The *Shoah*'s Impact on Family Continuity and Paternal Bonds:

Understanding the Phenomenology of Father-Son Relationships in Art Spigelman's *Maus* and Eliezer Wiesel's *Night*

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Main Argument

This thesis emphasizes the importance of father-son relationships in two key texts of Holocaust literature: Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. The thesis argues that both texts explore tensions between fathers and sons, but that both texts also show how those tensions eventually diminish. Ironically, the improvement in father-son relations in both works is due, in large part, to the impact of the Holocaust. Father-son relationships remain imperfect at the conclusions of both works, although in both works those relationships have nevertheless improved significantly.

The thesis consists of 22 chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of *Night.* Chapter 2 highlights how relations between father and sons are a crucial emphasis in *Night* from the very beginning of the text. Additionally, chapter 2 argues that the relationship between Eliezer and his father, Chlomo, prior to the *Shoah*, is founded on Eliezer's resentment towards his father; therefore, Eliezer finds a substitute father. Eliezer implies his disappointment in his father's disregard not only for his family, but

also for Eliezer during his childhood. The exploration of early tensions between father and son prior to the Holocaust shows how the progression and improvement of their relationship is due, in large part, to the impact of the *Shoah.* Chapter 3 contends that the title of Wiesel's book –*Night*– here refers to the living death endured in the concentration camps. The word "night" symbolizes an emotional darkness resulting from a drastic change that ultimately renders Eliezer unable to make a clear distinction between life and death. Within the camps, he begins to lose different kinds of faith, including his spiritual faith, his faith in others and humanity, as well as his youthful optimism. However, faith in his father, at least, has not yet died. Eliezer begins to view his father in a new light, and he still holds onto his love for his father. Chapter 4 emphasizes Eliezer's inability to find meaning in the world as he encounters the concentration camps. Eliezer's physical, mental, and spiritual struggles force him to question not only his faith in God but also everything around him. His outlook on life becomes forever changed, and he vows never to forget what he is experiencing. Chapter 5 asserts that Eliezer yearns to understand his surroundings, but he cannot define his new world since he is surrounded with uncivilized brutality. Not being able to establish a connection with his new world inside the concentration camps, he turns to the one person who is left from his past: his

father. Chapter 6 exemplifies the new bond between father and son. Eliezer and Chlomo both help each other endure pain and move forward together, which shows that the father and son grow closer because of shared pain. Chapter 7 explores Eliezer and Chlomo's mutual commitment to protect each other. Both vow never to be separated from each other, a vow which embodies the kind of father-son connection that is such a crucial theme in this book. Chapter 8 maintains that from the onset of the camp experience, Eliezer witnesses the debasement of his father. Here, Eliezer describes a painful change within himself that forces a separation between him and his father, which results from being tormented by the Nazis. This section represents the transition faced by children in the camps, who are forced to grow up much too quickly. Chapter 9 explores the breakdown of communication and focuses on how the Jewish community abandons the sense of brotherhood because of the desperation to survive. Moreover, this chapter focuses on how the memoir transitions from emphasizing the brutalities of the Germans to depicting how some of the prisoners themselves begin to behave inhumanely. Chapter 10 illustrates that Eliezer's bond with his father is threatened by the unpredictable, inhumane conditions in the camp. The mutual love between father and son makes both of them vulnerable when either is threatened. Chapter 11 argues that for the inmates, the only

survival that truly matters is their own. However, Eliezer's concern for his father is one of the few traits that helps keep him feeling human, especially when he witnesses the behavior of the other inmates. This chapter also illustrates the breakdown between fathers and sons in the concentration camps. These instances help put the breakdown of the relationship between Eliezer and Chlomo into a much larger perspective. After witnessing the breakdown of other father-son relationships, Eliezer begins to focus on the importance of maintaining his relationship with his father. Chapter 12 observes the fact that Eliezer's growing desire for freedom from worrying about his father leads to his increasing sense of guilt. Eliezer realizes his existence has completely changed after being immersed in the labor camps; therefore, he is divorced from his life, severed from his father, and forced to contemplate his survival in a former world he believed ended. Chapter 13 illustrates how the *Shoah* has forever altered Eliezer's sense of self and his identity as a Holocaust victim.

Chapter 14 begins focusing on *Maus* and provides an overview of the text. Chapter 15 argues that haunting representations of the *Shoah* affect Spiegelman and are a personal example of the effects of the past upon the present. Despite the years that have passed since the war, and despite the fact that Art did not live through that time period himself, the *Shoah* and its

effects influence his everyday life because of his father's experiences; Therefore a kind of transference takes place from father to son. Chapter 16 explores the different changes Spiegelman made to the first chapter of *My Father Bleeds History*, the subtitle of the first volume of *Maus*, to provide readers a deeper insight into the father-son relationship that is present throughout the text. Chapter 17 asserts that Art's personal and self-reflective narrative is his attempt to depict, in simple and familiar terms, the effects of a horrific past on his own life. Chapter 18 emphasizes Art's relationship with his mother as well as the impact of her death on him and his father. Chapter 19 examines the impact of the *Shoah* on Art's life as well as how he, too, feels as if he is a victim who survived a historical atrocity. Chapter 20 maintains that Art is trying to construct his own identity by coming to terms with the experiences of his parents and their emotions. Art is consumed with questions because his relationship with his father is not the only influence that shapes his development as a child, adult, and artist. Chapter 21 explores how his relationship with his father centers on one event that haunts both men: the *Shoah*. The conclusion of *Maus* highlights how Vladek's past memory influences his present state of mind as well. Chapter 22 contends that despite the similarities between *Night* and *Maus*, they also differ. Finally, the conclusion of the thesis maintains that although

the residual effects of a traumatic experience can produce a poignant emotional void within families, communities, and father-son relationships, the personal accounts by Wiesel and Spiegelman of the Holocaust prove that the horrific reality also restored, at least in those two cases, paternal bonds between father and son. Ultimately, however, father-son relationships remain imperfect at the conclusions of both works, although in both works those relationships have nevertheless significantly improved.

Background

Adolf Hitler's racially motivated Nazi ideology was implemented in a systematic ethnic cleansing of "inferior" people in Germany and in Nazi-occupied territories. This effort was known as "der Endlösung," or "The Final Solution." The publications surrounding this calamity have formed a new postwar literary genre known as Holocaust literature. While the term "Holocaust" is used to describe the murder of millions of civilians during World War II, this thesis uses the Hebrew term *Shoah* to denote, more specifically, the catastrophic destruction of European Jewry during World War II. Although the Hebrew term means "calamity," the word *Shoah* has been used since the early 1940s to avoid the supposed theologically and historically unacceptable nature of the word "holocaust."

The literary genre focused on the events of the *Shoah* has grown to encompass many different kinds of writing, including memoirs and graphic novels. These subgenres have been used by Elie Wiesel, an author deemed the "Messenger to Mankind," and Art Spiegelman, an American comics artist. Wiesel and Spiegelman are as much a part of their most famous works as those works are a part of them. Both *Night*, by Wiesel, and *Maus*, by Spiegelman, use the *Shoah* to explore such themes as identity struggles, the attitude toward the victims' disposition for survival, and father-son relationships. They also examine attitudes toward existence under extremely oppressive conditions. Although the narrators in both texts (Wiesel himself and Art Spiegelman's father, Vladek) are markedly different individuals and have different experiences during the *Shoah*, both texts when taken together, provide a comprehensive picture of the tragedies of the victims who died during the *Shoah*. Both texts also depict the impact of mass genocide upon survivors after the war. Both works likewise complement each other in presenting father-son relationships. Each portrayal illuminates the massively evil impact of Nazism. The Nazis' genocidal injustices produced many victims, but the Nazis' main objectives were to create a horrific reality specifically tailored to torture and to exterminate the Jewish people and culture. *Maus* (1986) and *Night* (1955) help explain

how the *Shoah* affected the lives and experiences of perpetrators and victims alike. This thesis will try to show that although the residual effects of a traumatic experience can produce a poignant emotional void within families, communities, and father-son relationships, Wiesel and Spiegelman's personal accounts of the *Shoah* prove that the horrific reality also restored, at least in those two cases, paternal bonds between father and son.

Though Wiesel experienced difficulty when trying to publish his memoir, the work eventually prevailed and affected millions of readers, inspiring much interpretation, analysis, and criticism, and earning Wiesel the title of "Messenger to Mankind." Wiesel is an ideologist and a writer, an integral figure within Jewish literature. *Night* discusses many aspects of the *Shoah* and delves deeply into the horrendous experiences of concentration camp inmates as well as the atrocities that Wiesel and his family experienced before they were forced into the camps. His work explains how he experienced an atmosphere that turned all aspects of his life upside down, causing him to reexamine all of his core values. His experiences caused him to doubt his faith in mankind.

Night depicts a young boy who is paralyzed, or controlled, by Nazi power. He quickly learns about the mentality of the concentration camps and realizes that many prisoners fall victim to the belief that "there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends [in the

work camps]. Everyone lives and dies for himself alone" (105). At first, Wiesel becomes passionless and paralyzed. Wiesel reflects on his lifestyle and state of mind before, during, and after the *Shoah*. He explains that *Night* represents a time in his life when "everything came to an end—man, history, literature, God. There was nothing left. And yet we begin again with *Night* (qtd. in Reichek 46). *Night* ultimately shows how Wiesel is still haunted by the aftermath of the *Shoah*, from which he thought he escaped after his release from captivity in 1945. *Night* shows how many father-son relationships were torn asunder in the concentration camps; however, the *Shoah* ultimately brings young Eliezer closer to his father and deepens their relationship.

This thesis begins by looking at Wiesel as a young boy before the *Shoah*; then as a concentration camp inmate; and then finally as a writer. Wiesel's personal life deserves analysis, especially since *Night* is a memoir. More importantly, the evolution of *Night* reveals the growth of his emotional and spiritual maturity. This thesis, therefore, explores Wiesel's biography, especially the significance of Wiesel's physical and spiritual relationship with his father. *Night* focuses on his life as a young boy and reports the atrocities in the concentration camps, the living conditions within the camps, and the destruction of humanity the camps made possible.

Wiesel begins by explaining his youthful religious views and development. His descriptions of his personal religious inquiries and training allow the reader to understand how important spirituality is to Wiesel and how his early spirituality was eventually challenged. We learn about Wiesel the boy, the religious student, the son, the prisoner, and the man. We witness his loss of his community and family, and the potential loss of his relationship with his father.

An important figure in the first part of *Night* is an old man named Moshe, who teaches Wiesel about religion. Wiesel regards Moshe almost as a father, but few people in Wiesel's village listen to Moshe when he warns them about an impending Holocaust. In this sense, Moshe represents Eliezer Wiesel's own ultimate desire to warn future generations against prejudice. Wiesel attempts to accomplish what Moshe originally tried (but failed) to do. Yet Moshe is not the only important father-figure in *Night*. Wiesel's own father is the most important of such figures. The complicated relationship between Wiesel and his father is the key subject of much analysis in this thesis.

Father-son relationships are also important in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, which is also, like *Night*, written from the son's perspective. Art struggles to make sense out of his father's experiences in the *Shoah* and of how the *Shoah* impacted Art's

own relationship with his father. Since Art did not experience the *Shoah*, he feels that a significant void exists between him and his father. Fortunately, Art's interest in understanding how the *Shoah* affected his family allows the father and son to talk, analyze their relationship, and build a stronger bond. This thesis focuses on how Spiegelman uses his father's testimony to help him comprehend his own life, identity, and personality.

Spiegelman uses *Maus* much as Wiesel uses *Night*: to emphasize the struggle to survive the *Shoah* and the significance of father-son relationships. When listening to his father's re-telling of his personal experiences in Nazi Germany, Spiegelman offers interjections that help make *Maus* a partly autobiographical work.

This thesis connects both authors' use of titles, metaphors, and creative styles to show the conflict between each author's conscious view of reality and the repressed emotions that resulted from the *Shoah*. As the works progress, so do both men's understanding of themselves and of their fathers. Both narrators eventually learn how the *Shoah* helped shaped the past of the fathers and the present of the sons.

