

ELIE WIESEL, SAINT OF THE HOLOCAUST

To the memory
of Pope Pius XII

Elie Wiesel

Saint

of the

Holocaust

A Critical Biography

By Warren B. Routledge



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Table of Contents

	Page
Foreword	9
Introduction	17
Chapter I: François Mauriac: Waiting for the Modern-Day Messiah	19
François Mauriac, Catholic Novelist and Man of Letters	19
Mauriac Abandons the French Right and Supports the Jewish People	21
Mauriac Supports the Allied War Effort	23
Mauriac Is “Silent” about the Jews in <i>Le Cahier Noir</i>	24
Flash Forward: Seeds Planted for the 1952 Nobel Prize for Literature	28
Mauriac, a Bridge between Catholics and Jews	30
Mauriac Was the First Major Cultural Figure to Accuse Pius XII of “Silence”	30
Mauriac’s Four Jewish Messiah Figures Prior to Meeting Wiesel	33
Mauriac’s Admiration for Pierre Mendès-France	35
Chapter II: Wiesel before Mauriac: Inherited Hatreds and Suspicions	37
The Myth of Wiesel’s Idyllic Childhood	37
Wiesel’s Divine Election Is Foretold	41
Wiesel Taught to Hate Catholicism as a Child	42
Wiesel’s Hatred of the Blessed Virgin	44
Wiesel’s Abusive Relationships with Older Men	45
Learning French in Paris	48
Wiesel’s Trip to India	52
Zionist Newspaperman	53
The Ten-Year Vow of “Silence”	54
Chapter III: Mauriac and Wiesel: The First Meeting	57
Mauriac’s Version of the First Meeting	57
Wiesel’s Version of Their First Meeting	60
Why the Difference of One Year Matters	65
Use of Retroactive Continuity to Explain the Genesis of <i>La Nuit</i>	68
The Mystery of Mauriac’s Initial Attachment to Wiesel	68
Chapter IV: Wiesel’s Exploitation of Mauriac, 1955 – 1970	71
Mauriac Helps Wiesel to Prepare <i>La Nuit</i> for Publication	71
1958: Publication of <i>La Nuit</i> Coincides with the Death of Pius XII	78
The Mauriac/Wiesel Correspondence, 1958-1970	78
Wiesel Insults the Memory of His Benefactor	86
Mauriac’s Death and State Funeral	88
Postscript on Mauriac and de Gaulle	89
Chapter V: Wiesel at Auschwitz	91
Is Wiesel Guilty of Identity Theft? Was He Ever a Detainee at Auschwitz or Buchenwald?	91
Fundamental Dishonesty of <i>Night</i> ’s Conformist Critics	93
Problem #1: Botched Chronology and Possible Identity Theft	94
Problem #2: Wiesel “Saw” Eichmann at Sighet	99
Problem #3: Wiesel’s Personal Encounter with Dr. Mengele	102
Problem #4: Burning of Victims in Huge Trenches	108
Problem #5: The Deaths of Wiesel’s Mother and Sister	124

Problem #6: Wiesel's Medical Treatment at Auschwitz	128
Problem #7: Wiesel's Alleged Loss of Religious Faith at Auschwitz	131
Problem #8: The Famous Hanging Episode	133
Problem #9: Wiesel Shuns Liberation, Leaves Auschwitz with Germans	140
Chapter VI: Wiesel at Buchenwald	147
Problem #10: Travel to and Arrival at Buchenwald	147
Problem #11: Liberation Day at Buchenwald.....	151
Problem #12: After Liberation: Interaction with the Germans	165
Problem #13: Mauriac and the Face in the Mirror.....	167
Chapter VII: The 1960s: Wiesel in New York while Mauriac Rewrites	
<i>Night</i>	171
Wiesel Launches His Career.....	171
Vatican II and <i>The Deputy</i>	174
Mauriac Blindsided by Hochhuth.....	177
Wiesel Starts His Career at <i>Commentary</i>	179
Wiesel Gradually Becomes the Spokesman for the "Survivors"	184
1959: Yad Vashem Policy Privileges "Memory" over History in Witness	
Testimony.....	187
Wiesel Rises to Fame amidst Concern of Some Jews	188
Wiesel's Career Greased by Abe Rosenthal at the <i>New York Times</i>	191
The Frankfurt Show Trial of 1963 – 65	192
An Unintended Result of the Frankfurt Show Trial: The Birth of Holocaust	
Revisionism	195
Wiesel Searches for a New Issue: Soviet Jewry	196
Wiesel Adapts Pius XII's Term "Church of Silence" for Zionist Purposes.....	197
The <i>New York Times</i> and the Unveiling of the Auschwitz Propaganda Monument ...	198
Chapter VIII: The 1970s: Wiesel Rises to Fame amidst Concern of Some	
Jews.....	199
Wiesel Triumphant	199
Thomas Lask Questions Wiesel's Notion of "Causality"	201
Wiesel Addresses Jewish Skepticism about the Holocaust.....	202
From the Beginning, Skeptical Jewish Voices Question the Holocaust.....	203
New York Jewish Chicanery: Wiesel Becomes a "Distinguished Professor" at	
CUNY	208
Arthur Butz's <i>Hoax of the Twentieth Century</i> Exorcized at Northwestern	
University.....	212
Wiesel, His Credibility in Doubt, Defends the Veterans Again	217
1978: <i>Annus Horribilis</i> for the Emerging "Holocaust"	220
Alfred Kazin, Self-Professed "New York Jew," Mocks Wiesel.....	223
1978: Zionist Media Campaign on "Why Auschwitz Was Not Bombed"	224
Israel Loyalist Stuart Eizenstat Plans a "Holocaust Museum"	226
Robert F. Drinan's Unholy Alliance with Wiesel.....	228
January 1979: the Month When the Holocaust Died	229
Mendacity of the <i>New York Times</i> and <i>Washington Post</i> about the Aerial Photos	230
1979: British Code Breakers: Another Nail in the Coffin of the Holocaust.....	232
Wiesel and Carter Clash over the "Eleven Million"	232
June 7, 1979: John Paul II at the Auschwitz Monument.....	233
Wiesel Submits His Report to Carter.....	234
Wiesel Travels to Auschwitz, the "Golgotha" of the Holocaust	235

Chapter IX: 1980s: Wiesel Becomes America's Holocaust High Priest237

1980: United States Holocaust Memorial Council Founded in Part to Fight Revisionism	237
Founding of the Institute for Historical Review	239
Another Blow to the Holocaust: Serge Klarsfeld Publishes the <i>Auschwitz Album</i>	240
Zionist Media Use of Retroactive Continuity in the Holocaust Narrative	242
The Holocaust Narrative Is a Form of Lowbrow Culture	244
The <i>New York Times</i> Finally Mentions Prof. Faurisson by Name	246
Wiesel Begins to Position Himself as the Holocaust Antipope	248
1982: Anti-Faurisson Conference at the Sorbonne	249
1983: Walter N. Sanning's Revisionist Study of Overall Jewish Wartime Losses	250
1985: Wiesel Does Not Testify at Ernst Zündel's Trial in Toronto	252
1985: Wiesel Testifies before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee	254
Wiesel's White House Investiture as Holocaust High Priest	254
The Nobel Prize Campaign	257
After the Fact: Wiesel's Nobel Prize Campaign Revealed	260
Simon Wiesenthal on Wiesel's Nobel	261
1985: Claude Lanzmann's <i>Shoah</i>	262
French Jewish Holocaustian Attacks Wiesel	263
December 1986: Wiesel Resigns as Chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council	264
Another Revisionist Insurrection: Henri Roques and <i>La Thèse de Nantes</i>	265
Noted Historian Michel de Boüard Supports Henri Roques' Right of Inquiry	266
June 1987: Wiesel's Bungled Testimony at the Klaus Barbie Trial	267
1987: Stage One of Wiesel's Abusive Relationship with Cardinal O'Connor of New York	273
1988: Wiesel, as Holocaust High Priest, Attacks John Paul II	276
Wiesel's Attack Was Part of the "Softening-Up" of John Paul II	278
Wiesel and the Catholic Holocaustians	280
1989: Wiesel Deeply Wounded by French Catholic Writer Jean-Marie Domenach	284
New, Obvious, Holocaust Fraudsters Reap <i>les dividendes d'Auschwitz</i>	286

Chapter X: 1990s: Growing Jewish Doubts about Wiesel289

1990: Orwellian Removal of the Four-Million-Dead Figure on the Auschwitz Monument	289
Main Components of Retroactive Continuity Applied to the Holocaust	291
Credibility of the Jewish Holocaust Tale Continues to Disintegrate	291
Bradley R Smith Emerges as a Major Figure in U.S. Revisionism	292
1990: Wiesel and Cardinal O'Connor Collaborate on <i>A Journey of Faith</i>	293
More Apologies from a Dying Cardinal	298
Wiesel's Continuing Offensive against the Papacy	299
The Pollard Affair	300
1992: John Clive Ball's Groundbreaking Work on the Aerial Photography of Auschwitz	301
1992: François Mitterrand Creates a High Priest Position for Wiesel	302
Wiesel Launches the USHMM Campaigns against "Hate"	302
The Term "Holocaust Denial" Is Born	305
On the Road with Wiesel's "Hate" Train	305
Changing of the Guard at the Holocaust Museum	306
New York Jewish Intellectual Takes a Dim View of Wiesel's Autobiography	307
1995: Official Remembrance of Auschwitz	308
Chirac in France, Like O'Connor in New York, Forced to Apologize	309
1997: Wiesel's Hypocrisy at De Paul University, Chicago	310
1998: More Hypocrisy at Boston University	311

1999: Faurisson's <i>Ecrits Révisionnistes</i> Appear as an Underground Publication	311
1999: Peter Novick on Wiesel and "the Holocaust"	312
Rabbi Neusner: Wiesel's "Holocaust-and-Redemption" Cult Turns off Young Jews	313
Chapter XI: 2000s: Wiesel, His Credibility Eroding, Is Satirized by Tova Reich, and Denounces "Deniers"	315
New Elements in Second Volume of Wiesel's Autobiography	315
Wiesel Testifies under Oath That Everything in <i>Night</i> Is True	316
Holocaust Museum Gift Shops Encourage More Faux "Memoirs"	317
Wiesel, the Catholic Church, and the Holocaust	330
Wiesel's Public Persona as Holocaust High Priest	349
Wiesel's Holocaust Gradually Formalized as New Global Religion	357
Wiesel's Achilles Heel: Holocaust-Doubting Fellow Jews	361
Pope Pius XII: Final Considerations	367
Conclusion: What Is Needed to Happen Now	373
Appendix: Elie Wiesel – the "Symbol of the Shoah"	377
Elie Wiesel in Italy	377
Is Elie Wiesel an impostor?	378
Is Elie Wiesel a Plagiarizer?	382
Is Elie Wiesel a False Witness?	383
The Enigma of Lázár Wiesel	396
Comparing <i>Night</i> and <i>Un di velt hot geshvign</i>	401
The Buchenwald Photograph	403
Editor's Caveat	405
Documents	406
Bibliography	419
Index of Names	439

Foreword

“What are you writing?” the Rebbe asked. “Stories,” I said. He wanted to know what kind of stories: true stories. “About people you knew?” Yes, about people I might have known. “About things that happened?” Yes, about things that happened or could have happened. “But they did not?” No, not all of them did. In fact, some were invented from almost the beginning to almost the end. The Rebbe leaned forward as if to measure me up and said with more sorrow than anger: “That means that you are writing lies!” I did not answer immediately. The scolded child within me had nothing to say in his defense. Yet, I had to justify myself. “Things are not that simple, Rebbe. Some events do take place but are not true; other are—although they never occurred.”

—Elie Wiesel in *Legends of Our Time*, Schocken Books, New York, 1982, p. viii (Introduction), about an exchange he had in Tel Aviv with the Hasidic teacher of his childhood, twenty years after he had last seen him in Hungary during the war.

In October 1944, the victorious Red Army crossed the German border for the first time by penetrating briefly into East Prussia. When the German Army managed to throw back the Soviet forces for a short while, they discovered with horror that many German civilians as well as French and Belgian PoWs had been raped, tortured and slaughtered in the most bestial ways imaginable.

When the Red Army advanced again during the following winter, more massacres were reported. Hence the German High Command ordered the evacuation of the entire German civilian population from East Prussia via the Baltic Sea, code-named “Operation Hannibal” – the biggest naval rescue effort ever undertaken.

In early 1945, the Red Army was approaching another German border area in the southeast: Silesia. Auschwitz was right in its path. Although this time the German civilian population was not to be evacuated, the inmates of the regional labor camps were slated to be evacuated west.

In history's best-selling Holocaust book *Night*, Elie Wiesel, who at that time was in the Monowitz Labor Camp near Auschwitz, wrote about this:¹

A doctor came into the room and announced:

"Tomorrow, immediately after nightfall, the camp will set out. Block after block. Patients will stay in the infirmary. They will not be evacuated." [...]

At that time Wiesel was in the camp's infirmary, where he was recovering from minor foot surgery. He had the option to stay and be liberated by the Soviets, or to leave with the Germans. Here is what he decided to do (p. 78):

"What shall we do, father?"

He was lost in thought. The choice was in our hands. For once we could decide our fate for ourselves. We could both stay in the hospital, where I could, thanks to my doctor, get him entered as a patient or a nurse. Or else we could follow the others.

"Well, what shall we do, father?"

He was silent.

"Let's be evacuated with the others," I said to him.

He did not answer. He looked at my foot.

"Do you think you can walk?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Let's hope that we shan't regret it, Eliezer."

We need to realize what this means: According to his book, Elie Wiesel and his father had been living for three-quarters of a year in a camp system where Jews had been burned alive *en masse* by their German tormentors. The living inmates had been abused and mistreated by every method one can think of. Then in early 1945 there was a chance to escape the clutches of these mass murderers and to be liberated by the advancing Soviets.

How would you have decided?

Elie decided to flee *from* their liberators *with* their diabolic tormentors. They decided to remain slave workers in the hell allegedly created by the evil Germans.

Arguing in my book *Lectures on the Holocaust* along these lines, I came to the conclusion that these lines prove that Wiesel never really felt threatened by the Germans, that the atrocity stories he tells in his book must therefore be untrue.²

But it's not that easy. When retired German judge Günter Bertram, who opposes the prosecution of peaceful historical dissidents in Germany,³ read my book, he criticized me for having omitted a crucial passage from Wiesel's text which he claimed refutes my hypothesis. I checked it and found that Bertram

¹ New York: Bantam, 1982, p. 77.

² G. Rudolf, *Lectures on the Holocaust* (2nd ed., Washington D.C.: The Barnes Review, 2010), 403.

³ See Günter Bertram, "Panischer Schnellschuss: Die Volksverhetzungs-Novelle 2005," in: *Mitteilungen des Hamburger Richtervereins*, No. 2, 2005, 24-28; www.richterverein.de/mhr/mhr052/m05213.htm.

was correct, superficially speaking, because Wiesel, after having been told by a doctor that they will be evacuated, wrote (pp. 77f.):

This news made us think. Were the SS going to leave hundreds of prisoners to strut about in the hospital blocks, waiting for their liberators? Were they going to let the Jews hear the twelfth stroke sound? Obviously not.

“All invalids will be summarily killed,” said the faceless one. “And sent to the crematory in a final batch.”

“The camp is certain to be mined,” said another. “The moment the evacuation’s over, it’ll blow up.”

So maybe he was afraid that he’d be executed when staying behind. Wiesel confirms himself, though, that these were only false rumors (p. 78):

I learned after the war the fate of those who had stayed behind in the hospital.

They were quite simply liberated by the Russians two days after the evacuation.

Even if he thought the Germans might kill anyone staying behind, it still would have made more sense to stay behind, because at that point in time it was clear to everyone that Germany was about to lose the war. Wiesel even says so in his book, which is full of references to the inmates’ understandable longing for Germany’s impending defeat and thus the end of their ordeal. Therefore Wiesel’s captors would have to leave him behind eventually anyway. It was merely a matter of when this would happen. Hence, if Wiesel really thought that the SS would kill inmates rather than leave them behind, it would have made sense to try and get away from the Germans as early as possible, because the more desperate the Germans’ situation was getting, the more likely excesses of violence would become.

