

The Phenomenon of Doubling in Elie Wiesel's *L'Aube* and *Le Mendiant de Jérusalem*.

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Résumé: Dans cet article, l'auteur analyse une stratégie narrative dans l'oeuvre narrative d'Élie Wiesel: le dédoublement de personnalité chez certains personnages. Le cas de Katriel dans *Le Mendiant de Jérusalem* est particulièrement révélateur à cet égard: le personnage est identifié comme étant un double du Messie, processus qui tire son origine d'une parabole qui agit telle une mise en abîme de l'oeuvre.

Summary: This article discusses character doubling as a narrative strategy in the award-winning novel *A Beggar in Jerusalem* by Elie Wiesel (originally published in French in 1968). The character Katriel is identified as being a double for the Messiah, an assumption originating from a parable in the narrative which acts as a *mise en abîme*.

Elie Wiesel's oeuvre is arguably the most accomplished and widely read body of work on the Holocaust and its aftermath. After the appearance of his testimony *La Nuit* (1958), Wiesel turned largely to fiction in an attempt to capture the horror of that which he had survived. Instead of depicting the Holocaust directly, Wiesel's fictional works often incorporate narrative strategies which only allude to the event, effectively suggesting its incommunicable nature. These strategies adopt numerous forms and range from ambiguous statements to "unconventional" techniques in the narration, such as the deliberate confusion of character's identities, or changes from the first- to third-person narrative and vice versa (*Le Mendiant de Jérusalem*). As critic Ellen Fine points out, even more common in Wiesel's oeuvre is the doubling and the fragmentation of characters, which attempt to suggest the devastation that the Holocaust has inflicted on the survivor (*Legacy of Night* 81). Wieselean protagonists, who are almost always survivors, if not doubles of Wiesel himself, are often divided by both phantasmic and external charac-

ters who represent the pre- and postwar selves, a division which implies the destruction of the prewar identity.

Implicit also in the Wieselean protagonist is an internal multiplicity which symbolizes the presence of the six million victims who dwell within the protagonist's "psyche." This suggests that the Wieselean "I" cannot be uttered without the tacit presence of "they," designating the victims, families and friends who perished in the concentration camps. As Wiesel writes, "As a Jew I know I must never say 'I' but 'we'. I participate in the struggles of all Jews everywhere as they participate in my tales" (*Against Silence*, Vol. II, 75). Thus, characters are often multidimensional and fragmented, seemingly "schizophrenic," embodying different identities from their pasts. Similarly, Wiesel also constructs characters who double and represent metaphysical figures central to Jewish belief, such as the Messiah, in order to question these roles in a post-Holocaust world. This article will examine the phenomenon of doubling and the significance of these secondary "selves" in two of Wiesel's best known early fictional works: *L'Aube* (1960)¹ and *Le Mendiant de Jérusalem*² (1968).

L'Aube: Double Structures

Based on historical and semi-autobiographical circumstances of Wiesel's life,³ *L'Aube* is situated during the colonial occupation of Palestine by the British Army. The narrator/protagonist, Elisha, becomes a member of a terrorist movement determined to liberate Palestine. In order to free a Jewish hostage held by the English (David Ben Moshe), the terrorist group retaliates by kidnapping a British soldier (John Dawson) and threatening to execute him if Ben Moshe is not released from his death sentence. Elisha's past becomes an element of great importance as he, a survivor of the camps, is chosen to carry out Dawson's execution, thus forcing him to transform from victim to victimizer. *L'Aube* documents the evolution of Elisha's fear and apprehension while exposing his psychological and metaphysical deliberations on the necessity of death and on the Holocaust. Despite his philosophical struggles, Elisha ultimately carries out the political assassination, but only in the presence of hallucinatory characters or "ghosts" issued from his past. The text questions the murder/victim relationship, yet advances no conclusions or justifications, remaining ambiguous and impartial on the issue of moral responsibility.