Yet the differences between the narratives are as important as their similarities. For instance, the first significant father-son bond in *Night* involves Wiesel's relationship with God. Young Eliezer's questions and doubts about God become more frequent as

he suffers in concentration camps, but at first he tries to cling to his youthful beliefs. Yet the more Eliezer tries to sustain his relationship with God, the more distant, at first, he grows from his father, who is not especially religious. But as Eliezer ultimately begins to lose his faith in God, he feels a closer connection to his earthly father. Eliezer and Chlomo must rely more and more upon each other to survive. Eventually, God even becomes a symbolic figure who represents the first destroyer of father-son relationships. Wiesel abandons his early faith in God and focuses instead on his and his father's earthly survival. His rejection of his supposed heavenly father brings him closer to his real, physical father in the camps. Their mutual suffering during the *Shoah* helps them overcome their estrangement and achieve a genuine bond.

A similar bond ultimately develops in *Maus*, although for different reasons. The bond in *Night* grows out of shared misery; the bond in *Maus* results from the son's ability to empathize with the misery suffered by his father – a father he had previously been unable to understand. The more Art learns about his father's experiences during the *Shoah*, the more Art is able to see his father as a human being worthy of love and respect, rather than as the distant authority figure the father had previously seemed to be. In *Night,* a father and son grow closer because they share the same pain; in *Maus*, a father and son grow closer as the son learns about

the pain suffered by his father. As each son tries to understand his father, each son comes to a better (but still imperfect) understanding himself. In both cases, the son's relationship with his father is crucial to the existence of the son, and in both cases the son's bond with the father improves but remains troubled.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that while the *Shoah* strengthened father-son relationships both in *Night* and in *Maus*, neither Wiesel nor Spiegelman truly understands the impact of the *Shoah* upon his relationship with his father. Both Wiesel and Spiegelman attempt to understand a traumatic past, but a full or perfect understanding is never reached. Although both Wiesel and Spiegelman grow more emotionally and intellectually mature, neither, ultimately, can completely understand the impact that the *Shoah* has had upon their lives.

Chapter One: Brief Overview of *Night*

Night, by Elie Wiesel, is most famous for its vivid depictions of the horrors of the *Shoah*. But another theme is important in this book: the enormous complexity of family relationships. *Night* depicts the family as a source of love and psychological strength, but he also shows how familial ties can be a source of profound pain. It is precisely because we love the other members of our family that our ties with them can hurt us so deeply, especially when family love is placed under unusual stresses. In Wiesel's *Night*, the most important family relationship depicted is the one between a teenager named Eliezer and his aging father, Chlomo. Eliezer and Chlomo suffer the terrors of the Holocaust together, but the nightmare world they endure sometimes strengthens their relationship while sometimes threatening to break the relationship completely. Part of the fascination of *Night* derives from its honest, unflinching depiction of the ways love can sometimes provoke a kind of hate.

Chapter Two: Family Matters and Resentment

Relations between fathers and sons are a crucial emphasis in Elie Wiesel's *Night* almost from the very beginning of the book. The narrative's very first sentence mentions an old man named "Moshe the Beadle" (3), who functions as a kind of father-figure to teen-aged Eliezer, the book's narrator and central figure. Both Moshe and Eliezer are Jews living in Transylvania during World War II, and both the boy and the old man take their religious faith very seriously. When Eliezer asks his biological father to find an instructor who can help the boy learn more about the complexities of Jewish thought, his father replies that Eliezer is too young to be concerned with such matters. But Eliezer is not deterred: "I succeeded on my own in finding a master for myself in the person of Moshe the Beadle" (4). Although Eliezer is still a boy, he is already showing the kind of independent initiative we associate with men. In a sense, by finding a figurative father in Moshe, Eliezer begins to act like a father (and as a father to) himself. He is already beginning to display the kind of maturity that will later be so important to his own life and to the life of Chlomo, his biological parent.

In the meantime, Moshe functions as a kind of substitute father for Eliezer in a number of different ways. He asks the boy thought-provoking questions (4); he offers thought-provoking

observations (4-5); and above all he shows his respect for God, the heavenly father whom both the old man and the growing youth love and honor (5). Moshe also shows the kind of respect for Eliezer's interests and intellect that Eliezer rarely receives, at this point in his life, from his biological father. The old beadle soon becomes, in some ways, the central human figure in Eliezer's life. Moshe speaks to Eliezer "for hours on end about the Kabbalah's revelations and its mysteries. Thus began my initiation" (5). Instead of sitting at the feet of Chlomo, his own father, to learn about his faith, Eliezer learns from Moshe, his substitute father. One suspects that if Eliezer had a choice of fathers, he would at this point choose Moshe.

And then, suddenly, Moshe is gone. The first important "father-son" relationship described in Wiesel's narrative ends as abruptly as it began. The sudden disappearance of Moshe foreshadows later, more severe losses in Eliezer's life. Eliezer now knows how it feels to lose a figurative father, and much of the rest of the book will concern his efforts not to lose Chlomo. In the meantime, the absence of the metaphorical father means that Eliezer will need to depend, more and more, on the real father with whom he seems, at this point, to have so little in common. Father-son relations – including the satisfactions those relations can provide and the pain that can result when those relations are

threatened or lost – are emphasized all throughout Wiesel's *Night*, including throughout its first few pages. It is as if Wiesel wants us to pay especially careful attention to this theme.

Moshe leaves the book, at least temporarily, because he is a foreign-born Jew, and one day all such Jews are expelled from Sighet, the small village where Eliezer and his family live. At first, no one in the village much cares. But somehow Moshe manages to escape from the Germans. And, behaving like a good father-figure, he returns to Sighet and tries to warn the Jews living there of the horrific fate that awaits them if they fall into the Germans' hands. He actually goes from house to house, trying to share his wisdom with the people of the town. Whereas once he had acted as Eliezer's figurative father by discussing theology with him, now he tries to act as a figurative father to the whole town by sharing highly practical, extremely worldly knowledge. But no one listens, and so Moshe, Eliezer's substitute father-figure, is changed in ways that foreshadow the later decline of Eliezer's real father, Chlomo: "Moshe was not the same. The joy in his eyes was gone" (7). The change that overcomes Moshe early in the book prefigures the similar change that will overcome Chlomo as the book progresses.

Two years go by before Moshe's predictions seem really relevant. In the meantime, Chlomo has spent most of his own

energies "taking care of his business and the community" (8). His willingness to devote himself to the community shows that he is a kind of father figure not only to his own family but also to others in the town. During this portion of the book, Chlomo behaves as fathers were expected to behave in the 1940s: he is a good provider for his own families and a good citizen of his villages. Chlomo's relations with Eliezer seem just as distant as they were before, but Eliezer now seems capable of fending more for himself. At this point in his life, he doesn't seem to need the kind of fatherly guidance that he earlier sought and that he will later crave.

Eliezer, during this period, manages to get along without much assistance either from his real father or from Moshe, his symbolic father. He continues to devote himself to his studies, and he seems to take no special interest, any longer, in Moshe. The old man, Eliezer reports, "would drift through synagogue or through the streets, hunched over, eyes cast down, avoiding people's gaze" (8). It is as if Moshe feels that he has failed as a symbolic father-figure, both to the community as a whole and to Eliezer in particular. It is as if he feels that no one takes him seriously as the symbolic father he wants to be. The only wisdom he has to impart is wisdom no one cares to hear. Failing in his self-appointed role as a father to Sighet, he becomes a shell of a man, and in this sense he foreshadows the later fate of Eliezer's own father. Ironically,

Eliezer, instead of trying to care for Moshe or comfort him, treats him as most others do: with indifference and neglect. Just as Eliezer will sometimes later ignore Chlomo when Chlomo is in need, so he now does the same with Moshe. In this way as in many others, the early relationship between Eliezer and Moshe helps highlight, through comparison and through contrast, the later relationship between Eliezer and Chlomo.

As Eliezer grows older during his time in Sighet, he tries to advise his father. He tries, in a sense, to act like a father himself: "In those days it was still possible to buy emigration certificates to Palestine. I had asked my father to sell everything, to liquidate everything, to leave" (8-9). Eliezer, however, is still at this point a young son, and Chlomo is still the authoritative father. Eliezer must "ask" his father to do things, and Chlomo still has the power to refuse. Later, in the camps, their relationship will alter significantly. Later, in the camps, Eliezer will more and more act as Chlomo's father-figure – as a figure whose advice and instructions Chlomo can no longer easily ignore. Life in the camps will alter the relationship between father and son in numerous ways. Eliezer will act more and more like a father, while Chlomo will act more and more like a child.

Interestingly enough, one of the reasons Chlomo gives for refusing to go to Palestine is that he is no longer the man he used

to be: "'I am too old, my son. . . . Too old to start a new life. Too old to start from scratch in some distant land . . . " (9). This statement is ironic in numerous ways, especially when it is seen as foreshadowing later events. Later, when he is a prisoner in the camps, Chlomo will truly feel "too old." Later, in the camps, he will need to "start from scratch in some distant land" in ways he cannot now anticipate. The fact that he is too old will mean that in the camps he will be treated like a child, sometimes by the guards and sometimes by his own son. It is Chlomo's greater age that gives him his authority over Eliezer, but later it will be his greater age that will give Eliezer some real power over his own father. Father-son relations, which are relatively simple in the first pages of the book, will later become enormously complicated.

Chlomo, of course, is hardly the only father who fails to act in time to save his family from the Nazis. Again and again, Wiesel describes how people chose to ignore warnings, ignore growing threats, and remain optimistic. And, since most of the people in the community who had real power were men who were husbands and fathers, it was the husbands and fathers of Sighet who failed (in hindsight) to act responsibly. Eliezer's father was just one of many male heads of household who miscalculated the dangers the Nazis posed. Paradoxically, the only father figure in Sighet who seems to

have behaved wisely was Moshe the Beadle, an old man who seems to have no wife and no actual children of his own.

Chapter Three: Journey into Night

While crowded into the train that will lead him and his fellow Jews to a concentration camp, Eliezer becomes somewhat indifferent to life or death, but he does not entirely lose his will to live: "Indifference deadened the spirit. Here or elsewhere. What difference did it make? To die today or tomorrow, or later? The night was long and never ending" (66). To Eliezer, the distinction between life and death has become irrelevant, and his original, deeply religious outlook has drastically begun to change. He is currently experiencing a living hell, and as he repeatedly remarks after the train has reached the camp, the surviving prisoners are now no better than corpses. Everyone is dying, some more quickly than others, and the darkness of night has taken over the day. The title of Wiesel's book – *Night* – here suggests the living death endured in the concentration camps – a kind of death that Eliezer does not think will ever end. Additionally, the word "night" symbolizes an emotional darkness resulting from loss. The term "night" appears 58 times within the text, but its importance is explained from the onset of Eliezer's journey. The moment of Eliezer's arrival at the camp signifies the end of his previous life and his previous reality. According to Ellen Fine:

> After one single night in Auschwitz, Eliezer is turned into a subhuman, identified only by an anonymous number.

> Yesterday an active member of a community imbued with religious teachings and traditions, the boy is now bereft of all faith. A black flame, the demonic union of fire and night, has permeated his psyche. At the center of his soul lies a void. (53)

At first, the inmates seem united by their common pain: "We are all brothers, and we are all suffering the same fate. The same smoke floats over all our heads. Help one another. It is the only way to survive" (39). The Jewish community attempts to hold on to community, but this belief quickly changes once survival demands a new mentality within the camp. Eliezer begins to lose different kinds of faith, including his spiritual faith, his faith in others and humanity, as well his youthful optimism. Although Eliezer notices a similar change in others, he still holds onto his love for his father. Faith in his father, at least, has not yet died.

Eliezer does, however, begin to view his father in a new light. Although Eliezer and his father fail to have a close relationship during Eliezer's childhood, eventually (and paradoxically) "the [*Shoah*] allowed them to become very close" (Cargas 86).

This process of growing affection begins even before Eliezer and his community are exiled from their town. Being treated like prisoners, feeling desperate for food, overcome with

fear of the unknown, and lacking the necessities of life, Eliezer and his family are initially forced to live in ghettos. Eliezer explains that even during this earlier period of their suffering, when they were being forced to move from their community, it was "useless to complain. The police were striking out with their truncheons. 'Faster!' I had no strength left. The journey had only just begun, and I felt so weak. It was from that moment that I began to hate [the Nazis] and my hate is still the only link between us today" (17). The fear and confusion that produced this hate allow him to transition away from what he could not understand and begin to focus on his father.

