete recovery, but it is obvious that it enables him to distance himself from the past. One can notice that he embodies two kinds of selves; one of the past and another of the present. Obviously, Eliezer of the present is the one who narrates the trauma of the past. Contrary to Schächter and Moishe, Eliezer offers himself the possibility to understand what once has been a nightmare, through the narrative story he enacts. He is finally able to distinguish between his past and present, but still can't forget and leave the site of its horrors. In this regard, Cathy Caruth quoted Kevin Newmark's words and explained that "*speech seems to offer only the attempt to move away from the experience of shock by reintegrating it into a stable understanding of it.*"[33]

The narrator's ability to distance himself from an unforgettable past is illustrated through his frequent shifts between past and present, throughout his narration. This kind of

shift occurs, for instance, when he tells about the French girl who comforts him after he is beaten by Idek, the kapo in charge of his group in Buna. At that moment of his narration, Eliezer jumped forward to,

> *MANY YEARS LATER, in Paris, I sat in the Metro, reading my newspaper. Across the aisle, a beautiful woman with dark hair and dreamy eyes. I had seen those eyes before.*
> *"Madame, don't you recognize me?"*
> *"I don't know you, sir."*
> *"In 1944, you were in Poland, in Buna, weren't you?"*
> *"Yes, but… "*
> *"You worked in a depot, a warehouse for electrical parts … "*
> *"Yes," she said, looking troubled.*
> *And then, after a moment of silence: "Wait…I do remember…"*
> *"Idek, the Kapo … t h e young Jewish b o y … your sweet words…"*
> *We left the Metro together and sat down at a café terrace. We spent the whole evening reminiscing.*[34]

Indeed, this narrative move from past to future gives an important detail of what has become of Eliezer after Auschwitz. This shows that his faith differs from that of Moishe and Schächter. Luckily, he has not gone insane. He moves to Paris where he carries his life as a normal person. After he notices the French woman in a metro, he reminds her of himself and they spend the evening talking about their past experience. Apparently, it seems that his life has finally come back into normal.

In brief, in order for the human spirit to survive, trauma must be acknowledged and verbalized. Its transformation into a narrative memory is fundamental for the survivor to move on from it. It is an agency used in order to resist the reoccurrence of the traumatic memory. Infact, the personal stories witnessed by ***Night'***s characters testify the annihilation and oppression of the whole Jewish community. The novel conveys the disruption of their life, culture and identity. In return, what the listener and reader witness is, in fact, the irrationality of the Nazi war, the absurdity of history and above all the tragedy of the modern world.

The Risk of Being Contaminated by a Traumatic Story

Night's characters have been subjected to the tortures and deaths of their families, friends and relatives. As a natural outcome, they become traumatized and contaminated by the shocking events they have been assisted to or heard about. This is because a story of trauma is always difficult to witness or hear. The fearful emotional intensity that characterizes it justifies the witness's anxious, and usually pathetic, attitude towards it. Therefore, the stories of Moishe, Schächter and Eliezer can be read not only as the stories of individuals in relation to the events of their own pasts, but also as those of the way in which their trauma is tied up with the trauma of their beloved.

First, in the case of Moishe the beadle, trauma reflects the one experienced by his fellows in the Polish borders. Eliezer narrated that *"[Moishe] went from one Jewish house to the next, telling his story and that of **Malka**, the young girl who lay dying for three days, and that of **Tobie**, the tailor who begged to die before his sons were killed."*[35] While he is narrating his story, Moishe also tells about that of Malka and Tobie. This implies that his trauma does not only come out as a result of his unexpected confrontation with death and his disastrous survival, but it is also an outcome of his sight of Tobie's and the young girl's tragic deaths. In view of that, the suffering he recognizes through the telling of their stories represents the experience of an individual traumatized by his own past through the trauma of another.

Moreover, while Moishe seeks to gain distance from his trauma through testimony, he in return subjects the people of Sighet to what Caruth described as the *"trauma's contagion of the traumatazation of the ones who listen."*[36] Trauma may be transferred to the one who listens, especially when he is not prepared to the unusual shocking events that constitute it. Infact, Eliezer narrated that after Moishe had told his terrific tales, *"people not only refused to*

believe [them], they refused to listen."[37] This refusal reflects their attempt to protect themselves from being contaminated by his wound. Besides, they adopt the same attitude towards Schächter's hallucinations. However, this time, they seem to be clearly contaminated by her terror.

Eliezer himself claims the effect her cries engender on him and on those who were in the train. He asserted,

> *Our terror could no longer be contained. Our nerves had reached a breaking point. Our very skin was aching. It was as though* ***madness*** *had* ***infected*** *all of us. We gave up. A few young men forced her to sit down, then bound and gagged her[…]the heat, the thirst, the stench, the lack of air, were suffocating us. Yet all that was nothing compared to* ***her screams,*** *which* ***tore us apart****. A few more days and all of us would have started to scream.*[38]

It is clearly apparent that Schächter's traumatic symptoms have infected the people who are with her. Some of them went further to beating her as they can no longer bear her frightening screams. The latter involves them in her terror which causes them to develop post traumatic symptoms demonstrated through their anxiety and their violent behavior.

