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Memory as Re-Vision:
The Religious Significance of Ritual,
Liturgy, Rhetoric, and Modern Literature

Jessica A. Moore
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Honors Thesis
Introduction:
Sitting in my usual pew at the Protestant church where I grew up, it occurs to me that I have seen this part of the service hundreds of times before. The minister lifts up the loaf of bread, says the usual words while breaking it in half, and sets it back on the plate before lifting the pitcher to pour grape juice into the challis. I am, as usual, caught up in the rhythm of a particular section of the liturgy that I know mostly by heart, even though I still read along in the hymnal:

"On the night in which he gave himself up for us
he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,
gave it to his disciples, and said:
'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.'

When the supper was over, he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
'Drink from this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me.'

And so,
in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again."

1 Why are we told to remember? In this ritual that I was taught to regard with solemnity and general importance, why does memory merit a place of honor? Almost as soon as these questions arise, I think back on what I have read about Passover, recognizing the fact that it

instructs its participants to remember as well. This is the first moment in which the religious significance of remembering strikes me as mysterious, neglected, and paramount for two reasons: its potential for cultivating a more meaningful understanding of ritual participation, and the way in which processes (such as that of remembering) lend themselves to rigorous academic study across disciplines.²

So what is missing in ritual today?

While much work has been done on the significance of the ritual acts themselves (concerning identity, freedom from bondage, return from exile, new covenants, and sacrificial cleansing), the important role of remembering as a religiously beneficial process deserves more attention. The act of remembering is inextricably connected to Judeo-Christian ritual and to religious ritual more generally. It is no less a part of the liturgy and rhetoric of these traditions. The mediation of memory through remembrance functions as the key to the connection between the divine and these three aspects of worship employed by practitioners.

The recognizable importance of remembering for religious practitioners and scholars interested in religious processes necessarily develops my questions. They move beyond the static, sometimes unanswerable ‘Why?’ that a practitioner can address to God alone, and shift to the perhaps more useful ‘How?’—a question that draws on an infusion of experience and research that both roles can address with valuable perspectives. While it is usual for scholars and general readers to consider the thematic work of religious and secular texts as separate enterprises, asking questions about the importance of remembering can trouble this

segregation. The theoretical separation of the two subjects appears especially invalid after a
time of communal suffering, as is present in the Passover and Communion narratives, but also
in the works of modern authors such as Elie Wiesel and Toni Morrison (i.e. enslavement, the
Holocaust, or the execution of a leader). Through their works, Wiesel and Morrison create
intriguing conversation partners for religious texts inasmuch as they discuss the subject of
remembering with striking parallels to its treatment by the authors of Exodus, 1 Corinthians,
and Luke. Instead of conforming to the subject pigeonholing inherited from post-
Enlightenment understandings of effective education, this paper explores the compelling ways
in which ancient education built around memory allows parallel themes, processes, and
insights between texts to create a religious imperative to understand one in conjunction with
the other. Especially through the use of memory, each of these written works deals with
making sense out of trauma by rendering a creation of words. While the aforementioned
religious texts explicitly establish ritual and liturgy through rhetoric to effectively urge the
remembrance of a specific event, the secular texts call upon previous knowledge of ritual,
liturgy, and biblical rhetoric in such a way that they simultaneously encourage and practice
the process of remembering.

The remembered ‘event’ of religious texts is understood and thereby framed as having
divine implications, which in the Judeo-Christian tradition means that it recognizes God. To
do so, religious texts necessarily point to a being greater in scope and importance than any
individual, and even greater than the community. Since the Enlightenment, many have
contended that memory is not creative, but rather simply parroting and reiterative, and
therefore flat and lacking inspiration. It has been denigrated in some scholarly circles as
“devoid of intellect: ‘just memorization,’ not ‘real thought’ or ‘true learning.’”3 This is not the conviction of Aristotle, Plato, or any other ancient thinker whose philosophical understandings have remained operative and compelling for centuries. For these influential thinkers, memory is the supreme means for creative and intellectual development, since they “valued...completeness, copiousness, rather than ‘objective’ accuracy, as we understand it now.”4 Where memory in particular is concerned, a reader of secular literature and familiar with religious texts may encounter clear links to and alterations of ritual, liturgy, and rhetoric. For such readers, these written works move beyond a mere position of having been influenced to the authoritative location of a text concerned with the ‘greater than’. It is clear that these works differ significantly as textual mediations of memory (i.e. a first-hand account and a work of fiction). That which the text remembers is removed from the writing by layers of time, space, and often the personal experience of the remembering person and/or writer. However, through the ways they address memory in a ritual, liturgical, and rhetorical manner, Song of Solomon and Night both suggest that a community is continually engaged in remembering the importance of memory itself. With an increasing awareness of the importance of past stories on their present, as well as how stories can shape the future, readers of these texts involve themselves in practicing the process of ritual remembrance.

Remember What?:

In light of all the admitted variations concerning Passover and Communion rituals, one is invariably led to an important question: What, if anything, does a religious scholar and/or practitioner do with the instruction to remember when the responsible reply seems to be,

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4 Carruthers, The Book of Memory, 17.
“Remember what? An original, fact-based, kernel of a historical event as it has been preserved over time? A divine act that reveals something about the character of God, or a prophetic act that demonstrates divinely gifted foreknowledge? Are these stories the inspiring, creative/creating interpretations of shattered hopes? Or are they something else altogether?”

Remembering as Re-Vision:

One apt response to these questions is that remembering is a ‘re-visioning’ of a people. This word does not only refer to the editorial process common to literary endeavors by which previous drafts are made new and clearer. In addition, ‘re-vision’ indicates that the act of retelling provides room for reorganization of details, usually due to the requirements of the narrative form itself. Looking at the word itself directly implicates its connection to memory, since the prefix ‘re’ means ‘again’ and a ‘vision’ is explained in the Oxford English Dictionary as “something which is apparently seen otherwise than by ordinary sight; esp. an appearance of a prophetic or mystical character, or having the nature of a revelation.” It can also be a liturgy, then, that passes on from one remembering generation to the next, and maintains its general shape. This general shape is not necessarily indicative of a specific piece of a factual event that somehow remains the same despite its journey through time, changing theologies, and in general different remembering people. Therefore, Passover and Communion do not carry a sort of kernel of ‘truth’ within them if ‘truth’ is determined by the present ritual’s sameness with a perceived original; instead, what is remembered is different

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5 The story variations about Passover and Communion will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.
from *and* the same as what has been previously remembered, even as revisions are different from, and the same as, one another.

Wyschogrod, although she does not use the term, points out one way to think of “re-visioning” community in her book *The Ethics of Remembrance*. In it she notably explains,

> “From the beginnings of Western philosophy, ‘the speaking otherwise’ that would come to characterize fiction could not be dissociated from its opposite truth. In Greek thought, the co-implication of speaking what is and what is not is articulated not as fact and fiction but rather as myth and logos. Myth in the Greek sense is fictive but not yet fiction, precisely because the logos, and not fact, is its co-determinant.”

Taking up this understanding of remembering has explicit ties to literature and writing. That is not to say that this study intends to privilege the written form and ignore the oral aspects of the texts concerning Passover and Communion. Quite the contrary, it is because these oral traditions are so clearly a part of the written re-visions of ritual that this particular literature is so interesting. The religious import of remembering has as much to do with a people (whether primarily connected to one another via an oral or literary tradition), and the culture belonging to the rememberers as it does to those who first decided that something should be commemorated through ritual. Furthermore, the rememberers have an important effect on that which is remembered, as the ethical questions that their role raises for scholars makes apparent. By taking on the task of historical remembrance, these scholars claim that the historian must ask herself the serious question of whether or not when “I enter into the other’s history, recount it, have I not created in his name a particular constellation of verbal or gestural instances having particular import, one that imposes a language of dominance and an alien historical identity?” While it is critical to grapple with how or if one is even able to

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8 Wyschogrod, *The Ethics of Remembrance*, 5.
“enter into the other’s history,” examining the endeavor to retrospectively bestow meaning on someone else’s experience is worthwhile for the ethical issues Wyschogrod delineates. Such questions are especially important in reading the biblical narratives of Passover and Communion because one could argue that Communion “imposes... an alien historical identity” on Passover as it re-visions it in and for a Christian context. Also intriguing is the fact that, as the following chapters will explain in detail, one can easily argue that even the written account of Passover in the book of Exodus is to some extent imposing an alien identity on pre-existing oral traditions. If textual accounts of the institution of ritual reveal a consistent re-framing of a history through language, then not only does the creativity of memory become easier to grasp, but one is faced with the troubling question about whether or not it is ethical to remember, to re-vision. Each of the texts considered herein grapple with this question of ethics in manner that is enriched by a religious contextualization, and despite their many differences, respond that it is in fact unethical to forget. One becomes unethical when one ceases to remember since one then ceases to carry the re-vision forward into a state relevant to the current generation.

The Task at Hand:

The prominent parallels that exist between religious and secular texts and memory’s role within them highlight the fallacy of separating them into mutually exclusive categories of religion and literature. In actuality, literary understandings are indispensible in reading religious texts, and religious themes and imagery are invaluable for allowing language to be what Morrison says it “ought to be... ‘a device for grappling with meaning, providing
guidance, or expressing love.9 The very words Morrison uses to describe language carry with them provocative religious connotations, since Judeo-Christians point to God for meaning, guidance, and the example of love and loving one’s neighbor. This understanding of language epitomizes the connection between the literary skill necessary for reading, and the religious avenues of thinking that language makes available. When memory is evoked either in biblical or modern texts by a community who has suffered, the narrative of that remembering process is a “re-visioning” of what it means to be religious and literary at all. The reader of these texts, therefore, necessarily joins the long line of persons called upon to participate in a ritual of remembrance as she or he hears/reads a community’s story and incurs the same ethical charge to remember, and therefore to tell/write.

Chapter 1:
Sharing A Table:
The Central Role of Community in Judeo-Christian Ritual, Liturgy, and Rhetoric

Introduction and Key Concepts:

At various junctures, the religious texts of the Jewish and Christian traditions emphatically instruct practitioners, religious scholars, and generic readers alike to remember. Those texts which have been traditionally read as instituting a particular ritual are especially concerned with remembering. Catherine Bell suggests that “Ritual is... ‘a type of practice’ found in all religions and even outside religion, involving expressive symbols intrinsic to the sense of self and workings of society.” Although ritual resists absolute definition, it nevertheless often involves a coordinated practice of actions and words, repetition, and symbols that have particular religious significance for participants. There is a complicated and nuanced way that ritual connects with current society, and yet transcends particular societies as it continues and is intended to continue through time and differing socio-cultural contexts. Passover and Communion (the latter of which is also known as the Lord’s Supper and the Eucharist) involve recognized rituals, and contain clear injunctions to remember specific acts done on behalf of God’s people. Both center around a set of actions that are to be performed by the participants in the ritual as they simultaneously remember what God has done for them. Even as they posit liturgical language with polished, song-like qualities that suggests their preexistent use by a religious community, the texts that present these rituals nevertheless mark the innovative move of that community to place their oral tradition(s) into a form associated with permanency and immutability. Whether or not these associations prove

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10 Catherine Bell, Ritual, 259.
valid in and for the resultant written documents, texts about Passover and Communion can and should be read as invested in having the rituals remembered as they are at the time of their composition.

The movement from oral to written purveyors of memory provides practical advantages of preservation for ritual, as do the text’s rhetorical arguments that cloak remembering with religious significance. Furthermore, while it has become somewhat commonplace for scholars to claim that a text attains excellence by simultaneously saying and demonstrating its central claim, these religious texts distinguish themselves by extending the important effect of memory beyond both the document and the skill of the author. As an author successfully emphasizes memory’s essential role in religious life, it becomes a focal point for religiously motivated attentiveness. Consequently, it becomes apparent that writing and reading these texts that respond to suffering actually parallels participation in the rituals they describe.

Ritual as Sacrament:

In order to proceed with these claims, it is important to acknowledge that since the second century CE, the Christian tradition has often linked ritual with yet another complex word: sacrament. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* underscores the fact that sacrament moves ritual away from a strictly Jewish understandings of liturgy, since even though “the benedictions of the priests, and the benedictions pronounced in the house of mourning, and at betrothals, weddings, etc., are mentioned [in Jewish religious texts], there are no indications that they were regarded as exercising any material influence on persons or things, *i.e.*, that they were sacramental as the Christian Church has taught and still teaches....They are merely utterances
of praise and thanksgiving, and it can no longer be determined whether originally they had
the force which the Church ascribes to them."\(^{11}\) As this assertion makes clear, even the task
of describing ‘sacraments’ requires one to grapple with theological terminology, since they
are described as “religious rites that confer special graces.”\(^{12}\) One senses from such a
definition that one must understand those “graces” before being able to understand sacrament.
It seems that the only way to gain such an understanding is by already being within a religious
community and perhaps even having previously participated in a sacrament, at which point a
description of the act seems less important.

Given this dilemma, it is useful to note that the term ‘sacrament’ springs mainly from
the Roman “oath of allegiance taken by a new recruit into the army.”\(^{13}\) It was Pliny the
Younger who first associated it with Christian acts of worship.\(^{14}\) ‘Sacrament’ maintains
aspects of both the Greek _mysterion_ and Jerome’s later Latin translation of it as _sacramentum_,
causing ‘mystery’ and ‘oath’ to intermingle and produce “a quasi-magical significance, partly
from...Jewish influences related to ritualistic and initiatory ablutions, as well as from the
Passover.”\(^{15}\) In addition, while it is “anachronistic to speak of ‘sacraments’ in the OT, since
the development of the notion of sacrament occurred in the post-NT church, sacramental
thought did appropriate terminology from various OT religious observances to show the
continuity between Israel and the church. Thus...the Passover terminology employed in the
Gospel accounts of the Last Supper was used to help explain the significance of the

search=liturgy=1415 (accessed April 27, 2009)


\(^{13}\) *Harper Collins*, s.v. “sacraments.”

\(^{14}\) *Harper Collins*, s.v. “sacraments.”

\(^{15}\) *Harper Collins*, s.v. “sacraments.”
Eucharist.” That said, and for the purpose of understanding ritual as a developing religious phenomenon, it is important to note that sacrament plays a key role in demonstrating some of the conceptual changes concerning Communion.

