Revisiting Wiesel's Night in Yiddish, French, and English

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The Yiddish *Ur-Text* of *Night*

Elie Wiesel's *Night,* first published in French in 1958 as *La nuit,* is widely regarded as a classic, or even as the archetypal, survivor account. Yet for a long time, editions of the book left out an important fact: it is the reworking of a Yiddish text Wiesel had published two years earlier in Buenos Aires, under the title ... *Un di velt hot geshvign* — " ... And the World Was Silent" (note the suspension marks, often left out in quotations). In this paper, I shall engage with some interpretations of differences across varying versions of the text, and then offer another perspective.[1]

The existence of a Yiddish pre-original or *Ur-Text* is addressed in Wiesel's preface to the new English edition of 2006, which superseded the 1960 translation by Stella Rodway. This new version, done by the writer's wife, Marion, in consultation with him, is not simply an improved translation, removing linguistic inaccuracies that cropped up in the previous versions. It also includes authorial emendations in the interest of greater factuality. A year later, in 2007, a new French version appeared that translates, and adapts somewhat, the new English preface by the author, also reproducing the authorial corrections. So, as is often the case with canonical works, there are several authoritative versions of the text, or in a sense, several "originals," in all of which the author was involved to varying degrees: the 1956 Yiddish text, the 1958 French version that significantly reworks that text, the 2006 English *Night* that corrects the earlier translation, and *La nuit* of 2007 that draws upon the new English text.

Why, in the preface to the English edition of 2006 (mirrored by that to the French version of 2007), did Wiesel finally incorporate information about the Yiddish pre-original? One reason for the change may be that in the nearly fifty years since the first versions of the book, what Yiddish had lost in numbers of speakers it gained in prestige. Already in the first volume of his memoirs in 1994, Wiesel had spoken of the process whereby ... *Un di velt hot geshvign* had morphed into *La nuit* (1995: 319–23).

The issues of factual inaccuracy in the text of *Night,* and of inconsistency across its editions, go beyond the halls of academia. The 2006 edition was showcased by American TV talk show hostess Oprah Winfrey for her book club, presumably to correct damage caused by her earlier featuring of a memoir, James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces,* that turned out to be a falsification (Wyatt). Yet as Ruth Franklin, literary critic for *The New Republic,* noted, "*Night* is an imperfect ambassador for the infallibility of the memoir, owing to the fact that it has been treated very often as a novel — by journalists, by scholars, and even by its publishers" (2011: 71). Some queries regarding contradictions and possible omissions are reasonable enough: was Wiesel 15 years old or younger when he arrived at Auschwitz? (Wyatt). Did he receive help there from a communist resistance network that he failed to acknowledge for

[1] I would like to thank Carole Ksiazenicer-Matheron and Leona Toker for inviting me to present my research on this topic at seminars at the University of Paris III and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, respectively. Victoria Aarons, Bruno Chaouat and Malena Chinski offered me useful comments and greatly needed encouragement.

political reasons? (Cockburn). Other questions seem far more lurid: were the infants whom Wiesel reports having seen tossed into flaming pits alive or already dead? Did the young people squeezed into the train to Auschwitz have actual sex or did they merely pet? About such ponderings, Franklin asks: "One cannot seriously worry about whether babies were burned alive or dead at Auschwitz without losing something of one's own humanity. Is it not enough to know that they were burned at all?" (2006). And regarding possible sexual improprieties committed by the youth in the inhuman convoy to Auschwitz, Susan Suleiman wonders, "Will we ever know (and do we want to?) exactly who touched whom in that wagon and how?" (177).

Far more contentious is Alexander Cockburn's critique of *Night,* published at the time of the new English translation of 2006. Besides accusing Wiesel of not mentioning helpful communist resisters, Cockburn follows Norman Finkelstein in combining challenges to Wiesel's factuality with reproach for his refusal to censure Israel — as though the two alleged failings were part of the same lack of moral compass. The issue of the *Ur-Text* emerges in Cockburn's analysis, when he repeats Finkelstein's questioning of Wiesel's claim to have read a supposedly non-existent translation of *The Critique of Pure Reason* into Yiddish. Less quibblingly, Cockburn quotes Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg on versions of *Night:*

> From a purely academic viewpoint ... it would be interesting to have a scholarly edition, comparing the Yiddish version with subsequent translations and editions, with appropriate footnotes, Wiesel's comments etc. He was addressing two entirely different audiences, the first being the Yiddish-speaking Jews, members of the world of his youth whom he addressed in nineteenth-century terms. There's more detail, more comment. I made that suggestion to Wiesel and he didn't react favorably.

Certainly, one of Hilberg's less conventional positions is that Holocaust deniers keep researchers on their toes.[2] Without wishing to join him in that assertion, we must note just how accurately at least one Holocaust minimizer, Carolyn Yeager, not only compares variants of the English and French versions of *Night,* but even cites the Yiddish text. Certainly, the choice of passages she examines is controversial, and the conclusions she reaches unwarranted. But the use of Yiddish by a Holocaust relativizer allows one to appreciate just how double-edged the gain in visibility of the language can be.

[2] "If these people want to speak, let them. It only leads those of us who do research to reexamine what we might have considered as obvious. And that's useful for us. I have quoted Eichmann references that come from a neo-Nazi publishing house. I am not for taboos and I am not for repression" (Hilberg, quoted in Hitchens 74).

Naomi Seidman's "Strong Misreading" of *Night*

The first serious discussion of differences between the Yiddish and French versions of *Night* may be found in David Roskies's *Against the Apocalypse* (1984), where the question takes up four pages (262–63, 301–302). Pointedly, Roskies remarks:

> Themes of madness and existentialist despair are not as highlighted in the Yiddish narrative, which ends with the *engage* writer's appeal to fight the Germans and anti-Semites who would consign the Holocaust to oblivion. Since no one in the literary establishment of the 1950s was ready to be preached to by a Holocaust survivor, existentialist doubt became the better part of valor. (301)

However, the explosion of interest in the Yiddish original of *Night* occurred only in 1996, with the publication of an article highly critical of Wiesel's adaptation of it into French: Naomi Seidman's "Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage." I shall deal at length with Seidman's interpretation, because it has become a canonical text in its own right; hers is an excellent example of what Harold Bloom would call "a strong misreading." The piece is almost invariably mentioned when the question of *Night* in French and Yiddish is raised, so much so that Alan Rosen, the editor of the MLA "Approaches to Teaching World Literature" series on the book, made a conscious decision to invoke Seidman's interpretation just once, to restore some balance within the critical field on Wiesel.[3]

