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Night (Night)



ELIE WIESEL

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

"A slim volume of terrifying power."
—The New York Times



Customer Reviews

I recall when I first read 'Night', it was just after Elie Wiesel had given a lecture at my university. It was in the mid-1980s, and the lecture hall was standing-room-only. Wiesel's presentation moved us to tears, and moved us to anger, and moved me to want to follow up on his words by reading what he had written. This is written a style that seems to be typical of many modern Israeli novelists; it is so close to the truth of the actual events that transpired in Wiesel's life that it might as well be treated as autobiographical. Thus, it seems to some to be more a work like a novel than a memoir, but Wiesel describes it himself as more of a deposition. It isn't autobiography in the traditional sense, but that is what helps give the book its power. Wiesel remembers the events here, This is actually part of a trilogy - Night, Dawn, and The Accident - although each element stands alone with integrity. (Dawn and The Accident are works of fiction, but also draw on Wiesel's own recollections and feelings.) How does one deal with survival after such atrocities as that at Birkenau and Auschwitz? How can one have faith in the world? How can one accept that a people so closely identified with a powerful God can ever accept that God again? Where is God in the midst of such things? Wiesel himself has spent his life in search of such answers, but doesn't provide them here. Why then would one want to read such accounts as these? Wiesel was silent for many years, until he was brought into speech and writing as a witness to the events. Wiesel proclaims that there is in the world now a new commandment - 'Thou shalt not stand idly by' - when such things are happening, one must act.

In a world that often feels like it is teetering toward relenting madness, Elie Wiesel's vividly haunting 1960 memoir still reminds us that there was a precedent for the deranged mindset that justifies acts of terrorism. In a concise, unadorned manner, he relives the spiraling insanity that surrounded the Jewish population of Sighet, Transylvania, as insulated a world as one could imagine and certainly a community who understandably could not embrace the insanity of the extermination occurring around them. Inevitably, they are taken to Auschwitz and Buchenwald, two of the most infamous concentration camps, where Wiesel provides painfully palpable detail of the day-to-day living conditions. He not only records the brutality and inhumanity of the Nazi guards toward the Jews, as others have, but more tellingly, describes the inhumanity of the camp inmates toward each other for the sake of survival. It's a stark peek into the nature of evil that is at once uncomfortable to acknowledge and invaluable to read and absorb. The propagation of evil from forces unexpected is what makes Wiesel's book resonate today. As we consider the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the Dili and Liquica Church massacres in East Timor, the 1994 Rwandan genocide (dramatized in the

superb film, 2004's "Hotel Rwanda"), or most pertinently, the detention camps that exist today in North Korea, it is obvious that the Third Reich did not have a monopoly on justifying such slaughter. With his two older sisters, Wiesel was able to survive the camps and share his devastating story with future generations. Compressed from a much larger memoir Wiesel wrote in Yiddish, the book represents a powerfully affecting treatment that edits the key moments of his existence to their essence. The result is elliptical and startling.

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