The protagonist is mirrored and haunted by a variety of apparitions, the most important of which is the figure of a child who doubles Elisha and represents his prewar self. As the imminent hour approaches (the execution is to occur at dawn), Elisha realizes that he is no longer alone, but in a room peopled with apparitions, or

tous ceux qui avaient contribué à former celui que j'étais, mon moi le plus durable. (76)

all of those who had contributed to my formation, to the formation of my permanent identity, were there.' (*Dawn* 166, in *The Night Trilogy*)

Amidst the victims, who include his parents, teachers, friends, and an enigmatic beggar, the narrator recognizes the ghost of himself as a little boy:

le petit garçon ... ressemblait à celui que j'avais jadis été. (80)

there was a boy who looked strangely like myself as I had been before the concentration camps, before the war, before everything. (167)

The child symbolizes a link between the protagonist's former existence and the present, a memory, a fragment of the prewar self forgotten in the ashes. Only the child can clarify the reason for the apparition's manifestation:

Tu es la somme de ce que nous étions.... Alors, c'est un peu nous qui exécuterons John Dawson demain à l'aube. Tu ne peux pas le faire sans nous. (80)

You are the sum total of all that we have been.... In a way we are the ones to execute John Dawson. Because you can't do it without us. (169)

The notion of the collective Jewish "I" becomes apparent in this last statement, as murder cannot be a solitary act. In his essay "The Solitude of God," Wiesel elaborates upon this concept: "a certain Jewish tradition forbids the use of the singular 'I': only God can say 'I.' God alone defines Himself in relation to that 'I.' Only God has no need of emerging from Himself to be Himself" (*Elie Wiesel: Between Memory and Hope* 2). The murder of John Dawson thus remains a collective act as Elisha attempts to usurp the singular "I," and, by extension, the role of God.

The child also assumes a secondary role which is related to the Jewish (contradictory) notions of Providence and free will. The latter is a fundamental element of Judaism: "it was heaven's greatest gift to man: he was not to be an automaton" (Adler, "Man" *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 844). According to Jewish ethics and philosophy, every individual possesses two basic components: *Yezer Tov* and *Yezer Ra*, namely an innate propensity for goodness (*Tov*) as well as for evil (*Ra*). This dualism in human nature explains the existence of evil in the world, while also doubling as a justification for divine punishment. Paradoxically, the concept of universal divine Providence (*hanhagah*) is ubiquitous in the Bible and the Talmud, a notion which is diametrically opposed to free will (Grintz, "Providence" *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 1279-82). Certain Jewish philosophers, such as Maimonides, have attempted to explain this contradiction, but the two notions are manifestly difficult to reconcile.

It is precisely this paradoxical tension which sustains the dramatic struggle of *L'Aube*. The narrator clearly announces the text's *dénouement* on the first page:

Demain je tuerai un homme, pensai-je pour la centième fois, tout en me demandant si l'enfant qui pleurait et la femme d'en face le savaient. (9)

Tomorrow, I thought for the hundredth time, I shall kill a man, and I wondered if the child crying and the woman across the way knew. (123)

This statement is imbued with an immense certitude, reinforced by the use of the *futur simple*. Elisha tries to resist the inevitability of Providence, struggling in vain to control his own destiny. "Je ne veux pas être bourreau" — "I don't want to be a killer" (178) — he cries, seemingly suggesting that there is no other alternative (96). As Ellen Fine writes, Elisha is "directed by a force higher than himself" and "seems to be controlled by the circumstances in which he finds himself" (*Legacy of Night* 40). The little boy is intimately linked to the motif of the will of Providence and the "predestination" of textual events. He assumes a prophetic role in the narrative, a herald of the future:

Cette nuit est différente; et tu es différent cette nuit — ou plutôt *tu vas l'être*. (84, emphasis mine)

Tonight is different, and you are different also, or at least you're going to be. (171)

There are no equivocations in the child's proclamation, much in the same way that he announces earlier that "c'est un peu nous qui exécuterons John Dawson demain à l'aube" (80). Again the *futur proche* and *simple* suggest a certain irrevocability of events in a definitive and unambiguous manner, the child prophesying the irreversible nature of a murder which cannot be avoided.

Elisha's double status as victim and persecutor

As well as being mirrored by an external character, the child, Elisha is also represented as being trapped in the dichotomy of victim/persecutor. As a victim of the camps who, "liberated," will be forced to assume the role of aggressor, the protagonist occupies these two roles equally. The narrative carefully prevents the reader from passing judgement or from forming a definitive point of view with regard to the protagonist's morality. However, the narrator states that he has very likely murdered before while carrying out anonymous terrorist activities, thus making it clear that he is capable of immense violence. Elisha's terrorist activity, however, is not without remorse; each violent incident provokes mental images of himself dressed as an SS

officer. On many occasions, the narrator recalls his virgin initiation into the brutality of terrorism, which shocks and sickens him:

La première fois que j'avais participé à une opération, j'avais dû faire des efforts surhumains pour surmonter ma nausée. Je me faisais horreur. (41)

Je savais que je sentirais différent, mais je ne doutais pas que cette différence me donnerait envie de vomir. (43)

The first time I took place in a terrorist operation I had to make a super-human effort not to be sick to my stomach. I found myself utterly hateful" (144)

I knew that I should feel very differently, but I had no idea that I should be ready to vomit. (144)

These emotions issue from the protagonist's past in the concentration camps. Incapable of separating his terrorist activity from the context of his own incarceration, Elisha associates his acts with those of a Nazi torturer. Rather than possessing a politically motivated inclination for violence, Elisha's previous exposure to the *univers concentrationnaire* seems to psychologically and physically compel him to assume the position of murderer. The text reinforces this by drawing parallels between the protagonist's virgin terrorist operation and the Nazi atrocities in the ghetto, on each occasion the victims "courant comme des écureuils" — "[running] like rabbits, like drunken rabbits" (145) — to elude death:

Je revis en mémoire les soldats SS dans les ghettos de Pologne. C'était ainsi qu'ils abattaient les Juifs, jour après jour, nuit après nuit. Quelques mitraillettes ici et là, un officier qui, riant ou mangeant, donnait un ordre bref: *Feuer* ... Quelques Juifs tentaient de franchir le cercle ... Ils couraient, ils couraient, eux aussi, comme des écureuils abreuvés de vin et de douleur et, à eux aussi, la mort coupait les jambes, brusquement. (45)

I remembered the dreaded SS guards in the Polish ghettos. Day after day, night after night, they slaughtered the Jews in just the same way. Tommy guns were scattered here and there, and an officer, laughing distractedly or eating, barked out the order: *Fire!*... A few Jews tried to break through the circle of fire, but they only rammed their heads against its insurmountable wall. They too ran like rabbits, like rabbits sotted with wine and sorrow, and death mowed them down. (146)

The parallel drawn between the victims is emphasized through similar narrative construction; the phrase "couraient comme des écureuils" is reiterated on two occasions, referring to both the British soldiers and the Jews in the Polish ghettos. By reliving his experiences in the ghettos and camps, the "aggressor" mentally reassumes the role of victim, thus compel-

ling the reader to envisage Elisha in the same manner. This reinforces the ambiguous status of the protagonist, who embodies the dichotomy of persecutor/victim and remains simultaneously suspended between the two positions, desirous of neither. As critic Joë Friedemann writes,

Il y a chez Elisha une oscillation perpétuelle entre deux positions extrêmes: une volonté d'origine morale de ne pas s'incarner *bourreau*, et une autre physique, de ne pas demeurer *victime*. (*Le Rire dans l'univers tragique d'Elie Wiesel* 78)

In the character of Elisha there is a perpetual oscillation between two positions: a will of moral origin not to embody the role of *torturer*, as well as a physical will not to remain a *victim*. (*Le Rire dans l'univers tragique d'Elie Wiesel*, my translation)

The protagonist's double status is further illustrated as he becomes intertwined with his imminent victim, John Dawson. Unlike Elisha, the latter's status as victim is unequivocal: Dawson is a sympathetic, paternal character who incites the reader's compassion, making it very difficult to condemn him as an implacable enemy deserving of his fate. Elisha himself cannot be persuaded to hate him:

Je ne ressentais envers lui ni haine, ni colère, ni pitié; je le trouvais simplement sympathique.... En d'autres circonstances, il aurait pu être mon ami. (117)

I felt neither hate nor anger nor pity; I liked him, that was all.... Under other circumstances he might have been my friend. (190)

In fact, much to the distress of his terrorist companions, Elisha wishes to converse with his victim, to get to know him, and to convince himself perhaps of the necessity for Dawson's death. Their conversation is structured around the motif of the laugh,⁴ a mechanism which eventually unites the two characters as victims. This common parallel, established through the laugh, reinforces the interchangeability of their respective roles.

