

**Early Holocaust Memoirs and the Influence of their Paratexts**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MPhil

The University of Sheffield

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

School of English

31st August 2024

**Abstract**

This study examines the reception histories of three early Holocaust memoirs: Elie Wiesel’s *Night,* Miklos Nyiszli’s, *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account,* and Gisella Perl’s *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz.* It will analyse how paratexts alongside cultural contexts and reception history have shaped the interpretation of these works. With all three memoirs, there is a central theme that these complex narratives are reduced to simplistic archetypes by the paratexts surrounding them. This means that the testimonies themselves are overshadowed, and the focus is on the ethical dilemmas of the authors. This MPhil highlights the crucial need for critical engagement with the texts to ensure that knowledge moves beyond oversimplification. The reception history of these three memoirs has been influenced by early critical analyses and by examining these factors, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities of transmitting historical memory.

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# Introduction

Holocaust memoirs by survivors like Elie Wiesel, Miklos Nyiszli, and Gisella Perl serve as essential testaments to a period of unimaginable horror. Zygmunt Bauman writes that it was a “horrible crime, visited by the wicked on the innocent.”[[1]](#footnote-2) There are also multiple autobiographies, memoirs and testimonies where survivors have reflected upon their own experiences. However, these narratives are not solely shaped by the lived experiences they recount. This thesis argues that, despite the emphasis placed on truthfulness and authenticity in life writing, particularly Holocaust memoirs, the role of paratexts in shaping reader perception remains underexplored and under-researched. This research will use approaches not typically used in Holocaust studies. Reception theory analyses how the reader or audience will interpret what they have read, which will be grounded in their own social experiences as opposed to passively accepting the intended meaning of the author.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Life writing encompasses multiple forms of written narratives about people’s lives, including but not limited to autobiography, biography and memoir. Autobiographical theory will also be used, which examines the construction and interpretation of narratives. Paul Ricoeur writes, “Our own existence cannot be separated from the account we can give of ourselves. It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories that we tell about ourselves.”[[3]](#footnote-4) This theory analyses how authors shape their representation of the self through language and memory while including the impact of cultural and social contexts. Gerard Genette’s notion of paratexts is a fundamental theory in this research. Paratextual elements such as introductions, prefaces, and blurbs can significantly influence how memoirs are received and discussed.[[4]](#footnote-5) The research will include Genette's seminal work, *Seuils* (translated as *Paratexts*). It will explore his definition of paratexts as the "threshold" elements alongside the main text, influencing its reception. The study examines Genette's subcategories of paratexts, such as the peritext (elements within the text itself, like prefaces and dedications) and the epitext (external elements like blurbs and reviews).[[5]](#footnote-6) Genette's framework will provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how paratexts function in Holocaust memoirs.

This dissertation explores the multifaceted nature of Holocaust memoirs through the lens of reception theory. It delves into the factors contributing to the enduring success and complex interpretations of these vital historical accounts. The research focuses on three specific memoirs: Elie Wiesel's *Night,[[6]](#footnote-7)* Miklos Nyiszli's *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account,[[7]](#footnote-8)* and Gisella Perl's *I Was a Doctor at Auschwitz*.[[8]](#footnote-9) By examining the reception history of each work, the dissertation aims to illuminate the diverse forces that shape reader understanding. Paratexts can set up expectations of a work and frame the reader’s interpretations. They can also be used as a tool to build credibility and authority to a work, which can be seen particularly in both Perl’s and Nyiszli’s testimony.

The terms memoir and testimony will both be used to allow a multifaceted perspective on the impact of paratexts on early Holocaust memoirs. As theorised by Smith and Watson, “autobiography is a site of cultural and social struggle,”[[9]](#footnote-10) meaning that memoirs can provide subjective accounts of personal experiences, allowing for an exploration of an individual’s realities. On the other hand, testimony focuses on firsthand accounts and the contribution of factual evidence. This research started by using the term memoir, but throughout the writing process, it became apparent that the authors studied here used the word testimony to highlight the truthfulness of their account. I will therefore use both terms.

This thesis investigates how paratexts can influence the reader's understanding of the authorial voice and, consequently, the perceived truthfulness of the narrative. Through systematically analysing the variety of paratexts of a selection of Holocaust memoirs, this thesis aims to bridge a gap in current scholarship. It further seeks to demonstrate how these elements shape interpretation, raise questions of authorial complicity, and ultimately influence the impact of these crucial historical accounts. This research investigates the influence of paratexts on the reception of Holocaust memoirs, focusing on the works of Elie Wiesel, Miklos Nyiszli, and Gisella Perl. The three authors were chosen because they were all early writers of Holocaust memoirs, and their works have been edited and translated into several editions. However, there is a clear disparity in their renown. While Wiesel’s testimony is globally known and Nyiszli’s has been very influential, Perl’s has only recently been republished. Whilst Wiesel was a teenage prisoner in Auschwitz, the other two were prisoner doctors, giving a range of experiences and determining how their works were received.

The central question guiding this thesis is: How do the paratexts of these memoirs—elements such as introductions, prefaces, and newspaper articles—influence readers' perceptions of the work? This research will examine Genette's theory of paratexts, focusing on both internal (peritext) and external (epitext) elements. Peritext encompasses paratextual elements physically located within the same volume as the main text, such as introductions, prefaces, and even the front cover. These elements act as a frame for the book, guiding the reader's initial encounter and shaping their expectations.[[10]](#footnote-11) Epitext, on the other hand, exists outside the physical boundaries of the book. This category includes elements like book reviews, advertisements, and academic articles surrounding the text in the broader cultural landscape. As Genette defines it, "paratexts are all those discursive productions, of whatever nature, which accompany the publication of a text, but without forming part of it in the strict sense."[[11]](#footnote-12) These surrounding materials significantly influence a reader's interpretation of the work. Epitext shapes the book's reception by influencing public opinion and critical discourse. The mix of internal and external paratexts is essential within this research, providing a complete picture of the reception of these works.

Combined with paratexts, this research will explore a specific aspect of reception—the ongoing debate surrounding prisoner complicity that has arisen from readings of Nyiszli's and Perl's memoirs. This investigation builds upon existing scholarship that recognises the importance of paratexts in shaping reader understanding in this regard as well. By examining how these elements function in Holocaust memoirs, this research aims to contribute a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between author, text, and reader in these vital historical accounts. This MPhil thesis will illuminate how factors beyond the immediate content shape the reception and interpretation of these narratives.

In all three chapters, both epitext and peritexts feature prominently and often both are used to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of paratexts on the reception of the work. The first chapter investigates the enduring success of *Night* within the Anglophone academic landscape. Moving beyond the author's fame, it explores the factors contributing to the book's canonical status. Employing both autobiographical and reception theory alongside drawing on studies by academics such as Hans-Robert Jauss[[12]](#footnote-13) and Wolfgang Iser[[13]](#footnote-14), the chapter examines epitexts such as reviews from Alfred Kazin and Gertrude Samuels. There is also an analysis of a peritext in the form of a highly critical introduction by Alfred Kazin. The chapter analyses how first-wave autobiographical criticism in British and US academia has influenced these reviews. Further, a republication of Wiesel’s *Night* in 2006featured a new translation which functions as a further form of peritext and highlights the influence of the translator. This will be analysed through the lens of potential fourth-wave concerns with validity and translation in critical circles.

The second chapter focuses on Miklos Nyiszli’s memoir. Drawing on Gerard Genette's concept of paratexts and in particular, epitexts, this chapter delves into the elements that "surround"[[14]](#footnote-15) and frame Miklos Nyiszli's *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*. These elements, including prefaces and advertisements, can significantly influence reader expectations and the text’s reception. The chapter begins with a brief background on Nyiszli before examining the original Hungarian publication and its pre-publication advertisement. It then shifts to analyse the "illocutionary force"[[15]](#footnote-16) of Nyiszli's stated intent for his work to be read as a historical account.

A central focus of the chapter is the paratextual shifts in the English translations. By contrasting the original prefaces and introductions (often raising questions of Nyiszli's complicity) with later editions that downplay these concerns, the chapter highlights how the debate surrounding Nyiszli's role is embedded within the paratexts. The analysis will include Bruno Bettelheim's original preface[[16]](#footnote-17) and Richard Seaver's[[17]](#footnote-18) translator's introduction, offering interpretations of Nyiszli's actions and their subsequent influence on generations of readers. Furthermore, it explores how Richard Evans' 2012[[18]](#footnote-19) work challenged these perspectives, leading to the relocation of Bettelheim's preface to the end of the work. This act underscores how paratexts can be actively debated and revised, further influencing reader understanding. Finally, the chapter will touch upon reader expectations – the "contextual paratexts"[[19]](#footnote-20) – that shape how individuals approach a Holocaust memoir.

The third chapter utilises Genette's paratext theory to explore how contrasting narratives of heroism and complicity intertwine in Gisella Perl's *I Was a Doctor at Auschwitz*. The analysis focuses on how these ideas are woven into the book's paratexts, rather than the text itself. This chapter examines the publication history, exploring why Perl's work remained largely unknown for decades. The chapter then shifts to the impact of gender on reception. This includes analysing the original introduction, an early *New York Times* article, and a *BBC Future* piece (2020). This combination of peritexts and epitexts reveal a tendency to frame Perl's experiences through a gendered lens. These news articles will be analysed as epitexts, which Genette writes are “the paratextual elements not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space.”[[20]](#footnote-21) These epitexts will be analysed to show their effect on the academic discourse surrounding Perl’s work.

Finally, the chapter contrasts the original introduction to Perl’s memoir with the new introduction accompanying the recent re-publication. In this case, there will be a focus on the illustration on the front cover, which shows Perl's influence as a figure of female experiences during the war. Further, these peritexts highlight how the "heroism vs. complicity" discourse surrounding Perl's work has evolved, partly shaped by the changing paratexts. By examining these elements, the chapter proposes a deeper understanding of the forces influencing the reception of Perl's powerful testimony.

The conclusion will synthesise all the case study findings, drawing connections across the three memoirs. It will explore the overarching themes and complexities that emerge from Analysing reception histories through the lens of reception theory and paratextual elements. Ultimately, the dissertation aims to contribute to a new approach to studying Wiesel, Nyiszli, and Perl’s memoirs, analysing how they are received and interpreted, and acknowledging the diverse forces and paratextual elements that shape their impact over time.

# Methodology

My initial research explored the intersection of life writing and evolving research trends, examining how these shifts have impacted the nature of personal testimony. While oral histories often inform life writing, I argue that this form of testimony occupies a distinct space, challenging traditional categorisations as narrative or life story.  As highlighted by scholars like Sidonie Smith, this ambiguity has led to ongoing debates about the appropriate analytical framework for authors such as Elie Wiesel.

Part of my methodology involved analysing the impact of developments in life writing theory on memoirs. This research needs an overview because understanding the history of life writing to show the scope of time is necessary before any academic research. This thesis fills that knowledge gap.

Also, it is essential to note the developments in autobiographical genres and theories. Autobiography has captivated readers for centuries. However, the critical lens through which we approach these first-person narratives has continuously changed. This research will acknowledge the four distinct waves of autobiographical criticism but will focus on only two of them, the first and fourth waves. This is due to such an interesting academic discourse change between those two waves with Wiesel’s *Night.*  I will highlight the genre's evolving understanding and significance before analysing its relevance to my research.

Smith and Watson acknowledge that the early first wave focused on validating autobiographies as historical documents.[[21]](#footnote-22) Scholars like Georg Misch privileged "high" autobiographies, typically memoirs of influential men, to understand Western history.[[22]](#footnote-23) There was the discussion of whether life was worth remembering and whether the narrative was a faithful reflection of actual events. Choosing who was to be remembered meant that specific historical figures’ achievements were solidified into memory. Cultural influences like the Enlightenment's "universal man" concept and the Romantic movement's "radical individualism" further fuelled this interest.[[23]](#footnote-24) Additionally, Wilhelm Dilthey's call for using life narratives in historical studies contributed to the surge in attention.[[24]](#footnote-25)

Although the second and third waves of autobiographical criticism are not included formally in my research, it paved the way to the fourth, which is included and is necessary to acknowledge in this methodology—the mid-twentieth century ushered in the second wave, marked by a shift in focus from "what" being to the "how" of self-representation. Scholars like Georges Gusdorf[[25]](#footnote-26), James Olney[[26]](#footnote-27), and William Spengemann[[27]](#footnote-28) emphasised the role of language and literary techniques in shaping the narrative. Influenced by philosophical and psychological theories of the self, this wave delved into how autobiographers construct and present their identities. Freud's theory of the unconscious, emphasising the past shaping the present and repressed memories influencing our sense of self, challenged linear narratives and the notion of perfect recall of events. This paved the way for a more complex understanding of memory and subjectivity in autobiography.[[28]](#footnote-29)

In the late twentieth century, criticism witnessed the emergence of the third wave, which challenged the homogeneity of the autobiography. Influential work by Sidonie Smith[[29]](#footnote-30) and Julia Watson foregrounded the influence of race, gender, class, and sexuality on autobiographical narratives. This wave critiqued the universality assumed in earlier academia, instead examining how social and cultural forces shape the stories we tell about ourselves.

Within fourth-wave autobiographical criticism, there has been a great deal of interest in the intricacies of translation. Much of this work is acknowledged in *Translating Holocaust Lives* (2017),[[30]](#footnote-31) which examines translation's role in understanding Holocaust texts. It states that “for readers of the English-speaking work, almost all Holocaust writing is translated writing.”[[31]](#footnote-32) Translation studies changed significantly in the 1990s, as Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (1990) describe.[[32]](#footnote-33) The change consisted of deviating from a linguistic focus in favour of an “openness to methods drawn from Cultural Studies, Reception Theory and Literary Sociality…translation scholars began to deal more often with a range of texts that are accompanied with a discourse of authenticity and witnessing…and had shifted the focus both onto the translator as a creative agent and onto the reader of the translated texts as an active participant.”[[33]](#footnote-34) This is relevant as it leads to questions of perfect ‘recall’ of events and whether this damages authenticity. This is mainly seen in Elie Wiesel’s text, where multiple translations have led to questions of memory and accuracy.

The fourth wave continues to grapple with these complexities. While identity remains a central concern, the focus has expanded to encompass marginalised experiences and the influence of the digital age. Scholars now investigate how online and social media platforms have transformed self-representation, fostering new forms of autobiography like online memoirs and carefully curated social media profiles.[[34]](#footnote-35) Although my research does not consider the role of social media, it does look briefly at the influence of another paratextual element, that of Holocaust deniers and the involvement of online ‘published’ articles.

Emerging alongside the early wave of Holocaust survivor memoirs in the 1960s, the burgeoning field of autobiographical criticism significantly shaped how these narratives were crafted and received. This criticism emphasised the importance of truthful representation and historical witness, prompting memoirs to prioritise accuracy in depicting the horrors of the Holocaust. It also recognised the profound psychological impact of such experiences, leading to a focus on trauma and the challenges of memory in the narratives. Furthermore, this critical lens questioned the limitations of traditional linear autobiographies, opening the door for experimentation with fragmented structures and non-chronological sequences, mirroring the shattered nature of the survivors' experience.[[35]](#footnote-36) Finally, ethical considerations regarding the representation of others and the responsibility of storytelling in the face of tragedy were raised, encouraging memoirists to consider the impact of their narratives and their role in bearing witness to those who died.[[36]](#footnote-37)

After researching the waves of autobiographical criticism, I started to look more in-depth at what was surrounding the texts. My focus shifted towards the influence of paratexts on reader interpretation. As literary theorist Gérard Genette argues in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation,* a text is rarely presented in isolation. Titles, author names, prefaces, illustrations, and even advertisements all function as paratexts, "surrounding it and extending it".[[37]](#footnote-38) These elements contribute significantly to a text's reception, shaping how readers approach and understand the central content. I analysed various versions of each specific testimony to investigate this, examining the introductions and any changes made across editions. Additionally, I incorporated reflection on contemporary newspaper articles surrounding the testimony to broaden the scope of paratextual influence. By analysing these elements, I aimed to uncover potential shifts in how readers perceived the testimony over time.

# Elie Wiesel’s *Night*: Reception History and the Problems of Articulation and Translation

This chapter argues that autobiographical theory, Genette's concept of ‘paratextس[[38]](#footnote-39) and reception theory are interconnected and influential when analysing Elie Wiesel's *Night.* This interconnected framework underscores the complex interplay between authorial intent, academic response and reviews of the text (including to its paratextual elements), and the subsequent reader response. Further, in *Night,* Wiesel's subjective experience of the Holocaust profoundly influences his narrative. Peritextual elements, such as the stark title *Night* and the dedication to Wiesel’s father, frame the testimony, immediately conveying themes of the enduring impact of loss. The title, with its connotations of darkness, immediately sets a sombre tone, influencing readers’ expectations and preparing them for the harrowing nature of the testimony. These elements effectively shape the reader's initial engagement with Wiesel's subjective experience. There will be a brief overview of *Night’s* reception history. Then, this chapter will analyse the terms ‘memoir’ and ‘testimony’ and the difficulties of classification that *Night* experienced.

The reception of *Night* has been significantly influenced by epitexts. There will be a study of two reviews published after *Night’s* initial release. These epitexts frame the initial reception of *Night.* They have been chosen and analysed chronologically as they show valuable insight into the extent of the impact of first-wave autobiographical criticism and ‘paratexts.’ The first review is Gertrude Samuels’ “When Evil Closed In,”[[39]](#footnote-40) which shows initial difficulties in corroborating first-wave autobiographical criticism theories in reviews as Samuels focused on the idea of Wiesel’s ‘enlightenment’ during the Holocaust and focused on the evidence to support the idea. Further, as autobiographical theory explores, the subjective nature of the author's experience is linked to the epitexts that shape the reader's initial engagement with the text. In his review “The Least of These,”[[40]](#footnote-41) Alfred Kazin places his personal views on Wiesel, thus showing how he is influenced by first-wave autobiographical theories of the “great man.” These epitexts have been influential in guiding readers’ expectations and have been chosen because they emphasise different initial receptions that then set the critical scene for *Night.*

Additionally, the reception of *Night* has significantly influenced our understanding of autobiography. The book's powerful impact has challenged traditional notions of objectivity and truth in autobiographical writing, highlighting the importance of subjective experience, translation, and the role of memory in shaping narrative. This research does not analyse second- and third-wave autobiographical criticism in the same depth. This is because the first and fourth waves show such a clear contrast in academic discourse.

Regarding fourth-wave autobiographical criticism, the reception of Wiesel’s newly re-translated *Night* after its second publication in 2006 will be analysed. As recognised in autobiographical theory, writing involves selection and interpretation. Wiesel's choices in presenting his memories, influenced by the imperative to bear witness, are intertwined with the peritext of translation. When there are significant changes in the translation, changes from the initial publication to a new translator, his wife, Marion Wiesel who changes some of the original translation. This impacts the reception as questions of authenticity are raised, which utilised fourth-wave autobiographical criticism theories.