There are other facts indicating that Wiesel could not have taken those rumors seriously, if they even circulated in the first place. First of all, the Monowitz Camp, where Wiesel was housed, had no crematory. Next, the nearest crematories at the Birkenau Camp had been taken out of service in late 1944 and dismantled in December 1944. Furthermore, Wiesel himself had experienced that thousands of inmates had been successfully cured of various ailments in the camp hospital where he was recovering at that time. Hence, Wiesel knew that sick inmates were *not* killed by the SS at Auschwitz, but that the German authorities went to great lengths to restore their slave laborers’ health. Finally, it was most certainly clear that the few members of the SS camp staff who would stay behind – the vast majority of them was about to leave the camp with the inmates – could not have carried out a major operation like killing and disposing of hundreds of sick inmates within a day or two before the Soviets’ arrival.

Cross-checking with another famous inmate at the Monowitz Camp, the Italian Jew Primo Levi, can clarify the matter. In his entry of January 17, 1945, Levi writes in his book *Survival in Auschwitz* how he would have followed common instincts and would have joined the other inmates that fled with the

SS, if only he had not been so sick and had to stay behind in the same hospital where Wiesel claims to have been at the same time:⁴

It was not a question of reasoning: I would probably also have followed the instinct of the flock [and fled with the Germans] if I had not felt so weak: fear [of the invading Red Army] is supremely contagious, and its immediate reaction is to make one try to run away.

The atrocities committed by the conquering Red Army induced fear and panic everywhere in Central and Eastern Europe, including the camps the Red Army was supposedly liberating. It turned out that such fears were indeed justified to some degree, for many a female inmate was raped by these “liberators,”⁵ and many detainees conquered by the Soviets ended up in Soviet labor camps rather than being liberated.⁶ Wiesel was therefore right to run with the Germans, whatever his subjective reasons were at the time. The Red Army, after all, did not come as a liberator, but as an army of conquest, occupation and oppression.⁷

I therefore maintain that the choice Wiesel made is truly revealing. Fritz Berg once wrote fittingly about it:⁸

The choices that were made here in January 1945 are enormously important. In the entire history of Jewish suffering at the hands of gentiles, what moment in time could possibly be more dramatic than this precious moment when Jews could choose between, on the one hand, liberation by the Soviets with the chances to tell the whole world about the evil ‘Nazis’ and to help bring about their defeat – and the other choice of going with the ‘Nazi’ mass murderers and to continue working for them and to help preserve their evil regime. In the vast majority of cases, they chose to go with the ‘Nazis.’

The momentous choice brings Shakespeare’s Hamlet to mind:

“To remain, or not to remain; that is the question:” to remain and be liberated by Soviet troops and risk their slings and rifles in order to tell the whole world about the outrageous ‘Nazis’ – or, take arms and feet against a sea of cold and darkness in order to collaborate with the very same outrageous ‘Nazis.’ Oh what heartache – ay there’s the rub! Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.

⁴ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Summit Books, 1986), 154.

⁵ Laurence Rees, “Raped by their saviours: How the survivors of Auschwitz escaped one nightmare only to face another unimaginable ordeal,” *Daily Mail*, Febr. 2, 2010; www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1247157; similar: Tom Hundley, “Struggle to mark horror of Auschwitz,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 27, 2005; www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-01-27-0501270319-story.html:

Although the Soviets were welcomed as liberators, it was only a matter of weeks before they began plundering and raping those they liberated. Women who survived the Nazis were raped to death by Soviet soldiers, according to survivor testimonies.

⁶ Jennifer Mascia, “Surviving the Camps but Struggling in Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, January 21, 2010; www.nytimes.com/2010/01/21/nyregion/21neediest.html.

⁷ On the Red Army’s atrocious style of warfare see Joachim Hoffmann, *Stalin’s War of Extermination, 1941-1945: Planning, Realization and Documentation* (Capshaw: Alab.: Theses & Dissertations Press, 2001).

⁸ Friedrich Paul Berg, “Poison Gas ‘Über Alles,’” *The Revisionist*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2003, 37-47; here 39; www.codoh.com/library/document/1417.

Considering all this, I revised my statements about this issue in more recent editions of my book *Lectures* along these lines.⁹ However, since Wiesel's various statements about the Holocaust are rather substantial and could not possibly be covered thoroughly within the limited framework of the *Lectures*, a different solution had to be found for this.

The solution to this dilemma was a thorough, critical analysis of Elie Wiesel, his activities and his various published statements in a stand-alone monograph, to which I could then refer the reader in my *Lectures*. But who would undertake this ill-rewarded effort?

* * *

In the spring of 2014, I was editing the English edition of yet another book by the prolific Italian revisionist Carlo Mattogno. I had edited the German edition in 2011, but the publishers of the English edition did not like its German title *Schiffbruch: Vom Untergang der Holocaust-Orthodoxie*,¹⁰ which translates to *Shipwreck: On the Sinking of Holocaust Orthodoxy*. They came up with a radically different yet catchy title, which describes the fact that the book addresses and debunks basically all the Nazi-gas-chamber claims ever made: *Inside the Gas Chambers: The Extermination of Mainstream Holocaust Historiography*.¹¹

A few days after I had listed the book with Amazon, I checked its availability there by searching their website for that title. This is when I ran into Shlomo Venezia's book *Inside the Gas Chamber: Eight Months in the Sonderkommando of Auschwitz*, which had been published in 2009.¹² It's the story of a person who in 1992 suddenly decided to claim that he had been a former Auschwitz inmate who had worked in and around the gas chambers of Auschwitz.¹³ On Amazon.com, Carlo's book debunking the gas-chamber myth was listed right next to Venezia's alleged eyewitness account. A starker contrast was impossible.

First I was dismayed that we had picked a title which had already been taken. But then I realized that this accident was giving Carlo's book a fortuitous placement it would otherwise never have received.

That is when the idea crossed my mind that a thorough, scholarly critique of each of the more-popular eyewitness accounts – rated by Amazon sales statistics – should be published, starting with the bestseller and then working down the ranks, one by one. We would give each of these monographs a title which includes the keywords people would search on when looking for the

⁹ See the 3rd ed. of 2017, pp. 472-474.

¹⁰ Uckfield: Castle Hill Publishers, 2011.

¹¹ Washington, D.C.: The Barnes Review, 2014.

¹² Cambridge, UK: Polity.

¹³ For a critique of this book see Carlo Mattogno "The Truth about the Gas Chambers? Historical Considerations relating to Shlomo Venezia's 'Unique Testimony'," *Inconvenient History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2010; www.inconvenienthistory.com/2/1/1920.

original, and – bingo! – next to the (purported) camp veteran’s testimony, the interested reader would also find a critical study of it.

There can be no doubt that Elie Wiesel’s *Night* is the best-selling book among all the “eyewitness” literature, just as Wiesel was, until his death in 2016, for decades the politically and socially most-influential of all the (self-styled) camp veterans. Wiesel with his book *Night* was therefore Number One on my list, followed by Rudolf Höss, the former commandant of Auschwitz, and then the lesser so-called eyewitnesses like Miklos Nyiszli, Filip Müller, Rudolf Vrba and so on.¹⁴

In early 2015, when I reached out to the usual revisionist suspects who might be interested in taking on such a project, I quickly found takers for Höss¹⁵ and Nyiszli,¹⁶ two narrowly defined and rather limited subjects. But for the ubiquitous Elie Wiesel I did not find anyone. The challenge may have seemed too big.

A few weeks later I got contacted by Dr. Warren B. Routledge, who was completely unknown to me at the time. He mentioned that he was looking for a publisher of his revisionist book project on Wiesel and his novel *Night*. As a last-ditch resort he had thought of Castle Hill Publishers, since no mainstream publisher would dare touch this debunking of a modern-day saint. Needless to say I was more than delighted to hear that what I had merely sketched out as a future project might already have been accomplished.

As it turns out, the book you are holding in your hands is even more ambitious in scope than what I had originally envisioned, which was basically limited to a critique of Wiesel’s various statements about the so-called Holocaust. Routledge’s study is in fact the first-ever critical biography of Elie Wiesel. Interwoven with this critical review of Wiesel’s writings and activities is an overview of the development of Holocaust revisionism, which is a resistance movement formed in reaction to what Elie Wiesel, the back then still “Living Symbol of the Holocaust,” personified: the perpetuation of wartime propaganda for insidious political, social and monetary ends.

Another strength of the present study is that it deals with the festering subject of the betrayal of the memory of Pope Pius XII by his own Church. The author contends that Pius XII can actually be considered as a forerunner of the revisionists, since he clearly never believed that Nazi Germany was carrying out an extermination program against Europe’s Jews.

Finally, Routledge points out the toxic effect which the orthodox Holocaust narrative has on ordinary Jews. It makes them paranoid and has driven them to

¹⁴ There are no monographs yet on Müller, Vrba and other witnesses, among other things because Amazon removed all of our books from sale in early 2017, since our strategy of placing our books alongside similar titles by our opponents was a sensational success. See my documentation *The Day Amazon Murdered History* (Uckfield: Castle Hill Publishers, 2018).

¹⁵ Cf. C. Mattogno, R. Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: Rudolf Höss, His Torture and His Forced Confessions* (2nd ed., Uckfield: Castle Hill Publishers, 2019).

¹⁶ Cf. C. Mattogno, M. Nyiszli, *An Auschwitz Doctor’s Eyewitness Account: The Tall Tales of Dr. Mengele’s Assistant Analyzed* (Uckfield: Castle Hill Publishers, 2018).

the exits through intermarriage with non-Jews, which assures that most of their children will probably not be raised in the Jewish traditions. The author also reveals that there are Jewish revisionists who have come to understand the menace which the falsity and venality of the Holocaust cult pose for Jewry in general. Granted, this issue is not explored in depth here, but it may serve as a call to action for others to investigate and develop it more thoroughly.

For me as the editor of the series *Holocaust Handbooks*, of which this present study is the 30th volume, working with the author on this ambitious project was a pleasure not only because of its interesting and multifaceted contents, but also due to the many improvements we managed to put in place during our many exchanges. Hence I wholeheartedly endorse the book's message. I hope the reader will find it just as edifying as I have.

Ultimately there was only one point on which Dr. Routledge and I agreed to disagree. The author refers repeatedly to the detrimental brainwashing effect today's omnipresent Holocaust propaganda has on young people. But when he runs into one concrete example of such an effect, he seems to side with Elie Wiesel. I am referring here to the case of Eric Hunt (see p. 317 of this book). Hunt was in his early twenties when he suddenly discovered that what he had been taught about the Holocaust might be profoundly wrong. At school he had been forced to read Elie Wiesel's *Night*, but now he came to understand that he had been duped. He became angry, understandably so. When he heard that Elie Wiesel would attend a conference near his home, he took matters into his own hands. He grabbed his copy of *Night* and a video camera and sought to confront Wiesel. He wanted to do "ambush journalism," that is to say, suddenly showing up in front of an unsuspecting individual with a running camera, asking some tough, provocative questions. But Hunt was too angry, too excited, and too disorganized. What unfolded when the two men met is unclear. Wiesel claims that Hunt became violent, whereas Hunt insists that he merely grabbed Wiesel by his sleeve trying to get him to stand still and answer his questions. The court believed Wiesel, so Hunt ended up in prison for 18 months.

After reading the present study, readers should be well-equipped to judge for themselves whether they would believe at face value anything Wiesel claims. I am convinced that Hunt would not have ended up in court, let alone in prison, had the person he confronted been Joe Shmoe rather than the world's Holocaust High Priest. Hunt's fate merely shows how Wiesel handles opponents.

With all this said, the book's stance is clear: It shows unambiguously that Wiesel's confession with which I started this Foreword has to be taken more seriously than any mainstream critic has ever dared.¹⁷ Put bluntly, Wiesel's

¹⁷ See for instance how Gary Weissman beats around the bush after having quoted this very passage in his book *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 67ff. (<http://books.google.com/books?id=kXO9wXvYuAQC&pg=PA67>); Ruth Franklin takes a similar approach in her *A Thousand Darknesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 69ff.

business is writing down lies. Exposing this shocking fact ineluctably required that the author, while writing the present study, had to defy the Holocaust taboo, or else he could not have gotten to the core of the many untruths spread by Wiesel in his various writings and public statements.

By revealing the unvarnished truth about Wiesel, his novel *Night*, and the Holocaust cult which Wiesel helped establish, this book has the potential to enlighten and therefore liberate readers from the conditioning they have been subjected to in schools and through the media.

But beware: when reading this book, you have a right to become upset, but your emotions *must* be harnessed to serve constructive and productive objectives. Violence should never be an option.

Germar Rudolf
March 21, 2015
updated on February 15, 2020

Introduction

The present study seeks to accomplish several goals simultaneously. Written both for non-revisionists interested in learning more about Holocaust revisionism and its relationship to the Jewish Holocaust Story of World War II, as well as revisionists of various information levels, the work does not presume any prior knowledge. Its first objective is to provide the reader with a general, introductory overview of the revisionist movement, including its main arguments, key players, and historiographical achievements. The study covers the period from the 1960s to the year 2010, and its purpose is not only to bring forth new revisionist arguments and information, but also to summarize and contextualize the accomplishments of the leading revisionist scholars. The terminus date of 2010 was selected because the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century corresponds roughly to a half-century of revisionist activity.

The book's second goal is to tell the story of the emergence and blossoming of Holocaust revisionism within the context of Elie Wiesel's life and career. His name has become synonymous with the Holocaust, and not a few people have called him the "Holocaust High Priest." Indeed, the vast majority of Holocaust devotees (both Jews and non-Jews) look upon him as a holy man of sorts, in part because of his supposedly miraculous survival at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, but also because of the key role he played in the founding of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

An additional benefit of this approach is that, by telling the revisionist story in the context of Wiesel's career, I have been able to add the theme of "Catholic-Jewish Dialogue" to the mix. This is so because Wiesel's greatest benefactor from the very beginning of his career was the French Catholic novelist, man of letters, and Nobel Prize winner François Mauriac (1885-1970). Mauriac "discovered" Wiesel, helped him to get his first book, the supposedly autobiographical *La Nuit* (1958), published in Paris, and wrote a flattering review of it when no one else seemed interested in it. He also had a very close personal attachment to Wiesel until his death in 1970. Their relationship is connected to another of the present study's themes: the problematic and at times abusive relationship that has existed between the various international Jewish organizations and media outlets on the one hand, and the men who served as Pope of the Catholic Church from Pius XII to Benedict XVI. In exploring this latter theme, I document and analyze the subversive role played by

various Catholic “Holocaustians.” Such men and women, nominally Catholics, often advance their careers in Zionist media or academic environments by claiming, without proof and to various degrees, that Pius XII and the Catholic Church as a whole somehow bear “guilt” for the Holocaust. It is a very cynical and mendacious game, but it pays quite well. The discussion of their activities, coupled with the surrender of the popes to the Zionist agenda, adds further insight into the reasons for the incredible and unprecedented decline of the Catholic Church over the past half century in every imaginable way.

While Holocaust revisionism is a truly international movement in which citizens of many nations are involved to varying degrees, the special focus here is on revisionism in France and the United States. In France, Professor Robert Faurisson has been the unquestioned leader in the effort for the past four decades. In the U.S., however, there has been a succession of actors over the years. From the emergence of Professor Arthur Butz in the 1970s, to the Institute of Historical Review in the 1980s and beyond, to the work of Bradley Smith and his Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (CODOH) for the past thirty years, many hands have lent themselves to this work. With regard to Elie Wiesel, Carolyn Yeager’s blog site, “Elie Wiesel Cons the World,” has played an enormous role in recent years by bringing to light a great deal of valuable information about Wiesel. I hope that her work, and that of other revisionists, will continue to flourish.