In the frosty days of the winter of 1945, a similar incident occurs during the prisoners' liquidation to Buchenwald, after the Russian army approached the Buna camp. The prisoners run for long hours in the snowstorm and darkness, covering more than forty-two miles to finally reach the Gleiwitz camp, and then travel for ten days in a train of roofless cattle cars. Because of cold and starvation, hundreds of bodies of dead men are thrown from the train. This led to the decay of the psychological states of the living people, as it is reflected in the following description,

> *On the last day of our journey, a terrible wind began to blow. And the snow kept falling. We sensed that the end was near; the real end. We could not hold out long in this glacial wind, this storm[...] Suddenly, a cry rose in the wagon, the cry of a wounded animal. Someone had just died. Others, close to death,* ***imitated*** *his cry. And*

> *their cries seemed to come from beyond the grave. Soon **everybody** was **crying**. Groaning. Moaning. Cries of distress hurled into the wind and the snow. The lament **spread** from wagon to wagon. It was **contagious**. And now hundreds of cries rose at once. The death rattle of an entire convoy with the end approaching.*[39]

Mass distress prevails in a context where there is no assistance. In their chaotic world, however, those people's struggle for selfish, personal survival constitutes an innate human response. Yet, while every prisoner seems to fight alone against death within his isolated world, the cries and moans of the dying people are dreadfully contagious.

Furthermore, Eliezer's testimony bears witness to his own personal trauma and to the trauma of other people as well. The voice of every character, addressed through his words, reflect the traumatic impact effected on him. Every character's voice seems to be an address that Eliezer tries to cry out and represent through his own self. Indeed, we know about the painful experiences of many characters such as his father, Schächter's son, the hanged young boy in Buna, through his own voice. For example, the influence of the sorrow of Schächter's son is illustrated in the following quotation, "*Her little boy was crying, clinging to her skirt, trying to hold her hand: "It's nothing, Mother! There's nothing there … Please sit down…" He pained me even more than did his mother's cries.*"[40] Eliezer feels pain in the trauma of the woman's child, exactly as he feels it later when he assists to the hanging of the young *Pipel* in Buna. Significantly, the traumas of those people conveyed through his testimony do not convey their own personal trauma as they reassert his own experience through their voices. This aspect is explained in Caruth's writings as follow: "*it is possible to read the address of the voice…, not as the story of an individual in relation to the events of his past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another… through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound.*"[41] Therefore, Eliezer's encounter with the trauma of those who surround him results in his own personal trauma.

Shlomo's experience is also conveyed through Eliezer's voice. During his imprisonment, Eliezer thinks constantly of him. This character functions almost as the center of the narrator's struggle for survival. Both father and son exchange a precious caring attitude towards each another. However, like other minor characters in Eliezer's tale, Shlomo remains stock and constant. Little information is given about him; there is no direct reference to his subjective thoughts. It is only through Eliezer's voice that we know about his painful and ultimately gradual decline.

What the author tells about Shlomo is transmitted through and felt by Eliezer. In his later narration, Eliezer focuses mainly on his father's painful words as they are the ones which marked him the most. Eliezer still keeps in memory his words when he was calling him crying, *"Eliezer… Eliezer …tell them not to beat me… I haven't done anything… why are they beating me?"*[42] This fragmentary memory revived through Eliezer's words holds the trauma of two characters caught on the edge of despair. Indeed, *"since* [*his*] *father's death, nothing mattered to* [*him*] *anymore."*[43] Accordingly, at the center of his father's story there is the irony of the fact that it is on the very few months before the Jewish liberation that he dies after struggling for years to stay beside his son.

To be a witness to the traumatic experience or speech of the traumatized may be very problematic. Most of the time the listener ends contaminated by the trauma experienced or told by the other. This is demonstrated in the novel through the reaction of people to the stories of Moishe and Schächter. It is also echoed through Eliezer's testimony which embodies his own traumatic experiences but also the ones experienced by his father and other people who were with him in the camps. Infact, the trauma enacted through every witness seems in a way or another to be contaminating the ones being around.

In brief, we have analyzed in this chapter the Trauma experienced by the characters of Wiesel's ***Night.*** We have discussed the reasons which, according to the critic Cathy Caruth, leave them bound to their past. In addition, we emphasized the importance of speech in the healing process of the characters, and also on the way it may be problematic, in its risk of traumatizing others. In fact, the novel is about the grounds of the possibility of discourse after the Holocaust. Through it, the author as a witness and a survivor of the holocaust attempts to find a balance, to understand a truth which the shocks he experienced in the camp made incomprehensible.[44]

By using Bergson's theories about memory and duration, the following chapter will reveal how Wiesel reflects the chaotic external world through the internal memories of the novel's narrator. By focusing on the study of the moment of durations, we will show how he experiences moments of timelessness which shape in return his state of being.

Endnotes:

[1] Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 7.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 32.

[4] Wiesel, *Night*, 7.

[5] Ibid., 24-25.

[6] Cathy Caruth, "Introduction: The Wound and the Voice" in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 2.

[7] Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in *Trauma*: *Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4.

[8] Wiesel, *Night,* 8.

[9] Ibid., 28.

[10] Ibid., 25-26.

[11] Ibid., 32.

[12] Ibid., 33.

[13] Ibid., 34.

[14] Ibid., 65.

[15] Ibid., 7.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction," *Trauma*: *Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 153.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Caruth, "Trauma and Experience", 8.

[20] Wiesel, *Night*, 34.

[21] Cathy Caruth, "Literature and the Enactment of Memory" in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 27.

[22] Wiesel, *Night*, 36-37.

[23] Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.* ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York:Routledge,1991), 63.

[24] Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: the process and the struggle" in *Trauma*: *Explorations in Memory*, ed Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 61.

[25] Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past", 153.

[26] Wiesel, *Night*, 7.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 183.

[30] Wiesel, *Night*, 7.

[31] Ibid., 25.

[32] Caruth, "Recapturing the Past", 153.

[33] Ibid., 154.

[34] Wiesel, *Night*, 53-54.

[35] Ibid., 7.

[36] Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience", 10.

[37] Wiesel, *Night*, 7.