*Night* is about Wiesel’s experiences as a child during Auschwitz. Ithas been chosen for its canonical status and the author's fame. Elie Wiesel was a well-known public figure, with *Night* featured on high school reading lists in the US. Further, his Nobel Peace Prize helped him to gain recognition. Ruth Franklin writes that “the small book was overshadowed by the subsequent fame of its Nobel Peace Prize-winning author, who during the 1970s and 1980s became known, for better or for worse, as a—or perhaps the—representative of the Holocaust.”[[41]](#footnote-42)

The initial publication of *Night* did not immediately give it the canonical status it has today. In the 2006 republication, an introduction by Elie Wiesel highlights the difficulties in getting the original Yiddish manuscript published. Wiesel completed an 862-page manuscript in Yiddish, which was only published in a small run in Argentina, called *And the World Remained Silent* (1954).[[42]](#footnote-43) Wiesel highlights that even the much shorter French version of *Night* was rejected by every major publisher. François Mauriac, the novelist and Nobel Prize Laureate, wrote to publishing houses, and only “after months and months of personal visits, letters, and telephone calls, he finally succeeded in getting it into print.”[[43]](#footnote-44) When he was trying to garner interest in *Night,* Mauriac had published his autobiographies, *Mémoires intérieurs* (1960)[[44]](#footnote-45) and would subsequently publish *Ce Que Je Crois* (1962).[[45]](#footnote-46) It could be argued that Mauriac’s championing of *Night hinted* at its later universal fame as he was a published memoirist and recognised *Night’s* potential. Other critics, such as Naomi Seidman, also mention the significance of Mauriac’s Catholic faith.[[46]](#footnote-47)

Wiesel’s book was first published in French as *La Nuit.* In the next two years, *Night* was picked up by a New York publisher (Hill and Wang in 1960) as a 116-page book. There is a significant difference in size between the 862-page Yiddish version and the French publication. Ruth Franklin states that “all material not directly related to the story was pruned away.”[[47]](#footnote-48) The diminution of the memoir since its first publication shows that some sections of the original manuscript were deemed unnecessary and curtailed. Naomi Seidman writes that Wiesel’s account does not fully show survivors' emotional and psychological experiences. Instead, by downplaying these emotions, Seidman suggests that some aspects of survivor experiences may have been downplayed in Wiesel’s work.[[48]](#footnote-49)

*Night* was re-translated in 2006 by Wiesel’s wife, Marion, and was included as a memoir in Oprah Winfrey’s book club. A previous memoir featured in Oprah Winfrey’s book club had been discovered to have validity questions. James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces[[49]](#footnote-50)* had been marketed as a memoir about being a drug addict and going through rehab. However, journalists and police departments came forward, stating that many of the police charges that Frey had alleged were placed against him within the memoir were untrue. *Night* was brought onto Oprah’s book club as the antithesis of Frey’s memoir. After its appearance in Oprah Winfrey’s book club, it was on the *New York Times* best-seller list for over a year and was removed for being deemed a modern classic. The *New York Times* best seller editor decided that *Night* was an “ever-green” book akin *To Kill a Mockingbird[[50]](#footnote-51)* or *The Catcher in the Rye,[[51]](#footnote-52),* which shows that it was considered significant.The editor said *Night’s* sales were now “driven by student reading lists.”[[52]](#footnote-53) This suggests that Wiesel’s popularity can also be due to its inclusion in school curriculums. Further, the book's widespread use in educational settings, often accompanied by teacher's guides and discussion materials, constitutes an extended paratext. This has contributed to its lasting impact on readers. These supplementary materials further shape the reading experience and contribute to the book's relevance. It cannot be refuted that *Night* is one of the most critical testimonies within the Holocaust canon, and the book sales since 1960 prove how far-reaching it has become. Lagerwey writes, “For many, Wiesel's story, powerfully told, darkly written, has become the story of an Auschwitz survivor, if not the story of a Holocaust survivor.”[[53]](#footnote-54) *Night* has sold 10 million copies since its first publication in 1960 and has been translated into thirty languages.[[54]](#footnote-55) *Night’s* narrative arc includes details about Wiesel’s life and family before the war, then descriptions of the events of persecution and how he survived. *Night* follows Eliezer and his father through Nazi concentration camps in the Second World War. Eliezer is an Orthodox Jewish teenager when he is transported with his father to Auschwitz Birkenau, then Monowitz. Wiesel’s mother and younger sisters were murdered in the gas chambers. Eliezer and his father survive a death march and are transported to Buchenwald when Eliezer’s father becomes ill with dysentery. After a beating from an SS officer, Eliezer’s father dies. Three months later, Eliezer is liberated by the Americans.

Within life writing studies, the terminology for writing about lives can be very varied and debated, particularly regarding different academic theories on life writing, dependent on their focus. Sociology and philosophy can interpret the terms ‘memoir’ and ‘testimony’ differently than in literary or life writing studies. This thesis argues that Wiesel’s *Night* follows a selective and focused account of the author’s life during the Holocaust. So the terminology that fits best within this framework is ‘memoir.’ G. Thomas Couser states that “Memoirs are not novels. Rather they are nonfictional life narratives…They may try to relate an entire life course or merely one of its temporal chapters, and they may attempt to include more or fewer of the dimensions of the author’s life. *Autobiographies* are generally more comprehensive – in chronology and otherwise; *memoirs* are generally more focused and selective.”[[55]](#footnote-56) One of the main problems with the classification of *Night* is that there is no consensus among publishing houses or within academia. Gary Weissman asserts that *Night* has been classified as a “novel/autobiography,” an “autobiographical novel,” a “fictional-autobiographical memoir,” a “fictionalised autobiographical memoir,” and a “memoir-novel.”[[56]](#footnote-57) Within the notes of his book, Weissman elucidates where he has accumulated these choices. He references John K. Roth “Elie Wiesel and on Ultimate Reality and Meaning alongside Irving Halperin “To Seek after Knowledge: Reading and Teaching Holocaust Literature” and David Stern, “Imagining the Holocaust” *Commentary.”* Within this quotation, there is an academic study, a pedagogical book and a newspaper report. This shows that there is no consensus on classification even between the different modes of theory and there is an ongoing debate on what to call Wiesel’s work.

Wiesel has consistently asserted that his work is a testimony. As a word choice, testimony is more assertive of Night's factuality. It is used to describe accounts given in courts. Benjamin McMyler asserts, "Much of what we know is acquired by taking things on the word of other people whom we trust and treat as authorities concerning what to believe. 1 But exactly what is it to take someone's word for something? To treat another as an authority concerning what to believe, and then to trust this person for the truth?"[[57]](#footnote-58) This shows the fundamental role of testimony is that there is an interplay between trust and authority in the knowledge process. Wieviorka attributes legitimising the word ‘testimony’ to the Eichmann trial, as the judicial setting “lent it all the weight of the state’s legitimacy and institutions and symbolic power.”[[58]](#footnote-59) The Eichmann trial also gave the witness a “new function: to be the bearer of history.”[[59]](#footnote-60) However, the term ‘memoir’ is the most appropriate for Wiesel’s *Night* because it is a focused account of his experiences during the Holocaust and because there are multiple theories on its literary aspects*.*Ellen Fine argues that it is a testimony and an illustration of those problems which affect all autobiographies.[[60]](#footnote-61) She argues that *Night* is a historical document and authentic record of the Holocaust, which gives voice to the people who suffered and died.

Wiesel himself became an advocate for Holocaust memory and education, Magilow and Silverman argue, so when he received his Nobel Prize in 1986, the committee called him a ‘messenger to mankind: his message is one of peace, atonement and human dignity.’[[61]](#footnote-62) However, Wiesel has also been the subject of controversy over contemporary events such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, notably when he wrote a letter to Barack Obama stating that “Jerusalem is above politics. It is mentioned more than six hundred times in Scripture - and not a single time in the Koran.”[[62]](#footnote-63) The letter urged Obama not to become involved in Israel/Palestine and asked, “What is the solution? Pressure will not produce a solution. Is there a solution? There must be, there will be. Why tackle the most complex and sensitive problem prematurely?”[[63]](#footnote-64) Academics such as Muwar Sutawi criticised the letter fully. They wrote that it was an “advertising campaign” by Wiesel to stop Obama becoming involved in the Israeli/Palestine conflict and that no city is “above politics.”[[64]](#footnote-65) Israeli *Haaretz* columnist Gideon Levy asserts that Wiesel was "on a mission from his... friend Benjamin Netanyahu. ..." [Netanyahu] "Sent him and asked him to do" just that: "To postpone. Postpone and postpone"[[65]](#footnote-66) regarding the Israel/ Palestine conflict. This seems like a juxtaposition between the Nobel Peace Prize-winning author and what the Nobel award is meant to present. By attempting to postpone US intervention in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Wiesel appears to be condoning Israeli acts of aggression towards Palestine. Further, stating that intervention would be premature at this stage seems a delaying tactic, as the conflict has been active since 1948.

One of the first reviews about *Night* was Gertrude Samuels’ “When Evil Closed In” on November 13th, 1960, in *The New York Times.* Samuels has difficulty corroborating first-wave autobiographical criticism within her review whilst she attempts to utilise fundamental notions of autobiographical criticism. Smith and Watson write that scholars assumed the autobiographer was:

An autonomous and enlightened “individual” who exercised free will and understood his relationship to others and the world as one of separateness…they assumed a concluding point at which some kind of self-understanding through reflection on past achievement takes place.[[66]](#footnote-67)

To enter the autobiographical canon is not only about fitting genres, yet the prevalent ideas regarding life writing studies within the 1960s were divided into elements of ‘high’ and ‘low’ autobiography.[[67]](#footnote-68) Mary Lagerwey asserts that “the attention paid to *Night* follows more closely traditional indicators of canonical status.”[[68]](#footnote-69) This shows that *Night’s* reception was indicative of it entering the autobiographical canon. For *Night* to enter the autobiographical canon, it would need to be asserted that the narrator had gained “some kind of self-understanding through reflection on past achievement taking place.”[[69]](#footnote-70) Samuels tries to view *Night* within this academic framework in her review.

Samuels’ literary review is responsive to the critical reception of life writing studies. It is influenced by the discourse and debate that have happened in the field of life writing studies. However, there is a gap between the academic knowledge, which means that she has taken elements of first-wave autobiographical criticism and moulded these ideas onto *Night.* This illuminates that while Samuel is aware of contemporary critical theory, she relies on the approach of first-wave autobiographical criticism. Samuels can recognise the motifs of autobiographical criticism but needs to improve the recognition. This implies that whilst she can identify the themes used in autobiographical writing, she forces them to apply to *Night.*

Gertrude Samuels was a photojournalist and a member of the editorial board of the *New York Times.* She was a major supporter of international conventions against genocide. Her obituary states that “in 1943, she wrote news summaries for the Week in Review before *The Times Magazine* assigned her to cover events nationally and abroad.”[[70]](#footnote-71) After the Second World War she toured displaced persons camps in Europe and reported on the Middle East. When her review of *Night* was published, she worked on a biography of David Ben-Gurion titled *B-G: Fighter of Goliaths; The Story of David Ben-Gurion* (1961).[[71]](#footnote-72) Samuels’ review has been chosen because she had background knowledge on acts of genocide and biography. Further, there is a clear interest in Israel and Jewish history.

In Samuels’ article, Wiesel’s loss of faith is the focus. Samuels highlights that the “slim volume of terrifying power is the documentary of a boy -himself - who survived the “Night” that destroyed his parents and baby sister but lost his God.”[[72]](#footnote-73) Samuels further continues to explain how Elie was a “deeply religious student” when the Nazis invaded. Samuels writes that the “story opens like a Talmudic parable as he describes his days devoted to probing the Bible, the cabala (Jewish mystical interpretation of the Scriptures) and man’s relationship with God.”[[73]](#footnote-74) The first point is that Samuels has difficulties classifying *Night.* She does not call it a memoir or autobiography but a ‘documentary.’ Considering this classification, she then states that it is akin to a Talmudic parable. These two definitions seem to be the antitheses since a documentary is typically solely factual, whilst a parable has both religious connotations and is a fictional story created for a purpose. Samuels perceives in *Night* both documentary elements and fictional techniques.

Religious aspects of the work are consistently woven throughout the short article, which also includes the moment that Wiesel is separated from his mother by the Nazi command of “’Men to the left! Women to the Right’. As the Jews fell to reciting the *Kaddish,* the boy felt bitter revolt as he asked himself: What had he to thank Him for?”[[74]](#footnote-75) The religious references throughout this article and to specific Jewish customs highlight the depth of Samuel’s interpretation of the importance of Wiesel’s Jewishness. For *Night* to enter the autobiographical canon, it needed to be shown that Wiesel had garnered some form of self-understanding, including in a religious sense. Within the first wave of autobiographical canon were texts such as St Augustine’s *Confessions[[75]](#footnote-76),* highlighting his spiritual meditations and insights. Samuels’ focus on Wiesel’s religious upbringing highlights that he has undergone the “self-understanding process” from being a deeply religious child to experiencing a religious crisis during the Holocaust. By focusing on religion and religious training, Samuels is highlighting the extent of Wiesel’s education. This makes Eliezer’s rejection of God and religion more potent, as the consistent references to his earlier education infer that his belief was ingrained in him. This is a negative trajectory as Eliezer’s religious pedagogy has been forcibly interrupted by the events of the Holocaust, and he must cope with a new religious attitude and self-understanding process.

Samuels has focused on Wiesel as an autonomous and enlightened individual who has undergone extreme brutality. This is undoubtedly the case, but Samuels emphasises certain aspects of *Night* and neglects the complexities ofthe narrative. Samuels finishes her review by stating:

In the months that followed, Elie and his father lived like animals. And as the brutality of the keepers debased everything in life, the forces of good and evil fought for supremacy in the boy: In the end, as his proud and youthful father was killed, he could no longer find the tears to weep for his father or for his lost faith.[[76]](#footnote-77)

Samuel’s portrayal of Wiesel’s condition dehumanises the prisoners. The word choice of “lived like animals” does not accurately represent Wiesel’s description of the concentration camps. Samuels’ word choice of ‘keepers’ also incurs images of a zoo. Within *Night,* Wiesel describes the work, beatings and lack of food. There is also animal imagery in *Night,* for example, when the guards shout “Faster, you filthy dogs”[[77]](#footnote-78) or when they were told to clean the block an hour before leaving on the death marches, the *Blockalteste* explained “for the liberating army…let them know that here lived men and not pigs.” The animal imagery focuses on German perceptions of the men.

Likewise, Samuels writes that Wiesel’s father was “proud and youthful”, which again does not accurately portray the book. Wiesel’s father is described by a camp guard as an “old loafer”[[78]](#footnote-79) during beatings. Although Eliezer’s father is young in usual terms, during *Night,* he becomes a burden due to illness. In Buchenwald, when he is dying, Eliezer thinks, “too late to save your old father…you could have two rations of bread, two rations of soup.” [[79]](#footnote-80) The effect that Samuels is trying to convey is the barbaric nature of the camps and the brutality which Wiesel had to face. The reader does not perceive Eliezer’s father in the same way, and combined with the earlier quote, Samuel’s portrayal of Wiesel is inaccurate.

Despite all the hardship, Wiesel is still an autonomous individual who has determined views on his faith. Samuels highlights that Wiesel has exercised free will as his thought processes within Auschwitz are focused on the nature of good and evil. Samuels reduces the complex themes of Wiesel’s *Night* to a simplistic binary of good vs. evil, which ultimately overlooks both the spiritual struggle and Wiesel’s autonomy, which is severely compromised due to the horrors of the Holocaust.

Overall, this review shows that Samuels needed help defining *Night* and alternates between fact and fiction categorisations. As an example of first-wave autobiographical criticism, Samuels has focused on Wiesel as an autonomous and enlightened individual. Yet, his experience casts doubt on the notion of enlightenment and autonomy as a positive force as Eliezer is unable to weep for his dead father or his loss of faith. There is a moment of self-realisation as Wiesel acknowledges his loss of faith after his father’s death. Samuels has highlighted many of the tropes of first-wave autobiographical criticism and has attributed to *Night* many of the attributes of “high” autobiography. These include focusing on the religious aspects of *Night* to show that akin to other “high” autobiographers, such as St Augustine Wiesel, had undergone a self-understanding process. However, Samuels has interpreted an account of Wiesel’s time in the camps by using examples that highlight the brutality of the camps. This generated sympathy for the protagonist and showed that despite these difficulties, Wiesel was still an enlightened and autonomous individual synonymous with the “great man” of first-wave autobiography. Samuels’ review is influential as a critical newspaper commentary of a work which follows autobiographical tropes. It shows the wider readership that *Night* has value as a significant autobiography.

Alfred Kazin and Elie Wiesel

It seems clear that Alfred Kazin was influenced by the first-wave autobiographical notion of “the great man” to the extent that he applied this logic to Wiesel, the author of *Night*. This section will look at the idea of reading testimonies as an active process and investigate through Kazin’s review of *Night* titled “The Least of These”how first-wave autobiographical criticism influenced this review. Kazin’s previous work blended personal narrative with critical analysis, which, although not explicitly labelled autobiographical criticism, bears many of the hallmarks of the first wave, such as using personal narrative as a critical lens and the importance of a critic’s personal engagement with the texts they analyse. At the time of *Night’s* publication, Kazin was already an established author, who had written *On Native Grounds* (1942),[[80]](#footnote-81) a study of American literature, and *A Walker in the City,* (1951)[[81]](#footnote-82), which is a memoir-adjacent essay that explores Kazin’s early life in New York.

In contrast, Wiesel was an unknown foreign correspondent for an Israeli newspaper. Wiesel writes of Kazin that, “when I was an unknown…his praise of *Night* in an intellectual weekly called *The Reporter* helped me to get noticed”.[[82]](#footnote-83) This led to a friendship between Wiesel and Kazin.

The impact of Georg Misch and the notion of the “great man” cannot be understated, and Smith and Watson write that “Dilthey and Misch were significant in inaugurating the last century’s critical fascination with autobiography. They offered a working definition of the genre and its controlling trope - the life of the “great man.”[[83]](#footnote-84) The idea of the “great man” came from different sources and was illuminated as a prerequisite for “high autobiography” by Misch in *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity.* Smith and Watson mention certain factors that helped create the cultural setting for the “great man” theories, such as the Enlightenment and the development of the “universal man," which refers to the idea that individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences share similar characteristics that transcend cultural boundaries. The concept was also linked to the idea of human progress, which is a notion that was disrupted due to the nature of the Holocaust. The nineteenth-century notion of ‘radical individualism’ was also part of the Romantic Movement. Lastly, they mention social Darwinism, the industrial revolution, and the ‘self-made man.’ These notions seem misplaced when faced with the reality of the Holocaust. However, when *Night* was published, the genre had not established itself fully. This means that the idea of the ‘great man’ would still be prevalent even regarding Holocaust memoirs, their authors and narrators.

Further, Kazin wanted to assert that *Night* was a high cultural autobiography and a testament to human resilience. Within first-wave autobiographical criticism, there is the notion that only certain works are worthy of representation. Georg Misch describes works such as “Demosthenes’ speech “on the Crown”, the *res gestae* of Augustus, the autobiographical passages of Marcus Aurelius” as the “works of absolute value in ancient times.”[[84]](#footnote-85) Further, his description of autobiography is that it “was aware of its true nature and emerged as an independent type of literature with its specific subject, the self-experienced reality of a human life.” Further, he argues that autobiography came from a “man of genius, presenting in broad outlines himself and his time, which he had helped to form, and bringing into philosophic consciousness permanently valuable realities of human life.”[[85]](#footnote-86) There is an emphasis on the autobiographer’s role in the public sphere. Smith and Watson write that “Misch’s emphasis on the autobiographer’s role as a public presence is part of his scheme as a division between the “high culture” of achieved and elite civilisations and the “low culture” of popular and everyday forms.”[[86]](#footnote-87) Wiesel fulfils this definition of ‘high culture autobiography’ as *Night* is a memoir about the unimaginable reality of the Holocaust, focusing on human survival and how Wiesel could keep his humanity through hardship.

Reading testimonies is an active process in which the reader becomes a witness. Ellen S. Fine claims that “to listen to the witness is to become the witness.”[[87]](#footnote-88) There is an ethical element to this theory in that “this means…that having crossed the threshold of moral being by our reception of the survivor’s voice, we are moved by a sense of obligation to pass it on, to transmit the survivor’s testimony so that others may likewise be inspired and transformed.”[[88]](#footnote-89) Literary critics have used an idealized version of the perfect reader, who understands the intricacies of the language and will acknowledge and improve their ethics. This is an idealized view of reading testimonies and does not answer why some testimonies are more highly regarded than others. However, it could also be argued that the ideal reader is also a construct and one which is disrupted by the Holocaust experience.

*Night* was Kazin’s first entry nto what the European Jews experienced during the war. Within Kazin’s autobiographies, most notably *My Debt* *to Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi*, there are descriptions of Kazin’s wartime years. He states that he felt “far removed from the actuality” when watching a film about the liberation of Bergen-Belsen.[[89]](#footnote-90) *Night* offered Kazin a more in-depth view of the Holocaust and the fate of many European Jews. When Kazin first met Wiesel, he described him as “A most appealing, gentle man…meeting Wiesel was an extraordinary experience for me, he is so quietly charming, and so strangely humble after his unspeakable afflictions”.[[90]](#footnote-91) This description shows that Kazin was looking for a version of Eliezer, the protagonist of *Night.* Kazin further writes that Wiesel personified the Holocaust “as no one else did.”[[91]](#footnote-92) Kazin had attributed qualities to Wiesel based on *Night* that later would not materialize.

