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Representing the Holocaust: Bearing Witness in Levi, Wiesel, and Sebald

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REPRESENTING THE HOLOCAUST: BEARING WITNESS IN LEVI, WIESEL, AND

SEBALD

by

MARISSA CAPIZZI

(Under the Direction of Daniel Pioske)

ABSTRACT

Representing large-scale historical traumatic events can be problematic as accounts are often subjective and biased. It is difficult to determine if the subjective historical account is factually accurate or not. When discussing the Holocaust, representation is an important factor. How is the Holocaust represented? This thesis shows how literature can fill in the gaps of historical representation. I focus on psychoanalyst Dori Laub's three levels of the witness and their role in testimony in relation to Holocaust literature. For Laub, the first level witness is the primary account from the person who experienced the trauma. The second level witness is who the first level witness shares his/her story with. The third level witness observes the process of witnessing between the first and second witnesses. Laub's ideas on witnessing and testifying are heightened when paired with Paul Ricoeur's notion of attestation, which is the act of believing in the speech of the testifier. For many Holocaust survivors, speaking about the traumas endured was extremely difficult. Often the only evidence survivors had of their experiences was their testimony. As a survivor goes through the process of attestation, he/she asks listeners to believe in his/her testimony. I trace Laub's three levels of the witness in Primo Levi's memoir *If This Is a Man*, Elie Wiesel's fictional *Day*, and W.G. Sebald's journey novel *Austerlitz*. Tracing the three levels of the witness in each text demonstrates Ricoeur's notion of attestation, which provides new insight into the representation of large-scale historical traumatic events.

INDEX WORDS: Thesis, Holocaust, Witness, Attestation, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, W.G. Sebald, Survivor, Trauma studies, Testimony

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DEDICATION

This product of research is dedicated to my Grandpa who unknowingly inspired me to give a voice to the voiceless. His testimony, as a World War II veteran, sparked an interest in the era which lead to, at a very young age, an interest in the anomaly that was the Holocaust. I never had the chance to thank him, so I will keep his memory alive by listening to Frank Sinatra, cheering for the Yankees, and sharing his story to anyone who will listen.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“For the dead and the living, we must bear witness.”

-Elie Wiesel

Representation is biased and subjective. No person’s representation of an event or experience is going to be the same as another’s. Subjective accounts become problematic when dealing with history and historical events, and even more so when dealing with large-scale historical events that were intensely traumatic for those who experienced them. There is no way to know if the subjective historical account is factually accurate or not. When discussing the Holocaust, representation is an important factor. How do we represent the Holocaust? How do we represent the Holocaust authentically? Millions of people were affected by its horrors, yet nearly eighty years later, the Holocaust, historically, feels so far away. Of course, various forms of art, memorial, and museums represent the Holocaust. These representations sustain the memory of the victims, accusers, and survivors. These representations bear witness to the atrocity that was the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is also represented through literature. From survivors’ testimonies to novels of historical fiction, literature depicts the Holocaust in many different ways including books, poems, short stories, and plays. There are works written from the perspective of the Nazis, non-Jewish people, Germans, and non-Germans. Some offer tragically detailed accounts of what people experienced¹ as bystanders, hidiers of Jews, and those forced to live in ghettos and concentration camps. This particular field of study is specifically difficult to sift through as the Holocaust was designed to eliminate all witnesses, which is why all genres of Holocaust

¹ A few examples are *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Anne Frank, *On Hitler’s Mountain* by Irmgard A. Hunt, *The Zookeeper’s Wife* by Diane Ackerman, *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, and *When Memory Comes* by Saul Friedländer.

literature must be, according to Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, “reinscribed, translated, [and] radically rethought” as a representation of history (xiv). Through various forms of literary representation, the witness’s account remains alive and offers new perspectives and insights into what really happened leading up to the extermination camps, during, and after. With the wide variety of Holocaust literature, the question moves from how is the Holocaust represented to how it is represented authentically via literature?

The notion of an authentic historical account extends beyond history and enters the domain that is “fiction.” While fiction is not necessarily historically accurate, it provides a unique platform to represent the past in a way that history cannot. Literature does not have to focus on ensuring that the facts are completely accurate as it creates a pathway to a separate form of authenticity that offers its own representation of memory and trauma. Traumatic memories are arguably the least reliable form of memory, but that does not mean that they are unbelievable. Subjective memories, even if infused with trauma, are not shortcomings but rather strengths because they offer the most authentic and intimate representation of the speaker’s experience, which is something only an eyewitness can provide. While historical facts are important and necessary when looking into the past, personal accounts are equally as important and necessary. Through survivors’ personal accounts, scholars, historians, and researchers can envision what it was like to be a part of the Holocaust.

Dori Laub’s Three Levels of the Witness

Literature, as it details the stories of Holocaust survivors, becomes a witness to the Holocaust. As it teeters between objective and subjective, literature should be accepted as a method of authentic representation of the past. There is a “crisis of history, a crisis which in turn is translated into a

crisis of literature insofar as literature becomes witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated” (Felman and Laub xvii). Literature works to articulate what cannot be historically articulated via the individual witness. A witness is someone who saw and experienced an event. Literature, as a witness, gets “at the heart of [the] experience” (Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics of Testimony” 436). Without the witness, then the full picture is incomplete. It would be impossible to imagine the past, to imagine the Holocaust, without the account of the witness. Thus, the witness, as found in literature, is vital to the construction of representation. The witness articulates the past within the present and, likely without knowing it, the future.

In, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Dori Laub, argues for and describes the three levels of witnessing within the chapter “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony, and Survival.” These levels are separate and distinct, but together, they wholly encapsulate the process of witnessing. The first level is a witness to oneself within the experience. The second level is a witness to the testimonies of others. The third level is a witness to the process of witnessing itself. A vital part of being a first level witness, also to be called the testifier, is the healing process that can come through sharing one’s story and experience, especially if it is traumatic. For Holocaust survivors, specifically, they must share their stories in order to “complete the process of survival after liberation” (Laub 85). For Laub, sharing one’s testimony is more than just surviving; it is speaking out about the injustices so that the emotional healing process can begin. Keeping silent about one’s traumatic experiences can lead to “distorted memory,” which is where a survivor has the potential to feel a sense of falsehood where he questions if what happened to him actually happened (Laub 79). In this case, the survivor begins to feel guilty and confused as he cannot separate what he truly witnessed

from what his distorted memory is telling him he witnessed. Therefore, it is imperative for survivors to share and process their traumatic experiences. In addition, witnesses share their stories in order to bring awareness to the reality of the event. Those who did not experience the event firsthand can learn what it was like through the witness's subjective representation.

As the first level witness works to speak about the trauma, it is vital for the second level witness, also referred to as the listener, to not only listen but to listen without judgment. Laub argues ethics when referencing the second level witness. For Laub, the second level witness should not only be present but actually participate in the healing process as the testifier relives and reexperiences that trauma. The second level witness helps the testifier "go beyond the event and not be submerged" by it (Laub 76). A mutual relationship between the testifier and listener must consist of support and trust in order for the healing process to occur. However, emotional healing is not guaranteed just because the first level witness shares his testimony to his listener. Reliving through the trauma, via testimony, can be a cathartic experience for the testifier; however, it can also lead to further emotional pain. Despite the lack of certain healing, Laub still strongly encourages first level witnesses to testify, and second level witnesses to listen. At the very least, the third level witness can absorb the testimony, share it with others, and in doing so, keep the memory of the testifier alive.

The third level of witnessing becomes more abstract as it is the process of witnessing what was already witnessed. To better understand the third level, Laub observed interviews between testifiers and listeners and watched how they interacted. He notices how the testifier sorts through his memory, digs through the trauma, and speaks about his experiences. He pays attention to how the listener prompts when necessary and is silent when needed. This interaction between testifier and listener is important because it is all about the process of witnessing. The

third level witness transcends from Laub watching these specific interviews to any person researching, reading, or watching an interaction between a testifier and a listener. In other words, someone reading a literary representation of the Holocaust becomes a third level witness because he observes how the testifier interacts with his listeners within the literary text.

Paul Ricoeur: Testimony and Attestation

If there is a testimony, then there is a witness. Paul Ricoeur writes on witnessing and testifying in his seminal article, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” in which he traces testimony from religious connotations to judicial connotations. However, he points out that while the word “testimony” is usually associated with religion or the court system, one can be a witness and have a testimony in any aspect of life. He differentiates between having an authentic testimony and a false testimony. In addition, Ricoeur states, “we must choose between philosophy of absolute knowledge and the hermeneutics of testimony” (“Hermeneutics of Testimony” 461). Ricoeur struggles with the hermeneutics of testimony, which he will later sort out in his book, *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur takes his ideas of the hermeneutics of testimony further by linking it to his notion of attestation, which is declaring and affirming something to be true. For Ricoeur, attestation is the height of testimony. While the two concepts are similar, attestation is the act of declaring that one’s testimony should be believed. Ricoeur states, “it is not a doxic belief, in the sense in which *doxa* (belief) has less standing than *episteme* (science, or better, knowledge). Whereas doxic belief is implied in the grammar of ‘I believe that,’ attestation belongs to the grammar of ‘I believe-in.’ It thus links up with testimony...insomuch as it is in the speech of the one giving testimony that one believes” (21). One offers a testimony because he attests his experience is true. The act of attestation is presented before others who must then either believe the testimony or deem it false.