Seidman's thesis essentially starts from the few pages Roskies devoted to the Yiddish and French versions of the book. She maintains that unlike *La nuit, ... Un di velt hot geshvign* foregrounds the anger and desire for vengeance felt by the survivor. Seeking support from the French Catholic writer Francis Mauriac — who would ultimately help him publish *La nuit* and would write a preface to it — and desirous that the Holocaust become a universal concern, Wiesel erased many specifically Jewish references and lightened the vindictive tone of the Yiddish text, displacing onto God the wrath originally directed at the Germans and humanity in general. The world is no longer accused of silence; God now is. There is a transformation "of the survivor's political rage into his existentialist doubt" (15). The catchall phrase "existentialist doubt" comes from Roskies; one may wonder exactly what artistic or philosophical current, designated as "existentialist doubt," precludes acting on "political rage." The terminology is, to say the least, blurry, given the Sartrean figure of the politically committed intellectual; and one is perplexed by Seidman's claim that "Mauriac frames the Jewish catastrophe within *existentialist religion*" (1996: 12, emphasis added). She also writes that "[f]rom the historical and political specificities of Yiddish documentary testimony, Wiesel and his French publishing house fashioned something closer to mythopoetic narrative" (1996: 5).

[3] Rosen 2007: 11; personal communication, June 21, 2009.

In a witty allusion to the German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine's *bon mot* on conversion to Christianity as an entry pass to European culture, Seidman sees in Wiesel's "sublimation" of a supposed desire for revenge a "ticket into the literature of non-Jewish Europe" (1996: 15). Wiesel is presented as having taken part in "complex negotiations" whereby "astonishing gains" of Holocaust universalization may seem in some way to "make good the tremendous losses" of the Shoah (1996: 16). The reference to negotiation, gains, and losses in such a context unavoidably brings to mind antisemitic cliches. In an interview, Seidman extends the metaphor: "Who got the better part of the bargain? I think the Christians did" (quoted in Kessler 10).

Positively, Seidman's analysis may be defined as Foucauldian, since she sees discourse primarily as a vector of power. Negatively, the cynicism on Wiesel's part that such a view suggests does not make it surprising that purveyors of the most cynical discourse of all — Holocaust denial — refer to Seidman's article on their sites or even reproduce it in its entirety.[4] But decent, well-meaning commentators also quote Seidman's piece as though it were unassailable. This is doubtless because few have direct access to the Yiddish text, and Seidman has achieved popularity as a molder of Jewish concerns to fit the ever-popular field of cultural studies. Thus in 2000 the French critic Philippe Mesnard reiterated her statement that in the Yiddish version of *Night* the narrator "transcends his vulnerability to express Jewish rage"[5]: "depasse sa situation de vulnerabilite pour exprimer la *Jewish Rage,* comme le dit Naomi Seidman" (165). Mesnard inserts the English phrase "Jewish Rage" into his text, apparently aware that translating it into French as *colere juive* would sound frankly antisemitic. Thus Seidman has led at least one significant critic to hypostasize (and capitalize) a *Jewish Rage:* it must exist because it has been identified as such by a significant Jewish intellectual.

In 2006, Seidman incorporated her "Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage" into her book *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation.* The only major change she made was to mitigate her statement about the more or less deliberate "negotiation" with the gentile world that she ascribes to Wiesel. Instead, she now sees Wiesel's downplaying of revenge and rage "as part of the tradition of safeguarding Jewish privacy" (235). Thus — in keeping with her title *Faithful Renderings* — Wiesel's partial translation is presented as not unfaithful to the original, because it is faithful to the Jewish cause. This casuistic misuse of the notion of faithful translation hardly makes the Jews look any better: it amounts to saying that they are not only a rageful people but also one who has made a tradition of hiding rage.

Except for that counterproductive rationalization, Seidman did not take into account trenchant criticism of her work. For example, she did not engage Ruth Wisse's 2000 response that the Yiddish original expresses "more disappointment than anger with the 'world'" (215) and that part of what Wiesel removed was the collective "self-

[4] See Manseau (2001) on the use of Seidman by Holocaust deniers.

[5] Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

blame" in which Jews engage (214). Likewise, Seidman failed to rebut a forceful point made by Menachem Z. Rosensaft:

> Not only are all the French version's famous passages about God present in the Yiddish volume, but the latter contains other equally harrowing examples of the young death camp inmate's struggles with his faith.

Elie Pfefferkorn and David H. Hirsch make the same observation, and give as an example the remarkable similarity in Yiddish and French of the perhaps most famous scene in *Night*: the hanging of three prisoners, of whom the youngest, purest one — a mere boy — looms as God himself, sacrificed. Thus what can be read as a Christological passage in the book is already in the Yiddish version. Likewise, in 2001, an unusual figure, the American Catholic writer Peter Manseau — who had worked at the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, and published in 2008 a novel where the Yiddish language itself plays an important role — notes that the accusations against God and religion are in fact clearer in the Yiddish original than in the French reworking. One can therefore argue that the Yiddish version contains more "existentialist doubt" than the French one, and that "negotiation" with the Christian world is already present in the Yiddish text. Manseau provides convincing evidence for his view:

> The opening lines of *Un di velt hot geshvign* are missing not only from *Night* but, strangely, from Seidman's comparison of the works.
>
> *Un di velt hot geshvign* begins *"in onheyb"*in the beginning," as do most Yiddish translations of Genesis and the Gospel of John... Beginning as he does, Wiesel leans in close to scripture, unafraid to show his resemblance to it. He nods graciously to his influences, and then he spits on them: "In the beginning was belief, foolish belief, and faith, empty faith, and illusion, the terrible illusion... We believed in God, had faith in man, and lived with the illusion that in each one of us is a holy spark from the fire of the *shekhinah,* that each one carried in his eyes and in his soul the sign of God. This was the source — if not the cause — of all our misfortune." (2001)

Actually, the Yiddish artistic world knows a long tradition of equating, or at least comparing, the suffering of Jews and that of Jesus on the cross. The best-known example is no doubt Chagall's *White Crucifixion* of 1938, where the Christian messiah is bedecked in a *tallit katan.* Already in 1909, Lamed Shapiro had published a pogrom story, "The Cross," where a character has a cross etched into his forehead. In 1922, there appeared a Yiddish calligram in the form of a cross, authored by the future Hebrew poet Uri Zvi Greenberg.[6]

[6] The poem appears in Roskies (1984: 269), in the chapter "Jews on the Cross" (258310), which covers Christology in Yiddish literature extensively.