During this early period, the ghettos are not guarded. During this time of transition, the family's servant, Martha, visits. She begs Chlomo to bring his family to her village, where she can provide them all safety and refuge. However, Chlomo refuses to heed her pleas; he once again declines to listen to others and believes he is acting in the best interest of his family. He tells his children that they can go with Martha if they want to but that he will stay in the ghetto, with his wife. Although Eliezer wants his family to leave, he refuses to be separated from them. He states, "My father wept. It was the first time I had ever seen him weep. I had never imagined that he could" (16).

The shock of witnessing his father's intense pain helps begin Eliezer's transition from one world to another. Everything from his familiar past pushes him to feel as though this new reality – this reality of the trains and the camp –cannot be real, but he eventually accepts his fate. His senses become blunted; his desire for self-preservation, self-defense, and pride collapses. Although his experiences within the camps have just begun, Eliezer quickly loses all hope. The looming presence of death and the senseless atrocity surrounding him crush his spirit and his ability to hope that perhaps this irrational reality will end. He despairs because he cannot accept the severity of what he is witnessing. He hopes he is dreaming; he believes there is no way for him to be alive or see what he witnesses. Eliezer realizes that within the camps, questions have no answers, a fact which leads him to believe he will not be able to find meaning in what he is experiencing.

Chapter Four: A Father's Protection

The many answers Eliezer searches for and his desire to find meaning in the world both end when he encounters the camps:

> Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never. (Wiesel 32)

Eliezer's physical, mental, and spiritual struggles in the concentration camps force him to question not only his faith in God but also everything around him. He confronts death and explains that he has experienced the death of values that at one time seemed important and intensely real and worthy. Eliezer repeatedly uses the term "never" to show how he has changed because of the flames, smoke, and destruction. His reiterated

insistence that he cannot forget is itself unforgettable. He predicts not only an end of his former beliefs and being, but also an end of life itself. Eliezer does not lose complete faith in God; however, he begins to doubt God's benevolence because his religious beliefs prior to the *Shoah* do not provide genuine consolation for what he is experiencing.

Just as he felt disappointed in his own father, especially during their time in the ghetto, he now feels intensely disappointed in God, his heavenly father. Eliezer's earthly father had the power to escape from suffering but failed to do so; Eliezer's heavenly father had the power to prevent suffering but seemed instead to permit it. Both fathers, it seems, failed to protect the very persons they claimed to love. Both fathers acted in ways that Eliezer can only consider irresponsible. Indeed, the heavenly father may be guilty of something far worse than irresponsibility. He may be guilty of evil. After all, if he has the power to prevent and alleviate suffering, why does he not use that power? How can he allow small, innocent children to be incinerated? Eliezer's experiences – both before and after he enters the camps – shake his faith in both of his fathers. The only father-figure who seems to have acted responsibly, so far, is Moshe, and the other Jews dismiss Moshe as if he were mad.

Nevertheless, despite Eliezer's frustrations with both his heavenly and his earthly fathers, Eliezer and Chlomo do watch out for each other, and this mutual concern is the beginning of a richer, more satisfying father-son relationship. Although solitude and individuality have become the new camp mentality among most of the inmates, Eliezer and Chlomo continue to rely on each other even when other families turn against each other. The ability of Eliezer and Chlomo to care for one another out of love and devotion shows their desire to ensure family continuity and strengthen their father-son bond in a system specifically designed to annihilate Jewish families and the Jewish continuity. Because they resist the general descent into selfishness, Eliezer and Chlomo remain human despite inhuman conditions.

Chapter Five: New World Relationships

The beginning of Eliezer's journey marks a time when he undergoes a complete change. Everything that he once knew, understood, and believed is devoured in the concentration camps. He is left alone in his thoughts of the unknown, unsure how to proceed in the unfamiliar territory. His feels helpless and alone. His former self, the young boy prior to experiencing Hitler's genocide, is now experiencing an abysmal darkness both externally and internally. He explains that the world he once knew is forced into the shadows of the night, never to be seen again. Just as the first day leaves him, so does his sense of normality. The flames not only destroy his youth but also consume the ambition of the boy who was once a devout student of Jewish mysticism. He now ventures on with his journey, having to conjure up new meanings for his existence. Eliezer yearns to understand his surroundings, but he cannot define his new world since he is surrounded with uncivilized brutality. Not able to establish a connection with his new world, he turns to the one person who is left from his past: his father. While he has encountered a world darkened by irrational death, he attempts to rebuild his strength and will to live by turning to his father in attempts to reconstruct a once-shattered-relationship. He turns to his father for meaning, guidance, and survival. His view of his father changes when he views his father

as capable of helping his son despite Chlomo's earlier dismissal of Eliezer. Eliezer focuses on lessening his suffering and increasing his chances of survival as well as his father's survival. Ultimately, Eliezer shifts the focus of his faith from his heavenly father to his earthly father.

Eliezer suggests that although prior to the *Shoah* he viewed his relationship with his father as distant, the extreme conditions of the labor camps help create a stronger and stronger bond between them. While other inmates' competition for survival causes them to fall victim to Nazi techniques specifically designed to destroy human relationships, Eliezer and Chlomo do not find any conflict between self-interest and their concern for each other. Their self-interest is focused on each other and each other's survival. The family connection centered on love between father and son represents life in a universe surrounded by death. From the very first moment when Eliezer arrives at the first concentration camp, he holds on tightly to his father's hand. He fears that he will be separated from his family; therefore, he vows not to lose his father. By reaching out for his father emotionally, physically, and metaphorically, he shows how although he is stripped of all of his possessions, separated from his mother and siblings, and torn from his home, he becomes fixated early on one thought—to be with his

father. Eliezer realizes at the beginning of his journey that the bond within families is important to maintain.

Several times when he is overwhelmed with what he is experiencing, he yearns to embrace his father and brace for the unknown by clutching his father's hand. Eliezer and his father are each other's lifelines, offering support and refuge from the evil that surrounds them. Both the man and the boy look after each other, provide the necessities for survival, and provide the inspiration to hold on to life in order to survive the camps.

However, the obsessive focus of the son on his father has been interpreted by the French scholar Andre Neher as juvenile. Neher claims that Eliezer basically remains a small, dependent child, at least psychologically, even though he matures physically and, to some degree, emotionally while in the camps. Yet Eliezer cannot be viewed as a dependent child because in the midst of mass destruction, he remains united with his father. He helps his father even more than his father helps him. He cares for Chlomo in ways that several times save Chlomo's life. But Eliezer nevertheless remains, in important ways, an adolescent. He is forced to confront his fears, including death, separation from a loved one, and fear of the unknown. His desires for security, love, control of the future, and immortality are strongly threatened by the possibility of his father's death.

Both father and son experience tensions that force them to transcend the traditional standards, in which children are dependent on their parents. Instead, they learn to trust each other as equals. Eliezer becomes crucial to his father's security and survival, thereby affirming his transition from childish dependency to adult responsibility because Chlomo loves his son and depends on him for support. Their mutual devotion allows them to transcend the role of victim and become rescuers of each other's lives. Although Eliezer is young, the camps force him to grow up quickly. Eliezer almost becomes a kind of father to his father in order to ensure the survival of the both. Therefore, Eliezer cannot be viewed as juvenile or merely "dependent." He does, in an odd sense, depend on his father for survival, not because he is a child incapable of providing for himself but because, ironically, his father is now the reason young Eliezer continues on this horrific journey and does not simply give up. Chlomo becomes the center of Eliezer's struggle for survival not because Eliezer feels dependent but because he feels love, duty, and a newfound commitment to his family. The new, stronger relationship between father and son clearly saves both men, several times, from becoming victims.

Chapter Six: Transitioning to Prisoner

A reciprocal devotion exists between Eliezer and his father. Chlomo saves his son's life five times throughout the work. If Eliezer had abandoned his father early on or had decided to act only in his own self-interest, Eliezer would have survived for only a short period of time.

Although Eliezer clutches to life throughout *Night*, when Eliezer first views the crematorium and is exposed to the inescapable hatred and brutality of the Germans, he considers suicide. He contemplates running into the electric fence to end his pain and escape the torture that awaits him; however, he quickly abandons this notion when his thoughts are interrupted by his father's voice, which brings him back to reality and reminds him that he is not alone on this journey.

Eliezer views his father's presence– including his simple embrace -- as one means of escape from such a cruel environment. Although their relationship had been strained over the years, the *Shoah* ironically brings them closer together. Eliezer becomes numb to his new surroundings. His only refuge is knowing that his father is with him.

For example, when the New Year arrives, Eliezer goes to find his father. He runs up to him and takes his father's hand and kisses it. He explains that although they are silent, they know each

other's emotions, love, and devotion: "A tear fell upon [his hand]. Whose was that tear? Mine? His? I said nothing. Nor did he. We had never understood one another so clearly" (65). This moment exemplifies the new bond between father and son. This is the first of the five times that Chlomo saves Eliezer's life.

The second time occurs when the prisoners are forced on a death march from Buna to Gleiwitz, the harsh conditions and demands to run in the snow force Eliezer to contemplate suicide once again due to the general pain he is experiencing as well as the particular pain in his foot. These pains hamper his ability to move forward physically even as the mental turmoil renders him immobile due to his overwhelming fear and uncertainty. Once again his father's voice rescues him from suicidal thoughts. Yet Eliezer knows that his father also needs *him*. Eliezer states:

> Death wrapped itself around me till I was stifled. It stuck to me. I felt that I could touch it. The idea of dying, of no longer being, began to fascinate me. Not to exist any longer. Not to feel the horrible pains in my foot. My father's presence was the only thing that stopped me . . . I had no right to let myself die. What would he do without me? I was his only support. (Wiesel 82)

His father's voice and presence give him the strength to move forward in his march as well as in life and survival. Chlomo's

presence helps them both endure pain and thus move forward together. Eliezer thus decides to continue running alongside his father.

The third time Chlomo saves Eliezer's life occurs when, after running all night, Eliezer and the other prisoners are allowed to rest. Once Eliezer stumbles to the stopping point determined by the guards, he falls down in the snow, exhausted and sleepy. His father approaches him and persuades him to find refuge and rest in a nearby brick building. His father thus saves him once again from freezing to death out in the open night, surrounded by snow.

Chlomo saves Eliezer a fourth time when the son remembers accompanying his father to the building. Suddenly, Eliezer awakes to his father's hands patting his cheeks. A voice "damp with tears and snow" warns Eliezer that falling asleep would make them both vulnerable to death. Significantly, this is only the second time that Eliezer sees outward displays of emotion from his father, which implies Chlomo's concern and love for his son. They both decide to rest in shifts to help protect one another from all dangers.

Finally, the fifth example of Chlomo's devotion to his son is portrayed when Eliezer and his father are forced into a wagon. The crowd of inmates begins to panic as they search for safety away from the guards. Trying to find a refuge themselves, Eliezer

and Chlomo are thrown to the ground. They see other inmates, who have fallen beneath the crowd, crying out for help. Eliezer realizes he, too, is crushing others while he is being crushed. He tries to move, but the weight of the other prisoners makes movement impossible. Suddenly, the crowd's weight shifts, and he cannot breathe. He feels that after all he has been through, this moment may kill him. For the first time Eliezer fights; he shifts his energy into his nails and tears at the flesh on the mass of bodies on top of him. Finally, he is able to shift his body and breathe. He uses all of his strength to call for the person who can liberate him: "Father!" (96). Chlomo runs to Eliezer's rescue, but he fails to liberate his son due to his own extreme fatigue. Yet he does not give up. He knows Eliezer needs him; therefore, he calls out to his friend to help rescue his son. Meir Katz comes to the aid of both Chlomo and Eliezer. Indirectly, then, Chlomo once again saves his son's life.

Throughout their time as prisoners, Chlomo protects his son at all costs. He holds on to the last connection that he has from the old world in this new world. Likewise, Eliezer carefully watches over his father and rescues him from death, thus demonstrating the reciprocal devotion between father and son. Eliezer's commitment to Chlomo is evident on various occasions. First, when Chlomo is selected for the gas chambers, Eliezer runs

after his father. He does not accept that after all they have been through, this will be the end of their relationship. By running frantically towards his father, he luckily creates enough confusion to allow both him and his father to escape from the line that leads to the crematorium. Chlomo rescues his son from death several times, and Eliezer reciprocates.

