

**Enduring Identities:
Jewish Identity in the Holocaust Literature of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD

The University of Leeds
York St John University,
Faculty of Arts.

February 2011

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to take this opportunity to thank my research supervisors Dr Robert Edgar-Hunt, Professor Pauline Kollontai and Professor Sebastian Kim. I am indebted to my supervisors for their support, knowledge, interest and patience over the last three years and very grateful for always finding the time and energy for me. I would like to thank Professor Sue Vice from the University of Sheffield and Dr Claire Honess from the University of Leeds for dedicating their time to examining this thesis. Thanks also go to Professor Julian Stern for his time and support during the upgrade and throughout my study. I would like to thank York St John University and the University of Leeds for their support, encouragement and resources in assisting me through the PhD.

Thanks must go to Dr John Rule and Jill Graham in the York St John Research Office for their unerring support throughout. I would also like to thank all my friends and colleagues in the York St John Graduate Centre for the moral support and the fantastic team spirit of the centre. I have to thank my family and friends for their support, encouragement and patience over the last three years. Special thanks to my mum Sue Nesfield for her endless patience in proof-reading and also to David Lewis for his time spent proof-reading and for his valuable suggestions. There are several people and organisations I would like acknowledge for their financial support throughout the PhD; I would not have been able to complete this study without the grants of some very generous charities to whom I am so grateful. Thank you to the Scarborough United Scholarships Foundation (John Kendall Trust); the Scarborough Municipal Charity; the Ruby and Will George Trust and the Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust.

Abstract

'Enduring Identities' is a comparison of the Holocaust literature of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, debating the cultural divide between Jewish communities in the East and West of Europe. Beginning with a historical and theological context, the thesis explores the establishment of the Jewish people, their movement into the Diaspora, the changes of Modernity and the ensuing dichotomy between East and West which created divided Jewish identities. There follows an identification and analysis of a literary lineage between the East and West of Europe, identifying a divide in cultural trajectories and situating Levi and Wiesel as Jewish authors within Western and Eastern literary paradigms.

Identifying four conceptual frameworks through which to compare the written works of Levi and Wiesel, the study takes as its central focus the Holocaust and discusses the representation of Jewish identity through the literary lineage of modern Jewish authorship and the East / West divide. The theme of 'otherness' is a central point of contention, identified through the work of Zygmunt Bauman on Modernity and Edward Said's work on theories of Orientalism, discussing the construction of 'the Jew' and Jewish identity as 'other' in Europe. Finally 'Enduring Identities' uses the Holocaust literature of Levi and Wiesel to discuss the identification of 'the Jew' from 'within and without', how Jewish communities perceived each other as different, across the East and West of Europe, from 'within' and how Jewish communities were perceived by the Gentile majority, from 'without'.

The study identifies how the divided Jewish communities of Europe had their identities deconstructed by the Nazi anti-Semitic persecution to the point of convergence in the concentration and extermination camps. The primary question the study aims to identify is whether the Holocaust united divided Jewish identity, or whether the cultural separations between the Eastern and Western Jewish identities endured. The study concludes that although the Jewish identities of Levi and Wiesel necessarily changed through the Holocaust, as a metaphor for an East / West dichotomy, the literature of Levi and Wiesel represents the continuing divide between European Jewry.

Abbreviations

Due to the large number of in-text references to the works of Levi and Wiesel, and also to biblical texts, the references to these works will include an abbreviated title rather than the Author-Date system used throughout. Below is a list of titles cited and their abbreviations.

Primo Levi *The Drowned and the Saved*: Drowned

Primo Levi *If Not Now, When?*: If Not Now

Primo Levi *If This is a Man*: Man

Primo Levi *The Periodic Table*: Periodic

Primo Levi *The Search for Roots*: Search

Primo Levi *The Truce* (within the same volume as *If This is a Man*): Truce

Elie Wiesel *All Rivers Run to the Sea*: All Rivers

Elie Wiesel *And the Sea is Never Full*: And the Sea

Elie Wiesel and Richard Heffner *Conversations with Elie Wiesel*: Conversations

Elie Wiesel *Dawn*: Dawn

Elie Wiesel *Day*: Day

Elie Wiesel and Michel de Saint Cheron *Evil and Exile*: Evil

Elie Wiesel *The Gates of the Forest*: Gates

Elie Wiesel *Messengers of God*: Messengers

Elie Wiesel *Night*: Night

Elie Wiesel *The Town Beyond the Wall*: Town

Elie Wiesel *The Trial of God*: Trial

The same principal will apply to quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, where the reference will cite the book title rather than author-date. Full bibliographic details of the *Tanakh* and *Bible* are supplied in the bibliography.

Contents

Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Abbreviations	
Introduction	1
1. Chapter One: Identifying the Jewish Character in the Scriptures	17
1.1. The Israelites: A Chosen People?	20
1.2. Redemptive Faith?	24
1.3. Job and the Tests of Faith	28
1.4. Victim Identity: From Genesis to Auschwitz	35
1.5. Judas the Betrayer? Anti-Semitism in the Gospels	40
1.6. Iconography and the Image of 'Judas the Jew'	45
1.7. The Christian Story: Hegemony and Anti-Judaism	49
1.8. Conclusion	51
2. Chapter Two: The Jew as 'Other': Modernity and the Development of Jewish Identity in European Literature	53
2.1. After the Renaissance: An Enlightened Europe?	54
2.2. Modernity and the Construction of Identity	61
2.3. The Oriental in the Midst: Race and 'Otherness' in the Nineteenth Century	67
2.4. East and West: A Geographical Divide of European Jewry	72
2.5. With Hind Legs Mired in Jewishness: the Jew as 'Other' from 'Within and Without'	77
2.6. Jewish Identity in the East: Aleichem and Singer	80
2.7. Conclusion	85
3. Chapter Three: The Jew of the East and of the West: Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi	87
3.1. Levi and Wiesel: A Cultural Comparison	88
3.2. The Jews of Italy	92
3.3. The Jew of the West: Primo Levi	93
3.4. The Jews of Hungary and Romania	99
3.5. The Jew of the East: Elie Wiesel	102
3.6. Post-War Modernity and 'Otherness'	107
3.7. Jewish 'Others': The Crisis of Identity from Within	110
3.8. Conclusion	114
4. Chapter Four: The Jewish Question: Anti-Semitism and 'Otherness' in the Propaganda and Ideology of the Third Reich	116
4.1. Out of a Defeated Germany: The Weimar Years	118
4.2. Mein Kampf: An Anti-Semitic Obsession	122
4.3. Legitimising Anti-Semitism: Persecution and Violence	125
4.4. Where They Begin By Burning Books...	130

4.5. The Return to the Ghettos	132
4.6. The Ghettos as a Prelude to the Moral Construct of the Camps	134
4.7. The Road to the Final Solution	138
4.8. Conclusion	143
5. Chapter Five: The Deconstruction of Jewish Identity in Auschwitz	145
5.1. Swallowed up by the Night: The Arrival at Auschwitz	147
5.2. Jewish 'Others': The Camp Infrastructure	150
5.3. Jewish Conformity in the Camp Structure	156
5.4. Grey Zones: Privilege in the Camps	165
5.5. Conclusion	168
6. Chapter Six: Narrative, Testimony and Holocaust Memory	170
6.1. Häftling A-7713: Elie Wiesel	172
6.2. Häftling 174517: Primo Levi	175
6.3. Memory in the Holocaust Narrative	178
6.4. Bearing Witness: The Representation and Language of Testimony	182
6.5. The Literary Heritage of the East and West in the Holocaust Narrative	188
6.6. The Construction of a Victim Identity	191
6.7. Conclusion	195
7. Chapter Seven: A Silent and Empty Sky? God and the Crisis of Faith in Auschwitz	197
7.1. "If This is a Man": The Deconstruction of Religious Culture in Auschwitz	199
7.2. "Buried Beneath History's Debris": The Role of God in Holocaust Theology	204
7.3. God on Trial: Elie Wiesel and the Evolution of Protest Theology	209
7.4. "A Strange Trial": Wiesel's Indictment of God	211
7.5. Primo Levi and the Confrontation with Faith	216
7.6. To Concur with Job: The Martyrdom of Levi and Wiesel	222
7.7. "The Drowned and the Saved": The Final Days of Auschwitz	224
7.8. Conclusion	226
8. Chapter Eight: Reconstructing Jewish Identity in the Post-Holocaust World	228
8.1. And the World Remained Silent	229
8.2. The Holocaust in the Media	233
8.3. Of Providence? Changing Holocaust Theology	238
8.4. Reconnecting With the East: Levi's Engagement With Jewish History	241
8.5. An Outcry of Despair Then Hope: A New Israel	244
8.6. Jewry in the Diaspora	248
8.7. The End of the Twentieth Century	250
8.8. Conclusion	256
Conclusion	258
Works Referenced	266

Introduction

This study debates the issue of 'Enduring Identities', comparing the Holocaust literature of Auschwitz survivors Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, their representations of Jewish identity and the impact of the Holocaust on European Jewry. Starting with the central argument that between the East and West of Europe there existed a polarisation of Jewish identity, represented by Wiesel and Levi, the study uses the Holocaust literature of each survivor to compare their representations of identity and of the experience of the Holocaust. Arguing that Levi represents the assimilated, secular Jew of emancipated Western Europe and Wiesel the religious Orthodoxy of East European Jewry and that these Jewish identities were distinct and divided, the study questions the extent to which Jewish identity was deconstructed and collapsed through the Holocaust. Considering the impact of the Holocaust on the social, cultural and religious divide between European Jewry, the study questions whether the Holocaust had any significant impact on Jewish identity and its divisions.

With a necessary and fundamental contextual discussion of the formation of Jewish identity in the Israel of the Hebrew Scriptures, the conceptual setting of the study is the period of Modernity. The cultural and socio-political changes of the period of Modernity in Europe allow for the interrogation of the divide between the East and West of Europe, perceptions and treatment of Jewish communities and the genesis and politics of National Socialism and anti-Semitism. It is vital to consider firstly the cultural, political and religious foundations of Jewish history in Europe, then to identify the influences that constructed the Jewish identities of Levi and Wiesel. The changing and divisive cultural identities across modern Europe and the fractures in religious unity within the Jewish faith have led to varied and at times totally opposed identities within Judaism, as Levi and Wiesel exemplify. These changes are considered as contextual to the formation of the identities of the two survivors. The impact of the Holocaust on the beliefs and identities of the two writers and how, as Jewish writers and survivors these identities both differ and compare, is evaluated using the testimonial and Holocaust related texts to trace the representation of changes in Jewish identity in modern Europe and the effect of the Holocaust and Nazi oppression on the cultural and religious identities of Levi and Wiesel.

Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel

Levi and Wiesel are considered as major twentieth-century Jewish writers and the two leading authors of the Holocaust literature genre in their prolific and often cited literature. Levi and Wiesel each have prolific bibliographies with which to compare their representations of identity and the Holocaust experience. Both survivors wrote their Holocaust testimonies in the aftermath of the Holocaust and liberation, as Levi returned to Italy and Wiesel settled in France. With difficult starts, but after finally establishing their literary careers within the field of Holocaust literature, Levi and Wiesel both explored various avenues of literary representation, from poetry to fiction and plays. Throughout their literary explorations, the narratives of both Levi and Wiesel were informed and influenced by the Holocaust and the experiences of the authors in Auschwitz. The survivors are perhaps best known however for their initial Holocaust testimonies; Levi's *If This is a Man* and Wiesel's *Night*. The study compares the two survivors and their work in an interrogation of the deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of Jewish identity during and throughout the Holocaust and in their lives afterwards.

As a model of comparison Levi and Wiesel are central to the area of Holocaust testimony as they exemplify the very opposite characteristics of the modern European Jewish figure discussed. In studies of Holocaust representation and theology, Levi and Wiesel are frequently mentioned as significant voices of the Holocaust, their narratives are held up as stylistically opposed and as Jewish survivors their religious stances are frequently contrasted (see, for example, Wollaston 1992; Morgan 2001; and Waxman 2006). The frequent brief discussions of Levi and Wiesel as survivors with differing Holocaust narratives, demonstrates the validity of comparing the two writers. The previous lack of any detailed comparative studies of the two writers, studying their Jewish identities and looking for points of convergence, provides an opportunity for new perspectives on the two survivors and their comparable Jewish identities. Levi and Wiesel's identities can be seen to be initially situated in opposition to each other within Jewish culture. However as the two men found themselves incarcerated in Auschwitz in 1944, identified solely as anonymous Jews (from 'without') and persecuted alike, the thesis questions how the two men experienced and latterly narrated their shared experience and the effect it had on their individual senses of

Jewish identity and how this was publicly represented. It is acknowledged at this stage that the East / West framework is used as a framework through which to explore the narratives and identities of Levi and Wiesel. There is necessarily a level of generalisation present in comparing divided Jewish identity in Europe and it should be made clear at this point that there are naturally exceptions to the pattern being identified and differences within each Jewish community discussed. However, as Levi and Wiesel both clearly exemplify very different elements of Jewish identity yet both demonstrate a sense of convergence through the Holocaust, it is argued that the East / West framework is a suitable one to identify Levi and Wiesel as European Jews through, and one which is valid in considering the timeframe of Modernity and the issue of enduring identities.

Two male authors are considered as Levi and Wiesel specifically are representative of the polarisation of Jewish identity across Europe and are both leading voices of Holocaust testimony in Europe (and for Wiesel in America also). In the period of time Levi and Wiesel wrote their Holocaust testimonies there was and to a lesser extent still is, a higher proportion of male accounts than female testimonies. This is very likely the result of the higher survival rate of men than women in the concentration camp system. Female deportees, who were pregnant, suspected of being pregnant or who accompanied small children were typically automatically sent to the gas chambers upon arrival at extermination camps; denied the chance of surviving through being a part of work details and slave labour units. Although there now exists a proliferation of female testimony, narrative theories and feminist critical theory surrounding this section of Holocaust testimony have emerged along with the testimony which is not the focal point of this study of testimony narrative and religious identity. It is also notable that these two men are continuing an andro-centric tradition in literature and authorship. The earlier examples of literature within this thesis are written by a male body of authors; however these texts have been selected due to their social, historical or narrative relevance to Jewish history and to Levi and Wiesel as writers. The issue of gendered Holocaust memory, as discussed by Pascale Rachel Bos, is acknowledged and applied to Levi and Wiesel's writing with relation to trauma, memory and testimony, with theory and supporting examples of gendered

text and memory used, to offer another point of comparison between the two authors and an alternative branch of narrative theory.

Research Methodology

Textual analysis is informed by close readings of the narratives of the autobiographical and Holocaust themed narratives of Levi and Wiesel in an exploration of constructions and deconstructions of Jewish identity. The primary methodology within the study is close textual and narrative analysis of the primary texts of Levi and Wiesel and in the first chapter, the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. For the purposes of a literary study and as the authors of both the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Biblical texts cannot be verified, the texts are considered as literature, with a defined doctrinal intent and historical significance. The Hebrew Scriptures formed the basis of the Jewish faith, one of the most enduring world religions, which has survived turbulence and tremendous change. It is this religious and literary history which joins Levi and Wiesel in their Jewish religion and heritage, therefore it has a vital and clearly defined position within this study as the starting point for the discussion of the construction of Jewish identity.

Several different texts of Levi and Wiesel's are discussed throughout the study, predominantly Holocaust testimonies, but also fiction inspired by the Holocaust such as Levi's *If Not Now, When?* and Wiesel's *Dawn* and *Trial of God*. Interviews given by both Levi and Wiesel throughout their writing careers are included as they give insights into the consistency of their views and identities throughout the social, political and cultural changes they lived through in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Interviews where Levi and Wiesel were asked questions they had not prepared or rehearsed answers for, provide more immediate and less constructed responses from the authors, providing a comparison with the structured form of the testimony narrative. It is acknowledged and forms part of the analysis of the texts, that Levi and Wiesel not only constructed personal Jewish identities, but in the publication of their literature, also public Jewish and survivor identities. Comparing the carefully structured literary texts with the relatively unstructured and unscheduled responses to interviews, the public and the personal identities of Levi and Wiesel can be analysed and compared. *If This is a Man* and *Night*, Levi and Wiesel's respective first books may be considered as

Holocaust testimony, as to testify and bear witness was the intention for each and Holocaust testimony is the literary sub-genre that both now represent.

Situating Levi and Wiesel within a literary framework, maintaining a consistent methodological framework throughout, the study uses the East / West concept to identify two distinct literary pathways. The analysis then explores the narratives and trajectories of Levi and Wiesel to situate the two survivors within a literary East / West dichotomy, within the cultural dichotomy which divides the two men initially. In this section of the study, the literature of Jewish writers Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer, whose cultural backgrounds, religious identities and emigrations to America are comparable with Wiesel's, and Franz Kafka, whose work is exemplary of the modern culture of Levi's life, is discussed within the framework of Modernity and the study's conceptual issue of the East / West divide in Europe.

There are several theoretical frameworks which are used to support this study. A consistent critical framework which is referred to throughout is that of East and West. This context forms a significant section of the discussion within the thesis, not only in the construction of Levi and Wiesel's Jewish identities, but also in the contextual chapters that interrogate how this East / West Jewish divide was constructed through the changes of Modernity and thus informed Levi and Wiesel's identities. The formation of the East / West frame of reference within the thesis refers to the European context and identifies Germany as the boundary between East and West. Germany naturally holds a central significance in a study of the Holocaust, as the birth place of Nazism. Geographically Germany becomes the seat of focus in the destruction of Jewry, as the Jews from all over Europe became ensnared in the Nazis' Final Solution. Socially and culturally in terms of Jewish thought and culture, Germany was also a significant site of Jewish Enlightenment and assimilation. East of Germany in countries such as Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Hungary and Russia, comparatively little was achieved in the assimilation and secularisation of Jewish culture. West of Germany, in the Mediterranean, France and Northern-Central Europe, assimilation and secularisation was far more common, although not exclusive and the cultural Enlightenment of the eighteenth century produced a much more visible culture of modern secular Judaism. Levi and Wiesel, as representatives of Western and Eastern Jewry represent this cultural divide. Politically in the aftermath of the

Holocaust and the Second World War, Germany clearly marked the divide between East and West with the physical line between the two drawn across Berlin, formerly the seat of Nazi governance and for decades later the site of the Berlin wall, a brutal and visible symbol of European East-West division.

The discussion which takes place throughout of 'within and without' refers to the perceptions and reception of 'the Jew', both inside the Jewish community, 'within' and outside of the Jewish community, 'without'. At the changing times discussed, the perceptions of the Jew as an 'other' figure changed and are explored and discussed here as perceptions of the Jew 'from without'. A central argument of the study is that European Jewry was clearly divided between the East and the West. Because of this and as is demonstrated in the comparison of Levi and Wiesel's representations of Jewish identity, perceptions and feelings toward the Jew 'from within', that is across the East / West Jewish divide, also vary. From 'within', the construction of the Jew as 'other' considers how differences within the Jewish community, in this study's context between the East and the West of Europe, have created separate and 'other' Jewish identities, represented here in the literature of Levi and Wiesel. In considering the issue of 'within and without', Levi and Wiesel are discussed with a consideration of how they can be 'other' 'within' the Jewish context as well as 'without', that is, in the Gentile communities of Europe.

Critical discussions on narrative theory and testimony assist in identifying the construction of Jewish identity and the Holocaust's deconstruction of identity, with the use of authoritative voices on Levi and Wiesel, the Holocaust and the framework of philosophies of Modernity. The critical frameworks that are used throughout this thesis are those of 'otherness' and Orientalism within the context of Modernity. Authoritative figures on 'otherness' and Orientalism, Zygmunt Bauman and Edward Said respectively, are utilised particularly in the exploration of the construction of the Jew from 'within and without'. Using the work of Said and Bauman the study interrogates how the figure of 'the Jew' is constructed and perceived from outside of the Jewish world, to be different, exotic, dangerous and 'other', demonstrated by the development of anti-Judaism and latterly anti-Semitism.

Thematic Notes

Levi and Wiesel both wrote in languages other than English. Levi's works were written in his native Italian and Wiesel, after initially writing in Yiddish, wrote in French. The testimonies referred to within this study are English language translations of Levi and Wiesel's texts (as are translations of other survivors' Holocaust testimonies referenced and earlier literature such as the works of Aleichem, Singer and Kafka). Care has been taken to ensure consistency in the translators used; Levi was familiar with his translators and their work, maintaining a rigorous interest in the translations of his writing. Wiesel's wife Marion frequently acts as his translator for English language versions of his texts.

An important explanatory note to make concerns Wiesel's nationality and its description throughout the study. Wiesel's hometown was Sighet; it is named and described variously in different texts and at different times as being a Romanian province and a Hungarian one, due to political and territorial changes. Wiesel clarifies the matter himself in his memoir stating that when he was born, Sighet was Romanian. During his childhood, the power and territorial control changed to Hungary, under whose control it remained throughout the war; now Sighet once again is a part of Romania. The thesis covers the changes in Wiesel's life from his early years to his later life, as the national identity of Sighet changed. For consistency, the thesis refers to Wiesel and to his hometown as Romanian, but notes to the contrary are included where relevant for accuracy and clarification.

The term and concept of assimilation is used throughout this study in describing and discussing Levi and broadly speaking, the Jews of the West. Assimilation within the context of the thesis refers to the Jews traditionally emancipated under the Enlightenment and the Napoleonic Revolution, who separated from the traditions, the rigours and the devout faith of Orthodox Jewry. Freedom of trade, education and lifestyle in emancipated Western Europe meant that Jews were not forced to remain insular communities, excluded from a national identity, committed to their faith and religious identity, as typically occurred in the East, a situation exemplified by the Pale of Settlement. Jews such as Levi's family, although considering themselves Jewish and observing some elements of the Jewish faith, were not rigorously observant and identified themselves as Italians firstly and Jews secondly. With respect to this at times

ambivalent attitude to Jewish identity, the analysis does not argue that assimilation resulted in a total disregard for Jewish ancestry and identity as the term was framed by Gustav Landauer, who argued that Jewish assimilation led to a total and forceful denial of Jewish roots (Landauer cited in Schmidt 1992: 127). There are varying degrees of assimilation and secularisation; assimilation is considered here as not necessarily adopting Christian attitudes in ostensibly Christian countries, but choosing not to follow a religious life. This definition is more typical of Samuel Klausner's definition which specifies the typical rejection of the religious facet of Jewish life, in conforming to the cultural norms of the majority population (Klausner 1992: 263). Assimilation in this study is thus used to describe and define the opposing Jewish identity to that of the typically Eastern Jewish figure of strong religious belief and observance and the Jewish-centred community context associated with Orthodoxy.

This framework sets Levi and Wiesel apart from each other as Jewish figures from the beginning of the study, representing opposing figures of East and West Jewry and opens an interrogation into how and when these identities converge and become similar. Opposing the notion of secular or assimilated non-belief, the question of faith and belief must be addressed and clarified. Within this context, the faithful or believing Jewish people refers to theists, who believe in God. Levi frequently engages with Jewish history and the Scriptures, although he always maintained his atheism. Wiesel however, despite his emotional struggle in Auschwitz, his religious disputes and his protests, has always maintained his belief in God. The Jewish identities of Levi and Wiesel are at times problematic and complex, particularly within their Holocaust narratives, but in comparing the backgrounds, cultures and the Jewish identities that the two men represent themselves, Levi and Wiesel appear to be polarised. As a starting point for comparison and analysis, Levi is considered as a non-religious, atheist, assimilated Jew and Wiesel as a religious, Hasidic and traditional Jew.

Chapter Structure

The lineage of the thesis and research question develops from the initial religious context of Jewish history and literature, to the socio-cultural context of Jewry in the modern Diaspora and up to the Holocaust. The histories of Levi and Wiesel and their

countries' Jewish histories are discussed as a prelude to the anti-Semitism and treatment of the Jews in wartime Europe, before moving on to an exploration of Levi and Wiesel's concentration camp experience and its impact on their identities. The study concludes with a comparison of the post-Holocaust lives of Levi and Wiesel and a consideration of how the Holocaust influenced their religious, cultural and literary identities and public personae as high-profile authors and Holocaust survivors.

Chapter One: Identifying the Jewish Character in the Scriptures

Chapter one identifies the religious history of the Jewish people, as represented in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian New Testament. Levi and Wiesel are introduced as writers with a shared Jewish history which is discussed here with reference to the Hebrew Scriptures, both the *Torah* texts and the book of Job, part of *Kethuvim* writings and the Christian-adopted texts in the Old and New Testaments, specifically the Gospel texts. This context is theological and literary, but it is instrumental in opening up the 'within and without' question of Jewish identity and its representations. The study confines the theological debate to the Judeo-Christian context. Many of the socio-political issues concerning the Jewish people in Europe have historically emerged from Christian ideology and despite being the parent faith to Christianity, Judaism is a minority faith in Europe, but one significant enough to be vulnerable to centuries of persecution prior to the Holocaust. Considering how the Scriptures develop a characterisation of the Jewish figure, one that is distorted and manipulated by Christian reinterpretations of the New Testament texts, this chapter engages with the religious history of Levi and Wiesel and identifies how they engage with their religious history.

Chapter one establishes the theme of 'otherness' as a concept which the East / West divide stems from within European Jewish culture. Beginning with the Hebrew Scriptures the chapter explores issues of victim identity, suffering and Scriptural precedents within Jewish history. Moving on to the New Testament Gospels, the construction of 'the Jew' figure in the earliest years of Christianity are discussed, examining the development of the Judas character, his genesis, characterisation and the Christian polarisation of the Semitic Judas figure and the Christianised Jesus figure

within Renaissance artistic representations of the Last Supper. The issue of faith, its importance within the lives and identities of Levi and Wiesel are also considered, to establish within this religious framework, how polarised Levi and Wiesel's Jewish identities are.

Chapter Two: The Jew as 'Other': Modernity and Development of Jewish Identity in European Literature.

Chapter two establishes the European context of Jewry in the Diaspora, which creates the East / West divide. The chapter argues that Wiesel represents the religious, traditional Jew of the East and Levi the assimilated Jew of the West. The socio-political situation in modern Europe is considered with the conditions which created a clear East / West divide amongst European Jewry and led to two polarised Jewish identities through the separation. This context introduces the period of Modernity and the theoretical framework of 'otherness', by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. These frameworks are considered as informing ideas of the Jewish figure from 'without' at this stage, how the minority Jewish figure was perceived and treated by the Christian majority across Europe. This treatment changed, fluctuated and progressed in the West through significant events such as the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, but the condition for the Jews in the East stagnated and this cultural dichotomy leads to the construction of two very different Jewish identities.

Chapter two also introduces modern Jewish literature from Sholem Aleichem, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Franz Kafka, establishing a Jewish literary heritage within Europe and beyond in America. The chapter considers the way in which these authors create archetypes of the Jew within their literature, specifically different archetypes of the Jew between the East, represented by Aleichem and Singer and the West, represented by Kafka. Issues of alienation, 'otherness,' the threat of anti-Semitism and the ambiguity of assimilation are all significant factors in the literature of Aleichem, Singer and Kafka. These re-emerge as contemporary issues facing Levi and Wiesel. The chapter argues that the literary path of Jewry in Europe follows the socio-political

division between East and West, a literary dichotomy that authors, Levi and Wiesel continue through their own literary identities as Holocaust writers.

Chapter Three: The Jew of the East and of the West: Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi.

Chapter three explores in detail the biographies and heritages of Levi and Wiesel, identifying how the divided Jewish identities emerge through their histories and literary representations of themselves. Using biography and autobiography the family and cultural histories of Italy and Romania are considered, with a focus on the establishment and treatment of Jews of the Piedmont region of Italy and of Sighet in Romania. The education, religious upbringing and social activity of Levi and Wiesel's youth are compared to establish the differences and similarities in identity. Issues of 'otherness' from 'within' and crises of identity are explored, to question whether Levi and Wiesel, despite representing polarised Jewish identities, faced the same issues of identity from opposing perspectives in the years before the Holocaust. The political changes which plotted the paths of the national identities of Levi and Wiesel are discussed. In Italy the Christian dogma and role of the Church is explored in a consideration of how the Levi family's Jewish identity is asserted in opposition to the dominating Christian identity. The changing national identity of Wiesel's Sighet home is discussed as the change of power between Hungary and Romania led to a conflicted and unsettled national identity, a void which was filled for the Jews of Sighet by their dominant religious identity.

Chapter Four: The Jewish Question: Anti-Semitism and 'Otherness' in the Propaganda and Ideology of the Third Reich.

Chapter four explores the rise of the Nazi party out of Germany's World War One defeat and the subsequent economic decline of the country. Hitler's developing anti-Semitism is explored from its roots represented in *Mein Kampf* to the ideology that informed the Nazi Party's policies to such a significant extent. Discussing the Jewish history of pogroms and persecutions the chapter questions the Nazis' use of centuries of anti-Semitism and the vulnerability of Jews in the Diaspora to push the Jews to the

edge of society before the Final Solution to destroy Jewry altogether. The implementation of the theory of 'otherness' is of significant importance in the Nazis' system of anti-Semitic legislation, in the propaganda-led construction of the Jew as a homogenous 'other' and a threat to the Aryan. Where the socio-political dichotomy discussed in the thesis up to now has been East / West, in the Nazi system, it becomes German / Jew, citizen / 'other' in the ordered ideal of the era of Modernity and the Nazi quest for a homogenised Aryan race. Bauman's discussion of the 'other', his critique of Modernity and its facilitation of the Holocaust are interrogated through the Nazi system of governance and progressive dehumanisation of the Jews in Europe. Levi and Wiesel's personal experiences in Italy and Romania are discussed and compared, to identify how their divergent lives began to converge within the Nazi system. The transition from legislative anti-Semitism to the violence reminiscent of the pre-modern pogrom is discussed, with *Kristallnacht*, the plans for the Final Solution and the return to the ghettos explored. The chapter questions these fundamental elements of the Nazis' oppression of Jewry as elements of Modernity, when such political devices imply a more medieval violence and prejudice than a modern state of rule.

Chapter Five: The Deconstruction of Jewish Identity in Auschwitz.

Chapter five discusses the Auschwitz experience of Levi and Wiesel. Both men were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944 and endured the trauma of the unloading ramp, the selections, the slave labour and the diseases within the concentration camp. Levi and Wiesel were also forced to rapidly come to terms with an entirely new social system and means of survival in the harsh camp environment where the Jews from all over Europe were confined together. A discussion of the deportations and arrivals in camp opens this chapter, which goes on to discuss the camp infrastructure and the Nazi methodology which attempted to not only strip Jews of their identity, but also to dehumanise them and force a breakdown of Jewish unity within the camps. Jewish complicity with and resistance to the Nazi methods, both insidious and open are discussed through analysis of Levi and Wiesel's testimonies *If This is a Man* and *Night* respectively. Both testimonies offer a short prelude to their deportation to Auschwitz, but are predominantly devoted to the narrative of their experiences of the camp from

deportation from Italy and Romania to liberation from Auschwitz-Birkenau and Buchenwald, for Levi and Wiesel respectively. Both survivors also revisited their Holocaust experiences in later texts. Wiesel's autobiography *All Rivers Run to the Sea* discusses in more detail than *Night* the events leading to the deportation of the Jews from Sighet and also discusses the experiences of Wiesel and his father in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Levi's last published work before his death, *The Drowned and the Saved*, is a collection of essays in which Levi interrogates issues such as survivor shame and guilt, violence and complicity which occurred in the camps. These texts are discussed together in this chapter to build up a profile of each author in Auschwitz and a sense of how their identities were shaped by their experiences.

Chapter Six: Narrative, Testimony and Holocaust Memory

Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel use the framework of the Holocaust narrative to represent their individual Jewish identities and construct their differing literary identities. The literature of Wiesel and Levi demonstrates the issues facing the survivor when writing their account of their Holocaust experience. The two survivors follow different trajectories despite discussing their experiences of the same place and time and these paths are indicative of the different identities they represent. The comparison of Levi and Wiesel's testimonies demonstrate how one event, place and time has produced differing literary responses, considering factors such as traumatic memory, authorial intent and personal representation. As interest in the Holocaust as an historical event and Holocaust literature as a genre progressively developed into an industry important psychological and literary issues surrounding Holocaust memory arose. It is necessary here to consider these issues of Holocaust memory in a discussion of Levi and Wiesel's testimonies, firstly to acknowledge issues of traumatic memory potentially producing distorted truths and a revised history. Secondly, as Levi and Wiesel constructed differing literary identities and post-Holocaust careers following the publication of their literature, the question of how a lived experience is constructed as a readable and saleable narrative must be interrogated.

In chapter six close textual reading of the literature of Levi and Wiesel explores the issues of narrative and memory in testifying to the camp system and the Auschwitz

experience. The chapter compares how Levi and Wiesel individually represent a shared experience. The narrative style of each author is compared, with theory on gendered testimony to support the discussion and examples of Levi and Wiesel's literary style and choices. Narrative and traumatic memory theories are discussed in more detail in this chapter to establish the frameworks Levi and Wiesel write within or stand outside of. The chapter also revisits issues of victim identity introduced in chapter one with reference to the Hebrew Scriptures and here with the construction of a Jewish victim identity through modern persecution of Jewry.

Chapter Seven: A Silent and Empty Sky? God and the Crisis of Faith in Auschwitz

The religious divide which typically marks Levi and Wiesel as so separate, yet both so significant within Holocaust studies, is discussed in chapter seven. The chapter explores the religious experiences of both Levi and Wiesel within Auschwitz and the representations of religious identity and issues of faith that both the non-religious and the religious man experienced. The chapter considers the extent to which the religious Jewish differences between Levi and Wiesel collapse as their paths collide within Auschwitz, an environment which offers little indication of a divine presence protecting the Jewish people, but an environment in which there is little material comfort, where the Jews have almost nothing but their faith to hold on to. In a situation where all physical elements of culture and identity have been forcibly removed by the Nazis and the SS, the faith and belief of the Jews was an element of identity that the Nazis had no control over. For a religious Jew such as Wiesel, the landscape of Auschwitz prompted a crisis of faith with the collapse of Wiesel's belief in a caring and intervening God who shares a Covenant with the Jewish people. For a non-believing Jew such as Levi, the ideological conflict between the mental rejection of a God and the overwhelming desperation in camp prompted a different crisis of faith. Despite the East / West divide still existing to an extent within Auschwitz, Levi and Wiesel, the opposing Jews experience a comparable crisis of faith and thus, of Jewish identity, throughout the Holocaust.

Elements of Jewish theology are analysed in the discussion of Jewish faith throughout the Holocaust, along with supporting texts from the Scriptures and theory

by Eliezer Berkovits, a Rabbi and theologian who was forced to flee Germany and Nazi persecution while his own family died in the Holocaust. The close reading of Levi and Wiesel's literature is extended to include Levi's essays and Wiesel's fiction, most significantly *The Trial of God*. The development of a Jewish identity informed by being a victim of the Holocaust emerges in this chapter, as Wiesel constructs his theological and literary protest and Levi is forced to confront his Jewish faith more intensively than ever before. The two men are compared in their literary representations of their experiences and in the argument that both men to an extent embody the 'Job' figure of Jewish victimisation.

Chapter Eight: Reconstructing Jewish Identity in a Post-Holocaust World.

Chapter eight considers how Jewish identity is reconstructed after the Holocaust and questions whether the testimonies of Levi and Wiesel represent the re-emergence of the East / West divide in the post-Holocaust world. Levi and Wiesel's differing experiences of liberation and the trauma of emerging as a survivor in a world reluctant to acknowledge the realities of the Holocaust are explored and compared. The difficulties both men experienced in attempting to publish their testimonies are discussed and compared with the reception of Anne Frank's diary, one of the most famous texts to emerge from the Holocaust. Levi and Wiesel's literary careers are discussed, as Levi engages with his Eastern roots in *If Not Now, When?* and Wiesel uses his fictitious *Dawn* to explore the transition in Israel from survivor identity to freedom fighter. The chapter closes the thesis and concludes with some issues opened by chapter one. Re-engaging with issues of Jewish theology and religious interpretations of the Holocaust, chapter eight discusses the issue of the Remnant, the belief in salvation by providence and compares Levi and Wiesel's beliefs in this idea, opposed as they typically are on issues of Jewish religious belief and faith.

Issues such as the construction and promotion of a victim identity, the East / West dichotomy and socio-political changes such as the establishment of the State of Israel are revisited in this chapter. The establishment of the Jewish homeland was the most significant event after the Holocaust for world Jewry and its political issues implicated Levi and Wiesel in their commentaries on modern Judaism. This chapter

compares the differences in Levi and Wiesel's post-Holocaust public personae, from Levi's reluctance to become a public figurehead of Holocaust identity to Wiesel's emergence as a prominent political figure and activist on issues of Jewish and non-Jewish oppression across the world. Levi's death in 1987 occurred within a year of Wiesel's acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, the identities of Levi and Wiesel as polarised at the end of the twentieth century as they were at the beginning of their lives.

Chapter eight returns the study to some of the central research questions and themes of chapter one, in the religious context of the study and a return to a discussion of the state of Israel and of the Jewish people in the homeland. The study follows the era of Modernity from its European beginning through to its close in the twentieth century. The lives of Levi and Wiesel are explored from their ancestry and births through to Levi's death and Wiesel's status in old age as one of the very few current Holocaust survivors. The study closes by bringing together the different themes and elements of Jewish identity throughout a timeframe encompassing most of the twentieth century. The identities of Levi and Wiesel are explored through this context and their literary representations of their Holocaust experiences are brought together in a comparison of the two authors and their representations of the two sides of European Jewry. The study concludes with an analysis of whether the seminal event of the Holocaust actually united the separated Jewish communities in Europe or further amplified their distinctness. The identities of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel are explored through this event to identify whether the Jewish identities of the two survivors endured throughout and beyond the Holocaust.

Chapter One

Identifying the Jewish Character in the Scriptures

I will make you into a great nation
 and I will bless you.
 I will make your name great,
 and you will be a blessing.
 I will bless those who bless you,
 And curse him that curses you;
 and all the families of the earth
 shall bless themselves by you.

(Genesis 12. 2-3)

This chapter identifies the motif of the Jew within Jewish and Christian religious history to debate the roots of anti-Semitism, which has had such a turbulent impact upon the Jewish people through the ages. The history of the Jewish character and the development of the Jew as a literary figure in the religious Scriptures are considered through an exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament) and the New Testament. This section encompasses religious history and theological research and these details form a context within which to introduce the thesis' primary figures Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel. The debate on Jewish identity leads to the focus on these two figures and the Holocaust. It is firstly necessary however to identify the origins of the historical figure of the Jew from 'within and without' the Jewish faith and the issue of persecution within Judaism's history and the literary representation of the Jewish figure. The chapter negotiates the variance between perceptions of the Jewish figure from 'within and without'. From 'within' it discusses how the divided Jews from East and West regard each other, as represented by the writing of Wiesel and Levi, both writing from 'within' Jewry but still with differing views. The representation and understanding of the Jews from 'without' refers to the Christian representation and understanding of the Jewish figure, particularly in this chapter, in the canonical Christian use of the Scriptures and the anti-Jewish trajectory drawn by Christian hegemony. Situating the context of the study within Europe provides a largely Christian populace within a Western paradigm. The two constructs are considered as contributing to the perception of the 'otherness' of the Jewish population. In discussing general perceptions of Jewish character within Christian populations, the

complex issue of essentialism must be acknowledged. The stereotypical idea of 'the Jew' as a single or universal identity is discussed as an issue facing European Jewry from 'without', and is challenged here in an exploration of Christian responses to Jews in Europe. From 'within' however, the differences in Jewish character and identity, exemplified by Levi and Wiesel, are clear. These issues are significant in the Biblical literature considered here. Issues of persecution also remain relevant through the course of Jewish history up to the Holocaust and in post-Holocaust Jewish identity.

The writings of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament representations of Jewish figures and history are considered as literary representations, to establish the literary theme which is central to the study. The deep reverence and religious belief in the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian New Testament is acknowledged. These Scriptures are the written records which are the basis of not just religious and spiritual belief and faith but also law and ritual. The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures on the legitimacy of the State of Israel is also acknowledged as demonstrative of the political power of religious Scripture. As this is a literary study the Scriptures are analysed and discussed as literature. The *Torah* Scriptures, narrative of Job and the New Testament Gospels are discussed as literary representations of God's relationship with His people, persecutions, turbulences and issues of faith. These motifs of religious identity and the methodology of literary analysis continue through the study with an exploration of modern literature, contemporary issues of persecution, Jewish identity and the analysis of Levi and Wiesel's literature. Levi and Wiesel are addressed and compared throughout the chapter, questioning the extent to which they both engage with the Hebrew Scriptures and their shared religious history. Despite Levi and Wiesel representing differing Jewish identities and religious views, both men refer to and engage with the historical and literary figures of their Jewish Scriptural history in their Holocaust narratives. The primary Jewish figures discussed in chapter one are Moses and Job and from the New Testament, Judas Iscariot. Levi and Wiesel's individual engagements with the Scriptures and their religious history are discussed and compared in the construction of their Jewish identities and in the role of Jewish religious history and Scripture as contributing factors.

1.1 The Israelites: A Chosen People?

The Israelite people are introduced in Hebrew Scriptures, the *Torah* or five books of Moses (the Pentateuch). The *Torah* forms the first part of the *Tanakh*, or written Jewish history, recording the early history of the Jewish people and their relationship with God, which also contains the *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and the *Kethuvim* (writings), including the book of Job (1985: v-vii). The *Torah* introduces Moses and the Covenant as the foundation of Israel. There is also an oral history of Jewish law and tradition. However, it is this written history, of unverified authorship (believed to be the words Moses received from God), which is included in the Christian Biblical canon as well as the Jewish Scriptures. The Pentateuch, the five books of Scripture from Genesis to Deuteronomy form the opening books of the Old Testament as part of the Christian canon. The books of the Pentateuch describe the establishment of theocracy, the history of the tribes of Jacob, the Israelite people and their at times turbulent but redemptive relationship with God (*Yahweh*) and the Covenant with Israel.

One of the cornerstones of the Jewish faith is God's Covenant with Israel. While Christianity acknowledges the historical relationship the Israelite people share with God, the Christian belief in the legitimacy of Jesus as the Messiah and son of God becomes the foundation of its faith. The Covenant between God and Israel therefore is a bond claimed by the Jewish people. Jews traditionally have retained their belief in the Covenant, while rejecting the belief in Jesus as the son of God and maintaining the traditional rituals not appropriated by Christians. Karen Armstrong writes of early Christianity, in the Pauline tradition:

There was, therefore, no need for Christians to observe the dietary laws, to keep themselves separate from the Goyim, or to practice circumcision, because these were the marks of the old covenant, which had now been superseded. All who lived 'in Christ' were now sons of Abraham, whatever their ethnic origin. (2005: 146-47)

Although Armstrong implies a sense of unity and shared heritage between Jews and Christians as "sons of Abraham", the notion of the Covenant of Moses and Israel being "superseded" is problematic and creates a rupture in the unity that Judaism and Christianity should share via their heritage and belief in God. It is this religious divide

which initially marked out the Jews in Christian Europe as different and 'other'. The Old Testament shares with its Jewish literary heritage the fundamental Jewish Covenant story. This story and many examples in the Old Testament books open up complex theological questions and issues about God's relationship with His people and the strength and endurance of the Covenant. These questions are as relevant now, in the shadow of the Holocaust as they ever were. In looking at a time of such violence and uncertainty for European Jewry it is important to return to the roots of the faith to begin a study on the construction of Jewish religious identity from 'within and without'.

The book of Exodus tells the story of the origins of the Covenant and of Moses the Israelite orphan who was rescued from the Nile and taken into the protection of Egyptian royalty (Exodus 2). After leaving Egypt, Moses was chosen by God to return and liberate the Israelite slaves from their bondage, leading them to a land of freedom and prosperity where they would be able to worship God freely and flourish as the chosen people. The attribution of the Covenant of Israel makes Moses the significant Hebrew figure and ultimately a positive hero of the Jewish story, but his experience is not without tests and suffering; like the more archetypal 'suffering Jew', Job. Moses finally succeeds in releasing the Israelite people from Egyptian slavery, but throughout his task he is isolated from his people and his doubt and initial failures with Pharaoh, make him the object of God's anger and the resentment of the Israelite slaves. "And they said to them, 'May the Lord look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers – putting a sword in their hands to slay us'" (Exodus 5. 21). The sense of unjust persecution from God (who chose Moses) and the isolation he experiences from his fellow men are shared by Job. Like Moses, Job also has his faith tested by God, but he appears to bear his ordeal far more severely than Moses, who at least understood his trial and was not the victim of a prolonged test of faith as Job is. If Moses' story is one of heroism and triumph through his tests, Job's story and the typical interpretation of it, places the emphasis on the suffering aspect of Job's experience. Although he is compensated for his losses, there is a sense of unfair and unjustified suffering and persecution aimed at the undeserving Job, a sense of victimisation more relevant than Moses' tests, to the persecution experienced by Levi and Wiesel. After the doubt and suffering he experiences as Pharaoh rejects his

commands to free the Israelites, Moses finally establishes the Covenant on Mount Sinai, the promise of being God's "treasured" people which remains a foundation of the Jewish faith.

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep my covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19. 4-6)

The Covenant of Moses and the Israelites forms the bond between God and the Jewish people and a basis of the Jewish faith that joins Levi and Wiesel. As a non-religious Jew the Covenant does not feature in Levi's narrative, but as a deeply religious Jew it is a much more significant element of Wiesel's beliefs. Elie Wiesel spent his early years devoted to his faith and his study amongst his Jewish community in Sighet. The realities of Auschwitz and the very real threat that the Jewish population of Europe would not survive the Holocaust to be redeemed created a crisis of faith and a need to protest within Wiesel. In admissions made after his literary protests of *Night* and *The Trial of God* he accepted that these protests were made within a faith in the Covenant: "Except that within faith we must sometimes take our stand against chance, but never against Covenant. In other words, I can protest against God within the Covenant, but not outside it" (Wiesel *Evil*: 12). Wiesel justifies his disputes with God and his acts of religious rebellion recalled in *Night* by maintaining that he protests as a believing Jew. Although it is problematic through his Holocaust experience, Wiesel demonstrates a reverence for the Covenant. His belief in God has always existed; while he experienced anger and resentment in Auschwitz and was forced to confront previously held beliefs about his own (and the Jews' as a community) demonstrations of faith towards God, he did not deny God or reject the Jewish faith.

Levi, in his literature and in interviews has always claimed to be an atheist, the opposite of Wiesel. While he has maintained his atheism throughout his narratives, his language is often comparable to Wiesel's, the language of faith. As an assimilated Jew, Levi was brought up exposed to the Jewish history of his ancestry but also the culture of Italy, a traditionally Christian country. Although Levi did not practise religion

devoutly within his family or believe in God, he demonstrated a familiarity with the history and Scripture of Judaism (not however to the extent Wiesel did). In adopting a religious lexicon in his literature, Levi demonstrates that his religious position is at times contradictory, he is not merely non-religious, but he rejects a belief in God and the Jewish religious ideology. Levi's use of religious language and his engagement with religious history is as much a statement of his rejection of faith as Wiesel's use of language and history is an affirmation of his faith. In narrating his pre-Auschwitz weeks as a partisan, Levi concludes: "He who dictated the Law to Moses, and inspired the liberators Ezra and Nehemiah, no longer inspired anyone" (Levi *Periodic*: 43). As a Jew who does not believe in God at all Levi may not believe in the Covenant and the relationship between God and the Jewish people, but in the turbulence of the time, he still engages with the Jewish beliefs. There is a sense in this passage that Levi would like to share in the hope of the protection of the Covenant, but cannot truly accept the faith and the belief that divine salvation will occur. Levi's non-belief remains consistent through his life and the timeline of his writing; in an interview many years after his liberation, he pronounces his offence at the suggestion that his life was saved by providence.

And this, I must confess, seemed to me a blasphemy, that God should grant privileges, saving one person and condemning someone else. I must say that for me the experience of Auschwitz has been such as to sweep away any remnant of religious education I may have had. (Camon 1989: 68)

The notion Levi finds offensive, of God saving one life over another, is not dissimilar to the idea of the Covenant with one specific group of people over another group. Levi rejects both the ideology of providence, the notion that it is possible to be saved by an omnipotent power through adherence to the Jewish faith and the belief in God as the omnipotent power. Despite the ideological objection Levi maintains regarding the theological notion of providence, the language Levi uses throughout his narratives does demonstrate an engagement and familiarity with Jewish history and ideas of faith.

1.2 Redemptive Faith?

Judaism, despite the tribulations and the punishments meted out to the people of Israel, is ultimately a redemptive faith. The Israelite people of Judaism's history lived and at times suffered in expectation of their Promised Land. The relationship God establishes with the Israelite people is recorded in Exodus but throughout the Pentateuch the relationship between God and His creation is narrated with a theme of turbulence as well as redemption. What is evident in Genesis is that God's relationship with His creation is fraught by the permanent presence of sin and punishment. The first genocide, as narrated in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Old Testament is the flood that destroyed all life, save the righteous Noah, his family and each living bird and animal, in pairs, or groups of seven (Genesis 7. 2-3). This tremendous act was God's reaction to the frustration He felt at the sins of His creation.

The Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created – men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them." (Genesis 6. 7)

Despite the 'fairytale' nature the story of Noah's Ark has now taken on, within the still predominantly Christian society and the typically Christian emphasis upon the salvation of Noah and the animals, the story of the flood is one of violence and the destruction of an almost entire population, akin to that of the Holocaust in the twentieth century. The next instance of such violence and mass slaughter at the hands of God is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Again in despair of the sins of His people God tests a good man, Lot, with the protection of two visiting angels. When he passes this test Lot is spared the terror of God's total destruction of the sinful towns.

The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the Lord out of heaven. He annihilated those cities and the entire Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the ground. (Genesis 19. 24-25)

These two instances of genocide show the precedent within Jewish written history of such trauma and make valid questions of the nature of God and His will when considering Holocaust theology. It is important to note that the destructions and holocausts within the Book of Genesis are indiscriminate; God saves the very few

righteous and destroys men and beasts of all of His people from all of His lands. In the narrative of Genesis, God has offered a Covenant to Abraham and to Noah, but not yet specified His chosen people and therefore it should be considered that this precedent of violence and destruction is more a question of the nature of God, than the fate of His chosen people. However since the will and whereabouts of God is such a prevalent and frequent question within Holocaust theology, the nature of the God of Genesis and the threat of a genocide reminiscent of those in Jewish Scriptural history remains significant.

The Biblical stories such as Noah and the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, which appear to focus upon destruction and punishment also offer a different theological perspective which is revisited by Holocaust theologians, that of the Remnant. The Remnant is the collective of remaining survivors: Noah and his family, Lot and within Holocaust theology, the survivors, including Levi and Wiesel.

The idea of a saving Remnant is based on Isaiah's prophetic message that the remnant will return (*shear yashuv*). This is not a mathematical probability but a miraculous act – a miracle whereby the Jewish people will remain in God's presence. (Cohn-Sherbok 1989, 1996: 33)

The idea of the Remnant as the 'chosen ones' is a Jewish belief derived from the Scriptures and in modern theological terms separates Jews from Christians who have formed a different belief system from their canon. This arguably forms at least one strand of the 'otherness' argument which creates divides and tension between groups, in this case, marking Jews as 'other' to Christians. As Levi has demonstrated his cynicism over the notion of God extending His protection for only a chosen number of people, it naturally follows that he has expressed discomfort and lack of belief in the idea of 'the Remnant'. The belief that Levi was saved over countless other lives in Auschwitz and particularly that as an atheist his life was spared over the religious masses, those who believed in salvation, the Covenant and in God, was a painful one for Levi who maintained that his survival was through chance alone. This is evident in Levi's response to a religious friend of his, who asserted, contrary to Levi's position, that he must have been saved by providence.

He told me that my having survived could not be the work of chance, of an accumulation of fortunate circumstances (as I maintained, and still maintain) but rather of Providence. I bore the mark, I was an elect: I, the non-believer, even less of a believer after the season of Auschwitz, was a person touched by Grace, a saved man. And why just I? [...] Such an opinion seemed monstrous to me. It pained me as when one touches an exposed nerve, and kindled the doubt I spoke of before: I might be alive in the place of another, at the expense of another; I might have usurped, that is, in fact killed. (Levi *Drowned*: 62)

Despite Wiesel believing in the Covenant and the faith that God will protect, he shares Levi's discomfort with the idea of being a part of the Remnant. Wiesel lost both of his parents and his younger sister in the Holocaust, therefore it is understandable that he would reject the idea that his life should be saved by God when his family's should not be. Wiesel's answer to the question of survival is very similar to that of Levi's, that to have been saved by a force which allowed friends, family and comrades to perish is not only an uncomfortable thought but an offensive one. This is despite the two men typically representing very different facets of Jewish identity and opinions on faith and religion.

To say that my presence here is the result of a miracle would be to say that millions of others did not benefit from any miracle. The word 'miracle' would then be an accusation: why weren't my friends, comrades, and companions saved by a miracle, not to mention all the others unknown to me? No, I prefer to think that it was pure chance, and indeed that is what it was. (Wiesel *Evil*: 8)

Wiesel like his fellow survivor also elects to attribute his survival to chance, thus evading the problematic issue of why some Jews should be divinely protected and others not. Arguably this is a more difficult issue for Wiesel to negotiate as he maintains a belief in God and the Covenant, rather than Levi who rejects religious belief outright. The question of salvation and providence however is clearly one which bears resonance with the religious and atheist survivor alike. Levi is able to reject both a personal belief in his salvation and the religious ideology, but this is more

problematic for Wiesel who is a believer, which suggests that he accepts the ideology of the providence that saved the righteous Noah. As a faithful Jew who justifies his religious disputes by acting “within the Covenant”, it seems likely that he would view himself as a righteous Jew (Wiesel *Evil*: 12). However if he implicitly believed in his own righteousness, it is expected that he would apply the same virtue to his equally devout family, particularly his innocent seven-year-old sister Tsiporah who did not survive. Faced with this ideological conflict, it seems that Wiesel chooses to accept a problematic relationship with the ideology of the Jewish faith and attribute his own survival to luck, thereby maintaining a belief in and an untarnished memory of the purity and righteousness of his murdered family. “My little sister Tsiporah, my little angel scorched by a darkened sun” (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 71).

Throughout the Book of Genesis there are insights into God’s vengeful nature and the emergence of ideas about sacrifice and holocaust. The term holocaust, derived from the Greek ‘holokauston’ means a sacrifice, a burnt offering (Gilbert 2000: 62). There are several examples of such sacrifices and burnt offerings in Genesis alone, at the behest of a God angry with His people. These examples, the questions surrounding a God who punishes so severely and the significance of the term ‘holocaust’ are all relevant in a contemporary analysis of the Hebrew Scriptures. One religious interpretation of the Holocaust is that of a vengeful God destroying His people to begin again. Another theory to emerge from the Scriptures is that of sacrifice. To name the most violent and devastatingly efficient genocide of the Jewish people in memory a holocaust, a sacrificial offering, has been a contentious issue. It is often called the *Shoah* by some Jews who prefer to give the event a specifically Jewish name. *Shoah* emphasises the significance of the event for the Jewish people and suggests a catastrophe, rather than a sacrifice. Wiesel himself was one of the first people to use the term holocaust to describe the genocide, due to the significance of fire as the means of destruction, initially preferring the religious imagery of the sacrifice, to the more natural implication of a catastrophe (Wiesel *Evil*: 39).

The idea of a holocaust, however controversial, is not without precedent in the Scriptures. Genesis 22 tells the story of Abraham, a devout and good man who is instructed to demonstrate his faith to God by sacrificing his beloved only son Isaac on an altar to God. This story not only refers directly to sacrifice and the significance of a

burnt offering, but also the recurrent trial of testing. God is here, as in the book of Job, testing the faith of a good man. “And He said, ‘Take your son, your favoured one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you’” (Genesis 22. 2). Abraham proves his faith in God and is prevented by divine intervention from sacrificing his child, but only after preparing to lose his child in the flames, only after God is satisfied that this good and faithful man will bear the utmost pain and suffering to show his faith. Thus in the very first book of the Hebrew Scriptures, a fundamental element of the Jewish faith, God’s creation is tried, tested and destroyed at the whim of the Almighty who demands absolute faith and obedience and who punishes sin and lack of devotion harshly.

1.3 Job and the Tests of Faith

Job epitomises the suffering Jew. He is a vital figure in considering the Holocaust, the writing of Elie Wiesel in particular, and the idea of a victim identity. The book of Job is the most significant instance in the Hebrew Scriptures of God testing the faith of a good man: “That man was blameless and upright, he feared God and shunned evil.” (Job 1. 1). Drawn into testing Job by Satan, who comments upon Job’s comfort, privilege and protection, God allows Satan to test the limits of Job’s faith and devotion, on the understanding that he does not take his life. “The Lord replied to the Adversary, ‘See, all that he has is in your power, only do not lay a hand on him’” (Job 1. 12). Job’s first test is to lose his livestock and children through fire, robbery and storm. Although he mourns his losses, Job accepts them gracefully, philosophically and without questioning God’s will:

Naked I came out of my mother’s womb,
and naked I shall return there;
The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord. (Job 1. 21)

Under God’s authority, Satan tests Job a second time, covering his body in sores. Initially refusing his wife’s behest to “blaspheme God and die”, Job maintains his faith (Job 2. 9). When his suffering does not abate and his friends’ attempts to console him

with their faith fail, Job begins to protest in despair: "I will not speak with restraint, I will give voice to the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (Job 7. 11).

It is the nature of Job's protest, the despair reached when pushed to the absolute limit of faith, or the anguish upon seeing the foundation of belief fall apart, which connects the Biblical figure of Job to the twentieth-century figure of Elie Wiesel. A devoutly religious Jewish child whose ideological beliefs and understanding of his faith were painfully compromised when he arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau and a prolific writer on his Holocaust experience, Wiesel has in his writing, allied himself with Job. In his first book *Night* which testifies to his experience of the Holocaust, Wiesel recalls the conversations he heard in camp about God and the mystery of His ways and he remembers the anger and rebellion building up within him. "As for me, I had ceased to pray. I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice" (Wiesel *Night*: 45). Wiesel does not discuss his ordeal in Auschwitz as a progressive test in the same manner as Job's experience was a test of his faith, but he does explicitly empathise with Job's anger and frustration with God's apparent silence throughout his suffering. Unlike Job's protest which gradually evolves through his trials, Wiesel presents his religious crisis in *Night* as a very sudden and definite rejection of the beliefs he had previously taken for granted (Wiesel *Night*: 34).

In drawing parallels between the Holocaust experience and the Hebrew Scriptures in Holocaust theology, it is the narrative of Job which becomes the most familiar and relevant experience to the suffering Jews of the camps. Several theorists have made the connection between the Holocaust and the Scriptures, from Jewish theologians Martin Buber and Irving Greenberg to Steven Kepnes (Kepnes 2002: 36-55). Moses, like Job is tested and suffers with his fellow Israelites whom he frees from Egypt. Like Job, Moses also challenges God over His permitting the mistreatment of His people; Job however, is significant due to his suffering, Moses for his victory. Within the Holocaust theologies that discuss God's absence, His hiding face, or even His death during the Jewish people's suffering, Job becomes the most appropriate figure and his suffering is the suffering that the Holocaust victims most explicitly identify with. Wiesel, like so many Jews of Europe could not be sure there would be another generation of European Jews if Hitler fulfilled his intention to rid Europe of Jewry.

Wiesel insisted in *All Rivers Run to the Sea* that the Jews of Sighet were let down by the rest of the world who could have warned the naïve Jews of the town of the Nazis' intentions.

Had we been told that the road from the ghettos led to the railroad stations, and that the trains' destination was Auschwitz, had we been told what Auschwitz meant, many Sighet Jews would have chosen to go underground – and thereby would have survived. (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 63)

In *Night* however, Wiesel is more explicit in the feelings of the Jews on the edge of death. "His cold eyes stared at me. At last, he said wearily: 'I have more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He alone has kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people'" (Wiesel *Night*: 80-81). Despite Moses being the stronger, heroic figure of Jewish history who argues with God, fights and succeeds, it is the weaker Job whose pain seems greater and who is only rewarded after he is utterly broken by God's tests, who becomes a model Jewish figure of suffering in the field of Holocaust theology and in the literature of Elie Wiesel.

The figure of Job is present *The Search for Roots*, an anthology of texts Levi compiled which he considered of personal importance and significance to him. Published late in his life and writing career, the anthology begins with an excerpt from Job, indicating that the thematic trajectory of his collection, which includes Jewish writers and Holocaust survivors, begins with Job, the epitomic Jewish sufferer.