Tracing Passover’s History – A Question of Authorship:

It is important for any project concerned with ancient, biblical understandings of memory to trace the historical evolution of Passover, both before and after its appearance in the book of Exodus. Within the text’s literary sequence of events, the ritual with its particular questions, actions, and interpretations is presented even before God passes over and spares Jewish homes. In stark contrast to an absolute ascription of ritual with an actual moment of the past, scholarship suggests that Passover may be less tied to a single, historical event then to various traditions that sprang up concerning how the “ancestors of some Israelites, and particularly those associated with the priestly tribe, came out of Egypt.” The monolithic understanding of Passover in terms of a singular event is further complicated by the common perception that “the plagues narrative and Passover passage manifest the kinds of duplication and dissonance that suggest...the story is already the stuff of legend.” In light of these observations, one attempting to understand Passover’s development must first grapple with the question of this book’s authorship. This question leads immediately to the historical claim that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch. Although this traditional assertion has verifiable textual support beginning in the 500’s BCE, most scholars since 1700 CE have questioned this conclusion. They claim that Moses’ authorship is improbable due to stylistic variations

18 Greenstein, *Study Bible*, 84.
and inconsistencies within the extensive group of texts. In 1878, Julius Wellhausen developed the four source theory that attributed the Pentateuch to at least four authors characterized by the name they use for God and their writing style. Source theory remains a necessary aspect for understanding modern approaches to biblical scholarship, largely since “By 1900, many biblical scholars were convinced that Wellhausen had basically solved all the major problems involved in the growth of the first five books of the Bible.”

Despite scholarly confidence, however, the Bible remains an object for continued study, even as Wellhausen’s work was further refined. With the renewed and developing “interest in the typical ways of primitive folk culture, especially the factors involved in oral transmission of stories and information” during the twentieth century CE, the four source theory was soon overshadowed by an approach known as form criticism. Form critics argued that proponents of source criticism “often overlooked the oral poetry and the primitive forms still present in the Pentateuch.” In raising this and similar objections, scholars identified several characteristics of texts that exhibit a sort of collision between oral and written cultures: the existence of contradictions and repetitions, a “piece by piece” feel to the information versus a flowing narrative or a substantive plot, and the inclusion of “a few special stories...that were probably used in liturgy or religious instruction.” Where these characteristics are present in texts, form critics suggest that oral tradition and written pursuits have merged.

20 Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, 106.
21 Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, 106.
22 Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, 106.
Addressing the question of authorship in regards to Exodus therefore leads to the understanding that, as part of the Pentateuch, Exodus must be “understood then as a complex of many types of traditions, ranging from some still close to their oral origins...up to some very highly developed law codes.”23 Nevertheless, neither source criticism nor form criticism alone can explain the intricacies of these documents. An accurate approach suggests “that neither [of these critical approaches] stands alone.”24 Due to the development and debate over these two theories, the traditional claim that Moses is in some way responsible for the contents of the Pentateuch has once again become a qualified yet exciting possibility. In many ways, “modern criticism has come around almost full circle...[and as a result of source and form criticism,] while the Pentateuch was not actually written down by Moses – many of its traditions, legal practices and covenant forms may actually date back to the time of Moses, and their central importance for Israel may even have originated with him, or at least with the community of the exodus and conquest.”25 The developments, radical changes, and even interweaving theories about the author of the Passover account in Exodus enrich the ritual, demonstrating that the complex history of the text is only a portion of its full history as an oral myth.

Biblical Background and Exegesis ~ Passover:

Passover, or pesach in Hebrew, which literally translates to “pass over”, inextricably ties action—specifically one’s own actions in the ritual and an action by God generating a ritual response— to this celebrated moment. In the explanation of this ritual as it appears in the book of Exodus, Moses tells the Israelites that “This day shall be a day of remembrance for

23 Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, 107.
you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.\textsuperscript{26} An alternate translation identifies the noun ‘remembrance’ instead as the past tense verb ‘remembered’, and the \textit{JPS Torah Commentary} notes that it indicates a need “to be mindful, to pay heed, signifying a sharp focusing of attention upon someone or something. It embraces concern and involvement and is active, not passive...”\textsuperscript{27} The author (who the four source theory identifies as the P or Priestly source due to a particular attention to ritual acts) depicts Moses describing only the logistical aspects of the ritual after he has claimed that the primary activity for Passover is remembering.\textsuperscript{28} Nevertheless, the ritual is incomplete without a description of these specific actions. Moses instructs the leaders of Israel:

\begin{quote}
“Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning.”\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

It is clear from the textual presentation of the Passover that the ritual acts are put into place to help practitioners accomplish a more important task: making this first \textit{pesach} memorable. Nevertheless, the symbiotic relationship between action and remembering is clear; the physical act and order to remember are mutually reinforcing. Moses seems to recognize that an isolated order to remember will prove ineffective (or is easily forgotten), so he gives the Israelites both the mandate of remembering and a procedure designed to aid them as they do so.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{26} Exodus 12:14.
\textsuperscript{28} Boadt, \textit{Reading the Old Testament}, 107.
\textsuperscript{29} Exodus 12:21-22.
\end{flushleft}
Another important aspect of Passover is the expectation of promulgation that, within the text, Moses presents as an existing, formulated liturgy even as he foretells the event to the Israelites. Liturgy is that which is composed of “[l]iturgical words—by which I mean words that are a regular part of worship services.”30 ‘Ritual’ and ‘liturgy’ are very interconnected (often ritual includes liturgy), and yet there is a sense that liturgy refers distinctly to the words rather than actions. Still, liturgy’s repeating nature endows it with ritualistic qualities. For clarity, liturgy in this paper will refer most specifically to the repeated words themselves.

In Exodus, the imperative that future generations be taught the ritual act of Passover is built into the ritual itself. Moses explicitly stipulates that “‘when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this observance?’ you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’”31 Remembering is not just acclaimed as a personal goal for individuals. It is rather a vehicle for the community of people to pass on a certain rationale for their suffering, and their resultant understanding of God.

Tracing Passover’s History – Concluding Thoughts:

Today, there are an assortment of Haggadot, or liturgical frameworks/prayer services, for the various Jewish communities who celebrate Passover. Preservation remains important even as a wide range of congregational traditions are recognized as meaningful interpretations of the ritual’s history. Works that outline the Haggadah are likely to provide a preface that explains their intent to leave as much space as possible for varied opinion and practice. In this

31 Exodus 12:26-27.
way, these books of prayer can reach a wide range of audiences and preserve the main focus of their endeavor: worship. They recognize that participation in the Passover Seder is so important that certain differences are unimportant in comparison. This being said, however, even publishers of relatively modern Haggadahs maintain that certain similarities (such as reciting texts in their original Hebrew) must remain present for a Passover service to be “more vivid and meaningful.”32 There are many variations between Passover celebrations today, so complex that they cannot be adequately detailed here. These celebrations even portray the importance of communal remembrance differently from one another. However, from the Passover narrative’s particular vantage point of experienced suffering, remembering is both the method and the theme that vitalizes its stories, ritual actions, and prayers.

**Tracing Communion’s History – Ancient Meal Practices:**

In a similar yet distinct manner, Communion like Passover is significant to ancient understandings of memory. In its ancient textual forms, the former appears as a derivation of the latter meal practice in the early Judeo-Christian community. In a short but powerful exegetical study of the Lord’s Supper traditions as they appear in the New Testament, Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig argue that “[r]ather than to singularity, the New Testament witnesses to a multiplicity of liturgical practices. That multiplicity reflects the fact that for these churches liturgy was not seen as a means to preserve a relic from the past but rather as a dynamic way to address the church of the present.”33 Paul’s treatment of the Lord’s Supper in a letter to the Corinthians refers to their meeting together for meals, and urges them to do so

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with certain decorum in remembrance of words accredited to Jesus. The gospels talk about this meal differently from Paul, and even present differences from one to the other. Luke is the only gospel in which, like Paul’s letter, followers of Jesus (in this case the twelve male disciples) are urged to remember Jesus through similar meals in the future. The three synoptic gospels claim that Communion develops out of a Passover meal, whereas John describes this meal occurring prior to pesach. The authors of Mark, Matthew, and John recount this final meal between Jesus and his disciples as one of many narrative events that continues the thematic work of that particular gospel.

In light of these differences, one can argue that “like all texts in the Jesus tradition, [these texts concerning the Lord’s Supper]...are here because they are perceived to have specific meanings to early Christian communities.”34 Whereas it has been noted that Paul and the author of Luke represent Communion as something that practitioners should remember and participate in as a ritualized rite, the injunction to pass on the story in any particular manner does not appear in the other textual accounts. This fact has contributed to the observation by scholars that “the nature of this text tradition...can be called an ‘etiological legend.’ That is to say, it has taken this shape not as a record of a past event but as a means for explaining the origin and meaning of current practices in the community.”35 The gospel writers employ the communal memory of these stories to frame a probable narrative of its beginning. Seeing Communion in this light reveals memory’s integral role in ritual’s establishment and continuation.

**Tracing Communion’s History – Literary Contextualization:**

35 Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 42.
Another interesting fact to consider when one attempts to understand Communion’s history and resultant religious significance is that scholars almost universally acknowledge that the gospels were written after the time in which Paul wrote, since the former are placed anywhere from 60CE to the second century CE, and the latter generally from 50 to 60CE.36 One question that, for the sake of time and focus, this paper cannot fully address, but recognizes as potentially significant, concerns the curiosity around why Paul found it necessary to urge the repetition of a ritualized meal when three of the gospel writers did not. Furthermore, the gospels and Paul all provide room for variation inasmuch as they do not present a script for, or assign practitioners and/or church leaders parts to perform in, a ritual observance of Communion. Scholars Smith and Taussig note that “there is a certain dissonance between the form of the text tradition and the ritual practices it purports to mirror, for it only speaks of a meal presided over by Jesus; it does not specifically define how it is to function in a liturgical context.”37 It is possible that even the literary consideration of placing the Lord’s Supper within a narrative form speaks to the diversity of traditions existing around what would later become a ritual prescribed by orthodoxy. Paul and the gospel writers seem to acknowledge the need for interpretive room if such a story is to live on within the various demands of communities that are not all the same socially, culturally, or even theologically.

The Original Event?:

Communion often assumes a false identity since “tradition posits one original event, Jesus’ Last Supper, as the basis for all subsequent liturgy. In New Testament scholarship, however, it is widely acknowledged that we cannot reconstruct one version of that event, nor

37 Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 42.
even establish with certainty that there was such an event."\textsuperscript{38} The lack of historicity by no means indicates a lack of poignancy in the unquestionable enduring importance that this piece of Christian identity has and continues to play in the lives of practitioners. What it does mean is that “to the extent that we in the church today are part of an on-going history of interpretation, we should also allow the text to speak to us anew.”\textsuperscript{39} Within this frame, part of being true to one’s Christian identity is to value creativity and the multiplicity of interpretations surrounding ancient meal practices. This valuing must occur even as one cultivates an understanding of the significance of modern-day meal practices as shaped by the tradition of a monolithic orthodoxy that has been handed down. More often than not, biblical texts are interpreted in ways which misleadingly suggest that they present one literal, historical event to analyze, but Smith argues that this is not the case. In fact, evidence deriving from ancient meal practices suggests that there are myriad possibilities that attend the traditions of these types of rituals.

\textbf{The Significance of the Ritualized Meal:}

Simultaneously, the socio-political pressures active in the ancient world require scholars to recognize the varied and sometimes fraught perspectives in the texts from which they study Jewish and Christian rituals. The nature of a document often means that the agendas of particular authors or groups are preserved inevitably without the beneficial tempering of other conversation partners. Therefore, it is important to discern with biblical scholars that over time orthodoxy became an increasingly pointed concern for the early Christian community, and necessarily shapes how one can view the recognizable

\textsuperscript{38} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 15.

\textsuperscript{39} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 15.
institutionalizing of ritual. In light of these developments, it takes intentional effort to regain the broader cultural understandings that would have surrounded the earliest Communion rituals. From a textual perspective, it becomes centrally important that one "recognizes the origins of the meal practices of the early Christians in the social institution of the banquet which they shared with their culture."\textsuperscript{40}

Banquets were held frequently and served as a social venue in the Greco-Roman culture of which the early Christians were a part. People would band together for all sorts of reasons, such as social entertainment with the added benefit that each attendee who paid dues was guaranteed to receive honorable funeral provisions. The symposia popularized by philosophers are yet another example of how important banquets were in ancient civic, intellectual, and religious life.\textsuperscript{41} In a useful comparison between these meals of the Jesus movement and Passover, Smith and Taussig note how "the passover liturgy in the Mishnah (\textit{Pesahim} 1.1\textendash 9), ... gives an outline of things to be said and interpretations to be applied, but the event is not reducible to this script, as anyone who has attended a Jewish Passover can testify. This event is a festive meal, with all the attendant meanings that such meals carry."\textsuperscript{42}

In fact, Jesus and his followers would have celebrated Passover as part of their ritualized meals together, demonstrating how Jewish practices functioned within and were affected by Greco-Roman culture. As scholars look at ritual development over time, keeping in mind the cultural context of the earliest known textual accounts often produces questions regarding their relevance or relationship to current ritual practice. Smith and Taussig address the shift away from what might be termed the original identity of liturgy when they critique how "life

\textsuperscript{40} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 37.
\textsuperscript{41} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 28.
\textsuperscript{42} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 43.
and fulfillment should be found [in the liturgy of a church], but too often today liturgy seems stale and lacking in vitality.\textsuperscript{43} The burden of this critique lies not on whether ritual and its accompanying liturgy is meaningful, but rather on maintaining and recognizing its meaningfulness. One must ask with other scholars “If, as we have said, liturgy today has about it a lifelessness, as if it is a rote repetition of an ancient rite, yet on the other hand we must acknowledge that all liturgy has meaning, how do we reconcile these two positions?”\textsuperscript{44}

Ritual – Two Theories:

In an attempt to address the above question, it is helpful to reflect on two influential theories concerning ritual today. A traditional, conservative interpretation of these texts that is deeply invested in perpetuating a monolithic interpretation of the ‘event’ links Communion’s actual occurrence with its modern relevance. The suggestion that many traditions merged into a single story and give increased significance to an extant practice of a community troubles such an interpretation, and therefore unveils a probable motive for past resistance to it. Perhaps one can even gain insight into the story’s initial generation by considering how various stories and interpretations leave greater room for questions and doubt; if a community wishes to eliminate this room, an effective manner of doing so would be to embrace a single tradition as uniquely authoritative from the very beginning.