Secondly, Eliezer saves Chlomo on another occasion. During the trip to Buchenwald, Chlomo gives in to fatigue caused by the harsh conditions. Many inmates on the train are dying, and their deaths make others angry because the corpses take up too much room in the crowded wagons. When the guards stop the train to throw out the dead, the other prisoners feel happy. When the other prisoners look at Chlomo, they assume he is dead. Just as when Chlomo touches Eliezer's face to bring him back to life and reality, so now Eliezer desperately slaps his father's lifeless face to force him to show the other prisoners that he is still alive. Finally, Eliezer's attempts prove successful. The guards and inmates leave the two alone, thereby allowing Eliezer to remain with his father and allowing Chlomo to escape, once again, from becoming a victim.

The final situation in which Eliezer saves his father is one of great importance as well as the pivotal transition in their relationship. Once they arrive at the camp, Chlomo reaches his

breaking point. He decides to give in to the temptation of death. His will broken, he sinks to the ground; he surrenders. Eliezer becomes frustrated and filled with rage. He feels that his father is not only giving up on his own life, but that he is also giving up on his paternal responsibilities to his son. Eliezer, therefore, transitions from the role of son to the role of father and caretaker.

After being beaten by other inmates and being deprived of the necessities of life, Eliezer enters the next stage of his relationship with his father. This new stage represents the second change he must undergo on his journey. He is now forced to become an adult and a caretaker of his father. Chlomo, who had so often saved and inspired his son during their time in the camps, now suffers from sickness and a broken will that breaks his bond with Eliezer. The *Shoah* forces young Eliezer to transition from a child into a man and ultimately turns old men into children who depend on their own children for survival. The once familiar face that offered reason, hope, strength, and a sign of humanity begins to wither away and collapse under the pressures of his oppressors.

Chapter Seven: Staying United

When Eliezer first enters the camps, his fear is overcome by the presence of his father at his side. From the first moment they arrive in Auschwitz, Eliezer finds strength in his father's embrace. As they actually enter the camp, they hold hands, joined together to face the fate that awaits them. This physical union symbolizes their mutual commitment to protect each other. Both vow never to be separated from each other. They believe that strength comes from unity. When they are briefly separated during the selection process, Eliezer even contemplates running after his father.

Next, during roll call, Eliezer and Chlomo figure out where they will be working. At one point, an assistant who chooses workers for an allegedly good unit approaches Eliezer and asks the boy if he would like to work in that unit. Eliezer quickly says that he would, but only if he can stay with his father. Eliezer's response is bold, especially after he has recently witnessed his father being beaten for politely asking to go to the restroom. Yet the man says he will arrange for both Eliezer and Chlomo to work together if Eliezer forfeits his shoes. Eliezer, however, refuses to give up his shoes because "they were all I had left" (46). By fixating on his shoes, Eliezer risks the very thing he said he wanted to avoid: separation from his father.

Eliezer's attachment to his shoes suggests that he has not fully grasped the concentration camp mentality. He still feels as though he has options, choices, and a voice in what happens to him and his father.

Shortly after this incident, a guard who oversees another labor unit approaches Eliezer. The unit is supposedly pleasant, despite the guard's sporadic fits of madness. Even when entering this unit, however, Eliezer once again insists on being with his father. Luckily, his request is granted, and he is able to maintain the connection that obviously means so much to him – the kind of father/son connection that is such a crucial theme in this book.

Once again, however, Eliezer's bond with his father is threatened by the unpredictable, inhumane conditions in the camp. For example, Eliezer's ambivalence toward his father is emphasized again when Idek, their irrational supervising guard, attacks both men. Eliezer remembers how Idek (a kapo -- that is, an inmate chosen to supervise other inmates) "leapt on me like a wild animal" after catching Eliezer spying on him (50). Although Eliezer is covered in blood, Idek walks away as if nothing has happened. Eliezer is shocked by Idek's behavior; he cannot understand the assault and assumes that Idek must be crazy. However, when Eliezer learns that Idek next beats Eliezer's father, his attitude changes.

One day the laborers' task is to load engines onto trains. Idek's watchful eyes peer at the men as they fulfill their duties. Agitated and stressed, Idek suddenly takes his frustration out on Chlomo. He beats Chlomo with an iron bar, knocking him to the ground. Although Eliezer watches the whole event, he never tries to protect Chlomo. Even worse, he actually blames his father for provoking the beating: " . . . any anger I felt at that moment was directed, not against the Kapo, but against my father. I was angry with him, for not knowing how to avoid Idek's outbreak" (52). Forgetting that he himself had earlier been the victim of an unprovoked attack by Idek, he now inappropriately blames his father for provoking the guard's cruelty. Eliezer's bond with his father is broken, at least briefly, and he even justifies Idek's aggression. This event signals the first separation between Eliezer and Chlomo. Losing his connection with his father (a connection symbolized by their literal hand-holding when they entered the camps), Eliezer not only begins to focus on protecting himself but also begins to blame his father for the cruelties Chlomo suffers.

Further ambivalence in Eliezer's relations with Chlomo appears when Franek, another abusive guard, notices that a gold crown caps one of Eliezer's teeth. When Franek demands the crown, Eliezer is unsure what to do. He explains that he wants to ask his father for advice. Franek agrees, but he demands a decision

in one day. Chlomo advises his son not to give up the tooth – advice that causes Franek to begin to torment the old man. Franek knows that Eliezer loves Chlomo; by abusing the father, the guard hopes to intimidate the son. Once again, then, Eliezer begins to see his father as a source of his own pain and vulnerability. Ultimately Eliezer gives up the tooth, and Frankel ceases his abuse. This incident, however, makes Eliezer once again see his father in ambivalent ways. The mutual love of father and son makes both of them vulnerable when either is threatened.

While Eliezer is fortunate to be with his father and maintain their unity, once Chlomo is transferred from his son's block, their bond becomes tested. During the night when the prisoners are celebrating the New Year, Eliezer runs off to find his father. When father and son are reunited, Eliezer quickly reaches out for his father's hand and kisses it. This moment verifies how the *Shoah* allows a relationship to develop between father and son. The moment of clarity is quickly interrupted by the sound of a bell signaling the inmates to return to their bunks. Shortly after, Eliezer learns that the Kapo has decided to start regularly selecting people to die. Now, the presence of death and the threat of an unwanted ending become closer than ever before. The anticipation of waiting to learn one's fate quickly forces all prisoners to be haunted by the thought that one's future is left to the Nazis' discretion. Eliezer's

first thought is about his father and how the labor and circumstances of the camps have led to his physical decline. Chlomo seems ripe for "selection."

The next day Nazi doctors examine Eliezer during the selection process. He becomes burdened with numerous questions whirling around in his head regarding his physical appearance. He vaguely remembers going before the judges during the selection process. His depression is lifted when he learns that he has passed the selection process. With all the questions and fear brewing inside of Eliezer, when he learns of his fate, the joy rises through his body in the form of laughter. He is happy with the doctor's decision, and he is glad to know that he has survived once again. Although Eliezer expresses that he has changed, the solitude and desire to protect one's self is apparent when he says, "At that moment, what did the others matter! I hadn't been written down" (69). His will to survive and the fact that his efforts have insured his survival for at least one more day highlight his focus on himself. However, once the bell signals that the selections are over, Eliezer's focus changes from himself to his father.

The selection process continues. When Chlomo believes he will be selected to die due to his age, he warns his son. He tells Eliezer that within a day, they both will know the outcome. While Eliezer is working, he continually worries about his father. His

peers notice that Eliezer is upset and try to offer kind words to help him escape from his thoughts. Additionally, Eliezer says that even the Kapos are being nice to him. They had given him easier work since they knew he was concerned for his father. While Eliezer thinks about his father, he is not reassured by others' kind actions. He states, "I felt sick at heart. How well they were treating me! Like an orphan! I thought: even now, my father is still helping me" (72). Once the day ends, Eliezer is reunited with his father; he explains the reunion as a "miracle . . . on this earth" (72). Their shared time in the camps has both brought them together and pulled them apart.

Chapter Eight: Role Reversal, Change, and Demise

From the onset of the camp experience, Eliezer witnesses his father's debasement. On at least three different occasions, he sees his father being brutalized but does nothing to help the old man. For example, when Chlomo asks to go to the restroom, he is beaten for approaching the guard. Instead of defending his father, Eliezer is paralyzed, afraid to move or speak out. Although ashamed by his inability to help his father in a time of need, he continues to witness the brutality his father suffers. Eliezer begins to notice how he and his father have changed. Although they are spending more time with each other, neither can find the words to express their emotions to one another; therefore, physical embraces and tears are all they can use to show their concern. Although both men want to watch over one another and protect each other from harm, the concentration camps force Eliezer and his father into a paralyzed state of disbelief. Eliezer recognizes how he has changed when his father asks a guard for permission to use the restroom. The guard is surprised at the request and strikes Chlomo in the head, knocking him to the ground. Eliezer is paralyzed. He states, "My father had just been struck, before my very eyes, and I had not flickered an eyelid. I had looked on and said nothing. I should have sunk my nails into the criminal's flesh" (37). His father realizes his son's emotions and lies to Eliezer, telling him that he

feels no pain. Eliezer hates the guard for hurting his father. The feeling of powerlessness is repeated when a guard, in a fit of madness, beats Chlomo with an iron bar; however, Eliezer not only looks on but actually becomes furious with his father.

Once again, then, Eliezer watches his father being brutalized but doesn't try to rescue Chlomo. This time, however, he is not angry at his inability to react on his father's behalf; he simply moves farther away to avoid being beaten himself. He states, "Any anger I felt at that moment was directed, not against the Kapo, but against my father. I was angry at him" (52). The concentration camp truly changes both men. Eliezer later describes this painful change and inability to act as "the realization that [my father] and I were already in prison, and not only I, but my mind is in prison, my soul is in prison, my being is in prison, and I am no longer free to do what I want to do" (qtd. in Cargas, "Telling The Tale" 140). Tormented by the Nazis, Eliezer begins to separate from his father.

Another example of such separation occurs at the end of *Night*, when an SS guard strikes Eliezer's sick father on the head with tremendous force. Again, Eliezer looks on without moving. These three examples show the brutal effect of the concentration camp life upon Eliezer's psyche. Fine suggests that "[Eliezer's] rage against the aggressor has been displaced onto the victim, and

concern for the other has regressed into a preoccupation with self-survival, reduced to primitive and instinctual bodily needs" (60). This change comes from the new camp mentality that is apparent in Eliezer's actions, but it also results from his belief that his father should know better than to act as he does. Chlomo declines physically during his time in the camps, but Eliezer, looking back at that time, is concerned mostly with his own spiritual and moral decline.

Chapter Nine: Breakdown of Communication

This chapter explores the breakdown of communication and focuses on how the Jewish community abandons the sense of brotherhood because of the desperation to survive. Moreover, this chapter focuses on how the memoir transitions from emphasizing the brutalities of the Germans to depicting how some of the prisoners themselves begin to behave inhumanely. In *Night*, breakdowns in communication often lead to breakdowns in morality and even to breakdowns in sanity.

Breakdowns in communication within families heighten the suffering the prisoners experience. It is bad enough that they are sent to camps; it is even worse that they cannot maintain their old bonds. Eliezer and Chlomo are tormented not only physically but also by their inability to build or sustain communication.

Eliezer first witnesses these kinds of breakdowns during the train ride Birkenau. He explains, "We had a woman with us named Madame Schachter. She was about fifty; her ten-year-old son was with her. Her husband and two eldest sons had been deported with the first transport by mistake. The separation had completely broken her" (22). Eliezer remembers that she was quiet, but losing her family changed her completely. "Madame Schachter had gone out of her mind. On the first day of the journey she had already begun to moan and to keep asking why she had been separated

from her family. As time went on, her cries grew hysterical" (22). Others on the train simply dismiss her behavior, just as they had earlier dismissed others who had attempted to warn them. At first they attempt to calm her down, but they soon become irritated with her and state, "She's mad, poor soul" (23). Eliezer explains that he is not himself irritated with the woman, and in fact he is moved when he sees her remaining son trying to comfort her by holding her hand. Unable to communicate with her any longer by using words, the son tries to communicate his love through touch. Her breakdown symbolizes the destruction of communication within families, while her son's gesture shows how words often give way to a mere embrace. Unable to communicate as before with his mother, the son continues to love her and continues to try to let her know that love, just as Eliezer will later continue to love Chlomo, even if he cannot always show that love as openly as he wants to do.