[38] Ibid., 25-26.

[39] Ibid., 103.

[40] Ibid., 25.

[41] Caruth, "The Wound and the Voice", 8.

[42] Wiesel, *Night*, 109.

[43] Ibid., 113.

[44] Susan E. Shapiro, "Elie Wiesel and the Ethics of Fiction", 71.

Chapter Two: The Idea of Memory in Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1958)

Our intention in the following chapter is to explore another theme of ***Night*** which is Memory. We will try to relate the novel to Bergson's theory about Memory and Duration, as developed during the beginning of the twentieth century to overcome the traditional idea of sequential memory in an attempt to demonstrate the timelessness of Eliezer's story. Thus, the chapter will analyze Wiesel's projection of past memories through an interaction between the internal and external chaos in the context of a Bergsonian universe. In this analysis, we will suggest that the narrator's recollections of past memories for a present narration are not taken from his past life, but from memory. Our analysis will be concluded by the study of the moments of duration in Eliezer's story and demonstrate how these moments play an important role in shaping, reconstructing and redefining his identity.

The Perception of the Past through Images, Remembrance and Memory

The importance of memory in Elie Wiesel's novel lies in its suggestive descriptions of the inner life, thoughts, feelings, and the world around its characters. Through an act of remembrance, the narrator distills memories of his past experiences and not the experience itself, in a form of interaction between external and internal images, creating a Bergsonian universe. Indeed, Wiesel's reflection of the characters' internal trauma stands as a metaphor for the external chaos of the Second World War era in Germany.

Sanford. V. Sternlicht, in his book entitled *Student Companion to Elie Wiesel (2003)*, wrote that,

> ***Night symbolizes the darkness*** *of the Auschwitz concentration camp, the darkness that descended over Europe when the Germans under Hitler began their World War II attempt at world conquest and racial purification, and* ***the blackness of death*** *that engulfed the six million Jews who were the victims of Hitler's monstrous, evil hatred."* [1]

Throughout his book, Wiesel explores one of the cruel human atrocities in the History of Germany and European Jewry. He reflects the systematic annihilation and destruction of millions of innocent European Jew as a result of Hitler's obsession with German racial superiority. In a Bergsonian context, ***Night*** is concerned with actions and reaction between feelings and bodies. It portrays an interaction between the inner and the outside worlds of its character. It is a story of images; images that characters, specifically the narrator, perceive including their bodies as images as well. To quote his words, Bergson asserted"*I call matter the aggregate of images, and perception of matter these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body*".[2] Therefore, the characters' bodies and what they perceive are forms of images. What distinguishes them from other external images is the fact that they are aware of their internal feelings through their senses, while they come to know about the images outside their bodies through perception.[3]

In this sense, Eliezer constructs his story through a combination of internal and external images. One of the first significant images he perceives once he arrives at the camp is the **chimneys,** in which the SS burnt the Jews,

> *not far from as, flames,* ***huge flames*** *were raising from a ditch […]so that was where we were going […] a little farther was another larger* ***pit*** *for adults.* ***I pinched myself****. Was I still alive? Was I awake. How was it possible that men, women, and children were being burned and that the world kept silent? No. All this could not be real. A nightmare perhaps…Soon I would wake up with a start, my heart pounding, and find that I was back in the room of my childhood, with my books…* ***My father's voice tore me from my day dreams…*** [4]

The narrator links his external sight with his state of being through the act of pinching his body. His description of fire is directly followed by a reference to his body, trying to confirm his consciousness of the horrific truth of such an image. Yet, the voice of his father proves the consistency of his sight. *"The word "chimney" here was not an abstraction; it floated in the air, mingled with the smoke, it was, perhaps, the only word that had a real meaning in this*

place"[5], Eliezer adds later. In this way, the pits and chimneys of fire represent for Eliezer images of terror and insanity.

The same connection is implied in every description from the very beginning of the novel. Waiting for their transportation from the ghettos of Sighet, Eliezer's mother says"*I have a bad feeling. This afternoon I saw new faces in the ghetto. The German officers, I believe they were Gestapo. Since we've been here, we have not seen a single officer.*" [6] The unusual presence of the officers in the ghetto is unpleasant for the woman. It stimulates feelings of anxiety in her; feelings that come again as a result of a perception of an outside image that of the Gestapo. In fact, every time Wiesel sheds light on the depressing effects the external chaos create on his characters, he reinforces the Bergsonian view of a close connection between "matter and soul".

Bergson also relates perception to the senses. He explains that it is highly determined by the degree of the mind's consciousness of the inner and the outside worlds.[7] This claim can be illustrated in the novel through Eliezer's portrayal of one of the most haunting moments of hunger he has experienced with the other Jews in Birkenau. He told,

> *In no time, the camp had the look of an abandoned ship. No living soul in the alleys. Next to the kitchen,* ***two cauldrons*** *of hot, steaming soup had been left untended.* ***Two cauldrons of soup****! Smack in the middle of the road, two cauldrons of soup with no one to guard them! A royal feast going to waste! Supreme temptation!* ***Hundreds of eyes*** *were looking at them, shining with* ***desire****. Two lambs with hundreds of wolves lying in wait for them. Two lambs without a shepherd, free for the taking. But who would dare?* ***Fear*** *was greater than* ***hunger****. Suddenly, we saw the door of Block 37 open slightly.* ***A man*** *appeared, crawling snakelike in the direction of the cauldrons. Hundreds of eyes were watching his every move.* ***Hundreds of men*** *were crawling with him, scraping their* ***bodies*** *with his on the stones. All hearts trembled, but mostly with* ***envy****. He was the one who had dared. He reached the first cauldron.* ***Hearts*** *were pounding harder: he had succeeded.* ***Jealousy*** *devoured us, consumed us. We never thought to admire him.* [8]

The unconsumed cauldrons, the crawling man, the hundreds of eyes, bodies and hearts reacting to them are all images which interact together in a universe without one of them being the center. Bergson wrote that "*here I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are opened to them, unperceived when they are closed. All these images act and react upon one another… ".* [9] The man and the cauldrons are external images, perceived and felt by internal ones which are the eyes, bodies and hearts while they are strongly focusing on them. But there is one single image which maybe distinct from the others and it is that of the body, which is privileged through its ability to act or no.[10] In this context, the hundreds of the starving bodies have the possibility of reacting to the images of cauldrons which function as a stimulus for action. However, no one of them, including Eliezer, dared to.