Why start with Job? Because this magnificent and harrowing story encapsulates the questions of all ages, those for which man has never to this day found an answer, nor will he ever find one, but he will always search for it because he needs it in order to live, to understand himself and the world. (Levi *Search*: 11)

The theological tone of Levi's explanation of his choice of Job bears resonance with Wiesel's use of the story in his own narrative. Levi's decision not to refer to Job in his Holocaust narrative then is curious when he places such significance on the text in his later writing. Levi acknowledges in his small introduction to the text that the questions Job raises do not have answers, therefore the scientist and the atheist may find the text an unsettling and problematic one to discuss explicitly with the Holocaust

experience, as Wiesel does. While Wiesel derives influence from the theological interrogation of Job's suffering, Levi clearly prefers to avoid such problematically religious issues and discusses the book of Job as a literary and cultural influence.

Where Job and Moses succeed and Wiesel fails, is in receiving any sign of response from God. Job may not understand his tests, or the ways of God, but he at least knows his protests have been heeded: "The Lord said in reply to Job: 'Shall one who should be disciplined complain against Shaddai? He who arraigns God must respond'" (Job 40. 1-2). The implication within the Hebrew Scriptures is that protest opens up a dialogue with God, who ultimately cares and intervenes on behalf of His people. For Wiesel this belief crumbles in the divine silence at Auschwitz. Wiesel's faith and his relationship with God is not as easily reconciled as Job's, once Job is rewarded for his faith and replenished for his losses. Wiesel, as a writer, Jew and Holocaust survivor, represents the anger, protest and despair of the Jews of Europe; the deeply religious people who find they are facing extermination and do not know whether their God sees them or not or whether He has permitted another holocaust.

It has been noted by Oliver Leaman that both Wiesel and the authors of the Hebrew Scriptures, are writing specific narratives for a readership and not necessarily relating exact facts and historically accurate details. Leaman writes of Job:

Many commentators have argued over the authenticity of parts of the text, which they have sought to reorganise in accordance with their interpretation, and there is little doubt that the text as a whole does seem to lack something in coherence. The Septuagint version tones down the aggression of Job and makes him out to be far more submissive than he is in the Hebrew version. (1995: 23)

Questions of narrative authenticity, exemplified here by Job are strongly linked to accuracy and authorial intent within testimony. Levi is explicitly aware of these issues, and is selective in his language and the thematic content of his testimonial literature. "It is natural and obvious that the most substantial material for the reconstruction of truth about the camps is constituted by the memories of the survivors. Beyond the pity and indignation they arouse, they should also be read with a critical eye" (Levi *Drowned*: 6-7). Wiesel's literature however, reflects the issues of negotiating the

balance between historical and traumatic memories and emotional trajectories. Like the early translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, Wiesel's *Night* has undergone significant alterations from his first manuscript and it is arguable that some of the accuracy and reality of the experience is masked by the poetic language of the final version. A well-known example of this literary creativity is Wiesel's recollection of his first night in camp, facing the smoke of the crematoria chimneys and a burning pit of children; a night which he eloquently states, "consumed my faith forever" (Wiesel *Night*: 34). Despite this resolute rejection of a faith which was so deeply rooted within him, it emerges, throughout later pieces of literature and interviews that Wiesel's faith was not absolutely consumed in the flames of Auschwitz's crematoria. He claimed in an interview in 1987: "I have never forsaken it [faith], and it has never forsaken me. Whatever has been shaken has been shaken within faith, for faith has always been present" (Wiesel *Evil*: 12). The nature of Wiesel's faith and his relationship with God may have changed irrevocably and become complicated by his Holocaust experience, but it has not been destroyed, as is implied so early in his first foray into literature. Leaman again observes that like Job, Wiesel, despite his protests maintains a belief in God no matter how fractured it is:

What makes Wiesel's work so interesting and artistically effective, is that he maintains both that God is dead and that he is still alive. God is shown to have ignored the plight of his people, and at the same time he is said to be caring. It is worth pointing here, as Wiesel does, to the similarity with Job, who also attacks the notion of a caring God while at the same time apparently hanging on to it. (1995: 208-09)

Leaman's interpretation of Wiesel's work is clearly different to how Wiesel himself defends his beliefs. However, the language and creative licence Wiesel manipulates in his literature construct a strong identity of a religious protest. Leaman's observations and comparison of the book of Job and the literature of Wiesel, is demonstrative of the parity between the texts in the evoked image of the suffering Jew.

Both Levi and Wiesel suffered a crisis of religious identity in their confrontation with the Holocaust. For Levi this was in his determination to keep separate the events

he was witnessing and any notion of God despite all the religious desperation and displays of prayer he was surrounded by.

Kuhn is thanking God because he has not been chosen.

Kuhn is out of his senses. Does he not see Beppo the Greek in the bunk next to him, Beppo who is twenty years old and is going to the gas chamber the day after tomorrow and know it and lies there looking fixedly at the light without saying anything and without even thinking any more? Can Kuhn fail to realize [sic] that next time it will be his turn? (Levi *Man*: 135-36)

Wiesel's suffering was initially the opposite of Levi's. Like Job, he was trying to make sense of a belief system he had long held but which was failing before him and he struggled to maintain his faith in a good God in a landscape with precious little to indicate the presence of any God at all. In his attempt to keep religion and God out of his understanding of the Holocaust, Primo Levi does not ally himself with Job or any other suffering Biblical Jew. He does, however, in *The Drowned and the Saved* refer to the Biblical figure of Cain. In a thematic difference to Wiesel's relating Job's suffering with that of the Jews victimised in the Holocaust, Levi looks to Cain, the 'bad brother' and the one rejected by God, for a parallel with the suffering Jews of the Holocaust, as he discusses the Jewish *Sonderkommando* victims corrupted by their forced alliance with the SS. In the chapter entitled *The Grey Zone*, Levi discusses the so-called 'privileged' prisoners of the camps and ghettos. Among them he recalls the Jews of Auschwitz who formed the *Sonderkommando*, the ever-changing unit of prisoners responsible for running the gas chambers and crematoria. Levi is aware of the irony of using the term 'privileged' to describe these prisoners, mostly Jews, who for extra food and alcohol must force the newcomers, their peers and sometimes even their families, into the gas chambers and dispose of their corpses after their deaths.

In this chapter Levi muses upon the idea of collaboration with the perpetrators and to what extent these collaborators who were desperate to protect themselves from the horrors around them are in fact culpable. In the case of the *Sonderkommando*, Levi departs from his typical measured voice and with a scarcely concealed contempt (towards the SS) recalls a story of some veteran

Sonderkommando prisoners being enlisted to play in a football match against the SS. Levi's feeling about the continuing dehumanisation of these prisoners through the SS's alliance with them is tangible. "You are like us, you proud people, dirtied with your own blood, as we are. You too, like us and like Cain, have killed the brother. Come, we can play together" (Levi *Drowned*: 38). Here Levi is making the Biblical association, not with a suffering Jew who is punished without reason by God but remains a believer, but with Cain, whose offerings to God are rejected in favour of his brother Abel. This association can be read as symbolic of the Holocaust in general, the idea that perhaps God has rejected His own Covenant with the Jewish people in favour of another people. Levi does not explicate this point, but his pointing to the figure of Cain shows he engages with Biblical history and Scripture to frame his Holocaust ordeal as Wiesel does, although they are from very different viewpoints.

The Holocaust and contemporary study of the Holocaust has prompted a return to the Scriptures and to Biblical literature and the Book of Job particularly offers some passages which now appear painfully relevant to the Holocaust.

When suddenly a scourge brings death, he mocks as
the innocent fail.
The earth is handed over to the wicked one;
he covers the eyes of its judges.
If it is not He, then who? (Job 9. 23-24)

This is Job's lament in his search for a sign that his God is aware of his ordeal and this cry is imaginable in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Levi has engaged with the Scriptures to an extent in his writing and they inform his identity and his religious position in so far as he rejects a religious belief. Wiesel relies upon the Scriptures, and particularly the Book of Job, in constructing his protest. Wiesel the 'protesting Jew' is an image and an identity formed and attributed to him through his trajectory of his first text *Night* in particular. Wiesel has demonstrated the ability as a writer and a survivor to utilise the post-Holocaust interest in theology and the survivor's victim trajectory to construct a literary identity which relies heavily upon his religious history, in a way that Levi has rejected. This is a retrospective connection being made between the Holocaust and the tests and destructions within the Scriptures and while these Biblical events may be read as literary precedents, it is not difficult to find echoes of

Job's suffering in the suffering Auschwitz prisoners when looking back through the Scriptures with such an intention.

1.4 Victim Identity: From Genesis to Auschwitz

Victim identity refers to the idea that one's identity is informed by a sense of persecution, suffering and victimisation. In this context the idea of a victim identity refers specifically to the Jewish people and is concerned with the extent to which the diaspora Jewish identity is informed by the historic persecutions the Jews have experienced. Victim identity refers to how Jewish identity is constructed through the sense of victimisation born out of the historical and cultural memory of the Jewish faith and history and from outside responses to Jewish religious and cultural identities. Within this Jewish context the term victim identity is applied to the individual, from Job to Elie Wiesel. This sense of persecution of the Jews originates from the religious Scriptures and the suffering imposed upon the people of Israel by rival tribes and at times their own God. Although this suffering takes place in the literature of the Jewish faith, the Hebrew Scriptures as they are analysed in the study, these narratives form the basis of Jewish law and belief. The Jewish people were founded through turbulent periods of punishment and suffering. As the Jewish people developed into numerous tribes which grew in number who then travelled across the world, the turbulence of the Scriptures followed them, with sporadic periods of intense suffering, but always with the hope of redemption. For the Jews of the modern age in Europe Jewish persecution and victimisation reached a climax with the Holocaust. Although this Jewish persecution and victimisation has not ended with the Holocaust, the Nazis' Final Solution reflected the Biblical suffering experienced by the Jews and the history of victimisation which became such a significant part of the Jewish identity.

The Biblical stories that both Wiesel and Levi engage with, while being strongly focused on suffering and punishment also offer the possibility and the ultimate hope of redemption. Primo Levi muses on the Jewish history of oppression and the hope for redemption. "But where was Kadosh Barukhú, 'the Saint, Blessed be He': he who breaks the slaves' chains and submerges the Egyptians' chariots?" (Levi *Periodic*: 43) This image is clearly derived from the Biblical story of Exodus and while ideologically

maintaining his atheism, Levi still looks for the divine intervention that will “submerge the Egyptians’ chariots” and save the Jews from oppression. These Scriptures must be acknowledged and considered as the foundation of Jewish identity; they represent the traumatic history of the Jewish people which clearly informs a sense of victim identity as a religious issue. This shared religious history bonds Levi and Wiesel, who engage with it, regardless of their individual ideas of faith, in trying to understand their own victimisation. Suffering and martyrdom are significant elements to the Jewish history and religion itself and the idea of a victim identity is something that is applicable in the Scriptures but develops outside of the religious and Scriptural history into a new facet of identity. The idea of a victim identity in the Scriptures refers to the relationship between God and His people, who are punished or tested by God. As Job’s trials are arguably unjustified, he emerges as a victim of God, who allows the ordeal to take place. This theological aspect of victimisation re-emerges through the Holocaust among the Jews who experience unjust suffering. Within Judaism historically, the suffering and turbulence that the Jews have faced have been experienced and endured with the ultimate hope of being redeemed with a homeland in Israel. While it is problematic to discuss the idea that redemption could provide consolation in Auschwitz for religious Jews, it is possible that the idea of a victim identity and of suffering in Auschwitz could at least be understood and made sense of with the belief that the Jews would ultimately be redeemed in Israel and in the afterlife.

The history of the Jewish people is represented in the literature of the Hebrew Scriptures and latterly the Christian Bible, therefore it is not wholly encompassing; it is represented through a literary narrative. Islam and Christianity, the other two monotheistic faiths in the same family as Judaism have relatively clearly recorded origins; Judaism’s ancient history and origins are narrated in the Hebrew Scriptures. The details and stories of the Israelite people, their histories and their experiences are derived from and depend upon the literary records which form and inform the faith. Irrespective of the accuracy of the Scriptures, these religious documents do establish a religious identity that affects both Levi and Wiesel. While Wiesel accepts the Hebrew Scriptures and the faith in God and Levi rejects this belief, both figures have constructed Jewish identities through their adherence to or rejection of the same Scriptures. The study of Biblical literature remains relevant to a study of the Holocaust,

by referring to exile and Diaspora, punishment and redemption; all issues which are considered within Jewish Holocaust theology and are relevant to the events of the Holocaust. While the Hebrew Scriptures demonstrate several examples of victim identity, from Moses' initial failures to Job's persecution, the Bible stories represent the histories of people from the very beginning (Adam and Eve), before the separating of the tribes and the establishment of the Israelite people. The stories of the Bible represent victim identity as related to transgressions, punishments, redemptions and the relationship between God and His people. These stories do not all necessarily refer to the Israelite and Jewish people, but they indicate that the ideas surrounding the suffering Jew and victim identity are strongly tied to the Jews' relationship with God and issues of punishment, exile and redemption.

The issue of 'otherness' is a prominent one within the history of Jewish persecution and anti-Semitism. Although the Biblical persecution of individuals at the hands of God is not attributable to racial divides, fundamental elements of the Jewish story such as the Egyptians' persecution of the Israelites demonstrate a Scriptural and historical precedent of the racial oppression of the 'other'. The notion of racial superiority and enslavement narrated in Exodus is an early example of the oppression of the 'other' that formed the basis of the Nazi campaign against the Jews. The study of the theory of Orientalism discusses the ideas of racial superiority, historically a Western notion of racial, moral and cultural superiority over Eastern races. Palestinian theorist Edward Said offers a modern perspective on the Orientalist theory of the 'other' and how the image of the Eastern 'other' is constructed in the mind of the Westerner as someone uncivilised, uncultured and incapable of self-government, justifying the Western tradition of colonialism and imperialist rule.

From its earliest modern history to the present, Orientalism as a form of thought for dealing with the foreign has typically shown the altogether regrettable tendency of any knowledge based on such hard-and-fast distinctions as "East" and "West" to channel thought into a West or an East compartment. Because this tendency is right at the center of Orientalist theory, practice, and values found in the West, the sense of Western power over the Orient is taken for granted as having the status of scientific truth. (Said 1978, 1995: 45-46)

Said, in his discussion of the Orient, understands the long history of Orientalism as a school of thought, not only as a way of understanding the 'other' peoples of the East, but a way of defining and understanding what it is, or should be, to be a civilised figure of the Western world.

In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. (Said 1978, 1995: 1-2)

For the Orientalists and as Said discusses, the Orient represents everything that Europe is not. Therefore, if Europe is a haven of advanced thought, developing technology and cultured people, the Orient must be a place of uncultured, archaic and uncivilised people. The 'others', then, are perceived as dangerous, unknown and different, the opposite of the cultured and civilised Westerners. Implicit within this threat of 'otherness' is an exotic appeal of the danger of the unknown. These issues of 'otherness' emerge as these people infiltrate Western culture. In modern Europe these 'others' are not necessarily confined to the faraway lands of the East as they were to the early Orientalists dating back to the fourteenth century (Said 1978, 1995: 49-50). The Oriental 'other' is perceived as a real presence within the developing modern European countries, complete with their archaic strangeness and unfamiliar cultures. The splintering and separating of the Jewish communities when they reached the European Enlightenment era made an already vulnerable community more fragile, but the use of 'otherness' is applicable to the perceptions of the Jews from 'without' as well as 'within' and as demonstrated in Exodus, has an ancient history.

The issue of cultural separation and ideas of social superiority are relevant when considering divides in modern Jewish cultures across Europe in the years preceding the Holocaust. The geographical divide between the typically Orthodox Eastern and assimilated Western Jewish communities created fractures in the idea of a homogenous Jewish identity in Europe. There was a visible and discernible 'otherness' in cultural identity between the Jewish groups. 'The Jew' of Nazi ideology was a construction of anti-Semitic propaganda, but the various different Jewish communities

across Europe in the twentieth century were already so distant and apart from one another that they experienced the persecution of the 'other' from 'within' European Jewry as well as 'without'. Modern attributions of a Jewish victim identity and issues of 'otherness' from 'within' relate to a sense of fractured identity amongst Jewish communities. The social and cultural issues which divided Levi and Wiesel and marked them as different to each other, were the result of widespread assimilation of Jewry in the West of Europe, compared to the typical dedication to Orthodoxy in the East of Europe, where assimilation was not so easily attainable. These divides created multiple Jewish communities and cultures across Europe and at times a lack of affinity and empathy between the groups. Jews of Levi and Wiesel's generation in twentieth-century Europe, found their Jewish identities split by geographic and cultural divides and the faith as a whole was fractured and divided. Immigration into Western Europe from the East and social and linguistic barriers in the concentration camps emphasised the discord and lacking sense of solidarity amongst the Jews who were fighting a common enemy at the time.

Levi and Wiesel have both discussed in their Holocaust literature the linguistic divides which separated different groups of Jews in the concentration and extermination camps, but Wiesel is more outspoken on the social issue of assimilation as a weakening of Jewish unity in modern Europe. "Assimilation, in my vocabulary, means to give up the heritage, to change everything, to change the name, to change religion, or to change tradition. And that, I feel, is foolish" (Wiesel *Conversations*: 169). This rejection of traditional, religious Judaism Wiesel speaks out against is the culture Levi grew up with in Italy. In the Piedmont region of Northern Italy, the long established Jewish community, including the Levi family, developed in a culture heavily influenced by the Catholic majority, the Jewish culture fragmenting and assimilating into Christian and secular culture, to create an identity of assimilated Judaism (Levi *Periodic*: 7-8). It is from these two very different cultural backgrounds that the lives of Levi and Wiesel collided in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944.

In tracing ideas of Jewish identity, particularly in the shadow of the Holocaust, through religious literature, there is a clear starting point in the figure of Job the suffering Jew. A study of the New Testament however, draws parallels with an equally tragic and enduring Jewish figure, which again may account somewhat for the

development of a victim identity, but more significantly the development of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism through the ages, a significant factor in the build up to and execution of the Holocaust. The New Testament also succeeds in leaving behind in the Hebrew Scriptures the negative ideas of the powerful and vengeful God associating Him with the persecuted Jewish people. The New Testament, significant by its very name, implying the idea of a superseding, reformed religion, focuses on the benevolence of Jesus, rather than the wrath of God. Post-war German Christian theologian Dorothee Sölle observes this manipulation of the religious ideology:

The Hebrew Bible becomes the 'Old' Testament, with all the negative connotations which this expression contains. God's covenant with Israel becomes the 'Old' covenant, and finally God himself, as a 'Jewish' God full of vengeance and hatred, is contrasted with the bright God of Jesus. (1990: 82)

This Christian division of old and new serves to emphasise the archaic nature and history of Judaism in contrast with the reformed thinking of Christianity, making the Jewish people and their history seem all the more distant, strange and unfamiliar to a Christian population and most damagingly for the Jews, they become a potentially threatening and dangerous 'other'.

1.5 Judas the Betrayer? Anti-Judaism in the Gospels

The study's present move in focus from the Hebrew Scriptures to the Christian perspective of the New Testament indicates a move to issues of persecution and 'otherness' from 'without', from outside of the Jewish community. The discussion remains with the religious history of the Jewish people in referring to the Christian adopted texts of the New Testament. In moving to a discussion of the Jew as 'other' in the Christian context the discussion uses the figure of Judas Iscariot, a Jew who became an outsider figure within the Christian trajectory, to negotiate the challenging notion of Jewish 'otherness' from both 'within' the Jewish context and 'without', in the wider Christian context. This discussion establishes a framework in which to discuss Levi and Wiesel as Jewish 'others' apart from each other and also 'other' to the

Christian majorities of their countries. The New Testament Gospels are documents written from the perspectives of Jesus' Jewish disciples but adopted as canonical texts by the Christian Church. Within these Gospels the 'other' figure is Judas Iscariot. While Judas in his lifetime and in the contexts described in the Gospels was a Jew within a group of Jews, the point of interest emerges through the later Christian focus upon and manipulation of Judas. The name and identity of Judas Iscariot becomes significant for modern Christian constructions of the Jew from 'without'. The Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Old Testament figures reveal a dichotomy between the hero and the victim figure, particularly within the stories of Moses and Job. Sölle evokes the interpretation of a new image of God and the monotheistic faith under Christianity in the New Testament, with Jesus as the figure of benevolence and mercy. There is however, a different dynamic within the New Testament Gospels, that of the victim and the betrayer. The Christian trajectory and the accepted version of Jesus' story in the Christian canon is that Jesus represents both the hero and the victim while Judas is the betrayer; the disciple who hands Jesus over to the authorities to be killed for thirty pieces of silver.

The first Gospels in the New Testament reveal very little about the figure of Judas Iscariot however he is a considerably more sympathetic figure than he becomes in the later Gospels. The books of Matthew and Mark call Judas "the betrayer" who appears at Gethsemane with an armed crowd, who upon Judas' sign of a kiss, arrest Jesus (Matthew 26. 47-50; Mark 14. 43-46). While Matthew specifies the thirty pieces of silver Judas accepts in advance of his betrayal, Mark does not mention this (Matthew 26. 14-16). Matthew, the first Gospel in the New Testament canon, makes a point of highlighting Judas' remorse and guilt. In a passage not repeated in any of the other Gospels Judas, overcome with guilt and grief at Jesus' death sentence, returns his money to the priests and temple elders and hangs himself.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What's that to us?" they replied.

"That's your responsibility."

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left.
Then he went away and hanged himself. (Matthew
27. 3-5)

According to Matthew, far from being the avaricious and calculating betrayer Judas does not even live long enough with his guilt to see his teacher crucified. His remorse is such that he ends his own life violently and abruptly almost immediately after his act of betrayal. This portrayal of Judas makes him more of a human, sympathetic character; however the Gospels that follow offer a very different view of Judas Iscariot. It is not until after Matthew's Gospel that Judas becomes a tool of Satan. The Gospel of Luke goes further in emphasising Judas' sin, in making him an active agent in discussions with the temple guards over how to hand Jesus over to them, but also brings the theological notion of evil into the character rather than just greed.

Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. (Luke 22. 3-4)

It is also in Luke that the binary opposition between Jesus' good and Judas' evil is heightened, with Jesus' altruism and compassion for his fellow men amplified, in preventing his followers from attacking the crowd who have come to arrest him (Luke 22. 49-51).

It is in the Gospel of John where Judas' character is developed into the mercenary, greedy, demonic character now associated with the name Judas.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 'why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money-bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. (John 12. 4-6)

John is the only Gospel to assign Judas charge of the money-bag and to describe him as a thief. In creating a thieving, mercenary character, Judas is given a reason (aside from being possessed by Satan, as in Luke) for Jesus' betrayal and an untrustworthy and greedy personality; traits which have emerged since in anti-Semitic literature and

Jewish characters created by Western Gentile authors. Hyam Maccoby recognises these traits and their re-emergence in anti-Semitism through the ages: “The fantasies that clustered round the figure of Judas were always liable to be transferred to the Jews as a whole” (Maccoby 1992: 84). Maccoby also emphasises the book of John as a damaging starting point for the character of the Jew in the Christian mind:

The latest and in some respects more elaborate account of Judas appears in the Gospel of John. Here Judas receives some touches that fill out his character in almost novelistic style; he is no longer a bare opposer, with only the most rudimentary motives. In particular, John extends the theme of Judas’s greed by making him into the corrupt treasurer of the band of disciples. The picture of Judas carrying his money-bag thus entered Christian iconology with tragic results to the Jews as a whole. (1992: 61)

Herman Servotte, in his reading of the Gospel of John, argues that far from portraying Judas as the evil agent betraying an innocent and unknowing Christ, John’s Gospel rather accentuates the foreknowledge of the impending handover at Gethsemane: “In keeping with the general intention of this Gospel, Jesus is not the helpless victim of Judas’ betrayal. Whenever he can, John stresses Jesus’ foreknowledge of what is to happen (See John 13. 11-18)” (Servotte 1994: 67). Servotte’s argument explains the foresight of Jesus, but fails to explain the necessity of Judas. If Jesus is able to prophesy and given his public presence in Jerusalem, Judas’ sign of identification is unnecessary and serves only to create in Judas a human evil by whom Jesus is betrayed. In emphasising the notion of Jesus dying for the sins of humankind, Judas represents the negative force that Jesus must overcome to assume his role as the Christian Messiah. Judas’ story evolves and changes through the four Gospels and Acts, but his fundamental role and enduring legacy is that of the betrayer of the human Jesus. This is a problematic issue for both Jewish and Christian scholars; Jesus’ death, his resurrection and therefore the salvation of humankind and the foundation of the Christian faith, rest upon Jesus’ betrayal by Judas. Judas must have been chosen specifically for the task, either because he was a zealot, devoted to his faith and to the future of Jesus’ ministry, or because he was an avaricious thief who would be tempted by the monetary bribe offered by the temple elders. These two

potential reasons for Judas being chosen offer very different portrayals of the character of Judas Iscariot and it is clear from the development of his character throughout the New Testament Gospels which personality the Christian reader will naturally ascribe to him. The small changes to the character of Judas Iscariot subtly but significantly alter the overall trajectory of each Gospel. As the negative traits of Judas are embellished he becomes a more polarised figure to Jesus and as Jesus is the fundamental hero of the Christian narrative, Judas' position as the villain is emphasised. In the canonical Gospels this characterisation serves to construct a more memorable character out of the figure of Judas, whose name and traits (according to the Gospels) remain in the Christian culture and lexicon, as a part of the Christian doctrine. Discussing the tensions and conflicts which have historically existed between the Jewish and Christian faiths, Wiesel places the responsibility in part on the "hateful writings of the church fathers" for the alienation and victimisation of Jewish communities at the hands of Christians indoctrinated by the New Testament texts (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 167).

An important issue to consider with these readings is the highly selective nature of the New Testament canon. The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were not written in the order presented in the New Testament and were not the only Gospels in circulation. It is believed that the Gospel of Mark was written first, circa AD 70 (Archer 2007: 92). Matthew and Luke were both believed to have been written circa AD 85 and John the last of the four Gospels to be written, emerged circa AD 100 (Archer 2007: 92). There are also a number of texts known as the Gnostic Gospels which were discovered in recent years, claimed by some to be the Gospels of those who knew Jesus' ministry and can authoritatively tell their story of Jesus, these include the Gospel of Thomas, the collection discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945 and even a Gospel of attributed to Judas Iscariot (Kasser 2006). These Gospels are generally disregarded by the Church, or not acknowledged as authoritative texts on the life and ministry of Jesus. The volume of Biblical Scripture authorised by the Church or not, demonstrates the selectivity in the New Testament canon and the differences in style and content of the Gospel stories. Despite the almost novelistic style to the Gospels of the New Testament, their storytelling and the character development within the narratives, they make up a text which is of vital political and ideological importance to

the Church and the states of Europe. As the Christian Church and the state were so closely bound for so long across Europe, the impact of Christian perceptions of the Bible and the New Testament figures was great for the Jewish communities. It is significant that through the small amount of information revealed in the Gospels about Judas Iscariot, which offers nothing on his family history and nothing consistent on his life and death after Jesus' crucifixion, he has become one of the most important figures in Biblical literature and one of the most enduring names in Judeo-Christian and literary discussion.

1.6 Iconography and the Image of 'Judas the Jew'

The Christian Church's selectivity in the Gospels they canonise is evident particularly in Christian Renaissance art of Western Europe (usually Italian, but also present in more northerly examples such as Dutch art). The artistic representations of the Last Supper follow a discernable trend of adopting the imagery of the Gospel of John, portraying Judas as the thief, the greedy treasurer and the traitor. The Gospel of John elaborates on the figure of Judas established in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, creating more of a character and a more identifiable image of the man. In representing the disciples in art, the Gospel of John presents the Renaissance artists with the most complete and recognisable image of Judas, who then becomes a focal point in the paintings.

A study of religious paintings of the Renaissance period demonstrates just how effectively the Gospel portrayals of Judas captured the imaginations of these Western artists. Through the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Eucharist was a popular artistic subject, with many European painters depicting the scene of the Last Supper, the moment Judas' role in the Christ story is affirmed and Jesus reveals his knowledge of the impending betrayal, the pinnacle of Judas' own story. The Christian art of the Renaissance periods often takes the form of church frescos or altarpieces. Commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church or by wealthy Catholic families, the paintings naturally convey a strong sense of Christian ideology and a Westernised aesthetic to appeal to the Catholic Church. The narrative and style of these paintings are significant when considering the possibility that these works of art were the

primary source of information and instruction to the illiterate members of the community, those who attended church but were unable to read the Bible. In a period of time in which Church and state were inextricably linked throughout Europe and to be a practising Christian was a matter of course for the majority population, these paintings take on a political and ideological importance in the general understanding of the Christian canon. The control, ideological stronghold and fluctuating powers of the Roman Catholic Church beyond the Renaissance era were particularly significant for the Jewish communities of Europe. With regard to the hegemony of the Church and the Christian art of the era it is clear that the Gospel representations of the Passion and particularly the narrative of the Gospel of John were still a considerable influence on the representation of the figure of Judas Iscariot, the Jesus / Judas binarism illustrated within and anti-Jewish sentiment which emerged sporadically among Christian populations. For Levi, an Italian, the hegemony of the Catholic Church would have been familiar to him, even if the specific teachings of the New Testament were not. Although Levi did not recall Turin to be intolerant towards the Jewish community, he was aware of his status among his Christian friends and colleagues, as a minority and increasingly in the Fascist and Nazi years, an anomaly within the dominant Catholic environment. Wiesel, considerably more isolated within his Jewish community in Sighet, recalled a different understanding of Christianity, one informed by fear and negativity, which emerged from the inherent anti-Judaism represented in the Christian teachings.

For me, a Christian was a hostile stranger, the false avenger. 'You killed Christ' was one of the insults hurled at me by my schoolmates. I didn't understand: I hadn't killed anyone; throughout history, Jews have been victims and not assassins. The Christians that surrounded me were wrong in believing anti-Jewish stereotypes, and I was wrong in oversimplifying. (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 168)

The figure of Jesus naturally assumes centre-stage in these images; however, Judas typically is also made deliberately distinguishable by his appearance, poise and demeanour. Judas is often seen at the end or the opposite side of the last supper table to Jesus, or else at the rear of the group of disciples as if about to make a quiet exit. Particularly significant examples of this positioning are Otto van Veen's *The Last*

Supper, in which the red-haired, red attired Judas sits opposite Jesus at a round table, but is turned away from the group, facing the observer (van Veen 1592). This positioning and his bright garment make Judas immediately visible to the observer. Also central is the moneybag clutched in his hand but below the table-top. The red hair, depicted in several Eucharistic paintings, is a European addition; red hair being a much more common trait in Europeans than among people of the Eastern countries. Red hair came to be commonly associated with Judas and later literary figures that were explicitly Jewish. Despite Jesus and all his disciples being Jewish, it is Judas who is highlighted in these images as the stand-out 'Jew' of later stereotypes. Jeremy Cohen discusses the development of the iconology of Judas which informs later stereotypes of 'the Jew'. "Later readers of the Gospels amplified these *Jewish* characteristics of Judas and rounded out the list with others: red hair, a crooked nose, a forked beard, allegiance to the devil, and more" (2007: 257). Levi responds to the anti-Jewish stereotyping that Cohen identifies by self-consciously replicating it in his own writing. Discussing the gradual realisation of his racial status in Fascist Italy, Levi writes that he felt his Jewish origin to be: "an almost negligible but curious fact, a small amusing anomaly, like having a crooked nose or freckles" (Levi *Periodic*: 29). Levi's reference to a crooked nose is clearly informed by the Christian imagery of the Jew which is transferred from the Gospels to religious paintings. In Pieter Pourbus's *Last Supper*, Judas is again red-haired and is again clutching a moneybag and depicted fleeing the table (1548). Judas is about to exit a doorway through which is entering a sinister death-like creature with a skull's face; his anxiety and guilt are tangible in this depiction.

The image of Judas clutching the moneybag, often concealed behind his back or held close to him, is a popular one and one of the most enduring stereotypes of the Jew to emerge in literature and ideology. In The Master of the Housebook's late fifteenth century depiction of *The Last Supper* Judas, again sitting opposite Jesus, appears to be peering into a moneybag, in sight of the surrounding disciples as Jesus looks away (1480). It is clearly the later Gospel of John, which fills out the character of Judas and elaborates his personality more than Matthew, Mark and Luke, which has most strongly influenced these artists' depictions with the prominent inclusion of the moneybag so often in Judas' possession. With the help of the Gospel of John, the

Renaissance artists were able to depict Judas as visibly and recognisably as they did Jesus, in their recreations of the Last Supper story. Heinz Schreckenberg explores the elimination of stereotypical Jewish physiognomy from images of Jesus in Christian art; a process Schreckenberg calls the “de-Judaizing of the New Testament”. He writes: “Jesus and the apostles think differently from the Jews and therefore also look different from them!” (1996: 22).

Painters often make use of chiaroscuro, the use of shade to emphasise points of light and dark in a picture. Valentin de Boulogne’s painting of *The Last Supper* (1626) exemplifies this technique, using Jesus and Judas as the figures of light and dark. Jesus, central to the painting is depicted in the light, emphasising his radiant goodness and also Westernising his features. In contrast, Judas appears to hide in the shade; his features obscured by darkness; he is recognisable by the arm held behind his back, concealing the by now all-too familiar moneybag. Judas is often to be seen in shadowy darkness, giving the impression to the observer of something sinister and dark about Judas’ personality and also about his appearance. While Jesus assumes a distinctly European countenance, Judas’ features, in the shade of the paintings, become exaggeratedly dark, another trait later perceived to be typically Semitic. Possibly the most famous painting depicting the Eucharist is Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* fresco (1498). Again, Jesus sits at the centre of the table, with a window behind him; he is haloed in light and commands the eye. Judas, while not at the end of the table, is noticeably darker skinned than the fair-skinned Jesus and even his fellow disciples. As a motif for the image of Christ with his disciples, announcing his impending betrayal to his followers, da Vinci’s famous painting is a perfect example of how the Messiah Jesus becomes a Westernised figure and Judas more than any other figure is emphatically dark and mysterious; a typical ‘other’. The heightened physical differences between Jesus and Judas, the positioning of Judas at the end or opposite side of the table and images such as the Master of the Housebook’s portrayal of Jesus and his disciples wearing golden nimbuses, with Judas the single and very obvious exception, all serve to underscore Judas Iscariot’s ‘otherness’ and the Jewishness inherent within.

The construction of ‘otherness’ emphasises the exotic, the dangerous and the unknown. This issue has segregated and discriminated against Jews throughout history. As Jesus and all of his disciples were Jewish, Judas was not the only Jew to be

represented in these paintings; however according to the Gospels Judas committed suicide, was struck down, or is simply removed from the texts without explanation following his betrayal. He is not represented as having converted to the Messianic faith and spread Jesus' ministry, thus, Judas is not remembered or represented as a new convert to Messianic Judaism in the way that the other disciples and the likes of St. Paul are (a conversion to be appropriated and attached to the Christian Church in later years). Hence the 'Judas the Jew' identity and imagery which has endured in art and ideology since. The artwork representing Judas as the 'other' betraying disciple had a significant impact on the Christian populace that were exposed to this imagery through the Renaissance period. This is proven by the proliferation of the Judas motif which has emerged time and again since the Renaissance, through the modern age, in literature, film and political propaganda.

1.7 The Christian Story: Hegemony and Anti-Judaism

In following the Gospel stories and creating iconic artwork to illustrate them, these European artists gave Western Christians an image of Judas. This was an iconology and an idea of what 'the Jew' looked like with his dark skin tone, his hunched figure and his black or often red hair, which these artists ascribed to him. These impressions are evident, like the Gospel accounts of Judas' character, in literature of this time and beyond and in propaganda and ideology in the twentieth century, instructing the Christian reader what the Jew in their midst looked like, how he behaved and how he could not be trusted. The iconology found in the New Testament Gospels created a character and a metonym evident in Jewish characterisation in Western art and literature since, a stage and storybook villain with characteristics the audience could recognise as evil and 'other'. Cohn-Sherbok traces these traits from the New Testament to the stage:

In scenes from the New Testament Jews were portrayed in the most heinous fashion, and numerous epithets were used to characterize them: "false Jews", "false thieves", "false miscreants", "wicked and felonious Jews", "perverse Jews", "disloyal Jews", "false swine". The Jewish people were thus presented as vile and treacherous, and

sadism became a central feature of the stage: torture, crucifixion and rape were repeatedly enacted to a believing audience. (1992: 53)

The damage and effects of such propagation is evident in the work of authors and artists through the ages, who acquire a recognisable motif they can appropriate and develop, when creating and representing the character of the Jew. The Judas motif notably emerges in the work of Shakespeare, in the mercenary character of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and again in Dickens' Fagin, the thief often just denoted as "the Jew" in the narrative of *Oliver Twist* (Dickens 1966, 1999). The repetition of the Judas image in the Jewish characters of Britain's most important playwright in the seventeenth century and the re-emergence in the nineteenth century, as constructed by one of the most influential, best-known and ostensibly philanthropic authors, is significant. The image of 'the Jew' is evidently rooted in literary culture; this has clearly emerged from the Christian image of the Jew which is inextricably linked to Judas Iscariot.

The influence of the Christian story is more detectable in Levi's writing than it is in Wiesel's, on the one hand this is natural given the closer proximity to Christian hegemony in Levi's Italian upbringing than in Wiesel's, but on the other hand, it is Wiesel who had the more religious upbringing and who continued to use clearly religious frameworks in his work. Nicholas Patruno detects in Levi's *The Truce* a clearly Christian motif in his construction of the character of Cesare. Arguing that Cesare is described by Levi to resemble Christ, Patruno observes the "teacher-disciple relationship" between the two men and cites Cesare's gift of the fish to the starving family as "the symbol of Christianity" (1995: 40). *The Truce* and specifically the parts of the narrative which refer to Cesare are humorous and focus on his ebullient character. The passage in which Cesare returns to Levi having given his fish away, portrays Cesare as a humanitarian and one who would suffer hunger out of charity towards starving strangers. "He approached, and offered her the fish, and she made him understand that she would have liked the fish, but had nothing to give in exchange; in fact, she and the children had not eaten for two days" (*Levi Truce*: 315). As Patruno suggests, Levi's writing here, is reminiscent of a Christian parable, albeit with the focus on Jesus rather than Judas. While Levi is able to derive positive elements out of the Christian teachings

which have so often led to the violent persecution of Jews, Wiesel tends to avoid the Christian teachings and devotes his attention to the Hebrew figures. His book *Messengers of God* discusses biblical figures from Adam to Job, exploring their messages and the themes of the biblical texts (Wiesel *Messengers*). He does not offer any commentary on New Testament figures, the Christian teachings, as he has argued, evoking fear and negativity within him due to their effects on the Jewish community throughout history.

Referring specifically to the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in post-Medieval France, Cohn-Sherbok discusses the Judas motif emerging again as a perceived characteristic of the Jewish people:

No doubt, as Christians grew up they learned to distinguish between good and evil and were informed of the strange people living in their midsts who were guilty of the greatest crime against humanity: the death of Christ. [...] Judas and the Jews were seen as interchangeable, and the Jewish people were presented as the tools of Satan. In the lives of Jesus and the saints, as well as in the accounts of pilgrimages, the Jewish population was presented in the most horrific fashion. (1992: 64-65)

Cohn-Sherbok is here referring to a time around fifteen hundred years after the death of Jesus. At this period in time it seems likely that given the relatively small Jewish population in France at the time, the figure of the Jew was still to these Christians, the unknown 'other', the unfamiliar figure of the Old Testament and Judas the metonymic Jewish evil of the Christian story.

1.8 Conclusion

The religious texts from the Hebrew Scriptures to the Christian New Testaments reveal some issues which are fundamental to the study of the Holocaust and Jewish identity. The catastrophic destructions and sacrifices described in the Scriptures open up questions of precedent in religious explorations of the Holocaust, as do the persecution of Job and the silence of God. Levi and Wiesel, although writing from opposing positions of Jewish faith and identity, share a common Holocaust experience

and at times engage with the same thematic issues of belief in God and Jewish persecution. The issue of 'otherness' becomes prevalent in a discussion on the Christian New Testament, particularly the evolving trajectories of the Gospels, their artistic representations and the characterisation of Judas Iscariot. The construction of the 'other' from 'without', that is creating the image of the Jew in the Christian context, is an enduring issue inextricably linked to anti-Judaism and the ensuing anti-Semitism. These issues have a history in religious dogma and identity and also leave a legacy which Levi and Wiesel must negotiate in their own constructions of identity and their Holocaust experiences.

Chapter Two

The Jew as 'Other': Modernity and the Development of Jewish identity in European Literature

Others, whether within or without, threaten our sense of distinctiveness, coherence, and stability. As we encounter the foreigner, the external Other, we feel threatened with a loss of self. Thus, the Other is viewed as a threat to our own precarious sense of self, on both the individual and group levels.

(Silberstein 1994: 8)

The Biblical literature discussed in chapter one established the Jewish people, their faith and their history in Israel, through the origins of the establishment of Judaism to the Biblical literature of the New Testament and the Christian faith. Within medieval Europe the Christian trajectory and the inherent anti-Judaism within it was dominant and established a separation between Christian and Jewish communities, marking Jews as 'other'. As the Enlightenment developed out of Renaissance Europe as the pathway to Modernity, European Jewry divided into an East / West dichotomy. The Jewish cultures which emerged through the period of Modernity indicate the divided Jewish identities constructed as a result of the changing political, cultural and social world and the tremendous changes European Jewry faced as a result. Theories of 'otherness' and Orientalism identify the construction of the Jewish figure from 'without' in European thought and the social changes throughout modern Europe are integral to the construction of Jewish identity from 'within', in both the East and the West of Europe. Philosophies of Modernity, the political divides that separated the East and West and the polarised literary identities to emerge from these two halves of Europe established distinct Jewish cultures which informed the identities of Primo Levi in the West and Elie Wiesel in the East.

2.1 After the Renaissance: An Enlightened Europe?

The Renaissance was one of the most significant periods of philosophical development in European history. It was the cultural move from the medieval era towards an age of artistic and philosophical advancement, reminiscent of the ancient Greek and Roman ages of cultural advancement. The Renaissance is the epoch that saw Europe move out

of the Middle Ages and towards a new era of Modernity. As a cultural and artistic movement the Renaissance was initiated in Italy and is often recognised within the framework of the artwork of the era. Certainly, a new group of artists and paintings flourished in this period, depicting religious scenes of the Old and New Testaments. Painted under the influence of and in many cases, for the Roman Catholic Church, these paintings are Christian-focused, powerfully ideological and depict Westernised images of Jesus and other sacred figures. Paul Johnson observes the rigorous control over the artwork produced during the Renaissance era: "The [Western] Orthodox Church had a paralysing tendency to tell artists what was the 'correct' way to render holy personages, as well as to limit the range of permitted subjects" (2001: 109). The Renaissance marked a new era of exploration of theological and philosophical thought. However the hegemony of the Church was still evident in the art and writing of the Renaissance era, particularly in its birthplace, Italy, the Papal centre. At the time of the Renaissance Church and State were still inextricably linked across Europe. The Jewish communities immigrating into Europe at this time arrived in countries of Christian majorities where Christianity was the state religion, therefore with the strict adherence to the Church among the majority populations the Jews were a visible 'other' in these countries.

An important figure of medieval Italian culture and one who confronted Christian religious belief and imagery in his writing was Dante Alighieri. Dante, a thirteenth-century Florentine, lived and worked until his exile in the centre of the early Renaissance (Johnson 2001: 21). He was also instrumental in the promotion and development of Italian vernacular in literature, rather than the traditional Latin. Dante's most famous and enduring work is his three part poem the *Comedy*, written in exile and narrating the author's tour through Hell, Purgatory and finally Paradise. Dante's visions of the circles of Hell and Heaven are vivid, detailed and show a theological interest and awareness of the Scriptures. The journey through the nine circles of Hell in *Inferno* evokes a lesson in the medieval Christian theology of sin and punishment, telling the story of the fates of well-known sinners and wrong-doers. Notably when Dante reaches the centre of Hell, the ninth circle, the figure condemned to be devoured for eternity by Lucifer is Judas Iscariot (Alighieri 2007 *Inferno* 34. 61-63). While Judas' fate is mentioned only briefly by Dante, albeit at the climax of

Inferno, Guy Raffa detects a reflection of the anti-Semitic sentiments of the medieval age within Dante's work in his naming of the centre of Hell:

Judecca, named after the apostle who betrayed Jesus (Judas Iscariot), is the innermost zone of the ninth and final circle of hell. The term also hints at a manifestation of Christian prejudice – which Dante certainly shares – against Judaism and Jews in the Middle Ages: it alludes to the names – *Iudecca*, *Judaica* – for the area within certain cities (e.g., Venice) where Jews were forced to live, apart from the Christian population. (2002)

What Dante demonstrates here is the inherent anti-Judaism of medieval Christianity the residue of which was carried through influential literature such as Dante's into the Renaissance and age of Modernity manifesting itself as a latent anti-Semitic mistrust of the Jews. While chapter one demonstrated the origin of anti-Judaism, the anti-Semitism of the modern era is arguably a combination of residual anti-Judaism of the Christian Church in Church-dominated states and the racial anti-Semitism of the modern preoccupation with 'otherness' and identity. As the Christian Church began to lose its grip over the control and governance of European countries the influence of nationalism took over. With populations beginning to identify themselves with their country rather than the more overarching power of the Church, the Jewish communities were faced with the choice of assimilating to a secular nationalistic identity or becoming isolated and anachronistic communities, separate from the populace.

Dante was a source of influence and inspiration to Primo Levi despite Dante's anti-Jewish sentiment and Levi's Jewish heritage. Levi's Holocaust narrative contains several references to Dante and an *Inferno*-like descent to Hell. Rachel Falconer discusses Levi's use of Dante but rather than just compare the narratives, she identifies a contrast between the two. Notably Falconer implies that Dante, in typical Christian dogma, represents the suffering of the figures in Hell as deserved punishment, including the damnation of Judas the betraying Jew. This divine justice is juxtaposed with the injustice of Levi's ordeal.

In brief, Levi alludes to Dante both to verify his own experience of Hell – what Dante imagined, the prisoners actually experienced – and to underline

the important contrasts – Dante’s Hell is an expression of divine *Justizia* [sic], Auschwitz of human injustice. (2005, 2007: 63)

The imagery of Dante’s narrative is representative of the ordeal of the prisoners of the concentration and extermination camps, but for Levi, a Jew, to utilise the Dantean trope and language is revealing of Levi’s formative cultural influences. The imagery and language of Dante’s epic poem is classically Christian, a sign of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Italy.

In narrating the most cataclysmic modern event for world Jewry, Levi uses an unmistakably religious trope. His recollection in 'The Canto of Ulysses' chapter of *If This is a Man*, where a momentary flash of the memory of Dante's words briefly transport Levi away from the reality of his ordeal, evoke biblical imagery both Hebrew and New Testament of heraldic trumpets. “As if I also was hearing it [the words of the twenty-sixth canto of *Inferno*] for the first time: like the blast of a trumpet, like the voice of God” (Levi *Man*: 119). Brought up in a Catholic country by assimilated Jewish parents, Levi’s literary and creative imagination was clearly more the product of the Christian influences of his Italian language and culture than of his Jewish heritage. The overt Western influence on Levi, distinct from Wiesel’s Jewish influences from his East European community and the resulting difference in Holocaust narratives, marks the two authors as comparable.

The Renaissance broadly spanned the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, emerging in Italy and spreading across Western Europe. This era introduced a new kind of theological interrogation through philosophy, art and literature; although this theologising remained publicly very much within the Christian framework. This era of philosophising gave way in the eighteenth century to the Enlightenment; an era of scientific and technological development. Although the Enlightenment took place through ostensibly Christian (and Jewish) philosophers and the Church still maintained much control over the populace, the rise in scientific thought began to deconstruct some of the Church’s medieval hegemony. This is arguably where Modernity has its roots, in the philosophy of the Enlightenment thinkers.

Hegel used the concept of modernity first of all in historical contexts, as an epochal concept: The “new age” is the “modern age.” [...] The discovery

of the “new world,” the Renaissance, and the Reformation – these three monumental events around the year 1500 constituted the epochal threshold between modern times and the middle ages. (Habermas 1987: 5)

German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel emerged in the late eighteenth century, the product of Kantian metaphysical philosophy and the romanticism of the French Revolution. Kant represented the early philosophy of the Enlightenment which professed a belief in God, the soul and in evil; but in a move towards rationalism and away from strict Christian doctrine he argued for human responsibility for evil and a more rational structure for understanding the world and God within it (Rossi 2004). As the Revolution continued, promoting tolerance and equality in philosophy and nationalism in politics, the philosophies of the Enlightenment changed and Christian doctrine began to lose its place as the centre of moral, religious and political thought.

The Enlightenment, the social and philosophical movement which spread across Europe in the eighteenth century was an ideological departure from the Renaissance before it, its interest in looking forward, not back in the search for knowledge and social enrichment. This enlightened belief and interest in the potential of the future, rather than the glories of the past is the transition period from Renaissance to Modernity. Jürgen Habermas says of this modern approach to social development:

The spell which the classics of the ancient world cast upon the spirit of later times was first dissolved with the ideas of the French Enlightenment. Specifically the idea of being ‘modern’ by looking back to the ancients changed with the belief, inspired by modern science, in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the infinite advance towards social and moral betterment. (1992: 127)

Habermas discusses rationality, morality and law as key facets of Modernity, in its scientific thought processes and in the optimism of a modern rational world. He then goes on to declare that, “the twentieth century has shattered this optimism” (1992: 132). The advancement of scientific technology throughout Modernity led to the most monumental and previously unimaginable events and creations in the twentieth century, from the poisoned gas unleashed in the trenches of the First World War to

the atomic bombs that destroyed the towns of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One of the most significant events to use the developments of science and rationality, but to shatter the optimism of the twentieth century in its destructive power was the Holocaust. The technological advances that made mass murder so efficient, coupled with the social conditioning which rationalised the persecution, dehumanisation and destruction of European Jewry created a lasting social and political impact upon world Jewry and the European continent.

The Jewish communities of Europe experienced the Enlightenment era through the *Haskalah*, the Jewish intellectualism movement. With a scholarly approach to learning and a rational approach to religious tolerance being tenets of enlightened thought there was a sense of optimism among Western Jews that the Enlightenment would end the religious intolerance and hegemony of the Christian states and open a more peaceful and free society for the Jews. John Locke saw religious toleration as a necessary step forward in the rationalising enlightened society (Bloomberg 2004: 67). Bloomberg cites Moses Mendelssohn (1729 – 1786) as a founding father of the Jewish *Haskalah*, whose contributions to the new Jewish literature of the Enlightenment argued the compatibility of Judaism with enlightened thought and intellectualism.

Mendelssohn's second major literary contribution was *Jerusalem*: In his literary introduction to this work, Mendelssohn wrote that his goal was to promote the case of civil emancipation of the Jews by showing how the Jewish religion was compatible with Enlightenment ideas. (Bloomberg 2004: 68)

The Jewish Enlightenment was to lead in the West to widespread assimilation of Jewish communities across the Western European states. Jon Stratton identifies the idealism of homogenous nation states as a key factor of Modernity as the crux of the Jewish assimilation movement enabled by Western culture.

When the nation-states of Europe demanded that Jews assimilate in exchange for emancipation, they had in mind cultural assimilation. This means, the taking on board of what is thought of as the common culture, based in the normative moral order, of the nation, expressed among other places in the mode of living of everyday life. (Stratton 2000: 57-58)

Although Eastern Europe also experienced the *Haskalah* and the desire for social liberation, the repressive control of the state slowed down the process of Enlightened thought in the East (Bacon 1990: 97-98). The rise of anti-Semitic groups across Europe in the twentieth century as nationalism and political turmoil erupted, meant that the Jewish Enlightenment and dawn of emancipation for the Jews was short-lived in the East, among the Jews who broke away from the Orthodoxy, while in the West assimilation and the dream of emancipation was crumbling under Fascism and National Socialism. "It [the Holocaust] forced the recognition that assimilatory acceptance, and toleration, like Othering itself, belonged to the dominant national group. It is theirs, and the state's to offer and withdraw" (Stratton 2000: 10).

Jewish philosophy which had previously engaged in debates on the compatibility of Judaism with the Enlightenment, emancipation and assimilation, was forced to change after National Socialism and the Holocaust. Jewish philosophers had to confront questions of totalitarianism, morality and the illusion of assimilation in addressing the existence of Jewry in the Diaspora. Emmanuel Levinas was a philosopher whose own life was affected personally by the Holocaust and whose writing interrogates these issues. Born in Lithuania in 1906 to a Jewish family, Levinas emerged from an Eastern Jewish community to engage in philosophy, particularly that of Heidegger at Freiburg University in the late 1920s (Atterton n.d.). Naturalised as a French citizen before the Second World War, Levinas experienced the war as a prisoner and wrote in the years following on ethics and morality. Levinas discussed the enlightened thought as a seductive ideal the Jews were drawn into, but ultimately are still not fully reconciled with.

In the wake of the Liberation, Jews are grappling with the Angel of Reason, who often solicited them and who for two centuries now has refused to let go. Despite the experience of Hitler and the failure of assimilation, *the great vocation in life resounds like the call of a universal and homogenous society.* (Levinas 1997: 210)

With hindsight and a personal experience of the persecution of the Jews through the Holocaust, Levinas perceives the assimilation of Western Jewry to be a failure, but for Jewish philosophers of the eighteenth century keen to demonstrate Judaism's

compatibility with the changing culture and politics of Europe, assimilation became a natural step in the rejection of medieval religious hegemony and the progress of scholarly knowledge.

2.2 Modernity and the Construction of Identity

Modernity is a term which describes not only the period of time following the Renaissance, up to the mid-twentieth century, but also the cultural epoch of that era and the tremendous changes which occurred during that time. When discussing the Holocaust, the idea of Modernity is considered as a framework of time between the end of Europe's Renaissance period and the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust. This period of time is broad and incorporates significant social, cultural and political changes across Europe, in addition to the technological and scientific developments. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman made the connection between Modernity and the Holocaust, not only through the science and technology which enabled the methodology and the machinery of mass genocide, but through Modernity's construction of the 'other'. This social and cultural construction promoted an atmosphere of fear of the unknown and the different, a situation which allowed the 'other' to be created, then ostracised and finally destroyed in an ostensibly advanced modern society.

There is no definitive starting point of Modernity but an accepted definition used here is that Modernity begins when the social, scientific and philosophical advances in Europe began to influence populations over earlier Church hegemony. Habermas defines the era and its ideals in his essay *The Project of Enlightenment*:

The project of modernity formulated in the eighteenth century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic. (1992: 132)

The era that began with the philosophical and theological interrogation into religion, God and humanity in the eighteenth century, developed through that century and into the nineteenth into a cultural and political discourse, informed by the identification

with nation states. Modernity and the development of independent nation states placed further emphasis upon knowledge, empire and identity. Habermas' argument that the "combined aesthetic, ethical and political outlook" of Modernity was unified until the splintering of developing Western societies after the eighteenth century, raises the East / West issue of identity in modern Europe (Habermas 1992: 125). Habermas was born in Germany in 1929 and was personally witness to the changing political outlook of modern Germany and the lengths to which the ideals of Modernity were stretched by the Nazis in their obsession with identification, rationalisation and social order and to justify their totalitarian ambitions.

Like Habermas, Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman bore witness to the changing political climate of modern Europe, the dominance of nation states and military powers and also offers an authoritative voice on the role of Modernity. Bauman specifically discusses the Holocaust within the framework of Modernity and the sociology of the modern world which made the Holocaust both technologically and socially possible (Bauman 1999). As the modern era progressed into the twentieth century there was a clear development in the extent to which identity, social order and national identity entered the political sphere and played a major role in the social and political changes of the twentieth century, notably the rise of Nazism and anti-Semitism in Europe. The bureaucratic Nazi system was obsessively interested in identifying and categorising the population and using these categories of identification to exact social order in Germany and the Nazi occupied nations. Compliant Aryan people of German heritage (that is to say Gentile heritage) were therefore identified as 'good' and rewarded as such through youth programmes and financial rewards for producing large families. Jews and other communities identified as 'undesirable' such as the disabled and homosexuals were then systematically dehumanised and forced to the edge of society. Civil rights, social and professional identities were stripped from the undesirable before they were removed completely in euthanasia clinics, concentration camps and finally extermination camps. In the most targeted and propaganda-led assault on the Jewish population in Europe's history, the Jews were identified and stigmatised as religious, racial and cultural 'others' and enemies of the German Reich. They were disenfranchised, victimised and murdered under a

nationalistic regime that destroyed the assimilated national identities the Jews of Europe, particularly the West, had strived to achieve through the Enlightenment years.

Bauman argues that far from being an anomaly, a horrific exception to the development and culture of Modernity, the Holocaust is the logical product of Modernity. "Like everything else in our modern society, the Holocaust was an accomplishment in every respect superior, if measured by the standards that this society has preached and institutionalized" (1999: 89). This is the point where social order, obedience to authority, rationality of social rule and the technological advances so revered and nurtured throughout Modernity, go too far.

The Nazi vision of a harmonious, orderly, deviation-free society drew its legitimacy and attractiveness from such views and beliefs already firmly entrenched in the public mind through the century and a half of post-Enlightenment history, filled with scientific propaganda and the visual display of the wondrous potency of modern technology. (Bauman 1991: 29)

This "wondrous potency of modern technology" is what made the Holocaust physically possible, on the enormous scale on which it took place, with the Nazi-controlled rail system running across Europe to the extermination camps of Poland, making use of state-of-the-field technology to become factories of murder, transporting and processing vast numbers of people every day to their deaths, from across the continent. However this physical machinery would not have been developed so effectively without this period of modern progress, nor would it have been able to take place so successfully without a powerful and effective ideology behind it. The systematic process of identifying people, assigning familiar or alien identities and processing those deemed enemies in the concentration camp system, highlight the bureaucracy involved in the Nazi regime. For the dehumanisation of Jewry and the destruction of Jewish life to continue largely unchallenged, the Nazis successfully constructed an 'other' identity to categorise the Jews within, socially and mentally detached and separate from the Aryan population.

Out of this era emerged Wiesel and Levi, Jewish figures representative of the East and the West of European Jewry. Through an exploration of their national and family histories throughout this era and the literary representations of their own

identities, a comparison will emerge of how the era of Modernity in Europe created a divide between Eastern and Western European Jewry. The social and cultural changes of Modernity amplified the East / West divide in Europe and then in later years, as the Nazi machinery enveloped Jews from across the continent, collapsed the very dichotomy it had in part constructed. The East and West argument within modern Europe is constructed by the differing Jewish cultures that emerged through both the possibilities and the constraints of the modern mind. In the East, the typically poorer communities, slower to develop technologically and scientifically and those who did not experience the transitional Enlightenment period out of the Middle Ages, the medieval religious dogma and anti-Jewish persecutions continued for longer. In the fast-advancing Western European states, developing commerce and knowledge presented an opportunity for assimilation the Jews had not experienced before and a pressure to conform to the secular, homogenous identity in the pursuit of a successful and comfortable life. As the modern period progressed, the gap between the Jews of the East and of the West widened socially and culturally.

The work of Bauman is rooted in the period of Modernity and focuses upon questions of identity and belonging, as a stranger in the modern era. Like the literature considered in this chapter, the issues Bauman debates concentrate on the European context and often specifically refer to the plight of the Jewish people, their experience of Modernity in Europe and the issues of identity and nationalism they faced, all issues to have personally affected Bauman himself. A primary issue in Bauman's work is the significance of nationalism as a key feature of Modernity in Europe. The modern era was a time of empire building throughout Europe, sovereign rule and the promotion of national identities. The modern idea of successful nationalism, as Bauman observes in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, relies upon homogeneity: "Nation states promote 'nativism' and construe its subjects as 'natives'. They laud and enforce the ethnic, religious, cultural *homogeneity*" (1991: 64). Jewish communities, with their own traditional ethnic, religious and cultural identities represent an 'otherness' and distinctness from their Christian neighbours. 'Within' Jewry these communities are not homogenised and from 'without' are perceived as 'other' to the nation state ideal. Assimilation into the nation state identity was required by way of rejecting rituals and

cultures which were visibly different from the cultural norms of the ostensibly Christian, but typically secularised nation state.

The literature of the modern Jewish authors discussed here, Franz Kafka, Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer exemplify these issues of native identities, the homogenous mass and the outsider. In the case of Kafka, these characters and scenarios are distinctly modern. Imagery of the mundane and the bureaucratic dominate the narratives of Kafka's literature: "To which authority did they belong? After all, K. lived in a country which enjoyed law and order; all the laws were upheld; so who dared pounce on him in his own home?" (Kafka 1994, 2000: 3). From Josef K's inexplicable trial without end, to the Land Surveyor K's doomed quest to enter the impenetrable Castle, Kafka's literature evokes a grey, bureaucratic world of faceless workers, commerce, insularity and a preoccupation with identity, the 'other' kept outside of the community and ignorant of the rules of society.