As “Liturgy has come to be dominated by an over-concern for the idea of ‘orthodoxy’ or correct doctrine,” the historical accuracy of an event has almost superseded the importance of participation in ritual memorial.\textsuperscript{45} The importance of ritual has been emphasized through oral tradition, the letters of a traveling evangelist, and again within community narratives

\textsuperscript{43} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 12.
\textsuperscript{44} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 17.
\textsuperscript{45} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 16.
telling the life of Jesus. While each of these purveyors of the Lord’s Supper demonstrates
the interaction of a people with a story that continues to exist over time and in various
contexts, the potential for the vitality and relevancy of this myth to affect people in their
present reality has somehow been denigrated as a thing of the past or confined to church.
Whereas the banquet was necessarily part of the fabric of existence for early Christians, today
many people do not recognize the complexity and diversity of its role. Unfortunately, the
tradition suffers from a tendency for “[o]ur traditional way of looking at liturgy...[to create]
an environment in which creative interaction with the culture and the lives of the people is
proscribed.”

Two main camps of thought have emerged concerning ritual as a result: The first
appears in Smith and Taussig’s analysis of Eucharistic tradition entitled *Many Tables: The
Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today*, stating that the “predisposition towards a
particular view of liturgy has influenced the way in which we have read ancient texts. We
have read them in terms of the single line of tradition. We have thus found there only what
we were looking for – warrant for a narrowed sense of correct doctrine”; the second claims
that a backlash of “narrow and negative view[s] of ritual that is endemic to our culture,
especially that aspect of our culture that is dominated by a traditional Protestant perspective”
has created a “vigorous anti-ritualistic” sentiment among many. These perspectives are
related, yet separate because one finds ritual a corroborator of order and unity in a way that
institutional logistics makes appealing; if ritual underscores orthodoxy, then it reinforces the
standards and views that those in power (or even simply those who adhere to a particular way

46 Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 16.
47 Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 16.
of thinking) find unthreatening. Through this understanding of ritual generally and Communion specifically today, the way modern practitioners often interact with the story today is only to pass along what some conceive as an untouchable, unchanging tradition based on and important because of historical facts. Noticing the cultural context of Communion and the ways it changes over time draws attention to the fact that little has been irrevocably solidified through the religious texts that presumably move toward such an end.

The other perspective stems from “[t]he long history of Protestantism [which] witnesses to the need for continual watch on the tendency of ritual form to harden and replace religious feeling. In wave upon wave the Reformation has continued to thunder against the empty encrustation of ritual.”48 Through this line of thinking, religious experience becomes almost completely internalized, and external motions are more susceptible to suspicion of falsity, empty performance, and in a sense to pompousness and ego. By closely examining Paul’s treatment of what comes to be known as the Lord’s Supper in his letter to the Corinthian church, Smith and Taussig counter this modern view. They echo Carruther’s claim about ancient understandings of memory as they maintain that instead of ritual having the tendency to cheapen religious experience, eliminating ritual actually impoverishes to the religious ideal of loving one’s neighbor and community. In Paul’s letter, “the symbolism is that the sharing of bread together serves to ritualize the bonds that make them [those partaking of the meal] into a community or ‘body.’”49 The ‘staged’ experience of community interrupts the seemingly natural self-centered consciousness of the individual. Actions focus on remembering and explicitly connect to having a better religious life, even as they repeat in

48 Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 17.
49 Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 65.
order for that betterment to occur consistently. The religious community becomes a catalyst for perpetual progression toward the constant awareness of one’s relationship to God, identity, and timeless connectivity to other practitioners. While objections to ritual’s tendency for empty action are not easily dismissed, Smith and Taussig’s argument offers a compelling indication that sharing the bread makes actual the internal connections of a group—not the other way around.

Biblical Background and Exegesis - Communion:

As noted earlier, the synoptic gospels present the ritual of Communion with intentional similarities to Passover, since these texts claim that the Last Supper was actually a Passover meal. The author of the gospel of Luke credits Jesus himself with acknowledging the association of these acts of remembrance with those of the pesach. The author quotes Jesus as telling his apostles how “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” As soon as he acknowledges the importance of participating in this ritual with others, Jesus begins reframing the memory that will be associated with this particular consumption of bread and wine.

According to the account presented by the text, Jesus goes through the logistical motions of the ritual as he takes “a cup, and after giving thanks” begins to simultaneously narrate the significance of these motions. Importantly, however, Communion and especially Luke’s description of Communion are completely absent from the earliest sayings attributed to Jesus in the source known as Q. In fact, due to the increasing belief of scholars that the

Gospel attributed to Luke is actually the latest gospel, probably written in the second century CE, the gospel writer's account offers unique insight into the theological developments that have occurred in the time after Paul's direct influence and the destruction of the temple. By the time Jesus took up the bread and the wine— the usual elements of Shabbat (or the Sabbath) in the Jewish tradition that would come to have new significance for future Christians— the Jesus of the narrative had everything in place to describe exactly what the disciples are to remember, and by clear extension due to its link to Passover, what they are to pass on for posterity to remember. It is at this point in the narrative that "he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"53

As rich textual interpretations concerning Communion are formulated, an increasing number of scholars insist that even if the ritual really is a transformation of the Passover meal as Matthew, Mark, and Luke suggest, "that meal should still be viewed in the context of the table fellowship that was a distinctive feature of Jesus' ministry."54 The habit of Jesus and his followers of coming together for food and teaching is repeatedly documented in the gospels to the extent that it can be responsibly hypothesized that Jesus preferred these teaching environments. This teaching form makes sense considering that the meal practices in the ancient Greco-Roman world recommend themselves to religious/philosophical symposia of this sort, where a meal would be eaten first, followed by a discussion or lesson of some kind,

54 Williams, Harper Collins, s.v. "Lord's Supper, the."
and concluded with drinking and the passing of the cup.\textsuperscript{55} Even though not all of one’s meals would have consisted of banquets joined with teaching, the frequency of such a practice would have encouraged participants to see the two as increasingly linked. In other words, after regularly eating and listening to Jesus teach, it is probable that the practice of eating in general would have contextually triggered an unofficial time in which followers of Jesus naturally recall the teaching from the previous night, etc. Hence the Pauline rhetoric that banqueters remember Jesus “as often” as they eat bread and drink wine seems entirely possible, and even orchestrated by Jesus’ teaching style.\textsuperscript{56}

In this context, rhetoric signifies particular uses of language, whether that is for persuasion or aesthetics. There is an attention to language in Paul’s letter which is distinct from liturgy that invites literary analysis. Rhetoric in this and other biblical texts frames the liturgy in a narrative structure that nuances the reason that participating in these rituals is important. In a manner similar to the way that some modern practitioners inevitably link a potluck with a Sunday morning church service, the Jewish followers of Jesus would have shifted and/or added to their understanding of the elements of Passover, linking the bread and wine more and more closely with the particular teachings of this rabbi. Because all of these nuanced aspects of Communion are easily missed when cultural context is overlooked, memory reminds Biblical scholars and practitioners that “this event is a festive meal, with all the attendant meanings that such meals carry.”\textsuperscript{57}

Not only does the preceding passage from Luke describe a ritual action, but it ascribes certain lines of speech to Jesus which continue to be spoken by priests and ministers as part of

\textsuperscript{55} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 29.
\textsuperscript{56} 1 Cor 11:25, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{57} Smith and Taussig, \textit{Many Tables}, 43.
Communion liturgy today. However, more than likely these words did not originate from Luke’s account, or even Luke’s source. Evidence suggests that these words were already being used in churches as followers of the Way gathered to break bread together. While it is possible that Luke’s author had the letter to the Corinthian church beside him or her while writing the gospel, it is far more likely that the liturgy included had been effectively circulated via oral tradition and memory. For comparison’s sake between the two liturgical passages, Paul’s letter to the Corinthian’s asserts that he:

“received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after super, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

58 Luke’s later date is further corroborated by the fact that its author leaves out Paul’s characteristically apocalyptic tone concerning Jesus’ impending return. Whereas Paul lived and evangelized with an expectation of Christ’s imminent return, the Christians of the second century were coming to terms theologically with how much time had already passed. Yet despite the length of time and other theological differences between the two works, both 1 Corinthians and Luke quote Jesus as saying and showing his followers how to remember him. As these liturgical phrases are repeated ceremonially over time, memory is both the focal point and the means of the ritual’s transmission.

Bridging the Gap- Ritual as Common Ground:

When one reads texts written by those who lived in ancient/biblical times, the rhetoric of these texts allows a certain common understanding of memory to emerge. This

58 1 Cor 11:23-26.
understanding can therefore be analyzed via the manuscripts which portray and preserve it. Ritual is not only a useful category for examining the significance of memory in a religious context, but it has also proved to be useful for the study of religion generally. Even though “the study of religion as a sociocultural phenomenon has emerged only gradually from among long-entrenched and barely conscious theological assumptions, the focus on ritual has helped to elaborate theoretical models that could examine the dynamics of religion apart from questions concerning the truth of falsity of doctrinal beliefs.”59 In other words, ritual encompasses varied interpretations of belief in the more objective aspects of a religious process. Affording a space or common ground between practitioner and academic, ritual opens itself up as a place for valuable conversation. The best of both positions can be shared through ritual. The discipline and thoroughness of uninhibited questioning can enrich one’s faith experience, just as the dedication, personal investment, and actual experience of the ritual subject provides irreplaceable information for a scholarly examination.

Ritual is as much about remembering one’s own culture as it is concerned with remembering an earlier culture, since one can only remember through one’s own cultural lens. One’s re-visioning of ritual exists and, in fact, persists, in communal culture. By framing the demand that future generations remember certain events in a certain way as God’s expectation, the language of these ritual accounts underscores the need to participate and pass on the memory. If a memory is tied with a divine action on behalf of humanity, then one is indebted to God. As one who owes something to God and yet continues to receive from God, the demand to remember is one met with thankfulness. Forgetfulness, in this context, is essentially ungratefulness; a denial of God’s concern for God’s people, or perhaps more

59 Bell, Ritual, 22.
scandalously, a people’s concern for their God. When a communal attitude toward God is
an important aspect of how a people think of themselves, framing the importance of memory
in a story about God allows that story to continue to shape and ‘revise’ the story/lived
experience of that group.

Ritual as a Mystical Experience:

One way that both Jewish and Christian practitioners express their thankful
remembrance to God is through devotional recitations. An example of a reason for this
association appears in the letters of the French religious philosopher, Simone Weil to her
religious mentor, the Reverend Father Perrin. For Weil, ritualized practice provides a
profound experience of unity with God. She explains her experience of reciting the Our
Father from memory in Greek on a regular, disciplined basis. The prayer she recited appears
as follows:

"Πατερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. Ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομα σου, γεννήθη ἡ βασιλεία
σου, γενήθη τῷ τῇ εὐλογίᾳ σου, καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ γῇς. Τὸν αρτὸν
ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δῶς ἡμῖν οὕτως. Καὶ αφεῖς ἡμῖν τὰ ὁφειλημματα ἡμῶν, ὡς
καὶ ἡμεῖς αφίσμεν τοῖς ὁφειλημματοῖς ἡμῶν. Καὶ μὴ εἰσενεγκής ἡμᾶς εἰς
πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥυσίπατα ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ, αμήν." 60

The “infinite sweetness of this Greek text” overwhelms her, and she claims that the “effect of
this practice is extraordinary and surprises me every time, for, although I experience it each
day, it exceeds my expectation at each repetition.” 61 She experiences an explicit moment of
connection with God through this combination of ritual and the “marvelously beautiful”
words of her liturgical practice. 62 Her letters describe these moments of prayer as times in
which “the very first words tear my thoughts from my body and transport it to a place outside

60 Matthew 6:9b-12.
62 Weil, Waiting for God, 121.
space where there is neither perspective nor point of view. ... Sometimes, also, during this recitation or at other moments, Christ is present with me in person, but his presence is infinitely more real, more moving, more clear than on that first occasion when he took possession of me.\textsuperscript{63} Weil leaves little doubt in her letter that reciting the Our Father has a mystical effect for her, where such an effect is understood as a powerful connection with the divine. The regularity and the self-propulsion of this act of remembering and reciting "with absolute attention" allows her to experience the presence of God/the divine in a way that is usually, if not traditionally, deemed impossible.\textsuperscript{64} Weil provides an excellent example of the fitness of ritualized practice for spurring this sort of experience. Her writing suggests that memory results in connectivity within the context of ritual, whether that is connection to God, other ritual participants throughout time, or both.

Weil regularly discussed the value of the Eucharist in her work. As she intellectually engaged with the Catholic understanding of this sacrament, she found that "[t]he virtue of the dogma of the real presence lies in its very absurdity. Except for the infinitely touching symbolism of food, there is nothing in a morsel of bread that can be associated with our thought of God."\textsuperscript{65} Weil recognizes the fact that comparing bread to God produces what can only be understood as a literary conceit; it is almost obscenely ridiculous to compare such a perishable morsel to an omnipotent, eternal deity. Because Communion does not make empirical sense as it attempts to connect humanity and divinity, Weil emphasizes the importance of the liturgy that accompanies the explanation of the ritual in these religious texts. As a result of Communion's "absurdity," "the conventional character of the divine

\textsuperscript{63} Weil, Waiting for God, 29.
\textsuperscript{64} Weil, Waiting for God, 29.
\textsuperscript{65} Weil, Waiting for God, 121-122.
presence is evident. Christ can be present in such an object only by convention.\textsuperscript{66} Implicit in the word ‘convention’ is the idea that something has been done repeatedly, and therefore frequency suggests a continual, lasting moment of connection. The very sense of something continuing requires the process of remembering, since without it one can only conceptualize the present and perhaps the future.

Weil links rituals like Communion to an acknowledgement of the past, or a moment of remembrance, even though she does not phrase it in these words. Perhaps more importantly, however, she goes on to distinguish between “human conventions” and “the convention by which religious things are pure.”\textsuperscript{67} The former, she claims “are useless if they are not connected with motives that impel people to observe them. In themselves they are simple abstractions; they are unreal and have no effect.”\textsuperscript{68} Immediately, this type of convention excludes the rituals of Passover and Communion, since they are framed by a narrative describing the significance that they should hold for persons who follow the God of Abraham. Exodus, Luke, and 1 Corinthians are all self-conscious texts in that they work in conjunction with these narratives to provide the motive for ritual observance, and directly present the means and expectation that that observance will occur.