Translating the Untranslatable

Seidman's argument, pushed to its limit, would entail reproaching Wiesel for not having translated the untranslatable. While "existentialist doubt" is already evident in the Yiddish original of the passage that Manseau analyzes, it is couched in specifically Jewish terms, part of the idiomatics of Yiddish that cannot be rendered in a traditionally Christian language. Thus in prefaces to the new English and French versions, where Wiesel translates the Yiddish incipit with its "reflexions desabusees" ("cynical meditations"), he leaves the word *Shekhinah* in Hebrew (2006: 14, 15; 2007: x, xi). However, one cannot imagine that in 1958, before the general religious renewal in the West, an unexplained reference to the *Shekhinah* would have been comprehensible even to many Jewishly aware readers of French or English.[7]

Another example of the untranslatability of Yiddish is evident in the passage where young Eliezer and his father arrive at Auschwitz. An acquaintance from Sighet working in the Sonderkommando gets word to them that "il avait lui-meme introduit le corps de son pere dans le four crematoire" (1958: 62; 2006: 80) — "he had himself put his father's body into the crematory oven" (1960: 45).[8] In the Yiddish original, one reads that he managed to send a note saying, "ikh hob gemakht boyre meoyre hoeysh afn tatn!" (1956: 72) — "I recited *bore meorei haesh* on my father!" (The blessing *bore meorei haesh* — "Creator of the lights of fire" — is recited over a candle at the end of the Sabbath, when one may now light a fire.) Actually, the text reads not even "I recited *bore meorei haesh,"* but literally, "I made *bore meorei haesh* on my father." Such a construction is imaginable in the English spoken in yeshivas, in what has been called *yeshivish* or "frumspeak" (see Weiser) but nowhere else. It is not even clear that direct translation would work in modern Israeli Hebrew: *asiti bore meorei haesh al avi* would hardly be comprehensible. Haim Gouri's Hebrew translation, made not from the Yiddish but from the French, simply reads: "haya chayav lisrof bmo yadav et gviat aviv" — "he had had to burn with his own hands his father's body" (1966: 48) — leaving out even the crematory oven mentioned in French.

Another instance of the untranslatability of the Yiddish original of *Night* is offered by Jan Schwarz and Susanne Klingenstein. They catch the fact that when Jewish houses in Sighet are abandoned, Wiesel ironically modifies words from the Passover Haggadah. The Aramaic "kol dikhfin yeysey veyekhol" — "all who are hungry enter and eat" — becomes "kol dikhfin yeyse veyikakh" — "all who are hungry enter and take" (Schwarz 56; Klingenstein 82n. 8). This allusion, understandably, disappears from all French and English versions.

[7] A sign of our re-Judaized times: on the first page of the 2006 English version of *Night,* we are treated to a Yiddish term — "He was the jack-of-all-trades in a Hasidic house of prayer, a *shtibl*" (3) — whereas in the previous version there was just "a Hasidic synagogue" (1960: 12). Both French versions keep "une synagogue hassidique," with no Yiddish (1958: 15; 2007: 31); French Jewry's re-Judaization has been far more Sephardic than Ashkenazic.

[8] The 2006 edition reads, "he had been forced to place his own father's body into the furnace" (35).

It is possible to load an English translation, for example, of Sholem-Aleichem's texts with footnotes explaining Jewish customs and thought patterns not only referred to but woven inextricably into his Yiddish; but, in 1958, the unknown writer Wiesel could hardly have been expected to give us a scholarly edition of his first book in French. Even if in the 1950s he was proficient enough in Hebrew to write articles for the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot,* he still had *La nuit* translated into Hebrew from French, not Yiddish: no doubt he realized that the Jewish world, outside the readership in his "mother tongue — at that point close to extinction" (2006: ix), could no longer immediately grasp all religious allusions. Even if they could, the generally secularist Jewish culture of Israel and the diaspora in the 1950s would not have been moved by them. (The number of those who could understand such references may well be increasing in the demographically exploding Israeli and diaspora Jewish religious sectors. However, Wiesel is largely discredited among ultraorthodox Jews, having, as they see it, soft-pedaled the strictures of their religious practice and denatured their worldview for an audience of Gentiles and assimilated Jews.[9])

There is one more serious objection to Seidman's interpretation. All the support she brings is from liminal material: the first and last chapters of the book, and paratextual elements (the differing titles and dedications in Yiddish and French; the foreword by Mauriac; the nature of the collection in which the Yiddish work appeared; comments Wiesel has made elsewhere about the book). A far more complete — and positive — comparison of the two versions was offered by one of the founders of Yiddish studies in France, Rachel Ertel. It came out in the same year as Seidman's piece, but has received little attention, perhaps because it appeared in French and contained no animus against Wiesel. Ertel writes:

> Reading Wiesel in French and reading him in Yiddish are two different experiences, because the states of the two languages are so different... Whereas French classicism imposes moderation, understatement, a mere outline, Yiddish produces excess, hyperbole, reiteration. (27, 28)

Hence, *"Night* is a sober, taut book, whereas ... *And the World Remained Silent* is a torrential one" (35). This is reflected in the fact that the 239 pages of the original are compressed into just 164 in the first French version. Additionally, Ertel remarks on the more frequent chronological movement back and forth in the first version: "The two

[9] This criticism came up in many conversations I have had with ultra-orthodox Jews. To appreciate the difference between the usual perception of Wiesel in their communities and in the general Western world, consider the beginning of the article on him in the Yiddish Wikipedia, known to be mostly nourished by Haredim (and the orthography and style of this article show it was done by Haredim and certainly not by secular Yiddishists): "Eli Vizl iz a frayer opgeforener id" — "Elie Wiesel is a secular, formerly observant Jew" *(an opgeforener* is "one who has gone astray"). The reason for ultra-orthodox dissatisfaction with Wiesel is, curiously, clear from Alfred Kazin's description of him as a "platform idol who gave ... rhetorical assurance of the Jewish tradition to secularized, middle-class audiences" (quoted in Franklin 2010: 81).

timeframes, that of the writing and that of the events described, emerge over and again in the Yiddish text" (34). Ertel's insights are in line with a statement by Irving Howe: esthetic considerations demand that one "lower the temperature" (i.e., tone down the rhetoric) when transposing Yiddish into a non-Jewish language (quoted in Wisse 215). Yet in the next section, I shall take this line of thought in a more radical direction.