In “The Least of These” Kazin focuses on religious aspects of *Night* as well giving an existential reading. Peter Davies calls this “an important review by Alfred Kazin in 1960, which introduced *Night* to American audiences, suggesting that critics have often read the text reductively in terms of a lone, heroic male protest against God (an existential reading): it can be dramatized into a narrative that supports modern individual spiritual crises. Discussion of the text then often places it in the context of a spiritual journey.”[[92]](#footnote-93) This shows that Kazin’s review of *Night* focused on Eliezer’s religious struggles, and that these ideas could be translated into an analysis of modern spiritual crises. However, Kazin’s review focuses on the religious characteristics to such an extent that he augments the text. In Kazin’s review, he writes that, “I don’t think that I shall soon forget the picture of this young boy standing on a mound of corpses, accusing God of deserting his creation.”[[93]](#footnote-94) There is no such scene within *Night* itself. Eliezer does not stand on a mound of corpses within the book, except in a metaphorical sense. Instead, this is a religious connotation associated with the bible’s Job, who has all his wealth, children and physical health taken away. Job debates God’s actions with his friends, and this is where Kazin has drawn a comparison. In Kazin’s review he writes that, “The Book of Job is the most universally understood part of the Bible, and the young Wiesel’s embittered interrogation of Providence unites, as it were, the ever-human Job to the history of our own time.”[[94]](#footnote-95) There is a consistent comparison between Job and Eliezer throughout this review, and the attribution of an intimate doubting relationship between Eliezer and God. There is an episode in *Night* where Eliezer doubts God, as Kazin relates: “Why, but why should I bless Him? In every fibre I rebelled…Because in His great might He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many factories of death?”[[95]](#footnote-96) This Job-like utterance shows the existential crisis that Eliezer has undergone, but Kazin has used hyperbolic language to impress upon the reader the existential crisis that Eliezer has undergone. Within first-wave autobiographical criticism, the notion of the “great man” was someone who was “bringing into philosophic consciousness permanently valuable realities of human life.”[[96]](#footnote-97)This does not mean that only ‘great men’ wrote autobiographies, but that even works which were deemed popular did not acquire “the status of ‘representative autobiographies”; these life narratives were not seen as formative of “civilization” and thus not celebrated as an appropriate subject of study.”[[97]](#footnote-98) Kazin has compared Wiesel’s work to the biblical Job because first wave autobiographical criticism delineated that for a work to become “high autobiography” it needed to convey human truths. The reason that Kazin focuses on Wiesel’s crisis of faith is perhaps about his own atheism. Kazin stated in a symposium in 1944 “I have never seen much of what I admire in American Jewish culture.” Kazin’s lack of religious belief during the period he wrote “The Least of These” compounded with how he focuses on Wiesel’s crisis of faith, suggests that Kazin is trying to show that a new reality of human life is agnosticism and religious questioning. It indicates that he feels disillusioned due to a sense of alienation in the American Jewish communities due to his lack of faith.

Gary Weissman argues that it was Kazin’s personal needs and fantasies regarding Holocaust testimonies that complicated his review, as these examples suggest. Wiesel’s failure to live up to the first-wave pedestal ensured that Kazin became disassociated from the work, and a lifelong feud began.[[98]](#footnote-99) Ruth Franklin states that Wiesel would soon “cultivate a public persona through his lectures at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan.” [[99]](#footnote-100) Further, Wiesel “would no longer admit to religious crisis as playing a part in *Night* at all.” Instead, Wiesel said that he needed God in Auschwitz, and it was afterwards that he “identified his (temporary) loss of faith.”[[100]](#footnote-101) Further, *Night* supported this claim, as there is evidence of Eliezer and his father performing the mitzvot and putting on his tefillin. The issue is that Wiesel has become a celebrated figure in part due to the religious significance that he imparts onto *Night*. In Kazin’s view, this is detrimental to his status as the author of *Night* as he writes, ‘it was my need to follow the fate of my people, if only through books, films, documents, that led me to Wiesel in the first place, as it was his religious extremity that had made his Auschwitz so particularly real to me.”[[101]](#footnote-102) This highlights that Kazin’s personal connection to the Holocaust and his interest in religious themes led him to *Night.* He found Wiesel’s exploration of his religious crisis meaningful. Hence, when Wiesel changed his ideas about the religious aspects of *Night,* Kazin changed his outlook on the authenticity of Wiesel’s writing.

Wiesel’s popularity is exemplified by the Nobel Prize committee, who wrote, "Elie Wiesel is a messenger to mankind; his message is one of peace, atonement and human dignity. His works, filled with fiery conviction, compassion and profound human understanding, have become a testament to the victims of oppression and a plea for the triumph of human values over inhumanity."[[102]](#footnote-103) This highlights that Wiesel’s commitment to bearing witness has solidified his legacy as an influential figure. This also raises the question of memory as Wiesel later changed his mind regarding religion. It was due to the difficulties of determining when or if Wiesel had a crisis of faith that garnered such a strong reaction in Kazin. He stated that “I had to conclude that Wiesel was a powerful myth-maker about his relation to God, with himself as the bearer of the myth.”[[103]](#footnote-104) Kazin’s assertion that Wiesel could not change his mind regarding his relationship with God, shows that he is unwilling for anything to impact his interpretation of *Night* and its author*.* The term ‘myth-maker’ also indicates that there can be no further explanations other than the one Kazin specified, regarding *Night’s* religious undertones. From the point that Wiesel declared that he had kept his religion during the Holocaust, a feud began between the two authors. Alfred Kazin gave *Night* the initial critical review that helped it to become influential as Kazin was an influential figure, and thus his endorsement lent credibility to Wiesel’s memoir, which widened its reception to a wider academic audience. It was Kazin’s personal investment in *Night* and Wiesel based on first wave principles which led to their estrangement, as it was based on Kazin misattributing the genre of *Night.*

In Kazin’s 1989 essay “My Debt to Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi,” he writes that *Night* not only“stands out among other camp memoirs” but is “lifted above” them as a “record of religious crisis.” [[104]](#footnote-105) For Kazin, religious crisis was the epitome of religious experience, and he claims that he found Wiesel’s book to be “inflamed with religious urgency and despair.”[[105]](#footnote-106) Unlike many of the authors that first wave critics had revered, Wiesel was still alive. The notion of “The Great Man” which persisted in first wave criticism as the reason that certain autobiographies became part of the canon, could fall when faced with an actual figure. For Alfred Kazin, there begins a descent into disillusionment and the fall of the ‘great man’ begins to falter when Kazin reevaluates and is confronted with Wiesel’s experiences during his fame. This shift in perspective ultimately challenges his assumptions of first-wave criticism.

Fourth Wave Autobiographical Criticism

This section will analyse the impact of fourth-wave autobiographical criticism and link it to the reception history of *Night.* The fourth wave of autobiographical criticism starts in the year 2000 up until today. Ben Yagoda writes, “As ubiquitous as memoirs seem in the United States, they are- if there are degrees of ubiquity- even more so in Britain, accounting for seven of the top ten best-selling non-fiction hardcovers in both 2007 and 2008.”[[106]](#footnote-107) Fourth-wave autobiographical criticism is imperative to this research because it is the last segment of the reception theory of *Night*. Further, fourth-wave autobiographical criticism showed an increase in analysis of translation and pedagogical approaches to teaching about the Holocaust.

Translation is a form of paratext. Genette writes that a paratext is a ‘threshold’ between a text and its readers. Translation fits this idea because it is a mediator between the reader’s impression of the original text. It can shape how a reader sees the work and influence their understanding. There is the argument that translators interpret the work through their choices of sentence structure and the influence of their cultural background. This becomes a further layer of interpretation which frames the work and influences the reader’s perception.

The first edition, published in English in 1960, was translated by Stella Rodway, with the second edition translated by Elie Wiesel’s wife, Marion, in 2006. The second edition contained some changes that critics quickly commented on due to their deviation from the original translation. This prompted a new discussion on the interpretations of translation and the validity of memory. The 2006 version went straight to the best-seller lists. The editors of *Translating Holocaust Lives* write that “scholarship has focused on the translation of texts that one can refer to as ‘canonical’ Holocaust testimonies, in the sense of being well known and having a significant influence in the English-speaking world.”[[107]](#footnote-108) This introduction further elucidates that Elie Wiesel’s work, alongside Anne Frank’s and Primo Levi’s, is at the forefront of this canon. The impact of this canonicity is that any translation errors are used to show the problems of memory and question its high standing and validity. This is because works such as *Night* or *The Diary of Anne Frank* have become so impactful in their message, and the fame of their authors that changes them invoke questions over the validity of all Holocaust memoirs. As soon as there was a republication of *Night*, Holocaust deniers began to pick up on the changes which had been made. A website called *Elie Wiesel Cons the World* has a section regarding the discrepancies between the two translations, which heavily relies on dates such as Wiesel’s grandmother’s birthdate and the age of Wiesel’s father. It refers to “a new translation by wife Marion Wiesel which changes (corrects) some of the more blatant “boo-boos” found in the original 1960 edition.”[[108]](#footnote-109) Although this is not an academic article or newspaper report, it is essential to acknowledge the consequences of translation.

There has been a lot of interest in the intricacies of translation during this time. Fourth-wave autobiographical criticism is linked to critical translation analysis, particularly in examining how translators’ choices can challenge dominant narratives. This allows for a challenge on how language can either marginalise or empower certain voices. *Translating Holocaust Lives* (2017) examines translation's role in understanding Holocaust texts. It states in the introduction, “For readers of the English-speaking world, almost all Holocaust writing is translated writing.”[[109]](#footnote-110) Translation studies changed significantly in the 1990s, as described by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (1990). The change consisted of deviating from a linguistic focus in favour of an “openness to methods drawn from Cultural studies, Reception Theory and Literary Sociality…translation scholars began to deal more often with a range of texts that are accompanied with a discourse of authenticity and witnessing…and had shifted the focus both onto the translator as creative agent and onto the reader of the translated texts as active participant.”[[110]](#footnote-111) This means that when Elie Wiesel’s *Night* was republished in 2006, many new practices relating to translation could be invoked.

The idea of translation and truthfulness can be traced to second-wave autobiographical criticism, which laid the foundations for study in the fourth wave. One of the most influential autobiographical critics of the second-wave period is Philippe Lejeune. His work on autobiography stems from several waves of autobiographical criticism, and he pioneered the notion of the ‘autobiographical pact.’ Lejeune’s work utilises the idea that there is a pact between the writer and the ‘implied ‘and ‘real’ reader. The ‘real’ reader has helped to create some of the meaning of the text. Smith and Watson write, “As he refines distinctions between autobiography and biography, on the one hand, and autobiography and fiction on the other, by considering linguistic modes of the “I,” Lejeune takes the position of the reader as his “pact” among narrator, reader, and publisher.”[[111]](#footnote-112) This is central to Lejeune’s argument and although he agreed that many published memoirs do not contain an explicit contract, there is an implicit one. He writes that most readers assume that they are reading a “narrative recounting of the life of the author” and that “there is *identity of name* between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about.”[[112]](#footnote-113) This shows that for most autobiographies, you are assuming that you are reading an accurate account of that person’s life. This also means that if the author includes inaccurate or fictionalised information, they have broken this autobiographical pact. When *Night* was republished, epithets in the form of academic reviews highlighted a debate in the public realm regarding the differences between the two translations.

A news article in The *New York Times* by Edward Wyatt (2006) examines the reception of *Night.* Aptly titled ‘The Translation of Wiesel’s ‘Night’ Is New, but Old Questions Are Raised’*,* it states that the memoir is “one of the first autobiographical accounts of the death camps and a book that changed modern American understanding of the Holocaust. At times over the last 45 years, it has been classified as a novel on some high school reading lists, in some libraries and in bookstores.” [[113]](#footnote-114) The reason that classification has been so difficult for *Night* is due to the many literary features that are included within the work. Some precise details are debated in relation to its status as an eyewitness testimony. For instance, Wyatt states that:

In the previous translation, published in 1960, the narrator tells a fellow prisoner that he is "not quite 15." But the scene takes place in 1944. Mr. Wiesel, born on Sept. 30, 1928, would have already been 15, going on 16. In the new edition, when asked his age, he replies, "15."[[114]](#footnote-115)

Although the age of Wiesel or his own view of it at the time could be considered a small detail, Daniel Schwarz argues that “is not this age discrepancy one reason why we ought to think of *Night* as a novel as well as a memoir?”[[115]](#footnote-116) Schwarz’s view is that inconsistencies within the text should entail a new classification. Wiesel has not provided a faultless account of his experiences. Wyatt then includes a quotation from the senior vice president at Farrar, Straus & Giroux, who are associated with Hill and Wang, the original publishers of *Night.* Jeff Seroy states, “Some minor mistakes crept into the original translation that were expunged in the new translation…but the book stands as a record of fact.”[[116]](#footnote-117) We can ascertain from these two arguments that scholars hold the view that the validity of memoirs should be questioned. In contrast, the publishing industry has attributed these discrepancies to translation errors and holds that *Night* is accurate.

Translation issues also affected how academics studied *Night.* Larochelle and Storm write that some altered passages could aid discussion on syntax, connotation and diction. As an example, they provide the following two sentences:

"No one prayed so that the night would pass quickly"

"No one was praying for the night to pass quickly"[[117]](#footnote-118)

The two sentences can imply completely different motivations. In Rodway’s translation, no one is praying because they want the night to pass quickly, while in Marion Wiesel’s translation, people are trying to prevent the night from passing quickly. The ambiguity of the two translations raises questions of accuracy, meaning, and translators’ intentions. This also shows that different translations of a single sentence can lead to vastly different understandings of the character’s motivations.

*Night's* linguistic and cultural nuances have been distorted in its various translations. There has been academic discussion regarding the translations from Yiddish-French/English. Naomi Seidman includes a chapter regarding *Night* and the problems of its multiple translations. Concerning *Night,* Seidman supports the argument that there are stark differences between the Yiddish and French originals and English translations. This example is cited by Seidman and is taken from a translation of the Yiddish version of *Night*:

The first gesture of freedom: the starved men made an effort to get something to eat.

They only thought about food. Not about revenge. Not about their parents. Only about bread. And even when they had satisfied their hunger-they still did not think about revenge.[[118]](#footnote-119)

The Yiddish continues: “Early the next day Jewish boys ran off to Weimar to steal clothing and potatoes. And to rape German girls [*un tsu fargvaldikn daytshe shikses].* The historical commandment of revenge was not fulfilled.”[[119]](#footnote-120) The crucial verb here is *fargvaldikn* or *“rape”* and the text is explicit in stating that even though they raped German girls, this cannot be considered revenge. The French version of this passage is “Le lendemain, quelques jeunes gens coururent à Weimar ramasser des pommes de terre et des habits –et coucher avec des filles. Mais de vengeance, pas trace.”[[120]](#footnote-121) In Stella Rodway’s 1960 version of *Night,* this is translated as “On the following morning, some of the young men went to Weimar to get some potatoes and clothes and to sleep with girls. But of revenge, not a sign.”[[121]](#footnote-122) The Yiddish version asserts that the men went to rape German girls, with an emphasis on the nationality and the act of rape. In the French and English versions, the act of vengeance, rape and the nationality of the women concerned is not included. In contrast, the French and English translations downplay the severity of the act and omit the word ‘rape’ and the nationality. This raises questions about the translator’s intent and the subsequent impact on the reader’s understanding. Further, Seidman argues that it also considers cultural and political issues, and the French and English translations aimed to soften the violence and avoid offending readers. However, because of these omissions, the versions obscure and sanitise *Night* and do not wholly explain the historical event. The differences in translation can be for a multitude of reasons. Wiesel’s second translation is forty-six years after the first one, which his wife translated. It has been stated earlier that *La Nuit* and *Night* were shortened versions of the Yiddish original and that some critics believed that this was to make *Night* more palatable for an American audience. This means that specific themes within the memoir may also have been curtailed for the same reason. Further, Seidman writes that “if the two versions characterise the larger group of survivors differently, they also present different views of the recently liberated Eliezer.”[[122]](#footnote-123) Seidman states that although the two translations are different, this shows that the way that facts are related alters according to the language and audience, which to certain academics may seem disturbing to those who expect complete and utter truthfulness.

In Wiesel’s 1994 memoir *All Rivers Run to the Sea[[123]](#footnote-124)* he recounts some of the same incidents that are in *Night.* These have differed from the original text; one argument is that this is due to problems with translation. Susan Suleiman states that these translation errors give the reader another view of *Night.* An example of this occurs during Wiesel’s transit to Auschwitz. In the 1960 version, it was stated that there was an “erotic atmosphere” within the carriage during the transport, and that “freed from all social constraints, the young people gave themselves up openly to their instincts and under the cover of night, coupled in our midst.”[[124]](#footnote-125) However, when the second translation came out, Wiesel had clarified what he meant by the word choice of “coupled.” He states in *All Rivers Run to the Sea* that:

That train journey is described in my very first testimony, but one point requires clarification—and it’s a delicate one: it involves the erotic atmosphere that supposedly pervaded the wagon. In the French version, I say: ‘‘Freed from all social constraints, the young people gave themselves up openly to their instincts and, under the cover of night, coupled [s’accouplaient] in our midst, without paying attention to anyone, alone in the world. The others pretended not to see.’’ The word ‘‘coupled’’ provoked raised eyebrows among puritanical readers, which is not too serious, as well as among old companions who were present on the journey, which is more so. I therefore checked the original version in Yiddish. There, the passage reads differently: ‘‘Because of the promiscuity, many instincts were awakened. Erotic instincts. Young boys and girls, under the cover of night, succumbed to their aroused senses. . .’’ In fact, these were timid contacts, hesitant caresses that never went beyond the limits of propriety. How could I have translated this into ‘‘coupling’’? I don’t know. Or yes, I do know. A misplaced shame? I was speaking about myself. I was speaking about my own desires, repressed until then. I was lying next to a woman. I felt the warmth of her body. For the first time in my life, I could touch a woman. A few fluttering strokes at her arms and knees, without her knowing it. (The rest belongs to fantasy. I remember.)[[125]](#footnote-126)

Wiesel has dedicated a lengthy description of the thought processes regarding the change in word choices. This shows that he recognised that this was an issue concerning his testimony’s reception. Wiesel has mobilised the same ideas as life writing scholars within this extract by acknowledging that there are problems with his word choices. He calls into question his own role as a translator of his work, since he writes “how could I have translated this into ‘coupling?’ Paul De Man writes about the relationship between autobiography and life and how there might be a cyclical relationship where both influence each other. He writes that:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined in all aspects, by its resources of his medium?[[126]](#footnote-127)

To clarify, De Man states that autobiographers are limited by their resources, which could also mean they are limited by the time that the works are written. Wiesel published *Night* in 1960, and when it was republished in 2006, there had been developments in discussions regarding the validity of memoirs and trauma theory. Aspects of trauma theory which have been applied to *Night* include Cathy Caruth, who wrote about Wiesel’s work in terms of its ability to convey the impact of traumatic events.[[127]](#footnote-128) Further, Lawrence Langer has also written about *Night* and its significance in understanding the human experience of trauma. Lamger writes, “factual errors’ and ‘simple lapses’ that sometimes occur in the material he analyses are ‘trivial’ in the light of ‘the complex layers of memory that give birth to the versions of the self.’[[128]](#footnote-129) This suggests that *Night’s* value lies more in its exploration of the subjective experience of trauma and how memory can be altered rather than due to its adherence to complete accuracy.

Further, De Man states that the autobiographical act of writing can determine the future life of its author. This seems apt in Wiesel’s case, as *Night* has been a determinant factor and influence in his life. Wiesel is thinking about writing as a type of translation, a rewriting. This suggests a complex relationship and the act of writing as a transformative experience for both the reader and the author. By looking at the autobiographical writing process as a form of translation, Wiesel is enacting how there is a subjective nature to memory and how personal interpretation can shape narratives. This idea challenges the theory that autobiography has a purely objective purpose and reevaluates how it can be transformative. Wiesel’s statement from his autobiography might also suggest that there is an inability for closure regarding the Holocaust. Wiesel is looking back and seeing that life writing is already an imperfect version of life. He is looking at life writing differently and analysing how to respond to it as a critic of his writing. Wiesel is acknowledging the lack of control over the ‘self.’ De Man also states, “The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge- it does not- but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is, the impossibility of coming into being).”[[129]](#footnote-130) This comment shows that it is impossible for life writing to be evidence of the ‘self’, and the author cannot gain closure from the writing of the memoir. This also means that memoirs are not the final edition, as different memories can intrude and become prominent years after, which is the case with Wiesel. De Man’s thoughts shift from thinking about autobiographical writing as a fixed time capsule that emulates a life that has not changed.

A close examination of *Night* reveals the complexities of memory and translation, particularly regarding a euphemistic Yiddish phrase. It shows the evolving nature of memory and the challenges of translating lived experiences. Susan Suleiman writes that Wiesel’s 2006 republication is a type of translation and asks, “What exactly did the euphemistically vague Yiddish phrase that Wiesel now translates as ‘succumbed to their aroused senses’ refer to? If all writing is a translation of lived experience, then what was the experience, the observed and recalled ‘fact’ that the Yiddish phrase itself translated?”[[130]](#footnote-131). Within this one instance of interpretation, the reader learns more about the Holocaust transit experience. By reviewing his memoir 30 years later, Wiesel was able to add a layer of meaning to this one episode. The fact that he felt a repressed shame regarding the observed desires, which did not make it into the original version but which, through age and experience, were able to be spoken and communicated, means that we have gained another metaphorical translation of his experiences. Suleiman writes that, instead of “correcting the previous one” the new version “brings another twist to a complex negotiation between memory and forgetting, or repression.”[[131]](#footnote-132) It can be easily understood that an adolescent boy from a strict religious background having his first sight of a woman in this environment would be something that he would be ashamed of, as well as create fantasies about. The main point is that debates about translation, memory and the repression of specific minor facts do not necessarily call into question a text’s authenticity. Instead, they are a portrait of an inner and unverifiable world.