This study is divided into three main sections. The first contains four chapters dealing with the Mauriac–Wiesel relationship and the genesis of his novel *Night*, while the second section’s two chapters offer a close critical reading of Wiesel’s novel. In the third section, I seek to combine my unauthorized biography of Wiesel with an overview of the development of historical revisionism in the U.S. (and to a lesser degree in Europe), from the appearance of *Night* in English in 1960 to 2010. These themes are presented chronically in order to give the reader a sense of how far revisionist arguments have advanced in a mere half-century of activity, as well as to document the inability of the Holocaustians to rebut them. I have also woven into this narrative the related issues of the abandonment of Pius XII by the post-Conciliar Catholic Church, and the negative reaction among many Jews to both Wiesel and the Holocaust narrative in general. While this ambitious, but focused, narrative might seem disjointed at times to some readers, it does adhere to this general outline and seeks as much as possible to avoid repetitions.

Chapter I

François Mauriac: Waiting for the Modern-Day Messiah

François Mauriac, Catholic Novelist and Man of Letters

François Mauriac (1885-1970) emerged in France in the 1920s as a “Catholic novelist” who used the traditions, symbolic world and belief system of Catholicism in his work. Although he rejected the term “Catholic novelist,” preferring instead to be known as a “Catholic who writes novels,” the term did nonetheless point up that his fiction portrayed a hidden and mystical world of divine grace active within every living person. In France, Mauriac was probably read by non-Catholics as much as by Catholics, for anticlerical readers enjoyed Mauriac’s fictional portrayal of the hypocrisy of upper-class Catholic families. In his novels of the interwar years, Mauriac mercilessly skewered and pitilessly laid bare the obsession with money and property that characterized the Catholicism of many members of his social class.

The theme of repressed sexual desire also figured prominently in his novels, with the result that fellow Catholics were often among his most hostile reviewers. For example, the Assumptionists, the religious order that owned and published the nationally distributed Catholic daily newspaper *La Croix*, often found fault with Mauriac’s novels on moral rather than esthetic grounds. Other opposition came from an influential Catholic priest with the improbable name of Louis Bethléem, who, during the interwar years, compiled a series of guidebooks on moral reading for Catholics. Of course, he warned them against reading Mauriac’s novels. One of the supreme rebuffs from this Catholic milieu came from a highly respected and widely read priest and literary critic, the abbé Jean Calvet. In his book *Le renouveau catholique dans la littérature contemporaine* (Paris: Lanore, 1927), he refused even to classify Mauriac as a Catholic novelist. In his assessment of Mauriac’s work, Calvet reflected the widely held belief among French Catholics that Mauriac was obsessed by sexual desire and its repression. They were repelled by his exploitation of Catho-

lic signs and symbols to covertly sell sex to his readers. Yet, for better or for worse, in the Catholicism of many members of what we can call “mainstream” French culture, during the interwar years Mauriac was as “official” a Catholic intellectual as any man in France. In somewhat altered form, the same could be said of the twenty-five years from the end of the war until his death in 1970, during which he remained active as a novelist, political journalist and man of letters.

Mauriac, the youngest of four boys, grew up in a very wealthy family. The Mauriacs’ wealth was largely based on property that included pine forests, which were lucrative for the manufacture of turpentine and related products in the naval stores industry. His mother was a staunch Catholic, while his father, who died when Mauriac was a boy, was an unbeliever. Mauriac had the feeling of being “different” as a boy growing up in Bordeaux. He never felt at home playing with the other boys and showed little interest in their games. He was subjected to terrible teasing by his older brothers (he was the youngest of five children) as well as by his schoolmates. Mauriac scholars have known for the last twenty-five years that Mauriac led a secret homosexual life, despite being married and fathering four children. In part to avoid embarrassing his children and grandchildren, this hidden aspect of his life was sometimes alluded to, but never directly discussed.

However, this situation has changed following the publication of Jean-Luc Barré’s new two-volume biography of Mauriac.¹⁸ In it, Barré candidly addresses an aspect of Mauriac’s life that had been hidden until now. Thus, we know today that Mauriac began to feel homosexual tendencies as a boy. During adolescence and in early adulthood, he had a close relationship with the openly homosexual François le Grix. In fact, Mauriac’s engagement to Marianne Chausson, the daughter of a well-known composer, was broken off by her family in 1911 because of his relationships with other “out” homosexuals, including Lucien Daudet and Jean Cocteau. Homosexual urges would trouble Mauriac throughout his life. It will be argued in the pages which follow that these proclivities probably played a role of some kind, never before discussed, in his bizarre “amitié,” or “friendship,” with the ambitious young Jew Elie Wiesel. In fact, it is inconceivable that Wiesel could have been unaware of Mauriac’s homosexuality when he burst into Mauriac’s life, completely unannounced and unexpected, in 1955. Wiesel’s main reason for trying to establish contact with Mauriac was because Mauriac was perceived by fellow Jews in



Illustration 1: François Mauriac postage stamp on the 100th anniversary of his birth (fifteen years after his death)

¹⁸ Jean-Luc Barré, *François Mauriac, biographie intime I, 1885 – 1940*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2009), and *François Mauriac, biographie intime II, 1940 – 1970*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2010).

Paris as a loyal friend of the Jewish people. At the same time, Wiesel's Jewish informants almost certainly told him of the rumors that circulated in Parisian literary circles at the time with regard to Mauriac's ongoing attraction to young men.

Mauriac Abandons the French Right and Supports the Jewish People

When Mauriac was elected to membership in the ultraconservative Académie Française, that is, as one of the forty "living immortals" of French culture, in 1933, he was still politically a man of the French Right. He belonged to the right-wing nationalist strain in French politics led by Charles Maurras, and depended on support from key conservative members of the Academy for election to that body. For Maurras, French Jews were dangerous not only because they were a culturally alien element in the French body politic; even worse, they also tended to be pro-German. In 1933, Mauriac implicitly shared such views.

By 1936, however, he began to move leftward and to support Jewish political causes. After criticizing Mussolini in 1936 for his invasion of Ethiopia, in 1937 Mauriac joined with the Catholic novelist Georges Bernanos and the neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain in denouncing General Franco's revolt against the Spanish Republic. To Mauriac, who had supported Franco during the first few months of rebellion, Catholics could not make common cause with Fascists. Most European Catholics, including of course the Vatican, rightly recognized Franco as an authentic anti-Communist, and supported him for this reason, but Mauriac could not be persuaded. To him, the execution of fourteen Basque priests by forces under Franco's control for having supported the Republican government could not be excused.¹⁹ While Mauriac had a valid point, at the same time he turned a blind eye to the deaths of the thousands of priests and nuns who had been slaughtered by the Spanish Republicans and their Communist allies. The death toll of 6,832 victims included 13 bishops, 4,172 diocesan priests and seminarians, 2,364 monks and friars, and 283 nuns.²⁰ He also discounted the vast inventory of Church property that was con-

¹⁹ Jean-Jacques Bozonnet, "Des évêques basques défient leur hiérarchie en honorant la mémoire de prêtres tués par des soldats de Franco," *Le Monde*, July 14, 2009. www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2009/07/13/des- eveques-basques-defient-leur-hierarchie-en-honorant-la-memoire-de-pretres-tues-par-des-soldats-de-franco_1218241_3214.html. These deaths are still an issue in Spain. In July 2009, Basque bishops apologized for having kept silent about these deaths over the years. Yet, these same bishops have never questioned the myth of the angelic nature of those who fought for the Spanish Republic, and have never demanded an apology from those who slaughtered thousands of non-combatant and defenseless priests and nuns.

²⁰ Julio de la Cueva, "Religious Persecution, Anticlerical Tradition and Revolution: On Atrocities against the Clergy during the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998), 355. See also: Arnaud Imatz, *La Guerre d'Espagne revisitée* (Paris: Economica, 1993) [2nd edition, revised and expanded], pp. 47-50; Vicente Orti, *La Persecución religiosa en España durante la segunda república (1931-1939)* (Madrid: Rialp, 1990).

fiscated and destroyed by the Republicans. The Catholic Mauriac's position on Franco was thus closer to that of most of the pro-Stalinist intellectuals of the day.

Luckily for the Spanish people and for Western Europe, the Communists did not win the Spanish Civil War. Franco's victory meant that Spaniards were not forced into Marxist servitude, as were over a hundred million innocent people in Eastern Europe (most of them Catholics) after World War II. For many years, it was fashionable for Western leftist intellectuals to denounce certain repressive aspects of Franco's regime as it continued into the 1970s. But Franco's rule over Spain, in comparison to the Communist regimes that persecuted the peoples of Eastern Europe after the war, was relatively benign. It also had the virtue of being homegrown, rather than imposed and enforced from without, as were the governments of the Soviet satellites.

By 1938, Mauriac was a fully-committed and fervent supporter of Jews and Jewish causes, and had begun to denounce the German government's policy of pressuring Jews to emigrate from the Reich. When many French intellectuals, fearful that Jews were trying to get France involved in another war with Germany, were urging caution and moderation regarding events within the borders of another sovereign nation, Mauriac called for direct involvement. By this time, he had come to reject the Maurrasian idea that Jews were foreigners on French soil. In February 1938, he wrote:²¹

If there is an issue that requires our intervention, it's the one that engulfs Israel [Jewry] with such a wave of hatred. The question is not to know what we think of the Jews as Jews any more than what we think of Auvergnats as Auvergnats.^[22] Before examining the problems created by this exodus of the persecuted [Jews], we must begin by means of a public act of opposition to anti-Semitism.

Taking aim at the Maurrasian beliefs that revolved around the doctrines of integral nationalism and anti-Semitism, and that had played a major role in his life as a youth, he wrote:²³

So let us be even more watchful against anti-Semitism, even unconscious, especially since all of us – yes all of us, without exception – are the heirs to this

²¹ François Mauriac, *Mémoires politiques* (Paris: Grasset, 1967), 73f.: "S'il est un drame qui exige notre intervention, c'est bien celui qui dresse Israël contre une telle vague de haine. La question n'est pas de savoir ce que nous pensons des Juifs en tant que Juifs, pas plus que des Auvergnats en tant qu'Auvergnats. Avant d'examiner les problèmes que soulève déjà l'exode des persécutés, nous devons commencer par un acte public d'opposition à l'antisémitisme."

²² French population group in France's central mountain range (Massif Central), a remote, mountainous and volcanic region of France known as Auvergne. Its principal city is Clermont-Ferrand.

²³ *Ibid.*: "Gardons-nous d'autant plus de l'antisémitisme, même larvé, que nous sommes tous – oui, tous et sans exception – les héritiers de cette haine séculaire; sinon de cette haine, du moins de cette hostilité entretenue en nous, il faut le dire à notre décharge par les fautes, par les maladresses d'Israël; et par cette flamme redoutable que la persécution attise en lui."

age-old hatred. If it's not actually hatred, it is at least a form of hostility that has been kept alive within us, we must admit in our defense, by the faults and missteps of the Jewish people as well as by the fearsome flame that persecution keeps alive within their breast.

Mauriac then concludes his essay with his own advice about overcoming feelings of anti-Jewish hatred:²⁴

To this element of hatred I have always contrasted the admiration that I feel for certain Jews, deceased or living, and the affection that more than one of them has inspired in me. There is no better antidote against racial hatred than to center our thoughts on certain people who are dear to us. There is no better response to anti-Semitic doctrines than to recall what both French and German culture owe to its Jewish ingredient – and what, in return, the Jewish genius owes to Western civilizations.

This kind of statement exposed Mauriac to criticism from some of his former friends on the Right. But it also showed his deep commitment to justice for his Jewish friends and for the Jewish people as a whole.

Mauriac Supports the Allied War Effort

Mauriac completed his move to the Left during the war years. As early as 1940, de Gaulle's follower, Robert Schumann, in his BBC broadcasts from London, identified Mauriac by name as a writer and intellectual who had remained in France and who incarnated the virtues of traditional Republican France. Unlike so many other writers who quietly went into exile abroad, Mauriac remained sequestered at his home in the southwest of France. There, under terms of the 1940 armistice, he could be required to provide lodging for German military personnel. Thus, an SS officer, Major Westmann, who commanded the German garrison in the nearby town of Langon, presented Mauriac with a requisition order a few days after Christmas 1940. The next day he moved in, occupying an upstairs bedroom, while his orderly slept on a cot in the dining room. The demarcation line between the free (Vichy-ruled) and occupied zones ran right through the grape vines surrounding his home.

Mauriac watched and waited, while also spending the dark days between the fall of France in the summer of 1940 and Christmas of that year writing the novel *La pharisienne (Woman of the Pharisees)*. Despite a shortage of paper, which limited the number of copies that could be printed, and the refusal of the pro-Vichy press to review his book, since they considered Mauriac to be a Jewish puppet, *La pharisienne* sold thirty thousand copies in the first two

²⁴ *Ibid.*: "A ce ferment de haine, j'ai toujours opposé l'admiration que je ressens pour quelques Juifs, morts ou vivants, et l'affection que plus d'un m'inspire. Il n'est pas de meilleur antidote à la haine de race que d'arrêter sa pensée sur certains êtres qui nous sont chers. Il n'est pas de meilleure réponse aux doctrines antisémites que de constater ce que la culture française et la culture allemande doivent au ferment juif – et ce que doit en retour, le génie d'Israël aux civilisations occidentales."

months, and went through several editions. It was widely read by the French people, who looked upon it as the quintessential “roman de l’Occupation” (novel of the Occupation). Amazingly, even though Mauriac had intended to write a “roman catholique,” or Catholic novel, about his dominating and smothering mother and those whose lives she affected, his readers, for reasons that lack of space does not permit exploring here, saw the book as an allegory of their own condition under German occupation.

The pro-German Vichy intellectuals despised Mauriac, and portrayed him as a traitor to his nation, his class and his religion. They mocked his obsession with sex in his novels, and hinted, correctly as we now know, that he was a closet homosexual. In other words, certain vices that these same intellectuals routinely associated with the Jews were attributed to Mauriac.

Mauriac Is “Silent” about the Jews in *Le Cahier Noir*

Mauriac’s most significant achievement on behalf of the Allies during the war was the publication of his pro-Allied propaganda pamphlet *Le cahier noir* in 1943. Smuggled out of France and rapidly translated in Britain as *The Black Notebook* by the Catholic intellectual (and future biographer of Mauriac) Robert Speaight, it became a success overnight. Mauriac’s little book expressed the ideals espoused by the Allies in a way that no one in the United States or Great Britain had yet been able to achieve.²⁵

Le cahier noir, and Mauriac’s strategy in writing it, tells us much about the context in which we must understand the alleged World War II “silence” about the supposed extermination of the Jews that Mauriac, and many others, imputed to Pope Pius XII after the war. Mauriac, writing under the pseudonym of “Forez,” had as one of his many goals in the book the arousal of sympathy for Jewry. His problem, as he wrote this piece of pro-Jewish propaganda, was to communicate his message without leaving himself open to the accusation, readily leveled by the pro-Vichy intellectuals and others, that those who championed the Jews were simply political puppets in Jewish hands. To be sure, by publishing *Le cahier noir* he was also risking his life, for the Germans could probably see through his pseudonym. Since the French press, whether in the occupied zone or in the Vichy-controlled area, repeated the principal German propaganda line throughout the war, namely, that the Allies were fighting a self-destructive war for the Jews and that Aryan boys were needlessly dying for Jewry, Mauriac chose to make his case indirectly, by writing of the travails of Jews in France but not referring to them by name.

Faced with the challenge of making a special plea for Jews without mentioning them as such, Mauriac used coded language. The code he followed involved the use of a simple little story in which the reader had to fill in the blanks. He told his readers that he had seen a train carrying a group of children

²⁵ Robert Speaight, *François Mauriac: A Study of the Man and the Writer* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976).

at Austerlitz Station in Paris about a year earlier. This station was one of about a half-dozen major stations in Paris at the time, and provided train service to cities like Toulouse and Bordeaux in the southwest of the country. Since Jews at the time were being deported from Austerlitz Station to the transit camp at Pithiviers, it was likely that the children in question were Jewish.