Because a ritual connected with certain specifications for how to eat a meal (be it the Passover lamb or the Communion bread) avoids the abstraction that Weil attributes to human conventions, one must read about the second category of convention as descriptive of such rituals. Weil says that “the convention by which religious things are pure is ratified by God

\textsuperscript{66} Weil, Waiting for God, 121-122.
\textsuperscript{67} Weil, Waiting for God, 121.
\textsuperscript{68} Weil, Waiting for God, 121.
himself."69 “Religious things” are therefore only important because of their connection with God.70 This idea differs somewhat from the understanding that ritual is valuable because it reflects the social process of a community, and yet these two perspectives can support one another. Their combined strength derives from the fact that both recognize that something greater than the individual is at work in ritual. While one names this ‘greater than’ as God, the other suggests that it is a group of practitioners.

Weil’s characterization of these rituals as divine conventions becomes even more provocative when she credits them with being “effective...containing virtue and [each as] operating of itself.”71 This final concept—“operating of itself”—suggests that these rituals are somehow self-contained, unattached to human manipulation, and are themselves processes capable of producing a religiously significant experience.72 Weil sums up the importance of such a convention by pointing out the importance of the tangible aspects of ritualized remembrance. She claims that “the Eucharist, or something of the kind, is indispensable for man; the presence of perfect purity is indispensable for him. For man can only fix his full attention on something tangible, and he needs sometimes to fix his attention upon perfect purity.”73 According to Weil, the elements of bread and wine increase the efficacy of Communion’s purposeful ability to cause practitioners to remember divine acts on their behalf.

The mediating role of memory shows up in Weil’s comments concerning the Eucharist as she argues that being part of Christ’s body by being part of the church is not as important

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69 Weil, Waiting for God, 121.
70 Weil, Waiting for God, 121.
71 Weil, Waiting for God, 121.
72 Weil, Waiting for God, 121.
73 Weil, Waiting for God, 123.
as the understanding that humanity and divinity are connected in a profound yet mysterious way. Weil recognizes that although “the Mystical Body of Christ is very attractive...our true dignity is not to be parts of a body, even though it be a mystical one, even though it be that of Christ. It consists in this, that...we no longer live in ourselves, but Christ lives in us; so that through our perfection Christ, in his integrity and in his indivisible unity, becomes in a sense each one of us, as he is completely in each host.”74 The difference she explains is no less powerful for its subtlety. The relationship between the whole and a part is one that Weil claims does not exist in the case of the ritual form of Christ’s body. Furthermore, whereas a body indicates intimate attachment to its parts, unity is a wholly different matter wherein the distinction between that which is human and that which is divine becomes supernaturally amorphous for a time. Weil’s argument about ritual is not unlike Smith and Taussig’s focus on the importance of the community for giving ritual continued significance.

Thin Places:

Another way to describe Weil’s understanding of the Eucharist and her experience of reciting the Lord’s Prayer is with what Marcus Borg calls “‘thin places’”– a phrase he intentionally borrows from the Celtic Christian traditions that sprang up around the fifth century CE.75 He makes it clear that what he designates as a borrowed “metaphor” is still relevant for Christian practitioners today.76 He also notes that a heightened, revived interest is evident as “Celtic spirituality is being rediscovered in our time.”77 Despite claims of popularity, however, Borg carefully provides the long, example-laden explanation which this

74 Weil, Waiting for God, 36.
75 Borg, The Heart of Christianity, 155.
76 Borg, The Heart of Christianity, 155.
77 Borg, The Heart of Christianity, 155.
term merits. In his various descriptions of what can serve as a thin place, Borg makes it clear that often such spaces take on their particularly moving qualities as a result of how they are remembered. On the one hand, he describes these as "places where the veil momentarily lifts, and we behold God, experience the one in whom we live, all around us and within us."\(^7^8\)

Clearly God is not only a surrounding presence, but one that can be sensed within – one who is in fact a part of one’s self, even though God is also illimitable, containing all of life and living.

In making this explanation, Borg draws on the understanding the sacramental aspect of ritual, and finds it useful to employ "sacramental language. [to declare that] a thin place is a sacrament of the sacred, a mediator of the sacred, a means whereby the sacred becomes present to us. A thin place is a means of grace."\(^7^9\) Thin places have their "home in a particular way of thinking about God....[which] sees God, ‘the More,’ as the encompassing Spirit in which everything is."\(^8^0\) Therefore, sacrament is a helpful concept for Borg as both a scholar and practitioner to explain that "God is not somewhere else; but ‘right here.’"\(^8^1\) The closeness of God is remarkable as a theological perspective that does not oppose, but rather complements a tradition which often defines God (the holy) as something strictly other than human (the sinful).

Borg maintains the idea of God’s nearness to humanity and human experience even as he describes God through language that acknowledges One greater than oneself. For example, Borg continues the description of thin places by pointing to "words attributed to

\(^7^8\) Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 155-156.
\(^7^9\) Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 156.
\(^8^0\) Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 155.
\(^8^1\) Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 155.
Paul in the book of Acts, [which say that] God is ‘the one in whom we live and move and have our being.’  

God is more than ‘atmospheric’ in these words, and in Borg’s interpretative placement of them within his rhetorical argument. Nothing is beyond the norm of human existence if it is “in” God that one lives (like a house) and moves (like the world in general); however, when “we... have our being” in God, the usual understanding of a static, detached environment can no longer be fully explicative of what it means to be.  

God, in Borg’s use this biblical passage, seems to be both the life source and the environment in which life becomes a reality. Borg urges readers to similarly recognize the importance of noting “how the words work: we are in God, we live in God, we move and have our being in God.”  

The Importance of Liturgy in Mystical Experience:  

Further underscoring the central role of memory in the human experience of the sacred, Borg explores how “Liturgical words...can become thin places.”  

Directly addressing Simone Weil’s experience of reciting the Our Father in a ritualized manner, he cannot talk about her mystical experience of being in the presence of Christ without memory coming into the conversation. He acknowledges that  

“When we say words that we know ‘by heart,’ it is not an intellectual exercise in which we think about the meaning of the words. Liturgical words are not about intellectual content. They serve a different function...the point is to let the drone of these words that we know by heart become a thin place. For Simone Weil...saying the Lord’s Prayer consistently brought her into a thin place, and not because she was paying attention to the meaning of the words.”  

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84 Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 155.  
85 Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 158.  
To know anything by heart, it must at one point be new to someone and become familiar over time via repetition. Borg’s claim is that memorization does not devalue the words or their recitation. In many Passover and Communion services, the written liturgy composed of parts for the rabbi, priest, or minister and responses for the congregants lends itself to memorization through its cadence and regular performance. Each aspect of ritual works in tandem to direct the practitioner’s attention toward God for whom the liturgy is understood to be spoken. The words of the liturgy are certainly important since practitioners find continuing reason to articulate them. Yet as time goes on, they become increasingly useful not for the meaning attached to them, but for their role in ritual process. Because the once foreign words have become as easy to call to mind as one’s own, the practitioner’s focus can shift from the words to the experience of God. The undiminished importance of liturgy is imperative for the continued, meaningful recitation that eventually allows it to facilitate an interaction with the divine rather than the words alone.

Memory’s Relationship to Words – Oral Tradition and Written Text:

The various Bible translations and Haggadot today each effectively and uniquely communicate the importance of remembering in Passover and Communion, and signify the potential for memory’s religious merit to become apparent through the written word. Nevertheless, scholars acknowledge the probability that these accounts are predated and therefore affected by sustained oral traditions. What the written and oral traditions have in common is the word, [λόγος (logos) in Greek], demonstrating that an arrangement of spoken or written words ordered by the grammar of a common language effectually reveals something about remembering. There are many practical reasons that this phenomenon
becomes a tool for better understanding memory’s role in religious, ritualistic contexts. There is a transparent value for communal bonds amongst the Israelites, who are encouraged in Exodus to pass along their memories via the scripted and spontaneous questions asked by their children. By voicing the act of remembrance, the Jews do more than supply information; they go beyond dutiful response and make memory inextricable from dialogue. The “central purpose” of repeating the liturgical words spoken during Passover is for those words “to become a thin place where our hearts are opened...[creating] a sense of another world.” 

Making a similar point in specific reference to the Christian tradition, Borg explains that the connection between the process of remembering and language shapes one’s perception and experience of reality. He underscores the fact that language and ritualized religious experiences impact how one actually lives. He elaborates on this idea by claiming that:

“being Christian means living within Christianity as a ‘cultural-linguistic tradition.’ It is a little bit like being part of a national group with its language and culture and ethos....So also to be Christian means to live within a Christian cultural-linguistic world, a Christian ethos, and to be increasingly shaped by it. In this, the Bible plays a special role. Its stories and visions and dreams shape our sense of who God is, who we are, and what life is about. More fully, Christian identity formation means living within the Christian tradition as a whole as a metaphor and sacrament of the sacred.”

Identity and metaphor stand out in Borg’s analysis, because he deems the former the purpose of ritual and the latter (a literary device) equivalent to sacrament. Perhaps the most important aspect of identity to examine is the idea of authenticity where the commemorated events of particular rituals are concerned. Like Smith and Taussig, Borg makes liturgical forms of remembrance key in allowing the world, or one’s physical life, to have a direct affect on one’s

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internal life, which these writers refer to as a life motivated by "faith." Borgia’s claim is therefore better understood by looking again to the argument that a negative change has occurred as "we have let our emphasis on preserving traditional forms and expressions overrule attempts to give vital expression to the life and faith of contemporary participants." This loss of identity, or shift in emphasis within liturgical traditions, appears particularly true in the Eucharistic liturgy. Unnecessary though it may be, there is a disconnect not only between self and world, but between traditional interpretations of liturgy and "the aesthetic and symbolic language of today’s culture." Ritual’s efficacy, therefore, through the command to remember in both text and oral tradition, stems from the fact that language itself is a combination of internal and external grammars, or patterns of organization that are understood through convention and repetition, but also evolvement. Languages change over time, phonetically, semantically, grammatically, and even reverse rules that at one point seemed irrecoverably fixed. Notwithstanding these transformations, language endures, and people continue to interact and create. Smith and Taussig stipulate that "for liturgy to communicate the principles derived from the tradition, it must be in a form that coheres with the social and cultural experiences and expectations of the people." The close relationship between the effectiveness of language and memory suggests that culturally-linked change over time does not hinder, but rather ensures the ability of ritual to continue having profound religious meaning for practitioners today.

Conclusion:

89 Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 12.
90 Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 12.
91 Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 13.
92 Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 13.
93 Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 14.
As practitioners of Judaism and Christianity are instructed to remember through the rituals of Passover and Communion, it becomes obvious that to get at the significance of these instructions, one must examine religious texts within their historical context, what they have come to mean over time, and how these understandings came to be. Literary analysis, therefore, is a crucial method for coming to understand memory as a community-shaping, connective framework that allows for re-visioning through rhetoric and re-vitalization through liturgy. Memory itself is foundational as a process in ritual, and while it has previously been viewed as subordinate to the broader importance of ritual, it is rather itself the impetus for, basis of, and the only truly enduring quality of these sacraments. Participating in the process of remembering is thereby a participation in ritual activity, and vice versa. Ritual, liturgy, and rhetoric therefore, are the continual inheritances of one culture to another, and a serious look at their historical personalities demonstrates that their value results from present communities who succeed in adding another layer of practiced remembering to its legacy.
Chapter 2:  
The Framework of Memory: The Importance of Judeo-Christian Ritual and Liturgy in *Song of Solomon* and *Night*

Various authors throughout the centuries have examined, relied on, and described memory, trying to more fully discern and express an ability that impacts the human experience, and therefore religious and secular conversations alike. The Holocaust memoir *Night* by Elie Wiesel and the novel *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison provide excellent examples of how ancient understandings of memory from the Judeo-Christian traditions still influence Western literature today. The stark importance of community for these religions and their ritual development (or, in some cases, deconstruction) appears overwhelmingly true for the main characters of these literary works. While *Song of Solomon* and *Night* maintain significant differences from one another in genre, subject, and more, a comparative reading of these texts makes it impossible to ignore how easily Wiesel and Milkman become participants in rituals, even as they maintain (intentional?) distinction from religious ritual. As they engage in cultural practices of remembering past suffering, numerous connections between Jewish and Christian ritual, liturgy, and rhetoric surface. To read these texts with a background of how ritual works in Judaism and/or Christianity displays the obvious impact of ritual on culture, allowing readers to trace the conscious and perhaps even subconscious echoes of memory in the work of modern writers.

At one point or another in the course of Morrison's novel, the narrator describes important moments in which each of the main characters engage in a process of remembering. In these moments, the process of remembering functions as a vital reiteration of character identity, and provides a reference point similar to that sought within a worship or liturgical
context. Her characters, like religious practitioners, use memories to gauge the desirability of their present reality. The self-evaluation spurred by memory becomes a plan of action for the character, based on the desired realignment that is envisioned in the moment of remembrance. By repeating, altering, and developing the song about Solomon throughout the novel, the text opens itself up for any reader familiar with liturgical practices to notice similar characteristics within the novel. Whether or not the novel elicits these parallels intentionally, these liturgical qualities act as a catalyst for memory and exemplify how memory works similarly in both religious and secular literature.

However, before further exploring these claims concerning *Song of Solomon*, it is important to address a critical binary that arises in the subject matter of these texts. Mary Carruthers stresses this need as she explains, "Whereas now geniuses are said to have creative imagination which they express in intricate reasoning and original discovery, in earlier times they were said to have richly retentive memories which they expressed in intricate reasoning and original discovery."94 The distinctions between the importance placed on remembering in the novel and ancient texts is also a critical component in this analysis, but perhaps cannot be discerned as meaningfully until the similarities are explored. For a modern reader attempting to understand the full extent of the novel's parallels to the key subjects of ancient texts, she or he must pay particular attention to any cultivation within the text to place memory on par with work of imaginative fiction itself. In *Song of Solomon*, this cultivation is thematically explicit for the purpose of cultural reclamation.

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A gaping hole would stand in any discussion of memory and the religious qualities (as understood through the Jewish and Christian traditions) it takes on in modern, secular literature, if one does not consider the questions raised in written accounts of the Holocaust. This literature brings with it an adamant demand for religious and secular persons alike to remember and prevent history from repeating itself. Night is among such texts, and demonstrates the impact that ancient understandings of memory have on the present in a way that complements and yet distinguishes itself from Song of Solomon. Night is a memoir written by Elie Wiesel, a Jewish man who has lived to tell about his experience of the Holocaust as a prisoner in several concentration/death camps. As in Morrison’s novel, Wiesel’s first work speaks of remembering in a manner that becomes clearer as one examines its place in the rhetorical, ritual, and liturgical framework of religion (particularly, Judaism).