The Witness and Literature: Primo Levi, W.G. Sebald, and Elie Wiesel

Despite his important contributions to the field of Holocaust studies,² Laub limits himself in his research on witnessing and testimony. As I trace the witness, within three texts that deal with the Holocaust in distinctly different ways, I will expand Laub's "*theory of testimony*" by pairing his research with Ricoeur's notion of attestation while identifying the various levels of the witness within *If This Is a Man*, *Day*, and *Austerlitz* (xvii). While Laub expertly explains how each level of the witness functions, his research can be better understood in connection with Ricoeur by tracing how testimony moves to attestation via the witness in literature. Connecting Laub's research to Ricoeur's notion of attestation pushes testimony into a realm where the story within the testimony becomes a bold declaration via attestation. The act of speech is where the attestation lies as the testifier asks listeners to believe. Without the push of Ricoeur's attestation, Holocaust testimonies, found in literature, remain at the level of stories when they need to be heightened into representational accounts. Laub, as a psychoanalyst, takes a scientific approach to his research and the Yale Video Archives. He situates the second level witness as himself as a psychoanalyst. However, Laub's definition and description of a second level witness can in fact be anybody who is a "companion on the eerie journey of the testimony," meaning that fictional and nonfictional literary characters can in fact be second level witnesses to the testifier's account (Laub 76, "Truth and Testimony"). The primary witness is standard in literature, but by adding Laub's second and third levels, the idea of the witness is enriched because the duty falls on more listeners besides just the first level witness. The answer of how to authentically represent the

² See page 75 of Felman and Laub's *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. The video archive can be found in various libraries as well as online at <https://fortunoff.library.yale.edu/>.

Holocaust, through literature, is found by expanding and connecting Laub's three levels of the witness to Ricoeur's notion of attestation.

There are benefits of representing the Holocaust in various genres such as memoir and fiction as each genre offers a different perspective via the witness's testimony. In Chapter 2, I first look at Primo Levi's memoir *If This Is a Man* and trace his testimony as a first level witness. In his story, his peers act as second level witnesses, which causes the reader to take on the role of a third level witness. In Chapter 3, I argue that Elie Wiesel's *Day*, a fictional representation of the Holocaust, encapsulates all three levels of the witness through the main character Eliezer, his companions, and ultimately the reader. In Chapter 4, I argue that the Gerald, Vera, and the anonymous narrator in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* are second level witnesses. The reader has the role as a third level witness because he experiences the conversations between Austerlitz and his peers as Austerlitz attempts to make sense of his past. Each book represents the Holocaust in different ways, but each representation offers new angles revealing different levels of the witness.

Primo Levi, an Italian Jew and Holocaust survivor, is a first level witness. In his memoir *If This Is a Man* published in 1947, he testifies about his experience in Auschwitz. Levi spent nearly a year in Auschwitz in which he suffered greatly from sickness, poor working conditions, and starvation. As a survivor, his story is his personal and detailed account of what he witnessed. The raw details of his experience are tragic and difficult to read. Levi fulfills his duty, as a first level witness, because he shares his story. In doing so, others can sympathize with and learn from what he went through.

Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust and author of his famous memoir *Night*, followed *Night* with two more books, which caused it to be a part of a trilogy. *Dawn*, the second

novel in the series follows a man who must murder a prisoner of war. *Day*, published in 1961, is the last novel in the trilogy. *Day* is about a man, named Eliezer, struggling to cope with the trauma he endured from living in the concentration camps. Unable to cope with his past, Eliezer attempts to commit suicide. He comes face to face with the demons of his past, forcing him to choose whether he is going to heal from his past or succumb to it. Wiesel says, about his trilogy, “In *Night* it is the ‘I’ who speaks. In the other two, it is the ‘I’ who listens and questions” (Wiesel, *The Night Trilogy* 3). Wiesel argues that while *Day* is not his personal testimony, elements of the story are true.³ In *Day*, Eliezer is a first level witness who speaks to his doctor, Dr. Russel, his girlfriend, Kathleen, and his friend, Gyula who are second level witnesses. They also see as Eliezer slowly begins to accept his new reality outside the walls of the camps, his miraculous survival, and the relationships he has. Each character plays a specific role in Eliezer’s journey to learn how to live a fulfilled life after the Holocaust.

As a German who did not directly experience the Holocaust, W.G. Sebald provides a unique contribution to the notion of witnessing and testimony in his journey novel *Austerlitz* published in 2001. Even though Sebald was not a first level witness to the Holocaust, as Levi and Wiesel were, his work is vital to Holocaust literature as it raises the question of can a German write about the Holocaust? *Austerlitz* is about a man, Jacques Austerlitz, who finds out, as a teenager, that he is adopted. He spends his entire life exploring his past in hopes of finding answers to who his birth parents were and how he ended up in England as the adopted son to very religious parents. For Austerlitz, the trauma of false identity “creates a *surplus of meaning* that overwhelms [his] cognitive machinery” (Myers 103). An unnamed man, who over the years journeys off and on with Austerlitz, narrates Austerlitz’s story. The narrator listens to

³ “Certain episodes are true—that is, taken from life. The accident actually happened to me. I didn’t see the taxi coming. The possibility of a suicidal impulse was invented for the sake of the story” (Wiesel, *Day* x).

Austerlitz's confusion and doubts making him a second level witness. The narrator is there to celebrate when answers are found and to console when more questions arise. The narrator walks through this journey of self-discovery with Austerlitz.

The three aforementioned books deal with the witness on various levels, and through the process of witnessing, Ricoeur's notion of attestation begs the listeners to believe in the testimonies shared. Levi, Eliezer, and Austerlitz, as witnesses, share aspects of their stories and experiences, and each story is a different representation of the Holocaust. As they share their experiences, their words become a testimony to what happened. Their testimonies, in the form of literature, move to the realm of attestation, summoning listeners to believe that what they said is true.

Responsibility: "Whether after Auschwitz you can go on living."⁴

In the words of Elie Wiesel, "For the dead and the living, we must bear witness" ("Elie Wiesel's Remarks"). At the dedication ceremony of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. on April 2, 1993, Wiesel gave a speech. His speech is the reason beyond this project. Bearing witness to any large-scale traumatic historical event is reason enough for analysis and research. However, the reasoning beyond the creation of the Holocaust, the deaths that resulted from it, and the people across the country so deeply affected by its aftermath, spark something beyond research and analysis. How do we talk about the Holocaust? How do we represent the Holocaust? Theodor W. Adorno, in his essay "Cultural Criticism in Society," states "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34). Years later, Adorno retracted this statement. In his book *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno explains, "it may have been wrong to say

⁴ Adorno, Theodor W. "Meditations of Metaphysics." *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E. B. Ashton, Seabury Press, 1973, pp. 361-408.

that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems” (362). Instead, he questions “whether after Auschwitz you can go on living” (363). Is Adorno talking about survivors, the reader, or perhaps both? Most readers find themselves in awe after reading Holocaust literature, this reaction heightens the responsibility of remembering victims and survivors. If the survivors are brave enough to testify to their experiences, then readers must join them in the search for how to live in a post-Holocaust world. It is not just a matter of justifying representations of the Holocaust but also about finding meaning in life post-Holocaust and post trauma. The job of the testifier and listener alike is hence to find a purpose in the testimony attested as well as a purpose in life.

Tracing the witness in each text, I also become a witness to the experiences, whether fictional or nonfictional, of the characters in the books. In doing so, the lesson to be learned is “perhaps, that we are all responsible, and indifference is a sin and a punishment. And we have learned that when people suffer, we cannot remain indifferent” (“Elie Wiesel’s Remarks”). History, while it details the past, is a part of the present and will certainly be a part of the future. When researching the facts of the Holocaust, “how can one understand that human beings could choose such inhumanity” (“Elie Wiesel’s Remarks”). This is a valuable question. However, erasing or rather eradicating aspects of history is actually possible as proven with the Holocaust. Many people died during the years of the Holocaust, and with them, their stories perished too, which is why the need for survivors to testify is vital to not allowing the past to be forgotten. There is a need to learn from the past and from the failures of humanity so that the mistakes of history are not repeated. Wiesel argues, “not only are we responsible for the memories of the dead, we are also responsible for what we are doing with those memories” (“Elie Wiesel’s

Remarks”). Levi, Wiesel, and Sebald keep the memories of those who were victims of the Holocaust, as well as those who survived, alive through their writing.

The witness provides a specific insight into the event, and literature is the platform in which that insight is shared. By tracing the three levels of the witness in *If This Is a Man*, *Day*, and *Austerlitz* our understanding of literature as an authentic representation of the Holocaust deepens. Discussing the weaknesses of humanity in literature does not make one weak but rather calls for strength and allows for growth. Levi, Eliezer, and Austerlitz have drastically different experiences with the Holocaust, but what they witness and how they transform their testimonies into attestations creates an ongoing discussion of the Holocaust and representation. Their stories further the cause of remembrance.

CHAPTER 2

THE WITNESS IN *IF THIS IS A MAN*

Primo Levi, a Jewish Italian Holocaust survivor, provides a testimony of his experience in Auschwitz in his memoir *If This Is a Man*. Levi is aware of how important it is to share what he witnessed.⁵ He fully embodies what Laub explains are the duties of the first level witness. He shares his testimony “to satisfy this need: first and foremost, therefore, as an interior liberation” from the trauma (Levi 10). Levi writes, “that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness” (45). Survival is one key aspect to testimony in relation to the Holocaust.

