

Holocaust: nazi germany and karl

[People](#), [Adolf Hitler](#)



The delineation of human life is perceiving existence through resolute contrasts. The difference between day and night is defined by an absolute line of division. For the Jewish culture in the twentieth century, the dissimilarity between life and death is bisected by a definitive line - the Holocaust. Accounts of life during the genocide of the Jewish culture emerged from within the considerable array of Holocaust survivors, among of which are Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower*. Both accounts of the Holocaust diverge in the main concepts in each work; Wiesel and Wiesenthal focus on different aspects of their survivals. Aside from the themes, various aspects, including perception, structure, organization, and flow of arguments in each work, also contrast from one another. Although both *Night* and *The Sunflower* are recollections of the persistence of life during the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel and Simon Wiesenthal focus on different aspects of their existence during the atrocity in their corresponding works. Elie Wiesel, winner of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize, wrote *Night* with the notion for society to advance its understanding of the Holocaust. The underlying theme of *Night* is faith. Elie Wiesel, for the majority of this work, concerns the faith and survival of his father, Chlomo Wiesel. The concept of survival intertwines with faith, as survival is brought upon Elie's faith in his father. Both Elie and Chlomo are affected in the same manner as their Jewish society. The self-proclaimed superman race of the German Nazis suppress and ultimately decimate the Jewish society of its time. Elie and Chlomo, alongside their Jewish community, were regarded as subhumans in a world supposedly fit for the Nazi conception. The oppression of Elie and Chlomo begins in 1944, when the Germans constrain the Jews of Sighet into two

ghettos. During the time of Nazi supremacy, Elie and Chlomo are forced to travel to various concentration camps, including Birkenau, Auschwitz, and Buchenwald. The determining concern of survival confronts both Elie and Chlomo throughout Night. The concept of survival is illustrated by the complications brought upon Elie and Chlomo. Elie and Chlomo believe they could only survive the concentration camps with one another; the father-and-son link was held together for the survival of each other. One complication in particular, was the instance when the SS officers separate Chlomo from Elie during a selection at Gleiwitz, as it was "[t]he weak, to the left; those who could walk well, to the right. My father was sent to the left" (Wiesel 91). Elie, fearing separation from his father, tries to overcome this problem by running after him. However, with several SS officers running toward Elie in order to constrain him, " many people from the left were able to come back to the right — and among them, my father and myself" (Wiesel 91). Elie's act of improvisation allowed him to remain alongside his father. The raw act of survival itself confronted both Elie and Chlomo several times in Night. At one point during the march to Gleiwitz, the mass was allowed to rest. However, if the victims were not ready to form their ranks, the SS officers would shoot the resting bodies to death. To overcome this complication for survival, Chlomo decides that Elie should sleep, while Chlomo would awaken him when ranks were to be formed. Elie refused, while "[his] father ... was gently dozing. ... [He] could not see his eyes" (Wiesel 85). Elie, attentive during this time, was able to awaken his father in order to form ranks. The tactic to watch his father sleep allowed both victims to form ranks upon the SS officers' commands; thus, Elie and Chlomo overcame their

difficulty of sleep and death. The concept of survival advances Elie Wiesel's theme of Night — faith. The process of surviving alongside his father allows Elie to bury faith in his very father's existence. The most significant event in Night is when Elie injects faith into his father, even though he renounces his faith in God. During his first night at Birkenau, Elie states, " 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 forgot those moments which murdered my God ..." (32). However, while resting during the march to Gleiwitz, Elie remembers Rabbi Eliahou and his son. During the run towards Gleiwitz, the son advances quicker in order to rid himself of his father, who was considered to be a burden. After contemplation on this subject, Elie says to himself, " My God, Lord of the Universe, give me strength never to do what Rabbi Eliahou's son has done" (87). Elie's statement is extremely crucial to the theme of faith in that Elie diverts to reclaim a sense of faith in order to survive alongside his very father. Elie Wiesel centers Night around faith, with the notion reaching a climax at this very statement. Elie talks of his faith in God to Moshe the Beadle before the evacuation into the ghettos. Elie's faith is then renounced when he sees firsthand the atrocities of the Nazi party. With Elie literally forcing himself to remain alongside his father in the name of survival, Elie redresses his faith by accounting his existence with that of his father's; this event in itself is the pivot in which other thoughts and notions in Night arise. The theme of faith is epitomized in this very event where Elie reclaims his faith to exist with his father, for his father. Although the aspect of faith is touched upon in The Sunflower, the author Simon Wiesenthal projects the theme of his work towards that of