Although more than one critic has endeavored to discuss the connections between Morrison’s work and the Judeo-Christian themes she employs within it, still more is needed. The same is true concerning the religious significance of Jewish themes in Wiesel’s writing. Despite Carruther’s assertion that memory is recognizably innovative, there has yet to be an effort that acknowledges both the religious aspects of these modern, secular works and the similar importance they attach to the role of memory as that which is operative in ancient, religious texts. If ancient understandings of memory actually hold true in modern texts, then nowhere should the parallel effects of memory be more apparent than in the creative work of literature.

It is important to begin with the understanding that even the act of passing on memories reshapes those memories with the particular intentions of a legacy. For
transmission to occur, the memory is shaped into story-form, altering it in some way from its original. From this point, the story might be abbreviated, rearranged for emphasis, or any number of other variations made based on the rememberer's agenda. Since "in all of Morrison's novels, meaning is multiple; contradictions stand intact...[and] the multiple possibilities of interpretation" are a part of her effective and acclaimed literary approach, there is a sense of inevitability, if not necessity, for this perpetual giving-up of the "power of history-making" by the present storyteller in deference to that of the story's next transmitter.\(^{95}\)

As a novel that describes, even as it participates in, storytelling, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* centers around the life of Macon 'Milkman' Dead III, his family, and the relationship he has to other members of the local black community. These characters live on Not Doctor Street in North Carolina during the early to mid 1900's, but even this street name addresses the white domination that keeps the black community from creating or maintaining its history. The narrator notes that:

"Some of the city legislators, whose concern for appropriate names and the maintenance of the city's landmarks was the principal part of their political life, saw to it that 'Doctor Street' [a name given to Mains Avenue by patients of the city's only black doctor] was never used in any official capacity...they had notices posted in the stores, barbershops, and restaurants in that part of the city saying that the avenue...had always been and would always be known as Mains Avenue and not Doctor Street."\(^{96}\)

It is a credit to this black community's humor and wit that they resist the attempts of white society to monopolize the power of naming by calling the road 'Not Doctor Street.' Yet this situation simultaneously exemplifies how their subjugation even extends into the realm of words. The various names for this contested street signal a battle of authority, and the group

\(^{95}\) Linda Krumhotz, "Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Morrison's *Beloved.*" *African American* 26 (1992), 398.
unable to assert the name of the street experiences displacement there, since changing the name takes some of the familiarity wrought by memory with it. Intrinsic is a struggle between the spoken and the written word, which symbolically pits cultural storytelling and the creation of communal, spoken terminology against the elite power of the written word. That which is written possesses the advantage of recognition by the authorities in place to shape, name, and manipulate history, or create laws.

The narrator deems the choice to call Doctor Street/Mains Avenue “Not Doctor Street... a way [for community members] to keep their memories alive and please the city legislators as well.” 97 It is not incidental, however that Morrison chooses the written form of a novel to describe ‘Not Doctor Street,’ even as this street typifies the challenge of the spoken versus the written word. That which is spoken is the communal, memory-holding word, whereas the written connotes the legalistic, dispossessing terminology of the oppressive race in power. Morrison provides further examples of the power associated with the spoken word as she inserts lines from a song about a man called Solomon (although the first few times the song appears he is called Sugarman) throughout the novel. Legend credits Solomon with flying away from his wife, twenty one boys, and home ostensibly in order to return to Africa. Parts of this song appear six times during the course of the novel, creating the sense of an oral tradition that effectively works within the text to reclaim the written word as it often reads, "O Sugarman done fly away/ Sugarman done gone/ Sugarman cut across the sky/ Sugarman gone home...." 98

97 Morrison, Song of Solomon 4.  
98 Morrison, Song of Solomon 6.
Although the plot of *Song of Solomon* reveals the repeatedly oppressive and detrimental effect of written documents on black cultural identity, the nature of its form as a novel is an integral part of the reclamation that Morrison is able to enact. The creation of a novel is an intentional act, and Morrison's topics are far from accidental. By using a book to effectively describe the potential problems that the written word can pose for a community, and by associating freedom with the oral tradition created within the text itself, the novel presents a perpetual challenge to the ability of written words (or even spoken words) to have the same disenfranchising authority ever again. As a result of the relationship between form and content, the written and the oral can work for the benefit of Milkman's community.

Even in these early stages of Morrison's novel, the influence of the ancient textual roles of memory is apparent. Just as the book of Exodus re-enacts the details of the pre-existing Passover ritual, *Song of Solomon* takes on added importance for the community it describes due to the oral history of its now written stories and songs. Memory is a key element in perpetuating oral tradition, since without its involvement there would simply be a newly articulated story rather than one that has been passed down. Exodus frames itself as requiring the accompaniment of an oral tradition as Moses instructs the Israelites to remember aloud the events leading up to their freedom, and how God "'struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" Another ancient text, the gospel attributed to Luke, focuses on Communion as a commemoration of the bodily sacrifice of an underclass Jew who dies at the hands of Roman imperial executioners. In the passage describing the Last Supper, Jesus is credited with foreseeing his impending death, since he declares of the bread, "'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the

99 Exodus 12:27b.
cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my
blood.’” 100 By presenting Jesus as knowingly sacrificing himself for his disciples and
followers, this story and its liturgy give a persecuted sect a tradition which strengthens rather
than destroys it. This same ability to shape communal memory is exactly the function of
Solomon’s song in the novel.

Morrison even weaves these biblical themes into the title of the novel itself. Also
known sometimes as the Song of Songs, this poetic book of the Hebrew Bible discusses a
highly interpretive (and interpreted) form of love, producing a subtle claim from the
beginning of Morrison’s text that her novel will do the same. Song of Solomon certainly is
about love, and specifically a love that embraces members and aspects of one’s cultural
heritage. Notably, however, the parallels with the biblical book are not as prominent as the
other themes that Morrison introduces and explores within the text. What is significant about
the title is that it seems to parallel the naming process exercised by Milkman’s illiterate
grandfather, who gives Pilate the first name that he points to in the Bible. There is a sense in
which the novel may be understood to have received its title through a similar process. Rather
than proving arbitrary and therefore meaningless, however, these names become authoritative
by the very fact that they do not perfectly mirror their biblical parallels. These names
maintain a strong association with particular stories and personalities, and yet create a textual
conversation by referencing and moving beyond that which has already been told. Morrison’s
novel underscores how even that which is written is enhanced inasmuch as it maintains
aspects of oral tradition (and vice versa), suggesting that it is false to assume that writing
could work effectively any other way.

Guitar’s reflection on why he “can’t eat sweets” after Milkman inquires how baked Alaska tastes exemplifies the relationship between character identity and memory in *Song of Solomon.*\(^{101}\) He answers Milkman’s initial question about the dessert, and then elaborates that sweets make him “think of dead people. And white people. And I start to puke.”\(^{102}\) When his friend probes him further as to why this is, Guitar connects his nausea and associations with the memory of his father, who “got sliced up in a sawmill and his boss came by and gave us kids some candy.”\(^{103}\) Although up to this point Guitar seems to have revisited this memory and endured its effects privately, he demonstrates the power of memory in storytelling since, as he speaks, he simultaneously remembers the sweetness of the candy, and has to walk away to throw up. Memory exerts a potent mental and physical effect, whether his remembrance is solitary or communal.

Aristotle, who was integral in affecting the thinking of ancient and classical persons, similarly discusses the physical and mental effects of memory in his work *De anima.* He asserts that “a memory is a mental picture (phantasm; Latin *simulacrum* or *imago*)...[and therefore] an ‘appearance’ which is inscribed in a physical way upon that part of the body which constitutes memory.”\(^{104}\) That what is envisioned mentally exists as a sort of bodily inscription is an exciting claim, especially in light of the similarities between Aristotle’s manner of discussing memory and Morrison’s novel. Inscription connotes engraving, writing, and leaving a permanent mark on something. Logically, this means that a memory is materially located, and perhaps even imposes itself in a physical form. Also, it suggests that

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\(^{101}\) Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 61.  
\(^{102}\) Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 61.  
\(^{103}\) Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 61.  
\(^{104}\) Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 16.
memory in and of itself has characteristics that lend it to both oral and written forms of communication. As Morrison’s novel demonstrates, the value of maintaining, re-discovering, and/or liberating communal memory is more important than the form that memory takes. In fact, the form should adapt to shifting social and cultural conditions so that the existing community can maintain a meaningful and thriving relationship with the memory. Like rituals that posit something of their memorial power in something tangible and finite (i.e. the blood of the sacrificial lamb over a doorway, an empty chair at the table, bread, and wine), the physical form of the novel becomes the location for similar memorial aspects at work in Song of Solomon when the reader pays attention to its ritualistic qualities.

In her work The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture, Mary Carruthers argues for the influence of ancient understandings of memory on the Medieval persons about whom she writes. By extension, the relationship of influence she establishes between the people of these varied time periods gives the first crucial bit of evidence for the connections that can be drawn between ancient and modern texts. She begins by examining Aristotle’s understanding of memory, because people in the medieval period regarded his work as authoritative to such a degree that his opinions contextualize each of their subsequent explanations on the topic. This relationship is also true for the church at and after his time, and the effect of his thinking on Christian practitioners and leaders is well known.

Carruthers notes the similarities between Aristotle and Plato, who “uses several of the same words in his own descriptions” concerning memory when he explains remembering as “the seeing of internal pictures’ which are imprinted upon the memory as if with signet
Both of these ancient philosophers understood that memory can be so vivid that it assumes the characteristics of physical inscription or imprinting. Although ancient and medieval persons would have used spatial mnemonic devices in order to envision 'storing' the large quantity of material that they wished to memorize, it is also useful to consider how space relates to the visual appearance of an inscription or imprint. Intentional blank space exists in order for the design or words to appear. These ancient thinkers suggest that a memory has a design with at least a few empty places left open for the sole purpose of providing this necessary space, as is true in the case of the grooves of a signet ring. In this description of memory, 'space' does not suggest that a memory is lacking something, nor does it suggest that it is inferior to a separate and modern conception of complete accuracy.

Today, much of the philosophical discussion around memory concerns whether or not it can be trusted. This misdirected analysis attempts to measure how little memory changes over time as an indication of its worth for scholarly or religious edification. Such an approach is a gross misinterpretation of ancient understandings of memory. Space is a necessary component for a signet ring to be intelligible, just as the 'truth' of anything transmitted by memory requires a broader understanding than the modern definition.

In Morrison's writing, the space within memory becomes clear as Guitar continues to recount the memory of his father's death to Milkman. The mark or inscription of memory appears as an ellipsis in the text. The ellipsis displays a hole in the dialogue, indicating just how far Guitar can get in his description of Divinity's sweetness before he has to step "into a

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105 Carruthers, The Book of Memory, 17.
106 Carruthers, The Book of Memory, 32.
The restaurant and the beauty parlor frame how remembering this story affects Guitar physically, and a few sentences follow before Guitar’s “dry heaving” colors in the significance of mentioning these places. They are only named because they border the place where he vomits. Guitar does not articulate the inner sickness espoused by his memory; instead, the text includes space that Morrison uses to portray the sickness indirectly. The space included in the text as Guitar goes through the act of remembering simultaneously demonstrates its effect and how it works. That which might initially appear as gaps in Morrison’s description actually serves to underscore the poignancy of memory.

Underscoring the formative effects of memory on racial tensions, the topics of this same exchange between Guitar and Milkman resurface years after this first recounting. Milkman finds Guitar at Tommy’s Barbershop heatedly discussing Emmitt Till’s murder. Afterward, as Guitar and Milkman are on their way to Mary’s for a drink, “they passed a tiny bakery, [and] Guitar swallowed hard and quickened his steps.” The nearness of sweets coupled with the discussion of Till’s brutal murder by white men displays the very real nausea that the combination still produces for Guitar. One of the justifications Guitar gives to Milkman when he explains his violent involvement with the Seven Days (a group that kills a white person for every black person killed) is that “White people are unnatural.” Remembering the insanity of white people is a pivotal reminder for Guitar of his own identity as a black man. Because of this memory, Guitar declares, “I am better” than white people,

107 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 62, emphasis mine.
108 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 62.
109 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 83.
110 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 156.
who have a disease "'in their blood, in the structure of their chromosomes.'"\textsuperscript{111} Guitar's memory, therefore, is representative of how he views white people's violent oppression of black people, and he creates "'balance'" with the Seven Days to counteract the imbalance to which his memory testifies.\textsuperscript{112}

While literary critics most often cite Morrison's use of ritual as it appears in her novel \textit{Beloved}, the claim that "Rituals function as formal events in which symbolic representations—such as dance, song, story, and other activities— are spiritually and communally endowed with the power to shape real relations in the world" is equally applicable to \textit{Song of Solomon} for several reasons.\textsuperscript{113} First, through the text, readers witness the particularly liturgical nature of each subsequent iteration of the song Morrison presents. Milkman invariably hears the song performed in a public manner, and often sung by more than one voice. Additionally, he recognizes the way that the song connects him to others who are listening to or singing it through a shared history. This history is portrayed by the content of the song itself, as well as the history built with each remembered moment of its singing. In an incident that occurs at the end of the novel which will be examined further, Milkman has "to listen and memorize [the words of the song]...while the children, inexhaustible in their willingness to repeat a rhythmic, rhyming action game, performed the round over and over again."\textsuperscript{114} After he learned all he could about it from Susan Byrd, Milkman claims that what for him is a new song unites him with absolutely everyone. He sings part of the song to his lover, Sweet, and in surprise she responds:

\textsuperscript{111} Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 157.
\textsuperscript{112} Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 158.
\textsuperscript{113} Krumhotz, "Ghosts of Slavery, 396.
\textsuperscript{114} Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 303.
“‘That’s a game we used to play when we was little,’...[Milkman answers,] ‘Of course you did. Everybody did. Everybody but me. But I can play it now. It’s my game now.’”

Although teasing about his wealth and nickname kept Milkman from participating in games like this as a child, his encounter with it as an adult who has memories about these songs positions him closer to the content of the song about a remembered story than the children who sing it in their youth. The text ties his move from an outsider to this song to complete ownership of it through the act of singing itself; when the words literally come from Milkman’s memory and mouth, they become his. Since the liturgy of both the Jewish and Christian traditions is designed to function in the same way, reading Song of Solomon adopts close links to ritual participation.