Those tempted men might not be reacting to the exposed cauldrons of soup, which is clearly stimulating them to do so. They react, however, to a tough stimulus which is the fear of being killed. This fear constitutes an internal image, which is highly determined by an external one; the SS officers who can shoot them at any moment if they dare and get outside their blocks. Notably, feelings of jealousy and envy also emerge as an outcome of the man's challenging act that no other man in the camp has been brave enough to perform. Bergson claimed that the body "*is open to the influence of external stimulation [… It, therefore,] answers to it by mechanical, physical and chemical reactions*"[11]. In short, the body's reactions are determined by the outside objects that surround it. This **dependency** in Eliezer's description is illustrated through the men's lust, envy and fear that come as result of the images of soup, that men and officers they perceive.

Night is a story of images about past experiences that the narrator perceives. Although his body represents one of the prominent images in his universe, it also works as a kind of center in his story. It shows how the close relation and interaction of the inner and external

worlds lasts in time through the power of memory. For that reason, one can say that the novel is all about the narrator's memory. It is a vivid representation of his past in the form of reconstructed experiences through the act of remembrance.

Memory is present in the form of personal recollections in the novel. To remember means to recover the past. Just like narration, it is an active and conscious process; a process of selection. According to Bergson,

> ***Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection****, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act sui genesis by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past -* ***a work of adjustment****, something like the focusing of a camera.*[…][12]

When an individual tries to recollect past memories, he detaches himself from his present in order to situate himself amidst the memories of the past. Besides, he will focus and select the memories which are according to him the most useful. For the purpose of narration, Eliezer brought himself to the realm of his past to recall a very specific period of his life, his experience as a teenage boy in the concentration camps of the Nazi.

The plot of Eliezer's story is very simple. After the Germans invaded Hungary in March 1944, the Jews of Sight who lived comfortably in their community were deported to Auschwitz. Eliezer gets separated from his sister and mother while he struggles to stay near his father. Both of them are assigned to hard labor. Together, they survive transfers, work assignments, selections, illnesses, and all the other daily threats of life in the camp, while many of their friends and neighbors fall to death around them. In January 1945, the SS evacuate Auschwitz before the arrival of the Soviet army. The prisoners march through the snow for days until Buchenwald. There, Eliezer witnesses his father's slow death.

Eliezer's choice of telling his story matches well with Bergson's idea of **selection**. He selects multiple events of his past and arranges them into sequences before, during and after

the concentration camp. He recalls his story in the form of **sequential images**, which are not told at the same time but one after another. In fact, *"In novels and films, representation of time and memory is constrained by linearity. In a book, words and paragraphs must be read in sequence […while] events must be narrated one after another*".[13] More significantly, Eliezer's memories are often remembered and described in association **with time**. *"**One day** [he] was summoned by the block secretary [to] go to see the dentist"*.[14] He tells then how he was asked to remove his gold crown and hand it back to the dentist. This memory is directly followed by another about his work in the warehouse beside a French girl. He is beaten by Idek. [52] *"**Another time**"*, it is his father who falls victim of the kapo's wrath.[15] *"**One Sunday**, as half of our group, including my father, was at work, the others including me, took the opportunity to stay and rest"*[16]*[…] **ONE WEEK LATER**", as we returned from work, there, in the middle of the camp, in the Appelplatz, stood a black gallows."*[17]

Throughout the novel, whenever Eliezer recalls a given memory, he mentions the day or the moment in which the incident took place, making his narration in accordance with the clock time. However, Wiesel breaks this chain of chronological order and frequently incorporates events from other times. Very often, he disrupts his linear narration with an inclusion of a past or future event, which is similar to the one he comes to interrupt.

One of these instances is when the narrator remembers Juliek, the musician he knew in Buna. After they are evacuated from Buna, Eliezer and other prisoners arrive at the Gleiwitz camp very exhausted. Searching for a place to rest, they crush each other to enter into the barracks. Eliezer crushes Juliek whom he recognizes through his voice. He narrates,

> *from beneath me came a desperate cry: "You're crushing me…have mercy!" The **voice was familiar**. "You're crushing me…mercy, have mercy!" The same faint voice, the same cry I had **heard** somewhere **before.** This voice had spoken to me one day. When? Years ago? No, it must have been in the camp [...] Suddenly I **remembered. Juliek!** The boy from Warsaw who played the violin in the Buna orchestra…"Juliek, is that you?* [18]

It is through the voice he hears that Eliezer comes to recognize Juliek without even seeing his face. He recognizes him, not at the very moment when his is addressing him, but only after a **short while of thinking**. This act constitutes in Bergson's theory an attentive act of recognition.[19] Bergson explained this kind of memory as follows "*To hear a speech is first of all to recognize a sound, then to discover its sense, and finally to interpret it […] in short it is to pass through all the stages of attention and to exercise several higher of lower powers of memory*".[20] Whenever people try to define a speech or a voice they are listening to, their state of consciousness passes through steps of procedural attention in order to recognize the nature of such memory. Because Eliezer has already listened to that voice in his past life, he realizes that it is Juliek's voice only after a brief moment of attentive consideration.