The key point here is that Mauriac, like Pius XII, did not mention that these children were Jewish. He wrote:²⁶

To accomplish Machiavelli's plans, groups of people have been shuffled around and deported, and whole races have been condemned to perish. At what other moment in history have jails enclosed so many innocent people? At what other time have children been ripped out of their mothers' arms, and piled into cattle cars, as I saw one sad morning at Austerlitz Station?

Mauriac did not witness this event; he heard about it from his wife and son. He also gratuitously added the detail about "cattle cars," which his wife and son had not mentioned. Mauriac left it to his readers to fill in the blanks as to the children's being Jewish. This anecdote was very effective, for readers in Britain and the U.S., under the sway of the Allied propaganda that filled the "mainstream" press, were easily able to identify the children as Jewish. Furthermore, they could just as easily pencil in the idea that they were being sent to a concentration camp. Thus, there was no need to tell these readers that the children were Jewish, for the Allied public would assume that otherwise the story would not have been told in the first place. Similarly, the propaganda movies that Hollywood studios made to support the war effort generally refrained from mentioning the Jewish dimension of the war. This fact is especially salient in the explicitly propagandistic series *Why We Fight*. Here, the predominantly Jewish producers followed the same script as Mauriac had in *Le cahier noir*, and largely sublimated the Jews, at most equating their sufferings with those of Christians.

It is in the context of this resounding "silence" by both Mauriac and Hollywood, of which the above are only two examples, that we must understand the supposed "silence" of Pope Pius XII. In following the strategy of "silence," these entities behaved much as did the Pope, who also undeniably favored the Allies and world Jewry. They all observed this "silence" for the same reason: because outright and explicit support of the Jews would have lent support to the Axis claim that they were acting as Jewish stooges and puppets.

Even after the war was over, Allied leaders and publicists – many of them Jewish – observed what was for all practical purposes a similar sublimation at the main Nuremberg tribunal. Mention of the Jews was virtually absent from the original indictment. In an edition of his father's letters from Nuremberg,

²⁶ François Mauriac, *Le cahier noir*, in: *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. 10 (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1952), 366f.: "Pour accomplir les desseins de Machiavel, les peuples sont brassés et déportés, des races entières sont condamnées à périr. A quel autre moment de l'histoire les bagnes se sont-ils refermés sur plus d'innocents? A quelle autre époque les enfants furent-ils arrachés à leurs mères, entassés dans des wagons à bestiaux, tels que je les ai vus par un sombre matin à la gare d'Austerlitz?"

where the latter had been a prosecutor, former Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) expressed shock at this, although lead U.S. prosecutor Justice Robert Jackson and the rest of the prosecution team were following a protocol of “silence” analogous to, though different from, that of Pius XII during the war years. After all, the Allies were utterly and unconditionally triumphant at Nuremberg, with Axis propaganda no longer a factor. Yet, as the letters reveal, concern lest the Allied populations see the war as a “Jew’s war” was widespread among the Jews and the gentiles who conducted the Nuremberg tribunal. Mauriac’s refusal during the occupation to describe child deportees as Jewish, Hollywood’s downplaying the Jewish issue to ensure gentile support for the war, and the comparative neglect at Nuremberg of the alleged genocide of the Jews are but three instances of a policy of “silence” that was carried out by various participants on the Allied side. The Allied policy has been largely forgotten, while accusations of a culpable “silence” that has been wrongly attributed to Pius XII have grown louder and more frequent since the war.²⁷

This book, which addresses the various silences of, and accusations of silence by, François Mauriac and Elie Wiesel, will examine the chief charge against Pope Pius XII in some detail – that he knowingly failed to speak out against an extermination of the Jews. Here it should also be recalled that the Catholic Church was officially a neutral party between Nazi Germany – whom Pius XII had not hesitated to speak against before the war – and the Communist Soviet Union. Those Jewish leaders in the U.S. who, somewhat hypocritically, requested that Pius XII explicitly “speak out” on behalf of the Jews in his various Christmas messages during the war years knew in advance that he could not. He simply could not speak specifically about the Jews without compromising his credibility as a neutral party. Even worse, with his loss of credibility would have come the charge by the Germans that he was just another Jewish puppet. In reality, as Professor Faurisson pointed out in his study *Le révisionisme de Pie XII*,²⁸ Pius XII was committed to the Allied cause, and his public “neutrality” was a smokescreen intended to hide that fact. Yet the

²⁷ Christopher J. Dodd, Larry Bloom, *Letters from Nuremberg: My Father’s Narrative of the Quest for Justice*. (N.Y.: Crown, 2007), 135f. In September 1945, Thomas Dodd wrote to his wife that the prosecution staff was overwhelmingly Jewish, a fact that has been erased from the official history of the event. Is it any wonder that the Germans were denied justice there? Dodd wrote: “The staff continues to grow every day. Col. Kaplan is now here, as a mate, I assume, for Commander Kaplan. Dr. Newman has arrived, and I do not know how many more. It is all a silly business – but ‘silly’ isn’t the right word. One would expect that some of these people would have sense enough to put an end to this kind of a parade. You know better than anyone how I hate race or religious prejudice. You know how I have despised anti-Semitism. You know how strongly I feel toward those who preach intolerance of any kind. With that knowledge – you will understand when I tell you that this staff is about seventy-five percent Jewish. Now my point is that the Jews should stay away from this trial – for their own sake. For – mark this well – the charge ‘a war for the Jews’ is still being made, and in the postwar years it will be made again and again.”

²⁸ Robert Faurisson, *Le révisionisme de Pie XII* (Genoa: Graphos Edizioni, 2002). English translation: *Pope Pius XII’s Revisionism* (Uckfield, UK: Historical Review Press, 2006).

Jewish leaders in the U.S., so selfish, so short-sighted and so self-referential, as if nobody else in Europe was suffering, made their demand, knowing full well that the Pope could not comply with it. They also knew that the Pope, like the Allies – including many influential Jews – and like Mauriac, relied on the perspicacity of the public to recognize that Jews were included in his condemnation of persecution. He could no more do their bidding than he could allow himself to publicly endorse the French Catholics who fought Communism on the eastern front. The volunteers of the *L.V.F. (Légion des Volontaires Français)* and later the Frenchmen of Germany's Charlemagne Division, would have appreciated such recognition. Yet the Pope always refused to give his blessing to such Catholic anti-Communist crusades, whether or not he would have liked to support them. When he turned them down, he did so for precisely the same reason he turned down the impossible requests from U.S. Jewish leaders. He had to maintain his public posture of neutrality.

Let us now return to Mauriac's simple little story. He was able to arouse sympathy for Jews indirectly, without mentioning them by name, by recounting in *Le cahier noir* that he had seen the Jewish children on the train. Yet, he himself had not seen them. Mauriac simply repeated his wife and son's account, but made two important changes. First, he claimed that *he* had seen the children with his own eyes, which was not true. He no doubt felt that he was prevaricating on behalf of a good cause, the fight against anti-Semitism, but he was in fact bearing false witness. A lie, even a white lie told with the best of intentions, is still a lie. Thus, ironically, Mauriac, a Catholic, became one of the first of the many false witnesses in what would later become the Jewish Holocaust narrative, a genre in which false testimonies proliferate, even dominate. The second change that he made in the story was to delete specific mention that the children were Jews, for reasons mentioned above. Mauriac, like Pius XII, could do this because he knew that, given the power of Allied propaganda during the war, his readers would be able to fill in the gaps and supply the word "Jew."

The publication of *Le cahier noir* won Mauriac many Jewish friends around the world. In addition, during the war years, French Catholics and Jews (primarily under the auspices of the Communist party) worked very closely together. Both groups, despite their many differences, supported de Gaulle and his call for internal "resistance" to the occupier. Judged security risks by the Germans, many resisters, Catholic and Jewish, were deported to work camps in Germany and Poland. Many of them died there, primarily of disease. And, finally, both groups shared the short-lived euphoria that followed the Liberation, with their respective ordeals being read into the record – however inaccurately – at Nuremberg. Mauriac was, in short, a living icon of the Catholic-Jewish alliance that had existed, however briefly and imperfectly, during World War II.

At the liberation of Paris in August 1944, Mauriac was commissioned to write the lead article in the first post-occupation edition of *Le Figaro*. Since

that prestigious newspaper, which had been banned during the occupation, wanted a patriotic piece in honor of General de Gaulle, Mauriac penned “Le premier des nôtres” (“The First among Us”).²⁹ Mauriac’s selection as author of this article was laden with symbolism, for he was not only a Catholic, but one deeply committed to the Jews. His devotion to Catholicism and to French republicanism mirrored the symbolism of de Gaulle’s “Free French” flag, the French tricolor emblazoned with the Cross of Lorraine. The Catholic Church and the French Republic had been engaged in a cultural and political war since the separation of Church and State in 1905. When de Gaulle decided to include the Cross of Lorraine, invoking the memory of Joan of Arc, who had come to the aid of the nation in a time of crisis centuries earlier, he was superimposing a symbol of traditional Catholic France on the ultimate symbol of the anticlerical Republic. In terms of the political and ideological realities of occupied France, this flag embodied the temporary alliance of the many Catholics in the French Resistance with the Jews and Communists who played a disproportionate role in its ranks and leadership. The general reluctance to mention the Jewish role even after Allied propaganda was no longer a factor underlines yet again how strong the inclination was to downplay Jewish prominence for Gentile eyes. As times changed, the major role that Jews, many from Eastern Europe, especially Poland, had played in the Resistance began to be acknowledged by the influential “Nazi-hunters” Serge and Beate Klarsfeld as well as other Jewish voices.³⁰

In a word, Mauriac incarnated de Gaulle’s Catholic-Jewish alliance quite well. Of course, once the war was over and the alliance had dissolved, the Cross of Lorraine would disappear from the French flag. But for this brief moment, Mauriac’s authoring this first article in liberated France was tangible proof that he had behaved during the war like a true patriot. He was a living symbol, however briefly, of what de Gaulle liked to call *la France éternelle*.

Flash Forward: Seeds Planted for the 1952 Nobel Prize for Literature

Mauriac’s support of the Jews during the war, more than his work as a novelist (he had not written a novel since 1940!), would be rewarded in 1952, when, most likely with Jewish support, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Due in part to the fact that the wording of the award was rather vague, most observers were astonished at his selection, especially during the heyday of existentialism, when names like Sartre and Camus dominated the headlines. Many had the distinct impression that Mauriac was receiving the prize as much for his political support of de Gaulle and the Allied cause during the war as for his fiction. After all, his best novels, *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927) and *Le noeud de vipères* [*Vipers’ Tangle*] (1932), belonged to another era, and the

²⁹ François Mauriac, “Le Premier des nôtres,” *Le Figaro*, August 25, 1945, 1.

³⁰ Monique-Lise Cohen, Jean-Louis Dufour, *Les juifs dans la résistance suivi de la présence juive en Europe et l’écriture de l’histoire* (Paris: Tirésias, 2001).

literary pulse of France had changed dramatically since then. In fact, as François Durand reminds us, Mauriac's literary fortunes had hit rock bottom in the late 1940s. Not only had his last play, *Passage du malin* (December 1947), been a total flop, he spent a good part of the next two years in "an almost constant battle," in his newspaper columns in *Le Figaro*, "against the Communists and their sympathizers, and their exchanges were often lively. In addition, a new generation of writers and thinkers was reaching the crest of fame – with Sartre and Camus in the lead – for whom Mauriac belonged to the past: Mauriac's failure with *Passage du malin* coincided in time with the success of Sartre's play *Les mains sales*."³¹ Thus Mauriac, with his career in a tailspin, and the object of ridicule in the eyes of many of the rising literary stars of the younger generation, would be open by then to friendly gestures coming from young Jews. They admired him for his courageous defense of Jews and Jewish interests during the war years, and were determined to show their gratitude. Mauriac's receipt of the 1952 Nobel Prize for Literature shocked his enemies, but did not inspire them to change their opinion of him as a vestige of a dead past. It did, however, re-ignite his career, for he began writing novels again, and found renewed inspiration and a younger audience as a political commentator.

Another reason for the consternation of many Parisian literati when Mauriac was awarded the 1952 Nobel was their naïve assumption that the Nobel awards are free of politics. They did not understand that there were forces, including influential Jews, behind the scenes who appreciated what Mauriac had done for the Jews during the war years. In addition, Mauriac's literary jousting with France's Communists at a time when Communist influence was a distinct threat to France's role as a U.S. ally in the opening years of the Cold War must have endeared him to the CIA. We now know that the CIA brought its influence to bear on the selection for the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature when CIA efforts enabled the Russian dissident Boris Pasternak to win out over the Italian Communist Alberto Moravia. They did so to embarrass the Soviet Union. Did they also do the same thing for Mauriac in 1952?³² In summary, only the naïve would believe that his novels of the 1920s and 1930s secured the 1952 award, and it is not an accident that the inner workings of the Nobel selection process remain hidden from view.

³¹ François Durand (ed.), *Mauriac: Œuvres autobiographiques* (Paris: Pléiade, 1990), 993: "Il est depuis deux ans en lutte, dans les colonnes du *Figaro*, contre les communistes et leurs sympathisants et les échanges sont souvent très vifs; d'autre part, une nouvelle génération d'écrivains et de penseurs arrive au zénith, Sartre et Camus en tête, pour qui l'œuvre de Mauriac appartient au passé: à l'échec de *Passage de Malin* succède la réussite des *Mains sales*."

³² Mark Franchetti, "How the CIA Won *Zhivago* a Nobel," *Sunday Times* (London), January 14, 2007, 6; Anatoly Korolev, "Doctor *Zhivago* and the 1959 Nobel Prize: The CIA's Secret Triumph," *RIA-Novosti*, January 20, 2009; see <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/20090119119705315/>.

Mauriac, a Bridge between Catholics and Jews

Wiesel has never given a straightforward answer to the question of why he sought out Mauriac. But part of the affinity can be explained by the feeling among French Jews that Mauriac was very sympathetic to them, a feeling Wiesel came to share as a young man living in France. He claims to have been a “voracious reader of Holocaust Literature. [...] I still want to understand what happened.”³³ In keeping abreast of books being published on the camps as they came out in the early 1950s, he must have noticed that Mauriac was widely known for supporting publication of memoirs associated with the war, even writing forewords for such works.

Thus, for example, Mauriac wrote a foreword for a memoir by a Belgian professor of history named Léon-Ernest Halkin. Entitled *À l'ombre de la mort* [*In the Shadow of Death*] (Tournai: Casterman, 1947), the book recounted how Catholics had clandestinely practiced their faith in the German camps. The fact that Mauriac had contributed a moving foreword probably did not hurt the book's fortunes, for it was awarded the *Prix Littéraire de la Résistance* in 1947. Mauriac also wrote an introduction for *Pays de rigueur* [*Land of Hardship*] (Paris: Seuil, 1951) by Boris Bouïeff, a young friend who had been imprisoned by the Germans during the war. Sickly before his arrest, Bouïeff, thanks to his religious faith, was able not only to survive, but to care for others. In Bouïeff's experience Mauriac found yet further evidence not only of man's inhumanity to man, but also of the power to overcome it through union with Christ. He wrote a third foreword for *Un camp très ordinaire* [*A Quite Ordinary Camp*] (Paris: Minuit, 1957), a memoir written by Micheline Maurel. A *lycée* teacher in Lyon in 1941-42, she joined the Resistance in 1943 and was arrested as a security threat shortly thereafter. Her book told of her twenty-month incarceration in Germany. Mauriac's foreword might have helped the book to succeed, for it received the *Prix des Critiques* in 1957. This foreword is of special interest because it was written while Mauriac was helping Wiesel prepare the proofs of *La Nuit* for publication by the same publisher, *Les Éditions de Minuit*.³⁴

Mauriac Was the First Major Cultural Figure to Accuse Pius XII of “Silence”

We cannot be sure if Wiesel was familiar with the forewords discussed above. But there was another foreword by Mauriac that he almost certainly read, for it

³³ Harry James Cargas, *Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel* (N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1976), 89.