forgiveness. The Sunflower is presented as a work centered around the author, Simon Wiesenthal, and Karl, the dying SS man who asks for Simon's forgiveness. For merely being a Jew, Simon is placed in a concentration camp located in Poland. Like Elie Wiesel, Simon is also looked upon as a subhuman outside the Jewish community. As Simon marches to and from the Technical High School, the public Poles have a look of remorse and ill pity for Simon and the Jews alike. Karl, the dying SS man, enrolled in the Hitler Youth at age sixteen. During Karl's adolescent years, the Hitler Youth was the popular movement for which one would gain national merit; as a result, Karl enlisted in the program. When the war broke out and the Nazi party needed officers, Karl volunteered into the SS program. It was of considerable value of Nazi Germany for men, such as Karl, to aid the movement. The Nazi society in which Karl was constrained to, ultimately turned him into a murderer; he was forced to completely annihilate a mass of Jews within a confined building in Dnyepropetrovsk. The issues concerning both Simon and Karl orient the purpose of The Sunflower. Karl, on his deathbed wrapped in bandages, has had a request granted, as a nurse leads Simon, a Jew, into Karl's death chamber. Simon is, one way or another, compelled to listen to the confessions of the dying SS man. The issue confronting Karl is asking for forgiveness of a Jew. Karl addresses this issue by confessing to Simon the significant aspects of his life up to the incident in Dnyepropetrovsk. Karl is guilty for murdering innocent victims in the name of the Nazi party; therefore, he repents in the presence of Simon, a representative of the Jewish community. Karl states, "... I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg for forgiveness from him. ... I know that what I am asking is almost too

much for you, but without your answer I cannot die in peace" (Wiesenthal 57). Karl awaits a response. The issue confronting Simon is whether or not to forgive this dying SS man, who states a final request. The event of Simon's decision concerning forgiveness is the apex and therefore, the most prominent event in *The Sunflower*. As Simon states, " At last I made up my mind and without a word I left the room" (Wiesenthal 58). Simon confronts this issue by not forgiving the SS man and walks away because although Karl repented, Karl was still a blind murderer. Simon's decision is exceedingly crucial in that the remainder of the work coils with doubts on whether or not the right decision was made. The theme of forgiveness is defined at this instance and persists in a motif-like existence for the remainder of the work. The fact that Simon is so absorbed in his decision after the death of Karl illustrates the significance of forgiveness in *The Sunflower*. Simon asks for the perspectives of his friends Josek and Arthur. Simon also confronts Bolek, a victim who had studied theology, by asking if the right decision was made. Although the opinions of Simon's comrades differ, the search for the right decision absorbs the majority of Simon's thoughts for the remainder of *The Sunflower*. Simon's decision not to forgive Karl affects him in a thought-provoking manner for the remainder of the Holocaust; therefore, this particular event is the summit of importance concerning the theme of forgiveness in *The Sunflower*. Another significant event in *The Sunflower* is when Simon visits the mother of Karl. This event was a result of the lingering guilt Simon felt after making his decision of no forgiveness. This visit to Karl's mother was a subtle, indirect way of forgiving Karl. Karl's mother has always believed in her only good son, Karl. This belief was far more than a

paradigm; to Karl's mother, it was the profound truth that Karl never caused harm to anyone. She states, " I can well believe what people said — so many dreadful things happened. But one thing is certain, Karl never did any wrong. He was always a decent young man" (Wiesenthal 95). Although he had an occasion to expose Karl's acts of murder, Simon left " without diminishing in any way the poor woman's last surviving consolation — faith in the goodness of her son" (Wiesenthal 95). The fact that Simon allows the image of the good son shines light to the idea of him truly yearning to forgive Karl. The perceptions of the Holocaust allow individuals to explain the reasoning behind this mass genocide. Although both Elie Wiesel and Simon Wiesenthal apply religion as the cause of the Holocaust, the reasoning behind the genocide exists through differing perspectives. In *Night*, Elie Wiesel explains the Holocaust as an event due to the betrayal of God upon His people. Elie states, " Why, but why should I bless Him? ... Because in His great mind he created ... so many factories of death? ... Praised be Thy Holy Name, Thou Who hast chosen us to be butchered on Thine alter? ... I was alone — terribly alone in a world without God ..." (Wiesel 64-5). Elie states that although God was responsible for the deaths of the Jews, He still insists on their praise for His Existence. God allowed the murder of Jewish culture to succeed. Elie denies the righteousness of God and recognizes His Holy Presence as of insignificance. God is eradicated by the simplicity of words. Elie Wiesel explains the Holocaust occurred because of the deception of God. Elie perceives God as a fraud; therefore, the Holocaust is interpreted as a result of His betrayal. Although Simon Wiesenthal too applies religion as the incitement of the Holocaust, his reasoning behind the atrocity of the Jews is

dissimilar from that of Elie Wiesel; the Holocaust was a result of the absence of God. According to Simon in *The Sunflower*, God did not betray His people; God was simply absent during the Holocaust, as it allowed sin to conquer the remains of sacredness on earth. As Simon stated, "... [T]he present state of things wouldn't be possible. God must be away. ... God was absent — on leave[.] ... [W]e all longed to see signs of His omnipresence" (15; 54). The exact reason as to why God was absent was not particularly touched upon in *The Sunflower*; however, the pertinent difference lies in the fact that Simon believes God was merely absent during the Holocaust. Simon Wiesenthal perceives God's temporary absence; thus, the Holocaust was a result of His scarcity. According to Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust was the consequence of God's betrayal upon His people. Contrastingly, Simon Wiesenthal believes the Holocaust was the effect of God being temporarily absent from His Role to the Jews on earth. Although both authors in their respective works acknowledge religion as the cause of the atrocity, their perceptions, and therefore explanations, of the Holocaust differ from one another. Other differences arise between Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* from the aspects of structure, organization, and flow of arguments. The key difference between *Night* and *The Sunflower*, structurally, is that *The Sunflower* is comprised of two dividing segments; Book One is the actual account of Holocaust survival, while Book Two is a collection of opinions concerning the rightfulness of Simon Wiesenthal not forgiving Karl. Both sections within *The Sunflower* are fixated upon the notion of forgiveness; however, Book Two is the opinions expressed by several dignified persons, including Edward H. Flannery, Martin E. Marty, and Cynthia