Levi’s awareness of how necessary survival is demonstrates his strength, courage, and determination as a testifier. Levi states, “we want these to be stories of the Lager, while much has already been written on man outside the Lager” (110). From this perspective, the intent for his memoir is not to show how he adapted to life post liberation but rather what it was realistically like to live in a concentration camp. This desire to attest to what happened is what gives his testimony its force, connecting it to Ricoeur’s notion of attestation. Levi even assures his readers, “it seems...unnecessary to add that none of the facts are invented” (10). Levi as a first level witness attests that his testimony is authentic. In doing so, he asks listeners as they read his memoir, to believe that his word is true. Jan Gross argues, when considering Holocaust survivors attestations, it is advised to “read in a particular account as fact *until we find persuasive arguments to the contrary*” (92). To assume one’s attestation is accurate is to give credit “to the lonely voices reaching us from the abyss” (Gross 92). By sharing his testimony, the testifier situates himself in a vulnerable position by asking his listeners to believe him. The choice to

⁵ In 1945, “the need to bear witness was so intense that Levi began to record, pell-mell, thoughts and events, conversations, things heard and seen at Auschwitz, on the back of train tickets, scraps of paper, flattened cigarette packets—anything he could find” (Thomson 42).

believe in the attestation is crucial for the success of the testimony because it affirms the testifier's experience and teaches present listeners the events of the past

Before writing down his experience in Auschwitz, Levi told nearly everybody he met what happened to him because his need to bear witness was overwhelming.⁶ Sharing his testimony provided "self-transformation" which was "tremendously liberating" for Levi (Harrowitz 7). The feelings of emotional liberation Levi experienced reflects the importance of why Laub urges survivors to share their traumas as the act of speaking causes the faded memories to become facts, which offers an opportunity for healing. Levi's ultimate suicide, however, does not negate the fact that he wanted to witness and share his testimony early on after his liberation. His suicide should not cloud the liberation he originally felt by telling others his story. Levi wrote down his story so more people can witness his testimony and believe in the "meaning of his texts and to look no further" for answers (Harrowitz 5). Levi chose to write his memoir just a few years after the end of Hitler's reign, and people were not quite ready to listen to him or believe that such an atrocity actually happened. Even though he originally struggled to find a publisher for his memoir, Levi did not give up on his goal of sharing what he witnessed. His memoir is likely so famous because it is one of the first pieces of Holocaust literature published. It paved the way for survivors like Wiesel and Germans like Sebald to testify what they witnessed so that people can know what happened.

Levi begins his memoir by stating, before he came to Auschwitz, "I was captured by the Fascist Militia on 13 December 1943. I was twenty-four" (13). Beginning his testimony with the word "I" clearly shows that this is his authentic story. Levi claims ownership of his story. He leaves no doubt in his listener's mind to who this testimony is about, which gives his story

⁶ "Levi said he began to buttonhole passengers on the Milan-Turin express, and tell them of what he had seen and suffered. Soon he was talking strangers in the street, on the trams and buses...reporting his story to anyone who cared to listen" (Thomson, *The Legacy of Primo Levi* 44).

agency. He also adds agency to his testimony as he shares the doctrine he learned in the Lager, “man is bound to pursue his own ends by all possible means, while he who errs but once pays dearly” (13). At the beginning of the memoir, he explains there is no end to how far the prisoners would go to survive in the Lager, which prepares listeners for the horrible events he includes in his testimony.

Upon arriving at Auschwitz, Levi sees the sign *Arbeit Macht Frei*, and for the first time, he is truly aware of what his future holds. Through the blurred process of handing over his last few belongings, stripping naked, quickly showering, having his body shaved, receiving “new” clothes and shoes that rarely fit, and getting renamed through a tattoo, Levi says “that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of man” (28). During the last step of entry into the camp, Levi states, “I have learnt that I am a Haftling. My number is 174517; we have been baptized; we will carry the tattoo on our left arm until we die” (29). The tattoo also serves as a witness to life in Auschwitz as it is every inmates’ “new name” (Levi 30). The number becomes one’s identity, which often causes the original identity to be forgotten, and to forget is to be unable to testify about how inhumane it is to be known only by a number. Levi moves from “trauma to transgression and finally testimony” as he details what it is like to lose one’s name and become simply a number. (Pugliese 3). He demonstrates the psychological trauma endured by those held prisoner in Auschwitz. By sharing his number, 174517, Levi indicates that he is also telling the stories of the 174516 people before him, as well as the unknown number of people who came after him, showing how his “story is told for *others*” as well as himself (Harrowitz 49).

Levi details what his housing quarters were like to show the inhumane living conditions in Auschwitz, which is information that could only be obtained from a witness. In doing so, he

shows why literature, as a form of representation, fills the gaps when “historical methods fail” (Myers 109). Due to overpopulation, most inmates had to share a bunk with another person. Levi’s first bunkmate never shares his name. His body is much larger than Levi’s, so he takes over most of the sleeping space causing Levi to morph his body around his bunkmate each night. Even so, an uncomfortable sleep next to a stranger is not the worst part of the night, according to Levi. He describes the wretched act of having to use the bathroom in a bucket multiple times a night due to “the great dose of water which during the day we are forced to absorb in the form of soup in order to satisfy our hunger” (68). The inmates are so malnourished their bodies cannot retain the higher ratio of liquid to solid foods, and each night the entire barrack suffers the natural consequences. With the description of an average night in the Lager, Levi creates “a historical testimony to the absolute,” which “can only occur on the *inside* of representation” (Myers 109). Levi can testify to the absolute because he is a first level witness to the history. He chooses to represent that history in his memoir to explain that not only is every man starving and malnourished but also a full night of sleep is near impossible, which ultimately results in persistent exhaustion. Stomach cramps, bad dreams, a small sleeping space, and periodically waking up is every night for the prisoners in the Lager. Levi shares that each morning, whether rested or not, “everybody climbs up and down, remakes his bed and tries at the same time to dress himself in a manner so as to leave none of his objects unguarded” (71). Levi is able to share his testimony because he survived, which points to Laub’s urge for first level witnesses to share their testimonies as a method to share the past.

Levi attributes the help he received during the long workdays as a key factor to his survival. Levi chooses to testify, in his memoir, one specific workday where inmates had to carry wooden sleepers weighing 175 pounds. Levi, too weak to carry the load by himself, devises a

plan of survival for the day. He strategizes, “I will try and place myself with Resnyk; he seems a good worker and being taller will support the greater part of the weight...then I will ask to go to the latrine and I will remain there as long as possible, and afterwards I will hide, with the certainty of being immediately traced...and hit; but anything is better than this work” (74). Levi does not know what kind of work tomorrow will hold, but today, the work is cruel and requires a strategy. He will need the help of a stronger inmate and the value wasting of time. As he stays in the latrine, “the oasis of peace,” for as long as possible, he is able to pass enough time to where he only has a few more trips carrying sleepers with Resnyk before the lunch break (Levi 76). The lunch break passes by too quickly as it is already one o’clock. The inmates are forced outside their barracks and back to work for the afternoon, in which Resnyk spats, “Si j’avey une chien, je ne le chasse pas dehors⁷” (Levi 78). Long ago, the Kapos stopped treating the prisoners as humans but as animals. Recalling the events of a typical workday in the Lager shows the cruel physical tasks and twisted psychological games the prisoners had to endure on a daily basis. Levi testifies to what it was like to be forced to work in the Lager, which sheds light on the real conditions of Auschwitz.

Each story that Levi chose to include in his testimony is important, for he experienced countless days of trauma and encountered many people who impacted his history in Auschwitz. Levi “made decisions about which stories to tell and precisely how to tell them” when writing his memoir (Harrowitz 4). The specific stories chosen are undoubtedly those he viewed as the most vital to his overall duty as a first level witness and testifier. Levi dedicates an entire chapter to a Hungarian man named Kraus, who “is nothing to [Levi] except for a brief moment,” yet during the interaction between Kraus and Levi “an important thing happened, and it is worth telling

⁷ If I have a dog, I don’t chase it outside.

now, perhaps for the same reason it happened then” (Levi 149-150). Levi meets Kraus while digging in a mud hole with two other men. Kraus, new to the Lager, is naïve in the ways of survival. When the day is finally over and the prisoners begin their march back to camp, Levi is paired with Kraus who has exasperated all of his energy during the day, which causes him to stumble in step. Levi knows the consequences of falling out of line while marching, and despite the beatings Kraus already received from the guards, he cannot muster up enough energy to progress effectively. Levi is worried for Kraus’ safety as well as his own, so he creates a beautiful story, set in the future, with a freed Kraus and Levi as its main characters. They are healthy, happy, and enjoying an evening together. This false sense of hope allows for Kraus to make it safely back to camp. However, Levi senses that Kraus will not live much longer in the Lager. Nancy Harrowitz argues, “largely shuns the autobiographical genre in favour of a testimony that can represent more than his individual life” (9). By including Kraus in his memoir, Levi represents the millions of other prisoners who fell victim to the horrors of the concentration camps. Levi’s book is more than just a memoir, it is a testimony to the Holocaust, which takes on the power of attestation as he reveals “the grave burden that post-Holocaust commemorative language must bear” (Harrowitz 9). Levi’s duty, as a first level witness, is to share his own story also to raise awareness and trigger remembrance for every Kraus that existed in Auschwitz.

The chapter, “October 1944,” details one of the largest selections that Levi witnessed and survived during his time as prisoner in the Lager, and I argue that this chapter is when Levi’s testimony “finally [comes] to full expression,” because while he shares many traumatic memories in his memoir, this specific trial was something he could not control (Ricoeur 21). The selections, as Levi’s memoir describes, show people randomly chosen in mass “according to a

certain percentage previously fixed” (Levi 144). Through his days of hunger and moments of physical beatings, Levi battles against himself and finds his will to live as he was determined to survive. Yet, when faced with death via selection, the will to live is irrelevant because the guards choose who lives and dies, and each prisoner has no say in the result. To share such a vulnerable experience takes courage. Ian Thomson states, “the Nazi’s greatest crime: [was] the assembly-line gassings of human beings” (49). Levi says, “the fact that I was not selected depended above on chance” (140). With the promise of another day, this moment is when Levi recognizes “an attestation of *self*” as he realizes day by day, he is surviving the extermination camp (Ricoeur 22). A key part of attestation, for Ricoeur, is to “trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative” (22). Levi rightly testifies, “what has happened today is an abomination, which no propitiatory prayer, no pardon, no expiation by the guilty...nothing at all in the power of man can ever clean again” (145). To Levi, there is no forgiveness for the selections, and he includes what he witnessed in October of 1944 to “[entail] a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated” him as a witness to the murder of prisoners through selections (Laub 69).