Again, the tension between uttered and written words emerges, and although initially the circumstances of Milkman’s new ownership appear to declare the superiority of oral traditions, the written form of this declaration necessarily modifies such a conclusion. In fact, simply listening to the song could not make it his. Identification with a text, whether spoken or written, is dependent on an individual’s agency as one encounters something of oneself in what one hears/reads. In this case, Milkman’s discovery that the song is all about his relatives allows him to find his place in its subtext, and personal meaning in its public history. As he listens to Susan Byrd with the memorized lyrics of the song in his head, “His mind was ahead of hers, behind hers, with hers, and bit by bit, with what she said, what he knew, and what he guessed, he put it all together.” He gains possession of the song because he can contribute to it.

115 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 327.
116 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 323.
Another significant effect of placing this orally imparted song in a written work lies primarily in the fact that each time part of this song appears, it implicitly demands that the reader remember its past appearances within the novel. If a reader only attends to or addresses one of the iterations of the Song of Solomon that Milkman hears, she leaves an obvious hole in her analysis concerning the way that the song is working in the text. These parallel bits of liturgy are repeated with enough similarity that they maintain an inseparable bond with all of the other bits, even as words change, names evolve, and length varies. The similarities and variations of the song mirror the mutable nature of oral tradition generally: details change, but certain main themes remain the same. The understood purpose of stories and songs in Song of Solomon is to remain open to the relevant circumstances of those reciting the 'liturgy,' so that it will not be forgotten as dead and inconsequential, though its transmitters well may be. The aspects of the song that show up in several or all of its iterations attain a certain merited prominence, since oral tradition preserves those aspects which resonate with the self-conception and/or values of the people who repeat the memorized text.

Throughout the novel, Milkman’s cultural, familial, and personal identity circles around repetitions of Sugarman’s song. Through these repetitions, the song becomes like a liturgy that alternately beckons, mystifies, and teaches him about his lived experience. When he goes to the south on a treasure hunt that evolves into an effort to find out about his ancestors and their stories, Milkman meets a racially snobbish and reluctantly informative relative, Susan Byrd. Susan is the daughter of his great uncle, and fills in many of the details about Milkman’s family history and the legends surrounding it. When he asks her about the
song he has heard the local children singing, she repeatedly deems the Song of Solomon
“some old folks’ lie,” and explains that many people living in her town of Shalimar, Virginia
claim that Solomon (perhaps called Shalimar as well, but in any case Milkman’s great
grandfather) was “one of those Africans they brought over here as slaves [who] could fly.”
When questioned whether or not she meant the phrase figuratively, Susan replies:

“According to the story he wasn’t running away. He was flying. He flew. You know, like a bird. Just stood up in the fields one day, ran up some hill, spun around a couple
times, and was lifted up in the air. Went right on back to wherever it was he came from.”

As Milkman learns more about his ancestors, the liturgical qualities of this song trigger
significant memories and discoveries for understanding his own identity.

Long before Susan Byrd explains the song about Solomon, Morrison foreshadows its
significance with Pilate’s variation of it. The very first time this song is sung in the novel, the
singer’s “eyes [are] fixed on Mr. Robert Smith” as he is about to jump off the roof of the
hospital with only some “blue silk wings.” Not insignificantly, the unnamed female singer
sings the song for the second time after telling another woman that her baby is coming “right
on time” and as she watches the suicidal Mr. Smith teeter on the roof after having “lost his
balance for a second.” Not only must the reader continue past these initial descriptions to
discover that the singer was Pilate addressing Milkman’s mother, but the text also connects
Milkman’s birth with Mr. Smith’s death. He is the first “colored baby...born inside Mercy,”
and in the first lines announcing Milkman’s birth the narrator reasons that “Mr. Smith’s blue
silk wings must have left their mark, because when the little boy discovered, at four, the same

117 Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 322.
120 Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 5-6, 9.
thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier – that only birds and airplanes could fly – he lost all interest in himself. To have to live without that single gift saddened him and left his imagination so bereft that he appeared dull even to those women who did not hate his mother. This sentence stands out because its tone of disillusionment is irrevocable, and sums up a loss of innocence that seems particularly pitiful in the face of recognizable limits concerning humanity’s natural abilities. Milkman is disappointed with human experience from a very early age, and this disappointment is tragic as a foundation for a life that is just beginning. In its subsequent appearances, the Song of Solomon intentionally and implicitly evokes the memory of Milkman’s disillusionment and earthbound status, and eventually revives Milkman’s self-interest as he pursues information about his flying ancestor.

The third iteration of the Song of Solomon helps to exemplify the alterations in the song’s presentation, since it introduces an additional quatrain. Milkman’s aunt, Pilate and her daughter Reba sing this newly offered verse, which pleads:

“O Sugarman don’t leave me here! Cotton balls to choke me! O Sugarman don’t leave me here! Buckra’s arms to yoke me.”

When Reba’s daughter, Hagar, joins the two singers for the same chorus sung by the woman now identifiable as Pilate from Milkman’s birth scene, Guitar responds with “a slow smile of recognition.” The significance of this smile can have a double meaning, both necessarily involving the act of memory since recognition insinuates an ability to recall and identify something about previous encounters with the recognized object. One possible meaning is the same recognition that the novel sets up for readers who literally recognize the song’s second

121 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 9.
122 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 49.
123 Morrison, Song of Solomon, 49.
verse from the beginning of the book. As in other novels where repetition or foreshadowing are prominent, Guitar’s reaction demonstrates that even the novel’s characters are in tune with the sections of the book, underscoring memory and the ways that pieces of Solomon’s song stand in conversation with one another through these rhetorical devices.

It is also possible that Guitar sees something of his own identity in these women as he watches them sing. Reading Guitar’s response in this manner makes it similar to an idea expressed in a later conversation between Milkman and Guitar where the former questions the latter, saying,

“[e]xcept for skin color, I can’t tell the difference between what the white women want from us and what the colored women want. You say they all want our life, our living life....Why worry about the colored woman at all?” Guitar cocked his head and looked sideways at Milkman. His nostrils flared a little. 'Because she’s mine.'”

Perhaps it is this same feeling of connection and self-identification which the novel routinely translates into ownership that causes Guitar’s “smile of recognition.” These women, each with a biblical name, are of his people, and their cultural bonds provide him with a sense of increased self-knowledge. Correspondingly, Guitar recognizes his unity with the singers, and quite possibly feels a sense of owning them, or sharing in their existence, even as Milkman ‘owns’ and is a part of the Song of Solomon by the end of the novel.

When Solomon’s song appears a fourth time, it is in yet another form that keeps Milkman from recognizing it. He thinks it is “some meaningless rhyme,” but that does not keep him from watching and listening to “eight or nine boys and girls [who] were standing in

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125 Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 49.
126 Interestingly, the oldest of the three generations of women, Pilate, has the only New Testament name among them, while her daughter, Reba (or Rebecca), precedes her textually and chronologically in the book of Genesis (beginning in chapter 24). The youngest of these women appears even earlier in Genesis (beginning in chapter 16). As a result of this pattern, Pilate, Reba, and Hagar embody the novel’s theme that the past does not become less important over time, but in fact is increasingly relevant for the future.
a circle [around] a boy in the middle [with] his arms outstretched, [who] turned around like an airplane, while the others sang.\(^{127}\) Parts of this new verse parallel the nonsense verbiage common in children’s singing games, stating “Jay the only son of Solomon/ Come booba yalle, come booba tambee/ Whirl about and touch the sun/ Come booba yalle, come booba tambee.”\(^{128}\) Milkman responds to what he hears by remembering his own childhood and the estrangement he felt from other children who had played games like this. As he tells Sweet at one point, hearing the song causes him to consider how “[h]e’d never played like that as a child.... he was never asked to play those circle games, those singing games, to join in anything.”\(^{129}\) The text proceeds to explicitly harken back to Milkman’s childhood disillusionment, commenting that “[a]s soon as he got up off his knees at the window sill, grieving because he could not fly, and went off to school, his velvet suit separated him from the other children.”\(^{130}\) Even though this memory reminds Milkman of estrangement from community rather than longstanding connection, the repetition of the passage highlights the importance of this particular memory, signaling to readers that it is important to remember this moment throughout the text, just as Milkman and the narrator do.

These recollections spur others, and “Milkman smiled, remembering how Guitar [had played a part in ending that exclusion; he helped him fight off some bullies, and had] grinned and whooped as the four boys turned on him. It was the first time Milkman saw anybody really enjoy a fight.”\(^{131}\) All because of the train of thought catalyzed by the song, the past and present compete in a manner that seems interpretive and prescriptive for Milkman’s current

\(^{127}\) Morrison, Song of Solomon, 264.
\(^{128}\) Morrison, Song of Solomon, 264.
\(^{129}\) Morrison, Song of Solomon, 264.
\(^{130}\) Morrison, Song of Solomon, 264.
\(^{131}\) Morrison, Song of Solomon, 264.
misgivings concerning Guitar, who is violently seeking revenge against Milkman for a perceived betrayal of the Seven Days. He finds himself thinking back on the immediate closeness of their younger friendship after Guitar helps him in a fight, and their bond reiterates itself in his mind with the strength of reality that overcomes more recent events and threats. Milkman determines that his memory of Guitar’s character must influence his present actions, and “Remembering those days now, Milkman was ashamed of having been frightened or suspicious of Guitar’s message. When he turned up, he would explain everything and Milkman would do what he could to help.”\textsuperscript{132}

As memory conflates time and promotes a present that engages with the past to mutually affect the future, memories and remembering take on an eternal quality by virtue of their continual recurrence and lasting relevance. Furthermore, that which is forgotten seems explicitly mortal, limited, and therefore human. Memory and eternity within \textit{Song of Solomon} are desirable characteristics for Milkman’s cultural understanding, and the excitement of an enduring connection to a “great-granddaddy [who] could flyyyyyy and the whole damn town is named after him” testifies to their superiority over forgetfulness and the usual human capacities which exclude flight.\textsuperscript{133} Yet aspects of the novel call into question whether or not remembering is actually better than forgetting. The excitement and lightheartedness that Milkman gains concerning his discoveries differs from his earlier apathy even toward death. Remembering as he does through learning and singing the Song of Solomon is the most positive course of action for Milkman, because through contact with cultural memory that connects to his personal narrative, Milkman “becomes capable of the sort of reciprocal

\textsuperscript{132} Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 264-265.
\textsuperscript{133} Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 328.
behavior that he displays with Sweet in the bath scene (Song 285). This capacity for genuine feeling and reciprocity ultimately culminates in the connection that he feels to Pilate at novel's end.\footnote{Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 303.} Nevertheless, one could argue that as a result of the process of remembering, Milkman's giddiness is also carelessness, which is itself a form of apathy toward life. In some circumstances therefore, forgetting might then be essential to his ability to survive.

Remembering, however, does not mean that a people continually think of that which is remembered in the same way. The fact that society has changed over time is incontestable. Therefore, it becomes increasingly significant and curious that memory appears and functions with marked similarity in both modern and ancient literature. Although the liturgies of Passover and Communion make individual participants aware of a continuing connection to the original event on which the ritual claims to be based, their actual memories consist only of the various enactments of the ritual rather than the event itself. As a result, ritual takes on significance in its own right, (just as Borg suggests), but can only do so by preserving the separate significance of what the original event can mean for ritual participants.

The most important repetition of Solomon’s song is perhaps the one in which it appears in its entirety. After learning much about his family history from the time he spends in Shalimar, Milkman identifies what he hears the local children singing as “Pilate’s song,” and determines to write it down, only to find “he had no pencil to write with, and his pen was in his suit. He would just have to listen and memorize it.”\footnote{Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 303.} After he “memorized all of what they sang,” he is able to put several pieces of his past together in comprehensible ways, and

\footnote{134 Lorie Watkins Fulton “William Faulkner Reprised: Isolation in Toni Morrison’s ‘Song of Solomon’.” \textit{The Mississippi Quarterly} 58 (Winter 2006/Spring 2005), 7.}
although he still has many questions, he knows that talking to Susan Byrd again will give him the information he needs to complete the story—his story.\textsuperscript{136} Indeed, even as his questions multiply, “he was as excited as a child confronted with boxes and boxes of presents under the skirt of a Christmas tree.”\textsuperscript{137} The first complete rendition of Solomon’s song exemplifies the tendency of characters in Morrison’s novel to make discoveries about themselves and the people they are connected to by means of memory.

The process of remembering in Morrison’s \textit{Song of Solomon} mediates time and differing conceptions of what is ‘authoritative’ in order to maintain an understanding of oral and written memory as valuable and even essential for cultural identity. When paralleled with the ancient understandings of memory as expressed through liturgy and ritual, the novel connects its present to the past through Solomon’s song; in fact, as a piece of secular literature able to accomplish this feat, it mimics the aspects of ancient texts that allow them to describe memory in an enduringly relevant way. \textit{Song of Solomon} excels at this project, perhaps because Morrison repeatedly writes about memory in a way that adheres to ancient understandings so closely that coincidence is less likely than design. Memory, according to ancient perspectives, is what “made knowledge into useful experience, and [this understanding of] memory that combined these pieces of information-become-experience into what we call ‘ideas,’ what they were more likely to call ‘judgments,’”\textsuperscript{138} is intentionally operative in Morrison’s novel.\textsuperscript{138} Writers and storytellers have sought and will continue to seek to express the importance of combining knowledge and lived experience, employing memory in ways that recognize its critical role in education and cultural/religious identity.

\textsuperscript{136} Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 303.
\textsuperscript{137} Morrison, \textit{Song of Solomon}, 304.
\textsuperscript{138} Carruthers, \textit{The Book of Memory}, 1.
The question of what is being remembered in *Song of Solomon* has several layers of complexity and no express or definitive answer. On the one hand, Milkman and the characters of the novel remember the particular act of Solomon flying away, and they are explicitly instructed that this is a literal description of a past event. The event of suffering that the novel recalls throughout centers around slavery and its enduring effects. The ‘Not Doctor Street’ example and Guitar’s character serve as reminders of the suffering still felt after its abolishment. Solomon’s flight is after all one of escaping slavery, even though he simultaneously deserting his family. The novel, therefore, presents Milkman as benefiting from the process of remembering any and all singers of Solomon’s song, singers who in turn remember a man flying from slavery, and all the while surround these moments of remembrance with questions concerning abandonment. While pinpointing the exact memory espoused by Morrison’s novel is a difficult task, this challenge is fitting considering the intricacy of the process of remembering.