Tiring of Madam Schachter's inability to keep quiet, several men force her to sit, and then they tie her up, and put a gag in her mouth. Now she is quite literally unable to communicate, even by screams or moans. While this action muzzles her for a few hours, she eventually breaks free from the forced silence and becomes louder than before. After failing to quiet her once more, the men become even more frustrated. Her conduct creates chaos

and panic, which ultimately changes everyone. The text highlights this first breakdown of the Jewish community when the prisoners yell:

> "Make her be quiet! She's mad! Shut her up! She's not the only one. She can't keep her mouth shut." [The men] struck her several times on the head—blows that might have killed her. Her boy clung to her; he did not cry out; he did not say a word. He was not even weeping now. He simply stroked her hand. (Wiesel 24)

From the first transport Eliezer describes how bonds between families are reduced to simple gestures in place of words and complex actions. The change derives from fear, and this fear foreshadows the obstacles and experiences that await Eliezer. The behavior of the young boy on the train ultimately foreshadows the actions and emotions that young Eliezer will, himself, experience once he arrives at Auschwitz. The paralysis of Mrs. Schachter's son foreshadows Eliezer's own inability to act and his own mixed emotions. This moment in Eliezer's journey represents the loss of innocence and the loss of childhood faced by children in the camps, who are forced to grow up much too quickly.

Once the train stops, SS officers encounter the inmates. The guards tell the prisoners to exit the train. Eliezer recalls "eight simple words spoken quietly, indifferently, without emotion: Men

to the left! Women to the right!" (27). Eliezer is now forever separated from most of his family and all that he knows. Feeling alone, he finds security in the pressure of his father's hand. Becoming fearful and experiencing the pain and looming presence of death, Eliezer "[shifts] his hand to his father's arm. [He has] one thought—not to lose his [father]. Not to be left alone" (27). Eliezer becomes connected to his father despite their past distant relationship.

Eliezer and his father quickly are told about the selection process and the notorious crematorium. The Nazis made selections in accordance with an inmate's age and health. Eliezer and his father learn how the Nazis determine if an individual is capable of work when a man questions them on their arrival:

> "Here, kid, how old are you?" "I'm not quite fifteen yet." "No. Eighteen." "But I'm not. Fifteen." "Fool. Listen to what I say." Then he questioned my father, who replied: "Fifty." The other grew more furious than ever. "No, not fifty. Forty. Do you understand? Eighteen and forty." He disappeared into the night shadows. (Wiesel 28)

Although Chlomo fails to listen to the previous warnings from others—including Moshe, Madam Schachter, and Eliezer—the advice he now receives in the labor camps seems to force him to want to avoid any potential threat of death for himself as well as

his son. Facing Dr. Mengele during the selection process, Chlomo and Eliezer lie about their ages, which allows them to be reunited on the "right side" literally and figuratively. Although they avoid the first obstacle they face on their journey, the nightmare is only beginning. Eliezer cannot believe that the displays of inhumanity that he is witnessing could possibly be happening. He explains:

> For three days or so I was in a haze. I thought I was dreaming. For three days I was dreaming. We were there in the shadow of the flames, and to me it wasn't real. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that in the twentieth century, in the middle of the twentieth century, people should do that, could do that, to other people. I somehow couldn't accept it, and to this day I cannot accept it. Something in me rejects the notion that would dehumanize a killer to such an extent. And the complicity, the indifference of the world—this, to this day, it moves me to anger. (Cargas, "Telling The Tale" 139)

Eliezer uses the term "shadow" to represent a transition from his former self before experiencing the *Shoah* to the person he is forced to become – a person who is void of life and understanding. He begins to think that this experience is merely a dream, but he is quickly brought back to reality when his father's voice draws him from his thoughts. "It's a shame . . . a shame that you couldn't

have gone with your mother . . . I saw several boys of your age going with their mothers . . ." (30). Although his father is sad about the separation of his family, his inability to protect his family, and his realization of being a void in his family's life, Eliezer understands what his father means. His sadness is caused by his realization that terrible things could happen to his son. He does not want to witness his son falling victim to the Germans' cruelty; however, he does not know how to protect his son. A void exists in their relationship. Eliezer tries to comfort his father; he tells him that humanity would never tolerate abuse of the Jewish people. His father replies in a choking voice, "Humanity? Humanity is not concerned with us. Today anything is allowed. Anything is possible, even these crematories" (30). Chlomo's pessimism comes from his ability to finally realize that the potential dangers are not mere fantasies. For the first time he has to come face-to-face with a reality that is out of his control. Eliezer, after witnessing his father's sudden change and hearing his words, also realizes the depth of Hitler's evil. Overcome with confusing emotions and feeling trapped, Eliezer decides that his only escape is in death. He thinks to himself, "I don't want to wait here. I'm going to run to the electric wire. That would be better than slow agony in the flames" (31). His father does not respond to Eliezer's words immediately. However, when Eliezer musters the strength to face

his death, he is interrupted by his father's hand. Eliezer pledges then not to ever be separated from his father.

Chapter Ten: Reality of Nightmares

At first, the disposition among the inmates is: "We are all brothers, and we are all suffering the same fate. The same smoke floats over all our heads. Help one another. It is the only way to survive" (39). This belief quickly changes, however, once survival demands a new mentality. Yet although Eliezer notices a change in others, he still holds onto his love for his father. For example, when he learns that his father will be beaten because he cannot keep up in various marches, he attempts to help his father practice. Eliezer and Chlomo watch out for each other. While the desire for survival initially unifies the inmates, they quickly abandon this attitude. Other inmates begin to focus only on themselves. For inmates such as these, the only survival that truly matters is their own. They think that the idea of brotherhood and helping one another only hinders their own survival. Yet although solitude and individuality become the new camp mentality, Eliezer and Chlomo continue to rely on each other even in the midst of other families turning against each other. The ability of Eliezer and Chlomo to care for one another out of love and devotion shows their persistent family bond in a system specifically designed to annihilate Jewish families. Eliezer and Chlomo remain human among inhuman conditions.

However, after witnessing Chlomo's decline into helplessness, Eliezer, too, becomes helpless, not only when faced with his new environment but also when attempting to rescue his father in his times of need. The father-son bond is weakening; therefore, their relationship changes. Numerous forces, spiraling out of control, change young Eliezer in many ways all at once. The young boy who entered the camp now becomes his father's caregiver. While he feels obligated because Chlomo is family, Eliezer also feels resentment and guilt because he is starting to realize that his father now threatens his own survival. As the new mentality starts to seep into Eliezer's mind, his will to live is strengthened, but his new bond with his father weakens. His father helps remind him to be determined to stay alive. If not for his father, Eliezer would have given up early on in his journey. Before finding refuge in his father, Eliezer describes the transitional period in his life as "an endless road. Letting oneself be pushed by the mob, letting oneself be dragged along by blind destiny" (83). This passage highlights how determination and commitment to his father are the only factors that keep him alive and motivate him to continue on despite what he faces.

Although Eliezer's frequent inability to protect his father often makes him feel impotent, they still rely on each other and are genuinely concerned for one another. For example, when a guard

who has just beaten Chlomo next beats Eliezer for watching the abuse, Eliezer discounts his pain and compares it to his father's pain and suffering. Eliezer states, "[My father] must have suffered more than I did" (56). This comment shows that Eliezer still worries about his father and is concerned for his well-being. This concern for his father is one of the few traits that helps keep him feeling human, especially when he witnesses the behavior of the other inmates.

Eliezer is continually amazed at how inhumane and beastlike the other prisoners can become. Every time that he thinks he and the prisoners have suffered as much pain as they can bear and have behaved as cruelly as possible to one another, the Nazis lead them to behave even more basely. In the nightmare world created by the Nazis, there seems neither morality nor a need for the prisoners to live by any standard of morality, for they are no longer living in a world of social responsibility and respectability. This new world forces them to behave as animals, without any regard to familial ties. The Nazis have created this environment, and the prisoners have no choice but to disregard the normal rules of human society to ensure survival. This environment affects even Eliezer.

Eliezer's focus on self first appears during an alert, when Eliezer is separated from his father and does not even look for him.

He even exclaims, "Don't let me find him! If only I could get rid of this dead weight, so that I could use all of my strength to struggle for my own survival, and only worry about myself. Immediately I felt ashamed of myself, ashamed forever" (101). Although Eliezer is plagued with the desire to free himself of his burden, which is his dependent father, he does not want to lose the one relationship he has left in the camp.

Chapter Eleven: Mutation of Father-Son Relationships

Eliezer first views the destruction of a father-son relationship when he witnesses the cruelty of another son toward that son's own father. Eliezer states, "I once saw a child of thirteen beating his father because the father had not made his bed properly. The boy shouted, 'If you don't stop crying at once I shan't bring you any more bread. Do you understand?'" (60). Young Eliezer is shocked and appalled by the son's cruelty and savagery. He cannot understand how any child would forget the duty to protect one's family, especially one's father. Yet this is just one of many instances in the book in which relations between fathers and sons break down. These instances help put the breakdown of the relationship between Eliezer and Chlomo into a much larger perspective.

At one point, for instance, Eliezer describes a time when spectators began throwing pieces of bread at the inmates. When he first describes the event, readers might initially believe that the onlookers are overcome with sympathy for the mistreatment they are witnessing. Apparently they want to show the inmates some compassion. However, sympathy and compassion are soon forgotten as the inmates begin to fight over the fallen scraps. Additionally, Eliezer even witnesses a father and son fight for food – a fight which seems to epitomize a key theme of the memoir.

When depicting this incident, Eliezer describes a man who is dragging himself on all fours as he searches for the bread that was thrown his way. The man is reduced, metaphorically, to the position of an animal, a position which symbolizes how his animalistic instincts for survival are prevailing over other, "nobler" instincts. When he finds a ration of bread amid the chaos, he quickly puts it in his mouth, not only to nourish his body but also to prevent it from being stolen.

Suddenly, however, the old man is tackled by a shadow lurking in the corner, waiting for the right opportunity to attack. The lurking stranger wants to know if the old man has any more food hidden away. While the old man lies on the ground, the stranger beats him relentlessly. However, while Eliezer believes the attacker is just another deprived, demented inmate, the old man yells out "Meir," revealing that he knows his attacker. The man cries out, "Meir. Meir, my boy! Don't you recognize me? I'm your father . . . you're hurting me . . . you're killing your father! I've got some bread . . . for you too . . . for you too . . ." (96).

But the old man's plea fails. He collapses with a small piece of bread clenched in his hand. He tries to carry it to his mouth, but his son snatches it from him. Eliezer cannot understand how a son would deliberately brutalize his own father. The son seems indifferent; he does not care that he has murdered his own

father for a ration of bread. He simply searches the corpse to find more food hidden away in his father's pockets. Finding all that he can, he begins to devour his findings and leaves his father's body crumpled on the ground. The son is more concerned with the bits of bread than with his father's death. However, his greed is short lived because other inmates, who are also overcome with greed and envy, beat him to death. Eliezer recalls that after the fighting is over, two corpses lie side by side: the father and the son. Although Eliezer notes that the father and son are brutally divided in their last moments of life, he also mentions how they are finally joined together in death. This attack epitomizes the breakdown of father-son relationships. This episode demonstrates that the prisoners focus maniacally on getting food, even at the expense of their closest relations. They have become predatory animals: "Wild beasts of prey, with animal hatred in their eyes; an extraordinary vitality had seized them, sharpening their teeth and nails" (95).

Eliezer explains that the new camp mentality caused a mutation among the prisoners. Possessions, compassion, and commitment to family ceased to have any importance and fell victim to the violence in the camps. This event highlights how the prisoners seemed to have only three options: join the sadists, join the executioner, or remain a victim. Eliezer suggests that the crowd is numb to the fact that individuals are being murdered at the

expense of their actions. In this sense, the crowd also represents Eliezer and his inability to help his father, but he still is forced to watch his father suffer. Although one may speculate, the style in which Eliezer writes allows all critics and readers to draw their own conclusions from this deliberate and willful wrongdoing of outsiders; however; this action reflects the motives and the same type of environment that the Germans created, especially for the Jews. Moreover, Eliezer's ability to provoke thought in his readers and probe a void forces readers and critics to analyze the severity of the situations for themselves.