Sex, Queerness, and the Holocaust

We have seen how one of the controversial discrepancies between the Yiddish and French versions of *Night* concerned the possible sexual activities in the train to Auschwitz. Suleiman (173–77) studies how Wiesel thought the matter important enough to address it in his memoirs, citing the ambiguity as the result of a garbled translation from the Yiddish and his own adolescent fantasies occasioned by his first close contact with members of the opposite sex.

Whatever interest this passage has attracted may well be explained by the assertion with which Elizabeth Heineman starts her article on "Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?": "The history of sexuality in Nazi Germany unites two subjects vulnerable to sensationalist coverage: sex and Nazism" (22). While these days the issue might pertain most of all to the fate of women under Nazi domination,[10] earlier times were characterized by far more dubious associations of ideas. Sexual matters surrounding Hitler were (and occasionally still are) evoked: his illegitimate birth, his supposed monorchism, his strange relations with his niece, his possibly having caught syphilis from a Jewish prostitute, his infertile liaison with Eva Braun.[11] Homosexuality was part of the mix. Today one thinks first of all of the repression of German gays by the Nazi state. However, the prime association used to concern the openness of same-sex relations in the SA that helped bring Hitler to power, an episode graphically portrayed in Luchino Visconti's film *The Damned* (1969). Heineman reminds us (22n. 1) of other "eroticized representations of Nazi Germany on film," such as Liliana Cavani's *Night Porter* (1974) and Lina Wertmuller's *Seven Beauties* (1975).

Omer Bartov, in turn, has written extensively on the "Stalag novels" published in Israel in the 1950s, which portrayed sadistic relations between SS women and allied prisoners. He sees this pulp fiction as owing much to the works of an author in Yiddish and Hebrew whom Wiesel took at least somewhat seriously: Yechiel Feiner, alias Yechiel Di-Nur, better known by another of his pseudonyms, Ka-Tzetnik 135633, meaning

[10] See, for example, Milton (1984) and Hedgepath and Saidel (2010).

[11] Hitler's bastardry is the theme of "Schickelgruber," a wartime propaganda song composed by Kurt Weill. "Hitler Has Only Got One Ball" was a ditty sung by British troops (see Roberts, who also mentions the rumor concerning the Jewish prostitute). William L. Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* a bestseller throughout the 1960s, suggests that the presumed suicide of Hitler's niece may well be traced to her feeling "repelled by the masochistic inclinations of her lover" (132). And no fewer than two biographies of Eva Braun have recently appeared (Gortemaker, Lambert), despite the admittedly little interest presented by her personality or the role she played (Lambert x).

"concentration-camp intern [number] 135633" (Ka-Tzet is the German pronunciation of the abbreviation *KZ* for *Konzentrationslager).* Ka-Tzetnik, author of *Salamandra* (published in English as *Sunrise over Hell*[12]*)* and other novels, is all too frequently remembered just as the author of *The House of Dolls,* which appeared in Hebrew in 1953 and depicts Jewish women kept as prostitutes for SS men; the factuality of that aspect of the book is considered by most authorities to be nil,[13] though the portrayals of ghetto existence are certainly not as questionable. Far less suspect, however, is his 1961 work *Piepel,*[14] a term for boys kept as sex slaves for Kapos who had been interned in Auschwitz as common criminals. Wiesel, Primo Levi, and several other authors also speak of or allude to the so-called *pipels* (Woods 248–49). That Wiesel does not dismiss Ka-Tzetnik's writings is clear from his having written the preface to the 1990 French translation of Ka-Tzetnik's last book, *Shivitti* (French edition: *Les visions d'un rescape ou le syndrome d'Auschwitz),* framed by the account of his therapy using LSD in order to overcome his survivor syndrome.

A discrepancy that has crept in between the Yiddish original and other versions of *Night* pertains to a sexual matter even more shocking than the question of what kind of contact went on in the train to Auschwitz. Unaddressed by Wiesel, it provides the best support for Seidman's thesis that the rewriting was designed to hide "Jewish rage." This is the transformation, in the French and American editions, of lines appearing toward the end of the book:

> Le lendemain, quelques jeunes gens coururent a Weimar ramasser des pommes de terre et des habits — et coucher avec des filles. Mais de vengeance, pas trace.
>
> [On the following day, some of the young men went to Weimar to get some potatoes and clothes — and to sleep with girls. But of revenge, not a sign.[15]

The Yiddish original reads, in Seidman's translation with an interpolated phrase from the original Yiddish:

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[12] For an excellent reading of *Salamandra* in its historical and iconographical context, see Szeintuch.

[13] The point is summarized here: "'It was fiction,' said Na'ama Shik, a researcher at Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority. 'There were no Jewish whores in Auschwitz'" (quoted in Kershner); likewise: "Although it is not 100 percent certain that no Jewish women were inside an official concentration camp brothel, chances are slim" (Sommer, in Hedgepeth and Saidel 53). Oddly, the chapter on Ka-Tzetnik by Miryam Sivan, in the same volume edited by Hedgepeth and Saidel, does not at all engage with the questionable truthfulness of *House of Dolls,* and sees him as a victim of those "denying reality" (210). She is right, however, in pointing out that critics' dismissal of his work as pornographic kitsch is ill-founded.

[14] A more common spelling of the word is *pipel.*

[15] Wiesel 1958: 178; 1960: 127; 2007: 199. The new English version offers some minor stylistic changes: "The next day, a few of the young men ran into Weimar to bring back some potatoes and clothes — and to sleep with girls. But still no trace of revenge" (2006: 115).

> Early the next day Jewish boys ran off to Weimar to steal clothing and potatoes. And to rape German girls [un *tsu fargvaldikn daytshe shikses]*.
>
> The historical commandment of revenge was not fulfilled. (Seidman 1996: 6; Wiesel 1956: 244).

