NIGHT

DAWN

HE ACCIDENT

THE ELIE WIESEL TRILOGY

The Night Trilogy

by ELIE WIESEL

Night
Dawn
The Accident
The Town Beyond the Wall
The Gates of the Forest
The Jews of Silence
Legends of Our Time
A Beggar in Jerusalem
One Generation After
Souls on Fire
The Oath
Animaamin
Zalmen, or The Madness of God
Messengers of God
A Jew Today
Four Hasidic Masters
The Trial of God
The Testament
Five Biblical Portraits
Somewhere a Master
The Fifth Son

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HILL AND WANG NEW YORK

A DIVISION OF FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

Printed in the United States of America
This paperback edition first published, 1987
Published in Canada by HarperCollins*CanadaLtd*
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Wiesel, Elie.
The night trilogy.
Contents: Night—Dawn—The accident.
1. Wiesel, Elie—Translations, English.
2. Authors, French—20th century—Biography.
3. Holocaust, Jewish, 1939–1945. 4. World War,
1939–1945—Personal narratives, Jewish. I. Title.
PQ2683.I32Z467 1987 843'.914 87-17681
Fifteenth printing, 1997

Introduction

BY ELIE WIESEL

Written between 1955 and 1960, these three narratives were created separately. Though the first is a testimony, the other two serve only as commentaries. However, they are all written in the first person. In "Night," it is the "I" who speaks; in the other two, it is the "I" who listens and questions.

These stories remain very close to me. Not only the first one, which for obvious reasons lives deeply in all that I have written and in all that I am going to write. The others too. The themes of "Dawn" and "The Accident" seem to be actually more topical now than at the time of their publication. I speak of society's attraction to violence on one hand and the temptation of suicide on the other. How can we explain the hate that burns in so many homes? How can we understand the

despair that pushes so many young people to suicide if not in the context of the Event? All roads lead us back there. Defying all analogies, Auschwitz institutes itself as a point of reference.

Because Auschwitz symbolizes the culmination of violence, hatred, and death, it is our duty to fight violence, hatred, and death: this is the theme of "Dawn."

Because Auschwitz deprives us of hope and love to the point of making us lose the desire to live, we must affirm hope and love in the name of life itself which will carry us through: that is the call which is echoed within "The Accident."

If I had to rewrite these three books today, I would not change a single word.

Night

Foreword by FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

Translated from the French
by STELLA RODWAY

In memory of
my parents and of my little sister,
Tzipora

Foreword

BY FRANCOIS MAURIAC

Foreign journalists often come to see me. I dread their visits, being torn between a desire to reveal everything in my mind and a fear of putting weapons into the hands of an interviewer when I know nothing about his own attitude toward France. I am always careful during encounters of this kind.

That morning, the young Israeli who came to interview me for a Tel Aviv paper immediately won my sympathy, and our conversation very quickly took a personal turn. It led me to recall memories of the Occupation. It is not always the events we have been directly involved in that affect us the most. I confided to my young visitor that nothing I had seen during those somber years had left so deep a mark upon me as those trainloads of Jewish children standing at Austerlitz station. Yet I did not even see them myself! My wife described them to me, her voice still filled with horror. At that time we knew

nothing of Nazi methods of extermination. And who could have imagined them! Yet the way these lambs had been torn from their mothers in itself exceeded anything we had so far thought possible. I believe that on that day I touched for the first time upon the mystery of iniquity whose revelation was to mark the end of one era and the beginning of another. The dream which Western man conceived in the eighteenth century, whose dawn he thought he saw in 1789, and which, until August 2, 1914, had grown stronger with the progress of enlightenment and the discoveries of science—this dream vanished finally for me before those trainloads of little children. And yet I was still thousands of miles away from thinking that they were to be fuel for the gas chamber and the crematory.

This, then, was what I had to tell the young journalist. And when I said, with a sigh, "How often I've thought about those children!" he replied, "I was one of them." He was one of them. He had seen his mother, a beloved little sister, and all his family except his father disappear into an oven fed with living creatures. As for his father, the child was forced to be a spectator day after day to his martyrdom, his agony, and his death. And such a death! The circumstances of it are related in this book, and I will leave the discovery of them and of the miracle by which the child himself escaped to its readers, who should be as numerous as those of The Diary of Anne Frank.

What I maintain is that this personal record, coming after so many others and describing an outrage about which we might imagine we already know all that it is possible to know, is nevertheless different, distinct, unique. The fate of the Jews of the little Transylvanian town called Sighet, their blindness in the face of a destiny from which they would still have had time to flee; the inconceivable passivity with which

they gave themselves up to it, deaf to the warnings and pleas of a witness who had himself escaped the massacre, and who brought them news of what he had seen with his own eyes; their refusal to believe him, taking him for a madman—these circumstances, it seems to me, would in themselves be sufficient to inspire a book to which no other could be compared.