Before entering Dawson's underground cell, Elisha participates in a discussion with his terrorist companions on the subject of their own confrontations with death and the twists of fate that spared their lives. Their memories are quite diversified, ranging from a disguise as a mental patient to a head cold which alters the sound of the terrorist movement's radio personality. When called upon, Elisha evokes an experience in the camps where he was strangled by a Nazi for having missed roll call:

Il se mit à me serrer la gorge dans l'intention bien précise de me tuer.... Je sentais mon sang affluer à ma tête, qui se mit à gonfler démesurément.... Elle était devenue si grande ... si excessivement

gonflée, que je ressemblais à une caricature grotesque, à un clown misérable ... C'est alors que le chef adjoint jeta un coup d'oeil sur ce ballon dont il tenait à la main l'orifice et ce qu'il vit lui parut si drôle, si cocasse qu'il lâcha prise et se mit à rire. De toute la journée, il ne put s'arrêter de rire. Il riait tellement qu'il en oublia sa volonté de me tuer. C'est ainsi que j'eus la vie sauve. C'est amusant, hein, de devoir la vie sauve au sens de l'humour d'un assassin? (60)

His [the barrack leader's] powerful hands closed in on my throat and in my enfeebled condition I did not even try to put up a fight. Very well, I said to myself; it's all over. I felt the blood gather in my head and my head swell to several times its normal size, so that I must have looked like a caricature, a miserable clown. I was sure from one minute to the next that it would burst into a thousand shreds like a child's toy balloon. At this moment the assistant leader took a good look at me and found the sight so comical that he released his grip and burst out laughing. He laughed so long that he forgot his intention to kill. And that's how I got out of it unharmed. It's funny, isn't it, that I should owe my life to an assassin's sense of humour? (157)

The laugh possesses a double function: to connect Elisha to the archetypal roles of persecutor and victim, the narrative linking him specifically to an SS officer and to John Dawson. In the above citation, the laugh is analogous to salvation, a quasi-divine intervention which spares the protagonist's life. Faced with his victim and the impending assassination, Elisha begs Dawson to tell him a funny story:

'Racontez-moi une histoire ... Une histoire drôle si possible ... Je suis le dernier homme qu'il vous est donné de voir avant de mourir ... Faites-le rire'. (119)

'Tell me a story... A funny one, if you can ... I'm the last man you'll see before you die ... Try to make him laugh'. (191)

As Elisha's life was once saved by his murderer's sense of humour, he hopes consciously that if he himself laughs, fate will intervene a second time and spare Dawson, thus relieving him of his not-yet-committed crime. Dawson's inability to tell a funny story, to make Elisha laugh, occasions logical narrative consequences. As mentioned previously, the story's *dénouement* is predetermined, constructed from the very first page ("Demain je tuerais un homme, pensai-je pour la centième fois, tout en me demandant si l'enfant qui pleurait et la femme d'en face le savaient" 9); therefore, it is consistent that the laugh is not produced. Rather, the protagonist's request for a funny story results in its antithesis, as Dawson can only pity his young assassin: "Je vous plains" remarks Dawson, "Ce n'est pas mon fils que je plains, c'est vous" (123) — "I'm sorry for you ... *You* worry me, not my son" (194). As Elisha pulls the trigger, the two characters have become so intertwined that the protagonist

believes he has also killed himself: "C'est fait. J'ai tué. J'ai tué Elisha" (140) — "That's it, I said to myself. It's done. I've killed. I've killed Elisha" (203).

Elisha's state of *dédoublement* operates on numerous levels: he is mirrored by his own phantasmic characters (the young boy and the SS officer) as well as by an external character (John Dawson). These "double" narrative structures represent the protagonist's (and thus the survivor's) fragmented state in an attempt to depict the aftermath of the Holocaust, notably the death of the prewar self, a death occasioned by the burden of survival and the memory of six million victims.

Le Mendiant de Jérusalem: A Messianic Double

Le Mendiant de Jérusalem, winner of the *Prix Médicis*, is a complex novel which reveals numerous forms of doubling. Though *Le Mendiant* does contain circumstances of doubling similar to those in *L'Aube*, such as the divided self, the text also explores the possibility of a messianic double.