Seidman has it that Wiesel is "frustrated with the failure of the Jews to fulfill 'the historical commandment of revenge'" (1996: 8). Indeed, this point is well taken. Here is a clear case of Wiesel's hiding from a larger audience scandalous things he could say to Jews — or rather, to his "Yiddish-speaking Jews" (as Hilberg, as quoted by Cockburn, put it). Seidman sees Wiesel as "disingenuous" when he counters Palestinian terrorism by downplaying the desire among Jews for vengeance against their oppressors (1996: 15).

Yet we can imagine other reasons for Wiesel's becoming "frustrated," as Seidman puts it, regarding a wish for revenge. "The survivors were painfully aware that in the face of genocide there could be no adequate retribution," writes Atina Grossmann (231).[16] Moreover, let us focus on the adjective in "di historishe mitsve fun nekome iz nisht mekuyem gevorn" ("the historical commandment of revenge was not fulfilled"). The commandment of revenge may be *historish* not only in the sense that it is hoary but also because it had been repressed in rabbinic thought. While the biblical God avenges wrongs befalling His people, in the Talmud the intention, as Yiddish linguist Max Weinreich points out, is

> to erase from popular memory all thought of physical resistance, which after the destruction of the Second Temple could lead to mass annihilation... The emphasis on the revolts by the Hasmoneans and Bar Kokhba is the product of an entirely new mentality that originated among secularists in the 1880s, in an atmosphere of ever-growing belief in democracy. (3: 226)

In her 2007 *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany,* Grossmann deals with all manner of exchange, both symbolic and real, between inmates of DP camps and the German residents around them. While rape by Soviet soldiers of German women occurred rather frequently and is well-documented, "there is very little record of this form of bodily revenge by Jewish survivors or soldiers" (62). Rather, "contempt" was a feeling commonly expressed (231). Most "revenge" Jewish DPs exacted was symbolic. It took such forms as glee at seeing the high birth rate they enjoyed (compared with a very low one among Germans), or holding Jewish cultural events in venues associated with Nazis, such as the infamous beer hall in Munich where Hitler staged his putsch. That "sleeping with" was felt to be a way of defiling German women is clear from this exchange from an interview conducted by Grossmann:

[16] Grossmann refers explicitly to Wiesel's use of the word "rape," noting that "the passage is not central to his account" (62).

> When, not wanting to offend, I carefully asked one of my interview partners, an Auschwitz survivor and Feldafinger [i.e., former resident of the DP camp at Feldafing, Bavaria], to tell me what she remembered about Jewish men "going out" with German women, she looked at me indignantly and burst out, "Jewish men did not *go out* with German women, they *slept* with them." (229, emphasis in the original)

Grossmann meant "going out with" as litotes; "rape" as used by Wiesel was hyperbole. It is impossible to imagine a Yiddish readership, even secular, taking the word at face value. In a certain sense, casuistic as it might sound, "coucher avec" *is* the proper translation of *fargvaltikn* in this context. That consideration mitigates Seidman's point, which, however, remains buttressed by rendering *daytshe shikses* as "girls," and not "German girls."

Still, we can imagine motivations for omitting the word "rape," besides the controversial one Seidman attributes to Wiesel. The same is true regarding her interpretation of the relationship between Mauriac and Wiesel. She presents their "negotiation" as one between antagonists who ultimately strike a deal on how to soft-pedal the Holocaust and thereby advance their competing agendas. According to her view, the Jewish writer removes enmity toward Christian inaction in the face of the Holocaust and rails against the silent Heavens in order that the Catholic novelist no longer need blame his coreligionists but may partake of the moral halo surrounding the victims. Certainly, the relationship between Mauriac and Wiesel was not smooth sailing. Seidman does well to quote the Jewish writer's own assessment of his "anger and 'bad manners'" during his first conversation with Mauriac, as he objected to his Catholic counterpart's foregrounding the Crucifixion over the Holocaust (1996: 13). Likewise, years later, he was rankled when Mauriac dedicated his *Life of Jesus* to "Elie Wiesel, who was a crucified Jewish child" (quoted in Wiesel 1995: 271).

Yet as Seidman herself notes, "in conversation with Mauriac, Wiesel developed a language to talk about the Jewish genocide that could hold the attention of Jews and Christians, a considerable achievement indeed" (1996: 16). Need that conversation be cast in largely negative terms, as one of wrangling over gains and losses, as Seidman puts it? According to Roskies, "[w]hen thirty-year-old Elie Wiesel sought the endorsement of Francis Mauriac, a meeting of like minds clearly took place" (1984: 262). That Wiesel had already aimed at a universal audience is clear from the Yiddish title ... *And the World Was Silent.* Despite the similarity in wording, Wiesel's attitude toward the world is at a far remove from Yankev Glatshteyn's in the 1938 Yiddish poem, "Good Night, World":

> Good night, wide world,
> Great stinking world,
> Not you, but I slam the gate. (101)
> Croak on a drop of our baptized blood. (103)

The volume, if we may employ Walter Benjamin's terms (152) in a slightly un-Benjaminian manner, "calls for translation," for the world at large could not be usefully accused in Yiddish alone; Wiesel's original realizes its intended purpose only in the French version.

Sighet versus Paris

Accordingly, my view of this episode of literary history is at some variance from Seidman's. I believe that Wiesel's encounter with Mauriac had an effect beyond leading Wiesel from Jewish particularism to Christianophile universalism. It helped him to make reasoned return to his belief in God and accede to a more nuanced faithfulness.[17] Instead of seeing, as Seidman does, a Wiesel who turns his "Yiddish documentary testimony" into a religious "mythopoetic narrative" amenable to a French Catholic writer (1996: 5), I view secular skepticism as the borrowed element that Mauriac enabled Wiesel to discard. We must consider how deeply secularist and anticlerical most Yiddish intellectual culture always was. How foreign it must have seemed to Wiesel, who grew up not on the streets of Warsaw but in the remote Carpathians. There, the Haskalah had never fully arrived, and never blossomed into some version, for example, of the Yiddish culture purveyed by the socialist Polish-Jewish Workers' Union, the Bund. The elements of Jewish modernity that Wiesel's memoirs show us penetrating his childhood Hasidic home are lessons in re-vernacularized Hebrew and "socioeconomic disquisitions on Palestine" (Wiesel 1995: 46). It is as though his family had been catapulted from the eighteenth century when Hasidism was born (and implanted itself so well into the Carpathians) into to the twentieth when Zionism came to the fore, missing the nineteenth century, when the Yiddish language started to modernize, primarily in the Russian Empire. Though Yiddish was the tongue Wiesel's family most often conversed in, his first significant exposure to secular Yiddish literature and formal Yiddish grammar occurred in the French capital, after the war (1995: 163–64).