Moreover, Eliezer experiences the same kind of present recognition through a past perception when he meets the French woman in Paris,

> MANY YEARS LATER, in Paris, I sat in the Metro, reading my newspaper.
> Across the aisle, a beautiful woman with dark hair and dreamy eyes. I had seen those eyes before.
> "Madame, don't you recognize me?"
> "I don't know you, sir."
> "In 1944, you were in Poland, in Buna, weren't you?"
> "Yes, b u t … "
> "You worked in a depot, a warehouse for electrical p a r t s … "
> "Yes," she said, looking troubled. And then, after a moment of silence: "Wa i t…I do remember…"
> "Idek, the K a p o … t h e young Jewish b o y … y o u r sweet words… [21]

Clearly, Eliezer remembers to have seen the woman before through the act of present encounter. He links the latter to his past assuming that he has probably seen the woman's eyes somewhere before. His act of asking her if she does recognize him plunges her, in turn, into the midst of her past. She does not recognize him at first. It is only a short while later that he reminds her of the time and place in which they met that she comes finally to know him. Her

recognition occurs after a short moment of attentive thinking, exactly in the same way as Eliezer did when he hears the voice of his friend Juliek.

Bergson provides a detailed account of how remembering takes place in the context of a present perception. He writes that,

> *the recognition of a present perception consists in inserting it mentally in its former surroundings.* ***I encounter a man for the first time: I simply perceive him. If I meet him again, I recognize him****, in the sense that the concomitant circumstances of the original perception, returning to my mind, surround the actual image with a setting which is not a setting actually perceived.* ***To recognize****, then, according to this theory,* ***is to associate with a present perception the images which were formerly given in connexion with it****.*[22]

An actual act of perception involves one's memory. In order to recognize a present perception, it must be first situated in its past context. The setting which surrounds the present perception is then not a present setting but a past one. It is only through this process that an individual draws the connection between what he perceives in the present with his past memories.

Pearson and Mullarkey wrote that "[*Bergson] acknowledges that describing life in terms of an impetus is to offer little more than an image, an image of thought as it were. The image, however, is intended to disclose something about the essential character of life, namely that is not of a mathematical or logical order but a psychological one"*.[23] These **images** are **psychologically recalled**; they are felt and relieved again once they are remembered. They are not perceived according to the rule of chronological time but according to the psychological one. Since Eliezer's story is a product of memory, it is impossible then to follow a strictly linear order for narration. His attempt at reconstructing his past as a story, with an association to the **clock time**, is very often **interrupted** by **spontaneous memories**. In this manner, the author plunges the reader into what Bergson called *"pure moments of duration"*, where he brings the past, the present and future under one umbrella.

Duration and Timelessness

Wiesel's perspective in the novel is one that shifts from a description of the outside atmosphere to the inner feelings of his characters. It changes from an external to an internal and hence from a linear to a durational. While trying to put his memories into a narrative story, Eliezer goes back and forth between the past, present and future, between the real and the virtual and between matter and memory. This suggests the timelessness of his story, illustrated through the frequent time shifts that it embodies. In fact, by using memory as the creative act for narration, Wiesel makes the immanent flow of Bergson's **Duration** flourish in the novel.

The story of ***Night*** as a whole is timeless. It is a story that takes place in the distant past of the narrator, which he decides to tell some decades later. Despite his efforts at reconstructing it in accordance with the logical time, his narration assumes a highly psychological stance. Bergson called it the psychological conception of time Duration. He defined it as "*the form which the succession of our conscious state assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former*".[24] For the purpose of narration, Eliezer brings himself to the realm of his past to relive once again those experiences that logically cannot be part of the present. Still, because memory is also a psychological faculty, his narration very often considers all moments of time to coexist regardless of the linear time.

To discuss the timelessness of Eliezer's story and the way his past controls his present psychic state, it is essential to introduce Bergson's idea of the relationship between the past and present, specifically, how the process of recognition takes place. Bergson pointed out that the totality of past memories belongs to the past and remains motionless while the present is of a constant movement.[25] This does not mean that the past has ceased to exist, on the

contrary, it exists while the present is only becoming to evolve to a newly past. Actually, the selection process of remembering involves a movement from the past toward the present rather than the present calling up the past. The past is the active agent.[26] Thus, when the present tense is used to describe a present reality, it, actually, signifies the totality of the past, which has been endlessly absorbing the newest past.

In the story, Eliezer **exists differently at every present moment**. However, his present existence always includes his whole memory of the past. More importantly, his story starts from the past, describing life in Sighet before the deportation of the Jews to Auschwitz. Paradoxically, it is his past which comes to meet his present, exactly in the same way as it is explained in Bergson's theory. While Eliezer uses past tense to narrate a past that is not yet over, he regularly describes his present state through a use of a present tense for narration. For example, when he recalls the speech of the frightening SS officer whom he meets on the first day of his arrival at the camp, he uses both present and past tenses to narrate that memory. While he uses the past tense, he utters the sentence: "*his face* [the Officer] *remains in my memory to this day"* [27] in the present tense, then he carries his narration with the past tense.