Le Mendiant de Jérusalem is a "fictional testimony" which is narrated by the protagonist just after the six-day war in 1967. The beggar/narrator David, also a survivor, mourns the disappearance of his friend Katriel, for whom he has sworn to bear witness should Katriel not return from battle. The two characters are never reunited. In effect, Katriel's very existence is dubious, as the text often clearly suggests that he is a fabrication, a figment of David's imagination: "Katriel est ma folie à moi, mon obsession" writes the narrator, "Peut-être l'ai-je inventé" (37) — "Katriel is my obsession, my private madness. I may even have invented him ..." (*A Beggar in Jerusalem* 34). Critics have often focused on the state of *dédoublement* between David and Katriel, as the two characters are intertwined to the point where the reader is convinced that they are quite possibly the same person. Critic Simon Sibelman has even suggested that a female character, Malka, whom David constructs as Katriel's wife, is in fact David's *own* wife, whom he refuses to recognize (*Silence in the Novels of Elie Wiesel* 113). However, the figure of Katriel is quite complex and must be examined individually, rather than in direct relation to David. In *Le Mendiant de Jérusalem*, the reader witnesses a different form of doubling which integrates the Jewish theological notion of the Messiah. Through the character of Katriel, who doubles as the Messiah, Wiesel challenges and questions the Messiah's role in a post-Holocaust world.

Katriel's role as a messianic figure finds its source in a parable which David relates to his beggar friends who mill about the Wall after Israel's victory. David, however, insists that the story is "true," wondering silently whether he should speak to his companions about Katriel (53). He decides to tell a tale on the subject of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the story, God, the three patriarchs and the angels gather together in the

heavens, quickly remarking that the Messiah is absent from their holy union. After searching in the Messiah's sanctuary, God grows angry and sends the angels to earth to retrieve him. When God finally confronts the Messiah, the latter admits that he was in Jerusalem, and God responds by reprimanding him for having once again attempted to force His hand. The Messiah defends himself, saying that he could not resist this time as he needed to follow the angels who descended to Israel to help their children:

Je ne pouvais que me joindre à eux, devenir *l'un deux*. Leur volonté fut plus forte que la mienne et la tienne ... Que veux-tu Seigneur? Ils étaient six millions. (55, emphasis mine).

I couldn't remain behind. Seeing them in their multitudes, stubborn and determined, watching them go down to earth bringing aid to their children, I had to join them, be one of them. Their will was stronger than Yours, and so was their love. You see, they were six million. (55)

The parable functions as a *mise en abîme* of the text in its totality, explaining and justifying allegorically Katriel's presence on earth. At this point in the novel, the Messiah of the parable becomes one with Katriel. The Messiah admits that he has left the heavens in order to become "l'un d'eux," to follow six million angels to Jerusalem and aid them in their plight, an obvious allusion to the six-day war.⁵ The Messiah thus disguises himself in human form, as Katriel, in order to participate in defense of the Jewish state and the destiny of the Jewish people. This image of the Messiah is one of compassion, a benevolent figure who wishes to aid humanity but is impotent in the face of divine will.

Through the parable, Wiesel offers an allegorical or fantastic "justification" for the Messiah's absence. In an essay in *From the Kingdom of Memory* (1990), Wiesel relates his doubt, describing his feelings of envy while listening to a young Jewish boy chant a Hebrew prayer, *Ani Maamin*, (*I Believe*):

'I [a child sings] believe in the coming of the Messiah, and though he may tarry, I will wait daily for his coming ...' I [Wiesel] look at that Jewish child who prays and is afraid to look; I listen and envy him. For him, for me, it was once so simple. I feared God while loving him ... I was a believer as they say. And if I questioned my belief at all, it was only for fear that it might not be sufficiently perfect. (24)

This citation is exemplary of Wiesel's need to question the notions of the Messiah and of God. In *Le Mendiant de Jérusalem*, which uses fiction as a vehicle for a personal theological investigation, Wiesel refers to the impetus behind this exploration: his (and protagonist David's) experience in the camps, which has forever destroyed his absolute faith. The narrator's memories, stories and reflections in the text constantly question God and His role,

His silence. In another parable, an anonymous Rabbi challenges God before a mass shooting of the Jewish people,

C'est la volonté de Dieu ... Mais est-ce vraiment ce qu'il veut? ... Sache ... que le Dieu d'Israël viole ici la loi d'Israël. (69)

It is God's will ... But is it really what he wants? ... Know too that the God of Israel today is violating the Law of Israel. (73)

There exist numerous other textual allusions which align the figure of Katriel with the Messiah. As we know, many religious sects await the Messiah daily, either patiently or impatiently, in one form or another according to the faith and the tradition in question. Christians anticipate the return of Christ, while Jews await the Davidic Messiah. In his critical work *The Vision of the Void*, Michael Barenbaum has identified the concept of waiting in a character/beggar who mills about the wall with David, "Shlomo l'aveugle."