The elements of modern Yiddish culture furthest from prewar Jewish life in Sighet were reinforced in Paris by many factors. The irreligiosity was no doubt abetted by widespread French secularism and even anticlericalism — a context in which Catholic intellectuals like Mauriac stood out as exceptions. Likewise, Yiddish progressive antiparticularism was in harmony with the general postwar denunciation of Vichy and of right-wing French nationalism and antisemitism.

Compounding these tendencies was the following fact: Yiddish circles in Paris partook of a strange phenomenon that affected the wider society. Much as a certain narrative of Zionism, that of the French resistance foregrounded its heroes, at the expense of Jewish victims who went — in the common perception at least — passively to their deaths. One example suffices to show the negative conception of Jewish victimhood.

[17] For an interesting interpretation of Wiesel's "agonistic misotheism" and his evolution toward a more orthodox stance, see Schweitzer 149–71.

Future French health minister Simone Veil (not to be confused with the philosopher Simone Weil), who had survived Auschwitz, has often recalled the icy treatment she received upon her return to France, compared to that given to one of her sisters, who had managed to hide her Jewish identity and was arrested for her opposition to the regime. We read in an interview with Veil:

> What had happened to the Jews, the extermination of the majority of them, provoked no interest. On the contrary, my other sister, deported to Ravensbruck as a resister, was feted. She was a heroine — a fact that is uncontestable. People expressed their interest, asked her what it was like to be in the Resistance, what happened in the camp. Perhaps that was a way for them to appropriate the Resistance. As for us, we might as well have not even tried to speak. They interrupted us and changed the subject.[18]

Her interviewer then asked, "So there were two types of deportation to Nazi camps? The courageous kind, that of the resisters, and the other kind of deportation, almost shameful?" Veil responded affirmatively, noting that "scorn" for the testimony of Jewish survivors lasted well into the 1970s.[19]

So it was quite understandable that there should arise a definite, though not universal, tendency among Jews in France (somewhat similar in this respect to those in the Soviet Union) to highlight any role they played as antifascist combatants and to use symbols of the republic, rather than Jewish emblems, to commemorate their tragedy.[20] In turn, non-Jewish French resisters wished to glorify their actions (and augment their political legitimacy) by donning the halo of martyrdom bestowed by having risked death down to the last man. Thus the communists in France came to be known as the party of the 75,000 fallen — a figure that corresponds more closely to the number of *Jews* murdered after deportation from France to German camps.[21] A few statistics show the difference between the fate of Jews and that of non-Jewish opponents of the Nazis and Vichy: of 63,000 French political resisters sent to Nazi camps, 37,000 survived; of 75,000 Jews deported to death camps from France, only 2,500 came back (Wieviorka 1994: 139).

To enhance the image of exemplary heroism on the part of Jews — and to reinforce the idea that death was meted out to French resisters almost as surely as to Jews — a paradigm developed: Jewish fate during World War II was presented as an extreme but otherwise not particular case of Nazi crimes against humanity. Jewish victims were lumped into the same category as resisters. Both groups were seen as having opposed

[18] Veil 2005. Regarding her sister's hiding of her Jewishness, see Veil 2007: 58.

[19] See Azouvi for a very extensive, and somewhat iconoclastic, analysis of the evolution of Holocaust discourse in France.

[20] Consider, for example, the ceremony of laying the ground stone of the Holocaust memorial in Paris, described by Wieviorka as a "rituel republicain" (1985: 86).

[21] The questionable claim of 75,000 communist dead in France shows up, for example, in a parliamentary debate during the French Fourth Republic *(Journal officiel de la Republique Frangaise).*

the Nazis for the same reasons and having faced a like degree of danger. One Auschwitz survivor put the situation in exceedingly raw terms: "[w]e made a deal: I'll lend you my gas chamber, and you'll give me your resistance" (quoted in Wieviorka 2005: 38–39).

This lengthy excursus has one point of relevance for my argument. The outlook that merged the fates of Jews and resisters deported to Nazi camps came to be adopted — or at least tacitly accepted — by a number of Yiddish speakers in France. As Samuel Moyn puts it, they "self-consciously created, and lived according to, a Jewish variant on the deportation identity so central to French postwar life" (101). This ideological construction followed closely the prewar and wartime conflation of Jewish and universalistic movements of progressive (i.e., socialist or communist) stripe. Accordingly, one of the first Yiddish books published on the Holocaust in France — a homage by a communist Jewish resistance organization to fourteen murdered Yiddish writers — eulogizes the latter as "inspired by the great traditions of freedom of the French people and participating in their struggle" *(Yizker-bukh* 12). True, Jewish communists in France could acknowledge the extreme nature of what had befallen them. "We Jews have a specific score to settle with the Hitlerite murderers," we read in a Yiddish resistance flyer from August 1944 (quoted in *Dos vort* 263). Yet in another such tract from the same month, we see how Jews could, when it was expedient, be cast as patriotic French resisters:

> It behooves us to salute our Jewish fighters, who standing with their French brothers have shown as much great heroism and self-sacrifice. The blood shed in common at Villeurbanne, Venissieux, and elsewhere will cement even more the union of the entire nation *[folk* in Yiddish], among all sons of France, of whatever origin or religion they may be. (quoted in *Dos vort* 262)

Note the slippage: in the first sentence the Jews fight alongside the French; in the second, they have become Frenchmen, differing simply in background ... or faith! Quite a sleight of hand for communists, who dogmatically styled Jewish identity as nationality rather than religion.

Yet as Seidman neglects the religious elements in the original Yiddish version of *Night,* so she disregards any pre-existent universalist narrative used in that language to portray the Holocaust. Thus, against the general tenor of her argument, it can hardly be contended that Wiesel played a great role in the actual *invention* of Holocaust universalization, even if he promoted it. The question should not even be lodged in those terms. Rather, Wiesel took part in the shift of the universalizing paradigm, from one that subsumed — nay, drowned — the Holocaust in a sea of Nazi crime to another wherein the specifics of the Jewish tragedy were presented before a universal audience. It was in that sense that the original French edition of *Night* foreshadowed what is often seen as a new, intense Holocaust awareness, dating from the Eichmann trial.