Again later, he asserts that he "*shall always remember that smile,"*[28] the smile of his sleeping father in his weakest moments. He also confirms that he "*will never know"*[29] whether the man, by whom he was crushed, was actually a dead man or not.[30] Later in the story, he asserts that he "*shall never forget Juliek*"[31] who was playing amidst crowded dead men. In fact, Eliezer's shift in the use of past, present and future tenses for narration elucidates how the past, despite its inaction, holds a fundamental place and plays an important role in both his present and future life. His integration of the future and present tenses while he conducts his narration in the past tense suggests the continuity of his past, and the **inseparability of future, present and past actions from each other**. This also implies that what has been once a past, is "*now*" [32] a present, and will also become a future. What the narrator has once

perceived, such as the frightening face of the officer, is not a distant past but an existing one that he relieves regularly.

These memories are not described as events experienced only in the past, or only for the first time in the present, but as acquired memories that will always be part of Eliezer's present and future. This indivisibility of the past, present and future is exemplified when he recalls the memory of the French woman who took care of him when he was beaten in the camp. He directly links this memory to another one which is related to that same woman but takes place in Paris, many years after the war.[33] In this way, Eliezer submerges the reader again into moments of pure duration

Eliezer's narration also reflects a lack of distinction between past, present and future tenses when he recalls the memory of Juliek playing with his violin,

> *I shall never forget Juliek. How could I forget this concert given before an audience of the dead and dying? Even today,* ***when I hear*** *that particular piece by Beethoven, my eyes close and* ***out of the darkness emerges the pale and melancholy face*** *of my Polish comrade bidding farewell to an audience of dying men.* ***I don't know*** *how long he played. I was overcome by sleep. When I awoke at daybreak, I saw Juliek facing me, hunched over, dead.*[34]

Bergson wrote that *"The primary function of memory is to evoke all those past perceptions which are analogous to the present perception, to recall to us what preceded and followed them, and so to suggest to us that decision which is the most useful"*.[35] Obviously, Eliezer's consciousness goes back amidst the memories of the dead Polish man whenever it happens to him to listen to that peace of Beethoven played by Juliek that night. This memory seems to regulate his present consciousness, but it also influences his future because, as he asserts, he will never get rid of such memory. In this context, however, Eliezer's memory does not suggest to him what to do, but it imposes on him that act of remembrance.

In a dream, Eliezer does not only reflect moments of duration but experiences them as well. *"I fell asleep standing up. I dreamed of a bed, of my mother's hand on my face. I woke: I was in the mud"*.[36] In Bergson's writing, this phenomenon is explained with reference to the relaxation of the nervous system. Bergson asserted that *"the exaltation of memory in certain dreams and in certain somnambulistic states is well known. Memories which we believed abolished then reappear with sticking completeness; we live over again, in all their detail, forgotten scenes of childhood; we speak languages which we no longer even remember to have learnt"*.[37] The nervous system becomes relaxed during sleep. As a result, the human consciousness in its spontaneity brings back past moments in the form of a dream. The narrator's dream constitutes a pure form of duration because it brings a past event into the midst of a present state.

Through ***Night***, Wiesel achieves duration and timelessness through memory by reviving and recreating moments that ignore linear structure and bring together moments of past, present and future. Within these timeless moments, there is a process of organization and interpretation of an individual's former state of consciousness, as Bergson claimed it.[38] As a result, the self reaches moments of emotional and spiritual revelation. Indeed, these durational moments that Eliezer experiences in the novel play a fundamental role in the construction of his identity.

Duration and the Emergence of a New Identical Elan

The primary focus of ***Night*** is the depiction of Eliezer's experience in the concentration camps of the Nazi. The narrator experiences unusual and chocking events which parallel a process of change in his identity and self awareness. In this context, Narration itself is a representation of a process of self discovery. By using memory to conduct his narrative act, he experiences moments of pure duration and revives those he endured in the camp. The more

the past is present to him the more it shapes his personality. Through these moments, he consequently experiences moments of present failure, nothingness and paralysis as well as moments of revelation, awakening and new self.

Eliezer experiences moments of duration that are of two types. **First**, he endures moments when he was still living in the camp, and **others** he lived once outside of it each time his remembrance and narration are activated. The durational moments that Eliezer experiences in the camp highlights the change of his identity. And while his experience evolves, a change in his personality evolves as well. Those moments of terror he witnessed become moments of duration later on in the story. Wiesel reflects those moments in an attempt to communicate the inner consciousness of Eliezer and also how those moments act as a transition towards the emergence of a new self.

Before Eliezer experiences moments of severe psychological trauma, he emerges as a strong believer in God. His identity assumes that of an innocent teenage; a devote Jew who studies Talmud, ambitious to know more about the secrets of the Jewish religion. However, his whole perspective and opinion change during the period of his stay in the camp. While he was supposed to grow into knowledge and perfection, life in the camp deprived him from his sense of identity. After they have been submitted to a process of complete dehumanization on the first day of their arrival at Birkenau, Eliezer with other prisoners experience the starting point of the degeneration of their identities.

At that moment, Eliezer's consciousness submerges into a brief moment of duration, where he describes the direct effect of that experience. He briefly breaks away from his linear consciousness and asserts,

> *I watched darkness fade through the bluish skylights in the roof. I no longer was afraid… We were incapable of thinking…. The instincts of self-preservation, of self-defense, of pride, had all **deserted** us. In one terrifying moment of **lucidity**, I thought of us as damned souls wandering through the **void,** souls **condemned** to wander through space **until the end of time**, seeking redemption, seeking oblivion,*

> ***without any hope of finding either****…In a few seconds, we had ceased to be men.* [39]

On one single night, the concentration camp experience has completely altered Eliezer's identity and those of his comrades. He has been stripped of his individuality and consequently of his pride and values. At that terrifying moment of duration, he experiences an endless moment of **nothingness**, **failure** and **absurdity**. His whole existence as a human being was eradicated in a very short moment of torture and humiliation.