Within the literature of Aleichem and Singer there is a particular focus on religious and cultural identity. Within the work of both authors is a discernible motif of the Jewish 'other' within a Christian majority. In Aleichem's stories *Tevye the Dairyman* and *Motl the Cantor's Son*, the characters are driven away from their home villages, but in their communities there is a familiarity and a sense of closeness among the characters. The Jewish faith is a strong presence both in the persecutions these characters face and the God-fearing tone of the language and expressions represented by Aleichem. In Singer's short stories, often the characters are European immigrants living in America. As a newly discovered country and the destination of immigrants from around the world (Aleichem, Singer and Wiesel included), America represents not only the utopian dream for persecuted communities, but also a sense of displacement. America may have offered a sanctuary to those forced from their own countries, but in a community made up of 'others', these people are both detached from and united with each other in their 'otherness'. There is a sense of yearning and nostalgia for the cultural familiarity of home in Singer's literature. "...I meet there [in New York] the *landsleit* from Poland, as well as all kinds of literary beginners and readers who know Yiddish" (Singer 1953, 1984 *The Cafeteria*: 287).

What makes Kafka comparable with Aleichem and Singer is that all three authors, while writing from apparently opposed perspectives of Modernity represent

the cultural and social differences between the East and the West of Europe at this time. Kafka, as a German-speaking Jew from a family attempting to assimilate, represents Western secularised figures in his literature and is brought up within that culture. Despite his upbringing, Kafka developed a strong interest in the languages, culture and faith of Judaism and came to identify later in his life with a more traditional and typically (for the period of Modernity) Eastern Jewish identity. Aleichem and Singer personally represent the traditionally Orthodox Jew of Eastern Europe in their cultures and backgrounds. In both authors' work however the Western utopia of America figures significantly. There is a crossover of identities here, the Western Kafka's later fascination with his heritage and for the Eastern Aleichem and Singer, the lure of America, the epitome of the modern world. This crossover emerges again in the post-Holocaust lives and literary careers of Levi and Wiesel, which will be explored later.

The Enlightenment attitude that attracted Kafka's family into assimilation did not satisfy Kafka, as he searched for his religious and cultural roots. Although Levi did not claim to be unfulfilled by his cultural and social identity, later in his post-Holocaust life and writing career, he also pursued an interest in his Jewish heritage in the East of Europe while writing *If Not Now, When?* and the compilation of literary influences in *The Search for Roots*. Aleichem, Singer and latterly Wiesel all found themselves forced from their lives which had been sheltered to an extent from the modernising Enlightenment through anti-Semitism and intolerance in the East. All three authors subsequently lived in America, the exemplar of modern secular culture. To be a part of assimilated life in America was unavoidable, but all three authors, while they must have found satisfaction in America, did not abandon their religious roots and culture and retained their identities as religious Jews, bringing with them the Hasidism and Orthodoxy of Eastern Europe into an alien environment. The East / West crossover is significant in terms of a comparison of modern authors; all the authors betray in their work to varying degrees, common issues of identity and the struggle to belong, despite an outward appearance of opposite cultures and lives. The Enlightenment highlighted the divide between the East and West of Europe and through that the separation of Eastern and Western Jewry. The Enlightenment however did affect both sides of Europe, the West directly in the changes in emancipation and the East vicariously, in

the Jewish pursuit of a sanctuary to live as Jews which ironically was found in the new, secular and modern America.

2.3 The Oriental in the Midst: Race and 'Otherness' in the Nineteenth Century.

The nineteenth century saw the rapid progression of modern scientific development. With this progression however and particularly with the developments in biology and anthropology, came a development in anti-Judaism, a move towards anti-Semitism, away from the theological prejudices and towards racial discrimination of the Jews. Considered within the theory of Orientalism, this prejudice was directed against the 'others' of Western society. Levi and Wiesel both narrated instances from their childhoods of anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism and of times when they were both made to feel 'other'. Although Levi and Wiesel both experienced the *racial* anti-Semitism of Nazi and Fascist rule, in the pre and early war years, both are able to recall memories where their *religious* identity created tension and discomfort, in the company of Christians. Where Said discusses the exotic danger and threat of the unknown that the Oriental 'other' brings with him (not necessarily a Jewish other in Said's case), Bauman focuses more on the threat of assimilation and the danger of incongruence that the Jews of modern Europe posed.

Keeping the stranger at a mental distance through 'locking him up' in a shell of exoticism does not, however, suffice to neutralise his inherent, and dangerous, incongruity. After all, he stays around. A moment of inattention, and the intercourse may well spill over the permitted limits. Thus the stranger remains the permanent 'slimy', always threatening to wash out the boundaries vital to native identity. (Bauman 1991: 67)

While the traditional Jew is thought of as strange and out of place within the new modern world, because of his traditional dress, archaic faith and devotion to the mystic and ritualistic practice of Judaism, this Jewish type is at least recognisable as such. Despite these people being perceived to not fit with the age of European Modernity, the embracing of a new more rational way of thought was not confined to the Christian communities. Jews like their Christian and Secular neighbours, were

adapting to the rational way of thought and the nationalistic cultures of the time. According to Bauman, in moving with the times to comply with the ideals of Modernity, the Jews served only to increase the sense of social instability and fears of the incongruence of the 'other' (1999: 45). Traditional Jews, the physically distinctive Orthodox and Hasidic Jews, may be tolerated as they are unambiguous and distinctive, but the assimilated Jew is unrecognisable as such (without the traditional and highly recognisable Orthodox and Hasidic Jewish attire) and therefore perceived to be a greater threat to the new Europe, with this ambiguous and potentially dangerous blurring of identities and the infiltration of Christian communities. This preoccupation with the appearance of the 'other' is a move from the religious anti-Judaism of the Middle Ages, towards a racial anti-Semitism of late Modernity. Stigmatising the Jewish 'other' existed in medieval times with Jews being forced to wear distinguishing clothing. With the preoccupation with biology and racial superiority in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, the stigmatisation of Jews developed further in categorising them as 'other'. In Catholic Italy, Levi, despite being from an area of Turin with a Jewish community, was exposed to the taunts of Christian children at school. "As a Jew, I'd been made fun of by my schoolmates: not beaten up, or insulted, but made fun of, yes" (Camon 1989: 67). Although Levi had his *Bar Mitzvah* at the normal age of thirteen, he was not devoutly involved with his Jewish community in Italy as a child or an adult, but he demonstrates an awareness in his literature, that despite his assimilated status, he did not fit into the Christian communities he encountered either; he represents the 'other' both from 'without' the Jewish community and 'within' it. This argument contradicts a statement made by Levi biographer Carole Angier, who began her biography with the following commentary on the assimilation of Piedmont Jews: "But one of them [Levi's friends] (a Jew) said to me, when Jews assimilate they become 110 percent like their neighbours" (2002: xvi). Angier's comment about Italian assimilation appears to echo the fears expressed by Wiesel that assimilation results in a complete rejection of Jewish identity and also supports the definition of Gustav Landauer, who argues that the assimilationist "denied his Jewish roots as forcefully and completely as possible" (Schmidt 1992: 127). The fact that Levi and his Christian classmates recognised his 'otherness' indicates that his assimilation was not a total rejection of Jewish identity or identification. Musing on his attraction to a chemistry

classmate, Levi discusses the religious difference between himself and Rita as an insurmountable obstacle. "It could even become an essential and fundamental discussion, because I too am Jewish, and she is not: I am the impurity that makes the zinc react, I am the grain of salt or mustard" (Levi *Periodic*: 29). Levi's choice of language in this passage is noteworthy and arresting in the political climate of which he writes. Although he uses a scientific analogy typical of Levi's interests and career; in describing himself as an "impurity" he adopts the language of the anti-Semite. There is a sense of knowingness in Levi's narrative, a self-consciousness of using the language of 'otherness'. The period of time Levi recalls is the pre-war years, a time when his Jewish identity was a potential danger to his safety, a certain barrier to his professional life and in the eyes of the anti-Semitic regime gaining momentum across Europe, an impurity.

With the problem of the Jewish 'others' in Europe becoming, in outward appearance, indistinguishable from Gentile Europeans, the political and ideological solution was a return to the traditional Orientalist attitude of drawing a line between 'us' and 'them', marking the 'others' with stigma to identify them as such and remind the Europeans, or non-Orientals, of the social boundaries drawn up to prevent the new social and cultural order of modern Europe being contaminated with the dangers of the strange and the unknown 'other'.

Stigma seems to be a convenient weapon in the defence against the unwelcome ambiguity of the stranger. The essence of stigma is to emphasize the difference; and a difference which is in principle beyond repair, and hence justifies a permanent exclusion. (Bauman 1991: 67)

With the boundaries now established and the stigma of the stranger clear, the Jews of modern Europe became inescapably 'other'. This stigmatisation and social exclusion of the Jews in the East, rather than eradicating their 'otherness', established closed communities, encouraged the Jewish faith and languages to flourish and in effect created an outside culture from 'within' Europe. This culture produced a literary body of its own and a distinct sense of Jewish Diaspora identity. Wiesel was born in 1928; he recalls from his childhood an almost intuitive fear and mistrust of the Christian world he witnessed in his hometown of Sighet. Like Levi, he felt an outsider to the Christians.

Wiesel recalls that his fear of the Christian community was built upon a belief that Christianity and Jew-hatred were bound together and posed a threat to Wiesel and the Jews of Sighet. "To see somebody with a cross . . . a cross for me was a symbol of torment, not of love. I never knew what was going on in a church. [...] I was convinced that whatever I knew about Christianity was that Christians hated Jews" (Wiesel *Conversations*: 61). Wiesel's fears may have been his own imaginative construction, but growing up in the 1930s and being exposed to the development of nationalistic anti-Semitism in his formative years, it is natural that Wiesel would feel threatened by any group outside of his vulnerable Jewish community in Sighet.

In the scientific development of racial studies, Britain played a dominant role. This was the era of Darwinism, the Descent of Man and the survival of the fittest; Orientalists leapt upon these ideas with fervour. At this point the long-held Orientalist ideas of Eastern inferiority could ground themselves within modern science and biology. Said explains:

Theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality within the West most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality. [...] To these ideas was added second order Darwinism, which seemed to accentuate the "scientific" validity of the division of races into advanced and backward, or European-Aryan and Oriental-African. (1978, 1995: 206-07)

This, as Said describes it, "second order Darwinism", particularly its emphasis on eugenics and hereditary characteristics, was to be seized upon later in the twentieth century by Nazi scientists who sought to eliminate entirely the inferior 'other' races, most notoriously the Jews. While the preoccupation with the 'other' of the nineteenth century had not reached the hysteria it was to reach in Nazi Germany only a few decades later, there was still a tangible fear of the 'other' and the threat it posed, represented in the literature of late Modernity. The propagation of the Nazi regime spread across Europe; in Fascist Italy, Levi the science student gradually became aware of the representation of the Jew in the political literature of the time and the pseudo-scientific categorisations that separated Levi from his Christian friends. "In truth, until precisely those months it had not meant much to me that I was a Jew: within myself,

and in my contacts with my Christian friends, I had always considered my origin as an almost negligible fact (Levi *Periodic*: 29). By the 1930s Levi was old enough to understand the racial preoccupation with the Jews and he acknowledged that he had become an 'other' for this reason. In Wiesel's hometown of Sighet where he was still a school student, the war was a distant concern. Although he recalls more frequent and more violent instances of anti-Semitic attacks than Levi, Wiesel's memories and narratives suggest a religious anti-Judaism, with the historical plight of the Jews as the typical explanation for his incomprehension at the hatred the Jews aroused in Romania. "My teachers' response was to have us read and reread the Bible, the prophets, and martyrological literature. Jewish history, flooded by suffering but anchored in defiance, describes a permanent conflict between us and the others" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 19). While Wiesel's memories of his persecution are rooted in religious history, he shares with Levi the recognition of the 'us' and 'them' separation between the Christian and Jewish communities.

The 'other' represents the threat of disruption to a comfortable and familiar system of order. Bauman observes: "The stranger is, for this reason, the bane of Modernity" (1991: 61). As a stateless people, a traditionally Eastern population and a religious minority in Europe, the Jews became vulnerable targets throughout the period of Modernity and the focus of a campaign of persecution against the 'other' of society. While persecution against Jewish communities was not a new occurrence, nor originated by Modernity, the developing means of travel, industry and immigration that the advances of Modernity permitted, heightened the fear of the unknown and incongruous 'other'. "For immigration, [Raymond] Williams argues, intensified and shifted the themes of the crowd and alienation, of unity and diversity characterizing perceptions of the urban or industrial centre during the nineteenth century" (Williams 1992: 82). Immigration, the social mobility of communities and the urbanisation of towns and cities were relatively new issues which informed both the ideals and the fears of Modernity. Questions of identity, the unknown and alienation were not exclusive to this era, but the technological advances of Modernity rapidly increased the processes of immigration and industrialisation, which were conducive to creating an atmosphere of fear of the unknown.

Just as the development of anti-Semitism and fear of the 'other' from 'without' the Jewish community (the Gentile world), confused and amalgamated religious, racial and cultural strands of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, the accounts of Levi and Wiesel demonstrate that in the fraught and tumultuous period of the 1930s and 1940s the perception of threat and danger within the Jewish communities was also constructed by a fear of the 'other', including religious (Gentile), political and cultural 'others'. The obsessions of Modernity that had allowed the fear of the unknown and dangerous 'other' who could subvert the stability and homogeneity of an advancing society had pervaded both the Christian and secular majorities and the Jewish minorities. Such a fearful and paranoid culture was to prove fertile ground for an oppressive, totalitarian system to emerge, pushing the ideals of Modernity to its limits.

2.4 East and West: A Geographical Divide of European Jewry

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era was one of the most significant events in modern European history, with far reaching consequences for the Jews of Western and Central Europe (and to a lesser extent, the East). After the social tumult of the middle-class uprising of the French Revolution under Louis XVI, Napoleon's self-imposed reign as Emperor of France, ruling not only the French but much of conquered continental Europe, led to the emancipation of the Jews in the conquered countries. Napoleon spoke out against the segregation and subjugation of the Jewish communities in Europe, confined to ghetto existences with little freedom. Napoleon was against the absolute authority of religion and the power of the Church to suppress other faiths. The Declaration of the Rights of Man espoused secularity and yet in 1790 Judaism and Protestantism were conferred with civil rights in a move towards equality (Lefebvre 1964: 274-75). Although the Jewish faith was now acknowledged and tolerated in France, the revolutionary development was unpopular throughout Europe among the rulers of the unconquered countries and Napoleon has been criticised retrospectively for encouraging assimilation into secular nationalism, rather than encouraging Jews to flourish within Jewish communities in France. However, Napoleon's rule from the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, gave the Jews of France, Italy, Holland, Westphalia and Spain citizen rights they had not

previously experienced. In the optimistic spirit of Modernity, many Jews of Western Europe, keen to ally themselves with the changing modern culture, abandoned their traditions and suppressed their Jewish identities to assimilate into Western secular culture. Only decades later scientific and anthropologic developments of late Modernity announced that 'otherness' was a biologically determined matter, inescapable by dress, behaviour and religious practice. As Tamar Garb observes, these Jews were seduced into the idealistic dream of Modernity which was later to destroy them.

They modernized, they transformed Judaism itself so that it would conform to the expectations of Enlightenment culture, they converted, they colluded, they disavowed, and even then, they were trapped by the perverse distortions of that ostensibly rationalist dream that had offered them redemption: they were measured, classified, contained, and eventually exterminated. (Nochlin L. and Garb 1995: 25)

If the most significant policy of the eighteenth century for the Jews of Western Europe was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and the emancipation rights of free worship and religion supported by the French Revolution, the most significant policy for the Jews of Eastern Europe was the Pale of Settlement of 1791. Under the Russian Czarist regime, initially instigated by Catherine the Great, the Jews of Russia and Russian-controlled countries were expelled from cities such as Moscow and St Petersburg and forced to live in the area called the Pale of Settlement. This area was made up of provinces of the Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Crimea and Belorussia. This settlement was the home of around forty percent of the world's population of Jews at the time, over five million in the last years before the Pale was abolished (Rubinstein 2002: 80). Expelled to the Pale, the Jews were heavily taxed, denied citizen rights or land ownership and faced the continuous threat of anti-Jewish pogroms. While this existence forced many to emigrate, largely to America at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, those who remained developed close religious and social communities within their enforced *shtetlekh* and also devised a sophisticated and effective social welfare system amongst themselves protecting their fellow Jews in their insular yet expansive ghetto. The Pale

of Settlement collapsed only after the last family of Czars in Russia had been overthrown by revolution (Slezkine 2006: 116). This period, at the end of World War One, also signaled the nearing of the end to the age of Modernity, in the building of a new system of order in Europe; one which was to have even greater ramifications for the Jews.

The political changes of the age of Modernity were monumental for the Jews of Europe. The period of Enlightenment, the era of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the age in which the philosophical and scientific minds of Europe were focused upon reason, science, logic and materialism, made the metaphysical ideas of religion of the medieval age seem irrational, to an extent irrelevant and archaic. The move from metaphysical and religious hegemony towards rational thought and science placed less importance upon religious difference and identifying the Jews as a religious 'other' within a Christian populace. The latent anti-Judaism of Christianity, demonstrated particularly in Western Europe by Renaissance art and literature, remained a presence and influenced the developing anti-Semitism and construction of 'otherness' of European Jews. As Western Jews were gradually moving towards assimilation into secular culture, the Orthodox, typically Eastern Jew (particularly of the *shtetl* community), in traditional dress and with ritualistic practices, became as archaic and out of place in modern enlightened Europe, as the medieval ideology of religious authority was in the eyes of enlightened Gentiles and thus a target for hatred and derision. It is during this modern era that Europe in all its political changes and social developments, became clearly divided between the East and the West; this divide notably manifesting amongst the Jewish communities. It was throughout this era that the Western Jews accelerated their pursuit of assimilation, to become more accepted in their societies. The hope of complete assimilation into secular culture was prevented by the progressive obsession with biologically segregating the Jews as 'other' and by the increasingly right-wing politics which pervaded twentieth-century Europe. The severity of these right-wing politics varied across the different European countries, with the Eastern European countries and of course Germany being the most virulently right-wing. As Stratton observes: "The Jews were emancipated as human beings but in the end, their assimilation foundered on a claim to their racial difference which varied across the nation-states of Europe" (2000: 120). The belief before

National Socialism however, was that assimilation could be and in many cases, had been achieved in the West. In countries where Christianity was the recognised state religion, assimilation had historically been forced, by means of conversion and not necessarily the choice of Jews eager to shed their traditional religious rituals and constraints. Eastern Europe however remained largely stagnated in anti-Judaism. In these countries, where social, political, technological progress and attitudes were slow to change, the Jews were held back, segregated and pulled further apart from their Western kin, in lifestyle, culture and religious identity.

In the twentieth century the process of uniformity, national identity and the marginalisation of 'others' were taken to their extreme limits in the Fascist, Nazi and later Stalinist states of Modern Europe. Bauman points to the Holocaust as the absolute manifestation of a bureaucratic and scientific regime manipulated to remove the 'other' from society, in an event which signaled the collapsing of the era which produced and promoted this social order. "Were the nation state able to reach its objective, there would be no strangers left in the life-world of the residents-turned-natives-turned-patriots" (1991: 65). More than any other event during this period, the Holocaust demonstrated how political power could manipulate the scientific and technological developments of the age to such a catastrophic end, in the ostensible interests of social order and regime. Modernity as a social system revered order and homogeneity, legitimated the creation of nation states and prioritised national identity over religious hegemony. The Holocaust was the product of the Nazi regime and its adherence to these ideals of Modernity. The Nazis' extreme nationalistic reverence for the German country and its demand of absolute obedience and idolatry of Adolf Hitler epitomised the regime as one of rigorous order and control. The Nazi regime's faith in and utilisation of scientific and technological developments not only informed the party's anti-Semitism and hatred of the 'other', but was also largely responsible for their methodology of genocide. The Nazis set a precedent for modern warfare and genocide in their systematic classification of the 'other' as an enemy of the nation and in their brutal efficiency in removing the 'other' from the population, using the technology created in the modern era and legitimising the genocide through systematic conditioning of the population in the ideals of a homogenous modern society.

The Jews of the West, while awarded the right of freedom of religion, were encouraged to assimilate into national culture, while the segregated Jews of the East, in being denied citizen rights, became far more insular than their Western neighbours. Thus the focal point of their segregated communities was their religion and their faith. With the rise of anti-Semitism in the twentieth century and the indiscriminate disenfranchisement and murder of even the most assimilated Jews in Europe, the reality of assimilation for the Jews of Western Europe is questionable. Garb raises an important question with her point that Judaism was modernised and transformed in the dream of redemption, before being destroyed, that of the validity and reality of assimilation (Nochlin L. and Garb 1995: 25). The question must be asked as to whether Jewish assimilation truly took place in Western and Mediterranean Europe, or whether the assimilated life the modern Jews experienced was just one more temporary solution, in a history of statelessness and persecution. It is arguable that these Jews were encouraged to contribute to and ostensibly be part of a nationalised society under the delusion of assimilation and were in fact never fully accepted or able to shed their 'other' identity. Rubinstein and others question this idea with specific regard to German Jews:

Germany's ever more assimilated and acculturated Jewish community increasingly saw itself as fully accepted and acceptable. Historians have often argued whether this was a generally accurate impression which was negated only by the wholly unexpected rise to power of Adolf Hitler in 1933, or whether the perception of full acceptance was illusory from the start. (2002: 35)

While the indiscriminate persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany suggests validity in the suggestion that Jewish assimilation in Europe was illusory, the charge that the Gentile majorities of Europe never fully accepted assimilated Jews is a general one. There is evidence throughout Nazi Germany and before, that many Christians and non-religious people supported, defended and protected Jews, accepting them as friends and neighbours regardless of their faith. It is also the case that many people in Nazi Germany and across occupied Europe will not have considered or been aware of the long and historic process of assimilation across Western and Central Europe, which set these Jews apart from their Eastern neighbours.

Levi considered himself and his immediate family to be assimilated Italians. Although instances of anti-Semitism emerged at various points in his life and his family's life, Levi appears to accept these as ordinary, if infrequent and a part of the existence of Jewry in Europe, given Judaism's fraught history of immigration.

Nevertheless, a wall of suspicion, of undefined hostility and mockery, must have kept them [the Piedmont Jews] substantially separated from the rest of the population, even several decades after the emancipation of 1848 and the constant flow into the cities, if what my father told me of his childhood in Bene Vagienna is true. (*Levi Periodic*: 4)

Levi does not discuss these issues as indicators that his family's assimilation, nor his own was illusory or false. Despite the persecutions Levi faced from the Fascist government in Italy, he does not recall a strong sense of anti-Semitism on the streets of Turin among the general population, the image Levi portrays of pre-and wartime Italy is one of general tolerance toward the Jews in spite of the political regime. "In the years I was born no one – in Italy at least – spoke of ostracizing the Jews" (Camon 1989: 5). Wiesel recalled a much more threatening environment surrounding Sighet in wartime Romania (by then Hungary). Wiesel's position as a Jew however differed from Levi's, as Wiesel's community were non-assimilated Jews vulnerable to personal assault as the differences between the Jews and non-Jews was clearly visible. For Wiesel, assimilation had not been considered as a way of living as a Jew, or as a culture, therefore he also did not experience the concern that it had been an illusion, although he later spoke out against Jewish assimilation as harmful to the faith (*Wiesel Conversations*: 168).

2.5 With Hind Legs Mired in Jewishness: the Jew as 'Other' from 'Within and Without'.

Primo Levi was part of a family who acknowledged their Jewish heritage and observed certain rituals without an Orthodox rigour. Levi was brought up in an assimilated environment but with apparently perfunctory observations of his Jewish family identity. This contradictory and complex identity echoes that of an earlier European Jewish writer, Franz Kafka. As a model of the complexities of an assimilated Jewish

identity and the influences of that identity on the author's literature, Kafka is discussed as a Western framework for and a comparison with Primo Levi. The heading of this section alludes to a comment made by Kafka in a letter. He observes the difficulties of being of parents (particularly of a father) of a traditional Jewish Eastern European history, who have made a conscientious effort to abandon that Jewish culture, while not disregarding the faith and adopting the culture, commerce and outward appearance of a modern, secular, Gentile. He described the identity crisis experienced by these Jews, himself included, as if "their hind legs were still mired in their fathers' Jewishness and their thrashing fore legs found no new ground" (Bauman 1991: 86). This statement epitomises Kafka's position as a Jew and an 'other', not quite fitting in or being comfortable anywhere and while there may be little in Kafka's literature to indicate a crisis of religious identity, the theme of 'otherness' and being a stranger or an outsider is typical of his work.

Franz Kafka was only one generation removed from the Jewish *shtetlekh* of Eastern Europe. His father Hermann Kafka was born in a *shtetl* in Bohemia. He grew up to move to Prague and become a German-speaking businessman, bringing up his son, born in 1883 (and other children) as secular German-speakers, with only a perfunctory observation of Judaism (Alter 1991: 29-32). This somewhat ambivalent regard for faith demonstrates in Hermann Kafka the difficulty of a complete assimilation into Gentile culture, away from an historic and traditional faith. This ambivalence was clearly evident to Kafka and became a source of conflict and emotional distance between father and son. In his adult life, Kafka developed an interest in Judaism, never introduced to him in his own home. After meeting a Yiddish theatre troupe in Prague in 1911, Kafka became absorbed in the history and culture of the Jewish faith and began to study the Hebrew language, another new experience for the German-speaker (Alter 1991: 38-39).

Despite this private pursuit of knowledge of his religious and cultural history, Kafka's literary work betrays little, if anything of this background. Aside from the central feature of the synagogue in his story *The Animal in the Synagogue*, Kafka's novels and short stories have a distinctly secular background to them. Not only are the settings and the images of Kafka's literary imagination secular, they are often banal, industrial and grey, such as the bank, the courts and the apartments of the poor

citizens in *The Trial* and the mundane village life of *The Castle*. The protagonists of these stories are often preoccupied with work or ensnared in a web of bureaucracy: Gregor's concern at catching a train to work, despite having been transformed into an insect in *Metamorphosis* (Kafka 2007), Josef K.'s attempt to maintain his work and daily routine while being mired in his mysterious trial (Kafka 2000) and K.'s impossible quest to reach the castle to fulfill his post as the land surveyor (Kafka 1999). Throughout these texts, there is little indication of any religious observation on the part of the characters, nor of the author's newfound interest in his Jewish religious identity. These texts in fact, demonstrate the opposite. More visible, is the culture Kafka was brought up by his family into, the typically modern, secular, industrial culture his father was so keen to be a part of, leaving his Jewish heritage behind in the *shtetl*.

While Kafka-the-Jew's voice may not be clear in his literature, that of Kafka-the-'other' of Modernity arguably is, a fact which stems from his religious ambivalence. The characters Kafka creates are often isolated figures, emotionally cold and struggling for acceptance against the mass populations they face. While in *Metamorphosis* Gregor has a family that the reader is given access to, his transformation isolates him from those he loves and makes him an 'other' of the most dramatic kind. His family's repulsion at the 'otherness' he embodies, their rejection and neglect of him eventually kills Gregor who is no longer considered by his family to be the son and brother they once had, no longer a part of the homogenous family unit (Kafka 2007). In other texts such as *The Trial* and *The Castle* the reader knows almost nothing of the families of Kafka's protagonists; these characters do not even have complete names, known only as Josef K. and merely K. respectively. Already they have mysterious identities, no supportive family unit to rely on and both are propelled into new worlds where they are the stranger, the outsider and very much the 'other'. It is through the sense of alienation Kafka's characters feel in their environments that the author emerges in his work. Kafka's inability to settle for long in a home or a relationship and his self-imposed isolation from friends and family suggests that he saw himself as something of an 'other' in the sense of being separated from a community, just as his characters experience. Kafka's own desire to reconnect with his religious history which he was removed from through his family's attempt to assimilate is also arguably represented

in the claustrophobic and uncomfortable, but distinctly secular environments that Kafka writes about. It seems that in his literature Kafka represents a perennial problem of Jewish identity, intensified during the period of Modernity, that of being an 'other' who does not belong. Like his literary protagonists, Kafka finds himself without a concrete structure in his life. In a modern world of order, system and regime, Kafka (and his family) have abandoned the religious structure of God, the Synagogue and the Jewish community, but in his isolation, he has been unable to find a new belief system to live comfortably within. In his literature, Kafka, arguably one of the most influential literary voices of Modernity, removes the religious and explicitly Jewish facet from this issue, but demonstrates the isolation of being a stranger, of not belonging to the community and the tragedy of 'otherness'. Despite the families of Kafka and Levi being keen to assimilate, to progress economically and socially within their Western culture, there is a prevalent sense of alienation within Kafka's literature which emerges in Levi's acknowledgement of his own 'otherness'. This may be the emotional cost of being a part of the modern Western world for the Jews, even as late into Modernity as the 1930s.

2.6 Jewish Identity in the East: Aleichem and Singer

When seeking to compare Kafka with other Jewish European writers of the age of Modernity, two significant figures are Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer. If Kafka represents the assimilated Jew of modern Europe, Aleichem and Singer both represent the religious (Orthodox) Jews of Eastern Europe. This parallel is reflected in the literature of these writers, in their distinctly Jewish stories and characters, the antithesis to the secular, industrial, lone figures of Kafka's stories. Sholem Aleichem was born in the Ukraine in 1859 (Aleichem 2009: ix). Like Kafka's father and due to the vast area ruled by Russia, and its Pale of Settlement, like most Jews of Eastern Europe of that time, Aleichem was born into a *shtetl* community. Unlike the Kafkas however, Aleichem (born Rabinowitz) remained a part of the Jewish community, accepting with this sense of community and cultural unity all the hardships and external prejudices that were associated with Jewish life at the time. Aleichem's daughter recalls in her memoir of her father:

The world into which my father was born was the world of the proverbial poverty-stricken Jewish small town in Russia. Such a town was often called a *shtetl* (townlet) but my father coined a special word to describe life in such townlets. *Kasrievka*, he named this world, from the word *kasriel*, meaning a man who is poor but proud. (Waife-Goldberg 1968: 30)

Alechem, it appears from his daughter's memoir, took pride in his Jewish roots, enjoyed the community spirit of the *shtetl* and derived inspiration from the language and the people of his community. Alechem's pen name itself is a Hebraic greeting, which indicates that while Kafka concealed his religious background, Alechem celebrated and utilised his in his career. Alechem wrote both in Hebrew, then later in Yiddish and was a supporter of the Yiddish language, traditionally the vernacular of everyday conversation. In writing in Yiddish, Alechem was writing for the people of his childhood and his history, marking his work with a strong stamp of Jewish identity. The Jewishness of Alechem and of his work, is of unquestionable significance and influence within the sphere of Jewish writing.

Raised in the village of Voronkov, Alechem was exposed from a young age to the *shtetl* life of these Eastern European Jewish communities of the late nineteenth century. A traditional Jewish early education made Alechem fluent in Hebrew, but Yiddish became his language of choice for his literature, struggling against a tradition which valued Hebrew as the written language of Jewish literature. Alechem pursued his quest to make Yiddish an accepted and respected language for literature both in Europe and New York, where he moved after the turmoil of the uprisings and pogroms of the Russian states and the beginning of the First World War and where he died in 1916 (Alechem 2009: ix-xi). Alechem's optimistic, tireless and loquacious writing style, demonstrated by Tevye's monologues and Motl's childishly enthusiastic narratives, suit the Yiddish language of the conversations of the *shtetlekh* that Alechem presents in his stories, more than the scholarly high language of Hebrew.

Alechem's literature evokes a world away from the modern, industrial and grey imagery of Kafka's work. The world of *Tevye the Dairyman* and *Motl the Cantor's Son* are communities full of character and humour. These small God-fearing communities recall the closeness and the other-worldliness of the *shtetl*, with the sense of

adventure and fear the characters feel upon having to abandon their homes and villages they know. Aleichem's work, while it discusses the pogroms and threats very real to the Jews of Aleichem's background, presents a faithful optimism, while continuing a dialogue on the trials of the Jewish faith:

The answer is this: *Slaves we were once in Pharaoh's Day*, and that's why we are the Chosen People. A Jew must exist on hope and faith. He has to believe, above all, that there is a God, and he has to have faith in Him who lives forever and hope that someday, with His help, perhaps things will get better. (Aleichem 2009 *Tevye the Dairyman*: 14)

Isaac Bashevis Singer was born in Warsaw in 1904, the son of a rabbi and of a family with a long and devout adherence to Jewish Hasidism (Blocker and Elman 1969: 11-12). Singer, like Aleichem, remained in Eastern Europe during his formative years and his work reflects the influence of his deeply religious, traditional community. Singer's stories are steeped in the history and folklore of the Jewish faith and the tales of his community, evoking a world completely apart from the ever evolving modern era of Western Europe. "It is the world and life of East European Jewry, such as it was lived in cities and villages, in poverty and persecution, and imbued with sincere piety and rites combined with blind faith and superstition" (Allén 1993). Singer, like Aleichem, wrote in Yiddish, evoking the language and culture of his early life. As a means of maintaining an income and to escape the violent anti-Semitism of Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, Aleichem travelled widely on reading tours, eventually moving to New York. Singer, under threat of arrest and persecution by Hitler's rising power, left Poland for New York in 1935 (Blocker and Elman 1969: 16). Written later than Aleichem's work, Singer's stories are steeped not only in the atmosphere of the religious communities consumed by the superstitions of their faith (*The Unseen* and *The Gentleman from Cracow*), but also presents the fears and traumas of the modern age. Stories such as *The Cafeteria* and *A Tale of Two Sisters* among others, feature characters who have survived Hitler's regime and the concentration camps and left Europe, only to remain haunted by the memories of the Holocaust.

Both Aleichem and Singer left communities where Yiddish was the common language, for new communities where the language was far more secular. In this way, both Aleichem and Singer, while moving from one Jewish community to another, found themselves to be strangers within their new cultures. In writing predominantly in Yiddish, until their names and their work were popular enough to be translated, both Aleichem and Singer had somewhat limited their readership to Jews. In arriving in America to discover the noticeable decline in the Yiddish vernacular, these two traditional Jews found themselves to some degree to be 'others' within a Jewish community and while they did not abandon their faith or their religious observance, some acculturation was necessary for both men to become a part of this new community. Aleichem discovered that fame and fortune was not easily achieved in America, where an understanding of Yiddish and knowledge of the *shtetlekh* of Eastern Europe were not common, apart from among immigrants like himself (Aleichem 2009: xi). Rubinstein and others, explain the modern attitude in the American cities such as New York and the declining appeal of the Yiddish language:

Eventually the rich Yiddish-based cultural world to be found in New York and other American cities with large eastern European immigrant populations declined, as few of the second and third generations spoke or read that language. They identified Yiddish with the impoverished and foreign world of the immigrants, with elderly men and women who failed to understand the modern world and were often regarded by younger generations as an embarrassment. (2002: 256)

Singer in his short story *A Day in Coney Island* most succinctly sums up the situation for European Jewish immigrants, when he describes the protagonist of the story as being "an anachronism" at thirty years old, with his stories of Jewish folklore (1953 1984: 372).

Aleichem and Singer may have found themselves strangers within the New York Jewish communities they left Europe for and they confront issues of the Jewish faith in their literature, but what they share is a belief in their faith and as demonstrated in their literature, a sense of belonging to the Eastern European Jewish communities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Removed from the modernising, fast

moving Western Europe and the secularisation of the Jewish identity there, Aleichem and Singer held on to the traditions and beliefs of their faith and managed to maintain a strong sense of religious identity, which Kafka experienced such difficulty with. This interrogation into European Jews maintaining religious faith and identity compared with those who reject it emerges again when considering how Levi and Wiesel each experienced and survived the Holocaust. Kafka, to an extent, represents the failure of the assimilation process of European Jewry, in their attempt to secure their safety and position in a period of enlightened thought and Modernity which was about to collapse, taking with it in its annihilation such vast numbers of Jews from both the East and the West of Europe. Returning to Bauman's work on Modernity, he discusses the German (and German-speaking-) Jews as forming the cultural and geographic bridge between the traditional, mystic, superstitious Jews of the medieval-like East and the assimilated, secular Jews of the West.

Thus for the duration of 'high Modernity' and through the heyday of Jewish assimilation, German Jewry remained the vital linchpin holding together the two branches of Jewish European Diaspora. In the result, though not necessarily by their own design, they served as the testing ground for the viability of cultural assimilation as a vehicle of social integration in a modern (or, rather, modernizing) society. (Bauman 1991: 109)

The problem Kafka demonstrates is again, the notion of 'otherness'. Kafka is aware of his Jewish history, but is sufficiently removed by the process of his family's assimilation, to lack a secure sense of Jewish identity. Thus, he is an 'other' and a stranger to the traditional Jewish communities of Eastern Europe his father strove to leave behind. However, the Kafka family's assimilation into a modern secular culture could not remove their history and Hermann Kafka's own perfunctory observation of Jewish high holidays meant that his son could not utterly disregard his 'Jewishness'. Thus, Kafka found himself in a religious and cultural no man's land between the modern secular world of the West, and the religious culture of the East which so fascinated him in later life. Bauman has called this issue "estrangement" and likens this estrangement by social isolation to the ghettoisation and segregation that these Jews were striving to leave behind, severing ties with the Jewish community, but failing to

establish a connection with the secular community (1991: 120-21). Another issue in the failure of the assimilation process and a point Bauman observes in his discussion of Jewish assimilation, is the fact that this assimilation and acculturation was always a 'one-way street' for the Jews who had to bow to the cultures, traditions and ideologies of Christian, albeit increasingly secular nation-states. "It was they, the non-Jews who were the 'respectable persons', who had the sole authority to define the meaning of being a Jew" (Bauman 1991: 89). As the atrocities of Nazi Germany would soon tell for the Jews of Europe, the assimilated West, the traditional East and the 'linchpin' Germans, the power of the Gentile authorities to define identity was to make redundant the centuries of modernising and assimilating to Western Christian society. In his discussion of Kafka's work Bauman observes the sense of being trapped in a world one does not belong to. Although he died in 1924, what Bauman detects in Kafka's representation of the grey and banal Modernity of his fiction, is tragically foreboding of the all too real situation the Jews of Europe were to find themselves in only a decade later, stigmatised, persecuted and annihilated for the crime of nothing more than a Jewish identity.

Like his nameless heroes, Kafka experienced guilt without a crime, complete with its consequence: condemnation without judgement. He lived in a 'world in which it is a crime to be accused' [Jaffe, quoted in Bauman], in which the paramount skill for all those who did not want to be convicted of the crime was 'to avoid the accusation'. This was the very skill, however, which it was impossible to obtain. From the world where the crime was to be accused, there was no escape. (Bauman 1991: 86)

2.7 Conclusion

The era of Modernity saw tremendous changes across Europe for Christian and Jewish communities. As Enlightenment philosophy spread across Western and Central Europe religious hegemony began to collapse under the pressure of rational thought and political power. In Eastern countries where the pace of scientific and technological change was slower, the culture remained largely stagnated in religious dogma and the Jewish communities there, far from being encouraged to assimilate, were isolated and

victimised. In the West however, the ability to assimilate and secularise did not protect the Jews from a sense of alienation and an enduring sense of 'otherness', as the literature of Kafka and Levi's own representation of Jewish identity acknowledge. The harsh reality of assimilation in the West suggests that it was not a perfect or easy transition for the Jews; however it was an opportunity and an option that was not present in the East. The changes of the era created a dichotomy between East and West in Europe and for the Jewish communities, polarised identities.

Modern preoccupations with developing nation states, nationalism and scientific study into race led to concerns with identity, belonging and 'otherness'. These concerns about the presence of the 'other' among a homogenised people became a condition of Modernity, demonstrated by the work of Bauman and Said and were particularly pertinent to the situation of the Jews in Europe. As religious 'others' in a predominantly Christian continent and in a period of time when scientific theories of race and the rise of nationalism promoted a fear of the 'other', the Jews were vulnerable to attacks of anti-Semitism. Themes of 'otherness' in the modern world, persecution of the 'other' and the construction of identity all emerge in Jewish literature of Modernity, from the both the West (Kafka) and the East of Europe (Aleichem and Singer). The culture and politics of Modernity, coupled with the Jewish literary frameworks of the era contribute to the establishment of the Jewish identities Levi and Wiesel constructed in the years before the Holocaust.

Chapter Three

The Jew of the East and of the West: Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi

I am a Jew because when I was born I was registered as a Jew at the Jewish community of Turin. But I am neither observant nor a believer. Nonetheless, I am aware of belonging to a specific tradition and culture. I feel Italian for three fourths, or four fifths of the time, depending on the circumstance. But that little part is very important for me.

Primo Levi. (Giuliani 2003: 67)

Primo Levi's statement demonstrates an ambivalence with which he regards his Jewish identity and the complexities which face a study of religious identity. Levi writes from the perspective of a non-religious Western Jew from an assimilated family, identifying his sense of Jewishness after the Holocaust, the period of late Modernity. This era marked a deeper distinction between the Jewish communities of Europe, between the East and the West. From 'without' the Jewish community these differences collapsed, in the mid-twentieth century with the emerging Fascism and the anti-Semitism which was to sweep across Europe, affecting Primo Levi and his community in the West and Elie Wiesel and his community in the East. To progress the context and work of the authors, the personal backgrounds of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel are discussed. A literary lineage has been established in a comparison of the East and the West of Europe in which to situate Levi and Wiesel's work. Levi's heritage of assimilated Jewry identifying with a Western culture is discussed as comparable with Kafka's identity. Aleichem and Singer are discussed as providing a literary heritage to Wiesel in relation to their backgrounds, religious identity and in the thematic issues of their literature. Questions arise about how the familial and cultural histories of each figure shaped their Jewish identities and created such a social, religious and cultural chasm between their identities up until 1944 when their lives were to converge so dramatically.

3.1 Levi and Wiesel: A Cultural Comparison

The comparable differences in Jewish identity between the assimilated Jewish writer Kafka and the traditional, religious Aleichem and Singer, are reflected again in the next

generation of Jewish writers of Europe, those to be directly affected by the Holocaust, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel. Levi, like Kafka, represents the assimilated, secular Jew of modern Europe. Although not a native German-speaker like Kafka, Levi being Italian, he shared Kafka's family background of assimilated parentage and a life acculturated into the Gentile world he inhabited, away from the *shtetlekh* culture of his Eastern European peer Elie Wiesel. Unlike Kafka, Levi did not personally embrace his religious culture, remaining a non-believing Jew. In his literature he does however betray a sense of religious ambivalence at times. Levi, like Wiesel, did not begin his writing career until after his liberation from Auschwitz and his repatriation in Italy. In his retrospective memories of his life up to, during and in the aftermath of the Holocaust, he presents a recurring preoccupation with ideas of religious faith and his lack thereof, despite claiming at times that his Jewish identity was not of everyday significance. It must be observed however that Levi's contemplative discussions of faith are likely to be the result of external interest in faith and belief in God through the Holocaust and questions that have frequently been put to Levi, as a voice of Jewish atheism. While Levi cannot bring himself to believe in God or to practise religious observance, he seems unable to entirely distance himself from questions of faith and religious identity, just as Kafka found himself unable to fully accept his father's determined assimilation into secular Czech culture.

Wiesel, as the Eastern European Jew, displays several parallels with his literary predecessors Aleichem and Singer. He was born in Romania to a religious family of Hasidic background. By 1928, the year of Wiesel's birth, the Pale of Settlement had been dissolved but the community in which Wiesel lived with his family up to their deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944 was a devout Jewish community with the Synagogue at its centre. The parallels between Wiesel, Aleichem and Singer are evident in the literature the three authors produced. Wiesel, like Singer, represents in his literature the small Jewish communities of his youth. Many of Wiesel's stories are set in Eastern Europe, often decades or even centuries ago and focus on communities of Jews living under threat of, or recovering from anti-Jewish pogroms. Singer's work, written at the time of and in the aftermath of the Nazi atrocities, also look back to the traditional Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, the Europe Singer left behind, that was decimated by the Holocaust only a decade later. The literature of Aleichem is

generally more optimistic and light-hearted than that of Singer and Wiesel. What Aleichem shares with Wiesel however, is a dialogue with God through the medium of the story and through the voice of the character. Aleichem's daughter explains of Tevye, one of her father's best known characters:

Though Tevye's faith in God is an active force in his life, he is continually needling Him for the injustice with which He administers the world. [...] "With God's aid, I starved to death...A Jew must hope, keep hoping, and if in the meantime his life is full of grief and disaster, well that is what we are Jews for, chosen, from all the peoples of the world, all of them envying us." (Aleichem 2009: 6-7 cited in Waife-Goldberg 1968: 145)

Tevye can be presented as the figure of Aleichem made into a fictional character. An optimist who is plagued by bad luck and is a victim of his own naivety, God becomes the target for Tevye's complaints and his fears. "And where was God, the Old Jewish God? Why was He silent? How could He allow such a thing? How could it be, and again, how could it be?" (Aleichem 2009 *Tevye the Dairyman*: 120). Unlike the modern Job figure of the twentieth century, Aleichem's literary descendant Wiesel, Tevye, despite all his complaints and misfortunes represents the optimism and faith of his creator Aleichem. The comparison lies in the literary framework of a theological dialogue between the Almighty Jewish God of the Hebrew Scriptures and the suffering Jew through the ages. This questioning of God's will and the treatment the Jews experience is echoed strongly in the literature of Wiesel, 'the twentieth-century Job'. "Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal, the terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent" (Wiesel *Night*: 33). While Tevye is ultimately an optimist who speaks to God in a provocative way, Wiesel's questioning is a 'cri de coeur'. Exasperated by the Holocaust experience, Wiesel uses his literature as a way of expressing his agony and his anger at God, the way Job challenged God when pushed to his emotional limit by his trials. The underlying sentiments of these two men appear very different, but they are comparable in that they are both using the arguably 'safe' medium of literature and the voice of a character (albeit often himself in Wiesel's case) to speak to, question and condemn God, while at the same time maintaining their personal faith in that God. In Wiesel's case it seems that, providing more than just the

opportunity to testify to his Holocaust experience as his initial work did, his literature is a vehicle through which to explore his complex Jewish identity.

In the years before his death Levi compiled an anthology of literary works that had influenced and inspired him. Among those discussed by Levi was Aleichem's *Tevye the Dairyman*. In discussing his choice of Aleichem as an influence, Levi acknowledges the difference in culture and background of the two writers: "His range is limited; eastern Judaism at the turn of the century, in full transitional crisis, from its isolation in the country to its urban, bourgeois integration" (Levi *Search*: 147). What Levi senses in Aleichem's literature, the "transitional crisis", is an aspect of Jewish identity that could typically be attributed to the conflicts of a Western, assimilated Jewish identity, more akin to how Levi and Kafka before him might experience their identities. "In his own way, Tevye senses the fracture that divides the world, he is himself sadly divided: in so far as he is a Jew of the Diaspora his destiny is to be wrenched in two" (Levi *Search*: 147). Levi reads Tevye's identity as torn between being Jewish and being Russian, but does not explicitly see his own identity as being torn between being Jewish and Italian. Levi sums up his discussion of Aleichem by writing "Tevye exists no longer: the gas of Auschwitz and Stalin's camps have destroyed him" (Levi *Search*: 148). Although Wiesel and many Jews from the East survived the camps, the vast depletion in Jewish populations of the Eastern countries through the Holocaust and the large number of emigrations to America and other countries after the war meant that the Jewish community of Aleichem's background and literary imagination, was to change in the years following his death in 1916. Despite Levi's commentary on Aleichem and his acknowledgement of the Jewishness that bonds the two men, a "remote Jewish kinship" in Levi's words, Levi does not make any reference to Tevye's victimisation or the persecution of Aleichem's community (Levi *Search*: 6). Levi re-engaged with his East European Jewish heritage in *If Not Now, When?* and again chose to focus on the fighting spirit of the Jewish partisans as a response to their persecution. The lineage of victimisation which began with Job and links Aleichem with Wiesel in the East is clearly a product of the politics and history of the East's treatment of its Jewish citizens. While Levi as a Jew shares this heritage to an extent, his assimilated Western identity is far more prevalent in his literature and separates him from Wiesel.

3.2 The Jews of Italy

For the Jews of Italy, their changes were rapid and constant from the period of early Renaissance and through the era of Modernity. With the Vatican in Rome the centre of the Catholic Church, Italy's Jews were governed by the fluctuating attitudes of the Papacy. Some of the ruling Popes were lenient towards the Jews and more sympathetic to their plight, however others such as Paul IV exacted a harsher regime against Italy's Jewish community during his Papacy from 1555 (Johnson 1987, 1995: 243). The expulsion of the Jews of Spain in 1492 by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella contributed to the increasing population of Italian Jews, with many Jews fleeing Spain for the Italian states. "There had been 50,000 Jews in Italy even before the Spanish expulsions and the number was quickly swollen by refugees" (Johnson 1987, 1995: 243). With the increased number of Jews in Italy, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century the Papal authorities of Italy initiated a process of ghettoisation beginning with the establishment of the first ghetto in the city of Venice in 1516, confining the Jewish community to a gated and guarded district, with curfews and trade restrictions. This is the ghetto discussed by Raffa in relation to Dante's *Judecca* and the ghetto that inspired Shakespeare's Jewish figure Shylock and his treatment at the hands of the Venetians. The ghettos developed throughout Italy following Paul IV's Papal Bull of 1555, requiring the Jews to reside there. This steady disenfranchisement of the Jews of Italy restricting their trades, banning their Scriptures and eliminating their living space by removing them to ghettos closed off from the Gentile population, demonstrates the suspicion and unease the Christian authorities felt at the growing population of Jews in Italy and the threat these 'others' were perceived to hold. There are significant echoes of this methodical disenfranchisement of the Jews in the policies of Nazi occupied Europe in the twentieth century, particularly in the censoring of literature and the restrictive ghetto areas of Jewish living space.

The oppression of the Jews of Italy remained until the late nineteenth century with the brief exception of their emancipation by Napoleon's French Revolutionary Army between 1796 and 1798 during which the power of the Papacy was declared over and the Jewish ghettos were opened up, as Jews were granted civil rights (Beales and Biagini 2002: 24). In the Piedmont region of Northern Italy, Levi's ancestral home, the Jewish community was made up of Sephardic Jews who had fled to Italy upon

expulsion from Spain. In the political turmoil of the nineteenth century, as monarchic, revolutionary and Papal authorities fought for control of the regions such as Piedmont, the situation regressed once more for the Jews of Italy. Finally in 1848 an edict of emancipation liberated the Jews from their ghettos and religious persecution (Beales and Biagini 2002: 95). The Jews of Italy then enjoyed the equal civilian rights of the Italian Gentile majority becoming a population of the most assimilated and emancipated Jews in Europe in the early twentieth century until the anti-Semitic legislation of the Nazi party infiltrated Mussolini's Fascist party and Northern Italy finally fell under Nazi occupation.

3.3 The Jew of the West: Primo Levi

Primo Levi was born in Turin, Northern Italy in 1919 to a Jewish family (Thompson 2003: 18). The formerly independent region of Italy, with a dialect of its own and a Jewish population made up of Sephardic Jews, the Piedmontese Jews were a community apart from the Jews of the Southern regions of Italy. In a family of varying religious observances, but all with a loyalty to and affinity with the Piedmontese identity, Levi was an emancipated Jew and by his own frequent admissions, a non-believing one: "No, I have never been [a believer]. I'd like to be, but I don't succeed" (Camon 1989: 67). His interest and lifelong devotion to the study of science and chemistry is potentially a defiance of the metaphysical and deeply faithful world of Orthodox Jewry. While Levi does not explicitly state that his chosen path of science was a rejection of religious faith, he stated in an interview that chemistry was to him "magical" and "the main key to open the secrets of heaven and earth" (Camon 1989: 66). Although the language Levi uses has a metaphysical tone to it, the subject and Levi's enthusiasm for man's power and knowledge is distinctly materialist and in opposition to the metaphysical attitude of Jewish religious faith. Levi considered himself and described himself as a middle-class Italian boy, part of the Turin bourgeoisie; Jewish in name and history, but not in belief. In an interview with Giuseppe Grieco on the theme of 'God and I' in 1983 Levi recalls his sense of Jewish identity at the time of his *Bar Mitzvah* as a passive identity. "I have no pride in being Jewish. I have never felt part of a chosen people bound to God by an iron pact. I am

Jewish by accident of birth” (Grieco 1983, 2001: 274). But at varying times and in different interviews and pieces of literature, notably the stories within *The Periodic Table*, he spoke of his Jewish heritage and culture. Levi’s ambivalence about his Jewish roots and identity make him an interesting case study on the question of religious identity and to what extent that identity was biologically rather than culturally determined.

Despite being registered and raised a Jewish child up to his *Bar Mitzvah* at thirteen years old and attending extra-curricular Jewish lessons, while attending a state school, Levi maintained that his family were not religious (Thompson 2003: 33). As a close family the Jewish traditions within Levi’s family did not extend much further than an observation of the religious high holidays as a way of bringing the family together to celebrate and eat together and obeying Jewish *kashrut* rules such as the prohibition of pork. Even these most primary religious rules were not observed without exceptions and challenges; Levi recalls in *Argon*, the chapter of *The Periodic Table* affectionately recalling the familial and cultural history of his childhood in the Piedmont region, his father’s struggle with the prohibition against pork.

He felt ill at ease at breaking the *kasherut* [sic] rules, but he liked prosciutto so much that, faced by the temptation of a shop window, he yielded every time, sighing, cursing under his breath, and watching me out of the corner of his eye, as if he feared my judgement or hoped for my complicity.
(Levi *Periodic*: 17)

Although Levi was brought up with a knowledge and familiarity with his family’s religious identity and the observances that existed with it the family’s lack of stricture and at times indifference to the rules meant that Levi was not imbued with a rigorous Jewish identity that preceded everything else in his life. Levi recalled in his interview with Grieco that he had a religious upbringing, “but it passed me by without leaving any deep marks” (1983, 2001: 273). It appears that the overriding memories Levi bore of his religious history and childhood were of the rejections and struggles with that religion, for instance his father, the God-fearing member of Levi’s immediate family, breaking and cursing the *kashrut* regulations. With this rejection of religious rigour, combined with the observance of the Jewish calendar and the most significant event

for a Jewish boy, the *Bar Mitzvah*, it is little wonder that Levi in his work and in his interviews, exhibits a profound sense of ambivalence over his Jewish identity.

As Levi entered his teens, following his *Bar Mitzvah*, he recalled that he began to feel a disillusionment with religion and faith; his growing interest in science became the more significant and meaningful engagement of his time and his mind, something which would continue for the rest of Levi's life. Again discussing this period of his life with Grieco, Levi spoke of the initial concern he felt at failing to truly accept God and feel a bond with him and the subsequent cynicism he felt regarding faith and the religious side of a Jewish identity.

I did try to find contact with God, but nothing ever came of it. I had been presented with a Ruler God, a punitive God who left me quite unmoved. After that short period of confusion, I cut myself off from him entirely, holding him at a distance like a sort of infantile phenomenon that had little to do with me. (1983, 2001: 274)

This disillusionment with religion suggests that Levi began life with a belief system more traditionally faithful than is typical of an assimilated Jew and indeed in the above recollection Levi does not say that he denied the existence of God at this stage, just that he held him at a distance. He did not reject a belief in God, but a belief in the spiritual connection between God and himself. This ambivalence of Levi's regarding his Jewish identity, as he himself discussed it, raises the question, to what extent is this religious identity a matter of faith and belief in God and to what extent it is a question of cultural identity. It is arguable that in his early years, his years of Jewish education and studious preparation for his *Bar Mitzvah*, a devotion to and belief in God was intertwined with the cultural identity of his Jewish family and community. As Levi grew up and expanded his knowledge and his circle of friends, it seems that first of all his religious faith disappeared and then his cultural 'Jewishness' began to dissolve with it.

As Levi grew older and new people and groups emerged, such as the student community at his university with opportunities to explore new cultures and identities, the faith and even Jewish culture that Levi had seen as significant in earlier years became diluted within his new circle of friends. As Levi the scientist and the anti-Fascist activist developed, Levi the Jew became less and less a part of his conscious

identity and sense of self. By this time however, it was the 1930s, the era of Fascism in Italy and of nationalism across Europe. As a student, particularly one whose status as an Italian student was tenuous throughout his studies, Levi cannot have ignored nor been untouched by the spirit of national pride and the desire for unity, to be seen as an insider rather than an 'other', a 'Jewish Italian', rather than the 'Italian Jew' he perceived himself to be. Religious identity developed into cultural identity, without the strong faith and belief system necessary to remain devoutly and primarily Jewish. What did not change however was the nationalistic facet of his identity, the Italian and particularly the Piedmontese part of his identity which remained a strong part of him. In this respect Levi is much more assured of his identity than Kafka, whose cultural background engendered in him an ambivalence and dissatisfaction with his language and his religious identity.

Levi places considerable significance on his Piedmontese background and the unique Jewish identity that is associated with the Jews of this Northern Italian region. The Piedmont Jews settled in the North of Italy later than their Southern Italian kin who had a history and established communities in cities such as Rome centuries earlier (Rudolf 1986, 2001: 23). Many of those Southern Jewish communities from places such as Naples and Sicily fled North around the time the Piedmont Jews were settling, both communities fleeing anti-Jewish Spain and its territories, which at the time included some Southern states of Italy (Rudolf 1986, 2001: 24). When the Savoy Monarchy under King Charles Albert emancipated the Jews of Northern Italy in 1848 and then unified the Italian states in 1859, the Piedmontese Jews of Levi's history were quick to adjust and move into modern Italian trades previously denied to them; in Levi's family that trade was banking (Thompson 2003: 7). The Piedmont Jews developed trades and businesses and in a country not known for virulent anti-Semitism, became accepted as Italian citizens, albeit developing a culture of their own, Italian in values, but with a strong sense of Jewish heritage. The one significant moment of destructive anti-Semitism Levi's family faced occurred in 1888, when a rumour spread that the Levi family bank had run out of credit. The usually dormant anti-Jewish prejudice and the archaic Jewish usurer stereotype were reignited among the Christian customers of the bank, fearful of losing their wealth. In a notable parallel with his grandson, albeit an event Levi does not discuss, Michele Levi, Primo's grandfather committed suicide by

jumping out of an apartment window after fleeing the mob who had surrounded his house (Thompson 2003: 9). While this was a rare display of violent anti-Semitism in the tolerant Italian region, it demonstrated that the historic anti-Jewishness and anti-Semitism that has persecuted the Jewish people for centuries was present even in the usually peaceful and tolerant havens of Europe and could be resurrected at any time.

While the fear and memory of the family banking crisis must have resonated strongly with Levi's father Cesare, for Primo his family history was one of a cultural mix of Piedmont personalities and Jewish observances. This multi-faceted heritage was manifested in the Levis' social circle in a linguistic nuance apparently unique to the Piedmont area. A mixture of Piedmontese dialect, attached to Hebrew words made up a language peculiar to the Jews of the area, conscious of being able to speak amongst themselves without being understood by their Christian neighbours (*Levi Periodic*: 8-9). It is interesting that this tradition continued into Levi's lifetime, amongst a community anxious to assimilate and be accepted as Italian citizens. That they would deliberately exclude themselves, or rather exclude the Gentile majority from their conversations may be a sign of their pride and of the importance they placed upon their Jewish heritage in its non-religious and non-traditional way, maintaining their history and traditional culture in a modernising world.

The modern world of Levi's childhood and youth was one of Fascism and racial determinism. Born the year of the founding of the Italian Fascist Party and the German National Socialist Party, Levi was born a Jewish child in a Europe about to change irrevocably for its Jewish community. If the first nineteen years of Levi's life were reasonably stable his adult years from the age of twenty onwards were to be marked and formed by changing identities and conflicting ideologies. Levi recalled his experience of being made fun of at school in an interview (Camon 1989: 67). The teasing that Levi recalls here is not violent or malicious, but clearly marks out Levi as an 'other' among his friends at a young age. This sense of being an outsider would remain with Levi both 'within' and 'without' the Jewish community and throughout his Holocaust experience.

Where Levi did belong, initially, was among the Fascist youth supporters joining the mass of boys his age and enjoying the security that afforded. The Italian Fascist Party, headed by Mussolini was not initially anti-Semitic in its policies, legislation or

beliefs. Indeed, many Jews were enlisted in the Fascist Party and like Hitler's Nazi Party, a youth organisation was founded in affiliation.

Political anti-Semitism had no historical basis in modern Italy. Italian Fascists were not anti-Semites, and Jews joined their party in proportions equal to their share of the population. Only in 1938 when Mussolini became dependent upon Hitler did he take measures against the Jews, measures extremely unpopular among Italians and even among important Fascists. (Weiss 2003: 193)

In 1924 Levi joined the Fascist youth group *Figli della Lupa* (Children of the Wolf) (Thompson 2003: 28). This is not an era Levi spoke often of, other than to state that his father, an engineer who had travelled around Europe, particularly to the Eastern countries, was wary of such Fascist organisations and the anti-Semitism which often emerged through reactionaries within these groups.