Lorenzo, an Italian civilian and second level witness, is a helper and friend to Levi while in the camp. Levi declares, “I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today,” not just because he shared his food rations and gave him extra clothing but also because as a civilian, who did not have to help anybody but himself survive the war, he reminds Levi that “there still existed a just world outside” the walls of the Lager (135). Levi explains in his testimony, “the personages in these pages are not men. Their humanity is buried, or they themselves have buried it...the evil and insane SS men, the Kapos, the political, the criminals, the Prominents, great and small, down to the indifferent slave *Haftlinge*” have, for whatever personal reason, lost their

sense of humanity due to the creation of the Holocaust (135). But, because “Lorenzo was a man; his humanity was pure and uncontaminated...thanks [to] Lorenzo, [Levi] managed not to forget that [he himself] was a man,” (Levi 136). As Levi references the title of his memoir, he does everything he can to thank Lorenzo for reminding him that, despite what the Germans insisted, he is not a Haftlinge. He is a man. As a man with agency, Levi fought to survive in order to tell his testimony to anyone who would listen. Lorenzo helped Levi meet his physical needs through gifts of food and clothing, and he also helped him meet his emotional needs through encouragement and friendship.

Levi, a first level witness, not only defied all odds and survived the very institution created to destroy him, but he also found the courage to boldly share what he did, saw, felt, and heard while a prisoner of Auschwitz. Levi states, “to destroy a man is difficult, almost as difficult as to create one: it has not been easy, not quick, but you Germans have succeeded” (167). But the Germans did not fully succeed because few did survive and to survive is to testify and to testify is to ensure that others know about the experiences endured. Awareness is key to prevention, and prevention ensures that another Holocaust never happens again. Testimonies are shared so that history can be inscribed and remembered. Levi fully encompasses Ricoeur’s notion of attestation because he boldly asks listeners to believe his testimony. In addition, Levi encompasses Laub’s first level witness as he represents the Holocaust by sharing his personal, authentic, and harrowing experience as a survivor of Auschwitz.

Despite its autobiographical form, it is necessary to not neglect the other two levels of the witness within Levi’s story. His memoir also notices “the other victims and survivors whom he wants to represent, and his reading audience” (Harrowitz 49). As a member of the reading audience, one cannot forget to “examine the moral and ethical questions that arise from a study

of the Shoah” (Harrowitz 50). Levi’s testimony is difficult to read, and it is important to read. It is a vivid representation of the Holocaust. The reader, in this case, is a second level witness, who participates in Levi’s testimony. To read his testimony, however, is not where the journey ends, for now the reader, if he chooses to believe the attestation, must take on the burden of witnessing by continuing to keep the memory of Levi, the victims, and the survivors alive through attestation. A reader who shares Levi’s testimony to others cause those who choose to believe in the attestation to take on the role of a third level witness, for they then become participants in the encapsulating process of witnessing, testifying, and sharing history.

CHAPTER 3

THE WITNESS IN *DAY*

Wiesel's *Day*, previously titled *The Accident*, is a fictional Holocaust novel that follows the struggles of a Holocaust survivor, Eliezer, as he continuously struggles to adjust to life after liberation from the concentration camp. The narration around Eliezer's past is vague as the Holocaust itself is barely mentioned in the novel. However, it is clearly inferred from minor details that Eliezer was forced into a death camp where he fought to survive. After liberation, Eliezer makes his way to the United States, specifically New York City, where he finds a good job as a journalist. Despite his successful career, Eliezer struggles to move forward from his past and adjust to a normal life. He has a difficult time maintaining relationships due to emotional and physical instability from the trauma endured while prisoner. At the beginning of the novel, Eliezer is hit by a cab. Whether it was an accident, a premeditated act by Eliezer, or a mixture of both is unclear until the end of the novel.

According to Wiesel, "a novel about Auschwitz is not a novel – or else it is not about Auschwitz" (x). To Wiesel, to fictionalize the Holocaust is difficult, for there is no way to imagine such horror. Wiesel does not need to imagine what Holocaust victims and survivors experienced because he witnessed firsthand the concentration camps, liberation, and adjusting to life after. Thus, he takes part in fictionalizing the Holocaust through his works of literature including his novel *Day*. As stated in Chapter 2, Levi relates what it was like to lose one's name only for an identification number to replace it, which dehumanizes and anonymizes prisoners. Wiesel, numbered⁸ as well, knows what this loss of identity is like, which is why the creation of a fictional character, like Eliezer, is one way to represent the stories of the prisoners who died as

⁸ "The three 'veterans,' with needles in their hands, engraved a number on our left arms. I became A-7713. After that I had no other name" (Wiesel, *Night* 39).

they were named only through numbers. In Eliezer's case, his story is one of adjustment as he learns how to move from being just a victim to reclaiming his name, purpose, and will to live. Robert McAfee Brown states "to be a survivor was not enough; one must also be a witness" (14). In *Day*, Eliezer becomes witness and shares his testimony and doing so helps fill the gaps in history.

Wiesel, like Eliezer, was the victim of a cab accident. He invents the suicidal impulse for the novel, yet the urge to commit suicide was common amongst Holocaust survivors. Even though Eliezer is a fictional character, his story could be any survivors' story as many survivors struggled to answer, "does life have meaning after Auschwitz?" (Wiesel x). Eliezer searches for meaning after his liberation and after his suicide attempt as he seeks to sort out his testimony of his experience in the concentration camp. Eliezer prefers to remain silent about his experience, which reflects Wiesel's ten-year vow of silence after his liberation. Yet, there can be no testimony unless the witness speaks. One has to come forward with a story in order for it to transform into testimony, which is exactly what Eliezer struggles to do. As Eliezer eventually reveals parts of his testimony, as proof of what he experienced, the characters in the novel become second level witnesses, and the reader evolves into a third level witness. Next, the characters and the reader must decide whether they believe his attestation or not, which is crucial for the testimony's overall effect as it is a glimpse into the past. The idea of testimony is that the speaker asks the listeners to believe that what he is saying is true, which then fulfills Ricoeur's notion of attestation

As Eliezer heals in the hospital from multiple fractures and injuries, he thinks through what it means to live and to die. He goes through a series of flashbacks including how he met his girlfriend Kathleen, his family members' deaths, and experiences he faced in the camps. As

Eliezer tells his story, Kathleen, his friend Gyula, and the doctor who saves his life become examples of Laub's second level witnesses, but they do so in different ways. Kathleen first witnesses Eliezer as he shares his story about his experience in the Holocaust; however, throughout their relationship he rarely speaks about the trauma again. Kathleen becomes a witness to Eliezer's struggle to adjust to daily life post-Holocaust. Dr. Russel witnesses Eliezer cling to the idea of death during his treatment. Through their conversations about life and death, Dr. Russel primarily witnesses Eliezer's suicidal thoughts. Gyula, as he paints Eliezer's portrait, witnesses Eliezer's battle between silence and talking, but he ultimately witnesses Eliezer's first step towards emotional healing. Eliezer states, "to listen to a story under such circumstances is to play a part in it," which reflects Laub's research on witnessing (Wiesel 81). The second and third level witness do more than just listen to the testifier. They play a part in the telling of his story through believing in the attestation. In *Day*, each of Eliezer's companions play a part in his attestation by believing in him and being there through his struggle to adapt to life post-Holocaust.

Kathleen, Eliezer's girlfriend, plays a vital role as she embodies Laub's idea of a second level witness by listening to and believing in Eliezer's testimony. Eliezer walks through the motions of life in a zombie-like state, which is most obvious in his inability to fully connect with Kathleen. When she first meets him, she begs him to tell her his story of being in the German concentration camps. Laub states that "testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude" (70-1). Eliezer needs a listener in order for his scattered memories to develop into testimony. When Eliezer finally opens up to Kathleen, he notices how she "was drinking in every one of [his] words as if she wanted to punish herself for not having suffered before" (Wiesel 42). Kathleen, born in the United States, was removed from the direct realities of the Holocaust. She

carries around a sense of guilt for being spared, which is similar to Eliezer's guilt for surviving. As Kathleen experiences the Holocaust for the first time through Eliezer's testimony, she "comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through [her] very listening, [she] comes to partially experience the trauma [herself]" (Laub 57). Because Kathleen embraces Eliezer's testimony as fact, Ricoeur's notion of attestation is fulfilled, which heightens Eliezer's story moving it from just his subjective experience to an authentic representation of the Holocaust.

For Laub, "the task of the listener is to be...both unobtrusive, nondirective, and yet imminently present" (71). Kathleen notices Eliezer's complex relationship with food and asks, "how long do you think you can hold out? You're slowly killing yourself" (Wiesel 6). As a listener, she is being present in Eliezer's struggle to adapt post-liberation by making sure he has his basic needs like food. She encourages him to eat, so the couple walk into a restaurant and order two hamburgers, which triggers a flashback from his imprisonment in the concentration camp. Eliezer recalls a time where he witnessed a man eating a piece of meat. Starving, he envied the man's food and "as if hypnotized, [he] followed the motion of his fingers and jaws" (Wiesel 6). However, the next day the man was found hanging in the latrine murdered by his barrack mates for eating human flesh. His defense was that the body was already dead. Due to this encounter with cannibalism, Eliezer deeply struggles with maintaining a proper diet. He does not verbally share this specific story with Kathleen, for he is not yet ready to discuss the experience. Laub urges second level witnesses "*to listen to and hear the silence,*" especially when the testifier is not ready to speak yet (58). Kathleen fulfills her task to remain unobtrusive and nondirective as she remains steady in the silence knowing that Eliezer is struggling internally.