Milkman, his neighbors on ‘Not Doctor Street’, and the people of Shalimar rediscover a greater connectivity to their cultural past when they recognize the vitality of their history as effectively preserved through memory. The novel exalts words that are spoken and sung as having this capacity, even as it reclaims written texts by making them memorials for an oral tradition. Layers of memory become apparent in Morrison’s novel, since memory mediates an oral past that attests to the suffering of slaves, the eventual joy of their emancipation, and a present domination by the written texts of *de facto* oppression in a society of *de jure* equality. *Song of Solomon* critiques this society through a thematic use of memory framed by a ritual of repetition, and finds that its role is equally significant as that which ancients understood it to
have in intellectual and creative pursuits. The Song of Solomon exhibits certain traits in its effects on characters through memory that are comparable to the effect of liturgy on congregants. Implicit in *Song of Solomon* is the insistence that readers remember the multifold injustices that still existed in the wake of slavery after slaves received their freedom, and memory works to enable the characters who do so to creatively envision a future that prevents negative acts of history from repeating.

*Night*

Elie Wiesel’s memoir *Night* is a useful comparison partner for *Song of Solomon* as it too responds to communal suffering on the basis of race though a modern, literary framework. Wiesel introduces readers to his family as they once were, and simultaneously guides them through memories of his hometown of Sighet, paying particular attention to the general optimistic and unsuspecting attitude that characterizes the Jewish community there. A prominent aspect of the rhetorical style he employs to do so allows different moments in the story to call to and echo one another. He often foreshadows an episode from his past in light of what happens somewhat later, causing such pairings, or resolving moments, to become typical and even expected in his work. Wiesel explicitly demonstrates the conflation of time by memory as he re-interprets events through later events, and presents both interpretations at once in the memoir.

In antiphonal liturgy, scripted calls and responses acknowledge (implicitly or explicitly) something of the previous line in order to contextualize and expand on their subject in that following line. The Jewish Encyclopedia describes a long tradition of antiphonal practice in the temple and then synagogue where prayers such as “The Shema’, known to all,
was chanted in unison; but the ‘Tefillah’ (Shemoneh 'Esreh) was intoned by the officiant only, the congregation responding loudly in unison, as also when Kaddish was read.”

In addition, “[t]he Psalms were chanted originally in a responsive antiphony...but soon the antiphony developed into a general unison...” Though influenced by this tradition, Wiesel’s narration rarely weaves between lines in exactly this manner. Nevertheless, the importance of memory, its overt connection to religion in Night, and the inclusion of official liturgical texts within the memoir suggests an existing, perhaps natural parallel relationship between antiphonal liturgy and the style of the memoir. The text demands that readers remember earlier sections of Night to grasp the full impact and significance of the author’s words, even as liturgy becomes increasingly meaningful when the practitioner allows the associations wrought by the text and context to come to mind. The process of remembering is the differentiating element determining the reader’s ability to recognize the text’s rhetorical sophistication.

There are numerous examples of this literary strategy, such as Wiesel’s comment concerning “[s]ome prominent members of the community [that] came to consult my father, who had connections at the upper levels of the Hungarian police.” A few lines later, in a fact that seems relevant or important only for the purpose of setting the scene, Wiesel explains that his family’s home in one of the ghettos “occupied a corner, [meaning that] the windows facing the street outside the ghetto had to be sealed. We gave some of our rooms to relatives.

139 Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. “Music, Synagogal.”
140 Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. “Music, Synagogal.”
who had been driven out of their homes.”142 The antiphonal call/response nature of these
comments becomes clear three pages later, when:

“Batia Reich, a relative who lived with us, entered the room: ‘Someone is knocking at
the sealed window, the one that faces outside!’ It was only after the war that I found
out who had knocked that night. It was an inspector of the Hungarian police, a friend
of my father’s. Before we entered the ghetto, he had told us, ‘Don’t worry. I’ll warn
you if there is danger.’ Had he been able to speak to us that night, we might still have
been able to flee... But by the time we succeeded in opening the window, it was too
late. There was nobody outside.”143

The earlier comments could easily have been passed over as interesting, but not inherently
important; yet this later passage has added poignancy in its implicit demand that the reader
remember these inconspicuous descriptions. Furthermore, the event that happens in the
narrative’s present (i.e. the mysterious knocking on the window) is immediately followed by a
comment that emphasizes the closeness of a missed opportunity to avoid the impending doom
and suffering. Due to the author’s retrospective point of view, the reader and even the genre
of the book recognize this near escape with tragic dramatic irony shaped completely by
memory. Whether that memory is first hand, as in the author’s case, or second hand as in
most other cases, a certain authority is vested in remembering as a witness and a bearer of that
experience.

Mrs. Schächter’s contagiously maddening (pun intended) screams during the horrific
train transport to the camps echo in the novel with antiphonal call/response characteristics.
Her screams of, “I see a fire! I see flames, huge flames!” are explicitly recalled when
Wiesel and his father see the smokestacks of Birkenau’s crematoria.144 When they realize that
they are being directed to the barracks rather than to their immediate deaths, Wiesel’s father

142 Wiesel, Night, 11.
143 Wiesel, Night, 14.
144 Wiesel, Night, 25.
asks him, "'Do you remember Mrs. Schächter, in the train?'" implicitly crediting the woman with both a haunting prophetic power and the archetypal prophet's reception—namely, rejection and violence.\textsuperscript{145} It makes since, therefore, that one of the most liturgical passages of the memoir appears just after this remark:

> "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.  
> Never shall I forget that smoke.  
> Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.  
> Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.  
> Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.  
> Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.  
> Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.  
> Never."\textsuperscript{146}

Bringing even more corroboration for the liturgical qualities of the previous examples, the repetition of the phrase "Never shall I forget" links these sentences in an antiphonal manner. This passage underscores the thematic importance of remembrance in Wiesel's recounting, even as it makes memorializing part of its very form.

Three other moments bearing this call/response quality distinguish themselves within the memoir, and merit mention. AfterIdek the Kapo furiously beats him for no reason, Wiesel is tended and somewhat cleaned up by a French girl who says kind, encouraging words to him. After relating this story, Wiesel describes a moment "Many years later, in Paris, [when] I sat in the Métro, reading my newspaper."\textsuperscript{147} He recognizes the woman whose words had been so uplifting, and in a subsequent conversation with her discovers that she is a

\textsuperscript{145} Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 34.  
\textsuperscript{146} Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 34.  
\textsuperscript{147} Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 54.
Jew who passed as a non-Jew during the war. Telling his story allows Wiesel to recognize that the woman’s memorable verbal encouragement was more dangerous than he could have ever realized had they not met again.

The second moment arises when Wiesel injures his foot and has the choice to either stay in the infirmary when the camp is evacuated, or to try to walk on it to avoid possible extermination by Nazis who might not risk leaving anyone behind. Wiesel relates the conversation concerning their decision to “be evacuated with the others” by specifically recalling his Father saying, “‘Let’s hope we won’t regret it, Eliezer.’”¹⁴⁸ In the very next sentence, he tells readers that “[a]fter the war, I learned the fate of those who had remained at the infirmary. They were, quite simply, liberated by the Russians, two days after the evacuation.”¹⁴⁹ The unwritten message is that this decision, although made in good faith, is one that certainly merits the sort of regret that comes with a helpless situation in which either choice could prove disastrous. Wiesel’s father ends up dying as a direct result of this death march, and the suffering of both is prolonged.

As in Song of Solomon, storytelling plays a key and perhaps obvious role in Night which is, after all, a memoir. Aside from the clear focus on transmission intrinsic to a narrative, storytelling becomes a major theme, especially in the character Moishe the Beadle’s life. After he miraculously survives the massacre of Sighet’s foreign Jews, Moishe becomes an impassioned, desperate storyteller convinced of the urgency of his words:

“Day after day, night after night, he went from one Jewish house to the next, telling his story and that of Malka, the young girl who lay dying for three days, and that of Tobie, the tailor who begged to die before his sons were killed....As for Moishe, he wept and pleaded: ‘Jews, listen to me! That’s all I ask of you. No money. No pity.

¹⁴⁸ Wiesel, Night, 82.
¹⁴⁹ Wiesel, Night, 82.
Just listen to me!’ he kept shouting in synagogue, between the prayer at dusk and the evening prayer.”

With the enactment of the “[f]irst edict...Jews were prohibited from leaving their residences for three days, under penalty of death.” Despite the danger, Moishe’s final appearance in the novel is that of the prophetic storyteller who demands that people remember his earlier cautionary words by “running to our house. ‘I warned you,’ he shouted. And left without waiting for a response.” Had Moishe’s story not gone unheeded, the memoir implicitly suggests that some suffering could have been avoided.

Wiesel also informs readers that the night before learning of the imminent transports, “My father was sharing some anecdotes and holding forth on his opinion of the situation. He was a good storyteller.” His father’s ability iterates the fact that Wiesel tells this story to honor the story that his father, talented as he was, cannot tell. Both of these examples offer the early indication that the welfare of a community depends upon heeding the storyteller.

Certainly Wiesel himself as author and narrator recognizes the necessity of writing to tell his story, and the need for readers to respond and believe his words in order to avoid similar tragedies from happening again. Not only does Night serve as a warning that unimaginable (and unimagined) horrors did and could occur, but communities create a protective awareness through the process of remembering.

A final example of rhetoric that conflates time in an antiphonal manner occurs when Rabbi Eliahu loses his son in the shuffle of the death march/evacuation. When the rabbi

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150 Wiesel, Night, 7.
151 Wiesel, Night, 10.
152 Wiesel, Night, 10.
153 Wiesel, Night, 12.
inquires after him, Elie answers, "'No, Rabbi Eliahu, I haven't seen him.'" It is not until the searching father has "already gone through the door when I remembered that I had noticed his son running beside me. I had forgotten and so had not mentioned it to Rabbi Eliahu!" After this feeling of regret and perhaps even guilt for his delayed memory, Wiesel "remembered something else" that brings up the recurring question of whether or not it might sometimes be more advantageous for a person's emotional welfare to forget. Importantly, however, it is only by remembering that the value of forgetting in this situation becomes apparent to Wiesel and his readers, when the former realizes that:

"his son had seen him losing ground, sliding back to the rear of the column. He had seen him. And he had continued to run in front, letting the distance between them become greater. A terrible thought crossed my mind: What if he had wanted to be rid of his father? He had felt his father growing weaker and, believing that the end was near, had thought by this separation to free himself of a burden that could diminish his own chance for survival. It was good that I had forgotten all that. And I was glad that Rabbi Eliahu continued to search for his beloved son. And in spite of myself, a prayer formed inside me, a prayer to this God in whom I no longer believed. 'Oh God, Master of the Universe, give me the strength never to do what Rabbi Eliahu's son has done.'"

Wiesel later reflects on the 'answer' to this prayer when he finds that his father, who is very ill, is given no food by the guards since the Germans believe that he and others who are sick will die soon anyway. In dutiful response to the situation as the sick and starving man's son, Wiesel:

"gave him what was left of my soup. But my heart was heavy. I was aware that I was doing it grudgingly. Just like Rabbi Eliahu's son, I had not passed the test."
Wiesel's initial prayer and later humbling exemplify moments in the text which are spatially distanced, but also linked, by intervening anecdotes that move the narrative focus to other subjects before returning via an explicit process of remembering to the first linking moment.

Wiesel the author uses other rhetorical devices that relate to the antiphonal call and response examples of the memoir in an importantly nuanced way. Springing once more directly from the nature of memory's role in writing such a text, he uses what can be identified as 'little did I/we know' clauses to demonstrate how what he has learned over time affects how he thinks of and describes the past. These retrospective phrases appear throughout the work, but as one might expect of these generally foreboding statements, they appear in a higher concentration earlier in the memoir, before Wiesel's arrival at either concentration camp. He uses a tone similar to that of a news broadcaster to depict the certainty with which the Jews of Sighet were convinced of imminent peace. Locating this conviction before the year of his own imprisonment to highlight the contrast between the town's pervading optimism and reality, Wiesel writes:

“Spring 1944. Splendid news from the Russian Front. There could no longer be any doubt: Germany would be defeated. It was only a matter of time, months or weeks, perhaps....The people were saying, ‘The Red Army is advancing with giant strides...Hitler will not be able to harm us, even if he wants to...’ Yes, we even doubted his resolve to exterminate us.”

The final sentences of this passage are coated with irony to underscore how, looking back, the confidence seemed justified. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth than what the community was telling itself and easily believing. What happened to the Jews of Sighet and countless other towns was beyond expectation, and Wiesel wants to ensure that readers

159 Wiesel, Night, 8.
employ the lessons he passes on through memory to keep others from making the same mistake of incredulity.

These phrases occur repeatedly, especially with each new step toward the revelation of the Singhet community’s fate. While detailing the arrival of the Germans to his home community, Wiesel employs syntactical parallelism and repetition to make an impact with each piece of retrospectively recognized evidence. He emphasizes the fact that “The Germans were already in our town, the Fascists were already in power, the verdict was already out— and the Jews of Sighet were still smiling.” The ‘little did we know’ quality of this phrase serves as a warning that not only tints the event with increased foreboding, but also signals the fact that this memoir is not the exact duplication of Wiesel’s experience as he went through each event. Instead, the innovative qualities of his writing enhance its ability to memorialize and preserve. Remembering in Night draws on and simultaneously re-visions memory, since it is shaped by an impetus to teach readers not to forget the events of the Holocaust so that they might never experience something similar.

In utilizing phrases of this sort, Wiesel implicitly uses the form of a memoir to question the ease with which one can accept anything— even this very genre— at face value. As in Song of Solomon, the author creates a relationship between the form and content of his work, since most of these phrases arise from retrospective observations about the acceptance with which he and the members of his community greeted each ominous action that signaled their fate. Exactly as they never felt (or believed the need to feel) alarm early enough to take preventative action, Wiesel underscores the tendency of people to never expect harm or danger. Admittedly, it seems ridiculous to think that one might need to fear a genre, but the

160 Wiesel, Night, 10.
reshaping of memory, and more specifically the erasure of memory through forgetting, is exactly what Wiesel writes to counteract, and that which he identifies as horrific. The tension of whether or not a memoir alters memory to such an extent that it becomes a socially acceptable form of forgetting is a concept that serious readers must grapple with. With the importance of telling his story and the risks associated with its portrayal, it becomes clear that the project that Wiesel undertakes, like liturgy, benefits from the ancient understanding of authentic memory as creative. Although liturgy and memoir serve different roles, do not share an impetus, and vary from one another in form, this commonality effectively allows those who are troubled by the process of remembering if it results as anything more than strict preservation to reexamine their discomfort. Whereas any newness seems antithetical and corrosive to the integrity of memory today, ancient thinkers readily acknowledged the innovation of remembering in a way that corroborates what the genre of memoir displays.