The memoirs included in this thesis were written during the immediate aftermath of the Second World War when memories and wounds were still fresh. This has been chosen purposefully so their reception can be tracked to the current day. However, selecting memoirs written in such a period means that mistranslations and multiple readings are possible. Mark Roseman uses a case study of a Holocaust survivor named Marianne. He writes that there are discrepancies in her different testimonies and that these changes are “related to moments of great trauma”[[132]](#footnote-133) and how Marianne had “struggled to cope with these feelings of loss and guilt.”[[133]](#footnote-134) To cope with this trauma, Marianne needed to put some “psychological distance between herself and the unbearable reality - to impose control on memory and on the moments that caused such pain.”[[134]](#footnote-135) In this case, Marianne’s inaccuracies came from a place of trauma. Indeed, the inaccuracies can still be productive. As Tony Kushner argues, testimonies gathered after the Holocaust may have inaccuracies. However, “the mythologies created within individual life stories, rather than being seen as an inherent weakness, have been celebrated as one of their great strengths.”[[135]](#footnote-136) This shows that errors can be productive in understanding the testimonies. Susan Suleiman argues about Wiesel that “the revised memory (regarding the train journey) adds a new layer to both Wiesel’s and the reader’s interpretations of a life-shattering experience, one that has virtually endless potential to be reviewed and interpreted”[[136]](#footnote-137). Suleiman is bringing trauma theories into her work on the impact of multiple translations.

Further, by showing that there can be multiple readings of a text, Suleiman draws from translation studies and the idea of the reader as an active participant who now gains further knowledge from the differences in translation. Translations of Holocaust memoirs are also products of their time. Saul Friedlander states that the time that a work is written is crucial:

There is a danger in memoir writing many years after the event. Memoirs written immediately after the war, like that of Primo Levi, of Auschwitz and others which were very close to the events, may be compared almost to on-the-spot diaries. But otherwise, and I don’t know how far I could say it about my own memoir, with the passage of time one tends to reorganize the past.[[137]](#footnote-138)

The main question here is whether a memoir which is not wholly accurate can still be valuable. A reorganisation of memories based on current lived experience may give an inaccurate picture of specific details of the past. However, they will still provide snapshots of truth and may also provide details that have been contemplated afterwards. For Wiesel, the ‘coupling’ or ‘caresses’ are immaterial to the overarching testimony. For *Night*, the revised translation was held up to a standard encompassing theory such as Philippe Lejeune’s autobiographical pact*.* Through small changes in the translation, there was questioning over the validity of the testimony.Translation studies were still looking at translation errors but had shifted focus to why this may have occurred. It emphasised the translator, their creative process, and multi-disciplinary methods such as an amalgamation of translation studies and trauma theory.

To conclude, this chapter has analysed the reception history of Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and applied reception theory to understand the main reasons contributing to its canonical status. It has also explained the constantly evolving debate over ‘memoir’ and ‘testimony’. By examining the book’s success in the context of life writing and autobiographical studies, we have gained an understanding of its appeal. By analysing multiple epitexts that surrounded the new 2006 publication of Wiesel’s *Night*, it has been shown the importance of translation in interpreting the works and how it is perceived by the reader.

The reception of *Night* was significantly influenced by the evolving landscape of autobiographical criticism combined with Wiesel’s public appeal. Gertrude Samuel’s epitext ‘When Evil Closed In’ shows the first wave of autobiographical criticism with Samuel’s focus on Wiesel’s ‘enlightenment’ during the Holocaust. She emphasised his spiritual transformation and provided a positive review that affirmed that *Night* was an authentic testimony. Conversely, Alfred Kazin’s review ‘The Least of These’ drew from first and second-wave theories and questioned Wiesel’s account by stating that his experiences were exaggerated in *Night.* Kazin firmly believed in first-wave ‘great man’ tropes and felt they could be applied to Wiesel, particularly regarding the spirituality within *Night*. However, once Wiesel became more prominent and verbalised different opinions,Kazin ultimately challenged that *Night* was a purely factual account. The fact that this debate was appended to *Night,* effectively surrounding Wiesel’s own memoir, shows the importance of peritexts in how an introduction can influence the reading of a book.

Subsequent waves of autobiographical criticism have also been influential and have continued to analyse Wiesel’s memoir. Fourth-wave autobiographical criticism has examined issues with memory, translation, and trauma. These discussions have shown a discourse between historical accuracy and the subjective nature of memory and autobiography. Despite continuous ongoing debates *Night* has had an essential impact on Holocaust knowledge and is a work which is still both taught and widely read today. The many profound and enduring themes have ensured its entry into the Holocaust literary canon.

# The Battle of the Paratext: Reception, Paratexts and Miklos Nyiszli’s *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account*

Many different paratexts are involved in Miklos Nyiszli’s *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account.[[138]](#footnote-139)* In this chapter, ' paratexts’ is derived from Gerard Genette’s *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation.* Genette asserts that a: “text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations.”[[139]](#footnote-140) These paratexts are meant to be there to “surround it and extend it, precisely to *present* it: to make present, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its “reception.”’[[140]](#footnote-141) Paratexts can include (amongst numerous others) prefaces, post-faces, and any advertisements used to promote the book. These accompaniments “surround” the text rather than the actual work itself, which this research will focus on. Paratexts are needed to create the book and ‘make present’ the work; the front cover, detail of the publisher and introductions to the author are all compulsory editorial decisions which merge to create the printed work. However, many of these elements will change with each edition or copyright change.

This chapter will look at how the paratexts surrounding Miklos Nyiszli’s *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account* shape our understanding of the memoir. It will explore how paratextual elements such as advertisements, introductions, and prefaces influence our interpretation. Further, it will focus on the changes in Nyizli’s prefaces across English editions, particularly by key figures such as Bettelheim, Seaver, Kremer and Evans who introduce and continue the debate about Nyiszli’s possible complicity in the crimes of the. Finally, this chapter will investigate how Holocaust deniers use Nyiszli’s memoir to fuel the debate regarding his wartime actions. Overall, this chapter will explore how all these paratextual elements create an intricate web that influences the reader’s perceptions of Nyiszli’s text and the subsequent ethical dilemmas they raise.

Background of Miklos Nyiszli

Throughout Miklos Nyzlisi’s *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account*, Nyiszli is haunted by his previous admiration for German culture and medicine. Although Nyiszli was born in Transylvania during the Austro-Hungarian empire, his medical education took him to first the University of Cluj in 1920, then to Kiel, Germany, between 1921 and 1924. From 1926, he enrolled at the Silesian Friedrich Wilhelm University in Breslau, where he completed his medical degree.[[141]](#footnote-142) This meant he studied in Germany for much of his medical education. Nyiszli is constantly reminded of his past affinity with Germany during his experiences in Auschwitz. For example, when he is given his tattoo number, “Suddenly I recalled another scene: fifteen years before the Rector of the Medical school of Frederik Wilhelm University in Breslau shook my hand and wished me a brilliant future as he handed me my diploma, ‘with the congratulations of the jury’.[[142]](#footnote-143) The noun ‘jury’ has a multifaceted interpretation as it could mean the literal sense of the medical jury as well as the life or death judgement that Nyiszli had just survived when he entered Auschwitz and was not immediately sent to the gas chambers. There is also irony as Nyiszli is wished a ‘brilliant future’ by the Rector, ironic because his future entailed imprisonment in Auschwitz.

Nyiszli’s medical background forced him to work with Dr Mengele. Nyiszli’s education focused on forensic pathology, with his doctoral dissertation on the indications of causes of death in suicides. He worked under the supervision of Karl Reuter, the director of the Breslau Institute of Forensic Medicine, and Georg Strassmann, pathologist and professor of forensic medicine at the University of Breslau.[[143]](#footnote-144) It was this education and work experience which impressed Dr Mengele during the selection process: “Dr Mengele questioned me at length, asking me where I had studied, the names of my pathology professors, how I had acquired my knowledge of forensic medicine, how long I had practised, etc.”[[144]](#footnote-145) This is relevant because when Nyiszli wrote his memoirs, it meant that he had first-hand experience of Dr Mengele’s experiments that would later become inexorably linked to the horrors of Auschwitz. This is also ironic as Mengele is asserting importance to a Jewish doctor’s educational background who ultimately will not be saving life. Nyiszli’s roles included medical care for the SS and Sonderkommando and being a pathologist for Mengele. Nyiszli's roles had nothing to do with ending others’ lives but were only undertaken in a medical capacity. However, it did mean that Nyiszli experienced the life of a so-called ‘privileged’ Jew and was one of the few to live through the Sonderkommando uprising. The word choice of ‘privileged’ is antithetical to the events perpetrated against Jewish people. Its usage has been to insinuate that on the scale of Jewish experience, specific categories of prisoners had more privileges than others. Adam Brown writes that:

Privileged Jews include those prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps and ghettos who held positions that gave them access to material and other benefits whilst compelling them to act in ways that have been judged both self‐serving and harmful to fellow inmates.[[145]](#footnote-146)

Nyiszli did not directly harm fellow inmates in this instance, as his work involved pathology and medicine. However, his job did come with the ‘benefits’ of food and no manual labour. The problem with these ‘privileges’ is that they came at an ethical cost of knowledge of the inner workings of the genocide process. Nyiszli and the Sonderkommandos were asked to make moral choices with no precedents on which they could base their decisions. An example discussed later in this chapter is when Nyiszli reassures a Jewish father and son about the tests he is conducting on them.

Nyiszli moved back to Romania, which was usually said to be under full Communist control by 1949, after the war and rebuilt his life there, unlike similar memoirists who went to the West, such as Elie Wiesel. Further, translated memoirs from Romania translated into English or about prisoner doctors are a rarity. Due to Nyiszli’s early death, there was no chance to “guard the public use of (his) experience in Auschwitz through repeated interviews and participation in oral history projects.”[[146]](#footnote-147) Unlike other memoirists, Nyiszli did not proceed to engage with the public for long, where he could defend either accusations or answer questions. Similarly, this meant he did not have multiple references or oral records post-war to use to reiterate his testimony.

This accumulates and extends to be one of the reasons why Nyiszli’s work is rarely discussed regarding the Holocaust experience in comparison to other prominent memoirists. Marius Turda writes, "Nyiszli does not appear as a Jewish author in the two-volume *Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopaedia of Writers and Their Work,* edited by S. Lillian Kramer (2002)”.[[147]](#footnote-148) This academic neglect could be due to Nyiszli’s early death and absence from oral records or because Nyiszli returned to Romania In contrast, many prominent memoirists moved to the West.

Anything which is not included in the physical manifestation of the book, but is still relevant, Genette calls its ‘public epitext.’ ‘Public epitext’ is “any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space.”[[148]](#footnote-149) Nyiszli is absent from the public epitext of his testimony, meaning he cannot speak back to his critics or adapters. This creates a vacuum for other voices to contest for authority regarding Nyiszli’s authenticity and experience. Thus, the argument of Nyiszli’s collaborative involvement is debated within the paratexts surrounding his work by Bruno Bettelheim[[149]](#footnote-150) and Richard J. Evans[[150]](#footnote-151).

Although Nyiszli’s work has not been analysed critically, it has been influential in film and as background information for scientific and historical portrayals of Josef Mengele. Nyiszli’s absence from the epitext has allowed the afterlife of his testimony to branch into a more diverse and contestable one. Future work could focus on *Son of Soul[[151]](#footnote-152)* and *The Grey Zone[[152]](#footnote-153)* as both films have judiciously selected material from Nyiszli’s work. Phillipe Mesnard writes of *The Grey Zone* that, “it is not so much a case of making visible as of producing a totalizing visibility that imposes its own codes on the real taken as a subject, described at once by way of stereotypes and generic characterization.”[[153]](#footnote-154) This means that although the film aims to reveal the horrors of the Holocaust, it is instead disallowing alternative interpretations. Further, by purposing its own codes and specific conventions onto the film, the audience perceives the Sonderkommando in a specific and stereotypical way. This leads to a generalised portrayal as opposed to a complex interpretation of the characters.

2. Hungarian Vilag and publication

Miklos Nyiszli’s memoirs were first published in Romania in 1946, then in the Hungarian newspaper *Világ* (The World) in the 1947.[[154]](#footnote-155) This led to a Hungarian book publication called *Dr Mengele boncolóorvosa voltam az Auschwitzi* *krematóriumban* (I was Dr Mengele’s autopsy doctor at the Auschwitz crematorium).[[155]](#footnote-156) Nyiszli’s work was also published in Jean-Paul Sartre’s monthly periodical review *Les Temps Modernes* in 1951.[[156]](#footnote-157) This was immediately followed by an English translation in the journal *Merlin* in instalments. Then, a full version of the memoirs in English was published in 1960 under the title *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account.* It is important to note that the English translation of the memoirs was posthumous, as Miklos Nyiszli died on the 5th of May 1956.[[157]](#footnote-158) The fact that Nyiszli died before an English publication and that his work came out of the communist bloc meant that he did not have a great deal of influence over the memoir’s reception. The English book publication included a foreword by Bruno Bettelheim, which was overly critical of Nyiszli’s actions during Auschwitz and his role in the Sonderkommando, which will be focused on later in this chapter.

The Hungarian newspaper *Világ* published Nyiszli’s memoir in 42 instalments from the 15th of February to the 10th of April 1947. These instalments took up half a page and were titled “Mengele boncolóorvosa voltam Auschwitzban: Egy magyar orvos naplója a náci-pokolból’ - I was Mengele’s autopsy doctor in Auschwitz: The diary of a Hungarian doctor from the Nazi hell’ This title conjures biblical hellish images. Notably, the 42 instalments were the entirety of Nyiszli’s work without omission.

Before the first publication, *Vilag* published an advertisement on February 12th, 1947, to gain readership for Nyiszli’s series. Within the short advertisement, there are genre signifiers, an illusion of a big scoop, ways that people were murdered and comments on proximity to Mengele. The advertisement is an example of a ‘prior paratext’ which Genette ascribes as “certain paratextual elements (that) are of prior (public) production: for example…elements that are connected to pre-publication in a newspaper or magazine.”[[158]](#footnote-159) Pre-publication means instances where parts of the subsequent book have been published *before* but not in a completed form. In this instance, prior paratexts in the form of an advertisement are meant to gain *Vilag*'s readership*.* The advertisement also aims to create a sensationalised discourse surrounding Nyiszli’s work.[[159]](#footnote-160)

The advertisement (translated) is titled ‘I was Mengele’s pathologist in Auschwitz’ and is translated in its entirety below:

**I was Mengele’s autopsy doctor in Auschwitz**

It is not a novel!

**A Hungarian doctor’s diary from the Nazi hell.**

Dr Miklos Nyiszli, the only Hungarian witness of the mass murder of the Nazi Auschwitz writes with cold realism how the Nazi executioners killed two million innocent people including Christians, Jewish, Russian, Polish, Czech - in Auschwitz.

**Methods of killing**

Gas, injection, shot at the back of the head, stake, flamethrower

\*

The assistants were killed every four months to make sure there would not be any witnesses.

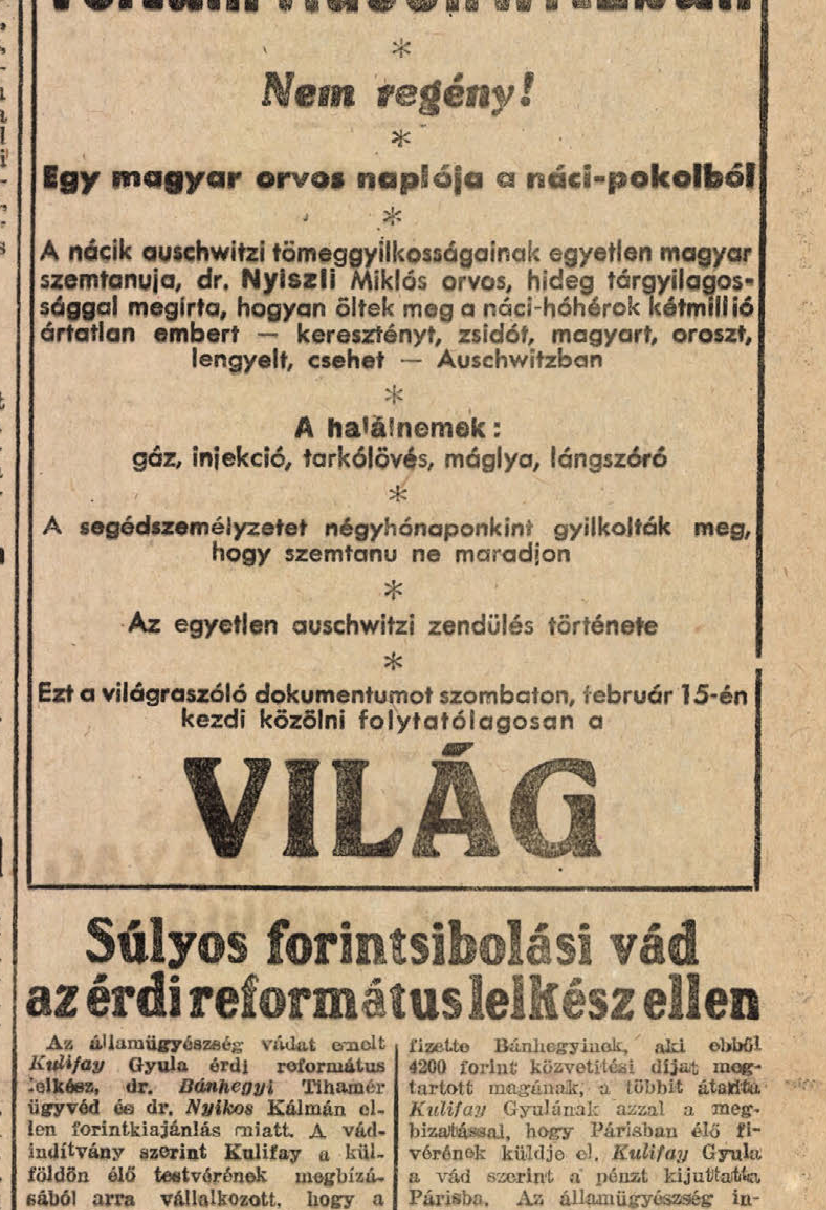
\*

The story of the only one uprising in Auschwitz

\*

This sensational documentary will be continuously published from Saturday, the 15th February by

VILÁG



The first element to note is that the advertisement for Nyiszli’s series of writings is not the same as the title given in the newspaper. In the advertisement, the onus is on Nyiszli’s occupation and proximity to Mengele. In contrast, the title given in the newspaper instalments forgoes both entities and sticks to the simpler “the hell of Auschwitz.” The nature of an advertisement is to gain readership, emphasising the proximity to the infamous experimentation of Mengele. This focus on gaining readership continues with the advertisement's word choices. It looks at the different “methods of killing” during Auschwitz: “gas, injection, shot at the back of the head, stake, flamethrower,”[[160]](#footnote-161) This list feels excessive, a focus on all the horrible things that had happened to Jewish bodies. It is meant to invoke horror and interest in the reader of what is almost a pornography of violence, intending to make them feel as if they are compelled to read.

Lists are used again to state the people who are killed, “including Christians, Jewish, Hungarian, Russian, Polish, Czech-in Auschwitz.”[[161]](#footnote-162) This list is revealing in terms of what it includes and omits. It includes Christians as the first category, perhaps meant to focus on the fact that it was not only Jewish people who were killed in Auschwitz. It starts with the two denominations of Christianity and Judaism, then proceeds to focus on nationalities that are in the vicinity of Hungary, not mentioning more Western countries that also had citizens killed in Auschwitz. This could again generate interest from the readers by focusing on the landscape and potential familial ties close to them.

Within the advertisement, there is an emphasis on the idea that Nyiszli’s work is non-fiction. Twice within the advert are statements which allude to this; “It is not a novel” and “documentary.” These word choices are definitive assertions of the validity of Nyiszli’s testimony.The fact that it is repeated also assures the reader that this is a truthful account. The advertisement wants to ensure the reader knows that the horrific elements mentioned are factual. These are also genre signifiers, which Nyiszli wanted the testimony to include as his first article is a signed declaration. This signed declaration is included in every version of the testimony in all languages. This shows that even within the advert, there is an indication and signalling of genre. Later in the advertisement, Nyiszli’s writing is described as “cold realism.” The adjective ‘cold’ hints that this will be an unembellished retelling, whilst “realism” is once again a genre signifier to show that the writing will be accurate and true to life. Further, the last sentence of the advertisement calls the following articles a “sensational documentary” The word ‘documentary’ is a further signifier of genre; however, the adjective ‘sensational’ alludes to the fact that something revealing either about the camps or conversely, Nyiszli’s actions, may be included within the text. The front cover of *Les Temps Modernes* delineates a separate category for Nyiszli’s work called ‘temoignages’, which translates as ‘testimony.’ There is only Nyiszli’s testimony within this category, so it can be inferred that the editorial decision was that it needed to be kept firmly separate from the literary works also present within the collection. In *Les Temps Modernes* and *Vilag,* the paratextual elements aimed to entice readers and promote readership have drawn on the proximity to Mengele. On the front cover of *Les Temps Modernes,* it states, ‘Dr. MIKLOS NYISZLI. - S.S. Obersturmfuhrer Docteur Mengele.’ [[162]](#footnote-163) Although we know it is a testimony of Nyiszli’s as it is under the headline of ‘temoignages,’ the fact that there are only the two names and no comment on what can be expected leaves the reader perplexed on what the testimony will be about. A reader could assume that the testimony will solely be about Mengele. In *Vilag,* the first line of the title reads, “I was Mengele’s pathologist in Auschwitz,” again drawing attention to the proximity of Nyiszli to Mengele.