Kathleen embraces her role as listener as she encourages Eliezer to attempt to adjust and live a normal life. She states he “refuse[s] to forget...what counts is the past. Not ours: yours. I try to make you happy: an image strikes your memory and it is all over. You are no longer there...you also think it is easy to live beside someone who suffers and who won’t accept any help” (Wiesel 95). Kathleen witnesses Eliezer suffering on a daily basis. At first, she feels guilty because she cannot truly understand what it was like to suffer in such a capacity. However, as time went on and she finally accepts the “bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread, and conflicts that the trauma victim feels,” she better understands why Eliezer struggles to adapt to life post-Holocaust (Laub 58). According to Laub, accepting the emotional and physical pain experienced by the survivor is crucial to being a second level witness because through acceptance, the survivor’s testimony is believed.

In the novel, Kathleen also struggles with past trauma, and she chooses to stay with Eliezer in order to mutually heal from their individual emotional pain. She says, “I’ll let you help me, provided you let me help you” (Wiesel 97). Kathleen fulfils her duty as a second level witness to Eliezer’s testimony by refusing to allow him to hide behind his past. Eliezer accepts her help, and he unveils part of his testimony to her. He explains that he “saw a strange thing: the train was leaving the tracks and climbing toward the smoke-gray sky,” and on the train was his family (Wiesel 98). Eliezer uses the metaphor of the train to explain how his family died while in the concentration camps. The smoke the train produces mirrors the smoke from the gas chambers in which they were murdered. The train leaving the station represents his family leaving for the afterlife while Eliezer is stuck at the station or rather stuck living. As he shares this image with Kathleen, he shares the testimony of his experience of losing his family in the concentration camps and the lack of closure that brings. Kathleen listens to his story and offers a consolation,

“every time your thoughts take you to the little station, tell me. We’ll fight it together?” (Wiesel 99). Kathleen follows Laub’s criteria of a second level witness as she knows how to “acknowledge and address” Eliezer’s silence until he is ready to speak (58). Once he finally speaks, she assures him that he is not alone on this journey of attestation.

While Kathleen witnesses Eliezer as he attempts to process the trauma he faced in the camps, Dr. Russel witnesses Eliezer as he attempts to process his suicidal thoughts. As an example of Laub’s second level witness and the primary overseer of Eliezer’s recovery, Dr. Russel challenges Eliezer to realize that life is worth living despite his past relationship with death. After surgery, Dr. Russel assures him that he will make a full recovery if he can beat the fever which currently threatens his life. Dr. Russel explains that death is the enemy; however, Eliezer disagrees as he thinks, “death is not my enemy” (Wiesel 16). These conflicting views show that if death is not Eliezer’s enemy, then life is, which implies that fighting the fever to stay alive is the enemy as opposed to succumbing to the fever and fading into death. Eliezer gets the sense that Dr. Russel “knew – or at least that he suspected – something,” which is why Dr. Russel insists that Eliezer chooses to fight the fever, for he has an intuition that the cab accident was in fact not an accident (Wiesel 15). His fear of Dr. Russel discovering his suicidal intentions is actually a “subconscious desire to purge himself” of his wish to die (Sibelman 53). Eliezer, so consumed by silence, cannot purge himself of the darkness he feels inside; however, Dr. Russel does not give up on him, which is why he fulfills Laub’s definition of the second level witness.

While operating on Eliezer, Dr. Russel first realizes that he attempted suicide, which ignites the process of witnessing Eliezer’s inner struggle with death. One morning Dr. Russel enters Eliezer’s hospital room and exclaims, “this time I won...I won! I conquered Death!” (Wiesel 57-8). Dr. Russel proceeds to explain to Eliezer that he was able to save a young boy’s

life by performing a miraculous surgery no other doctor was willing to do. Dr. Russel thanks the young boy because while under the anesthesia, “he didn’t accept death. He helped [him] to win the battle” (Wiesel 59). Dr. Russel tells Eliezer that he is the opposite of the little boy because during surgery, “you never helped me. Not once. You abandoned me. I had to wage the fight alone, all alone. Worse. You were on the other side, against me, on the side of the enemy,” which is death (Wiesel 60). Dr. Russel cannot understand why Eliezer did not fight to live during surgery nor can he understand why he does not want to live now. For Eliezer, the Holocaust was “a reality which extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another...[or] even oneself” (Laub 82). Felman and Laub argue, the Holocaust was effectively an event without a witness (xvii). Therefore, there was no one for Eliezer to speak to in the camp, so he chose silence. His silence, the “not telling’ of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny,” which reigned over his daily life and triggered his suicidal thoughts (Laub 79). Since Dr. Russel knows that the cab accident was actually intentional, his duty as a second level witness is clear, for he must help Eliezer heal from the emotional trauma that pushed him towards suicide in the first place.

Dr. Russel’s role is to be a witness not to Eliezer’s past but to his present recovery with the goal of extinguishing his suicidal aspirations. He encourages Eliezer to embrace life. Eliezer argues that because of what he witnessed while in the concentration camps, he is now so far removed from humanity. He cannot view the world how others who are ignorant of his experiences can because “those who came back, left over, living-dead...their appearance is deceptive...they look like the others. They eat, they laugh, they love...but it isn’t true: they are playing, sometimes without even knowing it” (Wiesel 65). Dr. Russel, while he does his best, cannot fully understand the reason behind Eliezer’s suicide attempt. Laub hints that often the

listener “will experience hazards and struggles of his own, while carrying out his function of a witness to the trauma witness” (58). To succeed as a second level witness, the listener must be aware of these hazards and become a victim by association but rather stay diligent in his or her duty as an aid to the process of witnessing. The second level witness must stay diligent because he is “the enabler of the testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as guardian of its process and of its momentum” (Laub 58). As a witness to Eliezer’s attempted suicide, Dr. Russel, while not perfect, does his best to meet Eliezer where he is and aid in his recovery. His continual visits set up Eliezer to break his silence and share part of his past trauma during his final meeting with Gyula.

Gyula, Eliezer’s friend, breaks Laub’s standard rules for a second level witness, but he does so to better benefit Eliezer. During Gyula’s daily visits, Eliezer feels the need to tell him what really happened during the cab accident. Every time he begins to speak, Gyula refuses to let him finish. For Laub, the purpose of sharing one’s testimony is to trigger emotional healing. As Gyula breaks Laub’s mold of a second level witness, he is not neglecting his friend’s emotional needs by leaving him in his trauma but rather he is “capable of comprehending the meanings and directions of the protagonist’s silence” (Sibelman 55). Gyula does not need verbal confirmation to know that Eliezer tried to take his own life as he explains, “I don’t need your stories in order to know” (Wiesel 105). For Gyula, Eliezer’s attestation is non-verbal. He does not need to hear Eliezer’s testimony to believe his yearning for death. Ultimately, Gyula’s goal in not allowing Eliezer to explain is to get him to stop dwelling on the past. Gyula knows that the more the past is talked about, the more it becomes the focus of the present. While the purpose of testifying is also to further the cause of remembrance, there is a difference between remembering and

dwelling. Eliezer dwells in his emotional pain so much so that it affects his daily life, which is why Gyula shifts his focus to process the past rather than be suffocated by it.

Eliezer struggles to let go and move forward with his life and relationships. He questions Gyula, “but what about the others? The others, Gyula? Those who died? What about them? Besides me, they have no friends” (Wiesel 107). Eliezer speaks of everyone that fell victim to the murder committed in the camps. Gyula instructs Eliezer to “chase them away from [his] memory” for “the dead have no place down here” (Wiesel 107). Gyula, even though he does not fully follow Laub’s notion of a second level witness, still fulfills his duty as a witness as he teaches Eliezer that while remembering the past is important, dwelling on trauma only suffocates one’s present and future. Gyula states “if your suffering splashes others, those around you, those for whom you represent a reason to live, then you must kill it, choke it” (Wiesel 107). He advises Eliezer to process his suffering so that it no longer harms him. He does not suggest that Eliezer erase all memory of the past but rather he yearns for Eliezer to not let the bad memories consume his present. Gyula “emphasizes life, offering the protagonist redemption from death” (Sibelman 55). Through his emphasis on life, he begs Eliezer to think of the people that care for him. If Eliezer can find a reason to live in the people who love him, then his mindset can shift from the traumas of the past and into the present, which is Gyula’s main goal as a witness. Ricoeur states that, “one can call upon no epistemic instance any greater than that of the belief” (21). Gyula believes in Eliezer’s nonverbal attestation, and he believes in his friend’s ability to move forward and make peace with his past. As Gyula breaks Laub’s second level witness mold, he embodies Ricoeur’s notion of attestation by believing his friend’s trauma. Thus, the notion of belief extends past simply witnessing and testifying.

The novel ends as Gyula burns Eliezer's portrait, fulfilling Eliezer's need to fully process the traumatic memories of the Holocaust. Upon seeing the completed portrait, Eliezer thinks, "my whole past was there, facing me...my eyes were a beating red...they belonged to a man who had seen God commit the most unforgivable crime: to kill without a reason" (Wiesel 106). As Gyula takes a match to the canvas, Eliezer shouts, "Don't do that, Gyula, don't do it! Don't burn Grandmother a second time! Stop" (Wiesel 109). Eliezer's words are the last dialogue in the novel. They show that he clearly is not quite ready to fully let go of the past. Eliezer "suffers from an inability to count on the future, to become attached to another person, thus to hope" (Wiesel ix). He struggles to feel hope in his life because of the trauma he endured, and his reaction to the burning painting shows that he still clings to the past and to the loved ones he lost to the fires of the death camps. Brown argues that the last line of the novel, "he had forgotten to take along the ashes," proves that "Eliezer's face is still the face of death...darkness is still eclipsing the light," and he will not recover from his past trauma (Wiesel 109, 70). However, I disagree. The last sentence stands alone separated from the previous paragraph, so it does not reference Eliezer's darkness but rather it alludes to Eliezer's hopeful future. Eliezer forgets to take the ashes of the portrait implying that he truly found peace in the life Kathleen, Dr. Russel, and Gyula helped him find as second level witnesses. Leaving behind the ashes is a sign that his experience in the concentration camp no longer controls over his present life. While the traumas of the past cannot or should not be forgotten, they can be processed, and they must be processed in order to truly live.