One analyst questions the intent of the father by asking, "Did the father genuinely intend to share the bread with his son, or is it possible that this is only a claim he makes after he is attacked?" (Evans 7). To suggest that the old man would share his bread with his son would also be suggesting that the father-son bond also remains strong in this case. Eliezer describes the father's actions as taking the bread out "with remarkable speed" (96). These words suggest that the old man focuses on himself and his own survival. Furthermore, the son does not approach his father and ask if he is willing to share, which suggests he already knows his father's intentions; therefore, the son feels justified in attacking his father to ensure his own survival.

The second time Eliezer witnesses a son abandon his father is during a march to Buchenwald. Rabbi Eliahou approaches Eliezer and asks if he has seen his son. He explains that he lost his son in the crowd during the night march. He realizes he did see the Rabbi's son. He remembers:

> His son had seen [his father] losing ground, limping, and staggering back to the rear of the column. He had continued to run out in front, letting the distance between them grow greater. He had wanted to get rid of his father! He felt that his father was growing weak; he had believed the end was near and had sought this separation in order to get rid of the burden, to free himself from an encumbrance, which could lessen his own chances of survival. (Wiesel 87)

Eliezer cannot believe that some children deliberately choose to abandon their fathers in times of need. Nevertheless, he continually witnesses young boys callously abandon their fathers. After witnessing this additional breakdown in a father-son relationship, Eliezer prays that God never allow him to treat his father this way.

Chapter Twelve: Divorced From Life

The death of Eliezer's father is a crucial event in the book; however, Eliezer does not react or respond as a typical child would. Eliezer has fallen victim to his desire for private or individual satisfaction. Colin Davis observes that Eliezer's "growing desire for freedom from his father goes together with Eliezer's increasing sense of guilt. Finally, Eliezer experiences the death of his father as a terrible liberation, bringing freedom from an unwanted burden but also the loss of his self-respect and of his closest link with the values of the past" (103). From the time of Eliezer's first arrival at the camps he has searched for a way to impose order on his chaotic surroundings. When his father dies, Eliezer is unable to express his emotions and pain because all of the suffering he has witnessed seems meaningless.

Although the brutalities of the concentration camps sever Eliezer's relationship with his father, the opposing attitudes of love versus hate intensify and begin to force the sixteen-year-old to become numb to his father's passing. He states, "I did not weep, and it pained me that I could not weep. But I had no more tears. And, in the depths of my being, in the recesses of my weakened conscience, could I have searched it, I might perhaps have found something like—free at last!" (106). Although Eliezer seems to have a moment of relief, he is quickly burdened by regret for his

callous actions and thoughts. He feels his attitudes contribute to his father's demise, and he ultimately feels survivor's guilt. Although Chlomo is no longer with him, Eliezer still feels attached to his father. The moment of his father's death, he says, changed everything, and nothing could ever touch him again. Having been separated from his entire family, Eliezer views his father's death as his last experience of the pain of separation. Eliezer believes that he will never experience any greater pain than this; therefore, he proclaims that he will forever be numb to any suffering in his life.

Lawrence L. Langer argues that Eliezer's reaction and mentality are justified due to the extreme loss that has surrounded him. Langer further explains Eliezer's reaction:

> [Eliezer] is divorced from his life . . . and the son severed from his patrimony [is] thrust forth onto a stage which requires the drama of existence to continue, though without a script, *sans* director, the plot consisting of a single unanswerable question: How shall I enact my survival in a world I know to be darkened by the shadow of irrational death. (15)

This quote argues that Eliezer's feelings include the loss of knowledge or "script" regarding how to proceed. Additionally, he feels alienated by his inability to refer to his father for guidance;

therefore, Chlomo can be viewed as Eliezer's "director" who is no longer able to assist him in his journey.

Chapter Thirteen: Mirrored Reflections: Past, Present, and Future

In "Darkness That Eclipses Night," Robert Brown explains "to be fully victimized is not only to be dehumanized in the present by the removal of world, God, and self, but to be denied a future. That is true death, whether physical life is terminated or not" (77). This belief suggests that Eliezer is justified in viewing himself as dead when he stares into the mirror at an unknown figure. His senses and emotions are numb towards others; the concentration camp mentality becomes his mentality in order to focus on himself as well as his survival; however, when his mentality, senses, and emotions are focused on himself, he is unable to recognize the person who he has become. All that he once knew is shattered; he loses hope; he loses everything that influenced who he is. Eliezer is numb to the surrounding death in the camps; however, when he sees his appearance in the mirror for the first time after all that he had been through, he no longer knows the person who is looking back at him. His existence has completely changed after being immersed in the labor camps. The metaphorical death symbolizes his complete loss, which causes him to see himself as a cadaver—no longer human, merely a body. Once again Eliezer witnesses an event that seems to be an illusion. Since he is deprived of life and any value, he is compelled to accept the desolate rule of the Nazis. The unfortunate death of his father and the expiration of a familiar

past ultimately result in Eliezer's realization that grief expires within him as well. Although the torment ends, Eliezer starts a new life with a paradoxical situation—he feels dead, but he is alive. The intense emotions and feelings Eliezer experiences emphasize the destruction he has suffered. Communal bonds are destroyed; family relationships destroyed; identity, childhood, and innocence are silenced. Lawrence L. Langer describes Eliezer's realization as an acceptance of the concentration camp mentality and the Nazis' hierarchy of priorities that were forced upon the prisoners. He states, "[Eliezer] is disinherited, bereft of any value that might permit him to confront the inevitable death of his father with at least the dignity of an illusion, and compelled in the depths of his heart to accept the desolate rule of l'univers concentrationnaire—'Here there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends. Everyone lives and dies for himself alone'" (15). The essence of Langer's observation supports the claim of a paradoxical situation because his analysis shows how an atrocity fueled by irrational death creates a paradox of Eliezer's existence.

Once again, Eliezer is trying to understand and control his future and attempt to reaffirm his rational mastery over himself and over his troubling circumstances. After escaping the pain of the *Shoah*, he looks at himself in a mirror and sees a stranger looking back at him. He states, "The look in his eyes has never left me"

(109). Eliezer reaffirms how much he changed from his experiences. Although he has survived, he has lost all of his connections with family, community, and sense of self. The wretched conditions of the camps force Eliezer to understand that since he cannot change the conditions around him, he must learn to accept his reality. He undergoes an archetypal process of initiation and rebirth from experiencing the *Shoah*; therefore, his concern with loss of control and fear of an unknown future force Eliezer to reassert his control of the future and of himself by vowing, once again, never to forget the journey from genocide to liberation.

Eliezer's reflection hinders him from being able to visualize a future due to the unrecognizable face that peers into his eyes. The child of the past finally comes face to face with the child of the concentration camp who will be forced to face life with the façade of death covering his being. This irremovable mask not only represents the battle scars between two worlds, but it also serves as a constant reminder of the transformation from hopeful child to a victim devoid of any external values or truths and trapped in solitude. Although the shadow of Eliezer's former self is faced with the stark reality that validates his experiences within the camps, he still is confused and is reluctant to give in to what his senses are showing him to be reality.

Eliezer's explanation of the change he endured from the onset of Nazi cruelty serves as his flashing forward into the future to illustrate how the *Shoah* has forever altered his understanding of himself as well as humankind. His feelings and his outlook are shaped by the *Shoah* and justify his reaction to his reflection in the mirror because the past is tangential to his existence. He calls his reflection a "corpse," which suggests he views himself as another person, someone drastically changed from the innocent boy who was forced out of Sighet; therefore, his new identity, the "corpse," represents his final transformation. His final transformation is succinctly explained when he claims he is two distinct beings—a separation between his sense of self and his identity as a Holocaust victim. The reflection serves as his reminder of how much he has suffered; however, he manages to separate himself from the empty persona before him. He acknowledges the need for assuming an identity that will endure beyond the *Shoah* and concentration camps by not continuing to feel the horrors, but by also understanding the separation within himself, his experiences will forever stay with him; therefore, he keeps true to his promise of never forgetting the journey that began when he was only fourteen years old.

Chapter Fourteen: Overview of *Maus*

Art Spiegelman refers to *Maus* as a "realistic fiction since the experiences [his] father actually went through are not exactly the same as what he's able to remember and what he's able to articulate of these experiences. Then there's what I'm able to understand of what he articulated, and what I'm able to put down on paper" (*From Mickey to Maus,* 1989). *Maus* centers on two primary narratives, which begin with Vladek's experiences as a Jew in pre-World War II Poland. Art Spiegelman's autobiography emerges as the second narrative within *Maus,* involving Art's relationship with his father. Art's meditation focuses on the effects of a major historical tragedy—the traumatic events of the *Shoah* on the lives of its victims and the people who were born after the war ended. Although Art did not live through the war, his childhood and upbringing show how a survivors' mentality can reverberate through future generations.

A bond between father and son similar to the one in *Night* ultimately develops in *Maus*, although for different reasons. The bond in *Night* grows out of shared misery; the bond in *Maus* results from the son's ability to empathize with the misery suffered by his father – a father he had previously been unable to understand. The more Art learns about his father's experiences during the *Shoah*, the more Art is able to see his father as a human being worthy of

love and respect, rather than as the distant authority figure the father had previously seemed to be. In *Night,* a father and son grow closer because they share the same pain; in *Maus*, a father and son grow closer as the son learns about the pain suffered by his father. As each son tries to understand his father, he comes to a better (but still imperfect) understanding himself. In both cases, the son's relationship with his father is crucial to the existence of the son, and in both cases the son's bond with the father improves but remains troubled.

Chapter Fifteen: Surviving Childhood

Maus begins with a haunting representation of the *Shoah's* continuing effect on the author and provides a personal example of the influence of the past upon the present. Despite the years that have passed since the war, and despite the fact that Art did not live through the time period himself, the events surrounding the *Shoah* are a part of his everyday life; therefore, transference takes place from father to son.

Art begins his autobiography by capturing a moment that he remembers from his childhood. As a child, he is roller-skating with his friends when they decide to race. Suddenly, Art's skate breaks, and his friends skate off without him. Feeling abandoned, Art runs to his father crying. He tells his father that he fell and his friends skated on without him, leaving him helpless. His father responds with a gruff demeanor, claiming that until Art has spent five days locked in a room with a group of people and no food, he cannot know the meaning of the word "friends." Vladek scolds his son in a manner that trivializes young Art's pain. This account, among others, signals the need for acknowledgement that Art failed and continues to fail to receive.

Vladek's reaction helps us understand why Art is continuously battling feelings of guilt: the *Shoah* was cemented in his mind at an early age due to his father's actions. Additionally,

Vladek's response proves that the *Shoah* is never far from his own mind. Both Art and Vladek are incapable of connecting with each other because of unresolved grief over lost loved ones, survivor's guilt, and a psychological block or lack of affect.

The problematic relationship that exists in the beginning of the text involves emotional abandonment: Art does not run to his father because he falls; Art runs to his father because his friends desert him. When he approaches his father, Vladek is portrayed as standing over his son while young Art looks up to his father submissively. He fears not only his father but also from learning about the friendless world. This scene shows both figuratively and literally that Vladek and the *Shoah* truly overshadow Art and his existence; therefore, Art learns early that his pain is unimportant and insignificant in relation to his father's experiences and story.

The prologue is the first part of *Maus* that captures Art during his childhood, and from this short scene, readers learn why the *Shoah* plays such a dominant role in his life and his psyche. Art gives readers an excellent introduction into his relationship with his father: the two men are not close, and tensions between them seem to prevent future closeness.

Spiegelman has commented on his decision to include an event from his childhood. He explains, "The prologue itself is a form of dipping into the past, though not visually represented, but I

figured those first two pages would function, thematically, as a fractal of the whole book. It seemed that positioning this sort of named childhood moment with a shadow cast over it was an appropriate lead-in" (*Meta Maus* 208).