³⁴ Another important foreword that Mauriac wrote in these years introduced *Cinq Années de ma vie* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1962). This book was the “édition définitive” of Captain Alfred Dreyfus's 1901 autobiography. Although published only in 1962, when Wiesel was already established in New York, it showed Mauriac's ongoing commitment to Jewish causes. He seemed to want to make public penance for the anti-Dreyfus opinions held and expressed by his mother and siblings over the years.

introduced a book that indicted the Nazi regime for what we call today “the Holocaust:” Léon Poliakov’s *Bréviaire de la haine* [*Harvest of Hate*] (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1951). Mauriac’s foreword to this book would prove to be an additional factor in his favor when the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to him a year later. That Poliakov asked Mauriac to write the foreword to his book, and that the author agreed to do it, testifies once again to the prestige that Mauriac enjoyed within the Jewish community of France.

Bréviaire de la haine is essentially a rehash of the Nuremberg documents as presented in the Blue Set (containing the transcripts of the main trial and documents presented in evidence). What Poliakov did was to rearrange the various atrocity claims found therein and present them by theme and in chronological order. Poliakov gave a great deal of importance to the supposed “confession” of former SS officer Kurt Gerstein. Thus, thanks in no small part to Mauriac’s involvement, Poliakov became a historian of repute, while Mauriac earned another stripe on his sleeve as a friend of the Jews, and took a step up on the ladder that would lead to the Nobel Prize a year later. Yet the same nagging question that dogged Mauriac’s wartime *Le cahier noir* bedevils his foreword to *Bréviaire de la haine*: was Mauriac a friend of the Jewish organizations, or their puppet?

The title of Poliakov’s book was not chosen at random, for the word “breviary” refers to the book of scriptural readings that Catholic priests are enjoined to read each day. The provocative and scornful use of the word “bréviaire” by Poliakov contains a powerful dose of anti-Catholic venom, for it implies that the Catholic Church was the wellspring of Nazi-sponsored, anti-Jewish hatred. Poliakov purports to provide “readings” of his own that supposedly document German plans of extermination during the war. In Poliakov’s view, Catholics were heavily responsible for Jewish suffering during the war years because many of the principal Nazis had been baptized as Catholics. Poliakov overlooks the Nazi persecution of the Catholic Church, including the thousands of Catholic priests who died in the camps, for he had no interest in writing a balanced history. His chief concern was to defame the Catholic Church and to help launch the attack on Pope Pius XII as the man responsible for Jewish suffering during the war.

In support of Poliakov’s attack on the Pontiff, Mauriac, in his foreword, contrasts Pius’s behavior with that of the local clergy who, according to him, were more heroic and charitable. He writes:³⁵

³⁵ François Mauriac, foreword to Léon Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la haine* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1951), 63: “Mais ce bréviaire a été écrit pour nous aussi Français, dont l’antisémitisme traditionnel a survécu à ces excès d’horreur dans lesquels Vichy a eu sa timide et ignoble part – pour nous surtout, catholiques français, qui devons certes à l’héroïsme et à la charité de tant d’évêques, de prêtres et de religieux à l’égard des Juifs traqués, d’avoir sauvé notre honneur, mais qui n’avons pas eu la consolation d’entendre le successeur du Galiléen, Simon-Pierre, condamner clairement, nettement et non par des allusions diplomatiques, la mise en croix de ces innombrables ‘frères du Seigneur.’ Au vénérable cardinal Suhard qui a d’ailleurs tant fait dans l’ombre pour eux, je demandai un jour pendant l’occupation: ‘Eminence, ordonnez-nous de prier pour les Juifs [...]’, il

But this breviary has also been written for us Frenchmen, whose traditional anti-Semitism has survived all the horrors in which the Vichy government played its timid and shameful role. And it has been written especially for us, French Catholics, whose honor was preserved by the heroism and charity of so many bishops, priests and members of religious orders who protected Jews, but who never had the consolation of hearing the successor of the Galilean, Simon Peter; condemn clearly, openly and not by diplomatic allusions the crucifixion of innumerable "brothers of the Lord." One day during the Occupation, I asked the venerable Cardinal Suhard [of Paris], who did so much behind the scenes for the Jews, "Your Eminence, order us to pray [publicly] for the Jews [...at Notre Dame Cathedral]." He lifted his arms up to heaven: there can be no doubt the occupiers had irresistible means of bringing pressure to bear, and that the silence of the Pope and the hierarchy was in fact a horrible duty; they wanted to avoid even worse misfortunes. Nonetheless, the guilt for a crime of this size falls to a large extent upon those who did not cry out, whatever might have been the reasons for their silence.

How ironic it is that Mauriac, who knew enough not to mention the word "Jews" in his 1943 *Le cahier noir* lest his enemies dismiss him as a Jewish apologist, should reveal here that he had asked Cardinal Suhard to break the code of silence that he himself had observed in his book! Here he is also impugning Pius XII, who had followed the same pro-Allied protocol – and for the same reason – during the war years. Pathetically, Mauriac also tries to offer Cardinal Suhard as an example of heroism, yet the latter evaded responding to Mauriac's request to pray publicly for the Jews at Notre Dame. Instead, he raised his hands to heaven. He could not pray publicly for the Jews in his parish church, the seat of the Archbishop of Paris, for the same reason that Pius XII had been "silent" and that Mauriac had been "silent." Overt support of the Jews by a man who was supposedly neutral would have been tantamount to admitting that he too was a Jewish puppet, and Cardinal Suhard could not do that. Furthermore, there were instances when denunciations of German Jewish policy by Catholic clergy had led to reprisals, as when the Germans deported Jewish converts to Catholicism from the Netherlands after condemnation of Jewish deportations from the pulpits.

Elie Wiesel later declared, with characteristic magnanimity:³⁶

For many centuries the Christian defined himself by the suffering he imposed on the Jew. [...] Mauriac was sensitive to the problem. We became so close because of his recognition of Christian responsibility. He understood the part of

leva les bras au ciel: nul doute que l'occupant n'ait eu des moyens de pression irrésistibles, et que le silence du pape et de la hiérarchie n'ait été un affreux devoir; il s'agissait d'éviter de pires malheurs. Il reste qu'un crime de cette envergure retombe pour une part non médiocre sur tous les témoins qui n'ont pas crié et quelles qu'aient été les raisons de leur silence."

When the English translation of Poliakov's book was published by Syracuse University Press in 1954 under the title *Harvest of Hate*, Mauriac's foreword was replaced with a new one by Reinhold Niebuhr.

³⁶ Cargas, *Conversation*, 35.

the Vatican, and he was the first to come out against Pius XII. It wasn't Rolf Hochhuth, it was Mauriac.

Of course, in this instance Wiesel is correct, and his words clearly indicate familiarity with Mauriac's foreword to Poliakov's *Bréviaire de la haine*.

In writing this foreword in 1951, Mauriac provided cover and legitimacy for those extremists in the French Jewish community who wanted to stigmatize Pope Pius XII. He apparently gave no thought to how his words would be manipulated in the future, nor did he understand that he was entering into conspiracy with the Jewish organizations, the forerunners of today's Holocaust fundamentalists, that backed Poliakov. Yet, in attacking the Pontiff he was acting in a way that could bolster his candidacy for the Nobel Prize a year later. When he cashed his Nobel check in late 1952, he not only secured financial independence for his family, he also established a paradigm for later generations of ambitious Catholic intellectuals. Here the names of three such persons come to mind: the Rev. Robert Drinan, S. J.; Sr. Carol Rittner, RSM; and the former Paulist priest, James Carroll. All of them have advanced their careers by denying their religious heritage in order to cater to powerful Zionist Jewish interests.

Ironically, Mauriac's foreword for Poliakov in 1951 came back to haunt him in 1963. In that year, Mauriac's words about never having the consolation of hearing "the Galilean, Simon Peter, condemn clearly, openly and not by diplomatic allusions, the crucifixion of innumerable 'brothers of the Lord,'" were used to promote an anti-Catholic indictment of Pius, Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy*. Hochhuth and his producers excerpted the line and placed it in a prominent place in the program distributed to theatergoers. When Mauriac, who had not been informed in advance of this use of his words, found out about it, he was thunderstruck and terribly embarrassed. He must have come to a sudden realization that certain of his Jewish "friends" were now using his words in a context that he could not have imagined possible back in 1951. But if he had received help and support from European Jews when he was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1952, certain chickens were coming home to roost, and he had nothing to complain about. To add insult to injury, Mauriac's verbal assault on Pius XII still appears in the foreword to printed versions of Hochhuth's theater production.

Mauriac's Four Jewish Messiah Figures Prior to Meeting Wiesel

When Elie Wiesel burst into Mauriac's life in 1955, he fit neatly into Mauriac's philo-Semitic worldview. In fact, Mauriac's obsession over – and abusive relationship with – Wiesel, which would span the years 1955-1967, was not the first attachment he formed to a Jewish figure. At the top of his list was Jesus, whom he revered as a member of the Trinity and Son of God. Then there was Captain Alfred Dreyfus, whose guilt had been taken on faith in his right-wing family during his childhood. (Mauriac's mother, a traditional Cath-

olic, referred to the chamber pot that graced each bedroom as “le zola,” in memory of the journalist Emile Zola, who had defended Dreyfus.) Such was the political background from which Mauriac had come: contempt for Dreyfus as a German spy. But, as I have shown above, after his abrupt move to the left and his alliance with Jewish interests after 1936, Dreyfus became a hero to him.

The third Jewish figure to whom he developed a strong personal attachment was the converted Jew and Catholic priest Jean-Pierre Altermann. Of Russian-Jewish heritage, Altermann was seven years Mauriac’s junior. He had started out in life as a poet, painter and art critic before converting to Catholicism and studying for the priesthood. He was baptized at the age of 27 and, six years later, ordained a priest in 1925 at age 33. It was in part through Mauriac’s friendships with Jacques and Raïssa Maritain and with the lesser-known writer Charles du Bos that Altermann entered Mauriac’s life in the late 1920s. Altermann, who had been instrumental in converting du Bos to Catholicism about 1927, became Mauriac’s confessor on du Bos’s recommendation in 1929. At this time, Mauriac’s life was in turmoil. In his forties, married and the father of four children, he had been involved for the past few years in an adulterous homosexual relationship with a young Swiss diplomat whose identity remained a taboo subject for years. Jean Lacouture, for instance, in his highly detailed but conformist 1980 biography of Mauriac, dismisses the question completely.³⁷

Details about the personal crisis he had just been through are of little interest.

But thanks to the publication of the new Mauriac biography by Jean-Luc Barré, we know that this lover was Bernard Barbey, an extremely handsome man who was fifteen years Mauriac’s junior. A novelist as well as diplomat, he and his wife Andrée would remain closely tied to Mauriac until the latter’s death in 1970. Thus, it seems that both wives tolerated their husbands’ relationship for many years. In the late 1920s, however, Mauriac seems to have undergone a spiritual crisis over this relationship with Barbey, since it was putting a severe strain on his family life.

Altermann arrived on the scene just as Mauriac was writing the novel *Ce qui était perdu* [*That Which Was Lost*] (Paris: Grasset, 1930), in which he was trying to bring closure to the experience he had just been through. Incredibly, Altermann, as Mauriac’s confessor, read drafts of the book as it progressed and made suggestions for improvement. Thus, he not only combined his two vocations, to literature and to the priesthood, he also had a decisive influence on *Ce*

³⁷ Jean Lacouture, *François Mauriac* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 231: “Peu importe les détails de l’épreuve affective qu’il vient d’affronter.” Mauriac’s detractors would later hint that he had been a closet homosexual. Robert Brasillach, the novelist and columnist for the collaborationist newspaper *Je Suis Partout* during the Occupation, made reference to such rumors. Later, Roger Peyrefitte made the same accusation. Writing in a deliberately scandalous and exaggerated manner, he nonetheless encapsulated comments that Mauriac’s enemies liked to repeat about him. Peyrefitte’s “Lettre ouverte à François Mauriac” appeared in *Arts*, May 6, 1964, 1.

qui était perdu, the only one of Mauriac's novels that gives prominence to a homosexual character. By May 1930, Altermann had been du Bos's confessor for several years, but du Bos was growing tired of the man, and complained to Mauriac about him. Mauriac reminded him that they should not allow Altermann's domineering personality to become an obstacle to spiritual progress, but rather chalk up their problems with Altermann to differences in ethnic origin, education and personality. The period of deepest rapport and understanding between Mauriac and his confessor occurred while Mauriac was writing *Ce qui était perdu*, but from then on it was all downhill. Although the priest was invited to attend Mauriac's inauguration into the French Academy in 1933, he stayed away, for by this time their friendship was over.

Lacouture attributes their breakup to a number of factors, including the fact that religion and literature had been too intimately combined, with Altermann abusing his entree into Mauriac's life to trespass even further into his creative life. He fails to consider the possibility that there might have been a homosexual dimension to the relationship between the two men, and Jean-Luc Barré seems to agree with him. Nonetheless, Mauriac's relationship with Altermann, a Jewish man with a domineering personality, was one-sidedly abusive and self-destructive. This experience prefigures the nature of his later deep attachment to Wiesel. Mauriac would later write that Altermann was a holy man:³⁸

[...] *on the border-line between the two Testaments [...] the ideal priest for helping a lost sheep who was worn out and who did not put up a fight, asking only to be carried on strong shoulders, and letting himself be carried along. [...] But as he got his strength back, he felt more and more uncomfortable about being led along in this way [...]*

Mauriac would later use the same image to describe Wiesel, stating that, "like John the Baptist, he stands on the border between the two testaments."³⁹

Mauriac's Admiration for Pierre Mendès-France

In 1954, Mauriac was still conscious of the debt he owed to those Jewish friends who had presumably helped him win the Nobel Prize in 1952. Thus, in his "*Bloc-Notes*" newspaper columns during 1953 and early 1954, he made much of a young politician named Pierre Mendès-France. His obsession with the man offers an eerie echo of his earlier obsession with Altermann. As Jean Lacouture has written: "It's slowly that Pierre Mendès-France, deputy from the Eure [Department], enters Mauriac's field of vision,"⁴⁰ but by the time "PMF"

³⁸ Mauriac, *Œuvres autobiographiques*, 748: "[...] à la frontière des deux Testaments [...] le prêtre le mieux fait pour secourir une brebis exténuée qui ne se débat plus, qui ne demande plus qu'à être prise sur des épaules robustes et à s'abandonner. A mesure que les forces lui reviendront, elle souffrira plus malaisément d'être portée [...]"

³⁹ François Mauriac, *Bloc-Notes*, ed. Jean Touzot (Paris: Seuil, 1993), Vol. 3 (May 29, 1963), 362: "Elie Wiesel se tient sur les confins des deux testaments: c'est la race de Jean-Baptiste [...]"

⁴⁰ Lacouture, *Mauriac*, 542: "C'est lentement que Pierre Mendès-France, député de l'Eure,

came to power as prime minister in June 1954, Mauriac was beside himself. He wrote in his “*Bloc-Notes*” column as if “PMF” was nothing less than another expression of his long-awaited Jewish messiah. Although he belonged to the anticlerical Radical Party, he was acting in accordance “with our faith and our hope as Christians.”⁴¹ Mendès-France, who became prime minister on June 18, 1954, fourteen years to the day after de Gaulle’s historic plea to the French people from London to continue the battle against Germany, was in Mauriac’s opinion a Jew who brought Catholics and Jews together. When “PMF” was booted out after only eight months in office, Mauriac claimed that his fall was caused by the fact that he was too courageous and too honest, and compared him to Alfred Dreyfus, who had also been, in Mauriac’s view, courageous and innocent.