There is a focus on witnesses within the advertisement. The advertisement is there to publicise, further emphasised by focusing on specific information to entice the reader. There is also an assertion from *Vilag* that Nyiszli is the only Hungarian witness, showing they believe in a lack of testimonies in the wider Hungarian sphere. *Vilag* has zoomed into how assistants , who were members of the Sonderkommando, were killed every four months to make sure there would not be any witnesses. The advertisement also asserts that Nyiszli is “the only Hungarian witness of the mass murder.”[[163]](#footnote-164) This is drawing attention to how testimonies of the inner workings of Auschwitz are scarce. It also emphasises the unique nature of the testimony and asks the reader to question how Nyiszli survived. This is shown again with the advertisement's title, “I was Mengele’s autopsy doctor,” the foregrounding of the “I” giving the form of an autobiographical narrative act. The audience is unsure of what will be said in the forthcoming articles. The admission to being an autopsy doctor for the infamous Mengele could be the precursor to a confession of misdeed. Even though this is not Nyiszli’s intent, and his actions were not at issue, the statement of the advertisement has connotations of perhaps acknowledging some fault or failure. This is intensified by the other statements regarding the pornography of violence, which the advertisement states will be included.

The advertisement in *Vilag* is an example of a “prior paratext” that surrounds Nyiszlis work to sell future issues, including his testimony. The culmination of these different devices, including lists of horrific atrocities, signifiers of genre and declarations that Nyiszli is one of the few men who can tell these stories, all intend to make the audience believe that if they read these following articles, there will be factual accounts of the horrors of Auschwitz. There is also a sensationalist aspect to the advertisement including the list of ways that people were killed as well as hinting that perhaps Nyiszli would confess to his involvement. This prior paratext is an essential source of information regarding Hungarian views of promoting Nyiszli’s work.

***Les Temps Modernes***

Text, letter

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Les Temps Modernes cover

Nyiszli’s work was published in Jean-Paul Sartre’s monthly periodical review *Les Temps Modernes* in 1951.[[164]](#footnote-165) This was produced in two parts in March and April 1951. However, it was not the complete version which was included in *Vilag.* The pages (1654-1673) totalled nineteen in the March edition. By contrast, in the April version (1855-1866), there were thirty-one pages. This accumulates to 50 pages of content, highlighting that the first French edition had been reduced during editing.[[165]](#footnote-166) The French edition of Miklos Nyiszli’s work focused on Mengele. It was titled “Dr Miklos Nyiszli-S. S Obersturmfuhrer Docteur Mengele”, and this meant that during the editing process, there was a focus on the chapters which centred on the atrocious scientific experiments or atrocities which happened in Auschwitz. The March edition of *Les Temps Modernes* also includes horrific brutalities suffered by the Jewish people. One of the reasons that certain aspects of Nyiszli’s work were omitted during the editing process could relate to the broader cultural debates regarding Jewish concentration camp survivors who returned after the war and the consequences of governmental policy that decided to ignore racial and ethnic differences. I will argue that due to the lack of returning Jews in comparison to other camp survivors, there was a vacuum of Jewish testimony regarding Auschwitz. After the war, there was a competition between survivor narratives as returning French resistance fighters focused on Buchenwald as a symbol of their resistance. The French government focused its policies on erasing their collaboration with the Nazis and promoting resistance. This led to an overshadowing of the suffering of Jewish people. The French edition of Nyiszli’s work aimed to shock the reader with specific brutalities witnessed by Nyiszli.

Further, Sartre’s periodical wished to appeal to the audience. It reduced the pages to keep interest and make the material more accessible, as well as ensure that there was a shock factor for the educated reader who had hitherto been more aware of the resistance survivors’ narrative. Lastly, Sartre’s guilt for his lack of resistance during the war ensured that he was willing to promote Jewish narratives.[[166]](#footnote-167)

When survivors of the camps started to return to France, there was only a minority of Jewish concentration camp survivors who were repatriated. Most returnees were “prisoners of war, STOs, and non-Jewish concentration camp survivors.”[[167]](#footnote-168) However, Jews comprised nearly half of all deportees. This highlights that from the outset, it looked as though there were not as many Jewish deportations. However, whilst 44% of non-Jewish prisoners returned (approximately 37,500 of 86,824),[[168]](#footnote-169) only a fraction of Jews returned from the camps. This meant that the small numbers of Jewish survivors were obscured and amalgamated with other (predominantly resistance members) returnees. If this is then compounded with the French Government’s conscious decision to “downplay differences between deportees,”[[169]](#footnote-170) there becomes an apparent vacuum regarding Jewish-specific narratives regarding the Holocaust. Annette Wieviorka writes that a post-war refusal to distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish deportees was prompted in part by the post-war government’s desire to return to a Jacobin tradition of the nation that turned a blind eye to ethnic and racial differences.[[170]](#footnote-171) The problem with turning this blind eye is that most non-Jewish prisoner-of-war deportees were not sent to Auschwitz. “Female (resistance) fighters were sent principally to Ravensbrück from France…deported male resisters had been sent in the most significant numbers to Buchenwald…deported Jews (men, women, and children) were sent overwhelmingly to Auschwitz, where the vast majority were murdered upon arrival.”[[171]](#footnote-172)

Not only were Jewish survivors returning in much smaller numbers than the French resistance fighters, but their experience of the camps was vastly different. During the Cold War, there was contention between the various groups of returned survivors, who were each trying to “claim and control the “memory” of different concentration camps.”[[172]](#footnote-173) This was primarily between Gaullist and Communist resisters, who felt that Buchenwald symbolised their resistance. The lack of a distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish survivors meant that Jewish-specific narratives became caught in the French governmental policy of attempting to obliterate their complicity and instead focus only on commemorating the resistance fighters as pinnacles of martyrdom under the Nazis. For Nyiszli’s work, however, there is a focus on Jewish-specific experiences in Auschwitz, but what is omitted in the French translation are the routines of the camps. At the beginning of the English and Hungarian versions, Nyiszli starts the testimony in the “locked cattle cars.”[[173]](#footnote-174) However, this is excluded, and the *Les Temps Modernes* French version starts when the train enters Auschwitz. Other exclusions include Nyiszli being given work clothes, shaved, and tattooed; there is also material about how Nyiszli learns about the selections and information about the gypsy camp, which is omitted. Essentially, the French version focuses on the atrocities, the horrors that Nyizli experienced and was privy to. Most of the omissions from the *Les Temps Modernes* are the “routines” of arriving at Auschwitz.

The next instalment was in April of the following month, when there were thirty additional pages of Nyiszli’s testimony.[[174]](#footnote-175) This instalment continues with a focus on the horrors but also focuses on the Sonderkommando and Nyiszli’s more complex decisions and reactions. Of note, there is Nyiszli’s decision to lie about typhoid fever that he finds when dissecting two women. Previous experience has taught him that any infectious diseases were treated with mass extermination, so on discovering a suspected typhoid fever, Nyiszli relays that it is a different non-infectious disease. Another episode recounted is Nyizli’s discussion with Oberscharführer Mussfeld (which is later re-created in cinematic form in *The Grey Zone*). This conversation revolves around whether Mussfeld’s ill health is due to his working conditions, including the fact that he had murdered people that same day. Mussfeld vehemently denies this accusation from Nyiszli, and this highlights the doctor-patient relationship, which (in Mussfeld’s opinion) is essential, even though secondary to Nyiszli’s precarious position as a camp doctor. There is also additional information about the Sonderkommandos, including their writings on the terrible events happening and burying them in the camp. There is also the moment that they find a girl alive in the gas chambers, Dominic Williams discusses Nyiszli’s impact on Primo Levi and that after the incident of finding the girl alive in the gas chambers (she is eventually shot) Levi focuses on questioning the Sonderkommando’s situation, “why did they accept that task? Why didn’t they rebel? Why didn’t they prefer death?”[[175]](#footnote-176) This contrasts with the discussion on individual behaviour and instead focuses on the collective discourse of trying to survive in extreme circumstances.[[176]](#footnote-177)

There has been a clear selection process within editing for *Les Temps Modernes*, as seen on page 1869, where small chapter sections have been highlighted. This includes the single sentence:

“L’organisation a son point de départ dans le 3 crématorium et se ramifie dans les autres”[[177]](#footnote-178)

This means, "The organisation has its starting point in the 3rd crematorium and branches out into the others." This is likely alluding to the revolt of Crematorium IV. On the same page, there is a short section about Doctor Mengele chastising Nyiszli for making marks on the documents, with Mengele asking him, “How can you be so careless with these files which I have compiled with so much love!” This is a short one-paragraph extract chosen from amongst a chapter. This was selected due to the irony of the love that Mengele had for his heinous crimes; it highlights his beliefs.

The translator of the Hungarian French edition was Tibere Kremer. When looking for biographical information regarding Tibere Kremer, everything is related to his work with Nyiszli’s memoir. Indeed, Kremer translated the text from Hungarian to French and may have had a part in the English translation. With the French translation, he is listed as the sole translator and includes an introduction to the work. Kremer puts Nyiszli’s memoir into historical context and claims that Nyiszli’s memoir shows elements to do with the concentration camps of which France was unaware. Kremer writes:

Les récits sur les camps et plus spécialement sur Auschwitz sont assez nombreux et du fait même de leur nombre ont contribué à créer une saturation. Cependant, je crois pouvoir affirmer que le journal du Dr Nyiszli relate des faits qui 6 ans encore après l’ouverture des dossiers des camps, demeurent inédits et inconnus en France.[[178]](#footnote-179)

This translated means, “The stories about the camps and more especially about Auschwitz are quite numerous and because of their number have contributed to creating a saturation. However, I think I can say that Dr Nyiszli's diary relates facts that, still six years after the opening of the camp files, remain unpublished and unknown in France” (own translation). Kremer acknowledges many stories about concentration camps led to a feeling of saturation for French readers. He argues that Nyiszli’s work is important and reveals ‘unpublished and unknown’ facts about the camps meant to pique readers’ interest.

Continuing in the same vein, Kremer writes:

En effet, alors même que les témoins et acteurs S.S. des scènes qu’a vues et vécues l’auteur, ont été extermines méthodiquement sur ordre du haut commandement S.S., afin que nul ne puisse raconteur ce qu’il a vu, lui – par un hasard miraculeux – en a réchappé.’[[179]](#footnote-180)

(translated)

In effect, even SS witnesses and actors in events lived and described by Dr Nyiszli were killed regularly on the orders of the SS high command so that no one could tell the stories he had seen. His story - by a lucky miracle - got out. By showing the danger Nyiszli faced as a witness and calling his survival a ‘miracle’, Kremer aims to gain intrigue in the memoir for the readers.

English publications and Forewords

The first translated English book edition of *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account* was published in the US and included a foreword from Bruno Bettelheim. Bettelheim was a known child psychologist who authored several books and was a prominent figure in psychoanalysis. He was also actively engaged in public discourse on psychology. Bettelheim was imprisoned in Dachau and Buchenwald for a year in 1938-1939, which likely influenced his later perspective on the Holocaust.[[180]](#footnote-181) His foreword of Nyiszli’s work included a scathing review of Nyiszli’s actions, which has been present throughout the many publications, albeit in differing forms. The original American 1960 Panther Books publication included the Bettelheim foreword and was reprinted multiple times in 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1967.[[181]](#footnote-182) This hints that the memoir was well received in America in the first ten years after publication. The Mayflower Books edition published in the UK and had reprints in 1963, 1964, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1971, 1973, and 1977.[[182]](#footnote-183) This highlights that, like the US, the memoir had multiple reprints without changes to Bruno Bettelheim’s foreword.

With Miklos Nyiszli’s *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account,* the foreword to the book, written by Bruno Bettelheim, impacted its reception. In Nyiszli’s memoir, the preface was written after the author died and included criticisms that Nyiszli could not defend. Bruno Bettelheim writes that Nyiszli was “one of the many concentration camp prisoners who volunteered to become a tool of the SS to stay alive”.[[183]](#footnote-184) Bettelheim’s assertion is judgemental and inaccurate. It is problematic because it ignores the forced choice that inmates had to make to survive. This quotation shows that Bettelheim believes that Nyiszli was a participant during his time at Auschwitz of his own free will. Bettelheim’s word choice of “volunteer” suggests erroneously that Nyiszli has willingly opted to work for Mengele. This undermines the horrific reality of the prisoners. Bettelheim states that Nyiszli has become a “tool” of the SS, saying that he is aiding them in their crimes. This suggests that Nyiszli was a mindless instrument who did not think deeply about the complex decisions and subsequent actions that he would have to make to survive. Bettelheim disregards the prisoners' uneven power dynamics and survival odds to criticise Nyiszli. This criticism at the front of the testimony casts doubts on Nyiszli’s perspective and detracts from the memoir's impact as readers have started the testimony by statements intending to state that the author was complicit in genocide. This frames the book in an immediate negative light that undermines the authenticity of the testimony

Genette writes that quintessentially, the preface is “legitimated by the author.”[[184]](#footnote-185) However, due to the posthumous nature of the English publication of Nyiszli’s memoir, he did not influence who wrote the foreword to his work. Genette writes that the preface:

Constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but of *transaction:* a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that whether well or poorly understood and achieved- is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it.[[185]](#footnote-186)

This shows that prefaces are there to allow a pertinent reading of the text and that they have influence over the reader. When Bruno Bettelheim wrote the original foreword in the English translation in 1960, he took umbrage at “prisoners who, like Doctor Nyiszli, were concerned with mere survival- even if it meant helping SS doctors in their nefarious experiments with human beings-(they) gained no deeper meaning from their horrible experience.”[[186]](#footnote-187) To a reader, this interpretation of Nyiszli’s experiences situates him in the grey area of moral ambiguity, or, worse, puts Nyiszli in the realm of a complicit actor in the Holocaust. It interprets Nyiszli’s memoir as one where he did not learn from his experience due to the choices he made at Auschwitz, inferring that he should not have worked alongside the Germans.

Richard Seaver 1962

Richard Seaver is the original translator from Hungarian alongside Tibere Kremer. He was an American translator who played a key role in publishing, as he established Arcade Publishing in 1988. Seaver wrote two introductions to Nyiszli’s testimony, one in 1962 and the other in 1993. These introductions investigate the complexities of the challenges faced by prisoners, found in both the Panther and Mayflower editions.

The focus in the 1962 introduction is Nyiszli’s proximity to Mengele and his knowledge of the Sonderkommando: “Dr Nyiszli was chosen by the evil mastermind of the Auschwitz crematoriums, Obersturmfuhrer Dr. Mengele, to take charge of all the pathological work carried on in the camp.”[[187]](#footnote-188) Further, Seaver writes that, “Dr Nyiszli became a member of the Sonderkommando, the specially qualified and privileged group of prisoners who worked exclusively inside the crematorium.”[[188]](#footnote-189) Seaver’s categorisation is more sympathetic as he raises the issues of power imbalances inside the camp. The word choices of “evil” and “crematorium” further argue that Seaver is more aware of the moral ambiguity of blaming a prisoner for their survival actions.

In 1993, Seaver wrote a new introduction for his publishing house, Arcade Publishing.[[189]](#footnote-190) In the new introduction, Seaver examines the importance of testimony and again considers the questions posed by Bettelheim, effectively placing Nyiszli’s work within a thirty-year debate on complicity. Seaver does not fully endorse Bettelheim’s views and does not completely condemn them. Instead, Seaver provides a nuanced approach.

Seaver points to the importance of testimony for those who did not experience the Holocaust: “That is why Dr. Miklos Nyiszli’s book remains so important almost five decades after it was written.” Although Seaver emphasises Nyiszli’s memoir and comments on its relevance as an early testimonial document, he does not contradict Bettelheim’s assertions over Nyiszli’s alleged complicity. Instead, Seaver merges the two ideas, describing it as “one of the earliest books published on the subject at a time when many preferred not to know what really went on day to day in the death camps- *Auschwitz,* for all the moral ambiguity of its author’s stance (which is duly noted, by Bruno Bettelheim in his eloquent foreword).”[[190]](#footnote-191) This highlights that Seaver had read Bettelheim’s view of Nyiszli’s collaboration; however, he states there is moral ambiguity instead of complicity.

Richard J.Evans 2012

In the 2012 Penguin Classics republication of Nyiszli’s *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account,* the memoir is situated between a new introduction by Richard J. Evans and Bruno Bettelheim’s initial foreword, now included as an afterword. This means that Nyiszli’s memoir is currently positioned between a debate on his complicity during the Holocaust. Evans' introduction puts Nyiszli’s memoir in the context of the time and defends Nyiszli’s actions from Bettelheim’s complicity comments.

Editorial choices can shape readers’ knowledge of a text. Penguin Classics’ audience is both general and educational. These editions typically include additional materials such as introductions and footnotes to add educational value. In this case, Evans’ new introduction provides historical context and explicitly critiques Bettelheim’s original foreword. This reframing positions Nyiszli’s memoir between two contrasting views of complicity. This serves an educational purpose and can prompt readers to analyse historical narratives critically.

The Bettelheim/Evans debate addresses a central conflict: complicity versus survival. Evans is sceptical about Bettelheim’s assertion that “the Jews of Europe went unresisting to their fate because they were possessed by a collective “death instinct.”[[191]](#footnote-192) Based on Bettelheim’s lack of historical knowledge, this implausible interpretation is challenged and revised by Evans, whose rebuttal concerns the intellectual context. He argues that in the 1960s, there was an intellectual climate of judgment for the actions of Holocaust survivors. Evans writes, "Bettelheim’s Foreword to Miklos Nyiszli’s memoir reflects both the problematic nature of its author's memory of the camp experience and the general intellectual atmosphere of the time”.[[192]](#footnote-193) However, regardless of Bettelheim’s comments on Nyiszli, his argument is still an afterword to the memoir. This highlights the continued discourse about the concept of complicity and how Bettelheim’s foreword likely influenced early readings.

Illocutionary force of a commitment to genre

Nyiszli’s memoir, consistently through all editions, keeps a signed declaration at the beginning of the book that states that his work has been written “in strict accordance with reality.”[[193]](#footnote-194) This declaration has been in every edition and the *Vilag* and *Les Temps Modernes* editorial*s.* This declaration aims to inform all readers that Nyiszli’s work is non-fiction. It is signed and dated: “Done at Oredea-Nagyvarad, March 1946.” All these elements add the impression of authenticity to the testimony. Nyiszli has indisputably argued that his writings are factual. This acts as an affidavit for Nyiszli, he is equating his testimony with one that could be presented in court. This works as an “illocutionary force”,[[194]](#footnote-195) which Genette ascribes to paratextual details which “communicate a piece of sheer information…It can make known an *intention*, or an *interpretation* by the author and or/publisher.”[[195]](#footnote-196) This intention can be a *commitment*: some genre indications (autobiography, history, memoir). These elements all combine to provide the impression of authenticity Nyiszli wanted to convey to the audience.

Nyiszli asserts consistently throughout the declaration that he writes as a doctor. The declaration states, “I, THE UNDERSIGNED, Dr Miklos Nyiszli, physician, former prisoner of the German concentration camps.”[[196]](#footnote-197) Nyiszli puts the title ‘Dr’ and asserts that he is a physician in the first line of the declaration. Nyiszli then claims, 'In writing this work, I am not aiming for any literary success.’ This is distancing himself from both potential monetary and celebrity gain. The distancing from the term ‘literary’ also alludes to the declaration that this is a testimonial account. Nyiszli asserts that “when I lived through these horrors…I was not a writer but a doctor. Today, in telling about them, I write not as a reporter but as a doctor.”[[197]](#footnote-198) The constant reference to being a physician throughout this short declaration is meant to formulate in the reader’s mind that this is being written from a clinical perspective. Nyiszli again removes himself from any conclusions that this testimony could be literary.