It is, however, another aspect of this extraordinary book which has engaged me most deeply. The child who tells us his story here was one of God's elect. From the time when his conscience first awoke, he had lived only for God and had been reared on the Talmud, aspiring to initiation into the cabbala, dedicated to the Eternal. Have we ever thought about the consequence of a horror that, though less apparent, less striking than the other outrages, is yet the worst of all to those of us who have faith: the death of God in the soul of a child who suddenly discovers absolute evil?

Let us try to imagine what passed within him while his eyes watched the coils of black smoke unfurling in the sky, from the oven where his little sister and his mother were going to be thrown with thousands of others: "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my Faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never."

It was then that I understood what had first drawn me to

the young Israeli: that look, as of a Lazarus risen from the dead, yet still a prisoner within the grim confines where he had strayed, stumbling among the shameful corpses. For him, Nietzsche's cry expressed an almost physical reality: God is dead, the God of love, of gentleness, of comfort, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, has vanished forevermore, beneath the gaze of this child, in the smoke of a human holocaust exacted by Race, the most voracious of all idols. And how many pious Jews have experienced this death! On that day, horrible even among those days of horror, when the child watched the hanging (yes!) of another child, who, he tells us, had the face of a sad angel, he heard someone behind him groan: " 'Where is God? Where is He? Where can He be now?' and a voice within me answered: 'Where? Here He is—He has been hanged here, on these gallows.' "

On the last day of the Jewish year, the child was present at the solemn ceremony of Rosh Hashanah. He heard thousands of these slaves cry with one voice: "Blessed be the name of the Eternal." Not so long before, he too would have prostrated himself, and with such adoration, such awe, such love! But on this day he did not kneel. The human creature, outraged and humiliated beyond all that heart and spirit can conceive of, defied a divinity who was blind and deaf. "That day, I had ceased to plead. I was no longer capable of lamentation. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, and God the accused. My eyes were open and I was alone—terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy. I had ceased to be anything but ashes, yet I felt myself to be stronger than the Almighty, to whom my life had been tied for so long. I stood amid that praying congregation, observing it like a stranger."

And I, who believe that God is love, what answer could I

give my young questioner, whose dark eyes still held the reflection of that angelic sadness which had appeared one day upon the face of the hanged child? What did I say to him? Did I speak of that other Israeli, his brother, who may have resembled him—the Crucified, whose Cross has conquered the world? Did I affirm that the stumbling block to his faith was the cornerstone of mine, and that the conformity between the Cross and the suffering of men was in my eyes the key to that impenetrable mystery whereon the faith of his childhood had perished? Zion, however, has risen up again from the crematories and the charnel houses. The Jewish nation has been resurrected from among its thousands of dead. It is through them that it lives again. We do not know the worth of one single drop of blood, one single tear. All is grace. If the Eternal is the Eternal, the last word for each one of us belongs to Him. This is what I should have told this Jewish child. But I could only embrace him, weeping.

They called him Moché the Beadle, as though he had never had a surname in his life. He was a man of all work at a Hasidic synagogue. The Jews of Sighet—that little town in Transylvania where I spent my childhood—were very fond of him. He was very poor and lived humbly. Generally my fellow townspeople, though they would help the poor, were not particularly fond of them. Moché the Beadle was the exception. Nobody ever felt embarrassed by him. Nobody ever felt encumbered by his presence. He was a past master in the art of making himself insignificant, of seeming invisible.

Physically he was as awkward as a clown. He made people smile, with his waiflike timidity. I loved his great, dreaming eyes, their gaze lost in the distance. He spoke little. He used to sing, or, rather, to chant. Such snatches as you could hear told of the suffering of the divinity, of the Exile of Providence, who, according to the cabbala, awaits his deliverance in that of man.

I got to know him toward the end of 1941. I was twelve. I believed profoundly. During the day I studied the Talmud, and at night I ran to the synagogue to weep over the destruction of the Temple.

One day I asked my father to find me a master to guide me in my studies of the cabbala.

"You're too young for that. Maimonides said it was only at thirty that one had the right to venture into the perilous world of mysticism. You must first study the basic subjects within your own understanding."

My father was a cultured, rather unsentimental man. There was never any display of emotion, even at home. He was more concerned with others than with his own family. The Jewish community in Sighet held him in the greatest esteem. They often used to consult him about public matters and even about private ones. There were four of us children: Hilda, the eldest; then Béa; I was the third, and the only son; the baby of the family was Tzipora.

My parents ran a shop. Hilda and Béa helped them with the work. As for me, they said my place was at school.

"There aren't any cabbalists at Sighet," my father would repeat.

He wanted to drive the notion out of my head. But it was in vain. I found a master for myself, Moché the Beadle.

He had noticed me one day at dusk, when I was praying.

"Why do you weep when you pray?" he asked me, as though he had known me a long time.

"I don't know why," I answered, greatly disturbed.

The question had never entered my head. I wept because—because of something inside me that felt the need for tears. That was all I knew.

"Why do you pray?" he asked me, after a moment.

Why did I pray? A strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?

"I don't know why," I said, even more distrubed and ill at ease. "I don't know why."

After that day I saw him often. He explained to me