Wiesel would fit neatly into Mauriac’s worldview, for whom Jesus, Dreyfus, Altermann and Mendès-France all shared a common trait in their Jewishness. After getting to know Wiesel and hearing him talk, Mauriac would have no difficulty in comparing this foreigner from a mysterious background to Jesus himself. In fact, when he dedicated his book *Le fils de l’homme* (*The Son of Man*, 1958) to Wiesel, he called him a “crucified Jewish child.” Unlike Dreyfus and Mendès-France, who were born into prominent Jewish families that were highly acculturated and thoroughly French, Wiesel had been raised as a Hasid in a ghetto atmosphere in Eastern Europe. Although Wiesel spoke French, his speech was accented, and he had no university degree. Nonetheless, Mauriac would embrace him without hesitation.

entre dans le champ de vision de Mauriac.”

⁴¹ Mauriac, *Bloc-Notes*, Vol. 1, 118. “Pierre Mendès-France, tout radical qu’il est, a agi en Indochine, à Tunis et va agir demain au Maroc selon ce qu’exigent notre foi et notre espérance de chrétiens.”

Chapter II

Wiesel before Mauriac: Inherited Hatreds and Suspicions

The Myth of Wiesel's Idyllic Childhood

The Zionist media fuel the myth that Elie Wiesel is a moral authority because he survived “the Holocaust.”⁴² As *Time* put it in 1986, he is special not only because he survived to bear “witness to the century’s central catastrophe,” but also because his name is virtually synonymous with “the Holocaust,” “a term Wiesel brought into currency,” according to *Time*.⁴³ This hymn of praise arose from that influential pro-Zionist weekly as Wiesel’s career was at its zenith. He had just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He was now a living saint in a secular society.

This exalted status helps to explain why Jack Kolbert, his English-language authorized biographer, paints an idyllic picture of Wiesel’s childhood. If Wiesel is considered to be a saintly man today, the reasoning goes, his early life must have already given signs of his future sanctity. Kolbert, intent on delivering a work bordering on hagiography, wanted to show that the man’s sanctity and intelligence dated back to his ghetto childhood in Romania. Thus, he emphasizes Wiesel’s violin lessons, but studiously avoids mentioning his subject’s childhood mental problems and neurotic fears. He writes:⁴⁴

⁴² I shall argue below that “the Holocaust,” with its implications of a sacrificial offering and its generally accepted definition as the attempted extermination of European Jewry, resulting in some six million deaths, is far from describing the historical reality. Due to the prevalence of the term in this book, I have chosen to employ it without quotation marks or the skeptic’s “so-called” or “alleged.” The reader should bear in mind that my skepticism of the orthodox Holocaust narrative is implicit throughout.

⁴³ Richard Zoglin, Mitch Gelman, “Lives of Spirit and Dedication; The World Pays Tribute to Eleven Who Stirred Emotions and Laid Foundations; Peace: Elie Wiesel,” *Time*, October 27, 1986, 66f.

⁴⁴ Jack Kolbert, *The Worlds of Elie Wiesel* (Selinsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), 23.

Happy were the days of Wiesel's childhood. Growing up in a tightly knit family of loving parents and siblings was indeed a joyful period.

While Kolbert systematically omits the dark side of Wiesel's childhood, the great man's other authorized biographer, Philippe-Michel de Saint Cheron, who writes in French, is a bit more forthcoming.

There is very little objective documentation about the early years of Elie Wiesel's life. Most administrative records have either been lost or destroyed. Since Wiesel was still alive when the present study was written, various administrative organizations still denied researchers access to what they consider private records. Thus, if I wanted to learn about Wiesel's life before Auschwitz, I had to depend in large part on what he chose to reveal about himself. The primary sources for reconstructing these years are the two volumes of autobiography, *Tous les fleuves vont à la mer* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), and *...et la mer n'est pas remplie* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).⁴⁵ In addition, there are various articles, interviews and nonfiction books that contain autobiographical material. Wiesel also claimed that *Night* is an autobiography, and the opening pages of that work deal briefly with his life before being deported to Auschwitz.

As a boy, Wiesel was very frail, both physically and mentally. He was the third of four children, and the only boy. His parents owned a successful grocery store on the ground floor of their home. They had two Jewish employees at the store, and a Gentile maid named Maria. Wiesel's father was often absent from the store, but his wife and two older daughters routinely stood in for him. Wiesel himself hardly ever did. Instead, he spent his time away from studying the Talmud or praying in the synagogue in hanging out with the village eccentric, a man called Moshe the Beadle. According to Saint Cheron, Wiesel "preferred by far to spend his time with Moshe the Beadle, also called Moshe the Madman, listening to him tell his weird stories."⁴⁶ There is no evidence that Wiesel played with other children or that he had any friends, either boys or girls; he preferred to hear his bizarre adult acquaintance's tall tales. Moshe prefigures other "friendships" with older men in the years ahead, including his Talmud tutor in Sighet in 1943/44, when he was at the threshold of adolescence; the Jewish doctors at the Monowitz SS hospital in January 1945; a man calling himself "Shushani" in Paris after the war, and of course the closet homosexual François Mauriac.

Wiesel had a neurotic attachment to his mother, which helps to explain why he liked to stay in bed all day. He simply wanted to be close to her at all times. He later wrote:⁴⁷

⁴⁵ These works have been translated as Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1995), and Elie Wiesel, *And the Sea Is Never Full* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1999).

⁴⁶ Philippe-Michel de Saint Cheron, *Elie Wiesel: Pèlerin de la mémoire* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 21: "Il préférerait de loin passer ses rares temps libres avec Moché-le-Bedeau, appelé également Moshé-le-Fou, l'écouter raconter ses histoires un peu bizarres."

⁴⁷ Elie Wiesel, *Tous les fleuves vont à la mer* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 18f.: "Cela vous fait sourire, docteur Freud? J'étais attaché à ma mère. Trop? Il suffisait qu'elle me quitte, qu'elle aille aider mon père au magasin, pour que je me mette à trembler sous ma couverture.

Does that make you smile, Dr. Freud? I was attached to my mother. Too attached? All she had to do was leave me to go help my father in the store, and I started to shake under the covers. If I was separated from her, even for a few moments, I felt rejected, exiled.

His parents could not understand why their son was so strange. According to Saint Cheron, “he was such a skinny kid, and his health caused his parents so much concern that they took him to one doctor after another.”⁴⁸ Of particular worry to them was another one of his neurotic obsessions, the one about being “buried alive.”⁴⁹ To their credit, they realized that a fear like this was abnormal. According to Saint Cheron, Wiesel’s father, “when he wasn’t waiting on customers, was an avid reader, including the works of Freud.”⁵⁰ One can only speculate that he might have been reading Freud in an attempt to find out what made his son tick. Because of Wiesel’s mental problems, his parents took him to a number of psychiatrists for analysis:⁵¹

Childhood, for me, was sickness. I was often sick. My mother used to take me to Hasidic Jewish sages to have them bless me, and to consult eminent professors. That’s how I came to visit Budapest; doctors had referred me there to be examined by renowned specialists.

Clearly, Wiesel’s problem was psychological, not physical. As for his physical appearance, we have to imagine him “with his *payess*, the curly sidelocks that hang down in front of the ears of Orthodox Jews, his Hassidic hat, and his *talith qatane*, the little prayer shawl that the most-pious of Jews wear daily under their clothes.”⁵²

As a child, Wiesel admired his father. But since Shlomo Wiesel was devoted to helping others, Wiesel seldom saw him:⁵³

I used to see him only on the Sabbath. And the rest of the week he would go around taking people out of jail.

In a word, while Wiesel was zealously studying his religious texts, his father was a community activist. This physical and psychological distance between the two would be a real problem after the Germans deported them to forced labor. Since Wiesel and his father barely knew each other, the chasm between

Loin d’elle, ne fût-ce que le temps d’une brève absence, je me sentais rejeté, exilé.”

⁴⁸ Saint Cheron, *Elie Wiesel*, 25: “[...] il était un enfant maigre, qui consultait médecin après médecin, tant sa santé causait d’inquiétude à ses parents. “

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25: “Enterré vivant.”

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22: “[...] entre deux clients, il lisait beaucoup, jusqu’aux ouvrages de Freud.”

⁵¹ François Mitterrand, Elie Wiesel, *Mémoire à deux voix* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1995), 41: “L’enfance, c’est aussi pour moi la maladie. J’étais souvent malade. Ma mère m’emmenait chez les maîtres hassidiques pour leur bénédiction, et consulter des professeurs renommés. Si j’ai pu visiter Budapest, c’est parce que les médecins m’y envoyaient me faire examiner par les grands spécialistes.”

⁵² Saint Cheron, *Elie Wiesel*, 16: “[...] avec ses *payess*, ces mèches de cheveux qui pendent derrière les oreilles des juif orthodoxes, son chapeau hassidique et son *talith qatane*, son petit châle de prière que les plus pieux portent sous leur vêtements en permanence.”

⁵³ John Joseph Cardinal O’Connor and Elie Wiesel, *A Journey of Faith* (N.Y.: Fine, 1991), 48f.

them would widen in the stressful atmosphere of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Ironically, while Wiesel laments the fact that he hardly knew his father as a boy, later he became, like his father, a Jewish activist. While Elie's own son, Shlomo, was growing up, Wiesel was often absent:

As for my son, I can tell you one thing. Since he was born, I have become doubly involved in public affairs. Because I brought a life into the world, it's my duty to make the world better for him. (Journey, 83)

In any case, Wiesel has tended to present his father as a non-observant Jew who, philosophically, would be called a secular humanist today.

Ellen Fine, who taught courses in French literature at the City University of New York (CUNY) during the approximately seven years when Wiesel also worked there (1969-1976), struck up a friendship with him and became his first biographer. In her study of his literary career, she contrasts the secular humanism of Wiesel's father with his mother's religious beliefs and observance. His mother, she tells us, wanted him "to be both a rabbi and a Ph.D."⁵⁴ Fine, a pioneer in creating the Wiesel myth, tells us that, at the age of twelve, he wrote a long commentary on the Bible. His mother was understandably quite proud of this alleged accomplishment. Then, after the war, Wiesel is said to have made an astonishing discovery. According to Fine, who presumably relied on Wiesel for her information, his lengthy commentary, which had been written in 1941, was "found some twenty years later under a pile of discarded volumes in the only synagogue left in Sighet." (*Legacy*, 4) Fine accepts this tale at face value. Kolbert, who rivals Fine for sheer gullibility, also believes the story, and claims that it foreshadowed great things to come:⁵⁵

Decades following his departure from Sighet, when he returned, he was surprised to find among the hundreds of Jewish books that still remained in an otherwise destroyed community a copy of a book containing the same boyhood commentaries. This rediscovery confirmed his decision someday to become a professional writer.

Saint Cheron avoids any reference to the alleged discovery, thus telegraphing his doubts about the "commentary."

Wiesel himself considerably downsized his claim to youthful brilliance in the first volume of his autobiography. Of his discovery at the former synagogue, he wrote:⁵⁶

I wanted to see the synagogues again. Most were closed. In one I stumbled upon hundreds of holy books covered with dust. The authorities had taken them

⁵⁴ Ellen Fine, *Legacy of Night* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 4.

⁵⁵ Kolbert, *Worlds*, 22.

⁵⁶ Wiesel, *Tous les fleuves*, 477: "Je tiens à revoir les synagogues. La plupart sont fermées. Dans l'une, je bute sur des centaines d'ouvrages sacrés qui traînent dans la poussière: les autorités les ont ramassés dans les maisons abandonnées et déposés ici. Fiévreusement, je me mets à fouiller et, bien entendu, je découvre quelques livres qui m'appartenaient. Je fouille encore, et encore. Dans un livre de commentaires de la Bible, je tombe sur des pages jaunies, flétries: je les avais écrites à l'âge de treize-quatorze ans. Mon commentaire des commentaires. Ecriture maladroitte, pensées confuses [...]."

from abandoned homes and stored them here. In a frenzy, I began to look through them, and of course I discovered a few that had belonged to me. I kept on searching, and then searched some more. In a book of commentaries on the Bible, I stumbled upon yellowed and withered sheets of paper. I had written them at the age of thirteen or fourteen. It was my commentary on other commentaries. The writing style was clumsy, the thoughts confused.

Finally, in his interview book with François Mitterrand, *Mémoire à deux voix*, Wiesel seems to express remorse about the fibs he has told about himself over the years:⁵⁷

For me, it's a dialogue. A dialogue between the child in me and the adult that he has become. He [the child] weighs on my work. Sometimes I feel as though that child is with me, asking me questions, and judging me.

Wiesel's Divine Election Is Foretold

In addition to the tale of his youthful commentary on the Torah, Wiesel also concocted a tale according to which his divine selection as “a great man in Israel” had been revealed to his mother before her death. This story, repeated by Wiesel over the years, received its definitive form in the opening pages of *Tous les fleuves*. By then, Wiesel had been the High Priest of the “Holocaust,” the secular faith of the United States, since 1985, when President Ronald Reagan awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House. This high office would later be confirmed by Presidents Bush I, Clinton, Bush II and Obama. Perhaps his story of his designation as “a great man in Israel” is an effort to justify these undeserved honors.

According to the story, in 1936, when he was eight years old, a famous rabbi, the “Rabbi of Wizhnitz,” came to Sighet, and gave his blessing to those of the faithful who sought it. When Wiesel's mother presented little Elie to him, he was able, through his mystical powers, to divine her son's extraordinary calling to be a “great man in Israel.” When the rabbi prophesied Wiesel's future greatness to his mother, she began to cry, but little Elie, unaware of the content of the prophecy, did not understand her tears. Thus, for the last years of her life, from 1936 to her untimely death in the summer of 1944, she never told him the reason why she cried. After the war, Wiesel learned the Rabbi of Wizhnitz's secret from his cousin, Reb Anshel Feig, who was gravely ill in New York. Feig allegedly sent for Wiesel in order to have his blessing before he died. When Wiesel went to see him at the hospital, Feig told him the words from the rabbi that had made his mother cry:⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Mitterrand, Wiesel, *Mémoire*, 31f.: “Pour moi, il s'agit d'un dialogue. Un dialogue entre l'enfant en moi et l'adulte qu'il est devenu. Il pèse sur mon œuvre. Parfois je sens que l'enfant m'accompagne, m'interroge, et me juge.”

⁵⁸ Wiesel, *Tous les fleuves*, 22: “Sarah, sache que ton fils deviendra un *gadol b'Israël*, un grand homme en Israël, mais ni moi ni toi ne serons là pour le voir; c'est pourquoi je te le dis maintenant [...]”

Sarah, know that your son will become a gadol b'Israël, a great man in Israel, but neither you nor I will be there to see it; that's why I'm telling you now [...]

Feig then went on to explain why he had summoned Wiesel before dying:⁵⁹

If the Rabbi of Wizhnitz had so much faith in you, your blessing must count for something in heaven.

Ironically, by the mid-1990s, Wiesel's claim to be "a great man in Israel" was becoming increasingly less persuasive in that country. For while he could claim with some validity to be a "great man in the pages of the *New York Times*," or a "great man in the Zionist-tilted U.S. media," of all places on the planet it is Israel where Wiesel's self-promotion is the most harshly criticized. In fact, one cannot help but think of the term used by the Israeli philosopher and man of letters, Avishai Margalit, to describe Wiesel: "kitschman of genius."⁶⁰ The term seems a lot more precise than "great man in Israel."

The rabbi's alleged prediction of Wiesel's future greatness shares a number of points with the story of the presentation of Jesus to the prophet Simeon in the Gospel of Luke (2: 33-5). There, Simeon, who has been assured by God that he will not die before seeing the Messiah with his own eyes, recognizes Jesus immediately. As he tells Mary and Joseph of their son's future greatness, "the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him." Simeon is explicit about Jesus's calling: "You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and a sword will pierce your own heart too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare." In Wiesel's telling of his life, the Rabbi of Wizhnitz reminds us of Simeon, his mother plays the role assigned to Mary (and Joseph), while he, of course, is the future "great man in Israel." In his own personal mythology, as well as in the existential and absurdist religion of "the Holocaust," Wiesel takes the place of Jesus.