I argue that Wiesel ends his trilogy with hope as Eliezer leaves the ashes of his past behind. Through testifying, Laub's first level witness "reclaims his position as witness [and] reconstitutes his internal 'thou'" (85). Eliezer finally "complete[s] the process of survival after

liberation” (Laub 85). Wiesel, through his writing, focuses on “the absolute need not only to remember but continually to confront the anguish and mystery of the Holocaust. His writings “embody the witness and the crisis of facing the event” (Rosenfeld and Greenberg xii). In *Day*, as witnesses, Kathleen shows Eliezer unconditional love, Dr. Russel shows Eliezer that life is worth living, and Gyula reminds Eliezer that while the past cannot be undone, it can be processed as there are people in the present who need him. Through processing his past and the help of his friends, Eliezer finds meaning in his life after Auschwitz.

Wiesel’s *Day* serves as a bridge between *If This Is a Man* and *Austerlitz*. As a witness to the concentration camps, like Levi, he has the firsthand knowledge of what they were like. However, unlike Levi, Wiesel fictionalizes the Holocaust in *Day* through a quasi-memoir genre. This unique medium of representation is why Wiesel and his writings are so popular amongst Holocaust literature and trauma studies. His literary works are a complex form of representation, which creates a different demand from the audience than Levi’s nonfiction literary work. With Wiesel, the audience acts as a third level witness who participates in Eliezer’s story as an invented reflection of Wiesel’s experience post-liberation. In *Day*, the audience can see Eliezer’s struggle to find meaning in life after the Holocaust. Eliezer’s emotional and physical pain, while created for the sake of the story, is all too real for those who survived and were left to figure out how to live post-liberation because for so many, liberation was in fact not freeing at all. As Wiesel is connected to Levi through their direct witnessing of the Holocaust, his fictional works of literature connect him to Sebald via the reader as the third level witness, which will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE WITNESS IN *AUSTERLITZ*

According to Jacob Myers, “several scholars have taken a close look at the failure of historical witness to the Shoah by those who experienced it firsthand,” which references Laub’s argument that the Holocaust was designed to eliminate all witnesses by attempting to murder every prisoner (107). While millions of witnesses never had the chance to share their testimonies, representing the Holocaust through literature is necessary to keep the memory and deaths of those witnesses alive and in cycle today. In doing so, the bonds of historical witnessing are broken, and fictional literature is accepted as an authentic witness. W.G. Sebald’s last novel, *Austerlitz*, certainly holds a special place in his collection of works as well as the canon of Holocaust literature. As opposed to *Day* and *If This is a Man*, *Austerlitz* was not written by a Holocaust survivor but rather by a German born towards the end of World War II who carried around a deep sense of guilt for having to grow up in the aftermath of post-World War II Germany. What does it mean for a German who never directly witnessed the Holocaust to fictionalize the event? This is the freedom that literature offers. It is less about how we speak and more about how we do not. Choosing to remain silent because the Holocaust is “unpalatable...[it] kills the dead a second time; it obliterates them from human memory” (Brown 5). Therefore, it is imperative that those who did not experience the Holocaust but choose to represent it through literature, to “never speak *for* survivors, never attempt to speak *instead of* survivors...[instead,] speak only to provide one more place where survivors can speak *for themselves*” (Brown 6). Sebald dealt with the aftereffects of World War II, and by writing a Holocaust novel, he is able to represent the catastrophe in a way that history cannot. *Austerlitz* is a unique piece of literature narrated by an unnamed man. While Jacques Austerlitz did not exist

as a real person, thousands of children just like him were forced on trains, taken to new countries, and given new identities all in order to protect them from the war. As Austerlitz deeply struggles with not knowing his true identity, it is clear that the children from the Kindertransports were not completely free from the effects of the war.

Jacques Austerlitz, a Jew born in Czechoslovakia, is put on a Kindertransport to England as a toddler in order to escape the expansion of the Nazi rule in Europe. His adopted father is a Calvinist minister, and his adopted mother stays home due to her weak health. Austerlitz fails to recall memories of his birth parents or his life in Czechoslovakia. All he remembers was “how it hurt to be suddenly called by a new name” (Sebald 45). It is not until his teenage years, at boarding school, when Austerlitz is told his true identity. In a matter of seconds, he went from his created identity, Dafydd Elias, to his real identity, Jacques Austerlitz. This dramatic transformation of self triggers Austerlitz to spend the rest of his life searching for his parents, his true identity, and to bring closure to the traumatic discovery of not being who he thought he was.

As Austerlitz embarks on this journey of self-discovery, multiple characters become second level witnesses to his testimony. Austerlitz’s best friend in boarding school, Gerald Fitzpatrick, accepts him into his own family and allows for Austerlitz to feel what it is like to truly be a part of a loving family. Vera, Austerlitz’s childhood nanny, answers many of the questions Austerlitz has about his parents and past. Lastly, the story’s unnamed narrator, a friend of Austerlitz throughout his adult life, shares the successes and failures of Austerlitz’s testimony starting from the beginning, as a boy, all the way to the end with his death. The process of witnessing, Laub argues “begin[s] with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence” (57). There is historical evidence of the Kindertransports; however, “while

historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant...the trauma...has not been truly witnessed yet” until Gerald, Vera, and the narrator hear his testimony and believe it to be true (Laub 57). The witness’s testimony allows for the event to be truly accepted by those who listen and believe. Author Irme Kertész states, “If the memory of what happened is to survive, it will not happen through official speeches, but through those who testified” (351). Allowing the memories to survive moves past the testifier, as he fulfills his duty by sharing his experiences, and to the second and third level witness. They are listeners of the testimony, so they have an obligation to remember the history shared by the testifier.

It takes many pages for Austerlitz to open up to the narrator and share his childhood and testimony, but once he finally does, he explains the important role his friend Gerald had as a witness to the collapse of his identity. Gerald is “a person at ease with himself capable of enjoying the world around him with an immediacy that is denied to Austerlitz” (McCulloh 120). Austerlitz is denied a peaceful existence because of the uncertainty of his past. Gerald refuses to allow Austerlitz to remain alone as he was often invited to his house, and the time he spent at the Fitzpatrick family residence causes Austerlitz to forever long for the “peace that always reigned there” (Sebald 78) The fact that Austerlitz includes Gerald, Adela, and Great-Uncle Alphonso into his overall testimony proves that they had a deep impact on his life. Gerald fulfills his duty as a second level witness by ensuring that Austerlitz, in his teenage years, is still surrounded by a family who loves him. In addition, Gerald witnesses the main event, Austerlitz learning his true identity, which spurs the rest of the plot of the journey novel. Austerlitz’s friendship with Gerald is crucial as it sets up the foundation in which Austerlitz learns to safely confide in others so he can later share his life’s story with the unnamed narrator, which for Laub is the first step toward emotional healing.

After boarding school, Gerald and Austerlitz remain friends until Gerald's tragic death, which "perhaps was the beginning of [Austerlitz's] own decline" (Sebald 117). Gerald's death causes Austerlitz to "withdrawal into [himself] which became increasingly morbid and intractable with the passage of time" (Sebald 117). The deep friendship that Austerlitz shares with Gerald gives him a sense of belonging and a reason to continue in his life pursuits. While Gerald dutifully served as a second level witness during his life, his death causes Austerlitz to lose the listener to his attestation. The loneliness Austerlitz feels after his friend's death reinforces Laub's belief in the importance of a second level witness. With no one to confide in, Austerlitz feels "had neither memory nor the power of thought, nor even any existence, that all [his] life had been a constant process of obliteration, a turning away from [himself] and the world" (Sebald 123). It will not be until later in his life when Austerlitz meets Vera that he once again finds a new listener and confidant as well as determination to live and find his place in the world.

Vera, Austerlitz's childhood nanny in Prague, is a witness to Austerlitz's journey of self-discovery as she listens to his life story post-Kindertransport. Laub states "the listener to the narrative of extreme pain, of massive psychic trauma, faces a unique situation" (57). As Vera listens, she also shares information about his birth parents and life before the Kindertransport of 1939. This two-way release of information expands Laub's traditional second level witness. Vera, who felt "endlessly familiar" to Austerlitz, opens up the doors to his entire unrecalled childhood, which helps Austerlitz get answers about his past (Sebald 153). Vera is unique, however, because she embodies two different levels of the witness. Vera transforms from a first level witness to Austerlitz's parents' story into a second level witness to Austerlitz's testimony "as someone who actually participates in the reliving and reexperiencing of the event" (Laub 76,

“Truth and Testimony”). Laub argues that “the emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and—heard is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to” (57). Without Vera’s insight, as a first level witness to his parents’ struggle as Jews living in Prague, Austerlitz would never have known what happened to his mother or father during the years of the reign of the Third Reich. Similarly, without Austerlitz’s testimony, Vera would never have known what happened to the little boy she cared for.