Nyiszli also focuses on the work that he performed during his time at Auschwitz. He writes, “As chief physician of the Auschwitz crematoriums, I drafted numerous affidavits of dissection and forensic medicine findings which I signed with my own tattoo number.”[[198]](#footnote-199) Nyiszli juxtaposes his work against the fact that he is a prisoner and must sign his work with his tattoo number. Nyiszli lays a trail of evidence of this work by stating where to find these affidavits:

I sent these by mail, counter signed by my superior, Dr Mengele, to the Berlin-Dahlem address of the ‘Institut fur Rassenbiologische and Anthropologische Forschungen’ one of the most qualified medical centers of the Third Reich. It should still be possible to find them today in the archives of this research institute.[[199]](#footnote-200)

This part of the declaration shows that Nyiszli believed that the “Institut” was a legitimate medical centre and the affidavits of work he was completing could be found in their archives. It is this section that Bruno Bettelheim mentions in his foreword with the assertion, “How Dr. Nyiszli fooled himself can be seen, for example, in his repeatedly referring to his work as a doctor.”[[200]](#footnote-201) It is clear from the verb ‘fooled’ that Bettelheim is highly critical of Nyiszli’s actions, which is exemplified when he takes Nyiszli’s declaration that the institut was “one of the most qualified medical centres of the Third Reich” and adds that “it was devoted to proving falsehoods.” Bettelheim continues, “that the author was a doctor didn’t at all change the fact that, like any of the prisoner officials who served the SS better than some SS were willing to serve it, was a participant, an accessory to the crimes of the SS.”[[201]](#footnote-202) The word choice of ‘accessory’ akin to “accessory to crimes” highlights Bettelheim’s views on Nyiszli’s actions during Auschwitz. This alludes again to questions of complicity, with Bettelheim asserting that Nyiszli was a willing participant and alludes that Nyiszli “served the SS better than some SS were willing to serve it.”[[202]](#footnote-203) Richard J. Evans comments on Bettelheim’s remarks in his introduction, stating that “Nyiszli had not ‘fooled himself’ (regarding the Institute for Race, Biological and Anthropological Investigation) as Bettelheim alleged; on the contrary, he was simply reflecting a widely, indeed internationally held belief of its scientific legitimacy.”[[203]](#footnote-204) This shows that Evans did not believe that Nyiszli was incorrectly justifying the legitimacy of the institute; in fact, it was a reasonable assertion.

The publisher’s paratext

Nyiszli’s memoir is; therefore, a text that has had multiple republications and translations since it was written, and many of them focus on his proximity to Dr Mengele. Genette writes that customarily, “the author and the publisher are (legally and in other ways) the two responsible for the text and the paratext.” [[204]](#footnote-205) This is called the ‘publisher’s peritext’ and could include elements such as ‘the cover, the title page, and their appendages, which present to the public at large and then many items of information to the reader.”[[205]](#footnote-206) Since Nyiszli died before the French and English publications, it can be assumed that the publisher has influenced republications. Marius Turda writes of Nyiszli’s text that:

Scholarly interpretations of it are lacking; his memoirs are either used to provide background historical information on Mengele-as in Robert Jay Lifton’s *The Nazi Doctors,* Benno Muller-Hill’s *Murderous Science,* or Gerald L Posner’s *Mengele: The Complete Story…*or they constitute auxiliary material for other reflections on the nature of medical science under National Socialism*.[[206]](#footnote-207)*

This shows that Nyiszli’s memoirs have inspired historical and scientific work and have provided evidence in academic writings regarding Mengele at the expense of their cultural or literary significance. The fascination with Nyiszli’s proximity to Mengele has also been used to sell the memoir. Many of the English re-publications have focused on this proximity. In 1986, Nyiszli’s memoir was renamed *Auschwitz: An Eyewitness Account of Mengele’s Infamous Death Camp.*[[207]](#footnote-208)This is a title meant to engage the audience by drawing on the intrigue and notoriety of Mengele, making it sound as though the volume will be entirely dedicated to Mengele’s actions, not to Nyiszli’s encapsulated account of his life at Auschwitz. Another republication claims “At Last the Truth About Eichmann’s Inferno, Auschwitz: A doctor’s eyewitness account.” (1961)[[208]](#footnote-209) This again references a larger figure in generating readership. The French edition published in 1961 was called *Médecin à Auschwitz: Souvenirs d’un médecin deporté*.*[[209]](#footnote-210)* This publisher focused on the fact that Nyiszli was a doctor.

Holocaust Denial and Miklos Nyiszli’s *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account*

When researching the reception history of Miklos Nyiszli’s memoir *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account,* it would be remiss not to comment on how Nyiszli’s work has been utilised to feed and perpetuate Holocaust deniers’ theories and to ask why this body of work is so extensive and why they have honed into Nyiszli’s work as a way to further their own agenda. The Holocaust deniers paradoxically are showing the importance of Nyiszli’s early and crucially important account of Auschwitz. This section research Charles D. Provan’s article ‘New Light on Dr Miklos Nyiszli and His Auschwitz Book’ (2001)[[210]](#footnote-211) and Carlo Mattagno’s book *An Auschwitz Doctor's Eyewitness Account: The Tall Tales of Dr. Mengele's Assistant Analyzed* (2018)[[211]](#footnote-212) to show that Nyiszli’s memoir is still exploited in Holocaust revisionist circles. This shows the influence of Bettelheim’s preface, as the questions of complicity have perhaps been seized upon in revisionist circles.

Charles D. Provan’s article asks whether Nyiszli even existed and attempts to find errors in the accuracy of the memoir. The article is ‘New Light on Dr Miklos Nyiszli and His Auschwitz Book’ (2017)[[212]](#footnote-213). When analysing the title, the word choice of “book” immediately disassociates from Nyiszli’s work as an eyewitness account. Provan’s article is published in the *Institute for Historical Review*, which is not a reputable publication, and falsely asserts that since Nyiszli’s account became available in the public sphere, there has been controversy over its accuracy. Within the article, it states that since the memoir first appeared in France in 1951, Professor Paul Rassinier (another prominent denier) was “struck by the exaggerations and absurdities of Nyiszli’s story, which allowed the reader to conclude that the Nazis had gassed twenty-nine million people at Auschwitz over four and half years and that the gas chamber at Birkenau had been one meter wide.”[[213]](#footnote-214) However, Provan does not write why or how Rassinier came to these conclusions or cite any passages within Nyiszli’s memoir that Rassinier quotes. Provan found a copy of Nyiszli’s doctoral thesis and traced a trip by Nyiszli to the United States in 1939. In Provan’s eyes, this definitively concluded that Nyiszli had existed, albeit in Provan’s view, still writing inaccuracies about Auschwitz.[[214]](#footnote-215) As mentioned previously, Nyiszli died in 1956 before an English book publication of his memoir. This means that in addition to the work of other survivors and living writers such as Elie Wiesel, who were able to defend their work, Nyiszli’s memoir has been continuously used to argue in favour of Holocaust revisionism.

Holocaust deniers’ historians write for journals and websites that have taken great effort to sound as academic as possible. An example would be the Institute for Historical Review to gain a semblance of authority and academic rigour.Similarly, ‘Holocaust Handbooks’ is a site which advertises articles, pamphlets and books claiming inaccuracies on Holocaust testimonies. Carlo Mattogno has dedicated a volume in his “Holocaust Handbooks” series titled *An Auschwitz Doctor's Eyewitness Account: The Tall Tales of Dr. Mengele's Assistant Analyzed*.[[215]](#footnote-216) Mattogno’s analysis scrutinises Nyiszli’s memoir by comparing “what we know is true about Auschwitz from solid material facts and authentic documentation.”[[216]](#footnote-217) For Mattagno, authentic documentation includes floorplans of the gas chambers. In this handbook, Mattogno gives credence to Nyiszli’s work being “the most important source for what Mengele is said to have done at Auschwitz”[[217]](#footnote-218) and likening Nyiszli to other key memoirists such as Elie Wiesel. This shows the importance placed on Nyiszli’s memoir precisely because of its appearance in the revisionist sphere.

Holocaust deniers have used Nyiszli’s memoir to cast doubt over the accuracy of the Holocaust, the number of people killed and the size of the gas chambers, suggesting the extent of its actual importance. However, it also has internally debated Nyiszli’s complicity in Auschwitz. This ranges from Provan’s view that Nyiszli was an accomplice to the murders to Mattogno’s assertion that Nyiszli was not complicit, yet still felt that Nyiszli was capable of agency during the time. The fact that Nyiszli’s work is a rare eyewitness account that explicitly mentions genocide within the camp and knowledge of Mengele means that Holocaust deniers must engage and attempt to disprove it.

To conclude this chapter, Miklos Nyiszli’s *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account* has been heavily influenced by the paratexts surrounding it. Several of these paratexts have been crucial in shaping the reception of *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account.* The forewords, introductions and advertisements from different editions and languages have all focused and sensationalised on Nyiszli’s proximity to Mengele. This has enabled the perception of Nyiszli as a privileged witness and further overshadowed his moral dilemmas.

The translations of *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account* have influenced its reception. The publication in the Hungarian newspaper *Vilag* was important in the testimony’s dissemination. It provided an initial platform that enabled Nyiszli’s work to be republished further. The French translation in *Les Temps Modernes* focused on the horrors of the Holocaust and omitted details concerning the more routine procedures of life in the camps. This has led to a narrow understanding of Nyiszli’s experiences and knowledge of the experiences of other prisoners.

Bruno Bettelheim’s initial foreword was highly critical of Nyiszli’s actions during Auschwitz, and this undermines the memoir’s impact and instead raises questions about the author’s complicity. It is one of the first paratexts that the reader engages with and has the possibility of shaping their reading. Bettelheim’s reading does not consider the historical context of Nyiszli’s experiences and that as a Jewish prisoner, he was forced to make difficult choices under immense pressure. His role as a doctor for Mengele and the Sonderkommando meant that he was coerced into making complex decisions and subsequently, his actions should be evaluated within the context of the Holocaust.

There has been an ongoing debate regarding Nyiszli’s complicity, and revisionist historians have used *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness account* to argue about his wartime actions. They have attempted to use his testimony to fuel the debate; however, they have frequently misinterpreted his experiences and motivations to further their reasoning for their own ideological extremism. The combination of these multiple paratexts and different translations provides a nuanced appreciation of Nyiszli’s memoir.

# *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*: Gisella Perl’s testimony and the influence of external epitexts and their gendered lens.

Gisella Perl’s *I was a Doctor at Auschwitz[[218]](#footnote-219)* is a testimony of her experiences during the Holocaust. This chapter argues that a consistent discourse of heroism versus complicity runs through the memoir’s paratextual elements. Further, gender has played a significant role in the paratextual response.

First, a section will be dedicated to the publication history of Perl’s testimony, which addresses why Perl’s testimony has not had the same amount of interest in readership and publications as other Holocaust testimonies. Then, this chapter looks at the impact of gender on Perl’s original introduction and an early *New York Times* (1982) article about her life. Further, heroism versus complicity discourse has shaped how Perl’s work has been received. There will be an analysis of a BBC Future article (2020) and the new introduction to the publication of Perl’s testimony. These have been chosen because they are some of the few to address Perl’s work in the public sphere, and due to this lack of alternative, the BBC Future article still references the New York Times.

Retrieving Gisella Perl

Dr Gisella Perl was born into a Jewish Orthodox family on December 10, 1891, in Sighet, Transylvania (now Romania).[[219]](#footnote-220) Perl was the first Jewish woman admitted to the University Medical School in Kolozsvár, where she graduated with merit. Until 1944, Perl was an established gynaecologist in Sighet, where she had a medical practice. Perl was also married with a son and daughter.[[220]](#footnote-221) Perl was deported with most of her family to Auschwitz in 1944, where she worked as a prisoner doctor. After a four-day train journey, Perl was separated from her son and husband, whom she would never see again. Her daughter remained behind with a non-Jewish family and survived the war.

From initial research, there are discrepancies with Perl’s birthdate; according to the article ‘Managing Pregnancy in Nazi Concentration Camps: The Role of Two Jewish Doctors’ (2018), Perl was born in 1907.[[221]](#footnote-222) By contrast, Noa Gidron (2020) claims that she was born in 1891, with the reference of validity coming from Perl’s grandson.[[222]](#footnote-223) One of the reasons for this discrepancy could be the shifting of power occurring where Perl was born. Sighet (or Sighetu Marmatiei) was Gisella Perl's birthplace and Elie Wiesel's.[[223]](#footnote-224) However, Wiesel was born in Romania (1928), whilst Perl was born in Sighet, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. until its dissolution after the First World War.[[224]](#footnote-225) At this point, it became part of Greater Romania until the Second Vienna Award in 1940, when it became part of Hungary. Due to the inconstant nature of governance and two wars in the space of Perl’s lifetime, there could be issues with retaining paperwork. Linda Barnickel writes: “The possession and exploitation of records and archives during wartime is an important means of military power and control” and that subsequently, “archival documents were destroyed or protected in an effort of make a statement about the worthiness of a particular people or culture.” [[225]](#footnote-226) When researching Romanian databases, there are no records of Perl or her family. The documents could have been destroyed during the wars or interim periods. Records show Perl’s birth and death dates in the U.S. Social Security Death Index (SSDI); according to their records, Gisella Perl was born on December 10, 1899, and died at 88 on November 24, 1988.[[226]](#footnote-227)

Another reason for the date discrepancy could be the absence of attention paid to Perl during her lifetime. This inconsistency is crucial because it helps to identify why Perl's work has a different reception than other survivor-authors of the time. Perl's life after Auschwitz involved medical contributions and opening a private obstetric practice in Manhattan. Most of her clientele were Holocaust survivors, and Perl went on to deliver over 3000 babies. Perl contributed to medical research and was the sole or co-author of nine publications in academic journals related to vaginal and urinary tract infections in pregnant women.[[227]](#footnote-228) These papers did not mention Perl's history but were utterly theoretical. Finally, Perl became an infertility specialist at Mount Sinai Hospital in Israel.[[228]](#footnote-229) Although Perl had an active life in America and Israel, she did not gain the same attention as other Holocaust survivors. One reason could be that her work was predominantly in the female sphere. Further, her memoir was less frequently academically studied, meaning there needs to be more research about her. However, there has been a greater interest in women's Holocaust writing, and subsequently, there has been a republication of Perl's book in 2019.

Publication History

*I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* was initially published in 1948. It included a foreword from Perl herself. It was republished in 1979[[229]](#footnote-230) by Arno Press (a company which specialised in out-of-print reference materials) and in 1987[[230]](#footnote-231) and 1998 by Ayer Company publishers. Then, in 2019, Gisella Perl’s work was republished with Lexington Books. In this chapter, a comparison of the forewords in the 1948 and 2019 publications is made. The publication history raises the question of why there was a new release in 2019. Also, considering the many editions, we might wonder why Perl is still little known and rarely studied.

In 2019, two academics working at Northwestern University were behind in republishing Perl’s testimony. Phyllis Lassner is a professor Emerita, and Danny M. Cohen is a professor of education and social policy. Lassner states that there are many reasons why she and Danny M. Cohen decided to republish Perl’s memoir. One of the reasons is that they wanted to teach Perl’s biography but found the “enormous expense” of the available copies to be a hindrance. Reprinting was also an obstacle: “the detective work to trace the copyright owner and acquire the reprint rights, as well as finding a publisher who understood the memoir’s historical and testimonial significance and recognised its sales potential.”[[231]](#footnote-232) These financial reasons were behind the absence of new re-publications of Perl’s memoir since 1998 and that it had to be pushed through by academics. There is a potential readership and burgeoning interest in Perl’s testimony because it accounts for a doctor’s experience. The University of Texas has a Gisella Perl Society that promotes “compassion, perseverance and self-sacrifice’[[232]](#footnote-233) among its doctors. However, this also highlights the difficulty with maintaining scholarly interest in a text when the material is too expensive to access; this shows the economic imperative to canon formation. Fortuitously, the new paperback is widely available in paperback, hardcover and E-book, which will allow for both mode readership and the issue of pricing to no longer hinder further academic study.

Perl’s testimony holds information specific to the female camp experience and being a camp doctor. At Auschwitz, Perl was at first given the task of encouraging blood donations from camp inmates. When Mengele realised, she was a gynaecologist, he ordered that Perl use her skills and specialism in the camp. While conducting this work, Mengele called Perl to “report every pregnant woman to him.”[[233]](#footnote-234) However, she quickly understood that all discovered pregnant women were killed or experimented on. From then on, Perl began to perform surgeries on pregnant women to abort the babies. Perl described it as “performing abortions on dirty floors with her bare, unwashed hands.”[[234]](#footnote-235) This highlights the horrific conditions and lack of medical equipment that Perl was forced to complete her operations with. Also, it highlights the role of preventing birth during a time of genocide and how Perl is resisting further murders by her actions. It also shows that Perl’s experience of Auschwitz was related to her knowledge of obstetrics.

There has been a plethora of contemporary research regarding gendered testimonies related to the Holocaust, to which Perl’s testimony could add invaluable source material. However, research into gender and the Holocaust did not happen immediately after the war: “Holocaust historians and scholars…did little or nothing about the subject for decades.”[[235]](#footnote-236) Over time, feminist scholars such as Marlene Heinemann, who wrote *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust[[236]](#footnote-237)* (1984), started to publish on the subject. Still, their work had less impact in the academic sphere due to male-centric narratives of the Holocaust being the norm. Other significant studies include John Roth and Carol Rittner’s *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust[[237]](#footnote-238)* (1993), which examined the absence of women’s voices and testimony in Holocaust scholarship. The lack of research, when Perl published her testimony, highlights that gender was not at the forefront of academic discussion. Petra Schweitzer writes: “Missing from male versions of survival are experiences unique to women, such as menarche, menstruation and pregnancy in the concentration camps.”[[238]](#footnote-239) This highlights that misunderstood source material exists without analysing female experiences. Perl's work continued to be under-researched even though her testimony is relevant to many of the above fields.

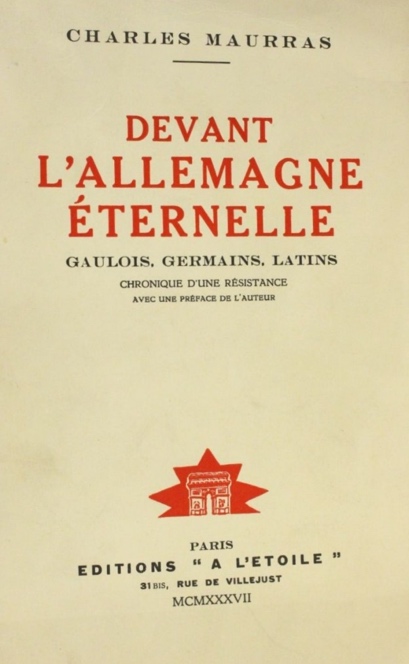
Gisella Perl’s Original Foreword

Perl uses the foreword to her testimony to demonstrate her innocence. Consistently, there has been controversy surrounding Perl because she performed abortions and was a camp doctor in Auschwitz. However, she uses the foreword to assert categorically that it was the Nazis who were to blame for the genocide. First, she looks at historical figures to show that antisemitism was prevalent in Germany and other European countries for centuries beforehand. Then Perl looks at the actions of the complicit German people during the war. She then names Dr. Kapezius to highlight that individuals should also be held accountable. Finally, Perl addresses her American audience, urging them to read her work so that they can understand her innocence. Perl’s introduction was written and published within three years of the war’s end, making her testimony “one of the very first to be published.”[[239]](#footnote-240) It was written in the context of the Doctors’ Trial at Nuremberg, which ran from December 1946 to August 1947; important memoirs by Jewish former camp medical orderlies like Miklos Nyizli or Lucie Adelsberger were published in this context.[[240]](#footnote-241)

Perl uses Heinrich Heine to highlight that antisemitism has been prevalent for centuries in Germany. Heinrich Heine was controversial in Germany during his lifetime (1797-1846), as his satires and poetry made him ‘appear to many as an unpatriotic and subversive scoundrel, and the growth of antisemitism contributed to the case against him.’[[241]](#footnote-242) Within Heine’s lifetime, there was a rise in antisemitism, which directly affected him as he converted to Protestantism to have the possibility of a civil service career (which was closed to Jews).[[242]](#footnote-243) Using Heine’s poetry in her foreword, Perl highlights the passage of time between Heine and her own experiences of prejudice. Perl is highlighting that things have not improved since Heine; antisemitism has evolved into the Holocaust. Perl is also using Heine because of his fame in Germany and the hatred the Nazis had for him. Heine’s songs and poetry were so popular in Germany that the Nazis were forced to include them in their anthologies; however, they wrote ‘author unknown’ as a form of control over the work and to limit the popularity of the artist.[[243]](#footnote-244) By emphatically giving Heine’s full name, Perl resists the exclusion and gives back the words to their owner. She is also highlighting that the Holocaust is part of a history of violence against Jewish people's voices.