Wiesel Taught to Hate Catholicism as a Child

Wiesel's family and culture inculcated in him a dislike and distrust of Catholics. He developed these attitudes early in life. The Hasidic Jews among whom he was raised generally avoided contact with Gentiles who, according to Wiesel, were about 60 percent of the population in Sighet.⁶¹ Hasidic Jewish people, then and now, have considered non-Jews potential enemies, and this must be taken into consideration when evaluating Wiesel's fierce and determined hatred of Catholicism. This hatred sprang in part from the system of segregation enforced by the town's rabbis. To ensure that their flocks shunned Gentiles (the fear of intermarriage was even stronger than it is today), they

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 23: "Si le Rabbi de Wisznitz avait une telle foi en toi, ta bénédiction doit compter au ciel [...]"

⁶⁰ Avishai Margalit, "The Kitsch of Israel," *NYRB*, November 24, 1988, 23.

⁶¹ Elie Wiesel, "The Last Return," *Commentary*, March 1965, 44. In this essay, Wiesel estimated Sighet's Jewish population to have been 10,000 out of 25,000, or 40 percent.

filled their heads with terrifying ideas. Thus, Wiesel grew up in a Judeocentric world with attitudes to match. Years later, he wrote:⁶²

My dream back then? To live in a Jewish world, completely Jewish, a world where Christians would have scarcely any access. Before the war, I avoided everyone who came from the other side – that is, from Christianity. Priests frightened me. I avoided them; so as not to pass near them, I would cross the street. I dreaded all contact with them. I feared being kidnapped by them and baptized by force. I had heard so many rumors, so many stories of this type; I had the impression that I was always in danger.

In addition to his strange obsession about being buried alive, mentioned by Saint Cheron, and his fear of being kidnapped, alluded to here, Wiesel had a neurotic fear of the incense used in some Catholic religious ceremonies. Of course, as an Orthodox Jew he was strictly forbidden by Jewish law from entering a Catholic church, but Wiesel's obsession went a bit beyond what the law required. He later recalled:⁶³

I was really afraid of that smell. Every time I walked in front of a church and smelled incense, I crossed the street.

The rumors and stories with which the rabbis had filled young Wiesel's head worked quite well.

Wiesel has always claimed that his dislike of Catholics was reinforced by experiences at school:⁶⁴

At school I sat with Christian boys of my age, but we didn't speak to one another. At recess we played separated by an invisible wall. I never visited a Christian schoolmate in his home. We had nothing in common. Later, as an adolescent, I stayed away from them. I knew them to be capable of anything: of beating me; of humiliating me by pulling my payess or seizing my yarmulka (skull cap), without which I felt naked.

Wiesel nursed his anti-Catholic fears and feelings, even though he was not required to attend public school every day. According to Saint Cheron, (who calls Wiesel by the diminutive name for Elieser, "Lazar," in this part of his book):⁶⁵

Lazar went to school very rarely, as he himself has admitted, because his father bribed his teachers, as was often done in the shtetl. During the last month of the academic year, he went to school only to prepare for his exams, which he passed without difficulty.

⁶² Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory* (N.Y.: Summit, 1990), 138. This same recollection is also presented in Wiesel's essay "Recalling Swallowed-Up Worlds," *The Christian Century*, May 27, 1981, 609.

⁶³ Mitterrand, Wiesel, *Mémoire*, 40: "Moi, j'avais peur de cette odeur-là. Chaque fois que je passais devant une église et que je sentais l'encens, je changeais de trottoir."

⁶⁴ Wiesel, *Kingdom*, 138.

⁶⁵ Saint Cheron, *Elie Wiesel*, 20: "Lazar alla fort peu à l'école, comme il le confie lui-même, car son père 'soudoyait' les maîtres, comme cela se faisait couramment au Shtetl. Au cours du dernier mois de l'année, il y venait pour se préparer aux examens, qu'il réussissait sans difficultés."

In other words, Wiesel benefited from special consideration as a child and in an environment in which his Jewish family lived above the laws that theoretically covered everybody. According to Saint Cheron, this special treatment was permissible because of the superior training he had received at his yeshiva school: learning how to study and to learn quickly.⁶⁶ But in hindsight it clearly would have done this neurotic child good to interact with other youngsters, especially those from diverse backgrounds. Young Elie would have been far better off if he had had playmates. Instead, he spent too much time in the company of an adult, the eccentric Moshe, who would later be transformed into a character in *Night*.

Wiesel's Hatred of the Blessed Virgin

In 1991, Wiesel mentioned the Rabbi of Wizhnitz in *Journey of Faith*. There, however, instead of using the story to remind us of his own divine selection, he used it to impugn Catholic veneration of the Blessed Virgin. Recalling a trip back to Sighet, he described discovering that another family was living in his former home. They were Catholics. He stated:

When I was seven or eight, the Rabbi of Wizhnitz, who was a kind, compassionate man, came to my town. He sat me on his knee and examined me. That was the custom. I was the last child to be examined. I loved him with passion and fervor. I remember when he died. I took his picture and put it on the wall over my bed. Now [...] the nail was there, but not his picture! There was, I think, a picture of the Virgin Mary. And that hit me with excruciating pain. I left silently, and in a way I'm still there. (Journey, 58)

Wiesel later modified this evidence of anti-Catholic bigotry, with its implication that the picture of the Virgin Mary was at least as offensive as the removal of the rabbi's picture, replacing the picture of the Virgin Mary with a crucifix. In *Tous les fleuves* he wrote:⁶⁷

The nail is still there, and a large cross is hanging on it.

This gratuitous change from the Blessed Virgin to Christ on the cross also suggests that the story is a pure invention to begin with. It is also important to understand that Wiesel's intent in including this incident in *Journey of Faith* was to offend his naïve and gullible "friend" and co-author, Cardinal O'Connor. Such insults are an essential part of the "dialogue" that has been taking place between Catholics and Jews since Vatican II, with the self-hating "interlocutors" on the Catholic side apparently enjoying every minute of the abuse they receive.

In a 1995 piece in the weekly magazine *Parade*, Wiesel put yet another spin on his return visits to his house in Sighet.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20: "C'était là l'un des précieux apports de la yeshiva, que de savoir travailler et apprendre rapidement."

⁶⁷ Wiesel, *Tous les fleuves*, 95: "Le clou y est toujours. Une grosse croix y est suspendue."

⁶⁸ Elie Wiesel, "The Decision," *Parade*, August 27, 1995, 6.

Dear Maria. If other Christians had acted like her, the trains rolling toward the unknown would have been less crowded. If priests and pastors had raised their voices, if the Vatican had broken its silence, the enemy's hands would not have been so free.

We have no way of knowing whether this person actually existed or is simply another creation of Wiesel's imagination. I say this because this particular type, the good-hearted Catholic servant in a Jewish household, or the Catholic of humble background who befriends Jews, is a standard feature of the master narrative of the Jewish Holocaust story. This character is thrust forward as a means of criticizing, by innuendo, Pius XII and the various Catholic institutional elites who were "silent" or who reacted to the Holocaust as "bystanders." Maria should thus be seen as a stock character who is used in counterpoint to Pius XII and the institutional Church.

Finally, the bigoted atmosphere in which Wiesel was raised brings to mind the words from the famous Rogers and Hammerstein song about prejudice from *South Pacific*. In order to hate, "you have to be taught, carefully taught," and that was how the rabbis of Sighet formed the young Wiesel.

Wiesel's Relationships with Abusive Older Men

An interesting and very important subject ignored by the conformist academic critics who comment on Wiesel's life and work is the tendency he exhibited as a young man to gravitate to, and then be abused by, older men. In the opening pages of *La Nuit*, when he talks of Moshe, the local eccentric, he makes it clear that this man had been watching him as he prayed in the local synagogue, and in fact it was there that Moshe initiated contact with Wiesel and began their liaison. As Wiesel sat lamenting the destruction of the Jewish temple in bygone days, the older man kept eyeing him. One evening, he approached and asked: "Why do you cry while you pray?"⁶⁹ The two whiled away days and nights together, supposedly in conversation on the Kabbala:⁷⁰

We would talk this way almost every evening. We would stay in the synagogue after all the faithful had left, sitting there in the darkness by the light of a few flickering candles.

In his autobiography, he relates a story of an abusive relationship with a Kabbalist master named Zalmen. He states that two other boys, Yiddele and Sruli, also joined in this relationship with Zalmen, but fell ill, losing the ability to speak. Neither the local rabbis and doctors, nor specialists brought in from as far away as Sweden, could cure them. Despite the consequences of this bizarre and sick relationship, Wiesel continued to see this man, against his father's

⁶⁹ Elie Wiesel, *La Nuit* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1958), 17: "Pourquoi pleures-tu en priant?"

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 18: "Nous conversions ainsi presque tous les soirs. Nous restions dans la synagogue après que tous les fidèles l'avaient quittée, assis dans l'obscurité où vacillait encore la clarté de quelques bougies à demi consumées."

strong opposition (*Tous les fleuves*, 50-53). He was now completely under his master's control. When, in 1943, his family decided to forgo its annual summer vacation, Elie was unperturbed: his "Kabbala master" needed him:⁷¹

Other families left on vacation, but I was content to stay at home. My Master needed me. [...] I stayed late at his house, and we stayed up all night. [...] I felt a terrible force pulling me, making me fall off one cliff, then another. [...] I awoke in a sweat, breathless. I was in a state of delirium and didn't know when I was dreaming or when I was lucid. I had lost touch with who and where I was. Seated on the floor and banging his head against the wall, my Master seemed desperate; his sobbing shook his whole body. I felt as if madness was overtaking the two of us. But I was determined to continue our quest, whatever the cost.

This relationship with Zalmen foreshadows Wiesel's later strange liaison with a man called "Shushani."

It is unclear when Wiesel's relationship with Shushani actually began, but it seems to have lasted for two or three years, ending in 1948. Much as he had been picked out by Moshe back in Sighet, he was picked up by Shushani. The event occurred on a commuter train returning from Paris to the town where Wiesel lived with other refugee children. Thus began a perverse relationship in which Wiesel would prove to be no match for his abuser. In 1985, as he was becoming our Holocaust High Priest, he put the following spin on this early relationship:⁷²

For three years, in Paris, I was his disciple. Alongside of him, I learned much concerning the perils of reason and language, concerning the ecstasies of the wise man and madman, concerning the mysterious evolution of a thought through the centuries.

If, as Wiesel claims, he was later able to "study at the Sorbonne," it was not because of his non-existent secondary school training, but because of Shushani:⁷³

Also, my teacher after the tempest, in the postwar years, was Mordecai Shushani. [...] he was the man who made me become what I am, who left an imprint on my thought, on my feelings, on my language. I took him as a prototype for many of my messengers, for many of my teachers, in many of my tales. [...]

⁷¹ Wiesel, *Tous les fleuves*, 56: "D'autres familles partaient en villégiature mais, moi, j'étais content de rester à la maison [...] Mon Maître avait besoin de moi [...] je m'attardai chez mon Maître et nous veillâmes toute la nuit [...] je sentis qu'une force terrible m'attirait, me faisait tomber dans un précipice, puis dans un autre [...] je me réveillai en sueur, hors d'haleine. Je délirais, je ne savais plus quand je rêvais ou quand j'étais lucide. Je ne savais même plus qui ni où j'étais. Assis par terre, cognant sa tête contre un mur, mon Maître me sembla désespéré: des sanglots secouaient tout son corps. Je sentis alors que la folie nous guettait. Mais j'étais déterminé à poursuivre notre quête, coûte que coûte."

⁷² Irving Abrahamson, *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel* (N.Y.: Holocaust Library, 1985), Vol. 1, 27.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 134.

he taught me philosophy. [...] He [...] prepared me for the Sorbonne. Whatever I knew, I got from him.

A decade later, while writing his autobiography, Wiesel was more honest about this abusive relationship. He reveals that Shushani would force him to state that he hadn't learned anything yet, while demanding that he beg for further instruction. But what was the real subject being taught? (*Tous les fleuves*, 154) One day, his abuser, as a pleasant surprise after all his previous maltreatment, gave him a special present: he decided to learn the Hungarian language in a mere two weeks, so they could speak in Wiesel's native language from time to time! (*Tous les fleuves*, 155) Wiesel, of course, expects his reader to believe this nonsense. Yet, two weeks or not, this is a classic scenario of manipulation, in which the dominating abuser turns suddenly "nice." Wiesel admits the extent to which he was dominated:⁷⁴

I couldn't and I didn't want to break with Shushani.

Shushani constantly played mind games directed at Wiesel, who described the process this way:⁷⁵

He would disappear, then come back again. Then there were his mood swings and temper tantrums, whether feigned or real.

Their relationship ended on a sour note in 1948, when Shushani dumped him and disappeared. They supposedly met again in Boston in the early 1960s. As he, Wiesel, was about to give a lecture there – Shushani magically materialized out of nowhere and would not let him speak. Seizing the microphone, Shushani cried out:⁷⁶

But I know who he [Wiesel] is. A faker, that's who he is. I read an article he once wrote in a Yiddish newspaper in Paris. And he misquoted the Midrash. Anyone who misquotes the sources has no right to speak in public!

Needless to say, neither of Wiesel's authorized biographers, Kolbert or Saint Cheron, bothers to inquire into this strange relationship. Both prefer to play dumb, mentioning Shushani only in passing. Their reticence hints that Wiesel's relationship with this man has become a taboo subject too hot to touch.

It should be noted, however, that Wiesel learned, as a victim of abuse at the hands of Shushani, how to apply abuse to others as needed. An excellent example of such behavior occurred when, upon first meeting François Mauriac at his home in one of the swankiest neighborhoods in Paris, he got up and

⁷⁴ Wiesel, *Tous les fleuves*, 157: "Mais je ne pouvais ni ne voulais me détacher de Shushani."

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 159: "Ses disparitions, ses réapparitions, ses changements d'humeur, ses accès de colère, feints ou sincères."

⁷⁶ Elie Wiesel, *One Generation After* (N.Y.: Random House, 1970), 122. This book is supposedly a "translation" of Wiesel's volume of essays, published a few months earlier, entitled *Entre deux soleils* [Between Two Suns] (Paris: Seuil, 1970). In reality, however, it contains only several chapters from the French book. The chapter in which the present quote is found, entitled "The Death of My Teacher," has no corresponding equivalent in the French volume.

stormed out on his host for no apparent reason, as described below in Chapter III. This theatrical and manipulative gesture, which was a flagrant abuse of the manners practiced and expected in Mauriac's very much upper-bourgeois French social milieu, was abusive in both form and content. Wiesel's deliberate abuse of Mauriac's generous offer of hospitality apparently convinced his host that he had somehow, unintentionally, said or done something of an "anti-Semitic" nature. Since such an act would be severely frowned upon in Mauriac's social sphere, he followed Wiesel down the hall and begged him to come back into his apartment.

Learning French in Paris

According to Wiesel, the four hundred Jewish children who were sent from Buchenwald to France were divided into two groups: one religious and the other secular. He belonged to the religious group, consisting of about one hundred children. Illustration 2 shown here on p. 49 shows some of these boys; this photo and the accompanying caption come from the website of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). The caption claims that Wiesel is pictured, but does not identify him. Wiesel began his studies in the town of Ambloy (Loir et Cher), and continued them at Taverny (Val d'Oise), a bit closer to Paris. Wiesel had continued to study the Talmud while at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, although the circumstances hardly lent themselves to such work. There exists no evidence to prove that Wiesel ever attended public schools in France or obtained a French *baccalauréat*, the secondary-school graduation diploma, which is needed to enter the university system. The mystery surrounding the matter of his education as an adolescent, like that regarding his early sexual experiences, are taboo subjects that he passes over in complete "silence," and that friendly interviewers know is off limits.⁷⁷ Thus, it should come as no surprise that "Professor Wiesel," as Cardinal O'Connor obsequiously addressed him in *Journey of Faith*, has not a word to say about his non-existent secondary-school studies in his two-volume autobiography.

Yet Wiesel would have us believe that he studied at the Sorbonne.⁷⁸

I went on studying French – mainly to absorb the language – and I entered the Sorbonne to study literature, psychology, philosophy, psychiatry – in a very autodidactic manner. All I wanted was to study.