When Austerlitz comes knocking at her door Vera participates in Austerlitz’s “detective story” (McCulloh 123). Vera is “aware that the trauma survivor who is bearing witness has no prior knowledge, no comprehension and no memory of what happened,” so she offers her help by showing Austerlitz a photograph of himself as a young boy as well as confirming the identity of his mother in a photograph that he found in an archive in Prague (Laub 58). Throughout his search for answers to his mother’s disappearance, Austerlitz has “flashbacks and other manifestations of *mémoire involuntaire* through which [he] gains access to his repressed memories,” which are later confirmed with the help of Vera (Garloff 161). Since she witnessed his childhood, she aids in filling in as many blanks as she can while ensuring him that his parents loved him and did what they thought was best for his future. This assurance allows Austerlitz to feel a sense of security finally knowing where he truly came from. Therefore, with Laub’s theory of witnessing in mind, Vera effectively fulfills her duty to Austerlitz by helping him achieve at least partial closure. However, as he learns of his true origin, he desires to learn what happened to his parents after the Holocaust, which creates an endless search with few answers.

The facts Vera shares about Austerlitz’s past offer more peace than he could have ever received without her as a second level witness to his testimony. Austerlitz’s decides to visit

Terezin, which has transformed over the years from a ghetto to a normal town, to see where Agata, as one of the “sixty thousand people [who] were shut up in the ghetto, a built-up area of one square kilometer at the most” lived (Sebald 200). Learning about the living conditions his mother endured takes a toll on Austerlitz because if it was not for the Kindertransport, he would have been condemned to suffer in the Terezin Ghetto just the same. Mark R. McCulloh states, “one of the lessons of Austerlitz is the extent to which the Nazis planned their methods of persecution and torment down to the last detail...the Jews of Prague were required to participate in their own degradation...then sent on by train to an unknown fate,” which is assumingly, death (127). Sebald’s depiction of Terezin triggers a range of emotions for Austerlitz. While passing a store front, he sees “objects that for reasons one could never know had outlived their former owners and survived the process of destruction” (Sebald 197). The same objects outlived his mother and will too outlive him. While Austerlitz never gets to bury his mother or know for sure what happened to her after she was forced to leave Terezin, Austerlitz’s conversations with Vera allow him to feel “liberated from the false pretense of his English life” (Sebald 254). Thus, despite the unsettling lack of full closure, Vera listens to Austerlitz’s story, provides information about his past, and enables Austerlitz to process the emotional trauma as a Holocaust survivor. In doing so, she fulfills Laub’s notion of a second level witness whose purpose is to listen and aid in the process of attesting to a past traumatic experience.

Vera, while never a direct victim of the Holocaust, certainly feels its effects by being so closely associated to the Austerlitz family. Due to her association, she too becomes a survivor, which allows her to better aid Austerlitz as he unveils his past because she knows what it is like to mourn for the same people he mourns for. Sebald’s inclusion of Vera as not just a witness to Austerlitz’s testimony but also as a witness to the Holocaust itself adds a deeper element to his

overall representation of the Holocaust. Vera did her best to support the Austerlitz family, but ultimately there was nothing she could truly do to save Agata and Austerlitz from the grips of the pending Nazi invasion. Vera's story, within Austerlitz's, serves as an example of the millions of people who tried to help the Jews despite their inability to prevent the history that was unfolding around them. Sebald writes Vera to help Austerlitz find answers as well as to show that so many people were affected by the Holocaust simply by association, and their stories should not be negated or forgotten.

Along with Gerald and Vera, the anonymous narrator of Austerlitz's story acts as a vessel and second level witness to his testimony. Off and on for years, the anonymous narrator meets up with Austerlitz, listens to his testimony, and aids in his process of self-discovery. The narrator states that Austerlitz was searching for "someone to whom he could relate his own story, a story which he had learned only in the last few years and for which he needed the kind of listener I had once been" (Sebald 43). Gerald and Vera are only there for parts of Austerlitz's testimony while the anonymous narrator is there, as a listener, from beginning to end. Readers would not even know of Gerald and Vera's influence on Austerlitz's life if the narrator did not share with them what Austerlitz shared with him. Thus, his role, as a second level witness, is different than the roles of Gerald and Vera. Michael Niehaus states, "the relation between the first-person narrator and Austerlitz remains totally abstract the pure coincidence of their meetings is repeatedly stressed" (321). Through these coincidental meetings, the narrator records Austerlitz's testimony to share his story. Niehaus states of the narratorial structure, "it is spoken. But there are no replies, no clarifications, no doubts" (321). Such analysis encompasses Ricoeur's notion of attestation. Austerlitz speaks to the narrator, and the narrator writes down his words without questioning his truth because he already believes in Austerlitz's testimony.

The narrator has a specific duty, under Laub's theory of witnessing, to authentically retell Austerlitz's testimony to support the cause of remembrance. His "task as listener...is to respond very subtly to cues the [testifier] is giving that s/he wants to come back, to resume contact, or that s/he wishes to remain alone" (Laub 71). Since the narrator perfected the ebb and flow of when to enable Austerlitz's testimony and when to remain silent, Austerlitz feels comfortable sharing his successes and failures over the years as he attempts to find the answers to his unknown past. Within Austerlitz's testimony, "there is so much destruction recounted, so much death, so much loss, so much hopelessness, that there has to be an abundance of holding and of emotional investment...to keep alive the witnessing narration" (Laub 71). As the steadfast listener, the narrator embraces Austerlitz's story, and when he writes it down, he never uses quotation marks for dialogue but rather writes "said Austerlitz" numerous times reminding the reader that this is the testimony of Jacques Austerlitz, survivor of the Holocaust.

McCulloh states, "at the core of the main character's identity is thus an emptiness that resists filling, despite his quietly heroic attempt to find his mother, his father, and to recall his earliest memories" (114). This emptiness is reflected in the book that Austerlitz gives the narrator, which is about a man, Dan Jacobson, who spends his life searching for his grandfather, Heshel, who fell victim to the Holocaust in 1944. Jacobson, like Austerlitz, does not find all the answers he desires regarding his past and heritage. The lack of closure, due to unanswerable questions, which follows Austerlitz to the grave prompts the narrator to switch perspectives towards the end of the novel. For the first time, the narrator's voice is the only speaker. Christina Szentivany states "collective memory and the responsibility of literary memory work to develop more adequate means of representation" (357). The narrator ends the novel with Jacobson's story to demonstrate that literature is an effective mode of representation. There are uncertainties in

Austerlitz's past because uncovering the past is a difficult task. The unknown, so to say, only provides a more authentic representation of the Holocaust because, as stated before and argued by Laub, the witness was largely eliminated by the Nazis. Literature seeks to revive the witness. Sebald's novel shows what it was like to be ripped from one's family, language, home, and name only to struggle to fit in for the rest of one's life. The parents of those sent on Kindertransports certainly had the right intentions, to protect their children from the spread of Nazism. However, as Sebald teaches through Austerlitz's testimony, no one was free from the traumatic effects of the Holocaust.

Sebald's German kinship adds a deeper element to his novel. He is sympathetic to Austerlitz and the trials he endures. Unlike Wiesel and Levi, Sebald was not a direct victim of the Holocaust, but he chose to be an advocate for the lives it destroyed. *Austerlitz* acts as propaganda against Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, and the idea of mass genocide, on any scale, ever happening again. The end of Austerlitz's story does not necessarily offer resolution; "however, because Austerlitz's pilgrimage can only lead into a further regress of words and images," it is an example of "the nature of any attempt at the historical reconstruction of past lives" (McCulloh 137). It is difficult to talk about the Holocaust. It is difficult to assert that every fact is correct and true when discussing the Holocaust. As a fictional story that feels so real, Sebald represents the Holocaust, its aftereffects, and its horrors, through Austerlitz, Gerald Fitzpatrick, Vera, and the anonymous narrator, as second level witnesses. These characters choose to believe in Austerlitz's attestation because they have no reason not to. They dutifully walk through the difficult journey of self-discovery with Austerlitz. Sebald, too, joins in as a witness to the effects of the Holocaust.

Published at the start of the 21st century, Sebald supports the cause of remembrance as he invites the reader to experience side by side with Austerlitz the complex “relationship of identity and exile” (McCulloh 108). As characters in the novel act as second level witnesses, the reader embodies the role of the third level witness because he observes the conversations between Austerlitz and his peers. By witnessing the process of witnessing, the reader should “reflect on these memories as they are spoken, so as to reassert the veracity of the past and to build anew its linkage to, and assimilation into, present-day life” (Laub 76). For Laub, the third level witness has a responsibility to “sense that there is a truth” the testifier and listener are trying to reach (76). Once this truth of past is discovered by the testifier and listener, the third level witness furthers the mission by allowing the, now processed, past to infiltrate the present via the cause of remembrance. Laub argues, “the survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive” (78). In literature, as representation, the reader has a duty to the testifier in his vulnerable state of attestation. In the novel, Austerlitz’s confusion, heartache, and isolation are evident; thus, the reader, as he learns of the effects of the Kindertransport, living in a post-Holocaust world, and dealing with an identity crisis witnesses Austerlitz’s journey and accepts his testimony as an authentic representation of the Holocaust.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In trauma studies, many historians and literary scholars often research the witness as the primary seer of an event. Laub expands the concept of the primary witness through the addition of the second and third level witness, which creates an encapsulating process of witnessing. While the primary eyewitness is key to recalling the event, the second level witness aids in the process as a listener and supporter. The third level witness then has a duty to take the interaction between the first and second level witness and keep the conversation alive by sharing the testimony with others. Laub's three levels of the witness are based on the presupposition that the second and third level witness automatically believes the first level witness's testimony, which is why Ricoeur's notion of attestation is so important to the process of witnessing. While Laub adds depth to testimony by expanding witnessing from just the primary eyewitness to the listener's duty, Ricoeur explores how the testifier embraces vulnerability as he attests his story without knowing if the listener is going to believe him or not. With these added layers, the idea of a witness sharing his testimony becomes more complex.