Perl makes clear to her audience that Germany does not hold the whole responsibility and other countries are antisemitic and that this has contributed to the genocide. The foreword starts with a reference to Heinrich Heine, and near the end, there is a reference to Charles Maurras. Perl writes that: “L’Allemagne Éternelle” (which translated as ‘The Eternal Germany’) boasts of the ruthless cruelty of its people, shows its real face on the pages of this book.”[[244]](#footnote-245) The language change here is because Perl references Charles Maurras’ publication ‘Devant L’Allemagne Éternelle.’[[245]](#footnote-246) Maurras was a French writer and political theorist known for his nationalistic ideas.[[246]](#footnote-247) He was a monarchist and one of the founders of *L’Action Française*, a review devoted to nationalism. Maurras frequently wrote negatively about the ‘Jewish question’ in the interwar period. These writings are within a context of anti-Jewish prejudice where Crane writes that the idea of the ‘racially hygienic construct of the Dirty Jew threatened to prevail in contexts ranging from the gutter to the drawing room to the classroom.’[[247]](#footnote-248) What this is highlighting is that in France, there was a public discourse about the “Jewish question” and what this meant for the future of France and French Jews, with one of the verdicts being that Jews were hastening a ‘national decline’. [[248]](#footnote-249)

Perl refers to her remarks on how the German people (L’Allemagne Eternelle) are ‘ruthless’ and ‘cruel’[[249]](#footnote-250), a continuous line of thought throughout her preface and testimony. Further, the use of the French word for ‘eternal’ again shows that, in Perl’s eyes, the German people’s acts are not an isolated event. Another reason to include Maurras is to highlight that it is not just the Germans who have a history of antisemitism but that it is an overarching issue which also affected the countries which fought Germany. By including Maurras’ *Devant L’Allemagne Éternelle* and referencing Heine, Perl establishes that antisemitism had a long history and was not limited to a single nation. For Perl, this culmination of anti-Jewish rhetoric contributed to the events of the Holocaust. Using Maurras, Perl effectively manoeuvres herself out of a complicity debate regarding abortion and her role as a camp doctor. She uses historical figures to insinuate that antisemitism extends further than the Germans.



Perl places the blame on the German people whilst simultaneously still showing disbelief at their part in the genocide. She clarifies that there is a misalignment between enlightenment and morality. Perl alludes to German philosophers and musicians and, such as: “Kant, Goethe, Beethoven, Bach, Durer” and writes that she will “never be able to understand how a people…. could sink so deep in the morass of depravity, crime and the enjoyment of torture.”[[250]](#footnote-251) Further, Perl states that ‘a people’ encompasses the entire German population, and she demands that the German people be witnesses to the events that transpired. This highlights anger and a sense of disbelief at the actions of the German people. By doing this, Perl is making it a national crime perpetrated by the country. Perl continues with her accusations and states, “The ancient, sadistic German rose from his grave, donned an S.S. uniform and…went forth to destroy, burn, plunder, torture and murder.”[[251]](#footnote-252) This list of destructive and violent word choices show the anger that Perl feels towards her persecutors. The use of the adjective ‘ancient’ also alludes back to the history of antisemitism.

Once Perl’s testimony begins, she highlights individual Germans' cruelty, which adds to her argument of who is to blame. Perl wants the audience to know the names of the individuals involved in her experience. This is evident in the first chapter of Perl’s testimony, where she describes meeting Dr. Kapezius, a German doctor visiting Perl’s hometown in 1944, who stated he only wanted to talk of Berlin and disagreed with what the government was doing: “I want to talk about Germany as it was in those days and as it will be again after Nazism is defeated.”[[252]](#footnote-253) However, after spending the evening together at Perl’s home, the next time that Perl would see Dr. Kapezius was her “second month of stay at Auschwitz…clad in an S.S. *Hauptsturmfuehrer* uniform. He was the commander of the camp.”[[253]](#footnote-254) This shows the level of deception that Perl experienced by a German doctor. The repetition of “Dr.” emphasises the double betrayal as both a human and a physician. Dr. Kapezius’ manipulative lie about wanting Nazism to be eradicated provides a clear picture to the audience of the Nazis’ intent to deceive. In the first chapter after the foreword, Perl continues to provide evidence of the cruelty inflicted on her.

Perl demonstrates her innocence and actions during the war and opposes the activities of the Nazis. Gisella Perl’s stated aim in the foreword is to offer the book “as a monument commemorating the events of the years 1939-1945, commemorating Nazi bestiality, Nazi sadism, Nazi inhumanity and the death of their six million innocent Jewish victims.”[[254]](#footnote-255) The repetition of ‘Nazi’ now changes the direction of the anger. Before, there was an overarching comment on the ‘people,’ whereas now there is a pinpoint on the Nazis who perpetrated these crimes. The repetition of the verb ‘commemorating’ shows that Perl wants to respect and remember the people whose suffering she witnessed, and she wants this book to be evidence of the events that transpired. She also uses this word about Nazi atrocities which shows that Perl also does not want the actions of the Germans to be forgotten either. Likewise, the word ‘monument’ and equating it with her book signifies that Perl wants her testimony to be everlasting and to stand as something memorable against the events of the Holocaust. Perl continues with:

Every individual story, every picture, every description is but a stone in that monument which will stand forever to remind the world of this shameful phase of history and to ask of its vigilance, lest the events of these years be repeated.[[255]](#footnote-256)

The repetition of ‘every’ highlights that Perl does not want the events of the Holocaust to be forgotten. Also, Perl sees not only every survivor story to have its place in memory but also the stories of the German people, who were witnesses to the atrocities. There is also a warning reminder for her readers: “lest the events of these years be repeated,” which highlights that Perl wants the readers of her testimony to remain vigilant for future events. This also falls into the genre of testimonies which are constructed as a warning for the future as well as an account of the past.

Lastly, Perl demands the American reader to be the witness to her work. By reading the testimony, they can know Perl’s innocence. Within the preface, Perl uses the second person to directly address her reader, the American public: “You, who have spent your lives under the protection of the Statue of Liberty, stop before this monument and read its inscriptions.”[[256]](#footnote-257) By switching her writing to the second person, Perl uses a hectoring tone with the American public, explaining that they have been protected and insinuating that they must be made aware of the happenings. Her use of the imperative verbs ‘stop and ‘read’ demands that the audience look at the words on the Statue of Liberty, which read: ‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free…”[[257]](#footnote-258) Perl states that the Statue of Liberty invokes the idea that Americans should be aiding others. Considering Perl wrote and published her work in the close aftermath of the war, she is asking the Americans to take in the Jewish people who have suffered, which includes herself. Perl could also be stating that the words in her testimony are the ‘monument’ the American public needs to read. Perl asks her readers to: “Read them, engrave them in your souls and carry them with you as a memento!” This is referring to the people in her testimony. This statement, which reads like an order, highlights that Perl asks the reader to remember the people she is talking about in her testimony. She asks the reader to take an active role in commemorating and remembering the dead. Perl states: “The dead are speaking to you here. The dead, who do not ask you to avenge them but only to remember them.” [[258]](#footnote-259) This sentence at the end of the foreword reads like a prayer or an oath, with Perl repeating “the dead” as a reminder of the significance of her testimony.

Foreword New edition

With the reprinting of Perl’s testimony in 2019, there is a new introduction by Phyllis Lassner and Danny M. Cohen. The recent reprinting takes the form of a ‘posthumous preface’[[259]](#footnote-260) after the author's death. It has two functions, the first being to provide information about the creation of a work: “Providing this type of information is the basic role of the prefaces…supplied by editors of scholarly editions, who retrace the stages of the works conception, writing and publication and move on logically to a ‘history of the text” and an account of their own editorial decisions.’[[260]](#footnote-261) Lassner and Cohen’s preface has three main strands, which will be analysed in this chapter. First, they place Perl’s work in the context of gender studies. Second, they emphasise why Perl’s testimony should be part of the Holocaust testimonial canon. Lastly, the publishing team decided to use the artwork of another female Holocaust survivor, Ava Kadishon Schieber, on the cover of Perl’s artwork.

Lassner and Cohen argue that Perl’s testimony is relevant to the intersection between gender and the Holocaust. They provide background information on 'Women in Holocaust History' and explain why it was such a “contested subject.”[[261]](#footnote-262) They state that scholars initially criticised the idea that distinguishing 'women's experiences and responses...ignores the fact that Nazi Germany's primary target for extermination was all Jewish men, women and children.'[[262]](#footnote-263) The point that Lassner and Cohen are making is that gender difference played a definitive role and that “women were perceived, treated, and responded differently than men in too many ways to ignore.”[[263]](#footnote-264) By placing Perl's work in the historical context of the history of gender studies, Lassner and Cohen write that a reason that Perl's work has not been studied is that: "Our ignorance of these differences creates blind spots in the memories and reconstructions of the Holocaust."[[264]](#footnote-265) They emphasise that without analysing women's experiences and Perl’s role as a doctor, academic research is not complete.

The 2019 re-publication is due to a burgeoning interest in women’s experiences of the Holocaust and what Perl can add to this field. Lassner writes that Perl’s writing is both ‘compelling’ and significant “for studies of Holocaust representation and women’s experiences and responses.” Perl’s writing is essential in showing female-centric experiences in Auschwitz, as well as being able to offer the female doctor experience. Lassner writes: “Everyone we spoke with expressed the importance of being able to teach the entire book as its comprehensive coverage of women’s suffering and Perl’s heroic resistance in Auschwitz-Birkenau was illuminating and added so much to Holocaust knowledge.”[[265]](#footnote-266) The word choices of ‘heroic resistance’ show a concerted stance on Perl’s actions and a riposte to any suggestion of collaboration.

Further, Lassner and Cohen argue that Perl’s testimony is crucial to gender studies because she writes about the ‘taboo’ subjects of sex in the Holocaust. The role of the later preface is to make the text seem more valuable to the reader. Genette writes, "The functions of emphasizing the value of the text…took on the task of providing a discourse that was more general and, as a rule, more enticing.”[[266]](#footnote-267) This means that these paratexts can help to summarise the main themes and provide context or highlight significance. They act as a form of marketing to create anticipation and be more appealing. Gender has been a provocative topic related to the Holocaust, but sex, prostitution and abortion, even more so, are considered taboo. Anna Hájková writes that: “Prostitution is among the most stigmatized topics in Holocaust studies. Both scholarly and more popular accounts of the Holocaust tend to omit mention of sex work, narrate it in titillating fashion or equate it with sexual violence.”[[267]](#footnote-268) Lassner and Cohen argue that Perl’s testimony can add to the awareness of the reality of prostitution and include a statement from Perl’s testimony where she sympathises with the women who were forced into sex work: “I even threatened to refuse treatment if they didn’t stop prostitution. But later, when I saw that the pieces of bread thus earned saved lives…I began to understand and to forgive.”[[268]](#footnote-269) By including Perl’s statements about prostitution, Lassner and Cohen are ‘enticing’ the academic reader to delve deeper into Perl’s work by highlighting the material to do with sex work that is unanalysed thus far.

Perl’s work is republished as part of an academic book series titled ‘Lexington Studies in Jewish Literature.’ This series of fourteen books contains various volumes alongside another memoir. By publishing Perl’s memoir as part of a series, the co-editors of Perl’s testimony have chosen to put it into this oeuvre of scholarship that includes as one of its titles: *The Midrashic Impulse and the Contemporary Literary Response to Trauma.[[269]](#footnote-270)* A series has a definitive objective encompassing all the books in that collection. Genette writes: “The series emblem, even in this mute form, therefore amplifies the publisher's emblem, immediately indicating to the potential reader the type of work, if not the genre, he is dealing with.”[[270]](#footnote-271) A series emblem is a visual design associated with a series of books. Aarons writes, "This series welcomes original scholarship that explores a wide range of diverse perspectives, approaches, and methodologies that advance our understanding and appreciation of Jewish literature.”[[271]](#footnote-272) There are two memoirs within the series of six, which shows that the types of books chosen for publication veer towards academic journals. This signals that the publisher who selects which volumes will be included has chosen to include many different Jewish voices. Questions are associated with the ethics and politics of creating a body of work. In this series, the publisher has chosen not to make a monolithic entity but to have the breadth of Jewish ideas and history alongside memoirs like Perl’s.

Aarons also uses the introductory paragraph to urge for more scholarly work, highlighting that Perl’s work targets an academic audience. A page is dedicated to asking for more creations: “We welcome original monographs and edited volumes as well as English-language translations of manuscripts originally written in other languages.”[[272]](#footnote-273) There is an active choice in creating this page; the fact that it is situated directly after the cover work and is titled as part of Perl’s work asks for it to be read as part of the whole that is the book. This forms part of the publisher’s peritext: “the whole zone of the peritext that is the direct and principal (but not exclusive responsibility of the publisher.”[[273]](#footnote-274) This is a call for works directed towards academics and authors who specialise in Jewish works, which signifies that Aarons believes this is the audience for Perl’s testimony. Ultimately, by including this page, the publishers are using Perl’s testimony to try and gain more scholarship for their series. This places Perl’s work within an academic Jewish study setting. This is important because it opens Perl’s work for reinterpretation and academic study.

On the cover of the new edition is an artwork by Ava Kadishon Schieber, another Holocaust survivor. It is a sketch of two intertwined figures, one smaller than the other. this artist has been chosen for three reasons. The first is that Schieber’s artwork highlights a mother and child intertwined, which resonates with the focus of Perl’s testimony. Secondly, there are similarities in the lives of Perl and Schieber. Lastly, both Schieber and Perl have been involved in the process of remembrance.

A close-up of a drawing

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Lassner and Cohen have chosen to use the artwork of a female Holocaust survivor and bring her work, alongside Perl’s, into the public sphere. The artwork is placed twice within the book, on the cover, and then a separate dedicated art page is set between the copyright page and the acknowledgements. This shows that the co-authors desired this artwork to be seen and studied alongside Perl’s work. Cover work is the ‘outermost peritext’[[274]](#footnote-275) of a work, in which it becomes “the first manifestation of the book offered to the reader's perception.”[[275]](#footnote-276) The fact that it adorns the cover shows how it is meant to draw the reader in as an entry into the book. In this case, the audience is meant to be grabbed by the striking image on the cover, which the reader will understand later and has significance to the themes of the testimony. It does this by having the two intertwining ghost-like figures with large black eyes, creating an eerie picture for the reader.

Lassner and Cohen chose Schieber's artwork to depict themes in Perl’s testimony. They write: “Ava Kadishson Schieber, Holocaust survivor and artist, whose compelling drawing graces the book’s cover and draws attention to both the caring and desolation experienced by Hitler’s victims.”[[276]](#footnote-277) The juxtaposition of ‘caring’ and ‘desolation’ shows the diversity of meaning within the artwork, depicting clutching figures that could allude to a parent-child scenario. Further, the artwork is stark, conjuring images of ghosts, memory and desperation. Schieber writes that she creates “loving ghosts” whom she wishes to be “present…not let them wither to dust, but to carry the memory/of their past churning cherished life/and tender warmth they thrust upon me to make me last.”[[277]](#footnote-278) This narrative of past loss is seen within the artwork where the two interlocking figures are clutching at each other. Neither of the figures has hair, which is reminiscent of the camp inmates’ shaved heads. The overlapping lines make it seem as if the drawing has been hurried, which signifies fleeting time and inconsistency. The mouths of the two characters are slightly open, and their eyes are looking in the same direction as though something is drawing their attention. Shading focuses on the two characters' eyes, the darkest part of the drawing, conjuring a feeling of haunted fear. The editorial team chose Schieber’s work because these drawings represent similar ideas in Perl’s testimony, such as the loss of family and children, the struggle to survive in the camps, and a sense of desperation to be remembered.

Another reason Schieber’s artwork was chosen is because of the biographical similarities between Perl and Schieber. Both were Holocaust survivors, as Schieber was born to Jewish parents in Novi Sad, inVojvodina.[[278]](#footnote-279) In 1941, aged 15, she went into hiding on a Serbian farm where she pretended to be deaf and mute so that the locals would not talk to her.[[279]](#footnote-280) Her father, mother and sister were also in hiding but in different places, separated from her. After the war, Schieber discovered that her father and sister had been killed, but her mother survived. This highlights the shared loss of Perl and Schieber, who had multiple members of their families killed.

Schieber and Perl lived in the same countries and were involved in remembrance. After the war, Schieber studied at the art academy in Belgrade and worked as a painter and animator for movie studios.[[280]](#footnote-281) Schieber and her mother eventually emigrated to Israel, and then after Schieber’s first husband had died, she moved to the USA.[[281]](#footnote-282) Perl also lived in Israel and America and had a career that spanned different countries. In America, Schieber was involved with the Shoah Foundation, where she verbalised her experiences: “The interview became a catalyst for Ava to continue testifying about those experiences, which she had previously communicated mainly through her art, and marked the beginning of almost three decades of her speaking to a wide variety of audiences.”[[282]](#footnote-283) Perl was also involved in the Shoah Foundation and talked about her experiences there.

Out of Death: A Zest for Life

In this section, I will analyse Nadine Brozan’s 1982 *New York Times* article titled ‘Out of Death: A Zest for Life.’ This article involved an interview with Perl. Out of Death: A Zest for Lifeforms part of the public epitext, which Genette describes as: “any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space.”[[283]](#footnote-284) A newspaper aims to provide content that the public wants to read. A newspaper article is meant to be impermanent and will subsequently disappear with the following headline. Genette writes that the aim of some paratextual elements is to: “reach a broader public than the public of first readers, but also sending this public a message that is constitutively more ephemeral, destined to disappear when its monitory function is fulfilled.”[[284]](#footnote-285) In the case of The *New York Times* article, however, its contents are then subsequently used as a source in a 2019 publication calledThe Auschwitz Doctor who ‘couldn’t do no harm’in the column BBC Futures.So, in this case, *The New York Times* article has influence, which is more far-reaching influential and has addressed another audience. It is then necessary to ask what the article highlights about Perl and what it omits. This research will argue that the placement of *The New York Times* interview in the *Style* section of the newspaper shows that Perl has received a reception that focuses on her gender. Further, the newspaper frames the interview through patriarchal ‘vows’ made to Perl’s father. Lastly, there are purposeful omissions from Perl’s story, such as the U.S. authorities' investigation of Perl’s involvement with Mengele.

Nadine Brozan, who wrote the *New York Times* article on Gisella Perl, has been writing articles for the *New York Times* (according to the online archive) since the 23rd of July 1970. She has publications from 1970- May 13th, 2011, so she has been part of that organisation or affiliated with them for 41 years.[[285]](#footnote-286) In that time, she has written about many subjects, from religion to real estate. She is a well-established journalist who has worked on Holocaust and Jewish-related topics and women’s reproductive health. In 1983, Brozan wrote an article titled ‘Holocaust Women: A Study in Survival,”[[286]](#footnote-287) which looked at Joan M. Ringelheim’s conference. This conference was particularly influential and arguably the start of the gendered history of the Holocaust[[287]](#footnote-288) as it was aimed at looking into female experiences. This area had previously been unexplored.[[288]](#footnote-289) Overall, Brozan has had an illustrious career within the *New York Times* and was writing about gendered experiences of the Holocaust to the point where academics were not yet researching it.

There has been a heroism versus complicity argument throughout the reception of Perl’s testimony. This has resulted in a reception which focuses heavily on her role in female-centric areas and creates an idealisation of womanhood as a mother and caregiver. For example, there is a summary of Perl’s achievements and a focus on her multiple roles concerning gynaecology and childbirth. The article starts with, “Every time Dr. Gisella Perl enters a delivery room, she stops first to pray: “God, you owe me a life, a living baby.”[[289]](#footnote-290) This shows that from the onset of the article, there is a focus on Perl as both a religious woman and the caregiver or bringer of life. There is also an underlying sense of atonement as the ‘living baby’ is about the ones that did not survive in Auschwitz. However, this is not explicitly stated and is an example of an omission that keeps Perl within the required boundaries of female propriety.

In the *New York Times* article, there are statements which show that Gisella Perl’s reception has been focused on her work with women. Perl’s interview has been placed within the newspaper's Style section, a traditionally female-orientated area. The positioning of the article alludes to the genre that this section of the paper represents. For example, the " Relationships " section is next to Perl’s image. Although the section heading is unrelated to Perl’s article, the placement of it visually puts both in proximity. It shows that they are both constituent parts of the same style section. There is also an article focused on who should decide on vacation plans, a section titled “New program for Adolescent parents”, and below there is an article called “*Women Making Inroads on Traditional Jobs of Men.”[[290]](#footnote-291)* This placing within the newspaper ‘style’ section, a quintessentially female-orientated area, indicates that the article is intended to be read by women. This arrangement on the page suggests dialogic links. Perl is surrounded by topics such as relationships, children and male-dominated professions, all relevant to Perl’s life. Perl has been placed in the female sphere, so it does not consider the whole story of her life.

A newspaper with a person in a mask

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The *New York Times* article has a patriarchal structure shaped through two ‘vows’ that Perl made to her father and husband which is inherently patriarchal. The first vow to her father is to be a “good true Jew” after he was concerned that if she became a doctor, she would lose her faith. It is also recounted that after Perl had finished medical school, she brought a prayer book for her father inscribed with his name. On this book, she swore to him: ''I swear on this prayer book that wherever life shall take me, I will remain an observant Jew.''[[291]](#footnote-292) Her father, Maurice Perl, took this prayer book to the crematorium in Auschwitz. The article highlights the family bonds and loss that Perl has suffered. The second vow was to both her father and husband: ''After four days in the cattle car that took us to Auschwitz, suddenly the S.S. officers opened the door, and prisoners in striped pajamas threw us out,'' she recalled. ''My father and husband both embraced me, saying, 'Swear we will never go back, we will meet someday in Jerusalem.”[[292]](#footnote-293) This second vow is prefaced with how Perl has moved to Israel to be with her daughter and grandson. These vows sound marital, and further, there are patriarchal undertones to structuring the article through the lens of Perl’s relationship with the men in her life. This posits Perl as: “the ultimate symbol of victimhood, as well as the embodiment of feminine heroism and the paradigm of appropriate motherly behaviour.”[[293]](#footnote-294) By positioning Perl as the ‘perfect’ mother, wife and daughter, the article is situating her story within the realms of the newspaper's ‘style’ section and positioning her as the dutiful woman.