My father, who had worked for a long time in Hungary and France, had had certain experiences and knew what anti-Semitism meant there. He had witnessed Béla Kun's revolution in Budapest, and had a traumatic memory of it, but he told me very little about it, extraordinarily little. (Camon 1989: 5)

Cesare Levi had witnessed the violence against the Jews of the East and while he maintained a membership with the Italian Fascists, it was a perfunctory and non-committal observation he made. David Ward describes Cesare Levi's relationship with Fascism as non-confrontational and self-protective: "For them, as for many others, one can imagine that the acronym PNF stood not so much for Partito nazionale fascista as for 'Per necessità familiare' (Out of family necessity)" (2007: 12).

It was not until 1938 that Mussolini, anxious for the Nazis' continuing support, implemented anti-Semitic legislation similar to that of the Third Reich. His race laws were an imitation of Hitler's Nuremberg Laws of 1935, strictly defining the Jews of Italy by their biological history. While the Fascists were initially more stringent in their definition of a Jew than the Nazis, the widespread unpopularity of the anti-Semitic race laws in Italy meant that many exceptions were made and cases overlooked, even by Mussolini himself (Weiss 2003: 212). Levi's racial status as a Jew made his time as a student difficult. In 1938 Levi was one year into his Chemistry degree at the University

of Turin. The race laws of that year prevented Jews from attending universities, however as he had already begun his studies he was allowed to continue and graduated in 1941 (Giuliani 2003: 17). Having completed his studies in an increasingly anti-Semitic environment, with Italy now involved in the Second World War and having found a new circle of friends, many of whom were Gentile, Levi's attentions turned towards political activism and anti-Fascism. In the 1940s, with Italy capitulating to her former ally Germany, Levi joined a band of partisans engaged in armed resistance. Untrained and inexperienced but living and working in a group with a shared anti-Fascist ideology Levi forged a new identity, as an insider among outsiders. His Jewish 'otherness' did not matter among anti-Fascists, an identity as dangerous as that of being Jewish. Levi continued his partisan activities until December 1943 whereupon he and his group were betrayed and arrested in their hiding places (Thompson 2003: 145). In a moment that was to define the rest of Levi's life, upon arrest Levi confronted his religious identity and any ambivalence he may have felt about it and announced his Jewish identity, rather than be tried and punished as an anti-Fascist.

The soldiers who captured me were Italian Fascists. I was recognized and owned up to being a Jew, out of a silly pride. Yes it was silly, as events demonstrated later, but I wanted to make the point that not only Christians but Jews too were fighting Fascism. (Rudolf 1986, 2001: 24-25)

Levi had become used to being perceived as an 'other' at school and university through his Jewish identity. In joining an anti-Fascist movement and announcing his Jewish identity upon arrest, Levi, as an outsider and victim of Fascism, had manipulated his Jewish identity to belong to a group fighting a common enemy. With Turin occupied by the Nazis in 1944 Levi's confession, while asserting his religious identity, was to lead to a future and a confrontation with the crisis of Jewish identity in Europe he could not have imagined.

3.4 The Jews of Hungary and Romania

The countries of Hungary and Romania and their Jewish populations experienced disruption and change frequently through the late modern period, particularly in the

early twentieth century in the intermittent war years. Hungary was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled by the Hapsburg emperors with the two nations united under the ruling power of Franz Joseph by the Passage of Settlement, or Compromise of 1867 (Mason 1985: 6). At a time when Italy was becoming unified and its Jews attaining civil rights as members of an Italian community, the Jews of Hungary and Romania were trapped in the country's struggle to establish and maintain a sense of national identity. While the Jewish population of Hungary before World War One was small, only around five percent, it was divided in religious attitudes and culture between the urban and rural areas (Rubinstein 2002: 152). A large number of the Jews of Hungary typically lived in the cities and Budapest was no exception; by the turn of the twentieth century, a quarter of Budapest's population were Jewish (Mason 1985: 17-18). The Jews here were often more secular, or even Christian converts, who spoke Hungarian or German rather than Yiddish and represented the more modern Jewish culture of Europe (Rubinstein 2002: 153).

The Jews of the countryside and the poorer regions were much more Orthodox in their religion and their lifestyle. Transylvania was an area of strategic and defensive importance and in a short space of time endured changing nationalities and alliances. With changing political allegiance and national status came fluctuation in identity. Citizens of Sighet, both Jews and Gentiles, were expected to display a loyalty and allegiance to their country and pride in their nationality, be it Hungarian, Romanian or Transylvanian. However, as their allegiances changed several times in Wiesel's lifetime alone, it was an unsettled and unstable national identity compared to the consistency of the Jews' religious identity, which had been present and stable throughout, despite periods of adversity. The fluctuation and instability of the nationality of the Jews of this region potentially explains the typical religious adherence and devoutness. The faith and religious rituals and culture of these Jews were consistent and therefore a more reliable and comforting identity to cling to than their inconsistent national and political identities. As has been debated to be typical of Eastern European communities at this time, the further away from urban development these Jewish communities were the less prosperous and modernised they were; therefore religion played a considerably larger role. E. Garrison Walters argues that the Jews of Hungary "were largely concentrated in the commercial classes" the centre of commerce being Budapest and

that typically these Hungarian Jewish communities were “small and better assimilated than in Poland or Romania” (1988: 212). Jewish populations such as Wiesel’s Jewish community in Romanian Sighet were distant from cities such as Budapest. Traditional Orthodoxy and Hasidism were typically much more common in these regions, Hasidism being founded in Eastern Europe and with a large following in Poland where the majority of European Jewry lived. As insular as these remote and religiously traditional communities were, they were not immune to the fierce anti-Semitism which pervaded the political scene of these countries, as Garrison Walters writes: “the traditional anti-Semitism of the villages had been heightened by the Béla Kun affair and became even more acute in the depression” (1988: 212).

The First World War was to prove disastrous for Hungary and for the Hapsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand lost the Empire its heir and in allying themselves with Germany they were defeated by the Allies and subject to the Treaty of Trianon. In this Treaty, Hungary lost substantial land to supporters of the Allies, such as Romania who acquired the region of Transylvania in 1920. Initially the Jews of this region may have been optimistic about their transition, with Romanian Jews attaining full equal rights for the first time in 1919 (Rubinstein 2002: 159). However, Romania was not immune to the post-war anti-Semitism of Eastern Europe which viewed the Jews with mistrust and exposed them to accusations of being Bolsheviks and a threat to national identity. The rapid and brutal border changes of the Treaty of Trianon gave little opportunity for the establishment of a national identity or a unity among the Jews of Romania and Hungary. In a behavioural pattern which was to be repeated in the camps, there was a fracture in Jewish unity and camaraderie between the established Jews of Romania and the newly arrived, or acquired Jewish population who had no roots or initial alliance with Romania (Rubinstein 2002: 160). This divide was echoed in the Marxist uprising in Hungary under the Béla Kun regime. Kun, a Jew himself, ran a government densely populated with Jewish revolutionaries, “non-Jewish Jews of the far left”, who persecuted the Orthodox and capitalist Jews, until their defeat later in 1919 (Rubinstein 2002: 154-55). While Romania did not suffer as heavily during the war as its neighbours, German occupation of particular regions, including the Transylvanian area, saw increased anti-

Semitism, ghettos and deportations to Auschwitz in 1944, transporting Jewish families including Elie Wiesel's to their deaths in Poland.

3.5 The Jew of the East: Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel was born in 1928 in the town of Sighet, in the former Transylvanian, Romanian territory that became Hungary during the Second World War. The third child in a deeply religious family, Wiesel was brought up with a strong faith in God and with the traditions of Orthodox Judaism (Downing 2008: 26). The childhood town Wiesel evokes in his literature is reminiscent of a *shtetl* community, as his recollections focus almost completely on the large Jewish population of the town and the close community which shaped Wiesel's identity as a devout Jew in his early years. "In Elie Wiesel's literary landscape, his hometown of Sighet is a metaphor for the Promised Land. His town is a small European Jerusalem" (Downing 2008: 41). Wiesel recalls Sighet as "a typical shtetl, a sanctuary for Jews, in this case since 1640" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 4). Yet later in Wiesel's memoir he names Sighet "the region's capital" although he adds "which wasn't much of a capital" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 22). Such was the strength of the Jewish community in Sighet, it became the centre of Wiesel's world, formed his religious identity and it seems, appears in Wiesel's nostalgic memory a *shtetl* town and haven of Jewish life. Despite the strong Jewish image that is conjured up by Wiesel, Sighet was not an exclusively Jewish town; the town was occupied by Christians too and like many Jewish families who observed the Sabbath day of rest, the Wiesels' had a Christian maid, Maria. In Wiesel's recollection of Maria he demonstrates the insular, self-protective circle the Jews of Sighet formed. This was a residual defence due to the region's history of violence against the Jews, engrossed in their own religious world, to the exclusion of their Christian neighbours.

She knew our customs, mores, and laws. Sighet, after all was pretty much a Jewish town, and all our Christian neighbours knew that a Jew could not light a fire on Saturday, eat leavened bread during Passover, or touch impure meat. The opposite was not the case: I knew nothing of the Christian religion, which inspired in me no curiosity, only fear. (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 23)

The first son of Shlomo and Sarah Wiesel, Elie's family history was rooted in Sighet, and like his father and father-in-law before him, Shlomo Wiesel became a central figure of the Sighet Jewish community, running the local store and maintaining an active and prolific standing in the town by helping the community with advice, information and charity (Downing 2008: 28). Wiesel later realised that the family was not well off, indeed the struggle for money was far greater than Elie ever realised as a child, with his parents financial struggles being exacerbated, but often concealed by his father's inexhaustible charitable acts, such as invitations to the poor to join the family for the Shabbat meal. Despite the hardships that came with such charity, the Wiesels were devoted to their faith and the obligations that followed. Both of Wiesel's parents were from religious families, but it was his mother Sarah and particularly her father Reb Dodye Feig who proved to be the most influential figures in Wiesel's early life. Wiesel wrote of his maternal grandfather: "A devout follower of the Rabbi of Wizhnitz, he was the embodiment of Hasidic creative force and fervour" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 41). The Eastern European tradition of Hasidism was the lifeblood of Wiesel's faith and infused the religious identity of his family and community. Whereas Primo Levi recalled the rites and regulations of Judaism as onerous tasks, dietary prohibitions his father struggled with, familial obligations and lessons in history that Levi felt detached from, the spirit of devotion to God and to Judaism was Wiesel's comfort and set him along the path of devoted study and piety.

Like Levi and like his own mother (and in spite of the religious spirit within which she was brought up), Elie Wiesel attended a secular school. This similarity between Levi and Wiesel's early lives suggest that Sighet was not the isolated Jewish *shtetl* Wiesel recalls. The Jewish community was clearly strong in Sighet and was of much greater presence and influence on Wiesel than Turin's Jewish community was on Levi. The Christian presence and the exposure to anti-Semitism and reactionary groups such as the Iron Guard indicate that Sighet was exposed to an extent to the changes of modern Europe, particularly the political changes. The divide between Wiesel and Levi appears to occur in Wiesel's apparent determination to both experience and remember Sighet as a traditional Jewish haven which was destroyed by the military, political and racial obsessions of the era, whereas Levi and his family flourished through Italy's emancipation of Jewry and ironically, emphasis on scientific knowledge.

At his secular school, Wiesel was exposed to the growing anti-Semitism in the East, an atmosphere he was shielded from at *heder* and at home. "Some of Eliezer's classmates at the secular elementary school participated in the anti-Semitic ways. At Christmas, some would wear masks and carry whips and take their places in the hunt for Jews" (Downing 2008: 53). In a growing culture of fear amongst the Jews of Sighet, Wiesel immersed himself in his studies and in the world of the *Torah* and the *Talmud*; the world of martyrs, of God and all his mystery. As Wiesel approached his thirteenth birthday and his *Bar Mitzvah*, his world was beginning to change, both his own private world of faith and religious identity and the outside world of wartime Romania.

Along with two Jewish friends Wiesel had become fascinated with the ancient Jewish practice of *Kabala* [Wiesel's spelling] (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 33), the mystical quest for a deep knowledge and understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and of the mysteries of the Jewish faith. Wiesel's father, a progressive but faithful man expressed concern for his son's safety in experimenting with such a controversial practice and he was not alone among the God-fearing people of Sighet. "Parents told their children to stay away from the three boys. The consensus was that this was a forbidden domain – a virtual religious minefield" (Downing 2008: 59). To the distress and fear of Sighet, Wiesel's two companions became ill one after another, becoming mute after deep and intensive studying (Downing 2008: 60). Wiesel however continued his quest for knowledge up until his deportation to Auschwitz in 1944. Whereas Levi's progression to adulthood after his *Bar Mitzvah* led to his cynicism and emotional separation from his faith and religious identity, Wiesel's teen years following his rite of passage into adulthood led him to forge an identity more deeply religious and idiosyncratic than his family and community were comfortable with. Wiesel was happy in the study house, immersed in the history of his religion, an insider among his Jewish peers, but his teenage quest was to break away from the circle of friends and move into more controversial circles, those of the mystics. Within the sphere of the Jews of Sighet Wiesel, in his pursuit of knowledge was to become an outsider and a deliberate 'other' in his own culture and family, in departing from the traditional Hasid and developing a religious identity based upon the knowledge of the *Kabalists*.

In the town of Sighet, a microcosm of the fluctuating political state of Romania, a religious identity was a reassuring constant, being a part of a community whose

national and cultural identity had fluctuated for decades and was to change again in 1944. Sighet occupied territory which had been fought over and divided with the rise and fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and thus its political position changed rapidly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Wiesel recalls the changing identities of his hometown:

It did, however, have a penchant for changing – its name, its nationality, and thus its allegiance. When my father was born, it was a proud part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and called itself Máramarossziget. When I first saw the light of day, it proudly bore the name of Sighetul Marmatei and belonged to the Kingdom of Greater Romania. When I left it, it was Máramarossziget again, a Hungarian city of noisy patriotism. (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 22)

In a culture of changing national identities and allegiances, where the situation for the Jewish community changed depending upon the politics and tolerance of the rulers, it is little wonder that the shared religion of the community became the central identity and the focal point of the community. It seems that Sighet had, for many years been home to a Jewish community who formed an insular circle of self-protection, finding in Sighet a sanctuary from the pogroms of the East, most notably the Chmielnicki massacres in the Ukraine of 1640. Wiesel discusses the insular security the Sighet Jewish community has traditionally offered, throughout the threats to its existence: “Still, in 1690 the local populace demanded that the authorities expel all Jewish inhabitants from the region. The authorities resisted; even then there must have been men like my father to protect our community” (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 4).

Centuries later in the 1940s, violent anti-Semitism raised its head again in Sighet. While the small community could and did engross themselves in their local business and ignore the war that was raging across Europe, local politics and particularly local anti-Semitism was harder to ignore. While the Nazi occupation of Hungary was not a primary concern for the rural Jews, the reactionary local anti-Semitic groups began to impact upon the daily lives of the people of Wiesel’s community with their attacks and assaults.

The Kuzists, as they described themselves, were the Romanian version of the Nazis. Savages thirsting for

Jewish blood, they would launch pogroms on the slightest pretext. "Don't go to *heder* today," my worried father would say. My sisters often didn't go to school. On those days the store was bolted shut, and regular customers were escorted in through the living room. (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 18)

The Jews of Sighet did not succumb to panic at the news that the Nazis had marched into Budapest, on the contrary the cultured Germans were held in higher esteem than the violent and brutal Russian forces. Despite the expulsion of foreign-born Jews from Sighet and the horror stories that Moshe the beadle brought back to the town, the arrival of the Nazis raised little alarm initially among the Jews of Sighet.

During World War I, Sighet had been overrun and occupied by the Russian army. Jewish citizens were beaten and oppressed by anti-Semitic Cossacks. When the German army came in, they treated the population with courtesy. During the early years of WWII, the Jews of Sighet could not believe the Germans would be any different now. (Downing 2008: 57)

Despite their differences, the traditional Jews of Sighet and the assimilated Jews of Turin fell victim to the same *laissez-faire* attitude and were guilty of indifference toward each other, with both communities paying little attention to the plight of the Jews at opposite ends of Europe and with neither community expecting to suffer the same fate as the other.

The Levis, like most Italian Jews, felt under no direct threat of such violence. They could not believe they were at the same risk as their coreligionists elsewhere in Europe. Polish or Russian orthodox Jews with their Hasidic kaftans and curls might arouse Jew-hatred, but not assimilated Italian Jews. Their integration into Italian society was a guarantee of safety. Bad things were happening in Germany, but to the Levis the persecutions were a remote rumour, irrelevant to them. (Thompson 2003: 46)

Even as the Nazi tanks rolled into Sighet, the attitude among the Jews was one of calm. Wiesel recalls the illusion of safety that his community preferred to live under, even as their world was ebbing away, their town turning into a ghetto and the population

depleting daily. The Jews once more, turned in among themselves for comfort and solace and made a sanctuary of their ghetto, their “small Jewish republic”:

People thought this was a good thing. We would no longer have to look at all those hostile faces, endure those hate-filled stares. No more fear. No more anguish. We would live among Jews, among brothers... (Wiesel *Night*: 12)

A matter of weeks after the confinement of the Jews in the Sighet ghetto, the deportations to Auschwitz began. Again, despite the distance and the cultures which were worlds apart, the same shock reality shook the Jews of Sighet and the Jews of Turin in 1944. They were about to experience horror they had not been able to bring themselves to believe was possible.

3.6 Post-War Modernity and ‘Otherness’

Throughout the era of Modernity the gap between the Jews of the East and West had been widening and their differences becoming all too prominent, especially to one another. However, as the twentieth century progressed the Jews of Europe were to find themselves trapped within the same net, their social and cultural differences about to disappear as they faced a common enemy. The Jews of Italy and the Jews of Romania had been preoccupied with their own national issues since the end of the First World War. In Italy Mussolini had launched several assaults in Africa to build up an empire and had been involved with the Spanish Civil War. With the rise of Fascism throughout the twentieth century, Italy had her own manifestations of the obsession with power, control and mass identity, which was to shape the period of Modernity and to steer it to its demise. The Jews of Romania while experiencing their own problems with nationalistic and organised right wing groups represented a different aspect to the crisis of Modernity, that of territory. Wiesel discussed the problem of national identity in a country whose borders were continually changing and thus whose political allegiances necessarily changed accordingly. Romania occupied land that was desirable and strategically useful to several empires and countries, at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains all keen to build up territory, land and a strong nation.

This, coupled with the need for unity and homogeneity among a loyal and orderly nation, was the desire and the goal of the period of Modernity.

The First World War had already demonstrated the technical and destructive level of warfare waged across Europe in the quest for land and power. From the early world exploration and colonisation of the late Renaissance era, to the Napoleonic reign and grand Empires of the East in the nineteenth century, the “audacious self-confidence and hubris of Modernity” was preoccupied with control, power and homogenised peoples, who acknowledge a national identity and authority, without deviation (Bauman 1991: 29). This era of fighting for power over state and people reached a climax in 1914. In a war that cost millions of lives and economically devastated much of Europe, the technological advances and imperialistic ideals of Modernity accelerated and resulted, following Germany’s defeat and the treaty of Versailles, with the collapse of empires, an upheaval of national identity (as in Sighet’s case) and a new geographical map of Europe.

The Second World War, less than thirty years later pushed the ideological and technological limits of Modernity further in the fight for territory, land and power.

Modern civilization was not the Holocaust’s *sufficient* condition; it was, however, most certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of Modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable. (Bauman 1999: 13)

Christopher Browning points to the technological and bureaucratic strength of Modernity already demonstrated in the First World War, as a key factor which made the systematic extermination of millions of people, mostly Jewish, possible (Bauman 1999: 13 citing Browning). The Holocaust was born out of Hitler’s and the Nazis’ violent and indiscriminate hatred of the Jews and their belief that the Jews were a threat to the order of the new regime and to the Nazi goal of European domination. As history has shown through such periods as the Chmielnicki massacres and the uprisings across the Russian Empire, in times of social and cultural insecurity, in the desire for land and in the pursuit of a pure and homogenised race, the Jews were to be the primary victims. As the scientific and cultural ambitions of Modernity were about to be pushed

to their limits, for the Jews of Europe their dream of Modernity was over and they were about to be forced to the edge of social existence.

The Jews were targeted during the Nazi regime as 'others', the enemy of Modern society. The Jewish population of Europe has historically been the 'other' within Christian Europe, but the era of Modernity saw a change in attitude from a religious prejudice to a racial one against the Jews, a development from Christian anti-Judaism to racial anti-Semitism. This change was encouraged in the nineteenth century by scientific advancements and the hugely influential biological and genetic research by the likes of Charles Darwin which shaped the attitudes of Victorian societies. Research into scientific belief that one's character and personality were unchangeable, a matter of biology and not of assimilatory and educational processes, gave credence to the anti-Semitism of Modernity which marked out Jews as 'others' who remained a threat to the homogenised order of Modern society. The Nazi campaign of anti-Semitism however, had moved on from the imperialist Westernised attitude that Said discussed in his work on Orientalism. It was from the Orientalist point of 'otherness' that the Nazi machinery began to use historical distortions of the Jew to exaggerate the Jews' 'otherness' and pseudo-science to legitimise their persecution and ensure a divide between the Gentile majorities and the alien 'others' in their communities. Bauman elaborates:

The modern scientific discourse of race (of an immutable, ascribed quality – hopelessly 'nature-ordained', admittedly hereditary, culturally unmanipulable, resistant to all remedy) from which the Nazi manufacture of the Other drew so lavishly, was from the start replete with the images of pathological deformation, degeneration, madness, sexual perversion. (1991: 48)

This was the kind of medieval character distortion that the Modern Jews of Western Europe (and the East-West bridge of Germany) were anxious to leave behind in their assimilation to secular Western culture. However this process of assimilation was very much one-sided, as these Jewish communities at the invitation of political revolutionaries such as Napoleon who saw commercial potential in Jewish business and money, abandoned much if not all of their religious culture and identity to fit in with a secular, Gentile ideal. There was no interaction between the two cultures; the

Jewish identity which remained so strong and Orthodox in Eastern Europe was overwhelmed in the West by the dominating secular culture. This process of assimilation was to offer no protection to the Jews of Europe during Hitler's regime, which made no distinction between the traditional Jew of the East and the assimilated Jew who maintained no religious belief or practice whatsoever. In fact, this ambivalence which made the 'other' Jew indistinct and inseparable from his Christian or Gentile neighbour, made the assimilated Jew more of a threat, more incongruent and dangerous according to anti-Semitic propaganda.

Wiesel describes the amalgamation of anti-Jewish prejudices which took place during this period, particularly throughout Nazi rule; the appropriation of centuries of Jew-hatred and its various reasons and histories. "We were either too poor or too rich; either too religious or not enough; either too patriotic or too cosmopolitan; either Communist or anti-Communist. And then all the contradictions merged into hatred of the Jew" (Wiesel *Conversations*: 155-56). The result was an absolute and indiscriminate hatred of all Jews which was to mark Hitler's ideology, the politics and culture in Nazi Europe and dictate the fate of the Jews across the continent. In the early years of the Second World War, the Jews of the East and West still appeared to be divided in culture and identity. However, as the war progressed and the Final Solution drew closer the Jews were to discover that there was to be no discrimination among the Nazis as to their cultural, religious, or social identities; as Jews they were the enemy of the Reich and had no place in the new totalitarian Europe of Hitler's design. For the Jews of the East, the dream of a modern world of toleration, a safe distance from persecution was over and for the Jews of the West, the illusion of assimilation was about to be shattered and for both communities the historic terror of the pogrom was to bind the communities together.

3.7 Jewish 'Others': The Crisis of Identity From Within

Both Levi and Wiesel recalled in their literature and interviews memories of anti-Semitism they experienced growing up in Italy and Romania respectively, from the teasing Levi suffered at school, to the violence of the Iron Guard and the Kuzists that kept Wiesel and his sisters from even attending school. Before they were directly

affected by the Nazis and the Final Solution and from a young age both Levi and Wiesel were made aware of being different, of being an 'other' and the negativity of that 'otherness'. Despite these two figures representing completely different aspects of Jewish culture and identity, Levi and Wiesel grew up aware that it was their 'Jewishness' which made them different, it was because Levi was a Jew that he was singled out and it was because Wiesel was a Jew that the Christian world evoked a sense of fear within him. Before they had grown old enough to fully understand and develop their own sense of Jewish identity, they realised that to be a Jew meant to be an 'other' and that was dangerous.

Primo Levi travelled around the North of Italy in his brief career working for a chemical company, but otherwise did not travel across Europe as his father had and come across the Eastern Jews Cesare did. Similarly, Wiesel only fifteen years old in 1944 had not travelled far beyond Sighet and does not record that his family had travelled out of the country. Consequently, for Levi who lived an assimilated lifestyle in Italy, the Eastern half of Europe and the very different Jewish communities living within were utterly unfamiliar to him, and for Wiesel, immersed in his religious community in the East, the idea of assimilated non-religious, non-Yiddish-speaking Jews was equally strange. Despite the common enemy that the Jews of Europe faced in the 1930s and 1940s, there was a division between the communities, a sense of apartness and a denial, (particularly among the assimilated Westerners) that the different communities could be considered one group, one race, even by a party so blinded by racist bigotry as the Nazis. The Orthodox Jews of the East may have looked with disapproval and suspicion upon the Jews of the West so keen to abandon their religious traditions and assimilate into a secular lifestyle. With a more recent and historic cultural memory of anti-Jewish persecutions from the authorities and the Gentile populations of Eastern countries than in the West, Jewish Orthodoxy of the East would naturally seek security and comfort within their faith and their community rather than encourage Jewish dispersion into changing and politically unstable environments outside of the Jewish religious community. However it was the attitude of these Western Jews which most closely resembled anti-Semitism. Like the anti-Semitism of Hitler's propaganda machine, it was the physical imagery of the Eastern Jews which the Western Jews found unattractive and threatening. With the distinctive

Hasidic clothing of kaftans and side-locks, the Ashkenazi Jews were immediately recognisable as such. To Gentile anti-Semites and to Jews of the West, keen to fit into the modern secular world, the Ashkenazi represented a backward, out-dated and overtly religious community, who did not fit in the modern world. This is the image that greeted Cesare Levi in the 1920s, as he arrived in Budapest to work.

The Great War over, Cesare was re-employed by Ganz. But he did not like what he found in Budapest. The city was swarming with ragged Ashkenazim made homeless by war. As an emancipated Jew from the West, Cesare recoiled from the sight of these Eastern Jews whose side locks, kaftans and Yiddish he considered backward tribal marks and customs. The Hungarian capital was now known as 'Judapest' for its swelling East European refugee population. (Thompson 2003: 16)

Cesare Levi returned to Italy with a negative view of Budapest and the Jewish community who lived there. Germany and the Eastern countries across Europe, Poland in particular, were the first to feel the force and the anti-Semitic hatred of the Nazis and many Jews fled West seeking safety and tolerance. As the Ashkenazi Jews arrived in countries such as Italy, they were not well received by either the Gentile or Jewish communities there. Assimilated Jewish families such as the Levis felt a sense of security in their non-Jewish appearance and way of life. The arrival of these traditional, archaic looking and poverty-stricken Eastern Jews unsettled the native Jews who brought with them horror stories of Nazi persecution. The assimilated Jews of Italy lived within an illusory safety net of assimilated lifestyle and appearance, and feared that the immigrants would draw attention to the native Jews and that they may be categorised all together, viewed as one group, 'the Jews', by the Gentile authorities who would view these poor immigrants as an unwanted burden. As refugees poured into Northern Italy, Levi kept his distance from them. Thompson cites a non-Jewish pro-Zionist student in Turin who did offer help to the Jewish refugees even when the Italian Jews would not.

[Giorgio] Segre explained: 'To most assimilated Jews these low-class ragged Ashkenazim were unsavoury – no anti-Semitism is more corrosive than Jewish anti-Semitism.' Levi did not want to believe their accounts of Nazi atrocities: Piedmont was his true

home, and things did not look so disastrous from where he stood. (2003: 97)

The Eastern European Jewish community may not have felt the same discomfort with the physical appearance of the assimilated Western Jews as the Westerners expressed toward them, but they had reason for concern at the lifestyle of their Westernised co-religionists. The Jews of countries such as Poland, the Ukraine and Romania had faced pogroms, violence and persecution regularly throughout their history. As Wiesel has demonstrated in his writing about Sighet, these communities had to unite and support themselves, forming self-protective, insular communities in order to survive. To be forced to leave their homes and countries and flee West only to see their religious and cultural traditions abandoned in favour of a secular lifestyle must have prompted further fears of the dissolution of Judaism in Europe.

Modern western civilisation exercised powerful attractions for Jews, to the extent of undermining a sense of the worth of remaining Jewish for large numbers of them. Not only did many Jews embrace Gentile ways – language, dress, nationality – but they often expressed feelings of embarrassment and even revulsion for those Jews who remained traditional.

Eastern Jews were described by western Jews as primitive, superstitious, and malodorous. Western Jews, according to those from the east, were stiff, supercilious, and cold, but more important, eastern Jews charged that western Jews had made an appalling mistake in embracing the ways of the *goyim*. (Lindemann 2000: 42)

When considering the near-destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust, including the assimilated Jews of the West, it is arguable that up until the years following the Holocaust the process of assimilation was, in some cases, an illusion (Nochlin L. and Garb 1995: 25). When the near-century of secular living in Italy was disregarded and the Fascists gave in to the pervasive anti-Semitism of the Nazis, the Eastern Jews' fear that it was a mistake to conform to the "ways of the *goyim*" appears valid and well-founded.

The German Jewish community has been called the 'linchpin' community, the central meeting place between the East and the West and home to one of the oldest

and earliest assimilated European Jewish communities (Bauman 1991: 109). As the birthplace of National Socialism and economically the worst affected country after her defeat in the First World War, Germany was politically very unstable in the 1920s. The scientific and nationalistic ideals of late Modernity which led to the Holocaust, developed most visibly and most obviously in Germany. It is this ideology of Modernity, distorted by the Nazis' pursuit of a homogenised and ordered super-race of German people, combined with a fervent hatred of the 'other' which underpinned the policies of National Socialism which were to envelop Levi and Wiesel in the later years of Nazism and Modernity itself. The 1930s saw the rise of Fascism in Germany and as has historically happened, the Jews were primary victims. An early example of 'otherness' dividing the Jewish community during this period was the expulsion of the Polish Jews from Germany in 1938. These poor, often very traditional Jews were forced out of the country they had settled in, only to be turned away at the Polish border. The reaction of one Jew in Paris was to provide the spur for *Kristallnacht*, the first real and officially sanctioned pogrom of Nazi rule. The events of *Kristallnacht* made international news, but still the reaction amongst the Jews to the East and West of Germany was that the same level of anti-Semitism would not and could not affect them. The anti-Semitism of Nazi rule and of the Holocaust years began in Germany, but the strength and ferocity of Hitler's totalitarian ambition and virulent anti-Semitism became a fearsome movement "combing" Europe, as Heydrich threatened at the 1942 Wannsee Conference, "from East to West" (Gilbert 1987: 282). For all the confidence and safety the Jews of each end of Europe felt, they were judged as one and pulled indiscriminately into the Final Solution.

3.8 Conclusion

Through centuries of Modernity the Jewish communities of Europe had been divided between the East and the West. For almost a century the Jews of Italy had been modernising with the changing culture and had already assimilated into secular Italian culture. In the East, in Wiesel's Romania the Jewish communities, still recovering from centuries of sporadic violent outbursts of anti-Semitism, had established insular, close and deeply religious communities. As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth

and anti-Semitism once again raised its head across Europe, the Jewish communities within were already disparate and fractured. In 1944 as the Nazis' net closed in on the Jews of the East and the West, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel were confronted with challenges to their sense of Jewish identity. Levi's sense of security as an assimilated Italian was shattered in the realisation that his safety in his citizenship was illusory. For Wiesel, who had believed devoutly in the Covenant with Israel and in the God who protected his people, his faith was shaken when he arrived at Auschwitz to discover the fate of Europe's Jews.

Chapter Four

The Jewish Question: Anti-Semitism and 'Otherness' in the Propaganda and Ideology of the Third Reich.

In the winter of 1918 – 1919 a kind of anti-Semitism began slowly to take root. Later on the National Socialist Movement presented the Jewish problem in a new light. Taking the question beyond the restricted circles of the upper classes and small bourgeoisie we succeeded in transforming it into the driving motive of a great popular movement.

(Hitler 1988, 2008: 501)

The issue of the 'Jewish Question' is discussed through the rise of Nazism in Germany and the targeting of the Jews as an 'other' race. From Hitler's seizing of power in 1933 out of the disarray of Weimar Germany to the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, the Jews of Germany and occupied Europe became increasingly persecuted and forced to live under impractical and humiliating laws and restrictions upon their education, work, personal and social lives. Starting with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* the development of his own ideology of anti-Semitism is explored, plotting the chronology to the physical manifestation of Nazi anti-Semitism. The construction of the Nazi ideology of anti-Semitism and persecution is traced with reference to Bauman's work on Modernity and its treatment of the 'other' and the impact of this persecution on Levi and Wiesel. The climax of this pre-Holocaust persecution in Germany came in 1938, with the event known as *Kristallnacht* (the Night of Broken Glass), twenty-four hours of widespread and officially legitimated violence that saw the destruction of the homes, businesses and synagogues of German and Austrian Jews. The build-up to and execution of *Kristallnacht* is discussed, followed by its aftermath, a regression for the Jews of Germany and by now the rest of Nazi-occupied Europe to the ghettos of years previously. The chapter concludes with the road to the Final Solution, the culmination of the Nazis' anti-Semitic regime and the most far-reaching and uniquely organised assault on Jewry in European history.

4.1 Out of a Defeated Germany: The Weimar Years

For the Jews of the countries such as Italy, France and notably (given its impending politics) Germany, those changed by the impact of the Enlightenment, the twentieth century began with a sense of unity and citizenship. Emancipated Jews such as Primo Levi identified themselves through their nationality primarily, Italian in Levi's case, in modernising and proud nations. During the First World War many of the Jews of Germany, as across Europe, fought, were awarded medals and died for their country. By the end of the war however and with the crippling reparations and punishments meted out in the Treaty of Versailles, the tide began to turn against the Jews of Germany. Rumours of a Jewish conspiracy with Russian Bolsheviks circulated, fuelling allegations that the Jews had sabotaged Germany's war effort and led the country to defeat. As a financially devastated Germany faced huge repayments amid an economic crash, the Jewish business owners in Germany were vulnerable to charges of Jewish profiteering in a ruined country and faced another assault on Germany Jewry in the crippled country. The aftermath of the war led Germany into the era of the Weimar Republic. Following the November Revolution of 1918, the Kaiser and the Monarch were exiled. The new republic of Germany, while becoming socially and culturally liberated, was not immune to the world-wide financial crisis exacerbated by the 1929 Wall Street Crash which pushed Germany's already crippled post-war economy to the brink of collapse. By the end of the 1920s Germany under the Weimar Government sank economically under the weight of unmanageable debt, hyper-inflation and mass unemployment (Gilbert 1987: 29).

The mismanagement of the country's failing economy and the booming culture of liberation offended the right-wing opponents of the Weimar Government but provided fuel for the growing opposition parties, among them the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, National Socialist German Workers Party) or Nazis, headed by Adolf Hitler (Dawidowicz 1975: 39). Hitler was a World War One veteran who had left his native Austria in 1912 and joined the German Army at the start of the war in 1914 (Hitler 1988, 2008: 125). He felt bitterly betrayed, firstly by Germany's loss of the war and secondly by the way post-war Germany was progressing under the newly established Weimar government. The Nazis, with Hitler as chairman from 1921 set out to take control of Germany which was still spiralling out of economic

control through the 1920s. With initial lack of support and an absence of any defined political ideology, the ambitious Hitler needed a means of gathering support for his party and with resentment throughout Germany about the war still high, the Jews of Germany were soon to be betrayed by their country. Germany's Jews had fought hard for equality and emancipation and it appeared, under the Weimar Government, had won it at last. By the end of World War One and with a new liberal government in power, permitting Jews unprecedented equality, they were now able to hold office under Weimar rule (Dawidowicz 1975: 76). It seemed that the divide between Gentile and Jew had been dissolved in Germany's bitter defeat in war, subsequent economic crisis and optimistic hope for the new century. However, the right-wing opposition to the Weimar administration felt that the events of 1914-1918 and the ensuing misfortunes for Germany only heightened the divide between the German Gentile, or Aryan, and the alien Jew and resurrected old prejudices to remove the Jews from their newly elevated position in society.

The Nazis struggled for power during the 1920s, one contender among many fighting for control over the struggling German republic. The failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 established the Nazis' intent for power, but led to Hitler's arrest and imprisonment for high treason (Gilbert 1987: 25). Hitler's nine-month-long prison sentence was to provide time and inspiration for him to contemplate his political career and to compose his infamous book *Mein Kampf*. This put on record his disillusionment over the war, the betrayal he believed Germany suffered, his political feelings and significantly, his obsessive anti-Semitism and reverence of the Aryan race (Rubinstein 2002: 209). Hitler's prolix two-volume book, filled with vitriol against the Jews was not commercially successful until 1933. Following the death of President von Hindenburg Hitler swiftly ascended to power firstly as Chancellor and in the same year, as self-appointed Führer of Germany, thereby destroying the hope of a democratic and liberal immediate future for the Jews of Germany (Rubinstein 2002: 209).

The ruling Nazi party's changes of policy were rapid and brutal, particularly for the well-established Jewish communities of Germany, some of the oldest in Europe. With Hitler's political status came the success and attention that had evaded *Mein Kampf* only eight years earlier and the politicising of anti-Semitism in the new Nazi state. The Nazi party wasted no time in setting up a legal system of regressive

disenfranchisement of the Jews, steadily deconstructing centuries of liberation, enlightened thinking and assimilation. Hitler and his regime of anti-Semitism was legislatively and rapidly pulling the Jews as a group apart from their Gentile neighbours and forcing them together as a stereotyped 'other', at the edge of Aryan German society. In Hitler's economic transformation of Germany from the chaos of the 1920s, respect for his leadership grew. Unemployment depleted significantly, industry and the economy recovered and prospered as Hitler became the saviour of the new Reich (Rubinstein 2002: 209). This respect and unprecedented adoration of a political leader gave Hitler his platform to raise his feelings about the Jews, his blame of the failure of Germany during the war and his vision of the future of the 'Thousand Year Reich'; a Reich that did not include the Jews.

The Nazi party, for all its economic success, had little in the way of a coherent political ideology. Bauman discusses the contradictory nature of the Nazis' modern ideology and the subsequent atrocities emergent through the Holocaust as "neither outbursts of barbarism not yet fully extinguished by the new rational order of civilisation, nor the price paid for utopias alien to the spirit of Modernity" (1991: 29). The Nazis' pursuit of the perfect society, Bauman argues, was in the spirit of Modernity but executed by a confused system of social engineering which combined medieval barbarism, religious intolerance and scientific progress. The Nazis also adopted the hubris of Western imperialism in making use of all the industrial and scientific knowledge at their disposal without ethical consideration, in what Bauman terms the "optimistic view, that scientific and industrial progress in principle removed all restrictions on the possible application of planning, education and social reform in everyday life" (1991: 29). The Nazi government put these principles into action with ruthless efficiency but a chaotic ideology.

One consistent but similarly contradictory element of their regime was the anti-Semitism which was to define the Nazi era and the rule of Hitler. A combination of medieval anti-Jewish hysteria, Orientalist thought and the fears of Modernity, the ideology behind Nazi anti-Semitism was disparate, contradictory and derivative of many varied sources. According to Nazi propaganda, the Jews were both capitalists and Communists, controlling the world's finances yet responsible for the spread of Bolshevism. Images of the Jew with his money bag were circulated in the anti-Semitic

press and evoked images of Judas Iscariot at the Last Supper table. The worldwide depression and Germany's own financial crisis after the war only exacerbated the potential Hitler saw to exploit this ancient stereotype, a development of the archaic reputation for usury of Jews in Europe. With Germany's defeat of 1918 still raw, Hitler used allegations of an international Jewish conspiracy, financial control and Russian Bolshevism to lay the blame of Germany's defeat at the door of the Jewish community and provide a scapegoat for the German population to turn against. Accusing the Jews of being revolutionaries intent on worldwide political domination and citing the forged document *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as evidence, Hitler combined medieval imagery of the lecherous, race defiling Jew, with modern threats of revolution and Bolshevism (Dawidowicz 1975: 46-47). Peter Longerich highlights the post-war period as fertile ground for the development of anti-Semitism propagated by Hitler, in a country humiliated and defeated by the Allies in the War's result and in the ensuing reparation punishments.

The anti-Semitic stance that Hitler finally adopted in the transitional period of 1918-1919 is clearly not an isolated circumstance but has to be seen in its context as a mass phenomenon. Anti-Semitism had received a sharp boost from 1916 onwards, but from about the middle of 1919 it is possible to detect a further increase in hostility towards Jews in Germany. (Longerich 2005: 29)

The increasing hostility towards the Jews from 1919, the year of the Nazi party's formation, although public in Germany, did not appear to have caused significant concerns for the Jews of Levi's Italian community. When asked in 1986 if he recalled from his childhood any sense of foreboding from the German attitude towards the Jews, Levi replied: "Not really. My family was a bourgeois one. In the years I was born no one – in Italy at least – spoke of ostracizing the Jews" (Camon 1989: 5). The anti-Semitism that informed the Nazi party's ideology to such a great extent was to pervade war-time Europe, but in Hitler's initial years of power the Jewish communities tried not to pay attention to the warning signs emerging from Germany.

4.2 Mein Kampf: An Anti-Semitic Obsession

Mein Kampf, Hitler's memoir was born out of defeat and humiliation; defeat initially of Germany in World War One and secondly of his personal power-bid heading the Munich Putsch in 1923. The putsch left sixteen of his comrades dead and Hitler incarcerated in Landsberg prison for nine months (Hitler 1988, 2008: 5). Dawidowicz describes *Mein Kampf* as: "a vision of the apocalyptic conflict between the Aryans and the Jews" (1975: 47). Certainly the preoccupation within the text is with the differences (racial, social and cultural) between the two groups. Fiercely nationalistic, Hitler repeatedly and forcefully argues that as a race hiding behind the façade of a religion, the Jews are inescapably 'other' and without purpose or right within Germany: "Jewry has always been a nation of a definite racial character and never differentiated merely by the fact of belonging to a certain religion" (Hitler 1988, 2008: 277).

As has been shown to be typical of anti-Semitism historically, the path to persecution in the Nazi regime was by making the Jewish people into an 'other' and attempting to alienate them from the rest of the German population through a campaign of distorted anti-Jewish propaganda. One derivative ideology the Nazis made use of was of the biology and science of eugenics. This policy, like the anti-Semitism of the nineteenth century before it, was the distortion of Darwinist theory and ideas of inferiority of race as a fixed, non-malleable identity. Hitler's anti-Semitism, as he initially represented it, was a racial prejudice. Constructed in opposition to the idolised Aryan, the Jewish people are discussed in *Mein Kampf* as a race, whose endurance through its tribulations, has conditioned its survival skills. "There is probably no other people in the world who have developed the instinct of self-preservation as the so-called 'chosen' people. The best proof of this statement is found in the simple fact that this race still exists" (Hitler 1988, 2008: 271-72). This racial element to the Nazis' ideology of anti-Semitism is clear in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* where the language and visual representation of the Jews took on a racial prejudice, with ever more inhuman, bestial imagery and characterisations. Jews were often referred to as vermin, another piece of imagery to be adopted by the Nazi party in propaganda films such as *The Eternal Jew (Der Ewige Jude)* released in Germany in 1940 (Hippler 1940). Hitler's complex and medieval anti-Jewish prejudices derive from his initial racial categorisation of the

Jewish people and his belief that Judaism is irreconcilable with the Aryan race. Hitler used *Mein Kampf* to narrate his personal experiences with Jews, his developing anti-Semitism and to highlight the 'otherness' of the Jews he experienced:

Once, when passing through the Inner City, I suddenly encountered a phenomenon in a long caftan and wearing black sidelocks. My first thought was: is this a Jew? They certainly did not have this appearance in Linz. I watched the man stealthily and cautiously; but the longer I gazed at that strange countenance and examined it feature by feature, the more the question shaped itself in my brain: Is this a German? (1988, 2008: 61-62)

Hitler, in this passage as within many in *Mein Kampf*, uses traditional Jewish characterisations such as the attire of kaftan and side-locks to imply a strange and archaic figure, far removed from the Aryan German ideal. However, as Hitler himself here admits, the Jew he describes looks nothing like the Jews of his hometown of Linz. He is constructing a character, a figure directly out of a piece of anti-Semitic propaganda or literature now considered to be anti-Semitic such as *The Merchant of Venice*. "There were very few Jews in Linz. In the course of centuries the Jews who lived there had become Europeanized in appearance and were so much like other human beings that I even looked upon them as Germans" (Hitler 1988, 2008: 58). Bauman has discussed the problem with this kind of mythic demonisation of the Jew, as being the problem of correlating these images to the Jews who lived across Germany, who were friends, neighbours and colleagues of the Germans exposed to this kind of propaganda. The Nazis made use of the gradual segregation and elimination of Jews within this society to depersonalise the Jew, to remove conflicting living evidence of the Jewish character and increase indifference among the German people, toward the plight of this 'other' race (Bauman 1999: 187).

As has been explored by Said and discussed with regard to Orientalism and 'otherness', as well as demonstrating what they, the 'other' are not, Orientalist theory uses this theory (albeit not specifically in relation to Jewish versus German identities) as a binary opposition to show what the native, the good, the German, are. While developing an ever more malicious campaign against the Jews, Hitler was simultaneously constructing and celebrating the vision of the Aryan ideal. With blond

hair, blue eyes and an athletic figure, the mythic Aryan was the polar opposite to the dark, hunchbacked Jew and exacerbated the differences between the good German and the bad Jew; “The Jew offers the most striking contrast to the Aryan” (Hitler 1988, 2008: 271). Like the pseudo religious anti-Semitic imagery likening the German Jew to Judas in his mercenary appearance, imagery of the Aryan takes on an almost religious vision. Like Christ at the Last Supper table, haloed in light and exaggeratedly Westernised, the Aryan is pitched in direct contradistinction to the dark and creeping Jew in his shadow, instructing Germany that the Jew in their midst is an irrevocable ‘other’, everything the good Aryan German is not, nor should be. While the Jew, according to Hitler, is a dangerous burden upon the German people, the Aryan by contrast becomes heroic in his superiority, romanticised and idolised in the rhetoric of *Mein Kampf*:

He is the Prometheus of mankind, from whose shining brow the divine spark of genius has at all times flashed forth, always kindling anew that fire which, in the form of knowledge, illuminated the dark night by drawing aside the veil of mystery and thus showing man how to rise and become master over all beings on the earth. (1988, 2008: 262)

By making this distinction excessively clear, the Nazis could better claim to be eliminating the Jewish ‘other’ as a blemish from an ideal society for the good of the Reich. The segregation of the Jews of Nazi-occupied Europe served to heighten the belief and appearance of their ‘otherness’ and widen the physical and emotional divide between Jew and Gentile.

4.3 Legitimising Anti-Semitism: Persecution and Violence

Throughout the Nazis’ rise to power, persecution and violence against the Jews was not only legitimised by governmental acts and decrees, but encouraged at civilian level. Aryan Germans (and Aryan citizens across Nazi-occupied countries such as Austria and Czechoslovakia) were able to attack, denigrate and humiliate Jews on the street, safe in the knowledge that they would be unlikely to face prosecution or any punishment for their actions. These small localised pogroms took place across

occupied Europe throughout the 1930s and 1940s and for the Jews of Eastern Europe were the most recent events in a long history of the anti-Jewish pogrom in Europe. For the more culturally and physically assimilated Jews, being witness and victim to the resurgence of anti-Semitic violence, placed them in a different yet equally uncomfortable position. The promulgation of the race laws defined, identified and stigmatised the Jews of all communities and cultures across Nazi-occupied Europe. In restricting employment and education, however physically assimilated they may have been the Jews were made more identifiable by their restricted lifestyles. Whereas the less assimilated Jewish communities could remain close to each other for support, the assimilated Jews who had left the Jewish community behind now found themselves without any strong community. Bauman writes of the assimilated German Jews: "In the no-win game of assimilation, the German-educated Jews found themselves transferred from closely-knit territorial ghetto to the grotto of social incongruity and cultural ambivalence" (1991 : 120-21).

Eastern Europe and the Russian states tolerated many violent pogroms and massacres against their Jewish communities through the ages. The most notorious of these was the Chmielnicki massacre in the Ukraine in 1648-49, led by Bohdan Chmielnicki and the Ukrainian Cossacks, resulting in the slaughter of tens of thousands of Jews across the region (Rosen 2009). As with Chmielnicki, these pogroms could last months, as mobs travelled for miles systematically destroying Jewish communities as they reached them. These pogroms are evoked in modern Jewish literature, such as Aleichem's work and the later literature of Elie Wiesel, who evokes the atmosphere of terror and persecution among rural Jewish communities in works such as *The Trial of God*. "Somewhere in a lost village, buried in dusk and darkness. The time: 1649, after a pogrom. Hate has won; death has triumphed. The rare survivors know that they are alone and abandoned" (Wiesel *Trial*: The Scene). These pogroms were not necessarily Christian-led, but the persecution was often a religious one, or was at least justified as one religion against the other. In *The Trial of God* the Christian priest does not lead the anti-Semitic mob, but is inactive in helping the few remaining Jews in Shamgorod. His only advice is for the Jews to abandon their faith and convert to Christianity (Wiesel *Trial*: 154-55). This enduring religious intolerance which re-emerged during the Second World War links this era to the time of Chmielnicki and Wiesel's *Trial of God*

and of earlier pogroms of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Christian crusades. The cultural memory and heritage of religious persecution seems to have been almost inescapable for the Jews of Europe despite the modernising culture. In the East the memories of violence and fear were far more recent, but even in the West to a lesser extent there was a history of anti-Semitism and persecution. Using archaic myths and defamations such as the infamous blood libel charge, Jews with their unfamiliar religion and close, devout communities were viewed with suspicion and were a vulnerable target against which a violent mob might be incited. Although the years of Nazi anti-Semitism had little conscious impact on either Levi or Wiesel at the time, their digressions from Holocaust testimony into an engagement with issues of 'otherness' set both authors apart from the large number of Holocaust survivors-turned-writers. Situating these issues within Levi's short stories in *The Periodic Table* and Wiesel's autobiography *All Rivers Run to the Sea* retains the Holocaust focus of the testimonies and extends the literary repertoire and relevance of both survivors.

The Holocaust and the preceding anti-Semitic reign of terror led by the Nazis, while evoking a medieval pogrom in its violence, was organised and executed in a very different way from previous attacks. It is argued here that racial anti-Semitism and the prejudices of Nazi ideology had their roots in the religious anti-Judaism of Christian dogma and in the repeated use of defamations such as the blood libel and the imagery of the mercenary Jew clutching his money bag; the progression is clear. Hitler and the Nazis however made much more use of modern science and anthropology to defend their ideology of Aryan racial superiority and consequently, Semitic racial inferiority. Dawidowicz cites the University of Bonn Ancient Civilizations professor Christian Lassen (1802-71) as a primary figure in the field of anthropology who encouraged the idea of Aryan superiority over Semitic peoples: "History proves that Semites do not possess the harmony of psychical forces that distinguishes the Aryans. But the Semite has other qualities: he is selfish and exclusive" (Dawidowicz 1975: 60 citing Lassen). While the work of Darwin is usually the better known of the anthropological and evolutionary studies, which was of course open to manipulation and distortion among racial supremacists such as the Nazis, conclusions such as Lassen's required no such manipulation. The academic and scientific worlds' support of Aryan superiority gave credence to the political and propagandist targeting of Jews as an inferior race. This

scientific study into race and particularly Semitic racial studies was something the Nazis continued with fervour, producing scales and gauges to measure the extent of one's Semitic identity; justifying a system which based identity upon physical appearance and persecuted people on this basis (Paulsson 2006: 11).

Previous pogroms and assaults on Jewish communities relied upon an incitement of hatred or vengeance against the Jews, but the Nazis used propaganda and media control to an extent not seen before. Using the technology and media of the modern time, the Nazis waged a relentless media war against the Jews with every piece of propaganda at their disposal. By tightly controlling the newspapers in Germany, supporting virulent anti-Semitic publications such as *Der Stürmer* and as part of the *Kristallnacht* assault, shutting down national German Jewish presses, the Nazis were able to control and dictate the daily news to German citizens. Censoring the media allowed the censoring of stories of violence against Jews and free rein to accuse the Jews of betraying Germany during the war, supporting Bolshevism and financial worldwide control. By using such a wide-reaching tool as the national media and denying the Jews a free media of their own the Nazis were able to isolate the Jewish communities across Germany from one another and make them a pariah people within their own nation.

This media-driven campaign against the Jews of Germany provided the opportunity for the Nazis and their supporters in the media (notably Julius Streicher, editor of *Der Stürmer*) to combine historic and archaic prejudices against the Jews, with modern racial anti-Semitism, in a long and relentless system of demeaning and dehumanising the Jews, and making them into 'others' of society. The Jews were to an extent, able to resist this propaganda-led system of exclusion and denigration so long as they maintained respectable positions within society. While the Nazis did not tolerate the Weimar liberalisation which permitted Jews to hold public office, they were, in the early years of Nazi rule, permitted to teach and practice professions such as medicine. These hardworking, respectable, German-speaking citizens were not promoted in the Nazi media, nor, conversely, did these Jews embody the representation of the lecherous, criminal, repulsive Jew of *Der Stürmer*.

Julius Streicher, the pioneer of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda, found that the most daunting of tasks

his paper *Der Stürmer* was set up to perform, was to make the stereotype of the 'Jew as such' stick to the personal images his readers held of the Jews they knew, of the Jewish neighbours, friends or business partners. (Bauman 1999: 187)

If the Jews of Germany did not fit the stereotype of the 'other' which the Nazis propagated, the Nazi solution was to physically, legally and socially subjugate the Jews until they did become the 'other' of society, through an ever more oppressive and threatening system of anti-Semitic measures introduced into Germany, pushing the Jews, once again, to the very edge of existence.

The persecution of the Jews of Germany began immediately after Hitler's assumption of power in 1933. The Enabling Act of 1933 which allowed the Nazi Government to pass laws without Parliamentary consent, gave Hitler *carte blanche* to introduce numerous new laws persecuting the Jewish communities of Germany (Dawidowicz 1975: 81). With the initial exception of Jews who had fought for Germany during the war, Jews who held positions within universities and the civil service found themselves forced from their jobs, doctors were only permitted to care for Jewish patients and strict limits were placed upon the number of Jewish children allowed into state schools (Rubinstein 2002: 213). These new laws marginalised Jews from German society and severely reduced their status and public appearance of contributing to the good of the country. The ceremonial and public book burnings which were to take place later the same year were a way to reject the words, work and philosophies of some of the most significant and influential Jewish (and German) academics and literary figures in history. In the absolute destruction of their work, the book burnings served to heighten the enemy status ascribed to the Jews, making them not only 'others', but dangerous 'others'.

1935 sealed the disenfranchisement and marginalisation of the Jews of Germany, with the declaration of the 'Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour', or the Nuremberg Laws as they became known, named after the German city famed for its Nazi rallies (Dawidowicz 1975: 98-99). The Nuremberg Laws forbade marriage or sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews, thereby forcing the anti-Semitic attitude of the Nazi party on to every German citizen, whether anti-Semitic or not. The Nuremberg Laws also defined Judaism as a racial identity, judging

and identifying Jews by the Jewish race of their grandparents, irrespective of individual beliefs and religious practices (Rubinstein 2002: 213). These laws were replicated to an extent in Italy where Levi was enrolled at university in Turin to study chemistry. Although Levi was able to continue his studies as he was already a student at the university when the racial laws were promulgated, he recalls detecting an almost unconscious emotional distance emerging between himself and his Christian peers.

My Christian classmates were civil people; none of them, nor any of the teachers, had directed at me a hostile word or gesture, but I could feel them withdraw and, following an ancient pattern, I withdrew as well: every look exchanged between me and them was accompanied by a miniscule but perceptible flash of mistrust and suspicion. (Levi *Periodic*: 33)

Levi's recollection of the insidious estrangement between himself and his university colleagues demonstrates the progressive system of alienating the Jews from the Christians across Europe and the success of the racial campaign. The anti-Semitism of Nazi propaganda may have been derived from the anti-Jewish art and literature of the medieval era, but the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 were irrefutably modern racist policies. The Nazi era collapsed the divide between medieval and modern anti-Jewish prejudices, amalgamating them into a confused anti-Semitism which marked the Jews, all Jews, religious, secular or atheist, a legislatively defined 'other' and made anti-Semitism an official political ideology to be observed not only by Jews, but by the Gentile majority of Germany.

Hitler's next step in his marginalisation of the Jews was to be a gradual expulsion of Jews from Germany, a policy he had desired from the earliest days of his anti-Semitic ideology. By expelling the Jews entirely from Germany, Hitler would succeed not only in removing what he felt to be a stain upon his vision of the Aryan master race, but would permit the German Aryans the *Lebensraum*, or living space to live more comfortably and expand as a race.

What we have to fight for is the necessary security for the existence and increase of our race and people, the subsistence of its children and the maintenance of our racial stock unmixed, the

freedom and independence of the Fatherland.
(Hitler 1988, 2008: 198)

In the nationalistic society Hitler was leading by the late 1930s, the first targets of Hitler's plan of expulsion were the immigrant Jews who had fled the persecutions in the East at the start of the century, to settle as German citizens in a modern society free from the archaic anti-Semitism that gripped the Russian territories. In Hitler's Germany however, these Jews were to find old prejudices resurrected, and their stateless identity would once more remove them from their homes and livelihoods.

4.4 Where They Begin By Burning Books...

The tide of anti-Semitic hysteria in Germany reached a climax on the eve of November 9th 1938. *Kristallnacht*, or the Night of Broken Glass, was the country-wide pogrom of violence, destruction and round-ups of the Jews of Germany, ostensibly as a government-sanctioned reprisal for an assassination that took place hundreds of miles away in Paris. In August of 1938, Hitler revoked the residency rights of 18,000 Polish-born Jews, living in Germany since the turn of the century. In October these immigrants were expelled from Germany, driven to the Polish-German border. With no allowances or provisions being made for their arrival in Poland and with all currency but ten German Marks being confiscated from the Jews by the German SS, the Jews were met with further destitution (Gilbert 1987: 66-67). Their arrival at the Polish border was followed for these homeless Jews, by days of surviving in a no-man's-land by the border, without food or shelter until they could be granted permission to enter Poland. Herschel (Hirsch) Grynszpan, a German-Polish Jew living in Paris, whose family was among the thousands held in limbo at the border, made his protest publicly and abruptly on November 6th. Grynszpan went to the Paris office of German Embassy official Ernst vom Rath and shot him, fatally wounding him (Gilbert 1987: 68). Having made his protest he then allowed himself to be arrested by the police without protest. Vom Rath was by no means a high-ranking Nazi but from the moment he was targeted by a Jew, even before his subsequent death, he had become a hero of the German and Nazi people and a martyr to Jewish violence and disorder.

The first repercussion for the Jews of Germany was to have their publications forcibly closed on November 8th. This halt to a dedicated Jewish press left the Jews of Germany with no nation-wide leading voice or means of community support. Then, the last few citizen rights not already obliterated by the Nuremberg Laws were rapidly removed, primarily denying Jewish children an education in State schools. With vom Rath's death on the 9th November, Joseph Goebbels made the evasive but unambiguous statement that official retributive action would not be organised but nor would it be prevented. This response essentially sanctioned a violent and destructive pogrom against the Jews of Germany in one statement, a pogrom that evoked the ferocity of the middle ages in one of the previously most enlightened and socially advanced countries of Europe. Goebbels' public reaction to the assassination absolved the Nazi party from any wrongdoing and once and for all, informed the Jewish communities of Germany and Austria that they were alone and could expect no support, aid or sympathy from their government.

Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues were destroyed across Germany in a night of violence and brutality. Those who attempted to defend their property were beaten and several people died in the attacks which were organised and initiated by the SA and SS. The most portentous actions of *Kristallnacht* however, were the round-up and arrest of around 30,000 Jewish civilians, mainly men, who were then sent without trial to concentration camps across Germany, such as Dachau and Buchenwald (Gilbert 1987: 69-70). Although most of these people survived their internment and were released again, *Kristallnacht* and the utilisation of the concentration camp system as a means of restricting the Jews' freedom, as early as 1938 showed the anti-Semitism awakening in Germany and the lengths the Nazi Party was prepared to go to rid Germany of Jews. The path from one night of arrests and short prison sentences was to lead to a genocide the Jews of Europe could not have anticipated. The Final Solution was not to be executed until the early 1940s but the seeds were sown in the rapid rise to power of a rabidly anti-Semitic leader and a few short years of legislative disenfranchisement of a minority group of Jews. The precedent had been set in one night of extreme violence across Germany, where the death of less than one hundred Jews was to pave the way for the murder of millions.

The events of *Kristallnacht* were to provide the spur which led to the increased emigration of German and Austrian Jews fleeing persecution in their homelands. The *Kindertransports* to Britain were mobilised for almost 10,000 German Jewish children whose parents entrusted them to the charity of British strangers, while many families made *Aliyah* to Palestine where Britain issued visas granting them entry (Paulsson 2006: 15). Other families settled in America and Britain and as far away as Asia. Many of those who did not leave mainland Europe were to again become caught in the Final Solution. For many however, the prospect of moving countries was too much, or impossible to manage and many Jews remained in Germany after *Kristallnacht*. Although the climate was oppressive and filled with fear for the Jews they were still permitted to live and work in Germany. The concentration camps active throughout the 1930s generally held other 'undesirables' such as Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals and those deemed a threat to Nazi rule, such as Communists. These camps were not extermination camps in the mould of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the other Polish sites. Prisoners died in these concentration camps in their thousands during the war, but initially the German camps were prisons in which to detain the 'others' of society, those who did not fit the Nazi ideal or conform to it. The Jews however, as the primary 'other' of Nazi society, by now identifiable by the mandatory yellow Star of David badge on their clothes, were forced to suffer further humiliation and persecution for their 'otherness' and their enemy status.

4.5 The Return to the Ghettos

It was not until Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 and the ensuing war, that the Jews of Germany were forcibly removed and deported East, in a policy Hitler named *Lebensraum* or 'living space' for Aryans. With Poland occupied and with Hitler's disregard for the Polish nation, considering them to be inferior to the German Aryan, the country effectively became the waste land for the undesirables currently living in Germany, occupying the space, land and property Hitler wanted to designate to the Aryan population. The 1940s (within the sphere of Hitler's reign) saw a return to the East / West divide of earlier Modernity, with the return to ghettos being constructed to contain Jewish communities. Germany and the countries West of Germany, while

falling under the rule of Nazism were not to be occupied with such control as in the East. Therefore the Jewish communities in places like Italy, the home of Primo Levi and his family, while being subject to increasingly anti-Semitic procedure, were not forced into medieval style ghettos and ever decreasing living spaces. The situation for Jews in Italy was still threatening, with the parallels developing between Italy's Fascist government and Germany's Nazi government. Even if the Jews of the West attempted to ignore the more immediately perilous plight of the Jews in the East, Levi was an adult and understood better the political situation in Europe than the more isolated teenaged Wiesel in Sighet, but attempted to maintain as much normality in his life as was possible. "Our ignorance allowed us to live, as when you are in the mountains and your rope is frayed and about to break, but you don't know it and feel safe" (Levi *Periodic*: 107).

The East, with a vastly bigger Jewish population than the West, many of whom would still remember the Pale of Settlement so recently dissolved, was to see a return to the ghetto existence. With unsanitary conditions, overcrowding and insufficient food, Jews were once again being pushed to the very edge of society. In their inadequate living conditions, they were being forced into the role and characterisation ascribed to them by anti-Semitic propaganda. The Nazis' legitimated their own racial slurs, by forcing the Jews to be unhygienic, stateless and poverty-stricken, thereby 'proving' to the Aryan population how different the Jews really were to the Aryans. Poland, the country with the largest Jewish population outside of the Soviet Union, was home to the largest ghettos, situated in cities such as Warsaw, Lodz and Cracow. Ghettos were constructed across Eastern occupied territory and even the Jewish communities of small towns such as Elie Wiesel's hometown of Sighet, were to find themselves being confined to overpopulated closed off streets, away from the Gentile community. "Two ghettos were created in Sighet. A large one in the center of town occupied four streets, and another smaller one extended over several alleyways on the outskirts of town" (Wiesel *Night*: 11). Bauman discusses this process of ghetto confinement as the modern bureaucratic approach to isolating a dangerous 'other':

The only adequate solution to problems posited by the racist world-view is a total and uncompromising isolation of the pathogenic and infectious race – the source of disease and contamination – through its

complete spatial separation or physical destruction.
(1999: 76)

Wiesel, recalling the Sighet ghetto in *Night*, observes that rather than being filled with fear by the presence of a ghetto, the ghetto walls actually became a source of comfort to the Jews, creating the illusion of protection around the population (Wiesel *Night*: 11-12). Wiesel himself was born a generation away from the Pale of Settlement. However, this illusory sense of safety felt within the walls of confinement implies an enduring sense of victim identity amongst the Jews of this area; an identification with and cultural memory of the heavily persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe. Whereas the Jews of the West and the newly emancipated German Jews experienced shock at the medieval treatment they faced under the Nazis, there is implicit in Wiesel's narrative a sense of almost familiarity with the conditions imposed upon his family and neighbours and even an optimism that the ghetto walls may protect them from the persecutions outside. This physical divide between confining the 'other' to a ghetto, exacerbated the physical differences and the emotional divide between Jew and Gentile in Nazi-occupied Europe. The power of the anti-Semitic campaign and the propagation of 'otherness' could be effective even within the Jewish population of Europe; fractured by the social changes of Modernity, the Jewish communities were culturally, physically and religiously diverse. The assimilation process of Modernity led to many different Jewish identities across Europe and a divide between how the East and West Jewish communities viewed and identified with each other.

4.6 The Ghettos as a Prelude to the Moral Construct of the Camps

The Nazis had developed a specific social and moral construct through which they could dehumanise their Jewish victims. The normal modes of behaviour, justice and morality were destroyed and replaced with a system which promoted social disharmony at best and at worst collaboration, betrayal and an abandonment of humanity. The process of physically and mentally breaking down the Jews evolved through the deteriorating conditions of the ghettos and acted as a precursor to the same construct in the concentration and extermination camps. Being forced to endure the starvation, poverty and disease that proliferated in the ghettos, the Jews were

pushed to the point of exhaustion. Witnessing the daily death toll from starvation, disease and also the sporadic acts of violence and brutality of the Nazis, were also instrumental in wearing down the energy and strength of body and mind and the humanity of the Jews. The “choiceless choices” the Jews were forced to make, in sacrificing friends and family to save themselves, for the minimal food and health care and for the work cards issued in the ghettos, providing a temporary escape from the bleak monotony of ghetto-life, were already fracturing Jewish unity in the ghettos as the Nazis stripped away and progressively deconstructed the Jewish social, cultural and moral identity (Brown 2008 : 128-29).

Levi did not experience the Nazi ghettos, being confined instead to a detention camp in 1944. Wiesel however, was forced to negotiate the ghetto system. Although Wiesel was fortunate in comparison to the Jews of the vast city ghettos, to live in a small town and to have his home within the ghetto boundaries so that he did not initially have to move, he did not escape the fear, chaos and fatigue that pervaded the ghetto environment. “I see images of exodus and uprooting, reminiscent of a past buried in memory; ravaged, dazed, disoriented faces” (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 64). With the energy and spirit sapped out of the Jewish ghetto prisoners, active resistance against the Nazis was a rare occurrence. Cases such as the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising paint a courageous and valiant picture of Jewish fighting spirit, but examples such as these are few, due to the lack of resources, strength and the preoccupation with surviving one day at a time, which often led to an automaton-like existence. Levi meditates on a similar situation within the camps, when the prisoners, stripped of all sense of identity and spirit, sink into a thoughtless, emotionless existence, manageable by a programme of mindless routine and monotony until their almost inevitable death.

Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer.
(Levi *Man*: 96)

Spirit in the ghettos meant retaining a sense of Jewish identity at all costs, religious, cultural, or ritual; to keep hold of a sense of self, of humanity, or just for some hope

and escapism from the bleak reality of ghetto life and death. For many prisoners in the ghetto, to remain a Jew was victory enough and fighting spirit enough against the Nazis' attempts to destroy Jewry. James Glass discusses:

It is true that in the ghettos religious practice declined, given the demands of basic day-to-day survival and German proscription of religious practice. But religious identity never disappeared. The Jews remained acutely aware of their identity as Jews, not as a negative projection, but as a culture singled out for terrible punishment. (2004: 107)

The deconstruction of the Jews' identity in the ghettos, removing them from their jobs, their homes, their possessions and reducing their daily lives to poverty, begging and stealing, wore down the spirits of these prisoners and confirmed their status as 'other'. By further breaking down their already fragile sense of self and humanity and subjecting them to the daily sight of death and violence, the Jews of the ghettos were broken down in preparation for an existence of conformity and obedience within the camps.

When this system exists, where a large group of people is subjugated and fractured, in the desperate fight to survive, there is also the potential for collaboration with the enemy and a further division among the victim group. As also existed later in the camps, the ghettos were rife with collaborators and a blurring of the lines between victim and enemy. The Nazis designed and operated the ghettos in such a way that would promote collaboration among the most ambitious prisoners and would therefore implicate the Jews in their own suffering and destruction. This collapsing of the good and evil binary opposition has led to some of the most controversial issues of judgement of the Holocaust and something that Levi in particular discusses in his testimony, most notably with regard to the ghettos and the case of Lodz Ghetto 'president' Chaim Rumkowski.

Levi devotes much of his essay on 'The Grey Zone' to Chaim Rumkowski an ambitious industrialist, who allowed himself to be flattered into his position in the ghetto, and was then handed the responsibility of selecting the Jews to be deported to Auschwitz to their deaths.

How he happened to obtain the investiture is not known: perhaps it was simply a hoax in the sinister Nazi style (Rumkowski was, or seemed to be, a fool with an air of respectability – in short, the ideal dupe); perhaps he himself had intrigued to be chosen, so strong in him must have been the will to power. (*Levi Drowned*: 44)

Rumkowski was humoured by the Nazis with a position of respect and elevation within the ghetto and managed to protect himself and his family until the last deportation, securing a letter which permitted them to leave the ghetto in their own 'private' car on the train, but there the privileges ended (*Levi Drowned*: 48). Rumkowski may have entered Auschwitz in a private car, but his destination was the same as the other Jews of Lodz, those he allowed himself to be placed above and those who, at the very end of their lives, died with a sense of unity amongst them. "There was only one fate for Jews in German hands, whether they were cowards or heroes, humble or proud. Neither the letter nor the special carriage were able to save Chaim Rumkowski, the king of the Jews, from the gas chamber" (*Levi Drowned*: 48). In allowing himself to be corrupted by the Nazis and to collaborate with them in the deaths of thousands of his neighbours, Rumkowski denied himself and was denied the camaraderie of the Jews who had lived, fought and died together under Nazi rule.

Levi does not exonerate Rumkowski's self-serving and collaborative behaviour in Lodz, but makes an effort to understand it. Levi considers the idea that Rumkowski was a dupe and was used by the Nazis. He also sees in Rumkowski a desire for power and a need to be seen as authoritative. In the extreme circumstances of the ghetto, Rumkowski's drive for power was exacerbated as he fought for his life and desperately clung to the identity he had constructed for himself, that of a powerful and respected leader. While he carefully suspends judgement of privileged Jews, Levi is critical of Rumkowski but seems to be saying that Rumkowski's behaviour is fallibly human and not monstrous. Wiesel appears to share the same ambiguity as Levi, regarding the judgement of Rumkowski and the other Jewish ghetto elders. On the one hand Wiesel claims not to be able to defend Rumkowski's self-serving behaviour: "Is he, too, defensible? No, he lived too comfortably, too 'luxuriously', for me to speak on his behalf" (*Wiesel All Rivers*: 65). On the other hand, Wiesel acknowledges that the likes

of Rumkowski were puppet leaders, controlled by the Nazis with very little power of their own (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 66). The desperate and power-hungry Jews such as Rumkowski were tools of the Nazis' methodology, their privileges were ultimately as illusory as their power and they faced the same fate as the Jews they acted against. While the behaviour of these Jews may be reprehensible it is also human and while the issue of judgement is a grey area for both Levi and Wiesel what is clear is how successfully these people were manipulated by the Nazi system, to fracture the Jewish communities of the camps and ghettos. Levi and Wiesel, who had different experiences both up to and within Auschwitz, select Rumkowski as a case study for moral interrogation and arrive at similar conclusions. Levi's discussion of Rumkowski appears characteristic of his humanistic interests, but Wiesel's shared opinion is more unusual, in that both men appear to focus on the humanist approach to discussing behavior and Wiesel chooses not to discuss Rumkowski within a religious moral structure.

4.7 The Road to the Final Solution

With the utilisation of the concentration camps in Germany after 1938 and *Kristallnacht* and the expulsion of Polish-born Jews the same year, in Hitler's vision of a homogenised Third Reich free from the Jewish 'others' of society, the Final Solution was drawing closer. By the beginning of the 1940s the Nazis had operational concentration camps established across Germany in which to detain the undesirable 'others' of society, most prolific and numerous of which were the Jews. The initial camp system had been continuously expanded through the 1930s, from the first camps Oranienburg (or Sachsenhausen), Dachau, Ravensbrück and Buchenwald (Paulsson 2006: 33). By the 1940s camps were active and staffed by the SS across Germany often providing slave labour for the war effort while simultaneously punishing, starving and working to death a continuous stream of undesirables who were being forced out of society.

Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939 gave the Nazis the opportunity to expand their concentration and labour camp system and move the 'other' out of Germany altogether. Between 1940 and 1942 the six sites which were to

become extermination camps in Poland, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Chelmno, Majdanek, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, were opened and active as camps. The Polish ghettos had been established and filled with the Jews of Poland, many of whom had fled or been removed from Germany only months before and already the Jews were being murdered in huge numbers. The ghettos of the East were over-crowded, without an adequate food supply and became a breeding ground for diseases such as typhus. People were dying of cold, exhaustion and disease in the ghettos, but by this stage a more ruthless method of removing these undesirables was in action. The *Einsatzgruppen* were units of SS whose purpose was to execute by firing squad huge numbers of Jews transported out of the ghettos on a daily basis. Thus, the Jews, having already been excluded from society, dehumanised and humiliated in their forced return to a ghetto existence, were led to their deaths and buried in mass graves, anonymous groups denied dignity and individual identities in death, as they were during the last years of their lives (Smith 1998: 19-20).

In January of 1942 a meeting took place which was to classify once and for all, the status of the Jews of Europe and their fate at the hands of the Nazis. The Wannsee Conference took place near Berlin and was attended by several high-ranking Nazis. It laid out in clear terms Hitler's wish to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe by the most efficient means possible. Led by Reinhard Heydrich, the conference discussed the progress of the Final Solution, from the initial exclusion of Jews from Jewish life to the expulsion of Jews from Germany. The Wannsee Conference would decide upon the details to remove the Jews from Europe altogether. Heydrich is quoted in Gilbert, treating the mass murder of European Jewry as little more than the natural process of death:

In the course of the final solution, the Jews should be brought under appropriate direction in a suitable manner to the East for labour utilization. Separated by sex, the Jews capable of work will be led into these areas in large labour columns to build roads, whereby doubtless a large part will fall away through natural reduction.

The inevitable final remainder which doubtless constitutes the toughest element will have to be dealt with appropriately, since it represents a natural selection which upon liberation is to be

regarded as a germ cell of a new Jewish development. (1987: 281-2)

Having decided to call a halt to the organised firing line executions taking place in the forests of Poland and Eastern Europe for the sake of the emotional and mental well-being of the executioners and having eliminated deporting the Jews to the island of Madagascar, the solution to the 'Jewish Question' was more modern in its execution. For Jews outside of Germany, information about the Nazis' intentions towards the Jews filtered through to communities across Europe. After his liberation Wiesel was critical of the divide between Eastern and Western Jews which led to a lack of communication and forewarning between the groups, and what he felt to be an abandonment of the Eastern Jews, by those better informed in the West, "the Jews of the free world" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 63). Despite this retrospective criticism, Wiesel admits himself in the same autobiography, that the Jews of Sighet were guilty of naivety and a deliberate refusal to believe that the rumours in their town could be true.

The truth is that, in spite of everything we knew about Nazi Germany, we had an inexplicable confidence in German culture and humanism. We kept telling ourselves that this was, after all, a civilized [sic] people, that we must not give credence to exaggerated rumors about its army's behavior [sic]. (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 27)

The organised bureaucratic killing of undesirables began in 1939 with the Euthanasia project known as T4. The T4 project was designed to eliminate mentally and physically disabled patients in Germany. With authorisation directly from Hitler protecting doctors and medical staff from prosecution for their role in the patients' deaths the Nazis were legitimising the organised murder through order, legality and bureaucracy (Dawidowicz 1975: 172-73). Initially the programme focused upon the murder of infants and children with mental and physical defects but by 1940 the programme was extended to include adults with disabilities and conditions such as schizophrenia and dementia (Museum 2009). The organised mass-gassings which became such an integral part of the Holocaust and the murder of the Jews in the Polish extermination camps were trialled at this stage as part of the covert T4 programme.

By 1944 the Nazi concentration camps of Germany and the extermination camps of Poland were all open and functioning. In Poland particularly, with the Jewish ghettos of the East being liquidated in 1943 and 1944, the camps were running to capacity and processing thousands of people at selections, deciding who was fit for slave labour and who would be directed immediately to the gas chambers. The most notorious of the extermination and concentration camps was Auschwitz-Birkenau. The complex opened in 1940 as a labour site at Auschwitz, initially detaining Poles (Gilbert 1987: 121-22). Satellite camps Buna-Monowitz and the Birkenau site holding women, further slave labour and four gas chambers and crematoria, increased the size and capacity of the vast Auschwitz complex.

The Buna is as large as a city; besides the managers and German technicians, forty thousand foreigners work there, and fifteen to twenty languages are spoken. All the foreigners live in different Lagers which surround the Buna: the Lager of the English prisoners-of-war, the Lager of the Ukrainian women, the Lager of the French volunteers and others we do not know. (*Levi Man: 78*)

In the East, the ghettos which had been formed in the early 1940s were emptied and liquidated. From the major Polish city ghettos of Cracow and Warsaw, holding thousands of families, to the small town ghettos of the occupied East such as the ghetto of Sighet where Elie Wiesel's family awaited their fate, the Jews of the East were loaded into cattle wagons and deported to Poland, ostensibly on work details in the East. "There are rumours', my father said, his voice breaking, 'that we are being taken somewhere in Hungary to work in the brick factories. It seems that here, we are too close to the front...'" (*Wiesel Night: 14*). After only a few weeks in the ghetto, Wiesel and his family were deported; among the last of the Sighet Jews to leave the ghetto and their home. Ordered to leave with only one bag of belongings each, Wiesel remembers the Sighet ghetto as a scene of chaos.

The street resembled fairgrounds deserted in haste. There was a little of everything: suitcases, briefcases, bags, knives, dishes, banknotes, papers, faded portraits. All the things one planned to take along and finally left behind. They had ceased to matter. (*Wiesel Night: 16*)

With only the delusion of a future of work in the East to prepare for, families packed as much food, clothing and practical items as they were able and prepared as best they could for their journey ahead.

In the West and particularly in Italy, where there were no ghettos, the arrested Jews had been detained in Fascist-run prison camps, such as Fossoli, the detention centre in the North of Italy, near Modena where Levi was held in January 1944 after his arrest by Fascists (*Levi Man*: 20). Despite the harsh conditions of war and the circumstances of being a prisoner-of-war, there existed within Fossoli comparative privileges and civilised treatment of prisoners by their corrupted and corruptible Italian guards. "Fossoli's superintendent, Commissar Domenico Avitabile, was a Naples-born ex-policeman on good terms with his prisoners. His outwardly warm manner helped to reassure them of their safety" (Thompson 2003: 152). However, despite the letters home, the food and the family atmosphere, there was clearly evident the chaos of the camp being taken over by the German SS and a lack of information accessible to either the prisoners or the Fascist guards, whom the Jews hoped would remain in charge for the duration of the war, so that the likes of Levi could remain captive but comfortable and amongst his own nation.

In theory the Italian police controlled the camp, as Domenico Avitabile was answerable to the Fascist prefecture at Modena, and not the German SS. Yet Avitabile's orders regarding the Jews in his care were not very clear. If he was not directly complicit in the Nazi round-ups, he must have known that Fossoli would at some stage have to be emptied. (Thompson 2003: 155-56)

On 22nd February the Fossoli camp was emptied of Jews, as they were also loaded on to cattle wagons and deported East, to an unknown destination (*Levi Man*: 20). Although Levi and his compatriots had the experience of being detained in a prison camp, they had been relatively protected from the fear and the anti-Semitism of the East and the harsh conditions of the ghettos. Levi's weeks at Fossoli were not to prepare him for his journey across Europe into Poland, nor the situation he would be met with upon arrival. Although Levi hints at a sense of hopelessness in the face of the Nazi assault on Europe in chapters of *The Periodic Table*, the lack of information Levi discusses on his thoughts (prior to his deportation) specifically on the Final Solution

indicate that he may have been as deliberately ignorant or as naïve as Wiesel as to the truth of the rumours amongst Jewish communities and his destination and fate as he left Fossoli (*Levi Periodic*: 42).

Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Germanised name for the Polish town of Oswiecim, located in South Poland close to the German border became the site where Eastern and Western Jewry converged and were faced with each other, as their differences and cultures collapsed in the reality of the camp system. Germany became central through the period of Modernity as the country that joined and held together the Jewish communities of the East and West in Europe. Only a few decades into the twentieth century, it was the German Nazis and their occupation of Poland that was to almost destroy European Jewry. It was Auschwitz-Birkenau that both Levi and Wiesel arrived at in 1944. "Auschwitz: a name without significance for us at that time, but it at least implied some place on this earth" (*Levi Man*: 23). After the progressive separation of East and West through decades of modernising and secularisation in the West and the emotional distance between the persecuted Jewish communities in the Nazi years, the lives and cultures of Levi and Wiesel converged and East and West were forced together in their destruction.

4.8 Conclusion

Hitler constructed a political career out of his anti-Semitism and virulent nationalism and emerged as a political leader in Germany at a time of chaos and destitution. In an anti-Semitic campaign with little else to form a political ideology, he cultivated and exposed in the German nation a widespread sense of resentment and damaged pride out of her defeat in 1918. By building up an image of the heroic Aryan and simultaneously creating an image of the dangerous and treacherous Jew, the Nazis' propaganda campaign successfully created a divide in the German sense of identity between the German and the Jewish 'other'. While the visual propaganda produced by the Nazis went some way to segregating the Jews and alienating them from their Aryan neighbours, the Nazis recognised that to fully convince the German population of the 'otherness' of the Jews, they would have to make the Jews fit their distorted imagery, before removing them entirely from the Third Reich of Hitler's vision.

A rapid policy of legislation and constitutional change discriminated against the Jews, prohibiting them from living successful, educated and socially free lives, before *Kristallnacht* saw a level of anti-Semitic violence unprecedented in the Nazi regime. With this boundary of violence and murder broken, the Nazis' persecution of the Jews accelerated after 1938 towards the Final Solution. By removing the Jews from their homes, jobs and education and forcing them into unsanitary, overcrowded ghettos and labour camps, the Jews began to fulfil the identity meted out to them in Nazi propaganda. By the 1940s, the Nazis had conditioned both the German population and the Jews of occupied Europe sufficiently, through a dehumanising propaganda and legislative campaign to begin their process of exterminating the Jews of Europe and removing the undesirable 'others' from the Aryan Third Reich. The lives of Levi in Italy and Wiesel in Romania had both been affected separately by Hitler's assumption of power. In the anti-Semitic construction of the Jew as 'other' which infiltrated the cultures of the occupied countries. Levi and Wiesel sensed their distance and 'otherness' from their Gentile neighbours. After a decade of Nazi rule, by the time of the arrival of Levi and Wiesel in Auschwitz, their Jewish identity had been deconstructed from 'without' and their formerly polarised lives were to converge in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Chapter Five

The Deconstruction of Jewish Identity in Auschwitz.

We now invite the reader to contemplate the possible meaning in the Lager of the words 'good' and 'evil', 'just' and 'unjust'; let everybody judge, on the basis of the picture we have just outlined and of the examples given above, how much of our ordinary moral world could survive on this side of the barbed wire.

(*Levi Man*: 92)

In their oppression of the Jews, the Nazis constructed a protracted and progressive system of dehumanisation and deconstruction of Jewish identity prior to the physical extermination which took place in the camps. The Nuremberg Laws barred the Jews from their professional and national identities in removing their citizen rights and in preventing marriages with Aryans the Jews were legislatively defined as both cultural and racial 'others'. The creation of the ghettos removed these 'others' from society and continued the system of dehumanisation. In a decade the Nazis had progressively stripped away the various facets of identity and citizen rights the Jews had fought for centuries to attain. In the East the Jewish population was no longer confined to the Pale of Settlement, but away from the more metropolitan cities they remained more isolated and segregated Jewish communities. In the West the Jews had won civil emancipation and were able to be a part of a national culture while maintaining their religious identity if they chose and also a national identity. The Polish extermination camps sealed the destruction of European Jewry.

Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi were both deported to Auschwitz in 1944. Within the camp system they were faced with a totally different world in which to survive and a new social and moral construct to negotiate. Under the tremendous physical, emotional and mental strain of the Holocaust the Jews of Eastern and Western Europe were forced to confront and re-engage with each other. In the extermination camps the cultural and geographic distinctions were removed as the stripping of identity was taken to its limit. Families and friends were separated, names removed and replaced with an anonymous number, civilian clothes and even hair were removed, denying a personal and physical identity. To compound this lack of individual identity, a hierarchy existed amongst the mass of anonymous prisoners. This was orchestrated in such a

way as to not only benefit the Nazis, but also to further damage the already weak and fractured sense of unity and camaraderie amongst the Jews and arguably to attempt to exonerate the Nazis from some of the most horrific acts and camp duties such as the operating of the crematoria. In exploiting the ambition and desperation of the Jews facing death, by putting them in positions of privilege against their fellow Jews and forcing a complicity in Jewish suffering and murder, the Nazis constructed a moral system in the camps and the ghettos that collapsed the ordinary binary opposition of good / victim (Jew) and evil / oppressor (Nazi). Wiesel and Levi were exposed to this new moral construct and hierarchy in their incarceration and were forced to determine and forge their own roles in the structure. The narratives of Levi and Wiesel record their attempts to negotiate a balance between maintaining their identity and humanity and surviving a system designed to destroy Jewry, mentally, emotionally and socially, as well as physically.

5.1 Swallowed Up By the Night: The Arrival at Auschwitz

The arrival at the Birkenau unloading ramp was a time of chaos and panic after the hours, days, even weeks of exhausting transit for the Jews and deportees of Europe. Jews of occupied countries' internment camps such as Fossoli where Levi was interned and ghettos such as Wiesel's in Sighet had experienced the Nazis' insidious methods of dehumanisation and deconstruction of identity to an extent. It was upon arrival at the camps however that the true extent of the Nazis' deconstruction of Jewish identity and the destruction of the Jewish people was revealed in the corruption, hierarchies and orchestrations of the concentration and extermination camps. Wiesel had experienced the ghetto system of incarceration and dehumanisation first-hand. Levi had not, but was aware of the Nazis' manipulation of the ambitious and functionary, but ultimately powerless collaborators from his experience of the Nazi take-over of the previously Fascist-run Fossoli detention camp (Thompson 2003: 157). Neither man however, was truly prepared for the full extent of Nazi rule and destruction that met them in Auschwitz. After days of arduous and exhausting travel across Europe in sealed cattle wagons, the deportation journeys of Wiesel and Levi came to an end in Poland at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp in 1944. Wiesel arrived in May with his family and they were

sent immediately to the Birkenau site (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 70). Levi had been deported from Italy in February, his own mother and sister still free at home (and his father having died years earlier of cancer) and having initially arrived at Auschwitz, had been transferred to various work details at the Monowitz-Buna site (Levi *Man*: 20).

Wiesel and Levi had both suffered the exhaustion, hunger, thirst and extreme discomfort of the transports to the camp, another preparatory stage in the concentration camp system and the Nazi policy of dehumanising their victims. After long journeys sealed in the freight wagons with no water or food, no space or peace to rest and no hygienic provisions, the deportees were tired, humiliated, with fraught nerves and with still no knowledge of their destination. Wiesel narrates in his literature the story of his neighbour from Sighet, Mrs Schächter, who is driven mad through the journey by her visions of fires and the toll her madness takes on the nerves of the people in her car. "Our nerves had reached a breaking point. Our very skin was aching. It was as though madness had infected all of us. We gave up. A few young men forced her to sit down, then bound and gagged her" (Wiesel *Night*: 26). The story of Mrs Schächter is told again by Wiesel in his later memoir *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 76). In using the imagery of a woman driven mad by visions of fires that no-one else can see until they face the chimneys of Birkenau, Wiesel not only illustrates the torturous journey the Jews had to endure, but also uses a motif traditional to Jewish history and literature, that of the prophet. Just as Moshe the beadle, who returns to Sighet from the pits of the *Einsatzgruppen* massacres to warn the Jews is not believed, nor is the visionary Mrs Schächter and so Wiesel highlights the shock and trauma the Sighet Jews experienced as they arrived at Birkenau (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 28-29).

This was the beginning of the Holocaust experience, the introduction to the camp system and already, through the trauma of the deportation journey the bonds between the Jews, fellow victims of the Nazi system, were being tested and damaged. Fellow Auschwitz (and Theresienstadt) survivor Ruth Kluger discusses in her memoir the fragile and turbulent relationships within her own family during the war years and beyond and defends her experience against the typical reaction that during times of such trauma: "the victims should have come closer together and formed strong bonds" (2003: 54). Kluger argues that the Nazi oppression only exacerbated the fragility of

human nature and in such confined and rigorously controlled environments as the trains and camps, the strain showed much faster and nerves were worn down much more severely. "In our heart of hearts, we all know the reality: the more we have to put up with, the less tolerant we get and the texture of family relations becomes progressively more threadbare. During an earthquake, more china gets broken than at other times" (Kluger 2003: 54).

Although he arrived later and was detained in a different part of the vast Auschwitz site, Wiesel's world collided with Levi's in 1944 at the point where their old lives disappeared into the chaos of the Auschwitz unloading ramps. With the harsh reality of the noise of German orders, the guard dogs, the beatings and the presence of strange emaciated men in striped uniforms, the memories of home were rapidly abandoned as Wiesel and Levi were forced to assimilate into the new world of what David Rousset termed "l'univers concentrationnaire", the concentrationary universe (Rousset 1946). After liberation, Wiesel argued against assimilation as he perceived it to be an abandonment of Jewish culture and tradition (*Wiesel Conversations*: 168). In assimilating into life at an extermination site, that is, in adapting successfully enough to avoid beatings, starvation, exhaustion and death, the Jews were required to suspend their reliance on their prior identities of culture, language, profession and class and rapidly learn the new rules of life in the camp. In only a matter of hours after arriving at Auschwitz Levi is able to say: "We already know in good part the rules of the camp, which are incredibly complicated" (*Levi Man*: 39).

As Wiesel and Levi recall their first night in Auschwitz, in their Holocaust testimonies *Night* and *If This is a Man* respectively, there are at first parallels in their language, particularly the symbolism of night to describe the disappearance of family, friends and compatriots, those with whom Levi and Wiesel had spent the previous days confined in cars, who "in the hour of decision," as Levi recalled, "said to each other things that are never said among the living" (*Levi Man*: 25). These men and women, who only days ago had become so close to each other, disappeared into the night never to be seen again. "The night swallowed them up, purely and simply" (*Levi Man*: 26). Levi lost friends and neighbours the night he entered Auschwitz. For Wiesel, his memory is scarred by the image of his mother and young sister being led away from him into the night; as with most women and young children they were led to the

gas chambers of Birkenau and immediately to their deaths. It is this memory that haunts his memoir and colours the rhetoric of his first night in Auschwitz. "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed" (Wiesel *Night*: 34). Wiesel's literary declaration in *Night* exemplifies his use of the imagery of night to describe his Holocaust experience and also opens up the theological tone of his narrative. In this early passage of his testimony, Wiesel's religious and literary identity is established.

5.2. Jewish 'Others': The Camp Infrastructure

The infrastructure and design of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the other Nazi concentration and extermination camps deliberately and successfully created divisions within the Jewish communities detained there. The sense of 'otherness' that divided the Jews outside of the camps during the early war years and throughout Modernity was promoted and cultivated in the camps. The bond that, as Kluger discusses, is normally expected to have united the Jews suffering the same plight, had already been fractured by the East / West divide, creating a cultural and religious separation between the Jews of each side of Europe and a weakened sense of camaraderie and unity between the groups as the Nazi oppression took hold in Europe. Through the camp system however, the bonds, alliances and community spirit unifying the Jews were to be deliberately and forcefully broken by the Nazis.

The Nazis' use of bureaucracy, infrastructure and design to divide, fracture and destroy Jewish identity and community was evident before the construction and implementation of the camps. Through the Nuremberg Laws the Jews were segregated, isolated and became second-class citizens, eventually losing almost all of their citizen rights. In response to the assassination of Ernst vom Rath in Paris in 1938, Germany's Jewish presses were abolished, denying the individual Jewish communities across Germany a voice, a system of support and a means of free communication. The creation of the ghettos performed as self-fulfilling for the Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda machine, as the once affluent, professional and integrated Jews were forced to become the dirty, starving and impoverished 'others' of Nazi propaganda living in unhygienic slums, begging and stealing to survive. The concentration and

extermination camp system was a development of the ghettos, turning the Jews into the ultimate 'other' to the desirable Aryan and in the process turning the Jews against each other by forcing them to survive in near-impossible situations under the most severe strain and tension. "The German executioners had transformed the Jewish body into a feared and hated object" (Glass 2004: 117).

The concentration and extermination camp system also transformed the persecution of the Jews in its use of Jewish collaborators. Willingly and unwillingly, Jews were recruited to assist with the running of the camps and the management of the prisoner populace. With the exception of the *Judenrat* (the Jewish officials and police of the Polish ghettos) this system was unique to the concentration and extermination camps and successfully separated and fractured the Jewish communities in camp. Within the camps which detained the 'others' of Nazi society, the SS had managed to construct a group of further 'others', the Jews who collaborated with their destroyers, weakening Jewish unity and support amongst the prisoners and thus further undermining the already fragile Jewish identity. There were several roles the Jews were expected to play in the camp system and several differing levels of collaboration and complicity, from the lowest level of the functionaries who swept and cleaned the barracks for extra food rations, to the Jewish *Kapos* and the *Sonderkommando*.

In general, they [the functionaries] were poor devils like ourselves, who worked full time like everyone else, but who, for an extra half-litre of soup, were willing to carry out these and other 'tertiary' functions: innocuous, sometimes useful, often invented out of nothing. (*Levi Drowned: 29*)

While the facts of the camp system make it clear that the Jewish prisoners were exploited and divided by the SS, the functionaries whom Levi discusses raise the point that occasionally the Jewish prisoners were able to exploit the SS for their own benefit.

In their system of useless cleaning rituals, endless roll calls and bureaucracy, the SS were pedantic and obsessed with order. Levi calls this system "useless violence" and dedicates an essay to it in *The Drowned and the Saved*. Levi acknowledged that much of the violence and brutality of the war he lived through was useful, even if it was horrific; useful in the sense that there was an aim and a desired outcome beyond

the violence and horror itself. The Nazi design of the Holocaust however, Levi argued, was largely useless, serving only to cause pain, trauma and violence. Beginning with the deportations to the camps in sealed train cars, Levi argued that the forcing of too many people per car with no provisions was a form of useless violence. Levi does concede however that the resulting trauma and dehumanisation from these journeys served to strip away the dignity of the prisoners and highlight their 'otherness' to German passengers at train stations en route to Auschwitz (Levi *Drowned*: 88). This act and many others of Nazi design were useful firstly in terms of propaganda and secondly in making the prisoners as vulnerable, exhausted and worn down as possible upon entry in the camps. Levi acknowledged this sadistic use of the design and administration of the Holocaust, but as they served no economic, financial or logistical purpose, he considers them to be forms of useless violence, not benefitting the Nazis, but heightening the suffering of the prisoners further. "It was a logical consequence of the system: an inhuman regime spreads and extends its inhumanity downwards. Unless it meets with resistance and exceptionally strong characters, it corrupts both its victims and its opponents" (Levi *Drowned*: 89). Levi and Wiesel both discuss some characters, from different backgrounds, whose moral will was strong enough to resist the corruption and inhumanity they were exposed to, but there were many more prisoners for whom the will to survive at any cost was stronger.

An example within Levi's narrative of a functionary position which supported the useless violence of the camp is the needlessly fastidious and impossible rule about bed-making in the barracks.

Anyone who did not make his bed properly, or forgot to make it, was punished publicly and savagely; furthermore, in every barracks there existed a pair of functionaries, the *Bettnachzieher* ('bed after-pullers': a term that I do not believe exists in normal German and that Goethe certainly would not have understood) whose task it was to check every single bed and then take care of its transversal alignment. (Levi *Drowned*: 94)

In assisting with the order and small details of camp administration, the functionaries had established positions within camp that benefited themselves, in a very small way, as well as the SS. This however was not an equally balanced relationship and these low

level functionaries could not be accused of or considered to be engaging in a mutually beneficial system of collaboration with the enemy. With the *Kapos* and *Blockältesters* (the barrack and work detail leaders) and the *Sonderkommando* units (those responsible for the running of the crematoria and the disposal of the bodies) in particular, the Nazi system of exploiting the Jews, forcing them to participate in the suffering and death of other Jews, was an integral part of the camp infrastructure and the social destruction of Jewry.

The *Kapos* played a significant role in the running and administration of the camps. While remaining subservient to the SS, the *Kapos*, in charge of large groups of prisoners, had the power to decide life or death and could make life bearable or could be a tyrant. Both Levi and Wiesel recall good and bad *Kapos* and Levi in particular, appears aware of the additional pressure the Jewish *Kapos* may have felt to perform their duties, to prove their worth to the SS by being particularly cruel or violent. Once in a position of relative privilege, the *Kapo* would not wish to risk losing their job, which could happen when he was deemed too kind or humane for the role. Wiesel recalls one such example, with the case of a Dutch *Oberkapo*, who was not only a benevolent leader but attempted to use his position to sabotage the SS and the camp.

The Oberkapo of the Fifty-second Cable Kommando was a Dutchman: a giant of a man, well over six feet. He had some seven hundred prisoners under his command, and they all loved him like a brother. Nobody had ever endured a blow or even an insult from him. (Wiesel *Night*: 63)

Wiesel does not meditate on the moral issues of Jewish complicity to the extent that Levi does and is apparently satisfied in *Night* to extol the virtues of the good *Kapos* and the rabbis who refused to comply with the moral complexity of Jewish collaboration. A more significant revelation relating Wiesel to the issue of Jewish complicity emerges in his autobiography. Wiesel discloses that the husband of his paternal aunt was also deported to a camp and “succumbed to the pressures and temptations of the camp life and became a cruel and murderous kapo” (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 73-74). Levi can evade the problem of a personal connection to the issue of complicity, but his fortune in this respect must be considered with Levi’s acknowledgement that he was fortunate enough to not lose his family in the Holocaust, as Wiesel did. A family such as Wiesel’s,

where such a large number of family members were deported to the camps was vulnerable to the statistical probability that someone in the family would succumb to the opportunity to comply with the SS. Wiesel admits the uncomfortable fact in his autobiography but does not dwell on it to question his uncle's motives or integrity. "My uncle in the enemy's service? A kapo? My uncle a torturer of his brothers in misfortune? I don't want to believe it. But yes, that's the way it was" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 74).

Levi and Wiesel appear to represent opposite views of the Jewish *Kapos* in Auschwitz. Levi suggests that the Jewish *Kapos* were more of a threat to the Jewish prisoners, anxious to maintain their positions and under more pressure to demonstrate their zeal for their role than the non-Jewish *Kapos*, who were not at such immediate risk of being sent to the gas chambers if they displeased the SS. "He is not a kapo who makes trouble, for he is not a Jew and so has no fear of losing his post" (Levi *Man*: 72). Wiesel conversely recalls his Jewish leader being more empathetic and kinder towards their fellow Jews. "It was good to have a Jew as your leader. His name was Alphonse. A young man with a startlingly wizened face. He was totally devoted to defending "his" block" (Wiesel *Night*: 51). As a non-religious Jew who did not attach himself to a Jewish community in camp and whose alliances tended to lie with other Italians, Levi appears to be wary of the divisions amongst the Jews, or more sensitive to the moral construct within the camps. He considers the Jewish 'prominents' to be more of a threat to the Jews than the non-Jewish prisoners, but as he is emotionally and culturally distanced from the majority of the Jews in Auschwitz, it is understandable that he may stay separate from the religious Jewish communities and observe the behaviours and constructs within camp. As a religious Jew with more involvement with other Eastern religious Jews, Wiesel allies himself with them and commemorates their morality and their unity. Wiesel's Jewish identity which although complex, he has maintained through his writing and public persona after the Holocaust is one deeply connected to the religious Jews of Europe, therefore it is in his interest to highlight the morality and the good / victim element of the camp binary, of his religious kin in Auschwitz, rather than interrogate the moral ambiguities of Jewish collaboration, as Levi does.

The *Sonderkommando* suffered more than any group of Jews in their moral position within the camp system. These Jews formed part of a rolling work unit, serving the unit for a period of usually twelve weeks before they themselves were killed in the gas chambers, their bodies destroyed by their successors. Very few *Sonderkommando* prisoners survived the camps and there is little in the way of testimony left by these Jews (Brown 2009). Having had the guilt of the SS forced upon them, the *Sonderkommando* prisoners who survived had to bear the memories and the shame of being both a victim and a collaborator of the SS and the physical responsibility of the deaths of thousands of Jews forced upon them. "This institution represented an attempt to shift on to others (specifically the victims) the burden of guilt, so that they were deprived of even the solace of innocence" (Levi *Drowned*: 37). The *Sonderkommando* as a unit and a device within the camp infrastructure are a significant factor in the question of complicity and judgement post-Holocaust and the ultimate example of the SS's use of Jewish labour and collaboration. Typically of his materialist identity and humanistic approach to writing, Levi interrogates the position of the *Sonderkommando* Jews and the psychology behind the Nazis' use of Jewish labour to murder Jews:

The Special Squads were largely made up of Jews. In a certain sense, this is not surprising since the Lager's main purpose was to destroy Jews and, beginning in 1943, the population in Auschwitz was composed of ninety to ninety-five percent Jews. From another point of view, one is stunned by this paroxysm of perfidiousness and hatred: it must be the Jews who put the Jews into the ovens, it must be shown that the Jews, the sub-race, the sub-men, bow to any and all humiliation, even to destroying themselves. (Levi *Drowned*: 35)

By forcing a section of the camp population to become representative of the self-destructive "sub-race", the SS thus legitimised their policy of genocide and justified their anti-Semitic propaganda that defined the Nazi era.

5.3 Jewish Conformity in the Camp Structure

Jewish conformity into the camp system was immediately obvious to the new inmates and retrospectively to the survivors, even if it was not a conscious or intentional behavioural transition. The constant perilous life and death situation within camp forced the inmates to rapidly recognise the divisive and self-centred system and to understand the behaviour necessary to survive, often to the exclusion and detriment of their fellow prisoners. The most vulnerable prisoners within this system were the new inmates. Arriving in Auschwitz after exhausting and traumatic journeys and immediately faced with the incomprehensible chaos of the unloading ramp, the selections and their arrival in the barracks, the new arrivals could only hope for some support, information and guidance from the existing prisoners. The newcomers were to discover that the Nazi design of destroying the bonds and the normal sense of humanity among the prisoners was effective and rapid and there was little sympathy for the newcomers from the old prisoners. Wiesel and his father experienced this attitude as they arrived at Birkenau's unloading ramp, but were fortunate to be offered an abrupt and brusque but lifesaving piece of advice.

“Hey, kid, how old are you?”

The man interrogating me was an inmate. I could not see his face, but his voice was weary and warm.

“Fifteen”

“No. You're eighteen.”

“But I'm not,” I say. “I'm fifteen.”

“Fool. Listen to what I say.” (Wiesel *Night*: 30)

Camp life bore the permanent threat to existence and survival depended greatly upon self-preservation. In the chaos and danger of the unloading ramp routine and the selections, there was little time for friendship and politeness, but Wiesel and his father were fortunate to have found a prisoner to give them a few seconds of time and save their lives. New inmates, arriving in their thousands in regular train loads, represented a further threat to the existence of the older prisoners who would have to make room for the next influx. Therefore the startled and disorientated new Jewish arrivals were treated coldly and cruelly by their predecessors and fellow Jewish victims of the Nazi system. Wiesel, despite the brief moment of help he had just received, elaborates on his arrival in Auschwitz:

He disappeared into the darkness. Another inmate appeared, unleashing a stream of invectives:

“Sons of bitches, why have you come here? Tell me, why?”

Someone dared to reply:

“What do you think? That we came here of our own free will? That we asked to come here?”

The other seemed ready to kill him. (*Wiesel Night*: 30)

Levi is more philosophical in his retrospective analysis of why the division between old prisoners and new was so strong and why the unity collapsed so quickly. He discusses the absurdity and cruelty of the hostility the new prisoners faced from their fellow Jews and explains the envy the existing prisoners felt, upon seeing the new arrivals, dressed in civilian clothes, innocent of the harsh new reality of Auschwitz.

The newcomer was envied because he still seemed to have on him the smell of his home. It was an absurd envy, because in fact one suffered much more during the first days of imprisonment than later on when habituation on the one hand and experience on the other made it possible to build oneself a shelter. (*Levi Drowned*: 24-25)

There is an implication evident within Holocaust testimony, the impression that the suffering experienced by the Jews in the camps should be equal. The new arrivals therefore were deemed by the older prisoners not to have suffered as much as they, not to understand the situation. The older inmates are portrayed as compounding the misery of the new arrivals and deriving a sense of satisfaction from that power. The Jews were helpless against the SS in camp, but as long as there were new arrivals there could still exist a hierarchy of power among the powerless, to which the prisoners consciously and unconsciously conformed, punishing their fellow prisoners for their naivety, their ignorance and their innocence, all virtues that were quickly lost in the camps. Wiesel refers to these older prisoners, those who envied and attacked the newcomers as “veterans”, prisoners who elevated their survivor status against the insignificant and pathetic newcomers. ““You’re lucky to have been brought here so late. Today this is paradise compared to what the camp was two years ago’...They burst out laughing. They were not veterans for nothing” (*Wiesel Night*: 70). Levi recalls the prisoner number hierarchy within Auschwitz and narrates the tricks and cruel

pranks that the 'low-number prisoners' played on the 'high-numbers'. He likens this division to any workplace or community outside of the concentration camps where there are "rookies" who have to prove their worth and become accepted and assimilated into the new environment (*Levi Man*: 34). The likeness of the Holocaust's moral construct to a normal work environment seems absurd, but as Levi among other survivors have discussed, language loses its meaning and impact in the Holocaust and to fully understand Auschwitz without experiencing it is impossible (*Levi Man*: 32). Levi relies upon everyday examples and similes to attempt to explain his experience.

What emerges in the Holocaust narratives, with regard to the rejection of the new prisoners by the old, is that this response, similarly typical in both Levi and Wiesel's narratives despite their differences, is the opposite to the Jewish rejection of Jews outside of the camp system. Throughout the Nazi years the Jews of Germany and the East became ever more persecuted, eventually fleeing their countries and searching for safety in the West. The Western Jews, such as the Italians, saw not fellow Jews in need of aid, nor a warning of what would become of them so soon, but a faceless mass of dirty, dishevelled and poverty stricken 'others'. As these 'other' Jews disappeared into the transports to Poland and established themselves in the camps, they turned the tables on the new arrivals; the dirty, starving Jews of Auschwitz, in their striped uniforms, who would fight each other for stale bread, looked down upon, rejected and reviled the newcomers who arrived well dressed, dehydrated and exhausted, but not yet starving to death. Even in the shadow of the crematoria, the divisions between the different communities of Jews existed, exacerbated by linguistic, cultural, religious and social differences and still, the East / West divide.

The design of the camps made it necessary for the Jews to abandon the normal rules of civilised society, to sever ties and bonds and to steal, collaborate and be ruthlessly self-serving in order to survive. Levi discussed a significant problem of representing the Holocaust experience to non-survivors to be the limitations of language and understanding. What it is to be hungry, cold and tired in a free world is not the same as the hunger, cold and exhaustion experienced in the camps. "It is an irksome habit of ours to intervene when someone (our children!) speaks about cold, hunger or fatigue. What do you know about it? You should have gone through what we did" (*Levi Drowned*: 69). Similarly, discussing Spiegelman's *Maus*, Smith cites

Vladek's conversation with his young son as illustrative of the point that what may be considered friendships outside of the camps take on an entirely different dynamic within the camp system (Smith 2009). The Holocaust survivor Vladek tells Artie: "Friends? Your Friends?...If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week...Then you could see what it is, friends!" (Spiegelman 1996: 6). When starvation, thirst and the threat of death are added to the equation, there is little room within one's life and little extra energy left to continue what would ordinarily exist as friendships. The friendships maintained in camp and recalled in the testimonies were typically ones which were mutually and materially beneficial. They became another way to survive the extraordinary circumstances of the camps and did not necessarily continue between survivors after liberation.

Levi recalls the system that forced the Jews to steal, barter and bargain to survive, but argues that most prisoners managed to retain enough humanity not to steal one another's bread. To steal someone's spoon, would make life extremely difficult for a prisoner, but to steal his bread ration could mean death. This was one area where the SS, despite all their encouragement could not force the Jews to turn against each other, sacrificing another's life for their own. In this desperate situation sometimes temptation proved stronger than civilised values. "Furthermore, all of us had stolen: in the kitchen, the factory, the camp, in short, 'from the others', from the opposing side, but it was theft nevertheless; some (few) had fallen so low as to steal bread from their own companions" (Levi *Drowned*: 56). It is noticeable that Levi here terms the SS "the other". Although he at times in his narrative appears to stand away from the majority of Jews in camp, when speaking as a prisoner of the Nazis, he adopts the 'us and them' language of a Jewish community united in suffering and the struggle to survive.

We travelled here in the sealed wagons; we saw our children leave towards nothingness; we, transformed into slaves, have marched a hundred times backwards and forwards to our silent labours, killed in our spirit long before our anonymous death. (Levi *Man*: 61)

Lucie Benchouiha terms this narrative effect "multiple testimony" and argues that Levi's narrative is unique among Holocaust testimonies for using his one voice to

represent the voice of the collective prisoner population (Benchouiha 2006: 7). Certainly, Levi allies himself with his fellow prisoners in discussing their common enemies and threats and the issues of behaviour and morality in the camp. Food and the lack of it became the primary focus of the prisoners within camp, occupying their thoughts and becoming a significant factor in the fights, the broken bonds and the divisions between the Jews in the camp. Wiesel recalls witnessing a fellow prisoner risking and ultimately losing his life for his courage in approaching an unattended cauldron of soup, when others dare not: "He had reached the first cauldron. Hearts were pounding harder: he had succeeded. Jealousy devoured us, consumed us. We never thought to admire him" (Wiesel *Night*: 59). Levi recounts a story, in an essay entitled "Shame" of sharing a secret water supply with his Italian friend Alberto to the exclusion of fellow Italian Daniele and the guilt he felt when facing Daniele again (Levi *Drowned*: 60-61). Levi's story echoes the powerful feelings of envy, jealousy and hurt Wiesel evokes in his narrative that occurred when one felt left out or robbed of a potential chance of food or drink and the enduring memories of such small instances, long after liberation.

Where the Jews did succumb to temptation or desperation at the expense of their fellow prisoners, or were forced into situations which divided the Jewish community within the camp, the Nazi system could claim a victory. Their camp structure was designed to destroy the Jews physically, but added to the damage by destroying the remaining humanity and sense of community the Jews had been able to cling to through the Nazi years. Levi refers to one instance in particular which demonstrated the sense of a fractured community in camp, in the form of a football match between the SS and the *Sonderkommando*. Levi, in uncharacteristic religious rhetoric and contempt for the SS orchestrators, likens the situation to Cain and Abel; these Jews, who kill their own, are broken, destroyed and in collaborating with the SS, have destroyed their blood bond, like Cain, they have been "dragged to the bottom" with the SS.

Behind this armistice one hears Satanic laughter: it is consummated, we have succeeded, you are no longer the other race, the anti-race, the prime enemy of the millennial Reich: you are no longer the people who reject idols. We have embraced

you, corrupted you, dragged you to the bottom with us. You are like us, you proud people, dirtied with your own blood, as we are. You too, like us and like Cain, have killed the brother. Come, we can play together. (Levi *Drowned*: 38)

Levi does not judge the *Sonderkommando*; both he and Wiesel recognise that the Jewish bonds and identities were extremely vulnerable and almost impossible to maintain in a system designed to destroy them. Levi and Wiesel have both recalled examples of other prisoners acting willingly and unwillingly against each other and also recognised such behaviour in themselves at times. While these narratives appear brutally honest and open, Levi's in particular, but Wiesel's too when he departs from the rhetoric he is better known for, it is important to consider that this behaviour is a result of the sense of institutionalisation the Jews of Auschwitz and the other camps suffered. In Auschwitz, the prisoners were plunged into a world unlike anywhere else. Just as limitations of language and understanding created difficulties for survivors to capture their extreme hunger, thirst and exhaustion in their narratives, so they experienced difficulties explaining the moral constructs they were faced with in the camps to an unfamiliar readership. The social conventions of everyday life no longer existed, as the Jews were forced to engage with a system that actively promoted selfishness and cruelty and prohibited community spirit and unity. The Jews were pushed to the very limits of their humanity and where they conformed to the harsh and divisive system laid down by the Nazis this was generally and most often an unconscious and necessary survival device. Wiesel recalls the strength of this system in his painful realisation that he too, must reject even the closest bond he had, with his father, in order to survive.

I had watched it all happening without moving. I kept silent. In fact, I had thought of stealing away in order not to suffer the blows. What's more, if I felt anger at that moment, it was not directed at the Kapo but at my father. Why couldn't he have avoided Idek's wrath? That was what life in a concentration camp had made of me... (Wiesel *Night*: 54)

Wiesel is recalling in this paragraph the point at which exhaustion had overtaken his need to protect his father. As Shlomo Wiesel succumbed to the beatings of the *Kapo*

Wiesel recalls the frustration he felt directed at his father, who was helpless in front of his son. As Wiesel had been forced to rapidly grow up and become an adult in the camp, a role reversal had begun to take place; with his father weakening, it was the younger Wiesel who assumed responsibility and protectiveness over his father at a time when the younger Wiesel was extremely vulnerable and had previously depended on the traditional parental support structure his father had provided. The overwhelming exhaustion which made the prisoners unable or at least reluctant to spare their time and energy on each other has been discussed as a facet of the Nazi design of the camp system. In the passage discussed, Wiesel discusses the insidious apathy towards his own father developing through his exhaustion. He is unable to prevent the horrific scene in front of him and is devastated by it, but as he cannot stop the *Kapo's* actions himself and does not want to witness the beating, his frustration becomes redirected towards his father, the victim of the scenario, for forcing Wiesel to confront his own inaction and helplessness.

Despite the carefully constructed Nazi system which was designed to force the Jewish prisoners into complicity with and conformity to the SS, breaking the bonds between themselves, there were many examples of resistance to this complicity and unity amongst the prisoners. Friendships began and continued against adversity, notably the friendship between Levi and Alberto, who is a prevalent figure in Levi's Holocaust narrative. Throughout their time in Auschwitz the pair sought out ways to survive together and to beat the Nazi system through their unity. Levi also found support in the form of his Polish bunk-mate Resnyk. A tall new-comer to Levi's barrack, Resnyk not only took care of making up the bunk on a morning, for the less statuesque Levi, but also supported him throughout the work detail, although Levi confesses in his narrative he was acting out of self interest in partnering himself with Resnyk, who according to the code of the camp should "refuse me with disdain and form a pair with another more robust individual" (*Levi Man: 73*). As Levi is himself aware, Resnyk was under no obligation to help him, on the contrary, to do so was to further sap Resnyk's energy and strength, weakening his own chances of survival, while increasing Levi's. "Instead, Resnyk accepts, and even more, lifts up the sleeper by himself and rests it on my right shoulder with care" (*Levi Man: 73*). The care, time and energy Resnyk devotes to helping Levi survive the hard labour is a further example Levi is able to recall of one

prisoner resisting the camp system to help another. There clearly were several instances of unity and bonds which individual prisoners maintained with each other, such as Wiesel and his father, Levi and Alberto and for a time, Resnyk. As Levi acknowledges however with his support from Resnyk, and Wiesel discovered with his father, to give someone else support cost time and energy prisoners could not freely spare.

Levi and Alberto shared a national identity which was their initial and primary bond. Levi found further humanity in the camps in another Italian, Lorenzo. An Italian (non-Jewish) civilian worker who donated his food to his compatriot, wrote a postcard for him, and gave him an extra layer of clothing, Levi thanks Lorenzo for his life, not only for the vital extra layer against the cold and the extra rations, as the prisoners were systematically starved, but for reminding Levi of the humanity that existed amidst a landscape of death and despair. "But Lorenzo was a man; his humanity was pure and uncontaminated, he was outside this world of negation. Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man" (*Levi Man*: 128). In the case of both Alberto and Lorenzo, who are remembered with positivity and fondness by Levi, the bond is a national one and it is the Italian identity which endures in Levi's memory and narrative of the people who sustained him in camp. For the non-religious Levi, who drew no comfort from the displays of religious faith around him in Auschwitz, the shared linguistic and cultural identity of the Italian prisoners provided a strong element of support and demonstrated that national and cultural ties could exist with effort in the camps. In an environment where the language was so harsh, foreign and often indecipherable to most of the prisoners and the surroundings bleak and desperate, a voice in a familiar language, or a shared cultural identity brought hope, strength and unity.

For Wiesel, his closest friend and ally in the camp was his father. Despite the exhausted resentment of his father that Wiesel experienced and blamed himself for at his death at Buchenwald, father and son had remained close throughout their time in Auschwitz, during the work details and selections and even during the exhausting evacuation from Poland into Germany. Wiesel, like Levi, attributes the bond of an ally, a genuine friend in camp, to his survival. Having someone to speak to and to share the dream of liberation and life after Auschwitz with, was a vital psychological imperative

to survive, particularly in Wiesel's case when he did not know the fate of his mother or sisters.

They [the Germans] tried to get the inmates to think only of themselves, to forget relatives and friends, to tend only to their own needs, unless they wanted to become "Mussulmen." But what happened was just the reverse. Those who retreated to a universe limited to their own bodies had less chance of getting out alive, while to live for a brother, a friend, an ideal, helped you hold out longer. (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 80-81)

The role of the *Kapo* was one which was open to the possibility of complicity. Levi recalled the *Kapos* who felt the need to prove their worth to the SS in a form of self-protection. Good and caring *Kapos* have also been recalled and discussed. The religious community that Wiesel surrounded himself with attempted to maintain a semblance of religious structure to their lives in Auschwitz, and looked to their faith for protection, rather than attempting to play the Nazis' game of protecting themselves at the expense of others. Wiesel recalls of the rabbis of Auschwitz: "With a single exception, no rabbi agreed to become a kapo. All refused to barter their own survival by becoming tools of the hangmen. All preferred to die rather than serve death" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 86). The tremendous moral strength required to refuse opportunities of self-preservation are enduring and memorable examples of the moral, religious and determined spirit of the Jews throughout the Holocaust. While the non-religious Jews in Auschwitz also found ways of resisting the insidious and destructive tools of the SS, the examples of the rabbis' refusals demonstrate that maintaining their religious beliefs and morals was, in itself, an act of non-compliance and defiance of the SS's designs. While the rabbis stood their ground against the cruel system of the camp, Wiesel does recall the kind words and the encouragement that one *Kapo* shared with the newcomers. Amid the chaos, the brutality and the fear that surrounded Wiesel's first night in camp, he recalls the Pole who urged the prisoners to show camaraderie and keep faith in the future, the "first human words" Wiesel heard in Auschwitz: "We are all brothers and share the same fate. The same smoke hovers over all our heads. Help each other. That is the only way to survive" (Wiesel *Night*: 41).