Shlomo the blind man sees clearly and personifies the spirit of waiting (for the Messiah) that so marked the pre-Holocaust Jew. 'He must come. When? I don't know. Who am I to know?' (Barenbaum's citation from *A Beggar in Jerusalem* 42)

Shlomo the Blind Man's appearance in the narrative is quite brief, but the motif of waiting also manifests itself elsewhere, often dominating David and Malka's general conversation. As David remains at the Wall waiting for Katriel after its recapture, Malka arrives to persuade him to follow her home. David refuses, saying that Katriel may still return and that her duty is "de l'attendre" (86) — "to wait for him" (92). Malka responds, "Je l'attends. Cela fait longtemps que je l'attends ... J'ai appris à attendre"²⁴ (86) — "I am waiting ... I have been waiting for a long time" (92). Superficially, she seems to be referring to her "husband" Katriel, but the tacit allusion is to the Messiah. This motif is reiterated near the novel's close in a conversation between David and Malka:

Regardez bien et dites-moi qui vous voyez, moi je ne le sais plus. Dites-moi si vous attendez Katriel comme moi je l'attends, moi. Katriel: était-ce même son nom? Oui ou non, peu importe: c'était celui qu'il arborait pour conjurer une menace, pour concilier une présence occulte ... Katriel est parti, il peut encore revenir. Un jour, il en aura assez et il resurgira, sous un autre nom ou sans nom, plus mystérieux que jamais ... Serais-je donc venu trop tard? demandera-t-il. En pleurant et en riant, Malka, vous lui ferez signe que oui: tu es venu trop tard, beaucoup trop tard. (183)

Look at me, Malka. Look closely and tell me whom you see; I don't

know any more. Tell me if you are waiting for Katriel as I am waiting for him. Katriel: was that even his name? Yes or no, it hardly matters: that was the name he flaunted to exorcise a threat, to ingratiate himself with that which is present but unseen.... Katriel has gone away, he may still come back. One day he will have had enough and he will reappear, under another identity, more mysterious and more invincible.... 'Have I come too late?' he will ask. Crying and laughing, Malka, you will nod gracefully: 'Yes, you have come too late, much too late'. (206)

Hence, Katriel is a figure for whom humanity waits, a figure who has obviously come "too late" for the Jewish people, already devastated by the Holocaust. Following the narrative events of the parable, the Messiah's clandestine voyage, uninitiated by God, can offer little consolation to the Jewish people. However, it is suggested in the text that Katriel's presence, though it does not engender the eternal state of grace, temporarily catalyzes the occurrence of *gilgul m'choloth*, generally a mystical and kabbalistic concept which translates literally as "to roll underground" and approximatively as "the resurrection."

The word *gilgul*, which alone translates as "the transmigration of souls," signifies the passage of the soul, at death, from one body to another (Scholem "Gilgul" *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 573). Popular belief is that transmigration offers "the purification of the soul and the opportunity, in a new trial, to improve its deeds," though interpretations are numerous (575). In the Jewish mystical tradition, the *gilgul* is utilized to explain the suffering of a righteous individual, as he is being chastised "for his sins in a previous *gilgul*" (575). From the concept of transmigration derives the notion mentioned above, *gilgul m'choloth*, true resurrection and liberation, described here in *The Second Scroll* by A.M. Klein:

It is written also that with the coming of the Messiah there would take place the wonder of *gilgul m'choloth* ... the cadavers and corpses of Jewry deceased in the Diaspora would roll and strive and roll through subterranean passages, through catacomb and grave, directed all to rise at last and stand erect on the heights of the Carmel, on the hillocks of the Negev, on the mountains of Galilee. (89)

According to Jewish mysticism, *gilgul m'choloth* will occur only after the Messiah's arrival. Therefore, the Messiah's reference to the six million souls who descend to Jerusalem is an allusion to the birth of *gilgul m'choloth*, or the emancipatory trajectory of Jews to Palestine, initiated by Katriel's presence. In *Le Mendiant de Jérusalem*, *gilgul m'choloth* is illustrated in a very emotional passage which David relives retrospectively just after the Wall's recapture and Katriel's disappearance:

Ainsi, à force d'appeler l'hallucination et de lui résister tour à tour, j'y [David] plonge et retrouve amis, parents et voisins, tous les morts de la ville, toutes les villes mortes du cimetière que fut l'Europe. Tous se firent pèlerins, et les voilà, à l'heure crépusculaire, intemporelle, envahissant le Temple dont ils sont à la fois les fondements de feu et les gardiens. Assez légers, assez hautins pour accepter de quitter ce monde, ils y sont revenus de loin, de très loin, par dessus les toits et les étoiles, revenus d'un autre temps, d'autres foyers, comme pour vivre à la fois la résurrection du commencement et celle de la fin. Rien ne pouvait les arrêter, *pas même la volonté qui enchaîne le Messie*. C'est qu'ils n'ont pas de tombes pour les retenir, pas de cimetière pour les rattacher à la terre; ils sont descendus du ciel, leur cimetière est le ciel, et leur regard est l'éternité, et sa nuit. (179, emphasis mine)

Thus, by inviting hallucination and then rejecting it, I plunge into it and find friends, parents and neighbors, all the dead of the town, all the dead towns of the cemetery that was Europe. Here they are, at the timeless twilight of the hour, pilgrims all, invading the Temple of which they are both fiery foundation and guardians. Free enough, proud enough to have accepted leaving this world, they have now come back from far, very far, beyond the roofs and stars, from another time and other homes, wanting to live the beginning and the end of their tale. Nothing could stop them, *not even the divine will restraining the Messiah*. For they have no tombs to hold them back, no cemeteries to bind them to the earth; they have come down from the sky, their cemetery is the sky, and their eyes are eternity and its night. (201, emphasis mine)

The first fruits of the eternal state of grace seem to be in motion, but as we know from the parable, the Messiah's terrestrial sojourn is transient, cut short by God's wrath. When God summons the Messiah (Katriel) back to the heavens, Katriel must obey and hence disappears, accompanied by the Jewish souls who have been temporarily released from their purgatory. As the narrator writes,

Et Katriel, où est-il? Peut-être les morts l'ont-ils emmené. (182)

And Katriel, where is he? Perhaps the dead have taken him along. (204)

Katriel's disappearance during the novel's *dénouement* is tantamount to the Messiah's return to heaven in the parable:

Katriel est parti, il peut encore revenir" writes David, "Un jour, il en aura assez et il resurgira, sous un nom ou un autre, plus mystérieux que jamais, plus invincible aussi, et se mettra à raconter à Katriel les aventures de Katriel. (183)

Katriel has gone away, he may still come back. One day he will have had enough and he will reappear, under another identity, more mysterious

and more invincible too, and he will tell Katriel the adventures of Katriel.
(205)

The phrase “il peut encore revenir” can be transposed to the Messiah, who may one day revisit the earth when God’s will permits it. Only the eternal Jewish question remains, ubiquitous in the Wieselean *oeuvre*:

Mais la clef du repos, pourquoi l’avez-vous confiée à Katriel? (184)

But the key to peace, why did you entrust it to Katriel? (206)

In both *L’Aube* and *Le Mendiant de Jérusalem*, the reader is presented with two very different manifestations of doubling which issue from the desire to make sense of a post-Holocaust world. In *L’Aube*, doubling is employed to represent the loss of the prewar self and the inability to recapture the past, as well as to symbolize the collective nature of the survivor’s memory. In *Le Mendiant de Jérusalem*, Katriel is a messianic symbol of hope, but one laden with unanswerable questions. In both novels, doubling is a strategy which attempts to portray that which is familiar to us, but which cannot be captured or known, understood or communicated. Through doubling, Wiesel aspires to bring what is unattainable closer, but at the same time understands the impossibility of such a task. Just as the Messiah remains a mystery to humankind, the Holocaust itself will also persist as a mystery beyond our comprehension.

Notes

- 1 Translated from the French by Frances Frenaye as *Dawn*, first published 1961. *The Night Trilogy*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.
- 2 Translated from the French by Lily Edelman and Elie Wiesel as *A Beggar in Jerusalem*, New York: Random House, 1970.
- 3 Like Wiesel, the protagonist is a young man liberated from Buchenwald who immigrates to Paris to study Philosophy.
- 4 For a more detailed study of the laugh in Elie Wiesel’s *oeuvre*, see Joë Friedemann, *Le Rire dans l’univers tragique d’Elie Wiesel*. Paris: Nizet, 1981.
- 5 Later in the novel, prior to Israel’s victory, an anonymous preacher at the Wall shouts to his audience that “Israël a vaincu parce que son armée, son peuple comptaient six millions de noms de plus” (180). (“Israel won because its army, its people, could deploy six million more names in battle”) (202).

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