Medical Ethics

Perl was a prisoner in a women's camp who worked as a doctor, including under Mengele. In the paratexts of Perl’s work, there has been a debate about whether her actions were heroic or complicit. Perl’s testimony is intertwined with her medical expertise in obstetrics, and it is these points which set apart her voice from other narratives in addressing questions of medical ethics during the Holocaust.

Academia has researched the intersection of medicine and the camps in the immediate aftermath of the war and subsequent decades. This research has influenced the paratexts of Perl’s work. Leo Alexander, who was a key medical advisor during the Nuremberg trials, wrote a report on medicine under the Nazis. In the report, he included the euthanasia program and the experiments conducted on concentration camp prisoners.[[294]](#footnote-295) This report created ten ethical conduct principles for medical research that are still relevant to modern medicine. This highlights that in the aftermath of the war, research was conducted on the medical acts perpetrated during the war. Since then, academics such as Michael A. Grodin have researched *Jewish Medical Resistance in the Holocaust* (2014)[[295]](#footnote-296), which looks at medicine as a form of resistance. In the *BBC Future* article analysed in this chapter, Perl’s work in the camp is argued to be a form of protest. There has also been research into female doctors and the Holocaust, for example, with Noa Gidron’s *Jewish Women Medical Practitioners who rescued Fellow Jews during the Holocaust* (2020).*[[296]](#footnote-297)* Perl’s testimony is relevant because by performing abortions, she was saving Jewish women’s lives.

BBC Future

In the ‘Missed Genius’ column of BBC Future, there is an article which looks at Gisella Perl titled: “The Auschwitz Doctor who ‘couldn’t do no harm’[[297]](#footnote-298), published in 2020. The article looks at Perl’s life and actions but through the lens of medical ethics, which includes the plethora of research conducted between 1984 and 2020. The report uses several philosophical and religious arguments to explain why Perl’s actions were necessary. The BBC Future article also includes the New York Times interview as a source, so there will be an analysis of how that has shaped the later article and to what effect.

The writer of Perl’s article has a strong knowledge of Holocaust medical ethics, which frames her article. Rachel E. Gross is an award-winning science journalist who “centres on bodies, values and the culture of science.” Further, she was a journalism fellow at the FASPE program for studying professional ethics at Auschwitz.[[298]](#footnote-299) In 2016, Gross started a special series in the *Smithsonian* that looked at female scientists written out of history. This led to her being a freelance BBC journalist for the BBC Future ‘Missed Genius’ column.

Gisella Perl’s article is under the heading of ‘medical.’ She has consistently been placed under this category in academic and non-academic writing. This is due to her work in academia, where she published numerous medical papers, her lifelong career as a doctor, and her medical work within the camps. The BBC Future article examines Perl’s actions through a medical lens of three categories. The first is situational, that Perl did not have the luxury of making ethical choices. Secondly, performing the abortions was an act of resistance, and lastly, Jewish law had precedents for Perl’s actions. By framing the article through this debate, Gross has highlighted the academic reception of Perl’s testimony and the ethical considerations which have arisen. These academics attempt to answer the overarching question: what is a doctor’s role at a time of moral ambiguity?

The article’s title draws from a misconception of the Hippocratic oath: *“The Auschwitz Doctor who ‘couldn’t do no harm’,* which immediately puts the reader into the domain of medical ethics. Many believe: ‘First, do no harm’ is part of the Hippocratic oath. However, this is an expression or popular term used to express the underlying ethical rules of medicine rather than an actual part of it. Titles have a specific purpose and particular delineations in that they include: "A set of linguistic signs ... that may appear at the head of a text to designate it, to indicate its subject matter as a whole, and to entice the targeted public.'[[299]](#footnote-300) By titling the article as such, Gross is firmly establishing Perl’s place in the discussion of medical ethics.

The BBC Future article aims to draw the reader in and place Perl in a series with other influential ‘Missed Genius’ women. This column looks at people throughout history who have contributed to science, maths or engineering but have been overlooked due to not fitting the archetype of a scientist. The BBC write:

Ask people to imagine a scientist and many of us will picture the same thing – a heterosexual white male. Historically, several challenges have made it much more difficult for those who don’t fit that stereotype to enter fields like science, math or engineering. There are, however, many individuals from diverse backgrounds who have shaped our understanding of life and the Universe but whose stories have gone untold – until now. With our new BBC Future column, we are celebrating the “missed geniuses” who made the world what it is today.[[300]](#footnote-301)

This summary of the aims of BBC Future puts Perl as a role model for female scientists. By including Perl in this series, the BBC highlighted that she is not well known for her scientific work or Holocaust testimony. The article does not delve into why Perl is a ‘missed genius’ or what factors could have contributed to her being relatively unknown.

However, we can see a difference between Gisella Perl’s title and the other women in the series. This is likely to be the work of a subeditor, as the author does not always write titles and headlines of an essay in journalistic media. Within the series, there is a theme in the titles; for example, the article on Miriam Menkle is: ‘The female scientist who changed human fertility forever,’[[301]](#footnote-302) whilst the column on Helen Octavia Dickens is called ‘The female physician who popularised the Pap smear.’[[302]](#footnote-303) In both article titles, the adjective ‘female’ shows that there has been a conscious effort to draw attention to women’s achievements. Considering the articles are trying to draw attention to these women who have been ignored by history, the subeditor is inverting this idea and purposefully putting it in the headline. However, in Perl’s article, the title is ‘The Auschwitz doctor who couldn't 'do no harm.' The subeditor wants to draw attention to Perl’s experience during Auschwitz, and the reference will likely entice readership.

By framing through the lens of situational ethics, Gross ensures that the audience is compelled to look at the horrific circumstances and lack of agency that Perl endured. Situational ethics is when: “moral decision-making is contextual or dependent on a set of circumstances.”[[303]](#footnote-304) Using this ethical approach, Gross highlights in her article situations that Perl was put in which were reprehensible, for example: “When Dr Josef Mengele, the camp’s chief physician, learned her speciality, he ordered her to report every pregnant woman to him personally. Perl soon realised that these women were marked for death.”[[304]](#footnote-305)Gross details horrific events and presents academic responses for the audience to consider, such as from Eva Hoffman’s 2019 afterword to Perl’s re-published memoir. This looks at the circumstances where Perl was forced to act: “She could not afford ambivalence.”[[305]](#footnote-306) The noun ‘ambivalence’ highlights that Perl had to make a definitive decision on her actions as well as focusing on Perl’s precarious situation as a Jewish prisoner.Further, the verb ‘afford’ hints at the personal cost and the lack of choices within the camps. Gross ensures that the audience knows Eva Hoffman’s background as: “an author and daughter of Holocaust survivors.” This legitimises the academic response and highlights that Hoffman understands why Perl acted urgently: “I think when she fully understood what was going on, she didn’t hesitate.”[[306]](#footnote-307) For the audience, Gross is delineating how crucial Perl’s actions were in saving lives and showing how desperate the situation was.

Situational ethics is further drawn to highlight that Perl’s actions were a form of resistance. Gross includes a compendium of academic voices such as Sara R Horowitz, Eva Hoffman and Sari J Siegal. With these female academics, Gross explains their job title (historian, author) to legitimise their voices in this debate and then proceeds to formulate a collage of agents interwoven in Perl’s ethical favour. Gross states that “Perl found herself in the very heart of the Nazi machinery which sought to “obliterate the biological basis of Jewry”: mothers and potential mothers. She used her position and expertise to intervene on behalf of pregnant women.”[[307]](#footnote-308) This is referring to Höss’ autobiography, where he states that the Nazis needed to kill ‘every Jew…(or) the Jews will one day destroy the German people.’[[308]](#footnote-309) Gross is highlighting the genocidal actions of the Nazis to argue that there could not be an ethical debate within the confines of being a camp prisoner. Gross quotes Sara R Horowitz:

In a certain sense, she was living in a time and place where you couldn’t talk about pure ethics… She couldn’t hide behind the fact of, ‘Oh, I would never do an abortion that wasn’t necessary.’ It wasn’t a luxury she had. The ethics were situational, but I think she believed that anything that opposed the aggressive genocide of Nazi ideology was inherently ethical.[[309]](#footnote-310)

Although it is not stated where this dialogue comes from, it sounds like a conversation between the academic and Gross. Horowitz points out that choices themselves were a ‘luxury’ that Perl did not have. This links to Lawrence Langer’s term “choiceless choices,” which is defined as “crucial decisions which did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of abnormal response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way the victim’s own choosing.”[[310]](#footnote-311) Perl, even as a ‘privileged’ Jew, did not have the agency to make her own decisions. Instead, her situation determined that she needed to act, to save: “the two lives that would be thrown in the crematorium.”[[311]](#footnote-312) Further within realm of medical ethics “have long held that when a pregnant woman’s life is at risk, a physician must prioritise saving her life over that of her unborn child. Doctors adapted this lesson to the camps.”[[312]](#footnote-313) Gross is putting forward to the audience academic ideas focusing on the medical ethics of Perl’s actions. The effect is that Perl’s actions become a topic of debate in the sphere of resistance.

Gross is writing this article from a predominantly American perspective, which politically has always had an undercurrent of internalised debate regarding abortion. However, Gross is writing for the BBC in this article and so does not go into the legality of Perl’s actions but instead draws from Jewish law regarding abortion:

Abortion is frowned upon in Jewish law, obviously, but the foetus doesn’t have the status of a person,” he says. “It’s a hard thing to say, but to save the life of the woman takes precedence over the foetus. And so, this would be a classic situation where it would be tragic but justifiable.[[313]](#footnote-314)

Using the word ‘justifiable’ shows that Perl’s actions were the correct choice. Within the article, Grodin is also quoted to have said: “It would be allowed –"perhaps mandatory” – for doctors like Perl to perform an abortion to save a living mother.”[[314]](#footnote-315) Words such as ‘mandatory’ and ‘justifiable’ provide definitive statements on the medical ethics of Perl’s actions. By framing the article through a medical ethics and law lens, Gross highlights the academic debates and discourses concurrently with Perl’s testimony. Further, the intellectual and religious authorities arguing in Perl’s favour attempt to recover Perl as a medical professional.

Lastly, the BBC Future article will be analysed by looking at what it has taken from the New York Times article, which Gross uses as a source. This means that the New York Times article has influenced a contemporary one 37 years later, and the question is to what extent this has impacted the new article. This elicits questions on the reception of Perl’s work and the influence of past paratexts.

One of the shared attributes between the two articles is the use of vocabulary. For example, both articles use the terminology of: “interrupted the pregnancies” rather than stating that Perl was performing abortions (although this is stated later). This is because of the negative connotations of the word ‘abortion,’ especially for an American audience. ‘Interrupted,’ which is used by Perl in the *New York Times* interview, is academic medical terminology that is seldom used in the UK (the preference being ‘abortion’ or ‘termination’) but is used in the U.S. Perl, by using this terminology is distancing her language and putting her actions into the medical sphere. Gross continues to use ‘interrupted’ alongside the term ‘abortion’, which highlights that Gross is keeping the language that Perl used initially but is also including the word ‘abortion’ to give voice to the action.

The BBC Future article draws from the information from the New York Times article. For example, both articles mention Perl’s father, the vows she made to him, and Perl’s encounter with Mrs Roosevelt. However, in some instances, the BBC Future article adds material to the story; for example, both articles mention a baby born just as Perl was being liberated from Bergen Belsen. In the New York Times article, Brozan writes: “At the precise moment that British troops were moving in to liberate Bergen-Belsen, Dr. Perl was delivering a baby, the first free child born there.”[[315]](#footnote-316) This creates a contrast from the hellish nature of the camps: the liberation whilst a new life is being born.

Further, it highlights how the New York Times article evasively does not include the more horrific details, which indicates being in the ‘style’ section. In contrast, in the BBC Future column, Gross starts the article by showing how profoundly tricky it was to give birth during the Holocaust years. Gross writes that Perl had: “no tools, no anaesthetics and no assistance.” This repetition of ‘no’ highlights the scarcity of resources available to Perl. The article then continues and shows that the woman giving birth (named Marusa) started to haemorrhage. Gross recounts that Perl begged a high-ranking British officer for equipment and that “Half an hour later, I had the water, the disinfectant, and could wash my hands and perform the operation, not as a helpless prisoner, but as a doctor.”[[316]](#footnote-317) Adding additional context to Perl’s story, Gross has shown the human nature of Perl's work and how she was constantly under extreme duress to help the women in her care. This emphasises Perl’s role as a medical professional and indicates how Gross has framed her article to include reasoning and medical ethics for Perl’s actions.

To conclude, Perl has consistently been placed in a debate over whether her actions during Auschwitz are complicit or heroic. The BBC Futures article highlights that Perl lacked agency over what she could control in Auschwitz. However, she was able to control women being sent to the gas chambers because of their pregnancy. So, she acted without hesitation. Further, by saving these women, Perl was endangering her own life, and so her actions were a form of resistance against genocide. Moreover, Jewish law argues that Perl’s actions were upheld on religious grounds, which cements the argument for Perl’s actions being heroic.

Gisella Perl’s memoir provides a valuable account of women’s experiences in the camps and the difficulties and ethical dilemmas faced by the doctors working in the camps. The paratexts surrounding Perl’s testimony have shaped its reception. The forewords, introductions and newspaper articles have focused on a heroism vs complicity debate which has impacted and obscured the complexities of Perl’s experience. Further, the historical context has played a significant role in the re-publications. There was a focus in France on resistance narratives and this limited the impact on Perl’s testimony. However, due to a burgeoning interest in women’s experiences during the Holocaust, Perl’s testimony has been recognised as important in the field.

# Conclusion

This research has shown the complexities of author, text, and reader in shaping the reception of Wiesel, Nyiszli, and Perl’s work. It has also explored how paratexts and critical frameworks have framed the interpretation of these works and their subsequent impact on the works themselves. Throughout the three chapters, there has been the recurring theme of reducing complex narratives about the Holocaust to the simple archetypes which are prevalent at the time. This is seen clearly with the ideas of survivor authors being constructed either as a heroic martyr or alternatively complicit in the crimes of the Holocaust. The problem with this reduction of ideas is that it overshadows the complex and multifaceted nature of these authors’ experiences and focuses solely on the ethical dilemmas that they faced. It reduces the testimony to a binary decision of whether the authors’ actions were morally right or wrong. However, it is necessary to move beyond this simplistic view and instead engage with both the testimony and paratexts to ensure that there is a critical engagement with the material and the relationship of the author to that material.

It is only through examining the ways in which these testimonies have been initially received, how they have been recirculated or translated and then how they have been interpreted will we better understand the challenges involved in transmitting Holocaust narratives. The goal is to ensure that Holocaust narratives and their paratexts are actively studied to ensure that their material is able to shape our knowledge of the past and retain awareness of changes in reception over time.

One of the central findings of Elie Wiesel’s *Night[[317]](#footnote-318)* is the “great man” trope, which was influenced by first-wave autobiographical criticism and drew on the work of Georg Misch. This initial approach enabled critics like Alfred Kazin to emphasise the existential dimensions of the text and allowed Kazin’s theoretical approaches to be developed, which enabled such high expectations of Wiesel. However, these ideas were challenged by subsequent waves of autobiographical criticism, culminating in the fourth wave, which highlighted areas of memory, translation, and the reader-author relationship. *Night's* multiple translations and subsequent debates regarding its authenticity show the reader-author relationship and the impact of debates on conceptions of autobiographical truth. This was further complicated when Wiesel’s new translations re-kindled academic debates on the distinctions between memory and representation.

This thesis has contributed to a deeper understanding of how Holocaust autobiographical works are produced and interpreted. Kazin’s problematic relationship with Wiesel shows the complex dynamics involved in autobiographies. Ultimately, this research suggests that while autobiographies can offer profound insights into individual lives and historical experiences, they should be approached with critical awareness of the authorial, cultural, and historical contexts in which they are produced and consumed.

This leads to Miklos Nyiszli whose testimony *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account[[318]](#footnote-319)* had multiple paratexts which heavily influenced its reception. The sensationalist Hungarian newspaper advertisement in *Vilag* had a crucial role in shaping reader expectations. The advertisement emphasised Nyiszli’s position as a pathologist in Auschwitz and his proximity to Mengele’s methods of killing. The advertisement was poised to garner the attention and interest of its audience and thus there was substantial impact for this paratext. Consequently, the framing of Nyiszli as one of the few Hungarian witnesses also incurred questions about the testimony’s content and the author’s role in the camps. The use of bold typeface on “methods of killing” and the focus on Nyiszli being “the only Hungarian witness” created a perception of the text which may have been unwarranted. The framing of the paratext meant that subsequent audiences may have misinterpreted Nyizli’s narrative and instead focused on the ethical dilemmas Nyiszli faced while simultaneously elucidating whether Nyiszli was complicit.

Subsequent publications of Nyiszli’s work were shaped by paratextual influences such as sensational events and Nyiszli’s proximity to Mengele. In the French publication in *Les Temps Modernes* there were editorial choices which prioritised shocking the reader over providing the full narrative. This reflected the desire to engage in resistance-style narratives prevalent to France at the time. Further, Bruno Bettelheim’s foreword[[319]](#footnote-320) was critical of Nyiszli’s motivations and actions during the Holocaust. Further, Nyiszli’s testimony was used by Holocaust deniers to support their stance, which highlights the issues faced by Holocaust testimonies. Overall, these factors collectively shaped the reception of Nyiszli’s work and its impact on public understanding of the Holocaust.

Gisella Perl’s *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz[[320]](#footnote-321)* demonstrated the complex ways in which forewords and media representations can significantly influence how a Holocaust narrative is understood. This chapter argued that paratexts influence Perl’s reception as there is a persistent focus on heroism versus complicity which overshadows and obscures the complexities of Perl’s narrative, such as using her work to understand a gendered experience of the Holocaust. The re-publication of Perl’s testimony with a foreword by Lassner and Cohen shows a revival of interest in the importance of female Holocaust narratives.

Perl’s foreword to her own work emphasises her innocence and works to ensure that she addresses any potential accusations of complicity. Instead, Perl argues that Germany’s antisemitism is the main reason, and she mentions Heinrich Heine and Charles Maurras as evidence to those who were demonstrating antisemitism long before the Second World War. Perl then aims to distance herself from the crimes conducted by the Nazis as she firstly shows disbelief at the German people; she then contrasts that to the Enlightenment ideals juxtaposed to the cruelties she was witness to. By this three-pronged approach, Perl deflects any suggestion that she was complicit in the Holocaust.

The paratexts to Perl’s work offer a unique perspective for a survivor narrative regarding gender and medical ethics. The paratexts frame Perl’s work through the lens of traditional gender roles, and there is also a heroism versus complicity debate that runs through the paratexts and often obscures some of the issues that Perl writes about. This research has critically examined Lassner and Cohen’s introduction,[[321]](#footnote-322) which underscores the importance of the gendered experience and Perl’s perspective as a female doctor. Lassner and Cohen place Perl’s work within the broader field of Holocaust studies and ask the readers to delve deeper into women’s lives and experiences during the Holocaust. Ava Kadishson Schieber’s artwork[[322]](#footnote-323) also creates a visual dialogue with Perl’s testimony, giving the reader a deeper understanding of survivor experiences. This positions Perl as an important figure in any academic discourse on the Holocaust.

The *New York Times* [[323]](#footnote-324)and BBC Futures[[324]](#footnote-325) articles portray Perl in contrasting ways, highlighting the difficulties of paratexts in shaping the public narrative. The *New York Times* article focuses on Perl’s role as a caregiver and provides a gendered view. It also emphasises her resilience during the Holocaust and through adversity. However, the BBC Futures article focuses on Perl’s medical expertise and the ethical dilemmas she faced. There is more of a recognition of Perl’s difficult choices that she was forced to make during the Holocaust. These two articles show the importance of media representation and how it can impact or reflect societal attitudes when they are written. It also shows that survivor testimonies should not be reduced to simplistic narratives and instead contribute to a more accurate historical record.

The three authors, Elie Wiesel, Miklos Nyiszli, and Gisella Perl, require further study in different cultural contexts and critical frameworks. Further work that could be completed includes investigating the impact of social media as a form of paratext and analysing the impact of these three authors on contemporary film and novels. Nyiszli’s testimony was influential in the 2015 film *Son of Saul*, while a film was made about Perl’s life. At the beginning of this research, the testimonies of Primo Levi,[[325]](#footnote-326) Olga Lengyel[[326]](#footnote-327) and Kitty Hart-Moxon[[327]](#footnote-328) were also going to be analysed; due to the scope of the research, they were not included. However, further research could be conducted on these authors using the analysis of paratexts and practice of reception theory.

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