Ozick. Elie Wiesel's *Night* is comprised of strictly a recollection of his life during the various concentration camps of the Holocaust. The organization in both *Night* and *The Sunflower* is similar; however, a subtle difference does indeed persist. This difference in organization affects the two works' flow of arguments; thus the flow of arguments in each work also differs. Both Elie Wiesel and Simon Wiesenthal organize their respective works according to the chronology of events they had to endure during the Holocaust. The difference arises in the fact that Simon Wiesenthal incorporates several uses of flashbacks in his organization of *The Sunflower*. A flashback emanates when the author stops the immediate action in order to retell an event which occurred at a point in time before the current state. Although Elie Wiesel incorporates a few flashbacks during his memory of surviving the atrocity, Simon Wiesenthal utilizes the flashbacks to an extent where each flashback further contributes to the motif-like state of the sunflower. For the majority of his flashbacks, Simon speaks of the sunflowers, which are planted above the graves of dead German soldiers. As he states, " Suddenly I envied the dead soldiers. Each had a sunflower to connect him with the living world, and butterflies to visit his grave. For me, there will be no sunflower. I would be buried in a mass-grave, where corpses would be piled on top of me" (Wiesenthal 20). Each time Simon recalls the notion of a sunflower during a flashback, he covets the dead German soldiers because it seems they will have peace after their groundless acts of murder. Simon's consistent use of flashbacks allows his flow of arguments to have a faint, lost sense of progression. Simon's flow of arguments is a bit coarse because of the constant flashbacks. It seems Simon jumps from his current points back to

the significance of the sunflower throughout his work. As a result, The Sunflower's flow of arguments differ from that of Night's because they tend to be erratic. Elie Wiesel's Night differs from The Sunflower in the aspects of organization and flow of arguments because Night is straight to the point; Elie Wiesel's work, although incorporating a few flashbacks, is more straightforward in organization than The Sunflower because it does not backtrack as often as the work of Simon Wiesenthal. With the lack of extensive flashbacks, Elie Wiesel organizes Night in an unequivocal manner. This characteristic is apparent from Night's flow of arguments, as the flow of arguments is directly affected by the work's organization. In Night, the flow of arguments advances from one point to the next; current points in the work are not extensively interrupted by certain events of the past. Night differs from The Sunflower in that Elie Wiesel's work is comprised of straightforward organization and thus, a smooth and consistent flow of arguments. In Night, the descriptions of the atrocities committed are portrayed in such a raw, yet emotional, manner. A pertinent section in Night stands out, as it is especially well-written. This section concerns Elie describing his first witness of abominations in the Holocaust. As Elie Wiesel describes, "... [F]lames were leaping from a ditch, gigantic flames. They were burning something. A lorry drew up at the pit and delivered its load — little children. Babies! Yes, I saw it — saw it with my own eyes" (30). This group of quotations is the most dominant and moving section in Night because of its simplistic description. Elie Wiesel does not utilize any form of literary devices within these quotations; this raw account of genocide is a testament to the purpose of Night. Elie Wiesel writes the epitome of true recollection in its most primitive

form; that fact in itself proves this section of *Night* is the epitome of genuine, artistic excellence. The apex of *The Sunflower*, where Simon Wiesenthal does not forgive Karl, is also described in the same manner expressed by Elie Wiesel. Consequently, the description of the apex is particularly well-written. As Simon describes, " I stood up and looked in his direction, at his folded hands. Between them there seemed to rest a sunflower. At last I made up my mind and without a word I left the room" (58). Simon writes these quotations in its rawest form. This simple form parallels his physical, passive-like response of quietly leaving the room without relying a single word. However, this simple form greatly contrasts the meaning behind the action; Simon does not forgive Karl for murdering innocent victims by merely walking out of the room in silence. This ample contrast is a result of Simon's graceful use of description; as a result, this account of *The Sunflower's* apex is the distinguished section in that it is principally well-written. Both *Night* and *The Sunflower* are works which must be spread to society as a whole. *Night* and *The Sunflower* must be read and comprehended because they provide lessons for the current society to utilize. *Night* and *The Sunflower* provide for society, a moving, descriptive, first-hand account of the inhumanity and atrocities committed during the Holocaust. The guiltlessness of the Jews allowed the German Nazis to decimate any trace of the culture. A better understanding of the causes, events, and results of the Holocaust allows society as a whole to discourage such genocides. Comprehending these two works will allow the current society to prevent such atrocities. Another Holocaust must never emanate again; spreading the works of Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* will aid in the cause.