Throughout the text, readers are subjected to Art's continuing obsession with his father's experience in the *Shoah*, but in the opening prologue readers learn that Art's obsession existed even when he was a child. Although this short section is one of the few that refers back to Art's childhood, Vladek's response to his son explains why the *Shoah* plays such a dominant role in Art's psyche. This section foreshadows the rest of the text because it provides insight into Vladek's personality and the ways in which the *Shoah* has shaped his life and his son's. Vladek's personality is largely dominated by his *Shoah* experiences; therefore, this section shows how Vladek is subconsciously trying to make his own son share in the guilt, so that their guilt will be closely intertwined.

Next, the text skips ahead several years to when Art lives in New York. He does not see his father very often despite living close to him. Their relationship is strained, and Vladek's demeanor and actions, colored by the *Shoah*, help explain why Art avoids his father. Within the opening pages, Vladek's personality, which is largely formed from his experiences in Auschwitz, directly affects

how he raises Art. Art always seems on edge around his father, and arguments tend to break out between the two frequently.

Wanting to learn about his father, his family, and, perhaps, the reasoning behind his father's behavior, Art decides to ask his father if he can dictate his experiences in the *Shoah* to him. After dinner, Art tells his father that he wants to draw a book about Vladek's experiences in the *Shoah*, and Vladek starts to tell his story. While Vladek offers to tell about his past experiences, he later blames Art for forcing him to recall such tragic events that he had placed out of his mind (II:98). This remark shows that Vladek does not understand the impact that his past has not only on himself but also on anyone with whom he comes in contact.

Art feels as though a past atrocity disastrously affected his relationship with his father. Therefore he views that relationship as one built around a series of taped conversation. He states:

> [My] safety zone and relationship with my father took place in discussing the moments when he was least safe, and where there were such high stakes and disaster everywhere. Yet for both him and me there was a certain kind of familial coziness on some level of having something to talk about other than our disappointment with each other. (*Meta Maus* 24)

Spiegelman explains that his request to document his father's past experiences gives father and son a foundation on which to attempt to have a relationship. Outside of the *Shoah*, Vladek and Art cannot talk or ask questions freely without one becoming angry. Outside of their arranged meetings Vladek is only a distant authoritarian figure. Art elaborates on the lack of intimacy and inability to bond with his father by stating, "My ability to ask questions and [Vladek's] ability to conjure up memories was a kind of intimacy we shared, and it was more than I could achieve elsewhere. Anger floated around us and it was easy to access—it was our leitmotif" (*Meta Mouse* 28).

This description does not portray Vladek as a sentimental man; therefore, Vladek's inability to express a desire to bond with his son throughout Art's life ultimately makes it too late for the men to form a relationship. However, explaining the premise in creating *Maus*, Art says, "There's more to survival than bringing the body through its ordeal unscathed. There's the building of a personality with depth and understanding, something enough to achieve even without passing through the center of history's hell. Survival is having children even if they hate you" (*Meta Maus* 73).

Critics and readers alike get a sense of the relationship between Vladek and Art by examining not only the many examples of conflict but also the numerous episodes of Vladek's past that are

shifted upon a young Art, beginning at an early age. Vladek's past pervades Art's present. Readers learn that during Art's upbringing Vladek uses a psychological defensive mechanism by which he unconsciously shifts emotions, affect, or desires from the original "self" of the *Shoah* to an immediate substitute, Art. This process of transference darkens Art's youth and adulthood.

Chapter Sixteen: Bedtime Stories

When analyzing Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, it is interesting to note the transformation made to the first chapter of *My Father Bleeds History.* The revised versions show different perspectives that should be taken into account regarding the father-son relationship in *Maus.* The 1972 three-page strip is very similar to the 1980 version because it captures the events of the *Shoah* by portraying Jews as mice persecuted by *die Katzen*—Nazis depicted as cats. However, the first publication featured in *Funny Aminals* and the first released chapter in *Raw Magazine* begin differently than readers expect who have read *Maus* already. For example, the first publication begins by showing Art lying in his father's lap, excited about the nightly tradition of story time. The actions highlighted here focus on how the father-son relationship is one built on a child-like request to be told a story. The introduction states, "When I was a young mouse in Rego Park, New York, my poppa used to tell me bedtime stories about life in the old country during the war" (*Funny Aminals* 7). However, the young mouse drawn as Art's avatar is called Mickey. The poppa mouse states, "And so Mickey, *Die Katzen* made all the mice to move into one part from the town! It was very crowded in the ghetto!" Mickey replies, "Golly!" (*Funny Aminals* 7). The following strips show a different beginning by capturing the extremes of living in

concentration camps. While some of the story overlaps, it is important to note how Art changed the beginning of his work, especially in regards to capturing the relationship between him and his father. In the comic strip, Art depicts a father and son mouse that both seem to enjoy the quality time of storytelling. Mickey is shown embracing his father and is physically and emotionally engaged in the story. At the end of the story, the father figure is seen tucking his son into bed and reassuring his son that the story will continue the following night.

Throughout the text Art continuously depicts himself exhibiting infantile attitudes and postures. By analyzing the different beginnings to *Maus*, critics learn more about Art's relationship with his father and are able to understand that the relationship is not one of mutual respect but strictly based on the conventional roles of parents and children.

In *Maus* itself, the text is now set in Rego Park, but the relationship is not based on nightly traditions.

The analysis of the different versions of Art's comics allows critics to see the underlying narrative embedded within Art's parents' story and his attempt to understand the effects of the past on the present. The original versions of the text foreshadow the upcoming events of the narrative, especially its conclusion. In the last panel, Vladek compares his relationship with Art to a

bedtime story. Vladek's phrase, "it's enough stories for now," suggests that nothing can truly heal the disconnect between father and son. Moreover, Vladek implies that repeated stories are all that can be offered; therefore, the void surrounding the *Shoah* can never truly be filled. This ending fits well with Art's first draft because the telling of "stories" is a primary means for Vladek and Art to attempt to understand the harmful effects caused by the *Shoah*.

Chapter Seventeen: Removing the Mask

While *Maus* alludes to the deep reservoirs of Art's psychic pain, *Prisoner on the Hell Planet* clearly depicts the jagged state of mind of an orphaned self – a self suffering from existential isolation and loss of familial intimacy. This personal and self-reflective narrative is Art's attempt to understand how a horrific past affected his life. Until Art introduces the insert of *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*, he avoids directly articulating his own *Shoah*-induced pain and guilt. However, triggered by his mother's suicide, Art finally reveals why he feels guilty: he is unable to understand what victims and survivors experienced.

This piece drastically contrasts with the other parts of *Maus* by presenting a horror story featuring actual human beings, not mice. This section reminds readers that although the text is a comic book and is cartoonish, the story is real and true. Additionally, Art here removes the masks and animal metaphors seen in *Maus* to present a reality that he uses to understand and relate to a horrific past; therefore, his drawing style is life-like: he now uses human faces, not the faces of mice, to help us understand the repercussions of the *Shoah*. Art explains that until his voice appears in *Maus*, "he had to put on a mouse head to enter his father's story" (*Meta Maus* 149). *Prisoner* expands our

comprehension of the agony of the *Shoah* by showing how it could create isolation and destroy familial intimacy.

Art Spiegelman originally wrote and released *Prisoner on the Hell Planet* in an underground comic book called *Short Order Comix* in 1968. This comic begins with Vladek arriving home to find his wife, Anja, in the bathtub with her wrists cut. Art arrives home shortly thereafter to find his father lying on the floor in shock from losing his wife. Art and Vladek sleep together on the floor, and Vladek moans and cries throughout the night. Art is forced to comfort his father instead of expressing his own pain at the loss of his mother. All he can think of is the last time they talked. Because he feels that he ignored his mother's cry for help, he feels responsible for his mother's suicide. The comic ends with Art yelling to his mother that she killed him and left him alone to handle the guilt caused by her death. Here and elsewhere, guilt is one of the major themes of *Maus*.

In an interview after the publication of *Maus*, Spiegelman talked about his mother's death. He explained that their relationship was close and based on mutual understanding and acceptance: "After the war, she'd invested her whole life in me. I was more like a confidant than a son. She couldn't handle the separation [that occurred when he was no longer a child]. I didn't want to hurt her, to hurt them. But I had to break free" (Weschler

58). His desire to be free forces him to believe that he is ultimately responsible for his mother's demise; therefore, until the publication of *Prisoner*, Art represses his pain and believes that he would never find any empathy for all he faced as a child as well as an adult.

This autobiographical comic sums up Art's life and emotions in great detail. It captures his enraged questions that seem to lack answers. *Prisoner* becomes Art's "therapeutic expression where the nightmare of history and familial agonies interphase and are compulsively repeated by [Art]" (Bosmajian 40).

Prisoner not only highlights the main theme in *Maus*, but it also enables readers and critics to analyze *Maus* as an autobiographical comic book—Art's narrative of deepest sentiment. The insert uses a new medium and style. It focuses on real people in a complex, more human way than in *Maus.* As Scott McCloud argues in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*:

> The author's ability to make the characters simple enough [in *Maus*]—to where the readers can relate to their stories—is one of the most important aspects of comics as a medium, and Spiegelman achieves this through his simplification and depersonalization—physically—of his characters. Likewise, Spiegelman also makes his mini-

> comic *Prisoner* "touchable" by its juxtaposition within *Maus*. Through this juxtaposition, he is able to give the reader greater insight into his relationships with each of his parents, while relating his own narrative. (50)

Prisoner emphasizes Art's inner turmoil and feelings of solitude regarding relations with his parents.

Chapter Eighteen: Strained Relationships

In *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*, Art shows readers how the *Shoah* affected his mother's personality. Vladek explains that he helped ensure his wife's safety during the *Shoah* by giving her extra food and providing her with emotional support. Several times throughout *Maus* Art mentions that his mother thinks about giving up; however, she survived thanks to the kindness and resourcefulness of others.

Even before the war, Anja had a long history of depression. After her first son's birth, Anja experienced deep depression and entered a sanitarium for medical assistance. Additionally, during her time in the concentration camps she continuously tells Vladek that she no longer wants to live, and she contemplates suicide frequently; therefore, Anja's suicide, decades later, should not surprise readers.

The only words we hear from Anja concern a conversation with Art when she asks him if he still loves her. He responds with a simple "sure." Art's cold response to and ignorance of his mother's plea for help leaves Anja feeling alone, overlooked, and unloved by her family. In fact, *Prisoner on the Hell Planet* shows Art literally turning his back on his mother – an act he now cannot forget or forgive.

Later, readers see Vladek crying, expecting Art to confront him. The roles of father and son are now, for the first time, reversed. Ironically, when Art does comfort his father, Vladek states, "Mother...mother..." These are words we might have expected Art to utter when his own mother died, just as we might have expected Vladek to comfort his son at that time. However, Vladek's inability to notice his son's depression is mentioned several times in *Maus*. Even in the opening pages of *Maus*, Vladek cannot see his son's pain. When Anja dies, Vladek feels only his own grief and fails to notice Art's. Vladek's lack of empathy for Art is a major theme of the book.

When Vladek calls out mommy, readers recall Art's relationship with his own mother. She is mostly absent in a book that focuses on the dominant theme of father-son relationships. But Anja is still present to some degree, and the *Prisoner* section focuses on how Vladek is not the only reason for Art's madness; Anja also fuels Art's inner turmoil. This section is full of personal emotions and begins by describing Art's guilt at rejecting his mother and her love when she was alive. He states, "I turned away, resentful of the way she tightened the umbilical cord" (103). He seems to be angry with his mother. He even blames her for his lack of self-understanding. He claims, "You put me here [mom]. Shorted all my circuits. Cut my nerve endings and crossed my

wires!" (103). But although he resents their relationship, Art feels responsible for her death. He even feels that his relatives blame him for Anja's suicide, and he speculates that his neglect incited her suicide. Since Anja does not leave a note, Art can never know why she killed herself. But he holds her past and its effect on his present against her.