The Nazi system of deconstructing Jewish identity was effective where the prisoners were totally dehumanised. By removing the ability to keep clean and hygienic, removing the dignity of privacy, speaking to the inmates as animals and by forcing them to become selfish, fighting each other to survive, the prisoners began to lose their sense of humanity in the camps. By shaving the prisoners' hair, replacing their names with numbers, replacing civilian clothes with dirty and anonymous striped prison garb and disregarding all native languages for the harsh German of the camps, the Jews were robbed of their individual, national and cultural identities, forming a faceless mass of the 'other'. It took strength, energy and determination not only to retain a sense of humanity and identity, but also to remind each other that they remained men, even in Auschwitz. Levi recalls his debate with fellow prisoner Steinlauf, who every day devoted his energy to washing as best he could and reprimanded Levi for not doing the same. Although loath at the time to waste his energy on such a pointless procedure, Levi remembered Steinlauf's lesson, "that precisely because the Lager was a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts" (Levi *Man*: 47). Wiesel recalls a similar lecture at the end of his Auschwitz experience, as the camp prepared to evacuate. Instructed by their *Blockälteste* to clean the barrack before they left, Wiesel and his fellow prisoners, like Levi, failed to see the point in wasting valuable energy: "'For the liberating army', he told us. 'Let them know that here lived men and not pigs'. So we were men after all? The block was cleaned from top to bottom" (Wiesel *Night*: 84). Despite the exhausting, dehumanising months in camp, both Levi and Wiesel and many more prisoners fought against the Nazi system; they resisted the disruptive and calculated SS methods of tearing apart the Jewish community and identity.

5.4 Grey Zones: Privilege in the Camps

One of the most debilitating and damaging facets of the camp system to Jewish identity within Auschwitz was the issue of privilege. Jews who assumed various roles in the camps (and earlier in the ghettos) for small benefits such as extra food, clothing, alcohol or sellable items, in return for undertaking jobs that were harmful towards their fellow prisoners, assumed the dubious title of being privileged. In actively or

vicariously harming other prisoners to meet their own needs, these Jews, despite potentially suffering a more amplified sense of the guilt and shame that is commonly referred to by survivors, demonstrated that the SS could separate the Jews, fracture the unity of the Jewish community and in effect, corrupt one group of Jews to act against another. The *Kapos* and the barrack functionaries have been discussed here, as have the *Sonderkommando* and it is this group, the mainly Jewish units formed by the SS which so effectively demonstrate the extent to which one group could be manipulated, conditioned, or forced to act against another.

Levi dedicates an essay in *The Drowned and the Saved* to the moral ambiguity of so-called privileged prisoners, whom he places in a “grey zone” of moral understanding and judgement (Levi *Drowned*: 22-51). Levi discusses not only the *Sonderkommando*, but also Jewish doctors who worked side-by-side with Nazi doctors in camp and prominent Jews of the Polish ghettos. The *Sonderkommando* however were faced with the harshest reality of the camps, the role of not only coaxing and forcing their fellow Jews and other prisoners into the gas chambers, maintaining the lie that they were being led to the showers, but also the duties of emptying the gas chambers of corpses, sorting through the dead bodies and then disposing of them in the crematoria. While these Jews played a significant role in the destruction of European Jewry, they were arguably among the most victimised tools of the Nazi system. By forcing the *Sonderkommando* to participate in the murder of their friends, families and compatriots, the SS were, to a degree, washing their hands of the responsibility and blame for mass murder and to another end, creating a divide in Jewish unity in the camps. The *Sonderkommando* unit as Levi observes, were not saved by this role, refusal meant instant death and even acceptance, for all the petty privileges, extended the prisoners’ lives by only three to four months (Levi *Drowned*: 34).

Levi’s point of discussion regarding the *Sonderkommando* is that the issue of these Jews collaborating with the SS arguably collapses the binary good / evil divide in the camp; the grey zone Levi refers to is the grey zone of judgement and morality. There is evident in some Holocaust studies, particularly ones which consider the Jewish persecution from a religious perspective, the sense that the Jews collectively represent the identity of ‘the victims’ and ‘the good’ and the SS collectively share the identity of

'the perpetrators' and 'the evil'. Wiesel's work often falls into this category as he discusses a Jewish population in Europe, betrayed by Gentiles whether Nazi or not (a similar theme is to be found in Berkovits 1979 which also considers the Holocaust within a religious framework). In collaborating with the enemy the image of the victim Jew becomes very complex. There is in theory a binary separation between the identities of Jew and Nazi within the camp. Where Jews join with the Nazis and the SS, to act against other Jews, there is a blurring of the lines and a collapse in the binary opposition and in the normal moral paradigm. "Levi's grey zone is essentially a metaphor for moral ambiguity" (Brown 2009). Levi is arguing that the Nazi system, and in particular the use of Jewish labour for the *Sonderkommando*, represents a system in which all normal modes of behaviour, morality, logic and choice have been destroyed by the Nazis. To engage in a normal system of judgement against the *Sonderkommando* therefore is inadequate, redundant and unfair. While Levi is not explicitly referring to a fracture in Jewish unity in the camps, having already referred to several more minor fractures and divisions, the existence of the debate over privileged Jews and the argument Levi engages so thoroughly in, suggests that for the victims and survivors of the camps there is clearly an enduring memory and a preoccupation with those Jews deemed to have more privileges than themselves and a discomfort with the idea that some people could break with the unity of the victim Jews and ally themselves with the enemy SS.

The prisoners' preoccupation with privilege and with each other's status leads to an interesting comparison between Levi and Wiesel. While Levi clearly acknowledged the debt he owed his education and his scientific background in enabling him to work in the relatively safe and comfortable Buna chemistry laboratories, the privileged prisoners for him are other Jews, the *Kapos*, the *Sonderkommando* (although for Levi, the term privileged is an uncomfortable and unfair one). While acknowledging his fortune, Levi does not consider himself one of the privileged. Wiesel however, has made the point that Levi had a job which provided him with privileges which were not available to him. "He was a chemist; I was nothing at all. The system needed him, but not me (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 83). Despite the differing situations of Levi and Wiesel, the different alliances and privileges and hardships both men suffered within camp, there is clearly a sense of 'otherness' and a fracture in their

own Jewish unity and the common victim identity when the issue of privilege is introduced.

5.5 Conclusion

For Wiesel and Levi, the extermination camp system was a test of their bonds and their identities. National, cultural and even familial ties were pushed to breaking point under an ideology of deceit, division and cruelty. In testimonies and narratives of differing style, tone and language, Wiesel and Levi similarly recall the trauma of the SS programme which actively sought to destroy the bonds, alliances and unity of the Jews through privilege, hierarchy and systematic dehumanisation. In the brutality of their narratives and the openness of their various recollections, both Wiesel and Levi interrogate the camp structure and demonstrate the cruel success of the Nazis' divisive methods. However, in their recollections of enduring bonds and alliances such as Wiesel's father and Levi's compatriots Alberto and Lorenzo, the two survivors maintain that not all humanity and facets of Jewish identity could be destroyed in Auschwitz. Levi and Wiesel observed the desire to survive at all costs in the behaviour of other prisoners in Auschwitz. Both also candidly narrate times when they themselves were weakened by the same desperation. The moral strength and unity amongst the Jews that maintained the mutual support which both men relied upon is however, attributed to differing facets of Jewish identity. In their testimonies the differing social, cultural and religious backgrounds of Levi and Wiesel are evident. Although both men discuss the collapsing moral structure of normal life, in the new concentrationary universe the exceptions to this moral collapse that both survivors recall emerge from differing perspectives. Wiesel's religious identity is evident in the religious morals he cites, such as in the rabbis' refusal to act as *Kapos*. Levi focuses on the national bonds he maintained in camp and discusses the humanitarianism in camp rather than the metaphysical strength of character that religious figureheads in Auschwitz managed to find in camp. In their own resistance to the deconstruction of Jewish identity in Auschwitz, once again the differing identities of Levi and Wiesel emerge, as Levi clings to his Italian identity and Wiesel to his religious faith. Despite the differences in identity, Levi and Wiesel similarly demonstrated and argued that there was resistance

to the self-serving rule of the camp and as demonstrated in these Holocaust testimonies, though 'dragged to the bottom' with the SS, men did exist in Auschwitz.

Chapter Six

Narrative, Testimony and Holocaust Memory

Everybody around us was weeping. Someone began to recite Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. I don't know whether, during the history of the Jewish people, men have ever before recited Kaddish for themselves.

(Wiesel *Night*: 33)

It is through the Holocaust testimonies of Levi and Wiesel that the different identities of the two men are most clearly presented. The differing ways that Levi and Wiesel recall, narrate and interrogate their shared experience in Auschwitz sets apart their Jewish identities as they are being deconstructed by the Nazis. In the concentrationary universe the cultural, national and religious identities of Levi and Wiesel divided the two men despite their joint plight and subsequently influenced their representations of the Holocaust experience. Levi and Wiesel do not discuss in any detail the role of, or their experiences of women in the camps in their initial testimonies and therefore female survivor testimony is not a significant issue to be raised in the study. However, as Holocaust theory developed as a field alongside the burgeoning literary industry of testimony, questions of female memory and literary representation emerged as a comparison to the more prolific and numerous male authored testimonies in publication. The issue of female testimony and gendered memory is discussed at this point by way of encompassing a now significant facet of Holocaust theory and offering a potential point of similarity between Levi and Wiesel as they are situated, in theory, together in opposition to female survivors.

Religious practice and the contentious issue of faith in the Holocaust is explored in more detail in the following chapter but presently the East / West divide and the Jewish prisoners' engagement with their religious history are revisited in the continuation of the comparison between Eastern and Western European Jewry. The Nazi system of the extermination camps collapsed the social, cultural and geographic East / West Jewish divide from outside of Jewry, but through the Auschwitz experience and beyond liberation the metaphysical and materialist East / West construct is explored to evaluate if it re-emerges as a continuing divide between Levi and Wiesel.

The literary heritages of East and West, those of Aleichem in the East and Kafka in the West are discussed with a consideration of their metaphysical and materialist attitudes and Levi and Wiesel's continuation of a divided East / West literary path is explored.

6.1 Häftling A-7713: Elie Wiesel

The search for and interaction with Jewish life and identity in Auschwitz is far more prominent in Wiesel's Holocaust literature than in Levi's. From the beginning of his Auschwitz experience, an experience that is recalled in *Night* with a strong religious and theological narrative, Wiesel's recollection of his life in Auschwitz is closely connected with the religious and Hasidic Jewish community. Having come from a community and a family with such a strong sense of religious Jewish identity and being part of the observant and devout Hasid, it is natural that Wiesel and his father would search out and become close to other Hasidic Jews. Wiesel is able to recall many fellow prisoners with whom he shared prayers, debates and dreams of a Jewish future and his testimony suggests that there was a close community of Jewish prisoners united by their beliefs and religious identity. "Evenings, as we lay in our cots, we sometimes tried to sing a few Hasidic melodies. Akiba Drumer would break our hearts with his deep, grave voice" (Wiesel *Night*: 45).

The established religious community Wiesel was immersed in during his time in Auschwitz is present throughout his testimony, the trauma of daily life numbed and helped along by the community support he received. This community support is something that is absent from Levi's testimony, with the exception of a small number of individuals such as Alberto. Wiesel recalled the sacrifices of food some prisoners made to be able to wear the contraband phylacteries and the escapism found in studying the *Mishna* as they laboured. "I can see us now, carrying bags of cement or large stones, pushing wheelbarrows filled with sand or mud, all the while studying a law of the *Mishna* or a page of the *Talmud*" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 82). As the religious Jews in Auschwitz suffered they engaged with their people's historic struggle against persecution. The victim identity experienced in camp is intertwined with the strong faith and religious identity displayed by the devout Jews. Despite the despair, the helplessness and the horror of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Wiesel's writing is informed by a

sense of hope and faith in Judaism. The Nazi persecution is discussed within a context of persecution of the Jews from the time of civilisation in Israel and endured with the hope of the return to the Jewish Promised Land. Captivated by the Zionist dream of a homeland in Palestine, Wiesel recalls his youthful plans for the future, after Auschwitz and after the defeat of the Nazis: "We decided that if we were allowed to live until the Liberation, we would not stay another day in Europe. We would board the first ship to Haifa" (Wiesel *Night*: 51). The religious Jews might have suffered a more devastating blow to their faith than the non-religious Jews when faced with the reality of Auschwitz-Birkenau, as represented in Wiesel's narrative, but it was these Jews who could view their oppression within the Scriptural history and Covenant and anticipate their return to Israel.

Just as Wiesel's writing focuses strongly on the religious community he found within Auschwitz as a deeply religious child upon entering the camp, his testimony is naturally also full of theological issues, questions and rhetoric. The reality of Auschwitz and the realisation of the fate of Europe's Jews presented to Wiesel, still so young at the time, some difficult questions of faith with which he was preoccupied throughout his Holocaust testimony and his subsequent literature. Despite his involvement in religious debate within his own small community, Wiesel recalls his struggle with maintaining the religious practices and observances of the Jewish calendar as he became more disillusioned with his faith. Wiesel begins several sections of *Night* with the names of Jewish holidays, namely *Passover*, *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, indicating that the events themselves were and continued to be clearly significant for him. The calendar dates and the memory of the religious observance in Auschwitz remained with Wiesel, even if these dates, both sombre and celebratory, became contaminated in Auschwitz with bitterness and frustration at the surroundings within which the faithful Jews were marking their observance. Wiesel's narrative is filled with the Job-like lament for the Jewish victims of Auschwitz and with a continuing and developing theme of religious rebellion which marks Wiesel's literary output. The religious lament which Wiesel and his writings were to become known for began in *Night* with his refusal to participate in the religious ceremonies still devoutly held, even in the camps. From his refusal to fast for *Yom Kippur*, to the anger he portrays as the

religious congregation gather to 'celebrate' the Jewish New Year, Wiesel's narrative is in many places a pained theological self-examination as much as a testimony.

How could I say to Him: Blessed be Thou, Almighty, Master of the Universe, who chose us among all nations to be tortured day and night, to watch as our fathers, our mothers, our brothers end up in the furnaces? Praised be Thy Holy Name, for having chosen us to be slaughtered on Thine altar? (Wiesel *Night*: 67)

What emerges as notable throughout Wiesel's narrative is the dependence upon the traditions and rituals of the Jewish faith amongst his community. As with his refusal to participate fully in the religious holy days, they nevertheless provided a stable framework for Wiesel to keep track of his time in camp, to recall his fellow prisoners and to situate his memories and his narrative within. Despite the doubts and the rejections of faith that his community suffered at times, the religious spirit was a significant part of their identity in a culture where every other facet of identity was forcibly removed. The small rites and rituals of the Jewish faith that were still possible within the camp naturally became valuable and more significant for both the devout and the protestors, as Wiesel at times became. One of the most significant of these rituals in the Jewish faith, particularly within the Nazi extermination system and one that features in Wiesel's literature was that of *Kaddish*; the prayer for the dead. Referring again to Akiba Drumer, who led his fellow prisoners in the Hasidic songs, Wiesel recalls that as soon as his faith began to suffer Drumer knew he would not survive Auschwitz. Although he no longer felt able to maintain his optimistic faith Drumer, knowing his fate was the gas chamber, requested that Wiesel and his community say *Kaddish* for him (Wiesel *Night*: 77). Drumer was not prepared to relinquish the last Jewish ritual and the comfort it provided him with, even if he could no longer maintain his hope or the more active rituals of the Jewish faith. Wiesel's narrative demonstrates that while the reality of Auschwitz caused crises of faith amongst even the most devout prisoners, religious identity and the rituals that attend it is something more ingrained and something much more difficult to relinquish, especially in the camps where there was little remaining for the prisoners to rely upon to maintain a Jewish identity.

6.2 Häftling 174517: Primo Levi

Within a comparative analysis of Levi and Wiesel's writing there are clearly issues and themes which the two writers recall similarly. One of these is the search for unity and for bonds within the camp, although the identities Levi and Wiesel represent differ even in Auschwitz. While Wiesel found himself amongst fellow Hasidim and religious Jews he could pray and engage with, Levi looked to his national identity and searched out fellow Italians to bond with. Levi arrived in Auschwitz with 649 other Italians deported from Fossoli, but after the chaos of the unloading ramp and the initial selection, the number of Italians depleted and continued to in the following days and weeks of life in Auschwitz (Levi *Man*: 22). He recalls in *If This is a Man* how the Italians of his camp arranged to meet weekly for support and how that initial hope and comfort rapidly turned to despair and unhappiness as the number of Italians present decreased week by week.

We Italians had decided to meet every Sunday evening in a corner of the Lager, but we stopped it at once, because it was too sad to count our numbers and find fewer each time, and to see each other ever more deformed and more squalid. (Levi *Man*: 43)

There were notable bonds that Levi maintained in camp, particularly with Alberto, his Italian comrade, friend and partner in crime. With Alberto, Levi formed a close bond as the two men worked together, stole, bartered and organised food and resources to ensure their own survival (Levi *Man*: 63). Such was their closeness that other friends and allies within the camp were excluded from the partnership of Levi and Alberto. One such example is fellow Italian Daniele. Recalling a story of finding a water spigot and secretly sharing the precious water only with Alberto, Levi shares his torment that his secrecy and closeness with Alberto hurt Daniele, who considered himself a friend and ally of the other two men.

We drank all the water, in small, avaricious gulps, changing places under the spigot, only the two of us. On the sly; but on the march back to camp at my side I found Daniele, all grey with cement dust, his lips cracked and his eyes feverish, and I felt guilty. (Levi *Drowned*: 61)

As if to counter balance the pressure of the memory on his own conscience, Levi recalls with a sense of relief his recollection of having offered some comfort and attention to a fellow Italian although he did not have the energy to offer such support to everyone who needed it: "I had also deeply assimilated the principal rule of the place, which made it mandatory that you should first of all take care of yourself" (Levi *Drowned*: 59). In adapting to the self-preserving rule of the concentration camp that you take care of yourself above all else, Levi maintained a bond with a small minority of people in camp. The relationships with other prisoners in Levi's case, more explicitly evident in his writing than in Wiesel's narrative, were those which were often due to a shared assimilated or Western identity as well as being mutually beneficial. The bonds Levi represents are practical and as in the case of his friendship with Alberto provide him with a sense of cultural familiarity, admiration and mutually beneficial friendship. Levi writes admiringly of Alberto as a fellow outcast, "none of us Italians have shown an equal capacity for adaptation", but one who proved himself to be incorruptible and popular (Levi *Man*: 63). With his trusted Italian friend by his side, Levi and Alberto survived the camp together sharing vital resources such as the water spigot. Levi's openness about the appeal of materially beneficial friendships is not so transparent in Wiesel's narrative and again marks out Levi as a writer who assumes the role of the brutally honest and unsentimental witness. This literary identity is a construction in the same way Wiesel's suffering and protesting Jew is, but the two constructions indicate how differently Levi and Wiesel present themselves and their experiences of Auschwitz.

Levi's national identity, while being an intrinsic part of his close and immensely beneficial friendship with Alberto was, as he recalled, initially a problem for himself and for his compatriots in understanding the camp system and its rules. The Italian Jews were not popular in the camp among the prisoners of elsewhere in Europe and were mocked by prisoners and guards alike. Jews like Levi were of the Italian bourgeoisie, intellectuals and professionals. Levi did not speak Yiddish, leaving him unable to communicate with many of the non-Italian prisoners. Being from the bourgeoisie and unused to hard labour may have created a social divide in terms of class outside of the concentration camp system, a divide which potentially continued into the camps to an extent. The ineptitude of these middle-class Jews in the physical

work details was a source of amusement to the guards and of frustration to their fellow prisoners who had to share the workloads with them. This divide between the Italian Jews and the Eastern fellow prisoners may have been a continuation of the class divide from the outside world but in the exhausting and life-threatening climate of the labour details the lack of unity could be predominantly attributed to the need for self-preservation and reluctance to spare precious energy on another less skilled prisoner, such was the deconstruction of unity and social support engendered in the prisoners by the tactics of the SS.

Everyone knows that the 174000s are the Italian Jews, the well-known Italian Jews who arrived two months ago, all lawyers, all with degrees, who were more than a hundred and now are only forty; the ones who do not know how to work and let their bread be stolen, and are slapped from the morning to the evening. (*Levi Man*: 55)

Levi displays in his recollection of having to learn how to use a shovel in Auschwitz how his inexperience at physical labour created a clear divide between himself, the intellectual and his fellow Jews from the East who were more used to the hard labour (*Levi Drowned*: 107).

The 'otherness' of the Italian Jews was largely a contributing factor to the rapid decrease in their population during their early days in Auschwitz. All of the SS orders were spoken in German and in a kind of German unique to the camps; harsh single-word commands, slang and language used to address animals rather than people.

So I realised that the German of the Lager – skeletal, howled, studded with obscenities and imprecations – was only vaguely related to the precise, austere language of my chemistry books, and to the melodious, refined German of Heine's poetry that Clara, a classmate of mine, would recite to me. (*Levi Drowned*: 75-76)

Without any knowledge of German, survival was almost impossible and most of the Italian deportees spoke only Italian. Among the prisoners who did not speak German, Yiddish was widely spoken, with the vast majority of prisoners being Jews from the East of Europe where Yiddish was commonplace. The assimilated Jews of Italy, Levi included, had little or no knowledge of this distinctly Jewish language which created a

divide between the Italians and many of the Eastern Jews who rejected the Italians as Jews who could not speak the common European language of the Jews. “The Polish, Russian and Hungarian Jews were astonished that we Italians did not speak it [Yiddish]: we were suspect Jews not to be trusted” (Levi *Drowned*: 78). With no comprehension of the rules and orders of the camp and with little support from the Yiddish-speaking existing prisoners, the Italians were very much a minority in Auschwitz, a group of ‘others’ within a whole structure of ‘others’. Fortunately for Levi, his scientific background was to be his salvation at his arrival in camp, not for the last time during his period in Auschwitz. Having studied German language chemistry books, he had a basic knowledge of German and was able to recognise significant words and commands. His German-language education was furthered in Auschwitz by sacrificing his bread for lessons from an Alsatian prisoner (Levi *Drowned*: 75). Levi credits his knowledge of the German language and particularly of German chemistry texts in part with his survival. Having a knowledge of chemistry that he could transmit in German attained Levi his job in the chemistry laboratory of the Buna camp, eventually giving him a place to work indoors with physically undemanding work and more food and warmth, which improved his health and strength sufficiently for him to survive to see the Allied liberation.

6.3 Memory in the Holocaust Narrative

Primo Levi states in *The Drowned and the Saved* that memory is a “marvellous but fallacious instrument” (Levi *Drowned*: 11). Levi completed this last collection of essays meditating on his Holocaust experience at a mental and emotional distance of over 40 years. His first piece of literature *If This is a Man*, although the initial manuscript was written and published in the late 1940s, was not widely circulated and read until the 1950s when changes had been made to the text. This was also the case with Wiesel’s *Night* (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 267). The revisions Levi and Wiesel made to their narratives indicate that their memories and interpretations of their Holocaust experiences changed from their immediate narratives to their understanding of their experiences years later. In constructing an identity to be publicly represented, Levi and Wiesel necessarily had to ensure that their narratives were acceptable to the post-Holocaust

public. There is an issue in writing a memoir of events, with representing the past lived event as it happened when looking back. This is particularly relevant when the event is as traumatic as the Holocaust. The fallaciousness of memory, as Levi calls it and the deliberate trajectories the authors choose to tell their story, create a conflict between the survivor and the testifier. In studying the Holocaust narratives that the survivors are firstly, able to recall and secondly, wish to tell, the reader cannot rely wholly upon the accuracy of the events narrated and the true details of the Holocaust may be distorted by the survivors themselves.

What is problematic furthermore in much first-generation research on the Holocaust and gender is that there is no discussion of *how* Holocaust narratives (written or spoken) relate to lived experience. Instead, narratives are seen as trustworthy historical sources. Testimony is read or interpreted as if it were a reflection of an easily accessible truth. (Bos 2003: 180-81)

Pascale Rachel Bos highlights three points of selection made by the survivor / author, deliberately or not, when narrating their Holocaust experience. Firstly the selection of particular events that are chosen to be discussed, secondly the events and memories that can actually be remembered and accessed by the survivor and thirdly, the rhetorical strategy decided upon; “a structure, a tone, a narrative order” (Bos 2003: 181). When studying the literature of Levi and Wiesel, Bos argues that in making the creative transition from survivor to author, both men have consciously or unconsciously experienced these three stages of selection and faced these issues of narrating a lived event from the past.

Bos has studied the gender differences in Holocaust memory and how they influence narratives. Specifically she has considered the differences between male and female survivor testimonies in how they remember bonds, relationships and instances of heroism. It is significant when studying the differences and similarities in gendered memory to consider that until the 1980s, the majority of Holocaust testimonies were written by male survivors; therefore the narrative studies and theories to emerge in this field were predominantly andro-centric. Gendered theory and a comparison with female testimony are relevant to a study of Levi and Wiesel when similarities appear in their narrative. This would support the theory that Levi and Wiesel can be compared as

male survivors despite the significantly different identities. A discussion of gendered memory is also significant when differences emerge between Levi and Wiesel's memories of the Holocaust which contradict gendered theory. Wiesel and Levi shared a similar experience of being thrown into a hierarchy in which the new prisoners were badly treated and abused by the older prisoners upon their arrival (Levi *Drowned*: 24-25), (Wiesel *Night*: 30). These existing prisoners viewed the newcomers as a threat and in the case of the Hungarian deportation, could not believe that in 1944 news had still not reached the Jews of Hungary (formerly Romania) as to the destination of the familiar freight trains (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 77). Ruth Kluger recalls similarly her first night in Birkenau having been transported from the Czech transit camp Theresienstadt:

But one sentence struck me: 'You are no longer in Theresienstadt.' She made it sound as if we had just been expelled from paradise. It occurred to me that this woman treated us as inferiors because she had been in Auschwitz longer than we. I felt confused: wasn't she an inmate like us? I learned the hierarchy of the numbers: those with the lower numbers were socially above those with the higher ones, because they had had to live for more days, weeks, and months in a place where no one wanted to live. A topsy-turvy world. (2003: 111)

On the theme of the arrival in camp and the newcomer as 'other', it seems that there is little difference in gendered memory between the experiences of male and female survivors; Kluger experienced the same division that Levi and Wiesel did. The hierarchy system of prison numbers and the desperate situations the prisoners experienced in camps, so far removed from the memories of home, was exacerbated by the sight of new arrivals and transcended the typical social differences such as gender, nationality and language. These social differences are all facets of a normal cultural identity, an identity which was deconstructed for the Jews by the Nazis. In forming a social hierarchy based on prisoner numbers, however skewed and cruel, the prisoners' attempt to affirm an identity for themselves which was so detrimental to the support and unity of the Jewish prisoners, only conformed to the Nazis' design.

The gendered differences Bos highlights, that women tend more often to recall close relationships formed in camps whereas the male survivors recall and recount instances of heroism or autonomous strength, are not wholly applicable to the

narratives of Levi and Wiesel (Bos 2003: 183). Both authors do focus strongly on their own relationships and are preoccupied with the Nazis' methods of destroying these bonds. The male trajectory of heroism has had a long journey throughout the history of male-dominated literature across the world, up to the genre of Holocaust literature. Levi and Wiesel were among the first published survivors, indicating that there has consistently been a demand for the heroic story of survival against adversity. In their own ways throughout their different narratives, Levi and Wiesel both fulfil this demand in their Holocaust stories and are comparable in this theme. However neither narrative is clearly focused on projecting an image of the hero. Wiesel's identity is typically one of the victim, and Levi explicitly does not promote an image of the hero survivor. Levi's account of his capture and imprisonment begins with a very blunt appraisal of his partisan activity and the flaws of the partisan group.

We lacked capable men, and instead we were swamped by a deluge of outcasts, in good or bad faith, who came from the plain in search of a non-existent military or political organization, or arms, or merely or protection, a hiding place, a fire, a pair of shoes. (Levi *Man*: 19)

Levi's portrayal of his own partisan activities does not reflect the heroism of the Eastern European soldiers he creates in *If Not Now, When?* or even the passion and self-belief that Wiesel injects into *Dawn*. Levi, it seems, is deliberately showing the failure and ineffectiveness of his partisan group and their delusions of heroism. This does not fit the pattern Bos identifies, but the post-war years Levi and Wiesel wrote in after the Holocaust may explain the discrepancy to some extent. It is significant that two men with as differing identities as Levi and Wiesel display, defy differences argued by gendered memory theory and display some similarities in their memory of the Holocaust. It appears that the divide between the two lies in their representation and understanding of their experiences. Levi and Wiesel wrote immediately after the Holocaust to tell their story urgently and to convey the horrors of the recent atrocities to a reluctant and in places, unbelieving audience. In later years when the reality of the Holocaust had become well known, the survivors who sought publicity and a writing career had to create a new identity within the established genre of Holocaust

literature. Instances of heroism and autonomy which made the survivors' stories individual established a saleable identity and trajectory.

6.4 Bearing Witness: The Representation and Language of Testimony

In fulfilling a consumer demand for a specific narrative, that of the hero and the survivor or alternatively of the victim, Levi and Wiesel negotiate the sometimes problematic issue of creating a witness testimony; a Holocaust narrative which is accurate and true and at the same time readable, saleable and meets the demands of the publisher and consumer. This was particularly a problematic issue during the 1950s when the first wave of Holocaust testimonies appeared and a time when there was a resistance to publishing these narratives and a reluctance to really acknowledge the reality of the events of the Holocaust. In negotiating the issues of representing real events, recalling traumatic memories from the past and writing a readable narrative, Wiesel and Levi create for themselves specific literary identities and narrative styles in their Holocaust literature. James E. Young writes of the many and often diverse Holocaust narratives published:

What is remembered of the Holocaust depends upon how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends in turn on the texts giving them form. (1990: 335)

As Bos observed that the differing memories of male and female survivors produce different trajectories, Young argues that the differing memories and representative styles of different survivors actually produce differing Holocaust realities for the reader and the survivors themselves. Beyond the recollection of the first night in camp and the metaphor of night discussed in chapter five, in the testimonies of Wiesel and Levi there is a divide in their style of representation and an emerging difference in literary personalities between the two. Throughout *Night* Wiesel uses rhetoric to represent his Holocaust experience in a novelistic and emotive method. His language and style is typically literary and hyperbolic.

The night had passed completely. The morning star shone in the sky. I too had become a different person. The student of Talmud, the child I was, had been consumed by the flames. All that was left was

a shape that resembled me. My soul had been invaded – and devoured – by a black flame. (Wiesel *Night*: 37)

Wiesel structures his narrative in a way that constantly digresses from the report of his experience. He testifies to his experience in Auschwitz and at the same time presents to the reader a stream of consciousness, which is narrated in the language and structure of a novel. Levi uses his narrative to explain the facts of his Auschwitz experience; he discusses his life at that time and he considers the system of the camp. His language is mostly rational and measured and his narrative carefully and calmly structured. Yet Levi too in his narrative meditates on the world around him and presents to the audience an imagery of Auschwitz filled with emotion. Levi's equanimity is not cold or indifferent, his method of structuring his memories as a humanistic observation of the behaviour around him in camp is presented as a candid meditation of his own participation in and engagement with the world of the extermination camp that he was forced into.

Some, bestially, urinate while they run to save time, because within five minutes begins the distribution of bread, or bread-Brot-Broid-chleb-pain-lechem-keynér [sic], of the holy grey slab which seems gigantic in your neighbour's hand, and in your own hand so small as to make you cry. (Levi *Man*: 45)

There are clear differences between the narratives of Levi and Wiesel, yet also comparable themes, imagery of the chaos in camp and issues of Jewish life and identity within the camp.

Wiesel, when questioned on issues of literature and the Holocaust, revealed some contradictory thoughts on the place of literature and novels in Holocaust memory. "I think a book of fiction cannot reveal the truth of that period. Literature and Auschwitz do not go together" (Wiesel *Conversations*: 160). In the same interview Wiesel concedes that: "I'm a novelist, so of course I believe in literature", but he goes on to express concern that a novel may be read instead of a testimony or historical document, rather than inspiring the reader of the novel to go on to read the testimony and the history (Wiesel *Conversations*: 163). Compared with Levi's testimony, Wiesel's writing is far more novelistic in its style and in the language used. For Wiesel to argue

that the traits of the novel are unsuitable to tell the Holocaust story appears to be a contradictory statement. Sue Vice cites Wiesel's concern that a blurring of literary boundaries between fact and fiction risks obscuring the truth of the Holocaust and argues:

It is easy to agree with Wiesel if the matter of Holocaust fiction is approached from the standpoint of a survivor (although Wiesel himself is the author of novels as well as testimony about the Holocaust). Approached the other way round, fiction is just one of several generic representations of the subject, not, despite Wiesel's eloquently expressed fears, its final resting place. (2000: 5)

What is present in Wiesel's statement and is touched on in Vice's observation of the variety of Wiesel's literary output, is an element of protectiveness and ownership of the Holocaust. A novel is typically a work of fiction written by an author who has imagined the story. In arguing against using the novel as a form of Holocaust representation Wiesel may be claiming that an unaffected author who creates a Holocaust story cannot accurately convey the truth or horror of the Holocaust reality as he, a survivor, can. A study of Wiesel's writing is inextricably linked to themes of religious language, use of rhetoric and literary effect. While describing the horrifying truth of the camp system, Wiesel uses carefully planned and poetic phrasing to amplify the dramatic nature of the events he describes and his own feelings at the time. "In one terrifying moment of lucidity, I thought of us as damned souls wandering through the void, souls condemned to wander through space until the end of time, seeking redemption, seeking oblivion, without any hope of finding either" (Wiesel *Night*: 36). In using words such as "damned", "void", and "oblivion" Wiesel's narrative takes on an apocalyptic tone, biblical in its rhetoric. This again draws parallels between Wiesel and the biblical victim, Job. *Night* also contains one of Wiesel's most poetic and dramatic declarations, well known within Holocaust literature; his declaration upon seeing the burning pits of children as he arrives at Birkenau.

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.
Never shall I forget that smoke.

Never shall I forget the small faces of the children
 whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under
 a silent sky.
 Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my
 faith forever. (Wiesel *Night*: 34)

For Wiesel, his faith and its impact on his Jewish identity was a long and continuous issue of contention throughout and after the Holocaust. His faith was not as he stated, consumed in the flames he saw on his first night in camp; but this verse makes a powerful statement and evokes a journey into hell. In his writing Wiesel focuses more on the power of language and the overall effect of narrating the Holocaust, than the historical accuracy of his experience. If his details of the events in Auschwitz are at times inaccurate or inconsistent, the focus of Wiesel's attention in *Night* is largely his emotional response to the Holocaust and its impact on his religious identity. This emotional and religious response to the Holocaust is idiosyncratic and creates a testimony personal to Wiesel only. To refer back to Young's argument, Wiesel's experience and understanding of what he lived through in Auschwitz created a Holocaust reality true to Wiesel. This reality may differ in parts from Levi's but the emotional responses from both survivors, transformed into literary narratives, demonstrates the very personal nature of Holocaust memory.

A notable example of such creative licence used by Wiesel is in the detail of his story of the last days in Auschwitz, immediately before the evacuation of the camp. Wiesel tells us in *Night*: "Around the middle of January, my right foot began to swell from the cold" (Wiesel *Night*: 78). He goes on to explain the procedure of entering the hospital barrack to have his foot operated on two days before the announcement of the evacuation of the camp, whereupon he and his father must decide whether to leave the camp on the evacuation march or to stay in the hospital barrack and await an unknown fate. Wiesel narrates this story again in his later memoir *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, with one small detail changed: "January 1945. Every January carries me back to that one. I was sick. My knee was swollen, and the pain turned my gait into a limp" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 89). This small detail initially appears irrelevant and does not detract from the overall narrative of the Holocaust experience. In fact, when revisiting *Night* it is clear that Wiesel's initial story adds to the powerful rhetoric by discussing an injured foot instead of an injured knee. As the camp is in chaos and Wiesel recalls leaving the

hospital unit to find his father, he includes the following detail: “I did not return to the infirmary. I went straight to my block. My wound had reopened and was bleeding: the snow under my feet turned red” (Wiesel *Night*: 82). By including this detail and by having a bleeding foot resting on the snow, Wiesel can add to the sense of drama and include the powerful visual detail of blood-red snow surrounding him on his last night in Auschwitz.

Psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub cites a famous example of a female survivor testifying to witnessing the Auschwitz uprising and the sight of the four crematoria chimneys ablaze. In fact, Laub points out, only one of the chimneys caught fire and held up to scrutiny, critical historians may reject the testimony as a whole when individual details are perceived to have been falsified. Laub however argues that the survivor is testifying to an event which surpasses the details themselves, she was recreating in her mind a symbolic act of rebellion and the accuracy of the fine details should not detract from the overall narrative of the testimony (1992: 223). Wiesel’s memory of the details of his injury may have become blurred over time, or on the contrary, may have become more refined and corrected with time, but the matter of a knee or foot infection does not change the overall Holocaust narrative. A further possibility is that the change between foot and knee is a translation issue, as the Yiddish word ‘*fus*’ means both foot and knee (Chare and Williams 2010). As Wiesel was familiar with Yiddish and wrote his first manuscript in Yiddish it is possible that a Yiddish word has complicated the translation. Wiesel’s grasp of English however, particularly by the 1990s and his French wife’s translation skills indicate that the change in detail is a narrative change and not a mistranslation. However, what the details and imagery such as the blood in the snow achieve is to add to the traumatic and shocking representation of the Holocaust experience and create a more stimulating narrative.

Cognitive psychologist and Holocaust testimony analyst Robert N. Kraft discusses the representation of fragments of memory and how they are transformed into a coherent and effective narrative:

Core memory is the elemental representation of the original phenomenal experience in the form of visual images, sounds, smells, tastes, emotions, and bodily sensations. Narrative memory is then

constructed from the images in core memory and shaped in accordance with narrative conventions. (2009)

Wiesel's narrative style is formed by his use of prose and a vivid imagery. His Holocaust literature follows the narrative conventions of the novel. In using powerful rhetoric, sensory images and the lamenting tone of the victim Wiesel creates an idiosyncratic identity for himself among the plethora of Holocaust memoirists; he becomes the Job of the twentieth century, the suffering Jew and the victim. Although his victimisation is to an extent redeemed later in life by his successful careers as an author and campaigner, his enduring image and identity as a Holocaust victim informs his literary and political identities and Wiesel remains the personification of Holocaust piety and victimisation through his self-constructed identity.

If Elie Wiesel represents the Holocaust's ultimate literary victim then Primo Levi arguably represents the Holocaust's primary witness. Levi adopts a different tone and narrative style in his Holocaust testimony from that of Wiesel. While Levi's literature is powerful in its content and in his narrative, the tone is calm and considered and the content more overtly factual and descriptive. In his testimony Levi assumes the role of witness, rather than judge and is conscious of representing a believable and convincing narrative. "I have deliberately assumed the calm, sober language of the witness, neither the lamenting tones of the victim nor the irate voice of someone who seeks revenge" (Levi *Man*: 382). The lamenting victim Levi here refers to suggests the figure of Elie Wiesel, whose religious protests have drawn many parallels with those of Job. Primo Levi was not a religious Jew; he was according to his own account, an atheist and at 24 years of age, a scientist. He did not enter the camps a believing child, or a "student of the Talmud" (Wiesel *Night*: 37); therefore the language Levi uses to represent the shock and trauma of arriving in camp is not laden with religious rhetoric, as with Wiesel's. The language and style Levi uses to recount his camp experience reflects his materialist character and identity as an assimilated Jew, when compared with the metaphysical tone of the deeply religious Wiesel's narrative.

Levi's narrative is more equanimous and arguably therefore seems to be the more authoritative testimony, through Levi's tone and choice of language. What is essential to consider however, is that in writing his Holocaust story Levi faced the same

issues as Wiesel in creating both a survivor and a literary identity. That is not to argue that as a religious man Wiesel is not a reliable voice of Holocaust memory and testimony and that as a non-religious figure Levi should automatically be considered as wholly accurate. The tone and style with which both men present their literature is markedly different. Wiesel's novelistic style, the modifications to his stories, exposed in the example of the foot operation and the poetic structures to his declarations such as the famous "never shall I forget" passage, imply to the reader that the Holocaust narrative is a more artificially constructed testimony than Levi's more sober literary construction (Wiesel *Night*: 34). It must be acknowledged however that both Levi and Wiesel have constructed literary representations of their Holocaust memories, both men had to transform traumatic memories and a shocking reality into a narrative readable by an unfamiliar audience. The emotion in Wiesel's work appears more raw and exposed through the language with which he constructs his testimony, as it shifts the focus of his trajectory much more on to his painful experience than the trajectory Levi is better known for. Representing potentially unreliable and certainly traumatic memories, finding a perspective to write from and ultimately creating a narrative for a readership with no personal direct Holocaust experience, meant that Levi and Wiesel both needed to write carefully, considerately and deliberately within their chosen trajectories. While Wiesel's rhetoric and choice of structure lends itself to the traumatic novel narrative, Levi remains close to his scientific background and attempts to provide the reader with what is largely a directory of the Auschwitz complex. Despite his comment on not wishing to be the voice of the lamenting victim, nor of the judge, Levi does digress from his testimony into a meditation on the trauma of his Holocaust memories. This narrative issue demonstrates the power and the trauma that Holocaust memory holds over the survivors and a significant factor in structuring a Holocaust narrative.

6.5 The Literary Heritage of the East and West in the Holocaust Narrative

In following the cultural and literary heritages that have been traced throughout the period of late Modernity, there are two visible and different paths which Levi and Wiesel follow and continue in their Holocaust narratives. Wiesel's influence from the

religious themes and strong Eastern Jewish identities of Aleichem and Singer has been discussed in chapter two. In Wiesel's theological interrogations and preoccupation with his Jewish faith and with his questions about God, it is clear that this strong metaphysical influence is retained through his Holocaust literature. Despite the despair Wiesel represents in his narrative it is clear that the religious Eastern European Jewish community he was a part of in Sighet is very much a comfort and a source of familiarity to him in Auschwitz. The figure of himself that Wiesel represents in *Night* is arguably comparable to an Aleichem literary figure, close to his community, a proud Jew, but struggling with issues about God, his whereabouts and his justice. There is a strong religious, metaphysical and very literary style to the work of Aleichem and latterly, Wiesel.

Aleichem's writing like Wiesel's, discusses Jewish life and culture under threat, as does Singer's literature, most relevantly where he confronts the Holocaust in his stories and the fragmentation of Jewish identity after the Holocaust. The metaphysical element Wiesel shares with Aleichem emerges through the inclusion of God not only in the story but in the conversations and conscious thoughts of the authors. Levi discusses religion and God as ideologies but He is not treated as a present figure in the narrative the way He is in Aleichem and Wiesel's work. Aleichem writes, as Tevye, in his story *Tevye the Dairyman*, "a Kishinev, a *constitutizia*, more pogroms, more sorrows and disasters – ach Father of the Universe, God in Heaven!" (2009: 83). Aleichem's exclamatory response to the Jews' troubles are echoed in Wiesel's protest at their ordeal in Auschwitz: "What does Your grandeur mean, Master of the Universe, in the face of all this cowardice, this decay, and this misery?" (Wiesel *Night*: 66). This dialogue, or attempted dialogue, with God which Wiesel and Aleichem open in their narratives has clear roots in Biblical Scriptures as Moses, Abraham and Job all suffer but elicit a response from God. Although Wiesel adopts the identity of Job, literary critic Dan Miron argues that this identity is not transmitted via Aleichem despite Tevye's lamenting of his misfortune and the victim identity he propagates.

Tevye's self-serving need to view himself as a latter-day Job (because he wishes to see himself, like the great biblical sufferer, not at all responsible for the disasters that befall him) is rooted in nothing like Job's moral courage, let alone readiness for a

confrontational (and therefore vital) I-Thou dialogue with God such as the Bible ascribes to such moral paradigms as Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah and Job. (Aleichem 2009: xiv)

Wiesel's literary identity clearly follows the framework of Aleichem's which engages with Jewish history and the suffering Jew. Although it is argued by Miron that Aleichem does not fit the Job pattern both authors follow the metaphysical literary and religious framework of engaging with God established in the Scriptures. Similarly, both Aleichem and Wiesel, Jews from the East of Europe, engage with their Jewish history of victimisation and persecution, which continued in the East sporadically throughout Aleichem's lifetime and into Wiesel's.

Primo Levi's Western, assimilated cultural identity and ambivalence over his religion, a faith which was not taught to him with any real commitment or zeal, echoes the identity of fellow Jewish writer Kafka. Kafka's literature is made up of bleak landscapes, cold and emotionless existences and a materialist attitude which considers human behaviour from the outside.

One winter morning – outside the snow was falling in dreary light – K. sat in his office feeling utterly tired in spite of the early hour. To shield himself, from junior officials at least, he had given his clerk an order not to admit any of them as he was busy with an important piece of work. But instead of working he shuffled about in his chair, slowly pushed some objects around on his desk, and then, without being conscious of it, left his arm outstretched on the desk-top and sat motionless with his head bowed. (Kafka 1994, 2000: 89)

Levi, in choosing to adopt the role of witness, has produced a Holocaust narrative which also describes a landscape of bleak hopelessness and a population of emotionless "mussulmans".

To sink is the easiest of matters; it is enough to carry out all the orders one receives, to eat only the ration, to observe only the discipline of the work and the camp. [...] All the mussulmans who finished in the gas chambers have the same story, or more exactly no story; they followed the slope down to the bottom, like streams that run down to the sea. (Levi *Man*: 96)

Kafka's religious identity was one of ambivalence and times of sporadic interest. Levi's own life reflected this assimilated, semi-secular upbringing and the sporadic and ambivalent religious and theological issues that Levi muses upon in his Holocaust narrative reflect these issues. Levi's Holocaust testimony is not devoid of issues of faith and religious identity. In fact he frequently discusses displays of faith in Auschwitz, which is natural in his role as witness to the largest scale persecution of Jewry in the world and in an environment where he is surrounded by faith and religious Jews. Levi's discussions of faith take place from the outside; he does not belong within the religious masses in Auschwitz and writes both as an 'other' and with a materialist attitude. Levi's assertion was that Auschwitz was created by man and that God should not be a factor in attempting to explain or understand the Holocaust (Levi *Man*: 136). As Young (quoted in Bos) observes:

the survivors' present-day location vis-à-vis the competing discourses of gender, class, Jewishness and their ensuing ways of acting in, looking at, describing and experiencing the world need to be considered as central to the narratives they will produce. (Bos 2003: 184)

As the Jewish literature of Modernity created a divide between the Jewish writers of the East and West, it created two different cultural and literary lineages which are evident in the literature of Wiesel and Levi. The lives of Wiesel and Levi converged in Auschwitz, representing the East and West converging at a significant point at the end of the era of Modernity. The Holocaust narratives produced in response to this event bear the cultural, religious and literary divides which separated the Jews of the East and West of Europe for centuries leading up to this event.

6.6 The Construction of a Victim Identity

In literary history from the Bible to Holocaust testimony, there is a divide between the hero narrative and the victim narrative. In the Hebrew Scriptures Moses is represented as the hero of the Jewish story, the man who led his people out of slavery and received the Covenant. Job is the victim of God and Satan's tests and of his faith. Within the Holocaust narrative these two themes collide, as the victims overcome adversity and

survive the camps that were designed to destroy them. Some Holocaust testimonies clearly prioritise the heroic trajectory over the sense of victimisation. Rudolf Vrba's testimony *I Escaped from Auschwitz* narrates the story of his daring, risky and heroic escape from Auschwitz to tell the world of the imminent deportation and extermination of one million Hungarian Jews (Vrba 2006). Narratives such as Wiesel's and to a lesser extent, Levi's focus more on the trauma of the camps and the persecutions the Jews suffer. Writing in an era when finding a willing publisher initially and then a readership, when publicly addressing the issue of the Holocaust was not popular, both Levi and Wiesel moved away from the hero narrative and established significant and enduring readerships for their literature which prominently addresses the sense of victim identity and the persecutions of the Jews in the camps. Levi and Wiesel were at the forefront of this style of Holocaust trajectory over fifty years ago and remain two of the most influential, widely read and widely studied Holocaust authors.

The victim identity of the Holocaust survivor is in part an externally constructed identity. Levi stated in his testimony that he did not wish to adopt the "lamenting tones of the victim" of the camps (Levi *Man*: 382). Despite this statement Levi equally did not propagate an image of heroism and his suffering is evident in his literature. His musings on the Nazis' many methods of persecuting the Jews in the camps naturally illustrate a binary in the study of the Holocaust between the oppressors and the victims. Although Levi has gone into great detail in his writing to discuss the 'grey zone' between this binary and the conflicts between good and evil, he did not consider himself to have been a collaborator or privileged, therefore within the good and evil paradigm of the Holocaust, in his unprivileged position in Auschwitz he is represented as a victim.

Wiesel, who constructed a narrative more clearly in the style of the lamenting victim, has deliberately created a victim identity himself, to which his audience can respond from 'without' and by which they can identify him. For Wiesel, his victimisation is exacerbated in Auschwitz firstly by the loss of his mother and sister in Birkenau and secondly by his young age. Thematically the issue of religion and faith heavily informs Wiesel's victim identity, as a religious boy whose faith is cruelly and painfully compromised in camp by the horrors he is witness to. Levi, when interviewed,

justified Wiesel's religious protest and the extent to which it informs his literary identity.

Yes, Elie Wiesel chose a different path from mine, but in my opinion his personal history justifies him. After all, I was lucky: I didn't lose my family, I was the only member to be deported. [...] I agree with you that his masterpiece is *Night*. He belonged to a religious family and he lost, along with his family, his faith – or at least endangered it. (Rudolf 1986, 2001: 27)

Although the discussion of Wiesel's identity as bound the 'suffering Jew' suggests a negative perspective of Jewish identity, there is a positive and logical facet to it. Wiesel's Jewish identity from his childhood has been informed by the literature and the history of the Hebrew Scriptures. In constructing a literary identity through the imagery of Job and the suffering of the Jews, Wiesel is arguably responding to his ordeal through the literature and culture he knows and situating his literary identity within an established framework. His Jewish identity endures throughout his persecution and beyond, his own life forming a part of a long Jewish history of survival.

Where Levi and Wiesel differ is in their views of each other's statuses in camp, or more specifically, Wiesel's perception of Levi. Wiesel's victim identity is amplified by his sense of helplessness in camp and by way of comparison he discusses his plight in contrast to Levi's position within the Buna site. Wiesel, who also found work at Buna, cites Levi's post-Holocaust debate with him, discussing Wiesel's enduring faith in God throughout and after the atrocity of the Holocaust. He considered Levi's scientific background to be a privilege in camp allowing him to form an identity within camp as a useful prisoner, a privilege Wiesel did not consider himself to have, leaving him reliant upon his faith to help him survive. "He was a chemist; I was nothing at all. The system needed him, but not me. He had influential friends to help and protect him; I had only my father. I needed God, Primo did not" (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 83). Wiesel discusses God and his religious belief as a necessary device for him to survive and a framework to live through in the absence of a privileged position, which he felt he lacked in comparison to Levi. Levi did not discuss faith and material privilege as similar principles in camp, nor did he classify himself among the privileged prisoners he himself discussed in 'The Grey Zone'. In his quote referring directly to Levi's position, Wiesel accentuates his

victim status and his helplessness in camp, juxtaposing himself with Levi, the older, educated, privileged scientist. Wiesel's assertion that Levi "did not need God" appears to be clearer to him than it is to Levi himself at times in his narrative. Levi's admission that he experienced what he called the "temptation to yield, to seek refuge in prayer" indicates that his scientific knowledge and function in the Buna plant did not provide the support Wiesel believes Levi to have had (*Levi Drowned*: 118). Levi's subsequent rejection of an opportunistic prayer represents his ideological stance and while he did not use Wiesel as a personal example to construct his own victim identity against, Levi rejects the notion that Wiesel propagates, that those who did not share his faith were not vulnerable to despair. On the contrary, he appears to directly contradict Wiesel by suggesting that faith was a privilege of its own.

The believers lived better [...] They had a key and a point of leverage, a millennial tomorrow so that there might be a sense to sacrificing themselves, a place in heaven or on earth where justice and compassion had won, or would win in a perhaps remote but certain future: Moscow, or the celestial or terrestrial Jerusalem. (*Levi Drowned*: 118)

Levi recalls in his narrative a problem of conflicting identities (the survivor and the Italian) and the moral crisis that accompanied it in his fortune of having survived the camp to the point of liberation. Despite suffering with scarlet fever and being exhausted and malnourished, left in the hospital barrack after the SS evacuated the camp, Levi and his neighbours in the hospital had managed to establish a system of feeding and taking care of themselves. Levi recalled some Italian-speaking survivors on the brink of death in a neighbouring barrack, who recognised him as a compatriot and begged for his help. To preserve his own chance of survival, Levi was unable to help all of the dying in the camp and although he initially brought the Italians water and soup, he felt burdened by hearing the cries for help in his own language and others. "I felt like crying, I could have cursed them" (*Levi Man*: 172). Levi is plagued by the guilt of seeing himself become selfish in the face of such desperation; he later admitted to having "assimilated to the principal rule of the place" of prioritising his own welfare (*Levi Drowned*: 59). Levi's proof of this transformation of his personality was evident in his rejection of his fellow surviving prisoners, and in his no longer wishing to hear his

own language in camp as to respond to those calls for help required a level of energy and strength Levi could barely find.

Levi discussed his experience of survivor guilt, and in his narrative it is evident that this guilt existed even before the Allies had reached the threshold of Auschwitz. "That many (and myself) experienced 'shame', that is, a feeling of guilt during the imprisonment and afterwards is an ascertained fact confirmed by numerous testimonies" (*Levi Drowned*: 54). To stand the best chance of surviving he had to dedicate his energy to himself; although he was not responsible for the deaths of the other prisoners, his guilt as a survivor was already present and hearing the Italian cries only contributed further. By the end of his year in Auschwitz, the national unity between Levi and many of his fellow prisoners left behind after the evacuation march had been broken by the sheer exhaustion of his experience and the overwhelming drive for self-preservation had won. Levi writes admiringly of the effort Charles, his French comrade after the SS had fled, made to assist a dying Dutch boy who, in a fit of typhus and scarlet fever had fallen from his bunk in the night and needed cleaning and moving, watched by an exhausted Levi. "I judged his self-sacrifice by the tiredness which I would have had to overcome in myself to do what he had done" (*Levi Man*: 173). The Nazi concentration camp system was in its structure and execution, designed to break bonds, unity and allegiances, leaving the prisoners isolated, alone and divided. Levi's narrative deliberately portrays him as being painfully honest in his self-analysis and haunted in his memories by the details of his tired and apathetic behaviour in the camp. It seems in Levi's narrative that by the end of his ordeal he felt defeated by the Nazi structure and had succumbed to the rule of self-preservation for which he can justify and explain but cannot fully forgive himself for.

6.7 Conclusion

It is clear from the narratives produced by Wiesel and Levi, that they chose different trajectories to tell their Holocaust stories. Wiesel clearly has an aptitude and a strong predilection for the literary style and the rhetoric of the novel to represent his Holocaust experience, despite his argument that the two do not sit well together. His language and tone is consistently passionate, hyperbolic and powerful but small,

specific details change or additions are made across different testimonies to fit the overall dramatic story, through the processes of memory over the timespan of Wiesel's writing career but also potentially informed by the process of constructing a literary identity. Levi chooses to focus on the small details and the accuracy of such details within his narrative, explicitly outlining his intention to testify as an honest and sombre witness. He however, also relies at times upon dramatic prose to highlight moments and events of high emotional tension and trauma. Levi, like Wiesel seems unable to prevent the trauma of the Holocaust memory from infiltrating the witness testimony.

Bos, Kraft, Laub and Young have argued that how the Holocaust testimony is told depends upon several factors and can be distorted by memory, trauma and informed by social and cultural backgrounds. It is evident through comparing and contrasting the literature of Wiesel and Levi that their individual memories have produced at times similar and at times very different experiences, which inform their Holocaust narratives. Their differences however are substantial enough for them to sit outside of a categorisation of shared male memory. As a comparison Levi and Wiesel do not sit comfortably together within the critical framework of gendered memory when compared to an example of female testimony such as Kluger's. What is also apparent is that the East / West divide, the dichotomy between the religious, devout and metaphysical Jews of the East and the assimilated, secular and materialist Jews of the West emerges again in the literature of Wiesel and Levi. While the Final Solution brought the Jews of the East and West together to their destruction, the cultural separation between the two groups informed the survivors' Holocaust experiences and how they are recalled and narrated in later life continuing the separate Jewish literary lineages which emerged throughout late Modernity.

Chapter Seven

A Silent and Empty Sky? God and the Crisis of Faith in Auschwitz.

But where was Kadosh Barukhú, 'the Saint, Blessed be He': he who breaks the slaves' chains and submerges the Egyptians' chariots? He who dictated the Law to Moses, and inspired the liberators Ezra and Nehemiah, no longer inspired anyone; the sky above us was silent and empty.

(Levi *Periodic*: 43)

The 'silent and empty sky' of Levi's recollection of his partisan years is a theological one. Although this quotation, taken from his collection the *Periodic Table*, refers to the period before his arrest and deportation, this chapter considers issues of faith in Auschwitz. The notion of a silent and empty sky above Auschwitz has lent itself to several themes and discussions since the Holocaust, including the Allied decision not to bomb the railway lines into Auschwitz causing a literal silent and empty sky. Predominantly the notion of a silent and empty sky refers here to the theological argument that God was absent throughout the Holocaust. The faithful Jews of Europe looked to God for deliverance from their suffering and their prayers were not answered, leading to the crises of faith that inform Holocaust narratives. This quote is significant as it does not come from the narrative of the devout Wiesel, who asked many questions of God throughout his time in Auschwitz and did not accept His silence. It is the ostensibly atheist Primo Levi who watched from Italy as Nazi Germany waged a war against Europe's Jews and declared that sky was silent and empty; unlike the Israelite slaves in Egypt, there would be no possible divine intervention to protect the Jews of Europe. The Jewish identities of Levi and Wiesel inform their crises of faith in Auschwitz. For Levi, although his ideological opposition to religious belief caused his emotional conflict, the notable examples of religious language within his narrative demonstrate an active response to issues of faith and religious crisis on the part of the ostensibly non-religious man. Wiesel's crisis is very much a compromise of his religious beliefs in the camp. Wiesel's response is far more visceral than Levi's ideological stance and the language and theme of his literature demonstrate that his response to his crisis of faith is inextricably linked to his Jewish identity.

7.1 "If This is a Man": The Destruction of Religious Culture in Auschwitz

The construction and administration of the Final Solution, the persecution and murder of Jews and particularly the destruction of Jewish culture within the concentration camp system, dehumanised the Jewish community to such an extent that a crisis of Jewish identity emerged within the camps. This crisis of identity was linked to faith, religious observance and cultural identity. The preoccupation with Jewish faith was evident in the research of Holocaust scholars and in the testimonies and literature of many survivors, naturally the devout Wiesel among them, but also in the recollections of the ostensibly atheist Levi. Although Levi could not avoid the faithful mass of Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz and the overwhelming displays of faith, protest and prayer, he maintained in his literature that Auschwitz was a man-made construction, the destruction of European Jewry the responsibility of man, not God. For the religious Jews such as Wiesel, having lived his whole life believing that God was the creator of life and humanity, rejecting God's accountability for his plight in Auschwitz was difficult. Wiesel did acknowledge that accepting and believing in God's responsibility and presence over the Holocaust was as much of a "stumbling-block" to the Jewish faith as rejecting God was, in a passage from his Holocaust-inspired novel *The Gates of the Forest*. Gregor, a boy in hiding from the Nazis muses to himself (and to the reader) on this problem which informs and troubles Haimi's understanding of his Jewish faith:

If your father is dead, it means that God is unjust, that life is a farce. It means that God doesn't love man or deserve his love. That fact is the stumbling-block on which he will build his idea of the world. God created man in order to kill him; he created him because he has no pity. (Wiesel *Gates*: 134)

The identity of religious protest Wiesel cultivates in *Night* is consistent with Gregor's comment in *The Gates of the Forest*. Nowhere does Wiesel deny the existence of God, conversely his frequent protests affirm his belief in God. In *Night* before the death of his father, Wiesel angrily asserts that God does not deserve man's love. This is exemplified in Wiesel's small acts of protest during religious ceremonies resolutely held even in Auschwitz. Provoked by the sight of so many suffering Jews displaying their faith as they were dying, Wiesel angrily exclaimed: "Why, but why would I bless Him?" (Wiesel *Night*: 67). The stumbling-block Wiesel concedes in his faith is his

acknowledgement that he does not have the answers as to why he and millions of others are suffering, but that he still cannot forsake his faith despite the suffering.