A New Perspective

Far from communist sentiment, Mauriac's role in the French resistance, his political activity and commentary stemmed from his deep patriotism and Catholicism. In this regard, I see Mauriac as acting not only as a guide but even a kind of psychoanalyst toward Wiesel. From the position of the other with a lower-case o — the Catholic writer in a largely secular French "republic of letters" — he allowed Wiesel to realize his true desire. Through Mauriac's intervention, Wiesel gained access to his Other with a capital O, whose faith is that of a modern man as opposed to a doubter. This scenario has the advantage of explaining some of Wiesel's later disappointment with Mauriac. The motor of psychoanalysis, as is well known, is transference, a most intricate complex of affect. Wiesel would not have been the first "patient" to have felt considerable ambivalence toward his "analyst." Such ambivalence can often be linked to the defects in the latter's interventions, especially countertransference on his or her part. Or to put it as Lacan does when he acts as Freud's analyst in interpreting the latter's dream of "Irma's injection": the doctor has to admit, that "[his] syringe is dirty" (196).

What were Mauriac's feelings toward Wiesel, besides religious ambivalence as when he wrote that his younger colleague "stands on the borders between the two testaments"? (quoted in Wiesel 1995: 271). The French Catholic writer's homosexual inclinations were an open but shameful secret,[22] and the prevalent notion of homosexuality in the 1950s was not the union between peers that we know today, but rather harked back to the Greek idea. The non-PC but still common term for *gay* in French — *pede,* short for *pederaste* — betrays some semantic confusion between homosexuality and attraction to underage boys; Andre Gide paints homosexual pedophilia as self-fulfillment in his classic *L'immoraliste* (1902); and Mauriac's foreword to *Night* refers to Wiesel over and again as an *enfant,* reflecting his mid-adolescent age when deported.[23] The object of desire in Mauriac's best-known novel, *Therese Desqueyroux* (1927), was the young scion of a Sephardic family from Bordeaux, recently converted to Catholicism.[24]

Mauriac's son Jean, in a recent memoir, suggests, as one critic put it, that his father fought for decolonization "not only out of a sense of justice, but also because of the beautiful eyes of Robert Barrat," a French activist for native peoples (Dufay). Might the

[22] There is a joke linking Mauriac's sublimated homosexuality and Gide's openness about such matters: "I remember that the day after Gide's death, Mauriac received a telegram: 'Hell doesn't exist. Can become dissolute. Stop. — Gide'" (Perec 51).

[23] Seidman (1996: 10) notes Mauriac's strange insistence on calling Wiesel a "child."

[24] Not all Jews come off so well in Mauriac's eyes. Thus he describes in 1921 what he finds when visiting the ailing Proust's bedside: "sheets of questionable cleanliness, the smell of this furnished flat, a Jewish face with a ten-day beard, the return to ancestral filth" (1990: 263). But this aversion to Proust's Jewish body may also be colored by Mauriac's Catholic rejection of his own homosexuality as against his fellow writer's more complex stance: "We are not of those who reproach [Proust] for having penetrated into the flames, into the rubbish of Sodom and Gomorrha; but we deplore the fact that he ventured there without adamantine armour" (1950: 46).

same have been true of Mauriac's solidarity with Jewish suffering, motivated not only by lofty concerns but also by interest in the younger man in whom he saw a "crucified Jewish child"? The homoerotic captivation of Jesus's image is obvious; Wiesel's striking figure is also quite commanding, as is pointed out by his admirers and detractors alike. Let us consider just one example, somewhat typical, from a 2008 biography: "Perhaps Wiesel's appearance is the proper beginning point for understanding his charisma... There is congruence between what he has seen with those eyes and what he writes and speaks" (Downing 4).

A blunt comment by Wiesel offers us greater insight: "Mauriac was in love with Jesus" (1996). Insofar as for Mauriac, Wiesel equals Jesus, substitutive logic suggests Mauriac was in love with Wiesel. Mauriac's language regarding Wiesel can wax at least as religio-erotic as that of Saint John of the Cross in describing the mystical union of the soul with God — and he throws in a little anti-Zionism, which he imagines Wiesel's presence as counteracting:

> How I love Jewish mystics, witnesses of the first love! Perhaps many still exist, but not within the Israel we know today, whose genius is wholly devoted to conquest and domination...
>
> Someday Elie Wiesel will take me to the Holy Land. He desires it greatly, having a most singular knowledge of Christ. (quoted in Wiesel 1995: 270–71)

"He desires it greatly." In French, desire appears twice: "Il le desire d'un grand desir" (Wiesel 1994: 342). In an age when "to queer" literature has become so much part of the critical landscape that it seems almost passe, I assume that this suggestion of unrequited feelings on Mauriac's part for Wiesel is far from shocking. And unlike queer readings that strive to overturn basic physical and metaphysical constructions of gender and sex, I am proposing a psychoanalytic reading hardly more radical, in present-day terms, than that offered by Ernest Jones, who just "stops short of implicating Hamlet and homosexuality" (Stanivukovic 148).

"Queerness" with regard to the Holocaust was not the furthest thing from Wiesel's mind. He was aware of the underage sex slaves for pedophile Kapos — not only as a reader of Ka-Tzetnik but as a witness to the phenomenon. A passage from the French and English versions of *Night* makes this clear:

> les enfants faisaient ici l'objet, entre homosexuels, d'une veritable traite, je l'appris plus tard. (1956: 80, 2007: 99)
>
> there existed here a veritable traffic of children among homosexuals, I learned later. (2006: 48)[25]

[25] The earlier English translation was hardly different: "there was a considerable traffic in children among homosexuals here, I learned later" (1960: 58).