The trick word here is "autodidactic." Wiesel might have attended a public lecture or two, but he never enrolled in a degree program. Nonetheless, his hagiographer, the irrepressible Jack Kolbert, proclaims naively:⁷⁹

⁷⁷ The prolix Wiesel has made a career of denouncing Gentiles' "silence," but is himself silent all too often about matters relating to various contradictory aspects of his published work and official biography. Another subject of silence concerns Jewish responsibility for the ongoing injustices committed against the Palestinians.

⁷⁸ Cargas, *Conversation*, 79.

⁷⁹ Kolbert, *Worlds*, 26.



Illustration 2: Group portrait of Jewish displaced youth at the OSE (Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants) home for Orthodox Jewish children in Ambloy. Elie Wiesel is said to be among those pictured. Ambloy, France, 1945. (USHMM photo #28147)

So proficient did he become that between 1948 and 1951 he felt comfortable enough with the language that he could enroll and study at the University of Paris's liberal arts program at the celebrated Sorbonne.

Despite Wiesel's claim that he entered the Sorbonne, and Kolbert's assertion that he enrolled "in the liberal arts program at the celebrated Sorbonne," there is no record that Wiesel ever entered a degree program at the Sorbonne, much less received a degree. Yet Kolbert wants us to believe that Wiesel advanced to at least the point where he could write a doctoral dissertation.

Ellen Fine, in her generally uncritical and laudatory book on Wiesel, also misleads her readers about Wiesel's education. She tells us that "a young French philosopher, François Wahl, helped him to learn French by introducing him to the great classical authors, beginning with Racine. Wiesel learned the language by listening in silence" (*Legacy*, x). Pious nonsense, of course, but it gets worse. Fine then claims that Wiesel embarked upon a plan of university study, but she is evasive, indeed totally silent, about dates, courses, programs and professors. Thus, she relates that "he took courses at the Sorbonne in philosophy and literature and, although he never officially completed his studies, he wrote a long dissertation on comparative asceticism" (5f.). In her narrative, Wiesel emerges as a hard-working student enrolled in a degree program at the university, not merely someone who hung out on the fringes in an "autodidactic manner." As for the "long dissertation," Fine identifies neither the title of the thesis nor its director. One wonders, also in vain, which members of the Sorbonne faculty were on his dissertation committee. Unfortunately, Fine does

not produce the name of even one former professor who is able to attest to having worked with the future Nobel laureate. Furthermore, it does not seem to have dawned on Fine that the writing of a thesis is the last obstacle in the academic steeplechase. It comes only after one has passed the preliminary hurdles, *i.e.*, course requirements and general exams. When did Wiesel take these exams, and what results were obtained? Is there any record of Wiesel ever having been a student at the Sorbonne? Has Fine been able to locate former friends, classmates or professors from these years? These questions all beg for answers, but Fine offers none.

With regard to the enigmatic François Wahl, about whom Fine furnished no details other than that he was a “young French philosopher,” Wiesel claims in *Tous les fleuves* that the refugee organization in whose care he had been placed assigned the young Wahl to give him “private lessons” (“des cours particuliers,” 150), and that they took place at Wahl’s mother’s apartment (“nos leçons ont eu lieu chez sa mère,” 151). Did the other Jewish refugee children receive similar private tutoring services? It was Wahl, says Wiesel, who taught him to speak and read French, but the two broke up when Shushani reappeared in Wiesel’s life in 1947 (151). The unreliable Jack Kolbert, wanting to present Wiesel as a full-fledged French intellectual before beginning his career as a writer, completely transforms both Fine’s and Wiesel’s portrait of Wahl. For Kolbert, Wiesel already speaks French when he meets Wahl at the Sorbonne where he teaches. Thus, Wahl is not Wiesel’s language tutor, but his mentor in the field of philosophy. Bizarrely, Kolbert also changes Wahl’s first name to Gustave! He writes:⁸⁰

Elie Wiesel seems always to have been susceptible to influences by his greatest teachers. Throughout his life, he had [sic] generously acknowledged his indebtedness to them. One of these teachers was Gustave Wahl, a philosophy teacher in Paris.

Later in his book, Kolbert tells us more about their relationship. He writes:⁸¹

Once he had gained sufficient competency in French, the young man moved to Paris, where he could pursue a university degree at the Sorbonne. Selecting mainly courses in philosophy and literature, he fell under the spell of his philosophy teacher, Gustave Wahl, who seems to have exerted much influence on his intellectual formation.

Despite the attempts by Wiesel and his biographers to blur François Wahl’s true identity, we know that he was born in 1925, accepted his homosexuality at the age of fifteen, and was an active homosexual for the rest of his life.⁸² He also passed the very competitive civil service “*agrégation*” exam, which entitled him to be employed in the state education system as a “*professeur agré-*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 26f.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁸² Elizabeth Roudinesco, “François Wahl (éditeur et philosophe), est mort,” *Le Monde*, September 14, 2014. www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2014/09/15/mort-de-l-editeur-et-philosophe-francois-wahl_4487663_3382.html

gé,” a prestigious title. His father, arrested by the Germans and deported to Auschwitz, died there in 1943, which helps to explain his interest in helping Wiesel. Wahl was a member of the Zionist Stern Gang between 1945 and 1948. Later in life, Wahl lived as a couple with his partner of many years, the Cuban artist and writer Severo Sarduy, until the latter’s death in 1993.⁸³ Could Kolbert, whose book appeared nineteen years after Fine’s, have known more about François Wahl’s private life than Fine did? In fact, by 2001, Wahl was not only a well-known member of the Parisian intelligentsia, he was also an open and unapologetic homosexual. Did Kolbert change Wahl’s name to “Gustave” in order to throw readers off the track of the real François Wahl? Did he do so in order to protect Wiesel from any possible suspicions of homosexuality because of his youthful association with this openly homosexual man who had come out of the closet at the age of fifteen?

In *From the Kingdom of Memory*, Wiesel presents himself as a consummate loner during these years in Paris:

I practiced asceticism on my own: in my home, in my little world in Paris, where I cut myself off from the city and from life for weeks on end. I lived in a room much like a prison cell – large enough for only one. The street noises that reached me were muffled. My horizon became smaller and smaller: I looked only at the Seine; I no longer saw the sky mirrored in it. I drew away from people. No relationship, no liaison came to interrupt my solitude. I lived only in books, where my memory tried to rejoin a more immense and ordered memory. And the more I remembered, the more I felt excluded and alone. (142)

Yet Jack Kolbert presents a completely different and somewhat far-fetched view of the young man:

An almost instant convert to the Parisian lifestyle, Wiesel frequented the left-bank cafés, where as his favorite pastime he enjoyed playing chess. (Worlds, 181)

The neurotic loner has also claimed that during his “Sorbonne days” he held a two-year graduate-level internship in psychiatry at a Parisian teaching hospital. He told Brigitte-Fanny Cohen that he did this internship because he had always been interested in the problem of mental illness:⁸⁴

[...] the insane have always fascinated me. In Sighet there was an insane asylum, and I went there every Saturday to bring them food. After the war I reestablished contact with them: I was studying literature at the Sorbonne, and

⁸³ Alain Badiou, “François Wahl ou la vie dans la pensée,” *Le Monde*, September 16, 2014. www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2014/09/16/francois-wahl-ou-la-vie-dans-la-pensee-un-temoignage-d-alain-badiou_4488663_3382.html

⁸⁴ Brigitte-Fanny Cohen, *Elie Wiesel, qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1987), 63: “[...] les fous m’ont toujours fasciné. A Sighet, il y avait un asile de fous, et je m’y rendais tous les samedis pour leur porter de la nourriture. Après la guerre, à Paris, j’ai renoué avec eux; j’étudiais la littérature à la Sorbonne et j’avais choisi de préparer un certificat de psychothérapie. Pendant deux ans, tous les matins, je suivais des cours à l’hôpital Sainte-Anne. J’observais les malades.”

had decided to prepare a minor in psychotherapy. For two years, every morning, I took classes at the Hôpital Sainte-Anne and observed the patients.

His long-time friend, Jean Halpérin, also assures us that this is why Wiesel is so interested in mental illness:⁸⁵

It's important to realize that during his school years in Paris he spent two years studying psychiatry at Saint Anne Hospital in Paris.

Nowadays, of course, neither Wiesel, in his autobiography, nor his two official biographers make any mention of these alleged advanced studies in psychiatry; the claim is just another one of Wiesel's many tall tales. The only scenario that makes sense is that Wiesel, lacking any diploma or training in medicine, came in contact with the renowned psychiatric hospital as a patient, not a practitioner. Did the morose and solitary Wiesel, battling doubts about his sexual, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identity, go there for outpatient counseling? Is that the real connection?

Despite his lack of either a secondary-school diploma or a college degree, two major U.S. universities later gave Wiesel faculty appointments – appointments for which a Ph.D. degree is usually required. Since the early 1970s, he taught first at the City University of New York and later at Boston University. At the latter institution, he occupied his endowed chair until his death, even though he was unable to teach since June 2011, when he underwent open-heart surgery. It is possible that Wiesel invented the myth of his formal attendance at the Sorbonne and the internship at Saint Anne Hospital in order to justify his academic appointments, for which he is clearly unqualified.

Wiesel's Trip to India

Wiesel made a trip to India in January 1952, traveling by boat, and seems to have stayed there for several weeks.⁸⁶ This journey has now been deleted, more or less, from his life story and except for Downing, his commentators generally do not discuss it. Yet at one time he seemed to be pretending that the trip to India was linked to his advanced studies at the Sorbonne, for he claimed to have gone there as a student of philosophy, seeking to broaden his philosophical base and to write his “dissertation”:⁸⁷

Later I went to India, having in mind to write a dissertation on comparative asceticism: Jewish, Christian, Hindu. I had written a huge volume, some six hundred pages or so, which I'm afraid to open – I'm sure it's not good. One

⁸⁵ Jean Halpérin, “Itinéraire, paysages intérieurs et message,” in: David Banon *et al.*, *Présence d'Elie Wiesel* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1990), 29: “Il faut noter d'ailleurs, dans son itinéraire, pendant ses études à Paris, les deux années pendant lesquelles il fut étudiant en psychiatrie à l'Hôpital Sainte-Anne.”

⁸⁶ Frederick L. Downing, *Elie Wiesel: A Religious Biography* (Macon, Ga., Mercer University Press, 2008), 89.

⁸⁷ Cargas, *Conversation*, 79.

day I will and probably will have to rewrite it. I didn't complete my studies. I had to work as a journalist, and it was hard work.

The impression he gives here is that he had been an “ABD,” an “all but dissertation,” someone who had finished all the coursework and examinations for a doctorate from the Sorbonne, and had simply failed to complete his dissertation. Wiesel’s trip to India took place in 1952, and it enabled him to continue to work on learning English.⁸⁸ The trip was once touted as one of the major educational experiences of his life. In *From the Kingdom of Memory*, Wiesel expands somewhat on his statement above, which he had made to Harry Cargas some twenty years earlier. He tells us that in these years he was attracted to Eastern philosophy, but provides no dates or specifics.⁸⁹

Disgusted with the West, I turned toward the East. I was attracted by Hindu mysticism; I was interested in Sufism; I even began to explore the occult domains of marginal sects here and there in Europe.

Since then, however, the importance of his trip to India has been downsized, and he said very little about it in *Tous les fleuves*.

Zionist Newspaperman

Wiesel started out in life earning his living as a teacher in the Jewish community in Paris. Ellen Fine tells us that “he earned a living as a tutor in Yiddish, Hebrew, and the Bible” (*Legacy*, 5). In *A Jew Today*, Wiesel said:⁹⁰

Ten years of waiting, of intense study, of earning my keep as best I could: as choir director, camp counselor, tutor, translator. I obtained a scholarship from OSE, the children's aid organization that brought me to France. I taught the Bible and Talmud in Yiddish to children of the rich who understood only French; after all, I had to pay the rent. There were times when I had only two meals in a week. The war was over, but I continued to live with hunger. Then, thanks to a stroke of luck, a newspaper hired me as a contributor.

Wiesel began working as a journalist as early as 1947, when he was only nineteen years old. He was hired by the Zionist paper *Zion in Kanf*, a mouthpiece of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, which, led by Menachem Begin, carried out numerous terrorist attacks and several massacres in furtherance of its Jewish apartheid policies. He eventually came to be an editor of this Yiddish newspaper and “in the late forties, published articles five, six times a week.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Fine, *Legacy*, 6.

⁸⁹ Wiesel, *Kingdom*, 140-1.

⁹⁰ Wiesel, *Un juif aujourd'hui* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 26: “Je gagnais ma vie comme je pouvais; chef de chorale, moniteur de colonie de vacances, boursier de l'OSE, précepteur, répétiteur. J'enseignais la Bible et le Talmud, en yiddish, à des gosses de riches qui ne comprenaient que le français. Il me fallait bien payer le loyer. Quant aux repas, il m'arrivait de n'en prendre que deux par semaine. La guerre était finie, mais je continuais à souffrir de la faim. Puis le hasard voulut qu'un journal m'acceptât comme collaborateur.”

⁹¹ Wiesel, *One Generation*, 122.

His early association with this group confirms his commitment, from his youth on, to the quite narrow, parochial and ultimately racist worldview in which he had been raised.⁹² Ironically, he refers romantically – and approvingly – to this Zionist Jewish terror group as the “Palestinian Resistance movement.”⁹³ Yes, terrorism is deplorable if Palestinians engage in it, but morally uplifting if Jews do so.

The Ten-Year Vow of “Silence”

After the success of *La Nuit* paved the way for Wiesel’s gradual ascent to media celebrity, he began claiming that, right after the war, he had decided to write a book about his wartime experiences. At the same time, however, he claimed that, in order to make sure he told the story correctly, he had also imposed a ten-year vow of silence upon himself. With regard to this alleged ten-year vow of “silence,” the only one of Wiesel’s commentators to have probed the subject with any degree of skepticism has been Brigitte-Fanny Cohen. In her book-length interview of Wiesel in 1987, she asked why he needed ten years, and he answered:⁹⁴

I felt that I needed ten years of preparation. Afterwards, it was time to leave the period of silence behind.

Dissatisfied with this response, she raised the question again, and Wiesel retreated into existentialist jargon to formulate his response:⁹⁵

[...] I had to act in such a way that silence would remain in the spoken word; silence and speech were not to be in opposition. And that takes time: I had to be sure that I could say what I had to say and especially that I would know how to say it.

What Wiesel was really saying here was that, before publishing his book, he wanted to be sure that any alleged German atrocities purportedly proven at Nuremberg were still a part of the official history. He also wanted to write something original, and not simply repeat what other survivors had already written on the topic of Auschwitz:⁹⁶

As soon as the Other appears,^[97] he must out of necessity influence our own project. And that frightened me. That’s why I gave myself ten years of silence.

⁹² Wiesel, *Tous les fleuves*, 194-5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 194: “mouvement palestinien de Résistance.”

⁹⁴ B.F. Cohen, *Qui êtes-vous*, 41: “Je sentais que j’avais besoin de dix ans de préparation. Ensuite, il a fallu sortir de l’ère du silence.”

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44: “En même temps, il fallait faire en sorte que le silence demeure dans le verbe; la parole et le silence ne devaient pas s’opposer l’une à l’autre. Et cela exige du temps: je devais être sûr que je pourrais dire ce que j’avais à dire, et surtout que je saurais le dire.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41: “Dès que l’Autre apparaît, il influe nécessairement sur notre projet. Et cela me faisait peur. Voilà pourquoi je me suis accordé dix ans de silence.”

⁹⁷ Probably a reference to Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous phrase: “L’enfer, c’est les autres,” meaning “Hell, this is other people.” Hence, for Wiesel, if someone else (l’autre) were to publish a work dealing with the Holocaust before his work in progress (notre projet) ap-

He also claimed that he waited ten years “because the Number Ten is a biblical number.”⁹⁸

peared, it would in some way or other influence what he would or could say in his book. Since that possibility frightened him, he let ten years go by before publishing his book.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: “Et aussi parce que le chiffre dix est un chiffre biblique.”