Furthermore, Eliezer can no longer define himself as the former innocent child of Talmud. As all other prisoners, he is deprived of his sense of being. He *"became A-7713. From then on, [he] had no other name"*.[40] His words *"there I too had become a completely different person… [It] remained only a shape that looked like me,"* [41] reinforce the belief that while he still exists physically he has completely lost the sense of social identity he once had. Besides, the lack of food and water has reduced him into a mere starving body. He "*was nothing but a body. Perhaps even less: a famished stomach.*"[42] As a result, he can no more think or act properly amidst the hundreds of dying people and the SS agonizing cruelty.

While Eliezer passes through those brief moments of duration, he accomplishes some sort of self discovery. They consist of his self awareness of the change imposed on his sense of morals and his identity as a whole. In the following quotation, Wiesel connects moments of Eliezer's past and present to reflect this sudden shift: *"I stood petrified. What had happened to me? My father had just been struck, in front of me, and I had not even blinked. I had watched and kept silent. Only yesterday, I would have dug my nails into this criminal's flesh. Had I changed that much? So fast?"*[43] Indeed, Eliezer asserts his powerlessness but more importantly his shock by the way he has changed so hastily. Thinking of what he could have done before to preserve his father's honor and what he did not do at his present moment, Eliezer recognizes the beginning of the collapse of his former self.

While Eliezer experiences moments of self realization of the disintegration of his social and human values, he endures disillusionment and loss of faith in humanity and God's existence. This is illustrated through his words when he assists to the slow death of the hanged young Pipel. Eliezer revolts against God's indifference through his words when he claims: *"Behind me, I heard the same man asking: "For God's sake, where is God?" And from within me, I heard a voice answer: "Where He is? This is where—hanging here from this gallows …".*[44] This quote symbolizes the low point of Eliezer's faith in God. Before, observance and religious duty were unquestioned parts of his sense of identity. However, disillusionment and disbelief emerge in his words "*what are You, my God? I thought angrily […] What does Your grandeur mean, Master of the Universe, in the face of all this cowardice, this decay, and this misery? Why do you go on troubling these poor people's wounded minds, their ailing bodies?"* [45] The terrifying moments that Eliezer endures since he arrives at the camp bring his persistence and faith in God's intervention into its utmost limits. Eventually, it carries his deteriorated identical ethics into an absolute collapse.

Through the combination of various fragmentary moments of his memory, the narrator transitions away from the linear consciousness in order to experience again a pure moment of duration, of awakening and self-discovery, as illustrated in the following quote,

> *And **I**, the **former** mystic, was thinking: Yes, man is stronger, greater than God."*[67]*[…] In days gone by, I knew that my sins grieved the Almighty and so I pleaded for forgiveness. **In those days**, I fully believed that the salvation of the world depended on every one of my deeds, on every one of my prayers. But **now**, **I no longer** pleaded for anything. I was no longer able to lament. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused. **My eyes had opened and** I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man. Without love or mercy. I was nothing but ashes now, but I felt myself to be stronger than this Almighty to whom my life had been bound for so long. In the midst of these men assembled for prayer, I **felt** like an **observer, a stranger**.*[46]

In this whole moment of interaction between past and present, Eliezer reflects the complete alteration of his former self from a devoted Jewish believer into a determinant disbeliever. This particular moment of lucidity highlights the continuity of his trauma while it reflects the disruption of his whole sense of character. In it, Eliezer connects all of his states of devotion in God's existence, his disillusionment by his indifference, his revolt against him, and his self-confidence and determination, into one single whole. As a result, he reaches a moment of awareness and awakening, a moment of self discovery.

Furthermore, the durational moments that Eliezer experiences outside the camp, at the moment of his narration, are of realization and commitment. In the very beginning of the novel, his narrative consciousness alters from a linear to a durational, when he decides to testify the continuity and endurance of his past trauma into his present life. When he asserts the following words,

> ***NEVER SHALL I FORGET that night,*** *[…] that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed [...] Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky. Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever […and]* ***those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes****"*[47]

He anticipates, as a result, the end of his story. This permits the reader to recognize that he is going to survive the concentration camp. However, while he reasserts the enduring effects of that experience on him, he also acknowledges his moral commitment to the remembrance of those killed innocents.

While Eliezer's narrative view transitions from the past to the present to honor the memories of his father and friends, he reflects a state of awareness about the traumatic experiences' results in the disintegration of one's identical ethics. This is well illustrated later when he claims ***"That is what concentration camp life had made of me."***[48] Indeed, this demonstrates how his self awareness and his awareness of the world around him have

improved and changed over time. When the American army arrives at Buchenwald and liberates the prisoners, Eliezer says that *"OUR FIRST ACT AS FREE MEN was to throw ourselves onto the provisions. That's all we thought about.* ***No*** *thought of r****evenge****, or of parents. Only of bread. And even when we were no longer hungry,* ***not*** *one of us thought of* ***revenge****."*[49] Because of the terrifying moments he has been through and precisely of the death of his father, Eliezer is unable to feel any sort of human emotion. This is not the case years later after his survival. In his present day, however, when he remembers the cruel ways by which they were expelled by the German police, he declares *"that was when I began to hate them, and my* ***hatred*** *remains our only link* ***today****. They were our first oppressor. They were the first faces of hell and death".*[50]

Eliezer's identity has changed throughout the course of his life in the camp and after. The Nazi cruelty distorts his perspective and engenders his loss of his innocence and eventually of his faith in God. Thus, his sense of self as a human being that constitutes the core of his personality has vanished. Indeed, through the power of memory and the multiple moments of duration that he endures, he recognizes the alteration of his former self and the gradual collapse of his ethics. According to Bergson, it is only in moments of real duration that the self experiences reality. Yet, this reality is not one of permanent or eternal forms, but one of immanent flow.[51] Obviously, while durational moments plunge Eliezer into moments of crisis and suffering, they also help him to reach a state of self determination and awakening.