Chapter Nineteen: Trading Places

In *Prisoner*, for the first time, readers see Vladek as weak and helpless. He reaches for his son, hoping Art can help him fight on. Art becomes his father's lifeline, helping him "survive" for and with his son. Vladek's vulnerability is the second bonding experience; the first was their discussion of the *Shoah.* This life-altering experience modifies the way Art thinks about and understands not only his own life but also his family life. Surrounded by constant reminders of the past, Art imagines being in the *Shoah* and seems to become obsessed with what his parents experienced. In *Prisoner* he finally shows readers how much this event has overshadowed his life. Although he comforts his father and thereby grows up quickly, he also draws himself in the concentration camp uniform, thus comparing his own inner turmoil to his parents' past experiences of the *Shoah.* Additionally, the clothing symbolically shows that Art's upbringing has forced him to feel enslaved to a past atrocity that he can never truly understand. *Prisoner* presents Art himself as not only a victim of the *Shoah*, but also as a survivor.

The *Hell Planet* episode allows Art to explain his relationship to his father, his parents, and the *Shoah.* It symbolizes his understanding of the concentration camps, but it also reflects his own psyche. Not only does he depict himself in prisoners'

clothing, but he also draws himself in a cell, implying how big an impact the *Shoah* had on his everyday life. Art feels trapped and overshadowed by an unfamiliar past; therefore, he has to confront second-hand memories of the *Shoah* in solitude.

Prisoner shows that although Spiegelman has not personally experienced the *Shoah*, he lives with its horrors, which have severely affected him. *Prisoner* bleakly shows how the past can mold a young child into an adult who constantly searches for understanding and a sense of belonging.

In *Prisoner*, the father-son relationship deteriorates further. Vladek fails to notice that his actions and words, which are always motivated by the mentality of the past, overshadow Art. Art feels scolded for his inability to relate to an unfamiliar past. Ironically, by surviving the *Shoah* Vladek loses connection with his loved ones, especially his child. He focuses only on his wife and his loss. Even when Vladek first sees Art's comic, he overlooks his son's inner turmoil and constant questioning of his existence. Vladek only worries about himself, stating, "[The comic] brought in my mind so much memories of Anja" (*Maus* 104).

In *Prisoner*, Art tries to alleviate the guilt that has been burdening him his entire life. Just as the opening of *Maus* captures the past within the present, so *Prisoner* shows how Art uses his drawing not only to express what he has internalized but also to

attempt to repair his psychic wounds. But at the end of *Prisoner*, Art remains a captive. This ending highlights how Art will remain in "jail" because he will never answer the numerous questions he has about his mother, nor will he be able to identify with his father, who is mentally and physically damaged by past suffering.

Chapter Twenty: Constructing An Identity

Throughout *Maus*, Art continuously thinks about the *Shoah* and the victims. His inability to understand what victims and survivors experienced bothers him. He yearns to understand why his parents act as they do, but he also yearns to understand how the *Shoah* has affected his own life.

Nancy K. Miller, in her essay "Cartoons of the Self: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Murderer—Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," claims that the creation of *Maus* allowed Art to explore and portray his identity; therefore, *Maus*' sub-narrative must be explored as Art's autobiography. Miller argues that Art's technique within *Maus* is "the construction of identity through alterity" (47). Thus, in *Prisoner,* Spiegelman inserts himself into the narrative and offers his own voice along with his father's.

Hamida Bosmajian explains that Spiegelman's primary task of creating a work based on his father's narration is interrupted by two other narratives that ultimately render him helpless in making any sense out of the *Shoah*. She states:

> The subtitles of *Maus* I—*A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*—and *Maus* II—*A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*—show the complicated relationship among history, Vladek's narrative, and Artie as the listener-son. Vladek bleeds history not only in the sense

> of a possibly therapeutic narration of his experience but also in the continuous seepage of repressed and displaced memories that affected Artie every day of his childhood. The blood of memory of the experience in traumatic history cannot be contained, and its seepage is contagious. The father's wound is internal and unhealed. The subtitle to *Maus II* can signify the continuation of the story after *Maus I* where Vladek and Anja arrive at the gate of Auschwitz as well as the troubles that pursued Vladek ever since. For Artie, too, the troubles began with Auschwitz. The seepage of those experiences will be a continual subtext in his life that affects him during [childhood] and beyond. (Bosmajian 30)

Bosmajian thus suggests that the event of the past that brings father and son together will never heal their disconnection. Nevertheless, both the father's and son's personal accounts ultimately become one. In that sense – and perhaps that sense only – the two men are reconciled.

Chapter Twenty One: The Orphaned Prisoner

When analyzing the conclusion to *Maus*, one should acknowledge the transitions and different versions relevant to its beginning. The inclusion of the beginning, when the character Mickey Mouse is being read to by his father, describes a father-son relationship that foreshadows the ending. In the opening section, Vladek refers to his account of the *Shoah* as a narrative when he says, "That's enough stories for now" (136). Just as the young mouse is being put to sleep by bedtime stories from the father figure, Art later implies the scenario once again of a parent putting a child to bed; however, the parent is now Art comforting his Vladek (his metaphorical child).

The last section mirrors the beginning chapter because it shows Vladek once again feeling exhausted from narrating: "I'm tired from talking, Richieu" (136). When Vladek here confuses Art with his first son, readers understand that genuine communication between father and son has still not developed, even though Vladek has been talking to Art at great length. Vladek's slip in names, when he mistakenly addresses Art as Richieu, may be symbolic. In a sense, Art has been metaphorically killed by his father, and Richieu has taken his place. Even at the end of the book, Vladek neither acknowledges Art nor apologizes for his lack of affection or his inability to understand Art's pain. Art's attempt

to use the story-telling process to bond with his father fails because Vladek still ignores his son.

While working with his father to try to understand how the past affects their lives, Art attempts to make a book from his father's testimony. This attempt is an empowering yet painful experience. At times it is physically and mentally exhausting for both men, and it finally proves painful to Art when he realizes that the experience has not brought him and his father closers together. Even during childhood, Art states, "Richieu was the ideal kid, and I was a pain in the ass. I couldn't compete" (II:15). This claim seems relevant when, in the end, he is denied for the last time by his father. Yet Vladek's memories are focused not only on his first son, but also on with his relationship with Anja. When describing his reunion with Anja, he states, "I don't need to tell you. We were both very happy, and lived happy, happy ever after" (136). This summation fails to acknowledge Art and Art's impact Art on Vladek's life and memory. The use of the term "happy" to refer to events after the *Shoah* as joyful is ironic, particularly given Anja's suicide. Vladek cannot acknowledge the effects of the past, and so he cannot achieve self-understanding. His final denial proves that the problematic relationship between father and son that began before the publication of *Maus* will never be resolved.

Art's separation from his father continues to exist, and this fact may deny Art the ability to gain self-knowledge as well. But Arlene Fish Wilner offers a more positive assessment. She claims that Spiegelman seems to embody a tension between the coherence of a narrative informed by personal victory that seems at least in part to have been earned and the knowledge that this victory is only to have survived as a moral human being—with never-healing psychic wounds—unimaginable and meaningless suffering (119). In short, Wilner suggests that Art, despite his pain, has achieved a "personal victory" of some sort simply by surviving, with his goodness and decency intact. He has not, like his father, become jaded and unable to relate to others.

Art Spiegelman views *Maus* and its conclusion as the summation of his relationship with his father: his father talked *to* him, not *with* him. He explains, "A reader might get the impression that the conversations in the narrative were just one small part, a facet of my relationship with my father. In fact, however, they were my relationship with my father. I was doing them to have a relationship with my father. Outside of them, we were still continuously at loggerheads (Weschler 65).

Clearly Art is deeply moved by his father's story, his struggles, and his willingness to explain his life. However, Art feels unable to reveal *his* problems and feelings to his father.

Ultimately, *Maus* offers only an *illusion* of a father-son relationship. The destructive impact of the *Shoah* on Art and his father continues even after the book concludes.

Art's yearning for a bond with his father causes a relationship that repeats a narration of the *Shoah*, but it does not provide any answers or closure for Art. He withholds his questions, feelings, and inner turmoil but assumes his attempt to build a relationship with his father through narration as an empathetic reaching out to his father, the survivor. By analyzing *Maus* and *Prisoner* together, readers become aware of Art's true feelings of being marginalized by not only his father but also his father's story, which causes him to feel insignificant. This inability to develop a relationship is foreshadowed throughout the text, and Art's ambivalent relation to his father and to his father's experiences is continuously shown throughout the work. Art wants to impress Vladek, but Art's self-pity and depression leave him feeling abandoned and void of any true understanding of the *Shoah*. He feels that he is an unacknowledged child because a child "can only experience his feelings when there is somebody there who accepts him fully, understands and supports him" (Miller 56). The difficulties that structure the father-son relationship signify that *Maus* strengthens the tie that bonds parent and child together in a contentious relationship through the labor that both men

entered into. By analyzing the end of the text as a problematic ending to a father-son relationship, critics learn that the fundamental theme focuses primarily on Art and his narrative as well as how the process of representing Vladek's narrative has only made the relationship worse.

The idea that is repeated in the last scene of *Maus* centers around the idea of loss. The idea of losing everything due to the *Shoah* informs the relationship that Art learns and develops as a child. Vladek's last words justify Art's belief that he and his father share only a traumatic bond. Art states, "All that took place anchored itself to my phantom brother Richieu, which allowed a lot of my problems [with the *Shoah*], and my problems with Vladek, to be brought back into that last exhale, that last phrase" (*Meta Maus* 234).

To further show the loss that surrounds Art, he includes a sketch of his mother and father's tombstone. He shows that a family of survivors is ultimately surrounded by and reunited in death. While Art continues on as the last survivor of his family, the impact of his upbringing continues to haunt him. Although his father's testimony has been given, Art must now try to organize his conversation with his father to create a work based on an experience he has only heard about.

Spiegelman explains this processes as creating a work that continues to loom over him as his father once did. He states, "*Maus* makes him keep his mask on; however, the mask gave him the lens to look into an unfamiliar past and craft its existence" (*Meta Maus* 8). By feeling that he was given this ability even after his father's death, Art views his text as a combination of cartoons and words that represent his father's memory and a text to commemorate not only his father but also a survivor of the *Shoah.* Moreover, Art intends for his work, especially the closing chapter, to capture the dysfunctional and distant relationship he shares with his father. He carefully crafts the final scene to ensure that it would weigh as much, or more, as all of the preceding chapters, showing that like his father, he, too, reaches a conclusion that lacks a happy ending.

Chapter Twenty-Two: A *Maus* in the *Night*—Conclusion

By exploring both Art Spiegelman and Eliezer Wiesel's works in relation to family continuity and paternal bonds during the *Shoah*, critics understand that while the *Shoah* strengthened father-son relationships, neither Spiegelman nor Wiesel truly understand the impact of the *Shoah* upon them. Both men attempt to understand a traumatic past, but their understanding is never fully reached. This thesis illustrates how the *Shoah* stimulates Wiesel and Spiegelman's transformation while reflecting on a traumatic past that shows that questions and true understanding pertaining to the *Shoah* can never be understood. Therefore, Wiesel and Spiegelman do not completely understand the impact and restraints of the *Shoah* on their lives, inhibiting both men from finding true understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness in a troubled past.

Wiesel and Spiegelman's meditation focuses on the effects of a major historical event—the traumatic events of the *Shoah* on the lives of its victims, and the people who were born after the war ended—second-generation witnesses. Although Spiegelman neither lived through the war nor experienced the concentration camps first-hand, *Maus* represents how a survivors' mentality affects his son's childhood and upbringing, which highlights how

the atrocities of the *Shoah* continue to reverberate through future generations.

The similarities between *Night* and *Maus* allow both texts to share a bond, although for different reasons. The father-son relationship in *Night* is centered on shared misery experienced during the *Shoah*; the bond in *Maus* stems from the son's inability to understand the impact and misery placed upon his father by the *Shoah*. However, although the paternal relationships develop for different reasons, several underlying themes are present in both texts: resentment, lack of communication, unanswerable questions, role reversal, identity struggles, desire for freedom, feelings of guilt, and the attempt to overcome the silence that surrounds the *Shoah*.

As each son tries to understand his father, he comes to a better (but still imperfect) understanding of the relationship with his father and of himself. Therefore, in both cases, the son's relationship with his father is crucial to the existence of the son, and in both cases the son's bond with the father improves but remains troubled. The agony of the *Shoah* on both a survivor and a child is present in both texts; therefore, an isolated void remains present in both authors in regards to conventional situations of familial intimacy.

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