The Yiddish was less sanitized, but the facts reported are the same:

> I did not yet know then about the shameful traffic in children, about the horrifying homosexuality *[vegn der shoyderlekher homoseksualitet]* that bloomed in every camp and also in Buna. (1956: 98)

Later in the book, in the buildup to the Christological scene of the hanged boy who looms as God, there is a discrepancy. In Yiddish we read:

> And he, the Oberkapo, had a "pipel," a small boy, for a servant. The boy was twelve years old, with black eyes and a gentle face, a face out of harmony with the camp's atmosphere.
>
> Among us in Buna were a lot of children, or "pipels," as they were called. They served Kapos or Blockalteste and received from them practical lessons in homosexuality *[praktishe lektsies vegn homoseksualizm].* (1956: 127)

In the English translations, the second paragraph is entirely left out:

> In his "service" was a young boy, a *pipel*, as they were called. This one had a delicate and beautiful face — an incredible sight in this camp" (2006: 63).[26]

The French versions (1958: 102; 2007: 122) do not even place quotationmarks around the word that could let the reader in on the scandalous nature of the "service" rendered. Why this omission?

I believe the answer lies in Wiesel's gratitude to Mauriac. Despite momentary misfires occasioned by what I have identified as countertransference, the older author helped his younger colleague fulfill his own wish to be, like him, a recognized writer in modes at once literary, theological, and political. Yet whether or not Wiesel sought to spare Mauriac any unpleasant innuendos, a Jesus figure all too closely equated with a pedophile's prey — like the fantasy of raping German women — may have seemed unpalatable to a general audience. And that would explain why the meaning of the word *pipel* was left vague in French and English versions of the book.

Perhaps Wiesel's greatest achievement — or flaw — is his ability to talk of the ultimate obscenity — the Shoah — in a tasteful manner. This is the very opposite of Ka-Tzetnik's stance, but here may well be a case of opposites' coming together. That we are dealing with a question of taste may well be clear from the fact that Wiesel's works elicit adulation or vilification. It is hard to be neutral in judging them.

Suleiman, in her close reading of versions of the sexualized scene in the train to Auschwitz, concludes that "the revised memory adds a new layer to both Wiesel's and the reader's interpretations of a life-shattering experience, one that has the virtually

[26] The original English version was even less explicit: "He had a young boy under him, a *pipel,* as they were called — a child with a refined and beautiful face, unheard of in this camp" (1960: 74).

endless potential to be reviewed and reinterpreted" (176). The comment seems to me a bit treacly, as though all elements of sexual life, and life in general, did not have "virtually endless potential" to be reconsidered, and as though deportation to Auschwitz could be summed up in the cliche, "life-shattering experience."[27] Seidman offers us a more substantial interpretation of the change "rape German girls" to "sleep with girls," as indicative of a desire for revenge ill-suited for publication, and of Wiesel's mistrust of Mauriac and Christendom generally. There can be no doubt that her reading includes much that is true, but it provides only partial answers.

I have argued for seeing another dimension in the relationship between the writers: a certain healing process effected by an exchange of desires. Mauriac's sublimated homosexuality may well have provided the motor for a cure whereby Wiesel overcame, as much as anyone could, infinite object-loss: that of his family, the universe and language of his youth, and the "world" in general that had until then "remained silent," as his Yiddish memoir so forcefully put it. This idea of cure is in tune with Manseau's reading of how the Yiddish and French versions of *Night* endow God's silence with diverse meanings: "It is the difference between an absence felt by a man under duress and one who is trying to rebuild his life" (2001).

Indeed, it is a question of rebuilding, or even of rebirth, for Eliezer Wiesel in Yiddish becomes Elie — Elijah in French. Perhaps this is coincidental, not a new name but simply a nickname, a shortening of Eliezer that happens to be the French for a far more important prophet. Querying the onomastic shift from "God is my help" (Eli-ezer) to "My God is Ya" (Eli-jah) is a hazardous enterprise, perhaps best left in the realm of suggestion. Nonetheless, *The Gates of the Forest* includes a passage that one reader (Robert E. Douglas, Jr.) sees as the author's own answer to the scene in *Night* where the child executed appears as God in terrible death throes, undergoing a veritable Passion. The later Wiesel has the prophet Elijah speak as follows:

> God's final victory, my son, lies in man's inability to reject Him. You think you're cursing Him, but your curse is praise; you think you're fighting Him; but all you do is open yourself to Him; you think you're crying out your

[27] Moreover, Suleiman (174) mistranslates as "promiscuity" the French term "promiscuite," a veritable false friend of a cognate, since it means simply "crowdedness." The erroneous meaning this lends to Wiesel's passage is most regrettable in this context. "Promiscuite" is the term Wiesel felicitously uses to translate the Yiddish *engshaft,* literally *narrowness* or *tightness* (1956: 48; 1994: 99). Suleiman also gets the last page number wrong in quoting Wiesel's memoirs, giving it not as 99 but 108 (Suleiman 2006: 252n. 30). She does well to point out that this passage disappears in the English translation of the memoirs, though I cannot account for her explanation. She attributes the omission to the fact that a later American edition of *Night* (New York: Bantam, 1982) "has modified the lurid French verb *s'accoupler* [to couple] to a much softer one: '... young people gave way openly to instinct, taking advantage of the darkness to *flirt* in our midst'" (Suleiman 176–77). Yet in the 1982 Bantam version I hold in my hand, on the page 21 that she indicates (Suleiman 252n. 34), I read that the young people took "advantage of the darkness to *copulate* in our midst" (my emphasis). The same wording occurs in the text of *Night* included in Wiesel's trilogy of 1988 (32).

> hatred and rebellion, but all you're doing is telling Him how much you need His support and forgiveness. (1967: 33)

God's Final Victory?

In all the Gospels, Jesus is clearly depicted as having died. Yet in the Christological scene in *Night,* the *pipel* equated with God is never actually shown as dead. He dies, but only off stage — in the real, unnarrated Auschwitz. Yet "he is presented as still agonizingly alive when Eliezer passes close to him," as Leona Toker has remarked.[28] She interprets the relevant passage thus:

> Wiesel writes: "I heard a voice within me answer him: Where is He? Here He is — He is hanging here on this gallows ..." This does not mean to say "god is dead" — it means that God is shrunken, helpless, tortured and in agony along with us, though he has attempted resistance. (219)

Moreover, it would be unwarranted to take at face value even so little as the trope of the hanged *pipel* as a figure for God. Just as Wiesel comes to show annoyance at emerging from Mauriac's hands as a "crucified Jewish child," so the *pipel*'s execution may be read as both a cruelly ironic and a real parody of the Crucifixion. Though not a major strategy of Wiesel's, farce — tragic farce — is not absent from his oeuvre. In *The Trial of God,* the defender of the Holy One after the Chmielnicki pogroms of 1648 turns out to be none other than Satan himself.

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