For Levi there was no conflict of belief in understanding his Holocaust experience within a religious faith in God. Ideologically for Levi the Jewish faith and the Nazis' persecution of Jewry were two distinct entities. Levi's stumbling-block, to use Wiesel's expression, was to maintain his ideological stance against praying for salvation even at his most desperate. Wiesel could pray or protest to God as he felt he needed to because he believed in God's implication in the Holocaust. As Levi argued against God and against any religious involvement in the Holocaust his moment of confiding his emotional weakness to his readers, where he was close to praying, is not dwelled upon but immediately followed by a justification to the reader and perhaps to himself that to pray as an atheist would be wrong. "I rejected that temptation: I knew that otherwise were I to survive, I would have been ashamed of it" (*Levi Drowned*: 118). Isabel Wollaston discusses religious belief and non-belief represented in Holocaust testimony and evaluates the debate between silence and a religious dialogue. "One of the key issues in Holocaust theology is whether a religious response should privilege either belief or unbelief at the expense of the other: we have testimony that both were among the responses of victims and survivors" (1992: 47). As Levi does discuss his "unbelief" in his narrative, by Wollaston's measure of Holocaust testimony Levi can be discussed as writing his own kind of Holocaust theology, albeit one that is complex, atypical and stands apart from the more typically theological narrative of Wiesel.

The acts of the SS and the orchestrators of the concentration camp system were primary instances of stripping away the Jewish identity of the prisoners. Replacing the prisoners' names with numbers tattooed on their skin and shaving off their hair not only violated religious beliefs but also stripped the prisoners of their identities and their individuality, reducing the Jews to an anonymous mass. Breaking up and separating families, friends and communities further isolated the prisoners and heightened their vulnerability. In discussing the disregard of the inmates' identities and particularly individual names, Levi recalled the strength required to maintain a sense of personal identity and memory in such an environment.

They will even take away our name: and if we want to keep it, we will have to find ourselves the strength to do so, to manage somehow so that behind the name something of us, of us as we were, still remains. (*Levi Man*: 33)

These typical concentration-camp practises not only dehumanised and depersonalised the prisoners, removing their social and cultural identities, but in the case of the Jewish prisoners offended their religious beliefs by mocking the traditional (and typically Hasidic) wearing of side-locks and beards of Jewish men and the Scriptural prohibition of tattooing (Leviticus 19. 27-28). The *kosher* regulations and dietary restrictions Jews observed were not respected by the SS, which led to theological debate over the rights and responsibilities of observant Jews and their insufficient food rations. To eat non-*kosher* food was to violate the *mitzvot*, but similarly to risk death by starvation would also violate the Deuteronomy command to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30. 19-20). In debating the correct pathway in camp and retaining their respect for their religious rules the observant Jews, Wiesel among them but not Levi, were at least attempting to retain a familiar sense of identity in spite of the Nazis’ attempts to remove this identity. The most devout or even ascetic Jewish prisoners in the various camps refused to eat their non-*kosher* rations, subsisting instead on bread, as Eliezer Berkovits records of a devout Jew named Pinche Steier. “His physical survival itself was a miracle as he lived chiefly on water and bread, refusing to eat non-*kosher* food” (1979: 17). Other Jews however resolved not to let the Nazis’ disrespect of their laws damage their faith or their religious observance in camp. Berkovits writes of these prisoners: “Religious Jews who stood in line to receive their share of soup from the camp kitchen did so with the understanding that by that act they were fulfilling the divine commandment ‘and you shall greatly guard your life’” (1979: 28). Faced with the Nazis’ insidious methods of destroying Jewish identity these religious Jews focused upon the primary tenets of the Jewish faith to maintain and defend their lives and their identities as Jews. Their determination to maintain the tenets of their faith against the efforts of the SS also demonstrate the religious Jews’ use of faith and religious practice as an act of non-compliance within the camps and their destructive processes.

Levi’s primary focus of the dehumanisation of the prisoners and human behaviour converges with his religious identity very clearly at the outset of his

testimony, even if the importance of a Jewish religious identity is denied later in the text and in subsequent narratives. Levi prefaces *If This is a Man* with a poem which Levi entitles *Shema* (although the title is not given in the prose text) and which refers explicitly to the prayer of Deuteronomy which follows the commandments issued through Moses and commands the Jews to: "Hear, O Israel!" (Deuteronomy 6. 4). The prayer of the Hebrew Scriptures commands the Israelites to hear the words of God and remember their identity as people of God. Levi, the atheist Jew who has survived the attempt to destroy the entire Jewish population of Europe, uses the motif of the biblical command but extends his call to all of his readers. The imagery of the Holocaust is present throughout *Shema*, as is the focus on humanity typical of his narratives.

Consider if this is a man
 Who works in the mud
 Who does not know peace
 Who fights for a scrap of bread
 Who dies because of a yes or a no. (Levi *Man*: 17)

There is a passion present in *Shema* and an imperative that the people of the free world who live in comfort and safety listen and understand the ordeal of the persecuted Jews which is reminiscent of Wiesel's indictment against the world in the immediate aftermath of his liberation, in his initial testimony title *And the World Remained Silent*. Deuteronomy commands the Israelites to: "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6. 6-7). Following these words, Levi similarly writes:

I commend these words to you.
 Carve them into your hearts
 At home, in the street,
 Going to bed, rising;
 Repeat them to your children. (Levi *Man*: 17)

Nicholas Patruno hears the "austere, poetic, God-like voice" narrating *Shema* (1995: 10). The monotheism and traditions of the Jewish faith are evoked very clearly in Levi's adoption of the God-like voice issuing his (Levi's) command to hear and to remember. The narrative which follows *Shema* in *If This is a Man* is a visible departure in style and tone, moving into a rejection of the religious community in Auschwitz,

speaking out against the convenience of prayer at the most desperate point of prisoners' lives, and focusing more on the issues of human behaviour than divine responses. Nancy Harrowitz echoes Patruno's response to the voice of *Shema*, arguing that Levi: "is putting himself in the position of an ultimate authority" (2007: 29). According to Harrowitz, Levi recognises the urgency to respond to the Holocaust, the necessity to commemorate its victims, and acknowledges that the place for this memorialisation is naturally situated within Jewish memory. Despite *If This is a Man* being an ostensibly secular text, Levi demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of his religious history and its scripture, and acknowledges this by "subsuming" his secular identity in placing Holocaust remembrance within a Jewish history (Harrowitz 2007: 29).

A form of persecution most obviously related to religious scriptural history and targeted at the Jewish victims was the use of religious dates for events such as executions and hangings within the camps. This method existed earlier in Nazi rule before the camps were fully active, with Jewish holy days being deliberately selected for pogroms and various attacks upon the Jews across Europe. "Since the first days of the invasion of Poland in September 1939, the Germans had used the Jewish festivals for particular savagery: these days had become known to the Jews as the 'Goebbels calendar'" (Gilbert 1987: 297). The Nazis' anti-Semitism had developed and mutated far beyond earlier religiously aggravated anti-Judaism, with the Nazis' predilection for racial studies and political hysteria (contradictory accusations of Jewish Bolshevism and capitalism remained rife throughout the Nazi years). While the Nazis' ruthless campaign of persecution removed the physical facets of Jewish identity, the faith of the Jewish religion which remained so strong in many prisoners, was beyond the control of the Nazis. In response, the Nazis cynically manipulated the Jewish holy calendar, making the dates and events which were so significant for observant Jews, days of yet more horror and fear. Berkovits highlights the Jewish festival of *Purim*, traditionally a celebration of the endurance of Judaism against anti-Jewish persecution, as a favourite of the Nazis, who used the holy day and the significance of the execution of ten men (the ten hanged sons of the anti-Jewish Haman) to mock the Jews' religious celebration.

On the previous day, ten Jews, mainly from among the *hasidim*, had been arrested under the spurious accusation of "sabotage." Since a similar event had occurred the previous *Purim*, when the same number of Jews were arrested under the same circumstances and then publicly hanged, the Jews feared a repetition of the tragedy. The number ten on both occasions, was intentional. (Berkovits 1979: 20)

The Nazis persecuted not only Jews throughout their rule and particularly within their camp system but the Jews were consistently the primary target. Such methods as the tattooing of prisoner numbers and the use of holy days meant that the Nazis' persecution was specifically related to and derogatory of the Jews. Gypsies, homosexuals and the mentally handicapped were victims of the Nazi obsession with race, eugenics and biological perfection. Jehovah's Witnesses and religious protesters including some Catholic Churchmen who voiced their dissent from Nazism were deported to the camps however the Jews were the only faith group to be relentlessly targeted from the beginning to the end of Nazi rule. Despite the Nazi assertion that categorised the Jews as a race rather than a religion, the religious identity and community of the Jews was of such significance within the camps and in post-Holocaust theology that it must be discussed. The propaganda and the ideology of Nazi anti-Semitism was contradictory; based on skewed assertions of modern science and also medieval hysteria and myth, defaming Jewish religious practices and tradition. In re-igniting ancient religious and cultural prejudices and once again threatening the existence of Jewish communities, the tenacity of the Jewish faith and the strength of religious belief against adversity became an integral issue to Jewish identity and survival through the Holocaust and a focus of Jewish theology in the aftermath.

7.2 "Buried Beneath History's Debris": The Role of God in Holocaust Theology

The theological preoccupation with the Holocaust in the years following the war has naturally been from a primarily Jewish perspective. Despite the materialist view espoused by Levi that Auschwitz was a man-made place and the Holocaust was a man-made event and therefore questioning God for an explanation is useless, there have

been a significant number of theological explanations and theories which have emerged in the decades following the Holocaust. The idea of a religious and historical precedent of persecution, the dream of redemption and faith in a vengeful and spontaneous, but ultimately caring God remained a cornerstone of religious identity for many Jews during the Holocaust and the ancient faith survived one more attempt at its total destruction. The more controversial Holocaust theologies have been more radical in theorising God's role in the Holocaust. In the 1960s Richard Rubenstein and Ignaz Maybaum presented their theologies which discussed God's role and presence in the Holocaust in different ways. Rubenstein's 'Death of God' theology argued that after the Holocaust (the death of God era) Jews cannot believe in a powerful, supernatural Deity who acts on behalf of man (Cohn-Sherbok 2002: 2). Rubenstein's stance is radical but appears to sit between Wiesel and Levi's views on religion and belief after Auschwitz. Like Wiesel, Rubenstein argues that the Holocaust is inextricably linked to the Jewish faith and that Auschwitz cannot be discussed without considering the presence of God. "Religion was not a sufficient condition for the Holocaust, but it was a necessary one. What happened at Auschwitz is inconceivable without beliefs about God held first by Jews and then by Christians" (Rubenstein and Roth 1987: 290). Rubenstein's quote is representative of Wiesel's Holocaust narrative which consistently includes God in his interrogation of his Auschwitz experience. There is a parallel between Rubenstein and Bauman in their similar discussion on the "sufficient" and "necessary" conditions for the Holocaust. Where Rubenstein discusses religion within this context and supports Wiesel's Holocaust trajectory, Bauman uses an almost identical sentence but discusses modern civilisation in place of religion (1999: 13). Bauman's approach, to discuss the social changes of Modernity, is far better suited to Levi's approach to the Holocaust as a non-religious intellectual. Where Rubenstein becomes comparable with Levi is in his own rejection of the traditional Jewish view of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, although Levi argued that the Holocaust confirmed his lack of belief in God rather than changed his beliefs.

Rubenstein's response in *After Auschwitz* must be seen as the expression of a highly assimilated Jew who, because of the Holocaust, had committed himself to the defense of his inherited religious tradition and then, triggered by his Berlin encounter

with [Heinrich] Grüber, found that he could no longer believe either in the God of that tradition or in the tradition's crucial doctrines of covenant and election. (Rubenstein and Roth 1987: 311)

Katz argues that the radical post-Holocaust theologies which responded specifically to the Holocaust tended to miss or disregard a significant amount of valid Jewish history (Katz 2005: 15). By focusing on the Holocaust as a Jewish catastrophe in isolation from centuries of Jewish history, good and bad, these theologies are divisive and may be held as contentious models for understanding either the Holocaust as a Jewish event or Judaism in the wake of the Holocaust. Many of these theologies however did consider Jewish history and the Scriptural heritage of tragedy and persecution, as did Wiesel and to an extent, Levi.

We tell them [tragic stories] to each other in the evening, and they take place in Norway, Italy, Algeria, the Ukraine, and are simple and incomprehensible like the stories in the Bible. But are they not themselves stories of a new Bible?
(*Levi Man*: 72)

Holocaust theology emerged specifically because the Holocaust was seen by theologians and survivors to stand apart from Jewish history, as an event significant as a separate entity and not one tragic event in Jewish history among many.

Holocaust theologies such as Berkovits' '*Hester Panim*', 'the Hidden Face of God' theory and Maybaum's '*Churban*' theology discuss the belief that God does exist and remains the God of the Jewish people, although they necessarily suffered through the Holocaust without His deliverance or intervention. Maybaum's belief is that the Jews have experienced three world changing destructions or *Churban*. The first *Churban* was, Maybaum argues, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, which led to the Diaspora of the Jews from Israel. The second was the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (Rubenstein and Roth 1987: 305). The third *Churban*, the Holocaust, was different from the first two, but comparable in the sense that Jewry lived predominantly in the Diaspora by the twentieth century and the destruction of the Diaspora Jewry was representative of the destruction of Jerusalem, the spiritual and historical home of the Jews.

For Maybaum, the Holocaust was God's terrible means of bringing the world fully into the modern age. This transition could not have occurred without the destruction of all that was medieval in Europe. Maybaum points out that the vast majority of the Jews who perished in the Holocaust were eastern European Jews who still lived in a medieval, feudal way more or less as their ancestors had, ritually and culturally isolated from their neighbours. (Rubenstein and Roth 1987: 305)

For Western assimilated Jews such as Levi, a theology such as Maybaum's fails to adequately explain or to justify why modern socially integrated Jews should be killed in a Holocaust or *Churban* designed to bring Jewry into the modern world. For religious Jews of the East such as Wiesel, who was opposed to assimilation as he believed it led to a dilution at best and an abandonment at worst of Jewish culture and beliefs, Maybaum's theory suggests that the assimilated, less devout and less religious way of life was more favourable to God than the ritualistic and devout culture typically practised in the East.

Bernard Maza's 'Fury of God' theory goes further, to suggest that the Holocaust was in fact God's own action to punish the Jews. "At this juncture in Jewish history, Maza contends, God's fury of unprecedented magnitude was poured out upon His chosen people" (Cohn-Sherbok 1989, 1996: 22). This theology is much more reminiscent of the Genesis theme of redemption; the Jews of Europe are representative of the victims of the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah who are punished as an act of purification. While this theory has been discussed by devout Jews concerned that the Holocaust was a punishment against them, it does not consider the non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust, of which there was a considerable number. Maza differs in this respect from other Holocaust theologians whose theories reject the active-in-the-world God of the Old Testament while not necessarily rejecting the idea of God. This theory, like Maybaum's and Berkovits' naturally does not fit with the view espoused by Levi, but neither does it suit Wiesel's theology, whose protests against God fit more closely with Berkovits' theory that God was present but hid His face from the suffering Jews. However, such was the force and the interest in Wiesel's own

Holocaust trajectory that the idea of a 'Protest theology' also emerged, with Wiesel himself at the forefront of the idea.

Wiesel's use of his faith and the crises that follow it in Auschwitz make him and his Holocaust narrative an ideal exemplar within Holocaust theology. Levi as a secular non-religious Jew is more problematic for Holocaust theologians and does not feature as heavily in their narratives. Michael Morgan however cites both Levi and Wiesel and discusses their narratives at length in his work on Holocaust philosophy. Wiesel's narrative provides Morgan with a variety of literary examples of his construction of the suffering Jew identity and how that identity informs Wiesel's life after Auschwitz. But Morgan also finds insights into Levi's work which (particularly when compared with Jean Améry's writing) point to an engagement with his Jewish identity.

To be sure, both he [Levi] and Améry agreed that religious belief was beyond them, and neither, for different reasons, admits the importance or even the accessibility of Jewish tradition, its conduct, texts, images, and memories. But Levi at least realizes that identity is somehow enhanced by continuity with some past or other. (Morgan 2001: 43)

Morgan is criticised by Marion Spies for treating Levi and Wiesel's texts as factual, when Spies considers them to be works of fiction. Spies cites Wiesel's *Night* and Levi's *If This is a Man* (discussed by Spies under the American title *Survival in Auschwitz*) as "well known works of fiction" and argues that Morgan's philosophical analysis of Holocaust texts is "problematic throughout the book, since he deals with those works as if they were non-fiction, historical documents" (Spies 2004: 250). Spies is correct to argue that Wiesel's (and to a lesser extent Levi's) testimonies to the Holocaust are structured as novels and her observations about issues of memory within the Holocaust narrative are valid. Her assertion that Levi and Wiesel's narratives are works of fiction and not historical documents however, suggests that they offer no historical validity to an event that both experienced and testified to through the accessible model of the novel. In fact Morgan does refer to Wiesel's *Night* as a "fictional-autobiographical memoir" which is contrary to Spies assertion, but does represent effectively the difficulty in categorising Holocaust testimony within a single genre (Morgan 2001: 31). Rubinstein shares Morgan's view that the survivor narrative

offers a valid, even essential, perspective on the emergent Holocaust theology which refers specifically to the faith of those people who suffered and survived the Holocaust.

Such testimony has an irreplaceable significance because it represents those who had to cope with the Holocaust firsthand. To make pronouncements or even suggestions about what can or cannot, must or must not, be credible religiously after Auschwitz without knowing what the survivors think about their own experiences would be to develop one's philosophy or theology in a considerable vacuum. (Rubenstein and Roth 1987: 292)

Although Levi does not actively engage with the theology of the Holocaust, an appropriate theory that is more applicable to Levi is Sherwin Wine's naturalistic approach, claiming that the Holocaust was a disaster of human suffering, for which "there can be no adequate theological solution" (Cohn-Sherbok 2002: 2). Wine was a humanistic Jew, whom Levi may not have agreed with on issues of faith in general, but Levi's materialist beliefs on suffering and Jewish persecution are comparable to Wine's, even if Levi himself was not totally immune to the hope of salvation during his weakest moments in Auschwitz. Wiesel writes in *The Town Beyond the Wall* that God "is the weakness of strong men and the strength of weak men" (Wiesel *Town*: 9). While the two men remain divided upon most questions of faith, Levi's discussions of faith and prayer in the camp suggest that he would concur with Wiesel's character in this sentiment.

7.3 God on Trial: Elie Wiesel and the Evolution of Protest Theology

In maintaining the traditional religious belief in God and His presence during the Holocaust, but rejecting the various explanations for the suffering of the Jewish people, Wiesel's Protest theology asks many questions of God. It does not accept His silence or His impassivity willingly, but in the face of the suffering of the Jews and the silence of God, Wiesel's model stands by the Jewish faith. This is the faith of Job, a good man who is tested by God who eventually shows His presence and His love. This

marks a separation from the earliest figures of Genesis who are punished by God for their sins and suffer as an act of retribution. Wiesel assumes the twentieth-century role of the protesting Jew with an ease and narrative skill evident in his extensive bibliography of Holocaust-inspired works, his identity is established early in his literary career with his bold statement in *Night*: “I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice” (Wiesel *Night*: 45).

The faith and tenacity of the Jews of Europe was pushed to the brink during the Holocaust. For those who experienced and survived the camps, Jewish identity and theology changed throughout this experience and in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The more radical Jewish theologies emerged after the Holocaust. This indicates that the Holocaust had a significant impact on Jewish understanding of the relationship with God, the stability of the Covenant and historical issues of Jewish suffering and evil and that Jewish thought and identity was irrevocably changed due to it. The non-religious Levi maintained, ideologically at least, that there was no valid theological interrogation of the Holocaust, as it was the heinous product of man’s totalitarianism. The devout Jews of the camps such as Wiesel were preoccupied with their Jewish history and engaged with the persecution of the Jews, who historically have suffered, as a means of understanding their ordeal in Auschwitz. Amidst the variety of new Holocaust-influenced theologies, Protest theology emerged not only as a dispute with God, but also as an affirmation of faith in the most adverse environment. Eliezer Schweid writes of the theology which emerged from survivors such as Wiesel; ‘Protest’ or ‘Revolt theologies’ emerged from the survivors’ legitimising and understanding their faith through the belief that God was present during the Holocaust.

Precisely because they did believe in spite of what they had lived through, there could be no answer to their unjustifiable suffering, unless God himself could be described as a victim of Radical Evil together with his chosen people. Thus, they experienced their protest as an inner dimension of belief after the Holocaust. (Schweid 2002: 263)

In his trajectory of the deeply religious boy who faces a crisis of religious identity in camp, as all his beliefs about a good, just God, collapse in the face of the reality of Auschwitz, Wiesel constructs a victim identity for himself. In the parallels

with Job that he draws and in his theological narrative, Wiesel as a Holocaust author has recreated the image of the suffering Jew. It is an image and a personality which lends itself to the theory and theology of the Holocaust which emerged after the initial wave of Holocaust literature. Levi, in *If This Is a Man* and his subsequent literature follows a different trajectory to tell his Holocaust story. Levi opts for the role of the witness rather than the victim; he stands apart from the tortured victim figure that Wiesel represents, as he stands apart from the traditional image of the religious Jew that Wiesel represents. Wiesel's representation of the 'modern Job' is first expressed in *Night* but it is his play *The Trial of God* where Wiesel's Protest theology is given space to develop and his literary identity of suffering Jew expands from the child of the Holocaust in *Night*. Wiesel is, according to Jakob Jocz, "the rebel *par excellence*. He has a perennial quarrel with God" (Cohn-Sherbok 2002: 61-62).

7.4 "A Strange Trial": Wiesel's Indictment of God

The Trial of God is a play Wiesel wrote after *Night*. It is inspired by his Holocaust experience which is more comprehensively covered in his first narrative. The "strange trial" of God was an experience Wiesel claims to have witnessed in Auschwitz, which he has alluded to in several texts and interviews (*Wiesel Trial: The Scene*).

In a concentration camp, one evening after work, a rabbi called together three of his colleagues and convoked a special court. Standing with his head held high before them, he spoke as follows: 'I intend to convict God of murder, for he is destroying his people and the Law he gave them from Mount Sinai. I have irrefutable evidence in my hands.' (*Wiesel Gates*: 197)

After a trial conducted as a traditional Jewish *Din Torah*, God was unanimously found guilty by his religious followers. Then the men, in Wiesel's presence, returned to their prayers. Despite their indictment against their God, they were taken to the gas chambers and ended their lives as devout and believing Jews. "After all, *He* had the last word. On the day after the trial, He turned the sentence against his judges and accusers. They, too, were taken off to the slaughter" (*Wiesel Gates*: 197). These religious Jews of Auschwitz had found their faith pushed to its limit. Their faith and

religious identity was so ingrained within them that they were not able to reject the idea of and belief in God, but could no longer accept His silence, so in exasperation and frustration they accused God and held Him responsible for the plight of His people. This is the crux of Wiesel's literary and religious identity from his time in Auschwitz.

Rather than representing this theologically significant trial in its original form, Wiesel transports the trial, the suffering Jews and the religious interrogation back in European Jewish history to the late seventeenth century. In a remote Jewish *shtetl* still reeling from the aftermath of a pogrom which echoes the Chmielnicki massacres of Polish Jews by Ukrainians, the two Jewish survivors, Berish the innkeeper and his mentally and emotionally crippled daughter Hanna are surprised on *Purim* eve by three travelling *Purimschpieler*. Upon learning that they have arrived in the notorious Shamgorod and are in the home of the only two remaining Jews in the village, the *Purimschpieler* further offend the once faithful but now emotionally broken Berish by offering to perform a festive *Purim* play. Berish, who a year ago endured the murder of his family and friends and the rape and torture of his daughter on her wedding day, instead insists upon a *Din Torah*, a trial of God, indicting him for murder. The Christian priest of Shamgorod arrives at the inn to warn Berish and his guests of another impending massacre, with an anti-Semitic mob travelling towards the village. Berish refuses the priest's offer of baptism and his Gentile maid Maria's pleas to flee the inn; instead he demands to make his protest to God with the last witnesses in Shamgorod. "I resigned from membership in God – I resigned from God. Let Him look for another innkeeper, let Him find another people, let Him push around another Jew – I'm through with Him!" (Wiesel *Trial*: 15). In setting his play on the eve of *Purim* Wiesel replicates the Nazi motif of the 'Goebbels's Calendar'. This sets the scene for the visiting *Purimschpieler* to arrive unexpectedly and also for the instrumental unmasking scene, but the *Purim* date also extends the poignancy with the last Jewish community being slaughtered on the eve of the day when the Jews traditionally celebrate their deliverance.

The *Purimschpieler* agree to Berish's *Din Torah*, with Berish acting as the Prosecutor, but the only person who will agree to act as God's Defence is Sam, a mysterious stranger who entered the inn unnoticed. Maria is horrified to see Sam, a man she had a brief relationship with in the past and the three *Purimschpieler* each

seem to recollect seeing his face at three previous pogroms they have witnessed. Sam reveals nothing until the very end of the play, when his true identity is revealed. Throughout the trial and with heightening urgency as the mob draws ever closer to Shamgorod, Sam calmly answers all of Berish's indictments against God, with the claim that the tragedies which have struck Shamgorod and surrounding villages are merely "sad" but nothing to do with God (Wiesel *Trial*: 128). The play ends with Berish preparing to fight to the death, the *Purimschpieler* desperately pleading with Sam whom they mistakenly believe to be a mystic or a *tzaddik*, one of the *Kabala's* 36 Righteous Jews, and the anti-Semitic mob reaching the door of the inn (Wiesel *Trial*: 160). Sam takes off his *Purim* mask and reveals his true identity. "*Satan is laughing. He lifts his arm as if to give a signal. At that precise moment the last candle goes out, and the door opens, accompanied by deafening and murderous roars*" (Wiesel *Trial*: 161).

In *The Trial of God* the voice of Wiesel is at times ambiguous. The obvious vessel for Wiesel's protesting voice is the character of Berish. Berish has witnessed a horrific pogrom which destroyed his family; he speaks as a survivor and as a religious man whose faith has been pushed to the very brink. Like Wiesel, he rejects the notion of a good and just God, while not actually rejecting absolute belief in the Jewish God. Although Berish claims to have "resigned from membership in God", he refuses to be baptised into the Christian faith even if it costs him his life. Berish's continuous argument with God, his desire to put Him on trial indicates that Berish, like Wiesel is unable to totally disregard a lifetime's faith (Wiesel *Trial*: 15).

This facet of Wiesel's personality is explored in similar Holocaust-inspired works, such as *The Town Beyond the Wall*, where the author's voice and experience is represented through fictional characters. In *The Town Beyond the Wall* the character of Michael bears strong resemblance to Wiesel. A religious boy, who returns to his Eastern European home after losing his father in a camp, recalls his village and his friends, including Kalman the *Kabalist*, the students who are mentally destroyed by the *Kabalistic* rituals and Moishe the madman who is invited to the Sabbath meal. In this novel, Michael tells Pedro:

I want to blaspheme, and I can't quite manage it. I go up against Him, I shake my fist, I froth with rage, but it's still a way of telling Him that He's there, that He exists, that He's never the same twice, that

denial itself is an offering to His grandeur. The shout becomes a prayer in spite of me. (Wiesel *Town*: 114-15)

Michael, like Berish and like Wiesel cannot accuse God without affirming His existence, which is a significant element of the Protestant theology Wiesel is often attributed with representing. This is the deeply personal anger and the frustration of a practising and believing Jew, one who has a history and a vested interest in the future of Jewish faith, but who represents the severity of the test of faith that was the Holocaust.

While Berish represents Wiesel's anger and frustration at God, he lacks the scholastic attitude Wiesel also bears in his theological interrogations. Mendel, the quiet and thoughtful *Purimschpieler* at times also appears to personify Wiesel, despite the ideological conflicts that Berish and Mendel have. Mendel tells Berish "Do not make fun of God, innkeeper. Do not make fun of God – even if He is making fun of you" (Wiesel *Trial*: 25). Wiesel does not discuss Satan within his Holocaust narratives, however in *The Trial of God* he has Satan as God's only defence and as the protagonist of each pogrom the characters have been witness to, which they attribute to God. By implying that there is collusion between God and Satan Wiesel demonstrates the way God can make fun of his people. Wiesel wrote in *Day* how he blushed at the way "God makes fun of human beings" (Wiesel *Day*: 34). In the apparent way God's work is delegated to Satan Wiesel replicates the Job scenario of the devout Jew(s) suffering without God's help as He watches their persecution at the hands of Satan. Like Berish, Mendel has witnessed a violent pogrom and as the only person to survive, he also acts and speaks as 'the survivor', a role Wiesel rapidly assumed upon establishing his career as a Holocaust writer. Mendel is given an implied history as a religious and devout Jew. Mendel's pogrom occurred while he was speaking in his synagogue. Positioning him in the synagogue as he faced death situates Mendel as the more traditional, scholarly and devout Jew than the innkeeper Berish and more representative of Wiesel. "As I heard the echo of my own words 'And you shall celebrate your holidays in joy' – I found myself without a community. I was still standing; I stood throughout the slaughter" (Wiesel *Trial*: 146-47). Mendel may be the more subdued figure in the play, but the persistent interrogation of God and His will throughout Jewish persecution is as much attributed to Mendel as it is to Berish. It is Mendel who asks "But God in all

this?" (Wiesel *Trial*: 26); but it is also Mendel who says, "I have looked death in the eyes; I have seen God at work" (Wiesel *Trial*: 53). Mendel lacks the overt anger and loud protests of Berish, but he nevertheless implicates God in the trials and persecutions of the Jews. Like Wiesel after Auschwitz however, he is determined that God should be understood and not be rejected outright.

The identities of the Jews in the Auschwitz trial are disguised by Wiesel transporting the trial to a different time and place. Holocaust theologian Cohn-Sherbok highlights his own examples of such protests during the Holocaust, demonstrating a theme common to Wiesel's own protest.

What does he say now, how does he pray, this last Rabbi of Warsaw? Does he lovingly accept the pain and suffering, or does he, through the medium of his prayer, conduct a dispute with the Almighty? [...] No, he does not beg; he does not pray; he demands! He demands his right. He calls for justice. Why were his children burned by the Nazis? Why was his wife reduced to ashes? (2002: 36-37)

Although Wiesel has established an identity for himself as a survivor and a religious protester, his theology and his protest are open to critique and the validity has been questioned. The predominant issue with Wiesel's religious stance is its inconsistency. Wiesel was brought up to believe in the God of the Old Testament and the Pentateuch, the God who gave His Covenant to the Jewish people and persistently intervened and interacted with His people. In Auschwitz this traditional belief collapses under the silence and the inactivity of God and Wiesel is forced to reconsider his formative beliefs. Wiesel's Protest theology is formed by his anger that God does not act throughout the Holocaust; this expectation contradicts his angry protest narrated in *Night* that the God of mercy and compassion is illusory. "Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent. What was there to thank Him for?" (Wiesel *Night*: 33). This contradiction may be due to the age Wiesel was upon entering Auschwitz and the utter shock he felt as his beliefs shattered. The anger Wiesel expresses against God may in actuality be anger that his beliefs were misguided or wrong, that God in Auschwitz was not the God Wiesel had always believed him to be.

Cohn-Sherbok cites Wiesel's Holocaust inspired texts as examples of his religious and theological inconsistencies. Cohn-Sherbok believes that Satan (Sam) acting as God's defence and in effect, his ally, in *The Trial of God* supports the argument that human beings are the playthings of a cruel God (1989, 1996: 102-03). In discussing Wiesel's cantata *Ani Maamin* Cohn-Sherbok argues however that far from being destructive and violent, Wiesel's God is now "a compassionate comforter" whose tears fall with his suffering Jewish peoples' (1989, 1996 p.103). Ultimately Wiesel remains a religious, believing Jew. His faith was not destroyed in the flames of the crematoria at Birkenau or on the gallows of Auschwitz (*Wiesel Night*: 65). Wiesel writes movingly and eloquently in several of his books about the crisis of faith the Holocaust caused him, but in his post-Holocaust career and identity it seems that he has reconciled himself to some extent with his faith, which still exists, although it may be problematic and necessarily different now from how it was before and during the Holocaust.

7.5 Primo Levi and the Confrontation with Faith.

Although he considered himself to be an atheist, Levi like Wiesel, found his Jewish identity compromised through his time in Auschwitz. Levi was suddenly confronted with faith and religious Jewish identity in Auschwitz ironically more than anywhere else in his life and the environment of Auschwitz forced a confrontation for Levi with his own religious identity and to what extent he truly was an atheist. Levi described the impact of Auschwitz on his "Jewishness" when interviewed saying that it, "further weakened my religious convictions which were already very feeble" (Bravo and Cereja 1983, 2001: 228). Myriam Anissimov asserts that Levi confronted his faith before arrival in Auschwitz, as he was faced with the faith of the religious Italian Jews preparing for their deportation from Fossoli:

For the first time, during that terrible night, Primo Levi felt a sense of belonging to the Jewish people. This was no longer "a small amusing anomaly," or the angry pride of declaring himself "impure" because the racial laws had made him a pariah. This time the feeling dawned in him that he shared the

fate of a very ancient people that for centuries had met nothing but exile and persecution. (1998: 97)

The language Levi used to narrate his last night at the Fossoli camp is filled with religious themes as he confronts the Jewish faith and its ancient history.

We collected in a group in front of their door, and we experienced within ourselves a grief that was new for us, the ancient grief of the people that has no land, the grief without hope of the exodus which is renewed every century. (*Levi Man*: 22)

Levi observes acts of faith throughout his time at Auschwitz and Fossoli before that. However it is notable that Levi uses the expression “we” as he does in this passage. As he prepares to depart from Fossoli to an unknown fate he not only engages with his ancient history, but also with the faithful Jews he was confronted by in the internment camp. Mirna Cicioni cites this section of Levi’s testimony as she observes the paradox Levi displays in confronting Jewish faith while denying his own engagement with it. “Yet the religious dimension of Judaism is consistently denied, even in passages which directly refer to divine justice and power” (1995: 32).

Once in Auschwitz and confronted with a greater shock than he could have anticipated, Levi found himself surrounded by the Jews of Europe and particularly the Orthodox and Hasidic Jewry of the East such as Wiesel. Levi, as Morgan observes, entered Auschwitz from a different perspective from that of the religious Wiesel (Morgan 2001: 35). As a secular Jew Levi was not only confronted by the centre of destruction of European Jewry, but also by a devoutness and overwhelming display of faith he had not seen before. Although he was emotionally separated from the religious majority within Auschwitz, Levi told Anthony Rudolf in an interview that “we never forgot the eternal morality of the Ten Commandments, but in daily life it could not be like that” (Rudolf 1986, 2001: 25). Once again Levi uses the “we” pronoun to associate himself with the moral code of the camp. Although he implies here that he is engaging with the morality code dictated by the Ten Commandments, Levi still tends to distance himself, on reflection, from the religious and faithful element of the engagement with Judaism in Auschwitz and in his interview with Rudolf he focuses upon the issue of morality rather than faith, unlike Wiesel, whose discussions of religious identity in camp highlight issues of faith and community.

Where there is a parallel between Wiesel and Levi in terms of victimisation is in the sense of martyrdom through faith that is apparent in both survivors' literature. Both men entered Auschwitz with strong ideological views and beliefs; for Levi this was his atheism and for Wiesel, his Hasidic Jewish faith which turned into a religious protest in camp. Witnessing the horrific reality of the concentration camp system and the Nazis' mass-extirmination system in operation prompted challenges to Levi and Wiesel's beliefs, and their determination to maintain these beliefs and identities. Despite representing opposing beliefs and holding different views on faith and religious observance, what is evident in the literature of Levi and Wiesel is their determination to maintain their ideologies even when it causes them more emotional suffering and anguish. The self-imposed suffering in their desire to retain the identities they have constructed in camp (Levi's to reject any involvement in religion, faith and prayer, and Wiesel's to continue his protest against God and the displays of faith and reverence), similarly makes martyrs of both Levi and Wiesel as they suffer a heightened emotional ordeal in their devotion to their ideological stances. Maintaining his belief in God, despite the anguish it caused him, Wiesel became a martyr to his Jewish faith. Wiesel struggled with the idea of a God of justice and mercy who could allow the murder of millions of Jews, yet he found himself unable to reject his faith. As he narrated resolutely eating his ration of bread as his fellow religious Jews fasted for *Yom Kippur* Wiesel wrote "deep inside me, I felt a great void opening" (Wiesel *Night*: 69). Wiesel was unable to give up his Jewish faith despite the illusory sense to it upon arriving in Auschwitz. He forced himself to suffer through his *Yom Kippur* protest, yet to maintain his faith also made him a victim of his Jewish religion. Levi maintained throughout his life and his literature that he was an atheist and that to pray for salvation in Auschwitz was redundant and, for a non-believer like himself, wrong, as he would have no right or reason to expect to be saved (Levi *Drowned*: 118). Despite this materialist belief Levi was not immune to the desperate need to pray in camp. He recalls in *The Drowned and the Saved* a selection during which he struggled to resist the urge to pray for his salvation.

For one instant I felt the need to ask for help and asylum; then, despite my anguish, equanimity prevailed: you do not change the rules of the game at the end of the match, nor when you are losing. A

prayer under these conditions would have been not only absurd (what rights could I claim? and from whom?) but blasphemous, obscene, laden with the greatest impiety of which a non-believer is capable. (*Levi Drowned*: 118)

At this point in his Auschwitz experience Levi's ideology and religious stance was torn between the scientific and material mind pulling against the emotional need for the spiritual comfort and hope that prayer would bring. Although he stood apart from the Jewish community spirit of the group Levi was not immune to the need for answers and understanding, but in his narrative remained non-religious therefore could not allow himself that comfort and hope of prayer and divine intervention, or the cathartic lament of the suffering Jew. Levi asserted to Grieco in an interview: "You cannot invent your own God for your own personal use. It would not be honest" (1983, 2001: 273). As a materialist and ideologically, an atheist, Levi suffers in Auschwitz, a martyr to his atheism, as Wiesel was a martyr to his faith.

Levi wrote several times in his narratives that he was not a believing Jew, but there are times in his literature where his engagement with issues of faith are much more akin to a religious debate. Discussing Kuhn, the prisoner in front of him at a selection who thanks God for his reprieve at the selection line, insensitive to those around him who know they are to be sent to the gas chamber the next day, Levi wrote contemptuously "If I was God, I would spit at Kuhn's prayer" (*Levi Man*: 136). Here, Levi does not deny the existence of God, but rejects, as Wiesel at times does, the idea of a proactive and involved God who responds to pleas and prayers with divine acts. Levi demonstrated that he still engaged in the same theological debate and question of faith as Wiesel did. As Levi attempted to remain balanced and measured in his narrative, his position on faith is interesting and his atheism as a Jewish Holocaust victim made Levi an interesting case study in the discussion of Jewish persecution in the Holocaust. The literary digressions into explorations of faith and identity which both authors engage in, demonstrates the issues inherent within Holocaust literature of reading historical testimonies which are represented through the medium of literary constructs. The similar way in which Levi and Wiesel incorporate into their literature the issues of Jewish identity that both were confronted with through their Holocaust

experience, which is ostensibly the subject of the testimonial literature, is a notable point of convergence in the two different Holocaust narratives.

As an atheist and secular Jew, Levi attempted to take a rational approach to understanding his Holocaust experience. He rationalised his philosophy on life and religion to Giuseppe Grieco by saying:

When I think about the cosmos, the universe, I begin suspecting that behind the enormous machine of the universe, there might be a driver who controls its movements, maybe even built the machine itself. But rest assured, my suspicion does not affect my conviction that the driver, if he exists, is indifferent to the matters of mankind. In short, he isn't someone to pray to. (1983, 2001: 276)

Levi the intellectual emerges in this interview as someone who was curious and expressed a deep-rooted desire for a religious system of order in the world to frame his life and identity within, as Wiesel had through his faith, before his confrontation with Auschwitz. "Of course I felt some envy [of Wiesel's faith]. I envy believers, all believers. But I cannot do anything about it. Faith is something you either have or you don't" (Grieco 1983, 2001: 273). However Levi appears to have been conditioned by the secularisation of Italian Jewry into the enlightened thought that rejected a controlling God who participated in the lives of His beings. Levinas wrote that "A Western Jew must still pretend, as Descartes puts it, that he has still to be converted to Judaism. He feels duty bound to approach it as a system of concepts and values that are being presented for his judgement" (1997: 51). Levi entered Auschwitz an atheist and his experience of the camp did not change his belief, but the point of collision of European Jewry in Auschwitz prompted a confrontation with his lack of faith and his religious identity that Levi engaged with in a typically philosophical and considered method, retaining the intellectual element to his identity.

For the religious Wiesel who had spent his life studying the Scriptures and the mysticism of the Jewish faith, the understanding of his faith and the belief in God's goodness allowed him to see the potential redemption awaiting his people. Although Wiesel's faith was shaken in the camps, his devout faith turning to anger and protest, he remained a believing Jew and after the Holocaust took a keen interest in the creation of the State of Israel. Levi, who considered himself an atheist, faced more of a

challenge in believing in the redemptive purpose of the Holocaust. Like Wiesel, Levi also faced a challenge to his beliefs in the camps. From having led a life in which he was comfortable with his atheism, Levi was suddenly confronted with the reality of the fate of the Jews of Europe and the crises facing the Jewish faith. Despite the occasional conflicts he recalled between his ideological atheism and his emotional need for support and comfort that other Jews in camp found in prayer, Levi remained unable to reconcile his secular Jewish identity with a belief in God. He was unable to accept the tenet of the Jewish faith, of redemption, and could not understand his victimisation and suffering in Auschwitz from the perspective of a religious Jew who believed in redemption, despite Levi's Jewish identity being the sole reason for his suffering in Auschwitz. Arguably the East / West divide in cultures is represented again here in terms of faith and suffering. Jews of the East of Europe had a more recent history of persecution and violence against them. As segregated and insular communities the Eastern Jews were sustained by their community support and strong Jewish identity. The more secular Jews of the West, as represented by Levi, had established successful lives and professional identities outside of the Jewish community. The Final Solution was a tremendous shock for the Jews across Europe and one which none had anticipated. For the Jews of the West the violence of anti-Semitic pogroms was a more distant memory than for those in the East and for the non-religious Jews, arguably harder for them to view this persecution within a history of religious punishment and suffering. The confrontation with a victim identity in Auschwitz was potentially more of a shock to Levi and his Italian compatriots, unused to anti-Semitic persecution, but the non-religious Jews were not forced to confront the failure of their God to protect them.

In a way, it was all much easier for me than for my fellow camp-prisoner and believer, Elie Wiesel. He was forced to confront brutally the immense trauma of the triumph of evil, and he later came to blame God for allowing it to happen, for not intervening to stop the massacres. (Grieco 1983, 2001: 274-75)

7.6 To Concur With Job: The Martyrdom of Levi and Wiesel

Wiesel and Levi suffered differently in Auschwitz and reflected in their narratives two different personalities and religious identities; although at times their identities appear to converge and become very similar. This is represented by Wiesel in his use of the Job motif for *Ani Maamin*, where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob cry to God to alert Him to Israel's plight. The response echoes Job's initial acceptance of his suffering:

God wills,
That is enough.
God takes
And God gives back,
That is enough. (Cohn-Sherbok 1989, 1996: 97)

Levi and Wiesel's comparative sense of martyrdom, suffering through faith and the denial of faith has been discussed. While the two men differ in their cultural and religious backgrounds and in their beliefs, the situation of the camps and their effect on Jewish identity and suffering created an unusual bond in the shared suffering and crisis of beliefs both Levi and Wiesel experienced. The two men arguably share a connection in their determination to maintain their ideological beliefs at an emotional cost; Wiesel's that his God has abandoned His people and they must protest against Him rather than worshipping Him and Levi's that to pray in Auschwitz is not only useless but impious for an atheist. At various points during their time in Auschwitz both men feel an emotional pull against their ideological beliefs and suffer in their attempts to remain rigidly against praying in camp.

The two men differ in their representation of their rejection of and dispute with faith in Auschwitz. While the preoccupation with faith is clearly evident in Levi's narrative, he did not deliberately form a literary and artistic identity around his confrontation with faith in Auschwitz. It is naturally a point of interest for scholars and interviewers of Levi, as he did make the point that he was an atheist Jew, an identity which does not sit easily in a discussion of a crisis of religious identity and a painful confrontation with the emotional need for faith. Levi maintained that he preferred the role of Holocaust witness to that of suffering Jew and judgmental victim. Like Job at the start of his torments however, Levi refrained from indicting God for His actions against the helpless and the stricken. Conversely Wiesel utilised his Holocaust narrative to speak out against God, the Nazis and the silent and inactive world which

witnessed the Holocaust. Wiesel made his religious protest novelistic, but he still carved a niche as the suffering Jew and the protesting Job figure. Wiesel pointed the finger at God and at the rest of the world at a time when it was not popular to even discuss the Holocaust in literary circles. Both Levi and Wiesel were at the forefront of opening up a discussion of the Holocaust and making it an acceptable subject to be written and published on, both being among the earliest published Holocaust survivors.

While Levi and Wiesel both engaged with the Exodus story, the literary, cultural and historical precedent for Jewish suffering, within the area of Holocaust narrative the book of Job is the more significant text that the authors, particularly Wiesel, relate to. Job, in his trials, his suffering and in his continued belief in God throughout becomes the ultimate epitome of the suffering Jew. Exhausted and exasperated by his torments, Job cries out to God, but he does not reject him or give up his belief in him: "The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1. 21). Job remains a believing Jew throughout his victimisation, which is observed and mitigated by God and becomes both a martyr to his faith and a victim of it. Levi was equally persecuted in Auschwitz for being Jewish, in the eyes of the Nazis, for being the same as Wiesel. However, he remained steadfast in his atheism against the wave of theological Holocaust interpretations which proliferated in the late twentieth century, and accepted neither any religious explanation of the Holocaust, or any faithful hope in providence for survival. However much Wiesel cried out against God, he remained faithful in Him and hopeful of redemption throughout his crisis of faith and despite his confrontation with the harsh reality of Auschwitz where he realised that salvation was not to come through a divine miracle. Wiesel, like Job, becomes a victim of his Jewish faith (an internal identity) as well as a victim of his Jewish identity (an externally constructed identity).

In the Hebrew Scriptures there is a sense of ultimate redemption. Moses receives the Covenant and despite knowing he will not live to see the Promised Land himself, he has passed the bond between himself and God on to the Israelites (Exodus 24). Job eventually has his losses replaced (Job 42) and Abraham is spared the ordeal of sacrificing his son Isaac once he has proved his devotion (Genesis 22). Levi and Wiesel survived Auschwitz; they were spared death but suffered the trauma of

survival. In writing their literature in relative comfort and freedom, they are able to be more reflective on their faith and their sense of Jewish identity. Levi overall appears to remain consistent in his beliefs or rather lack of, despite more open and reflective moments in *If This is a Man* and his last text *The Drowned and the Saved*, indicating his emotional vulnerability in Auschwitz. Wiesel however, despite his apparent rejection of a just God and the collapse of his pre-Holocaust youthful beliefs about God, maintains later in his life that he has never rejected his faith or his God. "That is exactly how I would describe my relationship to my faith. I have never forsaken it, and it has never forsaken me" (Wiesel *Exile*: 12). Despite the redemption Levi and Wiesel both experienced, ultimately both were victims of their religious identity.

7.7 "The Drowned and the Saved": The Final Days of Auschwitz

That there existed faith and religious devotion in Auschwitz is undeniable, although it was strained, tumultuous and pragmatically difficult to observe and practice. The unprecedented and encompassing Jewish persecution in Europe at the time of the Holocaust caused a change in the broad sense of modern Jewish identity and certainly affected the beliefs and identities of Wiesel and Levi. Berkovits argues that even the non-religious Jews of the concentration camps must have felt some comfort from the camaraderie and emotional support of so many Jews together (1979: 3). While Levi contradicts this idea in his narrative, it is clear from Wiesel's narrative and memories of his fellow prisoners that he derived inspiration and support from the community of Eastern, religious Jews, with whom he could explore and develop his own identity.

In January 1945 the Russian Army advanced upon South-West Poland towards Auschwitz-Birkenau. The SS organised evacuation marches out of the Polish extermination camps and into concentration camps in Germany as the Third Reich rapidly decreased under Allied pressure. The evacuation marches became known as the Death Marches due to the high number of fatalities among the prisoners crippled by exhaustion, disease, injury and starvation, who were unable to survive the marches in the harsh Polish winter. Levi, suffering with scarlet fever, was interned in 'Ka-Be', the hospital block at the point of evacuation and had to make a choice, remain in Auschwitz or evacuate. Both options carried the risk of the unknown; the common

belief in the camps was that the remains of Auschwitz would surely be destroyed, along with the remaining prisoners. It seemed highly unlikely that the SS would wish to leave evidence of their atrocities to be found by their Russian enemy. Levi's alternative option, of joining the evacuation march, offered little more hope. The duration and destination of the evacuation was unknown and the freezing temperatures and snow, insufficient clothing and the months of punishing work and starvation made a long march dangerous, particularly for someone suffering with fever, as Levi was. Levi's fragile condition dictated his choice; he would remain in the hospital block and await his fate. "So we remained in our bunks, alone with our illnesses, and with our inertia stronger than fear" (*Levi Man*: 162). Levi's choice most likely saved his life. Days after the SS fled, taking with them the majority of the prisoners, the liberating Russian army arrived at the gates of Auschwitz.

Elie Wiesel found himself faced with the same situation and choice as Levi; recuperating from foot surgery in the hospital barracks of Auschwitz, Wiesel and his father weighed up the risks of their choices. Unlike Levi they decided upon the evacuation march. Wiesel and his father marched for weeks together, unaware that Wiesel's two elder sisters remained alive. Wiesel was not to discover this until after his father's death, liberation and his arrival in France. With brief respite stops in Gleiwitz camp and farm buildings, fifteen year-old Wiesel forced his dysentery-stricken father to continue until they arrived at Buchenwald camp, near Gotha (Gilbert 1987: 791). Overcome with illness, his father died on the 29th of January, before the Allies reached the German camps; Wiesel reached liberation an orphaned child in a foreign country. "I woke up at dawn on January 29. On my father's cot there lay another sick person. They must have taken him away before daybreak and taken him to the crematorium. Perhaps he was still breathing..." (*Wiesel Night*: 112).

Despite the situation the Allied liberators discovered at the camps in Poland and Germany in 1945, the horror, desperation and hopelessness, the faith and the need for religious observance was evident, even in the adverse surroundings. British and American Forces chaplains' in German camps such as Buchenwald led services and prayers to the mass of Jews who, for years had been stripped of their rights to pray and to observe their religious rituals.

On that evening, Buchenwald staged a unique demonstration of faith and loyalty to God. Thousands of liberated Jews crowded into the specifically vacated block for the first post-war Jewish religious service to be held on the soil of defeated Germany. The *Muselmänner*, the cripples, the injured, and the weak came to demonstrate to the world that the last ounce of their strength, the last drop of their blood, and the last breaths of their lives belonged to God, to Torah, and to the Jewish religion. (Berkovits 1979: 24-25)

By May 1945 Levi had been liberated from Auschwitz by the Soviet forces and was on his epic journey back to Italy, but Wiesel, only just orphaned by his father's death in Buchenwald, was once more present at another test and triumph of faith. Having witnessed in Auschwitz the indictment and judgement against God by Jews who then returned to their prayers, Wiesel once more was in the presence of an astonishing display of faith and devotion by the suffering Jewish survivors in Buchenwald. Wiesel candidly narrates his troubles and ambivalences with his faith, but through all of his evolving feelings throughout his Holocaust ordeal it is arguable that the overwhelming display of religious devotion in Buchenwald may have reminded Wiesel of his initial faith and helped him to reconcile himself with his Jewish religion, which he maintains to this day.

7.8 Conclusion

Auschwitz-Birkenau, the site of the Nazis' conclusion to the Final Solution and the collision point of millions of European Jews, was also the site of the most extraordinary place of Jewish worship. Primo Levi had been comfortable in his atheist, secular Jewish identity but had gradually been forced to confront his racial identity through Italy's developing anti-Semitic policy. As Levi left the Fossoli internment camp for an unknown destination, he was confronted by another element of Jewish identity he had given little consideration to, that of faith. In Auschwitz Levi's non-religious identity collided with the religious faith of Elie Wiesel and the mass of Orthodox and Hasidic Jewry from the East. Both men were forced to confront and understand their previously held beliefs and religious identities within their new environment, which

removed the Jews' religious culture, offended their beliefs and shattered their previously held faith.

The uniqueness of the Holocaust led to a proliferation of new Jewish theologies focused on explaining the Holocaust and God's role within it. The difficulty of applying a Holocaust theology to the experiences of the survivors is the disparity of the survivors' beliefs. Levi and Wiesel's religious identities were so polarised they were problematic for theologians attempting explanations. While Levi's engagement with Jewish history, issues of faith and God is evident, if sometimes inconsistent, his ideological stance is problematic within Jewish thought. Even the more typically traditional Jewish identity of Wiesel is inconsistent with many of the theologies of the Holocaust and he is attributed to the development of Protest theology, demonstrated in *Night* and more clearly in *The Trial of God*. Despite their clear differences, the religious identities of Levi and Wiesel became similar in Auschwitz in the conflicts both men appeared to experience in maintaining their ideological beliefs in the most desperate and adverse of environments. Both Levi and Wiesel became martyrs to their beliefs to an extent and experienced crises of faith in opposing ways. As the concentration camps were liberated Levi and Wiesel were forced to rebuild their identities with the weight of the most significant event in modern Jewish history in their memories.

Chapter Eight

Reconstructing Jewish Identity in the Post-Holocaust World

“I’ll make it into an outcry,” he said, and there was a strange light in his dark eyes. “An outcry first of despair and then of hope. And finally a shout of triumph.”

(Wiesel *Dawn*: 14)

As the Nazi government capitulated to the Allies and the concentration and extermination camps were liberated, the Jews of Europe were left to reconstruct their lives and their identities in the post-Holocaust world. It is the purpose of this chapter to compare the approaches Levi and Wiesel took in reconstructing their identities in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the paths the two men followed through the twentieth century following their confrontations with their identities in Auschwitz. Their liberations were very different occasions and each man had to construct his survivor identity out of the trauma of the Holocaust. The crossing and dividing of paths and identities through their shared careers as writers and Holocaust memoirists will be traced through their narratives and interviews, comparing and contrasting the ways each survivor negotiated their Holocaust experience and the reconstruction of their Jewish identities. The events of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, from Hitler’s first race laws in 1935 to the discovery of the camps and the atrocities of the mass exterminations a decade later, necessarily invoke the question of the validity of Jewish assimilation in Europe. For the Jews who emerged from the camps to find themselves poverty-stricken, stateless and betrayed by former Christian and Aryan friends, the idea of assimilation must have seemed like an illusion. This chapter moves the context of the study beyond Europe to consider issues of Jewish identity in the Diaspora and in the return to Israel.

8.1 And the World Remained Silent

The lives and to an extent, the identities of Levi and Wiesel converged in Auschwitz but at the point of liberation their paths forked again. However the issue of statelessness and national identity were to prove problematic for both throughout the chaotic

aftermath of the Holocaust. Levi endured months of arduous travel in his repatriation journey to Italy. Nine months after Auschwitz was liberated the train returning Levi home, reached Italy. "I reached Turin on 19 October, after thirty-five days of travel; my house was still standing, all my family was alive, no-one expecting me. I was swollen, bearded and in rags, and had difficulty in making myself recognized [sic]" (Levi *Truce*: 379). Wiesel, not realising that he had two surviving sisters, opted not to return to Sighet or even to Hungary (as it had become again). As a child survivor, he remained in the care and responsibility of the Allied liberators and was taken to a children's home in France for Jewish survivors. Wiesel's unfamiliarity with the French language caused him to miss the opportunity of being granted French citizenship, although he retained French residency (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 109). Despite being denied official citizenship, Wiesel remained in France as an adult resident, constructing his new survivor identity and career as a writer in the more stable French environment, rather than returning to his former life in Romania-Hungary.

The months following liberation were not wholly ones of happiness and relief for the Jews of Europe, who emerged exhausted and traumatised from the camps, into chaos and poverty across Europe. The Nazi persecution of the Jews across Europe began with the looting of Jewish premises on *Kristallnacht* and the disenfranchisement of Jewish life. As the threat of deportation and execution became more intense, many Jews bargained with the Nazis with their savings and valuables, or left their belongings in the care of Christian neighbours as they prepared for deportation. Upon returning to their homes and communities after liberation, surviving Jews frequently found that their homes had been occupied by Aryan families who were not prepared to leave and that their previous friends and neighbours would no longer return their money, valuables or possessions.

They were driven out of the countries where they wanted their property restored to them, like Poland and Hungary. As you know, my sister, Béa, returned to Sighet and she found our house occupied by strangers. What could she do? She went to live somewhere else. We could not get a new start, and this was even more true because the surviving Jews were treated throughout like second-class citizens. (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 216)

Alone and utterly dispossessed, the statelessness and vulnerability of European Jews was in many cases, heightened after the Holocaust. While Levi certainly experienced the frustration and vulnerability of statelessness and poverty while trying to reach Italy, when he finally returned he arrived at his home to find his family safe there. Repatriation brought relief and security at last. For Wiesel, liberation brought him insecurity and the unknown; unable to return to his home country and unwittingly denied citizenship in the country which provided him refuge, Wiesel had entered Auschwitz a Romanian Jew and left camp a stateless orphan. Wiesel was to discover that his two older sisters had also survived Auschwitz and was reunited with them after he arrived in France. The loss of his parents and younger sister however were clearly traumatic events which informed several of his narratives.

I knew my father was dead. My mother was probably dead, since Mengele would have considered her too old to work. Likewise my grandmother. My little sister was too little. I hoped Bea and Hilda might still be alive, but how could I find out? (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 97)

Levi acknowledged Wiesel's trauma of losing his parents and the emotional crisis of faith it caused him. Although Levi's experience of Auschwitz was no less traumatic, he was able to be reunited with his family and his home upon liberation. "After all, I was lucky: I didn't lose my family, I was the only member to be deported. When I returned to Italy I found my home, I found my family, I found a job" (Rudolf 1986, 2001: 27).

Levi and Wiesel were born and brought up in a time when Jewish identity carried with it a stigma and a threat. Wiesel protected himself from this stigma by immersing himself within his Jewish family and community and Levi ignored it for as long as possible by not acknowledging his Jewish identity until he was forced to. After the Holocaust, aside from isolated events of anti-Semitism such as racial and territorial disputes in America and Nazi sympathisers in Eastern Europe, to acknowledge Jewish identity in Europe did not carry the threat of persecution. While the aftermath of the Holocaust permitted Levi and Wiesel to understand their Jewish identities in their own different ways their shared experience created once more, after their convergence in Auschwitz, a separation. The Holocaust confirmed for Levi his atheist beliefs; "the experience of the Lager with its frightful iniquity has confirmed me in my laity" (Levi

Drowned: 117). Yet for Wiesel, after his protests and his disputes with God, the Nazis' attempt to destroy Jewry altogether ultimately provided him with the impetus to cling to his faith.

Out of the aftermath of the Holocaust, surviving Jews had to reconstruct their identities once more. The survivor identity however, was one that was born out of an era of unprecedented change and division for the Jews of Europe, the most violent and systematic persecution of the Jews as an entire people and the largest mass-murder in Jewish history. "For Wiesel, the Jew *is* history's survivor. But the Jew is more than the paradigmatic survivor of history. From its beginnings, the Jewish People has also been history's witness" (Goldberg 1995: 20). The Holocaust was to prove such a significant event for Jewry that it was to inform post-war Jewish identity world-wide. Jews who had fled Nazi persecution and arrived in Britain and America associated their identity with the Holocaust. The 'otherness' that had marked the Jews out as different under Nazi rule followed the Jews beyond liberation, in their post-war identities in the Diaspora. Isaac Bashevis Singer who left Poland for America in 1935 wrote short stories about survivors of the camps settling in America.

I asked her and she told me a story that, if I hadn't confirmed it myself later, I would have called the ravings of a sick mind. Her sister Ytta, had jumped from the train taking her to the concentration camp and made her way through the fields and forests to Russia. (Singer 1953, 1984: 462)

The American novelist Phillip Roth's novel *The Plot Against America* sums up the tension among American Jews after the Second World War as Jews not directly affected by the Holocaust lived with the knowledge that a watershed of legitimised Jewish persecution and racial segregation had been passed in Europe.

Lindbergh was the first famous living American whom I learned to hate – just as President Roosevelt was the first famous living American whom I was taught to love – and so his nomination to run against Roosevelt in 1940 assaulted, as nothing ever had before, that huge endowment of personal security that I had taken for granted as an American child of American parents in an American school in an American city in an American at peace with the world. (Roth 2005: 7)

The use of the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Roth's novel demonstrates the continuing debate surrounding Holocaust memory and a Jewish identity informed by the Holocaust, particularly in America, where Wiesel was to construct his own survivor identity.