Seen from the perspective of Henri Bergson, ***Night*** is not a representation of a past that has once been present, but a view chosen through the creative impulse of memory. On the whole, this chapter sheds light on the way Elie Wiesel uses memory to translate a past experience into a narrative story. The importance of memory lies in its ability to shape the actual self. Indeed, its use as a creative act offers the possibility to join fragmentary moments

in time into one single whole. This permits the narrator to transcend the chronological time, to live in moments of duration states of suffering, but also of awakening.

Endnotes:

[1] Sanford V. Sternlicht, *Student Companion to Elie Wiesel* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 29.

[2] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory, 1896*. Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Allen and Unwin, 1911), 9.

[3] Ibid.,2.

[4] Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 32.

[5] Ibid.,39.

[6] Ibid.,13.

[7] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 1.

[8] Wiesel, *Night*, 59.

[9] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 1.

[10] Ibid.,3.

[11] Ibid.,18.

[12] Ibid.,172.

[13] Roberto Bartual, *Towards a Panoptical Representation of Time and Memory: CRIS WARE, MARCEL PROUST AND HENRI BERGSON4S PURE DURATION"*, Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art, Vol. 1:1 (Spring 2012), 49.

[14] Wiesel, *Night*, 51.

[15] Ibid.,54.

[16] Ibid.,58.

[17] Ibid.,61.

[18] Ibid.,93.

[19] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 119.

[20] Ibid., 134.

[21] Wiesel, *Night*, 53-54.

[22] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 106.

[23] Person and Mullarkey, quoted in Katie Moss, *The Power Of Timelessness and the Contemporary Influence Of Modern Thought.* (Georgia State University, 2008), 6.

[24] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 100.

[25] Ibid., 196.

[26] Ibid.,95.

[27] Wiesel, *Night*, 38.

[28] Ibid.,90.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 94.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 92.

[33] Ibid., 53.

[34] Ibid., 94-95.

[35] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 228.

[36] Wiesel, *Night*, 38.

[37] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 200.

[38] Ibid., 63.

[39] Wiesel, *Night*, 36-37.

[40] Ibid., 42.

[41] Ibid., 37.

[42] Ibid., 52.

[43] Ibid., 39.

[44] Ibid., 65.

[45] Ibid., 66.

[46] Ibid., 68.

[47] Ibid., 34.

[48] Ibid., 54.

[49] Ibid., 115.

[50] Ibid., 19.

[51] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the immediate Data of Consciousness.* February 1888, 267.

Conclusion

Our research has allowed us to discover that the themes of memory and trauma in Elie Wiesel's ***Night (1958)*** share one idea which is Timelessness. The study was carried out from two different perspectives. We have relied on Cathy Caruth's theory of Trauma to discuss the endurance of trauma on the psychological consciousness of characters. Then, we considered the theme of memory in the light of Henri Bergson's theory of Memory, to show how characters plunge into colorful moments of timelessness through the power of memory.

This dissertation leads to the following conclusions. It is true that the author Elie Wiesel reacts to the past, to war and discrimination, but he is reacting mostly to his own internal conflict, to his own trauma. Experiencing trauma results in a severe psychological disorder. Through the novel's characters, Wiesel demonstrates the enduring effects of traumatic encounters on an individual's psyche. One of these effects is the inability to get through the trauma and to get rid of its emotional intensity at every reenactment or remembrance. Sticking to the theory of Trauma, it has been clear that one of the reasons which explain this phenomenon is the obscurity which is at the center of the characters' traumatic experiences. This obscurity and inability to grasp what has occurred to them comes, indeed, from the intensity of the shock they have been subjected to in the concentration camps of the Nazi.

It is for this reason that the characters of ***Night*** face a failure of understanding and forgetting the violence, hanger and extermination they witnessed. They emerge into timeless moments in the belated manifestations of their trauma, whether in a conscious recall and remembering of their stories like the characters of Moishe the Beadle and the narrator Eliezer or in the uncontrollable reenactment of their traumatic symptoms such as the case of Mrs. Schächter. It is a matter of fact that these characters seek to cry out their wounds in many

ways. It is through her unwitting hallucinations that Mrs. Schächter manifests her quest. By contrast, Moishe and Eliezer transmit it through an act of narration.

Moreover, it has been deduced that Wiesel uses memory in the novel as a form of control, as the memories that are recalled in a reconstructive narrative are highly selective. Indeed ***Night*** draws, specifically, upon the memories of the narrator Eliezer in the concentration camps of Auschwitz. It is a literary representation of images of suffering of a Jewish community during a period of war. The novel reflects a past perception in the form of an aggregate of images through an interaction between the physical world of the Nazi's extermination and the spiritual feelings and thoughts of the oppressed Jews. For this reason, one can notice the close relationship between the memories and the bodies of the characters. Because memory brings the past nearly in its exactness, the pain of years ago is felt like a nearby pain.

The reason for which memory holds a permanent role in the novel is its ability to shape personal identity. To remember suffering endured is to keep the wounds open. The more vivid is the recollection, the stronger is the wound and the more the past and present merge into pure moments of duration, in which the narrator Eliezer feels past pain and present agony. In short, as of work of the traumatic, Elie Wiesel's ***Night*** demonstrates how trauma and memory shape the present and future lives of the Jewish people during and after the concentration camps of the Nazi.

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