Laub, also a Holocaust survivor, dedicates his research with the witness and testimony solely within the bounds of the Holocaust. However, his idea of "Testimony Theory" can be expanded from the Holocaust to any large-scale traumatic and historical event such as the slave system. Mary Prince, an enslaved woman records her testimony in *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* published in 1831. Prince claims her testimony not just as her personal experience but as a history. It is one of the very first "slave narratives" ever written with the goal of being shared in order to help abolish the slave system. When transitioning Laub's work from the Holocaust to the slave system, one must be aware that comparing the two events is often

“precarious and frequently wrong but not always impossible or improper” (Wood 11). To state that survivors of the slave system and survivors of the Holocaust have similar testimonies is incorrect. Even within a cohesive event, no one’s trauma experience is ever the same. To claim that it is would be a great injustice to those who fell victim and those who survived. However, applying Laub’s levels of the witness and Ricoeur’s notion of attestation to any large-scale traumatic event, in this case the European slave system, expands how literature, from any time period, can fill in the gaps of historical testimony as the trauma experiences are retold in order to heal, share, and remember.

Within Prince’s testimony, the levels of witnessing follow as: first, Mary Prince is the primary eyewitness to her personal trauma and experiences as an enslaved woman in the West Indies, Grand Turk Island, Antigua, and England. Prince, as the first level witness, is the speaker of her testimony. She relives the trauma she experienced solely so that she can share her story and heal from the emotional trauma associated with being enslaved. Although difficult, the benefits of sharing her testimony include her personal healing and the potential to ignite social change. Second, Mr. Pringle is a witness to Prince’s testimony as the listener, editor, and writer of the supplementary material to her story. In Mr. Pringle’s role as such, the reader in connection with Laub’s ethics notices how he has a duty to Prince to be nonjudgmental and nonbiased as he guides her through the reexperiencing of her past as she shares her testimony. Lastly, the third level witness falls on readers of Prince’s narrative. The term “readers” extends to people who read Prince’s pamphlet in England in the 19th century as well as historians and literary scholars today. There is a duty to not just acknowledge the witness as a historiographer but also to share that history, remember it today, and in the future.

Prince, as an enslaved woman, historiographer, and first level witness, fully embodies the notion of literature as a form of history and as a witness. Her life story and experiences reveal the realities of the European slave system. Her story is a direct path to what it meant to be enslaved in the West Indies during the 19th century. Her history gives a voice to the voiceless. Because she was brave enough to speak up about the injustices of slavery, she gave agency to herself and to every other enslaved man and woman in the West Indies and even worldwide. Although Prince did not physically write down her testimony, it clearly states that her story is “[Related by herself]” on the top of the first page of her written testimony. Prince further affirms her accuracy and assertiveness by opening her story with introducing herself. She says, “I was born at Brackish-pond in Bermuda, on a farm belonging to Mr. Charles Myners” (Prince 12). Using “I” as the first word erases any doubt on who this story is about. She states her birthplace and the name of her first enslaver as historical facts to allow the listener to know that this is a true account of her life. As an enslaved woman, Prince asserts her authority to speak about the suffering of those enslaved. Levi, as previously stated, also claims agency by beginning his memoir with the pronoun “I.” This technique is beneficial for the notion of attestation. Testifiers, in this context Levi and Prince, ask listeners to believe in their testimonies as that is likely the only evidence they have to show others what they experienced. By using the first-person pronoun, the testifier manifests agency in his/her story, which leads to a more authentic and believable testimony.

Mr. Pringle, the editor of Prince’s testimony, embodies the definition of Laub’s second level witness because he listens to her story and advocates on her behalf. After many long years of being sold to different enslavers, suffering abuse in a variety of extremely cruel ways, and attempting to earn her freedom so she could return back to Antigua to live with her husband as a

free woman, Mary Prince finally finds Mr. and Mrs. Pringle. The Pringle family takes Prince in, shares Christianity with her, and provides a safe and comfortable environment in which Prince works for wages while she searches, hopes, and prays for a way to achieve physical freedom from her enslaver, the Wood family. Mr. Pringle actively tries to convince Mr. Wood to give Prince her liberty and advocates on her behalf to the Anti-Slavery Society. In doing so, he acts as Laub's example of a second level witness because he is a witness to Prince's struggle for freedom. Mr. Pringle engages in a "role of dialogue" with Prince, which is essential in "working through and coping with trauma" (Welz 105). While staying with the Pringle family, Prince dictates her testimony, and Mr. Pringle publishes it for her as an Anti-Slavery piece of literature. In order for "the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*" (Laub 70). Mr. Pringle becomes the "other" for Prince by listening to and sharing her story. Mr. Pringle aids in this process of attestation because he chooses to believe Prince's testimony.

Laub's third level of witnessing falls to the readers of Prince's pamphlet. The third level witness first applies to anyone reading Prince's story in the 19th century. Prince ends her testimony with a long paragraph on what it means to be a witness to the horrors of slavery. She also speaks to the English and their role in slavery in the West Indies. She states, "I have often wondered how English people can go out in the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner...they forget God" (Prince 39). In drawing attention to English voluntary blindness, Prince states, "I will say the truth to English people who may read this history...I have been a slave myself – I know what slaves feel...the man that says...they don't want to be free – that man is either ignorant or a lying person" (Prince 39). She further continues to state that in England, they hire and pay their servants. Thus, any argument for needing slaves to run a

business or household is invalid. She does not just share her testimony to work through the emotional traumas but also to raise awareness for the abolition movement. She calls the English people by name so that there is no confusion on who she is asking for help. Prince is just one woman who takes on the burden of witnessing. Unfortunately, her one voice, while brave, is not enough to bring justice and freedom to every enslaved person. She needs the help of the Anti-Slavery Society, English civilians, and others who are enslaved to come together and change the way society functions. This is why the level three witness is so important, in this context, because it represents the masses. Mr. Pringle works very hard as a level two witness to publish Prince's testimony, but he after his role is over, he too needs the rest of England to keep Prince's testimony in circulation. The level three witness is crucial to Prince's goal of ending slavery.

The people of England, after the publication of Prince's history, had a different experience reading Prince's pamphlet than we do today, nearly two hundred years later. Readers of Prince's pamphlet today, more or less, include historians, researchers, scholars, and literary critics, who bear witness to Prince's experience as an enslaved woman. As 21st century witnesses to Prince's testimony, we have a responsibility to remember the past and to keep it in conversation with the present. Today, we should "reflect on these memories as they are spoken, so as to reassert the veracity of the past and to build anew its linkage to, and assimilation into, present-day life" (Laub 76). It is easy to neglect the traumas of history. It is easy to pretend that they did not happen. However, Prince's testimony, her history, reminds us that her story is one of thousands, and her experiences, feelings, and actions mattered then as much as they matter now especially for scholars as they work to imagine the past. In viewing Prince's testimony in the 21st century, readers can see how *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* is no longer an isolated event. There are numerous slave narratives that uniquely discuss what it was like to be

enslaved. Each offer different representations of the past. Situating Prince's story as literature as a witness allows for the pain and suffering of the enslaved to come to light. Prince, as a testifier, participates in historiography by sharing her testimony in a literary form.

Laub's research works to situate "a history which is essentially *not over*, a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively *evolving*" (Felman and Laub xiv). The effects of trauma seep into the present through each generation. Yet, often the history behind the trauma is never discussed, which was certainly the case for Holocaust survivors. Many survivors did not know how to talk about what they went through to each other or to their children, so they chose silence because it was easier than reliving the trauma via testifying. This choice of silence only caused survivors to minimize their pain, suppress their memory, and avoid true healing. Their silence, however, is not to be judged. Many felt as if they had no other option as so many people pretended the Holocaust did not happen, which is why, at first, Levi struggled to get his memoir published. Laub is correct in saying that history is not over because of the trickling effects of trauma flowing from generation to generation. However, the issue, as he raises, is not that the repercussions of history are felt today but rather, we feel the wrong parts of the aftereffects. Society should not only know that a traumatic event happened but also what happened in that event to cause such extreme suffering. This is where testimony is key. Society cannot learn from the mistakes of the past if the past is covered up.

In author Toni Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize speech, she states "language can never 'pin down' slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so" ("The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993"). Language is powerful, but as Morrison states it is not prideful enough to "pin down" large-scale historical trauma. If one chooses to focus on pinning down

large-scale trauma, then the subjective, authentic, first level witness accounts are overlooked. Language must work to “gain insight into the significance and impact of the context of the text” (Felman and Laub xv). The historical facts paired with literature are what “[tell] us what only language can: how to see without pictures. Language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names” (“The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993”). Language is not all encompassing, but it is all we have to imagine the past. Morrison states, “the future of language is yours” (“The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993”). The future of language is ours, as scholars, historians, and literary critics. We bear witness to history in the form of facts as well as through literature, and I believe that both are necessary in providing a well-rounded image of the past.

Tracing the levels of the witness in Levi, Wiesel, Sebald, and even Prince show the multiple layers and complications of witnessing and representing a historical event. Levi shares his grueling personal account in Auschwitz because he could not remain silent about the injustices. Wiesel fictionalizes a post-Holocaust story in order to show the inescapable trauma survivors had to endure. Sebald boldly creates a fictional journey novel about discovering one’s true identity after it was stolen by the Kindertransports because of the Holocaust. Representing a large-scale historical event, especially one that centered around eradicating a specific race is not an easy task. How does memory effect one’s testimony? Is it acceptable to fictionalize the Holocaust? Can a German advocate against the Holocaust? These are questions that will never truly have a satisfying answer. However, through Laub’s levels of the witness and Ricoeur’s notion of attestation, listeners have the ability to choose to believe in the testifier’s account. The witness’s testimony is a method to further show what actually happened in the German concentration camps. We were not there, so we do not know. However, we can choose to believe

in the testimonies of survivors, for they were brave enough to live through the trauma again by sharing their history in Auschwitz.

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