8.2 The Holocaust in the Media

The atrocities of the Holocaust had been documented in the immediate aftermath of liberation and the defeat of the Nazis, in newsreels filmed by the Allies. According to Jeffrey Shandler however, the media portrayals of surviving Jews, particularly in the American media, contributed to a specific victim identity, constructed from within and attributed to the survivors. Images of Jews, starving and passively observing the Allied filming, propagated an imbalanced view of camp liberation. Footage of the Jews and other prisoners actively feeding and caring for themselves and attempting to establish a community of survivors was deliberately discarded in favour of the more emotive footage.

The linking of the silent, passive, anonymous living with the dead in these earliest presentations of liberation footage portrays survivors as ghosts, creatures beyond the resumption of normal life routines. Along with the notion that most Jewish victims of Nazism responded passively to their persecutors, this spectral image of Holocaust survivors has persisted, informing many portrayals of them in American popular culture, especially during the first post war decades. (Shandler 1999: 17)

Following footage such as the Allied films Shandler discusses, the public expectation of the survivor would be one of the victim and these expectations would be reflected in the reception of the wave of testimonies soon to be published, firstly in Europe and then America. Levi and Wiesel clearly differ in their narrative style and trajectories and it is arguable that Wiesel fitted the survivor type expected and even demanded by the public in America more accurately than Levi. Certainly Levi did not enjoy his reception and his public performances in America the way Wiesel appeared to and Levi was not to become the public figure Wiesel did, who used his survivor status as a platform for

his campaigns and an opportunity to capitalise on the public image of the survivor-victim. Wiesel's humanistic concerns were with the Jews world-wide, from the Soviet Jews to the Israeli wars and with non-Jewish victims of persecution in South Africa, Cambodia and Bosnia. Wiesel spoke as a proponent of peace, as a survivor and as one who has witnessed the worst of humanity.

A decade after the end of the Holocaust Levi was repatriated in Italy, at home in Turin and working once more as a chemist by day, while privately writing his Holocaust testimony. Wiesel, by then living in Paris and a student at the Sorbonne, was working as a journalist for the Yiddish newspaper *Zion in Kamf* (Wiesel 1996 p.158). An encounter with Catholic writer François Mauriac in 1955 prompted Wiesel to discuss his Holocaust experience and encouraged him to publish his story.

I owe him a lot. He was the first person to read *Night* after I reworked it from the original Yiddish. He submitted it to his own publisher, promising to write a preface for the book, to speak of it in the press, and to support it with all the considerable means at his disposal. (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 267)

Despite his efforts, Mauriac's interest in Wiesel's story just ten years after the end of the Second World War was stronger than the general interest within the publishing world. Levi and Wiesel, although not the very first survivors to publish their experiences with any level of success, were among the first few published within fifteen years of liberation. However at the time the specific genre of Holocaust literature did not exist. The genre Levi and Wiesel were attempting to establish was a new field, constructing a public and literary survivor identity. Issues such as Spies' critique of Morgan's Holocaust philosophy discussed in chapter seven represent the difficulties in categorising Holocaust testimonies in a completely new literary field after such an unprecedented historical event.

The most famous and commercially successful piece of Holocaust literature is the diary of Anne Frank. Anne's diary only recorded her experience of her family living in hiding in Amsterdam; the family's concentration camp experience is not narrated in the diary. Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, published in 1947 and the first work of Holocaust literature to become widely known, is not a Holocaust testimony in the same format as Levi and Wiesel's narratives. It contains no information on the camp

experience, forced labour, or the mass exterminations in operation. While Anne Frank's diary does not testify to the atrocities she herself was victim to, the world-wide commercial success of the published diary is arguably due to the human face of suffering she represents. An eloquent, ambitious young girl, whose photograph portrays an energetic child but whose writing betrays a tragically mature understanding of the persecution her family endured, Anne Frank although not typical of the Holocaust victim, is an accessible emblem of innocent Jewish suffering. Levi himself says of Frank's power to garner public interest and sympathy as a representative of the Holocaust: "a single Anne Frank excites more emotion than the myriads who suffered as she did, but whose image has remained in the shadows" (Levi *Drowned*: 39). Frank becomes an icon of Holocaust victimisation; particularly a symbol of the tragedy of assimilated Jews in Europe and has attracted a vast readership which opened up the field of Holocaust literature to adults and children.

The success of Frank's diary ensured the public endurance of her own story, but her narrative does not expose the readers to the horrific and unpalatable details of the camps which were an integral part of the testimonies of Levi, Wiesel and the survivors of the camps and of understanding the event itself. Levi and Wiesel were adult men who offered their own Holocaust experiences to the public. They were unable to rely upon an image of photogenic innocence or childish wisdom beyond their years, as Frank portrayed, and further, were testifying details of the grotesque events of Auschwitz. Both writers needed to find a way to penetrate the public interest in the Holocaust that Anne Frank's Diary had tentatively established and to construct saleable identities as survivors of a horrific and potentially unbelievable regime. While Wiesel is able to represent himself as a child in the camps and propagate the innocence and tragedy of a child orphan, he lived ostensibly as an adult in camp like Levi and wrote from the vantage point of an adult journalist not a child, as Frank did.

Levi and Wiesel both wrote their initial literature in the first ten years following liberation and from their first drafts the narratives differed in style and trajectory. The two writers shared a similar experience in finding publishers and distributors for their work, in a period when Holocaust literature was not a popular market. Despite the existence of a small group of Jews in Turin within the literary community who had personal experience of the Holocaust, Levi experienced a lack of interest in promoting

If This is a Man (*Se questo è un uomo*) and after publication in Italian in 1947, initial sales were very low. The testimony and Levi remained in obscurity for a decade until it was republished in 1958 (Levi *Man*: 381). Wiesel's first draft of *Night* initially written in Yiddish was significantly longer than the published *Night* (*La Nuit*). The readership in France of a Yiddish-language Holocaust manuscript was limited and under Mauriac's guidance, Wiesel edited his testimony considerably and changed his written language to French.

Is that why my manuscript – written in Yiddish as “And the World Remained Silent” and translated first into French, then into English – was rejected by every major publisher, French and American, despite the tireless efforts of the great Catholic French writer and Nobel laureate François Mauriac?
(Wiesel *Night*: x)

Even when translated into French and with the support of the established Mauriac, Wiesel's testimony drew little interest initially among the French literary circles, with Mauriac being told, “no one's interested in the death camps anymore” (Wiesel *All Rivers*: 267).

From the first texts of Levi and Wiesel, *If This is a Man* and *Night* respectively, the trajectories and narratives of the two survivors were markedly different. Levi explicitly wished to portray himself and be read as a witness to the events he saw and experienced within Auschwitz and not as a judge of the Holocaust in its entirety. A literary pattern Levi established in chapters of *If This is a Man* but which is more prolific and visible in the essays of *The Drowned and the Saved*, is his attempt to negotiate the complexities of morality in the camps, while maintaining equanimity and emotional balance in describing his surroundings in Auschwitz and Monowitz (Auschwitz III). Wiesel as a writer is more poetic in his choice of language and his emotive trajectory. While he, like Levi, narrates his own experiences within Auschwitz-Birkenau, the theological trajectory, the descriptive language and the focus upon Wiesel's complex relationship with his faith, create a different overall theme to his memoir than Levi's more humanistic approach to narrating his experiences. Levi did deviate in his narrative from the witness account of Auschwitz and while his narrative could at times be read as an inventory of the construction and operating system of

Auschwitz, Levi also allowed the reader a view of the human relationships in camp. Levi explored his own philosophical musings on the survivors and victims of the camps and the systematic deconstruction of identity in the camps, which destroyed prisoners.

Imagine a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short, of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often loses himself. (*Levi Man*: 33)

Through the publication of their first Holocaust texts the differing personae of Levi and Wiesel as survivors and writers emerge. The divide between the witness and the victim emerges through the language and the trajectories of the two testimonies. The personalities of Levi, the witness and the writer and Wiesel the archetypal victim-survivor and the suffering Jew, once more divide their identities as Jews and also as survivors.

Levi did however, to an extent, reconcile himself with his Jewish identity, an identity he was only really forced to confront in the Nazi and Fascist era. With his literary career emerging, Levi's Jewish identity became a focal point of his literature and he established a link with Turin's Jewish community, even sending his children to Jewish schools, while maintaining a non-religious lifestyle himself. "We sent our children to Jewish elementary school to counterbalance the pressure of the dominant Catholic culture around them, but after that we preferred to move them into state schools" (Bruck 1976, 2001: 263). It seems that while he had accepted the Jewish identity prescribed for him by an anti-Semitic regime, the ambivalence which pervades his Holocaust narrative remained within him after the Holocaust. Levi's assertion that he sent his children to a Jewish elementary school merely to counterbalance the dogma of the Catholic hegemony in Italy is reasonable given his ideological rejection of religious belief, which applies to both the Jewish and Christian faiths. There is a contradiction however in Levi electing to give his children a prescriptively Jewish education and thus, a Jewish identity at the time that he experienced with frustration categorisation as a Jewish writer as he was promoted in America.

To friends in Turin he complained that the Americans had 'pinned a Star of David' on him. Yet in America, where people tend to segregate by

ethnic group and background, it was inevitable that Levi's would be primarily a Jewish audience. Indeed, he was marketed as such. If there had been misunderstandings, it was because Levi represented an unfamiliar figure in the literature of the Nazi camps: a Mediterranean, rather than an East European survivor. (Thompson 2003: 475-76)

If Levi realised that his children would be exposed to a religious culture in Italy despite his own beliefs, or lack of, his pride in his Jewish identity which emerges at points in his narratives, emerges again. Levi may not have shared the religious beliefs of his Jewish community, but the Jewish neighbourhood in Turin was a part of his family history and identity. The loyalty to his Jewish ancestry and identity is represented sporadically in Levi's literature, but his pride in family heritage is unquestionable. By educating his children (in their early years at least) through the Jewish community in Turin Levi maintained his family connection to his home town's community. Levi argued near the end of his life that "I'm a Jew, they've sewn the star of David on me and not only on my clothes" and that it was an irrevocable badge to remove (Camon 1989: 68). It must be considered that the time when Levi was writing and recalling his Holocaust experience was an emotional period with the trauma of recalling his experiences conflicting with the defensive assertion of his Jewish identity and the persecution he has endured because of it.

8.3 Of Providence? Changing Holocaust Theology

Throughout the Holocaust and the internment system, the Jewish faith and demonstrations of belief and observance, existed in varying degrees and manifestations in the camps. Rejections of faith, religious protests and changing belief systems similarly proliferated in the camp environments and through the Holocaust theologies to emerge in the years following liberation. The changing world which emerged and developed from the war years, particularly the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, provided the inspiration for a new group of Holocaust theologies and a vision of redemption to close the modern era, which had been one of unprecedented persecution and violence toward the Jews of Europe. Some of the new theologies

created in response to and by means of explaining the Holocaust, returned to the Hebrew Scriptures and the literary precedent within Jewish history of tremendous events and periods of suffering. Looking to Scriptural examples such as Noah's flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah brings the Holocaust back to early traditions of absolute destruction, whereas the immolation of Isaac, the slavery in Egypt and notably the trials of Job, reminded the victim and the theologian of the history of suffering, punishment and sacrifice within Jewish Scripture. Levi discussed the slavery and liberation of Exodus, with little belief in the possibility of a real liberation from modern oppression (*Levi Periodic*: 43). Wiesel, famously preferred the Job-like protest of the faithful, retaining a belief in God and the Jewish faith, while directing his protest at the suffering of religious Jews towards God, within his literary framework (*Wiesel Night*: 67).

The Remnant is a theological interpretation of Holocaust survivors, relating the experience of twentieth century Jews to that of the Israelite people of the Hebrew Scriptures. Both Levi and Wiesel discussed their discomfort with the notion of salvation by providence and the anger they feel at the idea of their lives being deliberately spared over the lives of friends and in Wiesel's case, family. Despite the differing survivor identities Levi and Wiesel promote in their writing and publicity and their polarised views of the Jewish faith and belief in God, their views on the Remnant, a significant element of Holocaust thought and theology, are shared and their arguments virtually indistinguishable (*Levi Drowned*: 62).

It would frighten me to use the word "miracle" to describe the fact that others suffered so much more than I did. To say that my presence here is the result of a miracle would be to say that millions of others did not benefit from any miracle. (*Wiesel Evil*: 8)

Levi as a survivor and a witness stood apart from the political platform Wiesel relished but is comparable to him in his attitude to the theological notion of the Remnant. To believe in the Remnant is to believe in providence and divine salvation, an idea Levi vehemently denied in his narrative. As Levi and Wiesel both explicitly rejected the notion of the Remnant, the validity of a theory that both religious and non-religious survivors disagree with is questionable. Levi and Wiesel both publicly

expressed their cynicism over the interpretation of their survival being due to a theological salvation, their lives being deliberately spared while others perished. The two men both preferred to attribute their survival to little more than fortune. Regardless of how Levi, Wiesel and the survivors of all of the camps understood their survival, their identities from liberation onwards were inextricably informed by their Holocaust experience. Levi and Wiesel necessarily reconstructed their national, professional, cultural and religious identities as Holocaust survivors, as their internment in Auschwitz and their experiences of the brutal, politically legitimated anti-Semitism, informed their lives, how they perceived the world and how they were perceived afterwards.

The establishment of the State of Israel also created some more redemptive, positive theological and historicist explanations for the Holocaust, suggesting that the suffering experienced through the Nazi years, the concentration camps and the murder of millions of Jews, were the 'birth pangs' of the new era for Jews. Pesach Schindler discusses this belief, the *Hevle Mashiah* (the suffering before the Messiah) as one compatible with Hasidic thought, making sense of the catastrophe, or *Shoah* within a redemptive and theistic framework (Schindler 1990: 116-7). As the State of Israel was established as a homeland and a haven for the Jews after years of campaigning, the eventual success and creation of a Jewish homeland provided justification for the belief that the Jews of Europe suffered in the ghettos and camps for a theological reason and the deaths of six million Jews through the Holocaust provided the necessary sacrifice for a new generation of Jews in Israel. As Moses failed to reach Israel in the narrative of Exodus, to establish the land of Israel, so too did six million Jews of the Diaspora fail to see the creation of modern Israel. As a model of interpreting the Holocaust it must be considered that the creation of the State of Israel did not take place until after liberation; the Jews of the concentration camps could not have known that their survival would have led to the Jewish homeland in Israel. Although Wiesel once asserted that the creation of Israel did not take place *because* of the Holocaust, he claimed that Israel was necessary for Jewish survival and both he and Levi argued that Israel was created by the survivors of the Holocaust (Wiesel *Conversations*: 178-79). "I must admit to feeling a sentimental tie with Israel, if for no other reason than it was built by us, by my fellow prisoners" (Camon 1989: 56). The

number of Jews who began to make *Aliyah* to Palestine in the 1930s from Europe and the Jews around the world who have opted to become Israeli citizens since the creation of the State in 1948 suggests that despite the tragedy which preceded it, Israel itself was created and existed with an ambivalent identity of tragedy, victimisation, optimism and redemption.

8.4 Reconnecting With the East: Levi's Engagement with Jewish History

As Levi's reputation as an author grew and his literary identity as a Holocaust survivor developed, he took the uncharacteristic step of engaging with the wartime plight of East European Jewry. A Westerner whose only previous experience of Eastern Jewry had been in Auschwitz, Levi's experience of these Jews had been of Yiddish- and Hebrew-speaking, Orthodox religious men and women whom Levi could neither understand or empathise with on a religious or a cultural level. Even in the camps the few marks of identity the Nazis could not fully strip the Jews of (their languages and their religious beliefs) still proved to be an insurmountable barrier to forming an emotional connection between the Italians and those from the East. As Wiesel remarked after Levi's death, of their previous encounter in Auschwitz, which Levi claimed no recollection of: "I had seen him without seeing him. He had crossed my path without even noticing me. Even *over there*, social differences existed" (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 345).

Wiesel refers to this Eastern European Jewish community frequently in his literature. Novels such as *The Gates of the Forest*, *The Town Beyond the Wall*, *The Trial of God* and *Somewhere a Master*, engage with the plights of Eastern Jews, usually referring to the Holocaust as a background context. Wiesel's stories frequently "recreate the shtetl communities that were lost" as he memorialises his Eastern kin (Wollaston 1992: 51). With his personal connection to the East, his religious Orthodoxy and his interest in the mysticism and legends of Jewish faith, Wiesel's literature typically reflects the character of the Eastern Jew and the historic struggles against oppression and anti-Semitism that have informed Jewish existence and identity in Eastern Europe.

Gavriel spoke in a light, almost detached tone of voice; he told a grotesque, farcical story, a legend to be listened to, a glass in hand, with a light heart. He laughed at it, with neither joy nor cruelty, with the laugh of a man who has known total fear and is no longer afraid of anyone or anything. (Wiesel *Gates*: 18)

Wiesel's support of Eastern Jews extended after the Holocaust to the plight of Soviet Jews prevented under Communist rule from fleeing the Soviet Union for Israel. Wiesel entered the political stage under the auspice of campaigning for Holocaust awareness, but in the years following the Holocaust his political interests ranged from the ensuing genocides across the world including Cambodia, to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Wiesel's immediate heritage lay with the Jews of Eastern Europe. *The Jews of Silence* is Wiesel's testament to the tenacity and faith of the Soviet Jews who existed under a prolonged anti-Semitic regime.

Levi's literary search for his Jewish roots also took him East, but for Levi it was a new experience and required research into Jewish culture he had been totally unfamiliar with until his confrontation with Ashkenazi Jewry in Auschwitz.

At Auschwitz, Levi had had to confront his antipathy towards the Ashkenazim, but later saw that he had more in common with the ragged Jews of Bukovina, Galicia and the Ukraine than he might have liked to think. *If Not Now, When?* was a gesture of belated solidarity and identification. (Thompson 2003: 409-10)

Without the emotional and personal closeness to the *shtetl* culture that Wiesel was brought up with, Levi's literary engagement with East European Jewry focused on elements of Holocaust history and a retelling of Levi's personal encounters with these Jews, infused with a retrospective pride in Jewish fighting spirit. Levi's novel is a testament to the Polish and Russian Jewish partisans, survivors of ghettos and massacres, who fought their own war against the Nazis in the forests of Eastern Europe. Levi became engrossed in Yiddish culture and history to write his tribute to the Jews of the East, a new experience for the wholly assimilated Italian, as he spent time researching the historical battles, trials and locations of the partisans in the East (Levi *If Not Now*: 280).

Levi's narrative of *If Not Now, When?* reflected previous memories Levi held of his Holocaust experience where his Italian identity was met with surprise by his Eastern companions. Levi narrated in *The Truce* the disbelief Russian Jews displayed at an Italian Jew who could not speak Yiddish.

'You do not speak Yiddish; so you cannot be Jews!
In their language, the phrase amounted to rigorous logic.

Yet we really were Jews, I explained. Italian Jews: Jews in Italy, and in all Western Europe, do not speak Yiddish.

This was a great novelty for them, a comic oddity, as if someone had affirmed that there are Frenchmen who do not speak French. (Levi *Truce*: 285)

In *If Not Now, When?* the concept of an Italian Jew is again met with humour, the preconceptions of Italy seemingly irreconcilable with the idea of a Jew. "He wondered if there were Jews in Italy. If so they must be strange Jews: how can you imagine a Jew in a gondola or at the top of Vesuvius?" (Levi *If Not Now*: 41). In exploring Eastern Jewry as a community distinct from his own, Levi took the opportunity to make his own observations about the assimilation of Italian Jewry and the lack of physical identifying marks of Jewishness, as compared with the distinguishing signs of Orthodox Jewry.

'They dress like everybody else, they have the same face as everybody else...'

'Then how can they be told from the Christians when they walk along the street?'

'They can't: that's the point. Isn't that an unusual country?' (Levi *If Not Now*: 260)

Levi attempted to stand in the shoes of the Jews he encountered in Auschwitz and along his journey home, to understand their point of view. In this novel he appears to demonstrate an understanding of how an Italian Jew, who does not believe in God, does not speak Yiddish and who is outwardly indistinguishable from a Christian, could be such a problematic idea to an Orthodox Jew who knows only other Jews, who appear alike in traditional dress and speak a language specific to their faith.

Levi's engagement with the East remained a literary project; he never converted to Orthodoxy or chose to establish public links with Eastern European Jews

as Wiesel did with the Soviet Jews. However there is a sense of admiration for the partisan characters Levi created in *If Not Now, When?* Levi had a brief history with a group of anti-Fascist partisans in Italy; he recalls that his partisan group was not greatly active, the pistol Levi was given was fired once during his short-lived duration with the partisans and the band came to an end as the group was betrayed and arrested in 1944. "I didn't know the first thing about guns; I had one but I didn't know how to use it: I only fired one shot, because otherwise it was a waste of bullets" (Camon 1989: 8). The partisans in Levi's novel fight actively in the harsh climates and terrains of the forests of the East, all year round, for years as the war continued through the 1940s. While the characters and events are, in detail by Levi's own admission fictitious, they are based upon truth, that Jewish partisans like these characters existed and fought the Nazis across Europe (Levi *If Not Now*: 279-80). There is a strong element of admiration and commendation in Levi's writing for the Jewish partisans of the East. It is likely that Levi would admire the partisans for their successes and small victories against their enemy, successes largely unachieved by Levi's own group of Italian partisans. There is also an element of Jewish pride in Levi choosing to write a testament to the strength and devotion of the Jewish partisans. While Levi remained throughout his life an assimilated, non-believing Jew, he did acknowledge his Jewish identity as distinct from the Christian identity in post-war Italy and among the Turin Jewish literary circle as a part of his survivor-writer identity. While he chose not to engage with the religious Jewish community typical of Eastern Jewry, as a victim of the Nazi persecution of Jews, he felt pride in the fighting spirit of the Jews who fought the Nazis in the East and wished to promote the bravery of the partisan Jews. This is Levi's own contribution to debunking the myth and the popular image of the Jews passively meeting their deaths in their millions.

8.5 An Outcry of Despair then Hope: A New Israel

The Holocaust was such a momentous event, with such serious ramifications for Jews worldwide that the reconstruction of Jewish identity post-Holocaust not only affected the first-generation survivors, but their children, the second-generation victims. Levi and Wiesel both married and became fathers after liberation and as with many

survivors had to confront their traumatic histories with their families as their children also had to construct their identities growing up with the shadow of the camps very much a presence in their lives. The dispersion of Jewish communities during the Second World War, from Jews fleeing Nazi Germany and by those who survived the camps and left post-War Europe for America, Canada, Australasia and Israel, was broad. Such was the world-wide establishment of Jewish communities, whose identities were either directly or indirectly informed by the Holocaust that when Levi and Wiesel had finally established their literary careers and the literary world was prepared to publish and promote Holocaust literature, the survivors found an empathic and interested readership world-wide.

Levi predominantly dealt with his Holocaust experience in literature, by discussing his experience of Auschwitz retrospectively. He wrote testimonial literature (*If This is a Man*, *The Truce*), short true stories (*The Periodic Table*) and a collection of essays revisiting his experience (*The Drowned and the Saved*) and also poetry, but tended to adhere to writing about his own experience when addressing the Holocaust directly. Wiesel, after writing *Night* chose an alternative route to interrogating post-Holocaust Jewish identity. Wiesel followed *Night*, his testimonial literature, with *Dawn*, a fictitious novel with the fraught post-war situation in Palestine as the context and the Holocaust a prominent shadow over the lives of the characters. In *Dawn* Wiesel explores the path his life could have taken after liberation, an alternative identity to the writer he became. The similarities between the author and character are initially transparent and Wiesel blurs the lines between fact and fiction. Elisha is the protagonist of Wiesel's novel, a teenaged orphan of the Nazi camps, liberated from Buchenwald and living in France as a refugee (Wiesel *Dawn*: 11). This biography of Elisha, very similar in name to Eliezer, is a direct replica of Wiesel's. The separation in their lives occurs at the point in Elie / Elisha's lives when Elie the author, interested in the politics of Palestine and Israel becomes a writer in France, whereas Elisha the character is recruited in France to join the Zionist Movement in Palestine, to fight for a Jewish homeland. Elisha is seduced by the idea of a strong Jewish force fighting for independence and freedom after so much oppression and tragedy. "This was the first story I had ever heard in which the Jews were not the ones to be afraid. Until this

moment I had believed that the mission of the Jews was to represent the trembling of history rather than the wind which made it tremble" (Wiesel *Dawn*: 15).

The character of Elisha romanticises the idea of a Palestine liberated from British rule and the Zionist dream of a modern Israel, but what Wiesel really discusses in *Dawn* is the reality of terrorism in the Near East, in which Palestine and Israel have been heavily involved since the late 1940s, a turbulence which was exacerbated by Israel being established as a state within Palestine. Elisha follows the movement to Palestine and fulfils his role watching over a British Officer who has been captured and is due to be executed in retaliation for the execution of a Palestinian freedom fighter. Elisha is charged with executing the Officer and thus will transform his identity from victim to killer. "At dawn tomorrow at the same hour, the same minute, they will die – but not together, for there is an abyss between them. David ben Moshe's death is meaningful; John Dawson's is not. David is a hero, John a victim..." (Wiesel *Dawn*: 19). Elisha kills Captain John Dawson, a man he feels no personal animosity towards, in retaliation for the death of David ben Moshe, a man Elisha has never met. The terrorism Elisha enters into is an ideological protest against the victim identity of the Jews and a sign that after the Holocaust the Jews must fight with the ferocity of their oppressors. Elisha is indoctrinated by Gad, his mentor, who justifies his terrorism:

We don't like to be the bearers of death; heretofore we've chosen to be victims rather than executioners. The commandment *Thou shalt not kill* was given from the summit of one of the mountains here in Palestine, and we were the only ones to obey it. But that's all over; we must be like everybody else. (Wiesel *Dawn*: 22-23)

Elisha, although he fulfils his duty, does not appear to easily reconcile himself with his actions. Gad presents a very polemic view of Jewish identity, that of the choice between the victim and the warrior. Elisha, having once been the victim, struggles to accept his role reversal. Wiesel, when questioned on the figure of Elisha argued that Elisha did not become an avenger, despite him killing out of retaliation and in the name of a political cause. As far as Wiesel is concerned, Elisha is a victim and remains so after (and because of) his own actions killing Captain Dawson.

This book about violence is an indictment of violence. It is meant to show quite starkly that there

are certain things that a victim must not do. The key to the novel, in fact, comes when the hero, Elisha, says, 'It's done. I've killed Elisha.' (Wiesel *Evil*: 126)

Wiesel here claims to have written an indictment of violence; he has explored the option of violent retribution and fighting, but has rejected it. It is a significant conflict then, that Wiesel calls Elisha, a terrorist and murderer, his novel's "hero" as well as a victim. Wiesel may not be prepared to venture into the world of freedom fighting and terrorism, but he also refuses to condemn Israeli and Jewish acts of violence both in his novels and when questioned on current political affairs. Wiesel's survivor identity is informed by a sense of victimisation in his literature, a sense of persecution for which he directs his protest towards God, within the 'safe' framework of literature. As a believing Jew, Wiesel maintains that his protests against God, and His lack of action during the Holocaust, have always been made through faith, "within the Covenant, but not outside it" (Wiesel *Evil*: 12). Writing as a character, albeit as himself, Wiesel is arguably using the literary format as a safe framework to protest; similarly, he is able to explore the alternative identity of the murderer and terrorist, safely within his literary framework.

Levi does not experience the same adherence to religious faith as Wiesel, therefore does not demonstrate the need to use his literature as a safe outlet for an emotive protest. However, as he does not attribute his ordeal to a theological explanation he does not take the opportunity to develop a theological protest within his literature. Levi also differs from Wiesel in post-war identity, in the significance of Israel. Levi was not a Zionist nor did he claim any desire to emigrate to Palestine or Israel. He at times publicly ventured opinions on the politics of Israel, although he received criticism for not offering unwavering support to Israel's military actions (see, for example, his interviews with Bruck 1976; and Pansa 1982, both in Belpoliti 2001), but he demonstrated no personal interest in the avenging identity of the Jewish freedom fighters in Palestine. Conversely it was Levi who had previously engaged in partisan activities before his deportation and although he admitted to participating in little activity, he had believed in fighting for his cause. Perhaps because his attempts failed and he returned from Auschwitz exhausted, or perhaps because he felt his own attempts produced relatively inconsequential results compared to Palestinian and

Israeli fighters, Levi abandons the desire to fight after the Holocaust. While Levi's personal issues with depression created a public appearance of a traumatised survivor who was uncomfortable on the public stage that Wiesel appeared to relish, Levi's typical literary identity was that of the witness. Although he is comparable to Wiesel in that they have both made use of testimony and fiction to explore characters from the activist or fighter figure to the witness, Levi more consistently allies himself with the identity of the secular witness, with interests similar to his own, such as the figure of the chemist (*The Wrench*) or the watch-maker (*If Not Now, When?*), those who create with their own hands, like Levi and his engineer father before him. Wiesel's literary characters vary from victim to terrorist, but are all informed to some degree by Wiesel's Holocaust experience and defended by Wiesel as such.

8.6 Jewry in the Diaspora

In the years following the Holocaust Wiesel found his Jewish identity evolving once again, with the political changes which had such a tremendous impact on world Jewry, the creation of the independent State of Israel in 1948. The optimism and the political turmoil Israel has faced, from its creation in the aftermath of the Holocaust and through the Six Day War in 1967 gave Wiesel a platform on which to develop his political survivor identity and his life-long campaign for the future of Judaism and global Jewry in a changing world. In the years following Israel's establishment, perceptions and theologies surrounding the Holocaust changed from arguing that the Holocaust represented the end of Judaism and Jewry as it had existed before, a sign that God's Covenant with the Jews had either changed or been broken. The strength and determination that Israel fought with for its territory in Palestine appeared to prompt a more optimistic belief such as Berkovits' that the Holocaust represented not the vulnerability and fragility of Jewry, but its strength; that Judaism itself and the Jews have survived such attacks upon them indicates a spiritual and supernatural power. "That the Jewish people has withstood all the barbarous attacks upon it, that it has been able to maintain itself in the midst of deadly enemies, bespeaks the presence of another kind of power, invisibly playing its part in the history of men" (Berkovits 1979: 83). Wiesel, seemingly reconciled with his faith, appears to support Berkovits' view and

since its establishment, has been an active and vocal champion of the State of Israel and its necessity.

Despite his strong feelings of support towards the state created by his fellow survivors, Levi chose not to live in Israel. His culture, language and identity was very much that of an Italian. In a surprising parallel with Levi, Wiesel also chose not to live in Israel, despite following its trials and its developments and visiting many times. As Levi observed, the survivors of the Holocaust built modern Israel and moved there in large numbers. In America Wiesel had constructed an identity for himself that was commercially successful and politically powerful. This identity of the victim-survivor-activist would not have been so idiosyncratic in Israel and while Wiesel was a vocal supporter of Israel, refusing to criticise it from outside, he would not live there permanently. “Yes, such is the price I must pay for living in the Diaspora: I never criticize [sic] Israel outside Israel. We are Jews, you and I. You are Israeli; I am not. [...] You have found; I am still seeking. You have been able to make the break; I have not” (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 61). In using the term “such is the price I must pay” Wiesel implies that he is unable to live in Israel or to criticise its state policies.

As was the case with many Jews, Wiesel emigrated to America rather than Israel. With a population of approximately one million more Jews in the United States than in Israel over the last decade, Wiesel made his home in the late twentieth century among the world’s largest Jewish community (Gilbert 1995, 2010: 123; 136). New York State on the East Coast of America became the most populated area of Jewish immigration and settlement (Gilbert 1995, 2010: 142). Isaac Bashevis Singer settled in New York before the Nazi occupation of his Polish homeland and in the aftermath of the Holocaust Wiesel followed, to work in Boston. The large Jewish communities established in America, particularly in the New York area, grew with the emigration from Europe before and after the Holocaust and infused the communities with a strong Diaspora identity and cultural memory of ‘otherness’. Wiesel made a choice to live in America rather than Israel and found work, a successful career and fame as a political activist. In America Wiesel was able to maintain his Diaspora identity, as an ‘other’ and also managed to justify his stance of evading criticism of Israel when he was very much involved in other issues of persecution and conflict around the world.

Returning to Italy, Levi's desire not to become a public talking head on issues of war and oppression in general were reinforced by his brief public engagement with Jewish politics. Levi found himself in the midst of a controversial argument over Israel and its military force. After Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 under Begin's rule, Levi wrote an open letter to the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* calling for a halt to Israel's advancement into Lebanese territory (Thompson 2003: 428). Levi was heavily criticised by pro-Israel Italian Jews for his apparent lack of sympathy and unconditional support for Israel and found himself alienated from several Jewish friends. His criticism of Begin and Sharon was not missed by Wiesel, who also added his own judgement against Levi's anti-Israeli protest (Thompson 2003: 446-47). Levi found the controversy and the expectation of him as a Jew and a Holocaust survivor to be unconditionally pro-Israel an uncomfortable distraction from his writing. As he remained a non-believing Jew who held no ambition to become an Israeli citizen, he refrained from entering the political stage or becoming a public voice on humanitarian issues, in the way that Wiesel enjoyed the role.

8.7 End of the Twentieth Century

By the end of the twentieth century Levi and Wiesel had established themselves as high-profile Holocaust survivors and prolific writers, heading a large and still growing genre of Holocaust literature. The industry of memorialising the atrocities of the Holocaust developed through the century which followed the Second World War with the Cold War, Soviet Gulags, the Vietnam war, genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia and widespread instability across the Near and Middle East. While there have been murders and persecutions against the 'other' for centuries, the Holocaust represents a shift in technique in the modern war against the 'other', that Bauman perceives as both the failure and the product of Modernity.

Like everything else done in the modern – rational, planned, scientifically informed, expert, efficiently managed, co-ordinated – way, the Holocaust left behind and put to shame all its alleged pre-modern equivalents, exposing them as primitive, wasteful and ineffective by comparison. Like everything else in our modern society, the Holocaust was an

accomplishment in every respect superior, if measured by the standards that this society has preached and institutionalized. (1999: 89)

Levi and Wiesel were witness to the ideals of Modernity, order, rationality and homogeneity, pushed to their limits not just through the Holocaust but in the atrocities which followed. As the era of Modernity passed into Postmodernity, Levi and Wiesel constructed public identities as survivors in a culture conscious of its recent past.

Wiesel, a high-profile figure throughout the late twentieth century, entered the public and political stage through his persona as a Holocaust survivor but used his status to engage with and campaign for victims of atrocities, oppressions and genocides across the world. Wiesel settled in America and finally attained citizenship there, where he became a familiar face and name within the field of Holocaust memory, literature and education. Wiesel attained a degree of notoriety as a powerful name within politics, being involved alongside numerous Presidents in Holocaust awareness discussions. He was involved in and for six years was Chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust, which campaigned for and designed the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, working alongside Presidents Reagan, Carter and Clinton. Although Wiesel professed a belief that the Holocaust should not become a political tool, it seems his strong beliefs on remembering Jewish victims drove his involvement with politics and Holocaust memorialisation. "It is impossible not to see the public relations game involved. I tell my friends: 'This confirms my doubts: We must never use the Holocaust for political purposes'" (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 182). Loath as Wiesel may have been to enter into "the public relations game" or to taint Holocaust memorialisation with politics, when his beliefs were attacked or threatened, he demonstrated an adroitness at using his survivor status to manipulate his political position with successive Presidents.

Wiesel's most memorable political campaign occurred in April 1985. President Reagan was mired in a controversial planned visit to Germany's Bitburg Cemetery, the grave of several *Waffen SS* men with West Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl, but was not to visit any concentration camps while in Germany. During a medal-giving ceremony at the White House, Wiesel, a recipient, was presented with the opportunity to speak out personally to the President on television. Despite the controversy and

fears over America's relationship with Germany, Wiesel spoke out. He pleaded with President Reagan not to visit Bitburg, telling him: "Your place is with the victims of the SS" (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 238). Although the Reagan administration refused to withdraw the President from the Bitburg visit, embarrassed White House staff were forced to add a visit to Bergen-Belsen to the German itinerary and Wiesel demonstrated a powerful ability to manipulate media interest in the Holocaust to meet his own campaign interests.

Wiesel returned to Germany in June 2009, then accompanied by President Obama, visiting Buchenwald camp, the site Wiesel was liberated from 64 years previously. Standing alongside the President, Wiesel delivered an impassioned speech referring to his father's death at the site and pleading with yet another American President for an end to racial hatred. Wiesel's influence and appeal to the American public and to its successive governments appears to be in his effective role-playing of the victim-survivor. The trend of Wiesel's persona began in his literature, the innocent child-victim of the Nazis and also in the theme of the believing Jew, agonised by the plight of his people whom he witnessed being tortured, dehumanised and murdered in Auschwitz. Wiesel's public persona developed through his time in America, gaining academic and political accolades alongside television airtime, transforming his survivor identity into a humanitarian and activist one, using his own experiences of the horrors of war and genocide to speak out on the atrocities that continued throughout the twentieth century. Wiesel effectively fulfilled the image of the Holocaust victim demanded by the American media, constructing himself as a powerful figure in politics and media and, as Shandler observes, simultaneously maintaining public interest and awareness in the Holocaust.

Television has also facilitated Wiesel's image as a public figure whose moral authority extends beyond the Holocaust. [...] On such occasions [as his numerous honours and television appearances], Wiesel has linked his status as Holocaust survivor with that of universalist humanitarian, thereby situating the Holocaust in a central, paradigmatic position within the contemporary discourse of morality. (Shandler 1999: 204)

Levi constructed a considerably different post-Holocaust public identity from Wiesel's in the decades following his literary publication. Levi chose to remain living in Italy where he continued to work as a chemist until retirement, writing in his free time. Levi arguably achieved more critical acclaim for his writing than Wiesel, but his public appearances were more limited, particularly in America. Levi's biographer Ian Thompson questions a potential ambivalence in Levi's feelings about fame as a Holocaust survivor. While Levi perhaps felt that Wiesel's approach to publicity was not appropriate in the context of Holocaust memory, the respect Wiesel commanded was attractive to him.

Levi was not very fond of Wiesel, or rather of what he stood for. Wiesel had cornered a sentimental middle-brow Jewish market and made a celebrity cult of his survivor status. Perhaps Levi was a little envious. He had never achieved – nor ever would achieve – the reverence bordering on idolatry lavished on Wiesel in America. (Thompson 2003: 446)

Although Levi spoke in schools and universities and was keen to play his part in maintaining awareness and education of the Holocaust, he did not become the high-profile celebrity that Wiesel had become. Although Levi and Wiesel were both responsible at least in part for the construction of the public survivor's identity, this element of Jewish identity was created from both 'within and without' the Jewish community. From 'within', Jewish survivors wanted their experiences made public and from 'without', the media and the public demanded a specific vision of the victim to engage with emotionally. While Wiesel fulfilled this role with apparent ease, Levi was less willing to conform to type.

In America, where he travelled for a book and lecture tour in 1985, Levi found the reception that Wiesel had become used to unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Levi's public speaking performances were inhibited by his lack of confidence in the English language and his awkwardness, although he was met with sympathetic and interested audiences. Levi did not willingly conform to the image of the Holocaust survivor that America expected; his ambivalence over his Jewish identity proved problematic for the audience and the author. Promoted as a Jewish victim, Levi was unhappy at the categorisation of his writing and survivor identity as definitively Jewish. Levi was also

aware that the market he was speaking to in America was largely Jewish. “Dr Levi, where would you locate the world centre of Jewry?’ Levi replied in heavily accented English: ‘After six days in New York I’d hesitate to locate it in Israel!’” (Thompson 2003: 470). While the efforts of Levi and the enthusiasm of his audience were admirable, the Holocaust-awareness message, it seemed in America, was being confined to a predominantly Jewish market.

Primo Levi died on 11th April 1987. He had retired several years earlier and had since devoted his time to writing full time. Ill-health plagued Levi, as it did his mother who remained at home with him and many in the circle of Jewish Holocaust survivors Levi surrounded himself with in Italy had died. Levi’s death was caused by a fall from the third storey of his apartment building. The widespread belief was that Levi committed suicide. This was the conclusion reached by the Italian police and the investigation into his death. “This sad chronicle was closed on 5 June 1987 when a Turin court officially declared that Primo Levi had died by his own hand. There would be no penal proceedings, therefore, and ‘all papers relative to the suicide’ were consigned to the tribunal archive” (Thompson 2003: 5). Levi certainly admitted to suffering bouts of depression throughout his life, a condition that can only have been exacerbated by the memories of the Holocaust and the recent deaths of fellow survivors. The last book Levi wrote before his death was *The Drowned and the Saved*, a collection of essays revisiting the Holocaust and his experiences of Auschwitz, published in 1986 in Italian and 1988 in English, following his death. Levi’s writing displays a preoccupation with the Holocaust, the cruel methods of the SS in dividing the unity of the victims and stripping them of their identities and also the guilt of being a survivor. Levi’s suicide cannot be fully proven, nor the influence of his past and his survivor identity; however the impact of the Holocaust upon his life and literary identity is irrefutable. Elie Wiesel was quoted in *La Stampa* newspaper days after Levi’s death as saying “Primo Levi died at Auschwitz forty years later” (Cicioni 1995: 171).

In 1986, the year Levi completed his final work, Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his campaigns for Holocaust awareness and his role as Chairman of The President's Commission on the Holocaust (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 269). As Levi appeared to struggle with the public role attached to his literary career and his survivor identity, Wiesel was increasing his public profile and attaching his survivor

identity to his campaigns to maintain a Holocaust memory in America. Wiesel's high-profile identity and the circulation of his Holocaust survivor story have been marred somewhat by accusations of fraud in recent years; as the modern technology has enabled Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism to proliferate un-policed on the internet, the uncensored online environment has permitted attacks on Wiesel's high-profile status attached to the Holocaust. (Websites such as the following are demonstrative of the attacks levelled at Wiesel: <http://northerntruthseeker.blogspot.com/2010/05/elie-wiesel-is-fraud-house-of-lies.html>.) Websites such as these are unfortunately not uncommon, however as they are uncensored works which are distasteful and offer no scholarly credibility they will not be discussed any further here. What they do illustrate however, is the way in which inconsistencies between texts or between literature and history are seized upon by critics of Wiesel who are keen to expose his entire history and reputation as fraudulent. Wiesel discussed his public persona and the vulnerability to criticism in his second memoir:

As regards myself, the attacks and insults come from many sources. I upset a lot of people. I am disliked by racists and anti-Semites of the reactionary right as much as by certain young intellectuals who need to prove their independence of the establishment. (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 124)

Wiesel has been particularly vulnerable to accusations of what he has termed "Judeocentrism" an attack he argues is made by Gentiles who believe he uses his public status to highlight the plight of the Jews in the Holocaust more than the non-Jewish victims (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 124). Wiesel defends himself against this charge, but argued to President Carter and the American Congress: "Not all the victims of the Holocaust were Jews, but all the Jews were victims" (Wiesel *And the Sea*: 129). Although it is natural that Wiesel's vested interest lies with the Jewish population around the world, statements such as those could be taken as inflammatory to those critics who accuse Wiesel of Judeocentrism. The development of the internet at the end of the twentieth century and particularly into the twenty-first century, has exacerbated the existing problem of anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial, allowing it to spread faster and become more virulent in a comparatively un-policed medium, more so than books which had previously assumed an academic stance on Holocaust denial,

discredited historian David Irving's work being a case in point. As Wiesel is such a high-profile figure in the field of Holocaust memory and awareness, he is vulnerable to attacks from anti-Semites, Holocaust deniers and high-profile literary figures. However Wiesel entered the public arena to protest against ignorance and the dangers of anti-Semitism and despite his assaults, remains an active figure and a tireless campaigner in Holocaust awareness.

8.8 Conclusion

The Holocaust was a subject the literary world was not keen to address in the 1940s and 1950s, as Levi and Wiesel attempted to make public their experiences in Auschwitz. By the end of the twentieth century the Holocaust had become a mainstream literary and cultural issue. In Europe, the sites of concentration and extermination camps are open to public visits, having been developed as museums and memorials. Schools and colleges across Europe lead educational visits to the camps and remaining living survivors, Wiesel included, continue to deliver lectures and talks, educating new generations to the horrors of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. Across Europe, America and Israel the Holocaust forms a part of educational curricula, and significant anniversary dates form international memorial days, such as the liberation of Auschwitz, January 27th, becoming an official internationally recognised 'Holocaust Memorial Day'. Levi and Wiesel's literary legacy has been to open the gates of popular culture to an awareness of and interest in the Holocaust.

The Holocaust survivors' identity, although informed by religious and cultural influences, becomes a new facet of post-war Jewish identity of its own. Levi and Wiesel negotiated this new identity differently, despite both men choosing the path of a literary career to explore their Auschwitz experiences. Levi and Wiesel appeared outwardly very different men, separated by language, culture and religious belief. The literary and public identities of these two men are bound by the common experience of the Holocaust. However the publicity attached to the survivor status divided Levi and Wiesel, making them as opposed after the Holocaust as they were before. Despite this, both figures contributed together to the construction of the survivor identity and the genre of Holocaust literature and thus, the Holocaust in public consciousness. The

Holocaust has permeated modern twentieth- and twenty-first-century popular culture and literature in a way that seemed unimaginable in the decade following liberation, when Levi and Wiesel challenged a silent world to read their literature and understand a population of Jews whose identity was now inextricably linked to the Holocaust.

Conclusion

The study has considered the theme of 'Enduring Identities', tracing the divergent and convergent Jewish identities of Holocaust survivors Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel. Through an exploration of their literature the Holocaust's impact upon divergent European Jewish identities is identified. The study traced Jewish identity from the time of origin of the Covenant with Israel, through a divided East / West Diaspora identity in modern Europe, to the destructions of the Nazi persecution and Holocaust and finally the reconstruction of Jewish identity in the post-Holocaust world, both in the Diaspora and in the return to Israel. Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel are situated together at the point of the most significant event in modern Jewish history; both deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, but are separated by the centuries of history which divided European Jewry between the East and the West. The East / West dichotomy is a notable framework to have been utilised; it identifies the geographic divide across Europe which created a cultural and social separation between the Jewish communities in each half of Europe. Through this argument, Primo Levi is discussed as representative of Western Europe and Elie Wiesel representative of Eastern Europe as both embody the cultural, religious and social traits of the Western and Eastern sides of European Jewish identity. In their divergent identities following the Holocaust, Levi and Wiesel maintain the East / West divide and through their own literary contributions, reconstruct divergent Jewish identity in the post-Holocaust world.

As a primarily literary study the thesis explored Jewish literature produced in modern Europe and identified the literary divide between the literature of the East, that of Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer and that of the more Western trajectory, written by Franz Kafka. Within this literary divide the polarised trajectories of Levi and Wiesel are identified. There is a discernible lineage between the Western and Eastern Jewish authors of modern Europe which is clearly manifested in the narratives of Levi and Wiesel after the Holocaust. The thematic central focus of the study is the Holocaust and its literary representation by Levi and Wiesel. In an interrogation of Zygmunt Bauman's discussions of the modern state's treatment of the 'other', the Nazis' deconstruction of Jewish identity is framed through the construction of 'otherness'. In removing the professional, citizen and cultural identities of the

Jewish communities of Nazi-occupied countries, the Jews were re-identified as a homogenised group of demonised 'others'. In the concentration and extermination camps the dehumanised Jews from both sides of Europe met in their forced convergence. Identified as one group from 'without' by the SS and the Nazis, from 'within', the literature of Levi and Wiesel demonstrates the extent to which the prisoners fought to maintain their identities against the pressures of the concentration camp system. Thus the forced convergence of Jewry in the concentration camps at the hands of the Nazis was unsuccessful in wholly deconstructing Jewish identity to the point of creating a homogenous mass which the Jews of the camps would identify with, even when they were identified as such from 'without'. The seemingly negative element to Jewish resistance to unity in the camps can be viewed with the positive perspective that the Jewish prisoners, despite the adversity they faced, attempted to retain as much of their previous identities as possible. This is represented by both Levi and Wiesel in their literature, in Wiesel's attention to the religious community represented in *Night* and Levi's recollections of his relationships with fellow Italian prisoners in *If This is a Man*. Through a detailed analysis of Levi and Wiesel's representations of Jewish identity up to, throughout and beyond the Holocaust, it is the conclusion of this thesis that the Holocaust did not unify European Jewry or the identities of Levi and Wiesel, who remained separated by their religious beliefs, their cultures and their ideologies.

Chapter one introduced the issue of victim identity which has been a consistent thread of the discussion of Jewish identity throughout the study. In identifying the theme of victim identity as linked to Jewish identity as it moves into the Diaspora, the study has identified a parallel between the history of the Jewish people in Israel as represented in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian New Testament and the Jews of modern Europe, reconstructed in modern literature. A comparative analysis of the literature of Levi and Wiesel identifies a shared engagement with their religious history in the thematic issue of victimisation. With this cultural memory Jewish identity in the Diaspora is informed by a sense of 'otherness' born out of the victimisation the Jews have historically experienced. As a method of comparing Levi, Wiesel and the separated halves of European Jewry, victim identity becomes a comparative issue as the division between assimilated West and traditional East left the community of

Wiesel and his ancestors separated from the emancipated Jews of Levi's culture and heritage. In the Nazi persecution of the Jews in the twentieth century the issue of a victim identity once again becomes central to a discussion of Jewish identity as the lives of the Jews across Europe converged in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the point of climax of the Nazis' victimisation and systematic deconstruction of Jewish identity in Europe.

In chapters two and three the framework of Modernity, within which Levi and Wiesel and the Holocaust were situated, was interrogated. As a cultural framework the period of Modernity is the time of the most significant socio-cultural and political changes for the Jews of Europe. The Jewish literature of the East and West, Aleichem, Singer and Kafka traced a literary pathway which Wiesel and Levi both follow, in their Holocaust literature and their construction and reflections of Jewish identity within the texts. The literary identity is argued as one of the significant divides between Eastern and Western Jewry and this divide has been demonstrated in the comparison of the narratives of Levi and Wiesel. The Enlightenment and emancipation of Western Jews changed the political and social status and opportunities for the emancipated Jews, emphasised the reliance upon a religious identity in the East and further heightened the divide between East and West. This dichotomy provided the foundations for the cultural identities of Levi and Wiesel and their individual responses to the collapse of the social divide in Auschwitz.

The thesis introduced individual elements of Jewish identity, from religion and belief, to emancipation and citizen rights, to cultural and literary themes. In comparing the situations across the East and West in relation to these elements the conclusion is that there was a clear dichotomy between the East and West of Europe established by the changes of Modernity, particularly affecting Jewish communities. The era of Modernity led to social, philosophical and scientific knowledge and an emphasis on progress. In the modern ideal of homogenisation, it seemed that Modernity was a positive period for the Western Jews who were emancipated as the social and professional barriers between Gentile and Jew were removed. In the East, where the opportunities were not available to modernise and where the Orthodox and traditional Jews were viewed as 'other', Modernity did not present itself as a positive time of significant change for European Jewry. 'Within' European Jewry the divisions between the Western Jews eager to secularise and the East European Orthodox determined to

retain the integrity and historical tradition of their faith, emerged and the unity further weakened between the two groups. As an assimilated, non-religious Jew of the Italian bourgeoisie, Levi is an ideal representation of the Western Jew. With his professional interest in science and his determination to maintain his ideological non-belief in God, Levi is situated in opposition to Wiesel. As a deeply religious Jew from a traditional East European culture and with a literary identity which represents the faith of the Hasidim and the culture of the Jewish *shtetl*, Wiesel is representative of his Eastern community and provides an exemplary comparison with his fellow survivor. As European Jews of the same period, who found themselves identified and persecuted alike in the Nazi years, Levi and Wiesel were very different people with divergent identities. To be a Jew meant very different things to each man, growing up in a politically unstable environment and facing the most intense anti-Semitic persecution in Jewish history, the representations of their Jewish identities throughout are therefore very different.

The identification of Zygmunt Bauman's theory of 'otherness', its relation to Modernity and its cohesion with Said's work on Orientalism ties together the contextual chapters and offers a point of comparison with Levi and Wiesel. The relevance of the theme of 'otherness' to the study's discussion of Jewish identity from 'within and without' demonstrates a valid and significant argument through which the identities of Levi and Wiesel have been interrogated throughout. Levi and Wiesel remained separated by their cultural divide but both experienced the sense of 'otherness' which oppressed the Jews of the East and West of Europe in the Nazi years. The 'otherness' that both men represent in their testimonies reveals some similarities between the two in their experiences, but their Jewish identities remained separate and their sense of 'otherness' from 'within' were opposed. As a point of comparison, the sense of 'otherness', from both 'within and without' remains a consistently central method of analysis of Jewish history and culture, the literature of Levi and Wiesel and the East / West divide which endured across European Jewry. The identification of Said's critical theory, as a Palestinian theorist, whose work on 'otherness' and Orientalism is a valid framework for the central issue of Jewishness, is a crucial element to the findings of the study.

In discussing the rise of the Nazi party and the persecution of the Jews in Europe in chapters five and six, the study demonstrated through historical research

and the testimonies of Levi and Wiesel that Jewish identity was deconstructed by the Nazis in their systematic destruction of the Jewish population across occupied Europe. From 'without' the social and cultural divides that separated Eastern and Western Jewry collapsed as the Jews were persecuted as one homogenous group of people, the 'other' of Bauman's theory, who were similarly stripped of their identities and forced together in concentration and extermination camps. Analysis of the Holocaust trajectories of Levi and Wiesel however, indicated that from 'within', amongst the Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz, the divisions still existed. Although the Jews had been stripped of their professional, linguistic and cultural identities, issues of faith and belief and national and cultural alliances remained in camp, albeit with strained relationships. Under the pressure of the Holocaust the divide between the Jews of the East and West was still clearly evident in their literature.

Considering issues of testimony, memory and Holocaust representation, there are varying points of divergence and more significantly, convergence between Levi and Wiesel's identities and trajectories. Chapter six's discussion of gendered memory demonstrated how Levi and Wiesel displayed similarities in how they remembered relationships in camp and their reliance upon emotional support from people close to them. Similarly both men defy the gendered memory argument and do not focus on heroism in their testimonies; rather both men discuss the emotions and relationships of their Holocaust experience. The crisis of faith is an issue both men faced in Auschwitz despite Levi and Wiesel confronting the issue from opposing perspectives. Chapter seven raised the complex and controversial issue of religious faith throughout the Holocaust and revealed the more unexpected points of convergence between the ostensibly opposed Levi and Wiesel on the issue of religious faith. The devout Wiesel arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau and was confronted by the horrific reality of the Holocaust which prompted an agonised questioning of his previously-held beliefs about God and His relationship with the Jewish people. The atheist Levi distanced himself from the religious population in Auschwitz and maintained ideologically that the Holocaust was the construction of man and nothing to do with God or the Jewish faith. Despite his staunch ideological belief, Levi suffered from the same anguish and fear as every prisoner and was not immune to the desperation which prompted prayer and a search for faith when on the brink of death. Although Levi maintained that he

successfully resisted the temptation to pray, he admitted that the temptation did exist. His ideological beliefs were not always enough to sustain him emotionally and mentally and thus Levi experienced his own crisis of faith. The study draws from the narratives of Levi and Wiesel, fundamentally Levi's texts *If This is a Man* and *The Drowned and the Saved* and Wiesel's text *Night*, that the issue of faith which both men similarly were forced to respond to, was in fact the issue that separated the two men. It is the conclusion of the thesis that the Holocaust and the crisis of faith it prompted in camp did not unite European Jewry despite the confrontation between East and West and the Nazis' deconstruction of Jewish identity. Jewish identity was deconstructed through the Holocaust, but the collapse of Jewish identity resulting from the Nazis' attempted destruction of European Jewry did not emotionally unite Jews even at their most vulnerable and the divisions were evident in Levi and Wiesel's narratives.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, as the Jewish prisoners were forced to rebuild their lives and identities in the memory of the extermination camps the East / West Jewish divide emerges strongly again as the Jewish survivors followed distinct paths into their new lives. Chapter eight closed the study and returned the discussion to the lives and identities of the two men outside of the concentration camp system. Primo Levi, typically of the Jews of the West, returned to his home in Italy and the secular life he left behind. After initially moving to France as an orphan, Wiesel settled in America, as did a large proportion of Eastern Jews from the Nazi camps, where they settled in areas of high Jewish population which had previously been a haven for East European Jews fleeing earlier persecutions. The traditional culture and reliance upon religious ritual and belief in Eastern Europe has been identified as distinct from the modern, more secular West. Therefore it initially seems an unusual trend that it was the choice of these devout and traditional Eastern Jews who chose to emigrate to America; the epitome of a secular, modern country, whereas the secular and more assimilated Jews of the West largely remained in Europe. In comparing the lives of Levi and Wiesel however, the widespread emigration from the East was a natural step for the Jews who had little, or even nothing to return to upon liberation from the camps. Levi acknowledged that he was fortunate to return to the same home he left, his family and his former career in Italy, after liberation. Wiesel was liberated from Buchenwald an orphan; his older sisters had returned to Sighet to discover their family

home had been occupied. Wiesel lost his family, his home and having entered the concentration camp system a dependent child, emerged an independent adult who was forced to construct a new life and identity. In settling in America, Wiesel was able to join the community of immigrant Jews on the East coast. Following in the path of his literary predecessors Aleichem and Singer, Wiesel's post-Holocaust life in America was reconstructed in part through the new Jewish community he found in America and partly constructed through his Holocaust experience and his response to it.

After the Holocaust, the significant event for world Jewry was the creation of the state of Israel. The study's discussion of the return to the homeland and a Jewish identity in Israel brings the thesis full circle, but with a transformation from the victim identity to the survivor identity which constructed the new Israel. The significant question in the aftermath of the Holocaust is why neither Levi nor Wiesel chose to move to Israel after liberation. Levi, as has been discussed, was content to return to his life in Italy and to the Italian identity he worked so hard to maintain in Auschwitz. Wiesel however embodied a much more complex issue of post-Holocaust Jewish identity. It is the conclusion of the final chapter that Wiesel's Jewish identity remains inextricably linked to the 'otherness' which informed the European Diaspora identity historically. Despite being a strong advocate of Israel, Wiesel's decision to remain only a visitor to the Jewish homeland not only allows him to evade public criticism of the state but allows him to maintain his Jewish identity. This is an identity which to a significant extent is informed by a sense of 'otherness' and being in the Diaspora. Levi's support for world Jewry and particularly his re-engagement with the East in his literature is the legacy of the Holocaust. A literary identity was the consequence and the opportunity of Levi's Holocaust experience. Although he explored Jewish identity in the East with sympathy and pride, his assertion that he probably would never have written were it not for his Holocaust experience, indicates that were it not for his forced confrontation with Eastern Jewry in Auschwitz, Levi would not have re-engaged with Eastern European Jewry in his literature. Levi's death in 1987 suggests that he was unable to find complete peace after the Holocaust and although it is clearly an enduring element of his identity and arguably a significant contributing factor to his death, it is not the suggestion that the Holocaust was wholly responsible for Levi's death. Wiesel's assertion that "Levi died at Auschwitz forty years later" disregards

acknowledged prior issues with depression and paints a sweeping portrayal of the emotional damage of the impact of Holocaust on Levi's mental state. It is this conclusion that although the Holocaust bore a tremendous emotional impact on the lives of both Levi and Wiesel, to attribute Levi's suicide wholly to his Auschwitz experience is to simplify the death of a complex figure. Wiesel's perpetual return to his Holocaust experience in his literature, work and political activism suggests that he too, is unable to put the event behind him, although Wiesel seems to have found a productive and emotionally satisfying outlet through which to understand and accept his experience.

To conclude the comparison of the lives and Jewish identities of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel through an exploration of their Holocaust literature, the identities of the Western Levi and Eastern Wiesel do converge in some ways in Auschwitz. This convergence however is forced and is evaluated through a comparison of the literature of Levi and Wiesel, the conclusion remains that Eastern and Western Jewry were not united through or because of the Holocaust. Levi and Wiesel are situated as divided in Jewish identity before the Holocaust, and in their lives and identities separate again after the Holocaust. This convergence thus demonstrates the extremity of the situation for the Jews through the Holocaust. In the enforced deconstruction of Jewish identity from 'without', through the campaign of persecution which reached the emancipated Jews of Italy and the more culturally isolated Jews of Romania, the resolve to maintain a sense of self and identity within the camps heightened in the Jews' resistance and non-compliance to the concentration camp infrastructure. Levi and Wiesel worked hard to retain their identities through their Holocaust experience, using their languages, national bonds and their polarised religious ideologies to maintain their individuality and their humanity. Their survival of the tremendous shared experience of the Holocaust confirmed each man in his identity and upon liberation, the paths of Levi and Wiesel as free men and Jewish survivors diverged once again as they pursued post-Holocaust lives, professional careers and Jewish identities which were however, both similarly inextricably informed by their survival of the Holocaust.

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