Perhaps the most obvious and concurrently heart-wrenching example of a ‘little did I know’ clause appears the last time Wiesel sees his mother and little sister. He focuses on the details of an instant that was admittedly passed over as one more fearful occurrence in a day that was probably the most terrifying yet of his young life. Fashioning telegraphic sentences (both actually and seemingly so due to the way he punctuates them) in a manner that brings the brevity and seeming inconsequential nature of these words amid the constant threat of violence to the forefront, Wiesel quotes the SS officer who shouts:

"Men to the left! Women to the right!' Eight simple, short words. Yet that was the moment when I left my mother. There was no time to think, and I already felt my father’s hand press against mine: we were alone. In a fraction of a second I could see my mother, my sisters, move to the right. Tzipora was holding Mother’s hand. I saw them walking farther and farther away; Mother was stroking my sister’s blond hair, as if to protect her. And I walked on with my father, with the men. I didn’t know this
was the moment in time and place where I was leaving my mother and Tzipora forever. I kept walking, my father holding my hand.”

Every comment about his mother and/or Tzipora either before or after this textual moment becomes connected to and affected by their eternal separation through the memories created by reading the account. Where in real life this moment lacked the feeling of significance or conscious farewell merited by the loss it portrays for Wiesel’s life, the memoir allows it nothing short of a paragraph of focused recognition. This particular moment is one in which memoir is advantageous in the way that it differs from the actual event; what was horrible and unable even to be recognized as such can herein be treated with the emotion it deserves.

As one literary critic, Harry James Cargas, puts it, *Night* is “part of a literary tradition – growing more rapidly because of Wiesel’s contribution – known as the literature of silence.” He specifically cites the above passage, claiming that it presents a conscious use “of understatement, of unwillingness to lapse into sentimentality” instead using “sentiment [which] is proper emotion, one suited to the dignity of a human being, particularly one in need of comfort, one in pain.” Cargas defines sentimentality, on the other hand, as “an excess of emotion, something which can be projected by formula and, therefore, which cheapens what ought to be a proper response.” As a creation of memory itself, the memoir allows Wiesel to fashion exactly the right memorial for his mother and youngest sister. The ‘little did I know’ aspect of this memorial tinges it with the sentiment it deserves, leaving the rest to the silence it is and was.

162 Harry James Cargas, *Telling the Tale: A Tribute to Elie Wiesel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (St. Louis, MO: Time Being Books), 103.
163 Cargas, *Telling the Tale*, 103.
164 Cargas, *Telling the Tale*, 103.
In addition to antiphonal call and response and ‘little did I know’ clauses, *Night* evokes memory through three main uses of liturgy. First and most simply, traditional Jewish liturgy is quoted and spoken recurrently. Secondly, the Holocaust creates a context in which liturgy changes due to the necessary reinterpretation of words that mean something new considering the events at hand. The third manner in which *Night* evokes liturgy is best understood as an inversion of ritual as well, because it concerns the actions that prisoners are forced to perform, and the way that these actions become habitual, unnaturally instinctual, and/or take on a warped, or anti-liturgical quality. One of the first times that traditional Jewish liturgy appears in the text is after Wiesel’s family arrives in a new ghetto. Writing in a tense that could refer to simply his family or to all of the newly arrived Jews, he makes a point to note the prayer of the weary travelers, when “Throwing down our bundles, we dropped to the ground: ‘Oh God, Master of the Universe, in your infinite compassion, have mercy on us....’”165 Intense suffering and an understanding of God’s relationship to that suffering begins to emerge with these words, offering the first example of liturgy’s ability to spur theological questioning in the memoir.

Similar to the refrain reiterated throughout the *Song of Solomon*, recitation of the Kaddish occurs frequently in *Night*. Its regular presence suggests that Wiesel recognizes that this liturgy will never be understood in quite the same way post-Shoah. When someone begins to recite this prayer soon after their arrival at Birkenau, Wiesel reflects, “I don’t know whether, during the history of the Jewish people, men have ever before recited Kaddish for themselves. ‘Yisgadal, veyskadash, shmey raba...’May His name be celebrated and

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sanctified...’ whispered my father” 166 Soon after this reflection on how being in the camp is already altering a people’s history, the change becomes even more personal. This prayer for the dead changes for Wiesel himself, since instead of feeling reverent or awestruck, “For the first time, I felt anger rising within me.” 167 Out of these emotions, the studious and self-proclaimed mystic so intent on studying Kabbalah is surprised to find himself asking, “Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent. What was there to thank Him for?” 168 When Wiesel’s theology no longer seems consistent with life events, he dawns the role of a highly educated and incisive objector.

Despite his admitted anger, something about this liturgy and the circumstances forced upon him find natural expression together. As if the only way for him to react in this situation is to use liturgy, Wiesel explains how “against my will, I found myself whispering the words: ‘Yisgadal, veyiskadash, shmey raba...May His name be exalted and sanctified....’” 169 Even though Wiesel tells readers that saying this prayer for oneself is an anti-intuitive and unusual practice, this in-the-moment act of reinterpretation is a natural extension of his identity as an observant Jew, and the liturgy itself seems to automatically propel itself through him. This self-propulsion seems absolutely tied to his memory, as well as the fact that his (un)natural reaction to fear and grief is to pray for the dead of whom he now considers himself a part.

A clear example of liturgy changing due to the unique circumstances of the concentration camp arises when a Kapo attempts to forcibly deprive prisoners of their shoes if

166 Wiesel, Night, 33.
167 Wiesel, Night, 33.
168 Wiesel, Night, 33.
169 Wiesel, Night, 34.
they happen to be new. Wiesel finds himself in a situation that leads him to respond litergically, since “I had new shoes myself.”\footnote{Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 38.} However, he is spared the assault on one of the few ‘possessions’ he is allowed because “they were covered with a thick coat of mud, [and] they had not been noticed.”\footnote{Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 38.} In a response of gratitude disproportionate to Wiesel’s usual lifestyle in which shoes could be taken for granted, “I thanked God, in an improvised prayer, for having created mud in His infinite and wondrous universe.”\footnote{Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 38.} Although tinged with a sort of humor, this ad hoc prayer marks the process of crossing a problematic line. Employing religiously framed humor concerning a situation of suffering on the basis of that religion exhibits a reaction to a psychological wound affecting one’s standard of living and religious customs. Neither Wiesel’s experience of life’s material norms nor his understanding of prayer can escape this occurrence unscathed.

Liturgy shows itself a dependable outlet for expressing the effect of these damaging experiences when even Wiesel’s theological thought process is expressed in liturgical terms and with pieces of liturgical structure. Significantly setting the scene “[o]n the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the last day of that cursed year, [Wiesel notes that] the entire camp was agitated and every one of us felt the tension.”\footnote{Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 66.} He then reframes memory by placing lines from the traditional liturgy into his own sentences to explore why the community is experiencing this particular trauma. Wiesel points out that “[a]fter all, this was a day unlike all others. The last day of the year. The word ‘last’ had an odd ring to it. What if it really were the last day?”\footnote{Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 66.} As he and others mull over these questions and fears, there is nevertheless a response of
devotion to God by the inmates that aligns with traditional standards. For Wiesel, witnessing the gathering of the faithful leads him to a further outburst at God characterized by, and yet rebelling against, liturgy. He describes attending the Rosh Hashanah ‘service’ with other prisoners, and in between the responsive recitation, his thoughts frame themselves again in clearly liturgical diction:

"‘Blessed be the Almighty...’ The voice of the officiating inmate had just become audible. At first I thought it was the wind. ‘Blessed be God’s name...’ Thousands of lips repeated the benediction, bent over like trees in a story. Blessed be God’s name? Why, but why would I bless Him? Every fiber in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in His mass graves? Because He kept six crematoria working day and night, including Sabbath and the Holy Days? Because in His great might, He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many other factories of death? How could I say to Him: Blessed be Thou, Almighty, Master of the Universe, who chose us among all nations to be tortured day and night, to watch as our fathers, our mothers, our brothers end up in the furnaces? Praised be Thy Holy Name, for having chosen us to be slaughtered on Thine altar?"

For anyone who has participated in Jewish prayer before, these words are familiar, and the questions they frame particularly unsettling considering how perfectly they reveal the abandonment felt by a religious people engaged in a deep-seated struggle, persecuted for their religious identity, and betrayed by the theological convictions that previously seemed to work straightforwardly for their good. In this extended, engulfing, and seemingly eternal suffering, liturgy becomes the language that Wiesel can most aptly use to express the accusations he brings against God. No other words bear the context of generations of covenant faithfulness, and since there is no language for accusing— only worshiping— the divine, Wiesel’s experience of the Holocaust inverts this liturgy. Consequently, he rejects liturgy even as he yields its historical significance for a biting expression of emotion.

175 Wiesel, Night, 67.
Wiesel is certainly not having these theological conversations in isolation. He expresses his awareness that he is part of a camp-wide debate questioning the meaning of this imprisonment experience in light of God’s relationship with the Jewish people. He is privy to the conversations in which:

"Some of the men spoke of God: His mysterious ways, the sins of the Jewish people, and the redemption to come. As for me, I had ceased to pray. I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice." 176

Not only does liturgy frame, but it also encourages this ongoing conversation for Wiesel as a religious individual. Even as he denies God’s power and justice, he joins in reciting the Kaddish at the end of this service in a way that suggests that doing so under these particular circumstances and in the framework of Rosh Hashanah questions religious experience on an integral (and intimate) level. Thinking back on his past, Wiesel admits that the significance of this day has changed for him, since "[i]n days gone by, Rosh Hashanah had dominated my life....But now, I no longer pleaded for anything" 177 Wiesel’s ability to remember his own faithful participation in this liturgical event also connects him, through what the words of the liturgy make clear, with everyone who has participated in Rosh Hashanah throughout time. The reasoning he gives for this shift of perspective has everything to do with the fidelity he witnesses among the suffering prisoners of the camp who assemble to continue honoring and acknowledging a God whom Wiesel feels is not honoring or acknowledging them despite enduring devotion.

Even in his recognizably piteous state as "nothing but ashes now" Wiesel’s indignance makes him feel "stronger than this Almighty to whom my life had been bound for so long. In

176 Wiesel, Night, 45.
177 Wiesel, Night, 68.
the midst of these men assembled for prayer, I felt like an observer, a stranger." As shockingly devoid of faith as this statement might be, Emil L. Fackenheim claims after reading *Night* that "with this book Elie Wiesel emerged as a Jew of fidelity – to Israel, to the God of Israel, and to the unique anguish between the two that has come to be ever since the Holocaust." While this opinion is certainly not shared by all critical readers of *Night*, his claim is a weighty one. To justify his opinion, Fackenheim describes fidelity as "the central virtue of a Jew" as was "once asserted by Yehuda Halevi." Through the previous passage, it becomes apparent that Wiesel's estrangement from God flows from the fact that what he thought he knew about God has completely changed, and the qualities he valued in God he now sees more clearly and heroically in the prisoners. Even so, he and the other prisoners "[remain] standing in the *Appleplatz* for a long time, unable to detach ourselves from this surreal moment." The memoir demonstrates that the awesomeness of what remembering in the context of liturgy does depends on, or at least is not unaffected by, the life events of the practitioner. Something about the liturgy connects this group of prisoners together in a way that would be impossible under normal circumstances, and they are faithful to that connection even when they do not understand the God they gather to honor. Whereas the fact that they are culturally and religiously bound to the liturgy would be an adequate explanation for their shared experience of it in any place other than the concentration camp, their current setting and suffering makes this gathering even more powerful for reasons beyond these more basic aspects of identity. The process of remembering connects them to a time when saying this

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178 Wiesel, *Night*, 68.  
180 Fackenheim, *Telling the Tale*, 114.  
181 Wiesel, *Night*, 68.
liturgy had a benign significance, and now these words seem to fit their situation with a more terrible meaning.

Where forced compliance by the Jews to German orders sometimes takes on a distorted but nevertheless liturgical quality, two examples distinguish themselves for different reasons. One emerges as Wiesel “was in the midst of prayer when suddenly there was shouting in the streets. I quickly unwound my phylacteries and ran to the window….The police were taking roll calls, once, twice, twenty times.” As the memoir progresses, the repeated and eventually expected practice of standing in ranks and enduring roll call for uncomfortable lengths of time and in indiscriminate weather conditions becomes a ritual. Ritual is often closely tied to liturgy as a result of being its framework during a service, and this example demonstrates the connection between the two. The ‘calling’ aspect of a roll call, the mention of prayer immediately before this instance of it, and the fact that standing as a group is a usual part of congregational responsive readings closely binds this enforced practice to liturgy, even as it expunges the sacred nature of the practice.

Another example, which also occurs early in the account, presents Wiesel and his community as they prepare for their transport. He comments on the desecration to the space in which the Jews of Singhet participate in liturgy, since:

“The synagogue resembled a large railroad station: baggage and tears. The altar was shattered, the wall coverings shredded, the walls themselves bare….It was Saturday— the Sabbath—and it was as though we were there to attend services. Forbidden to go outside, people relieved themselves in a corner.”

The reference to attending services in this passage refers not only to weekly participation in the ritual action of synagogue attendance, but also to the regular hearing and speaking of God

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82 Wiesel, Night, 16.
83 Wiesel, Night, 22.
in a place where God is recognized as present. However, the conditions of oppression
make even the synagogue a place that must be treated with the mean considerations that
nature demands. They do not allow for the respect due a place ‘set apart’ for the worship of a
God honored for setting the worshipers themselves apart. As a result of the synagogue
changing from a sacred space to a place of shameful desecration, liturgy itself cannot avoid
drastic re-visioning.

Certainly this alteration due to suffering, like many similar moments, affects Wiesel’s
faith. As Fackenheim’s case for Wiesel’s fidelity discusses above, the Holocaust leads the
author to describe an anger frankly directed at God, rather than a belief that God is not real.
Wiesel adamantly questions God’s supreme justice as a result of his, his family’s, and the
overall suffering he witnesses. Although he comments on no longer believing in God, the
book exhibits that this lack of belief is most likely a cessation of trusting that God will act
justly. Nowhere is this clearer than on the conversation around another high holy day:

“Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement. Should we fast? The question was hotly
debated. To fast could mean a more certain, more rapid death. In this place, we were
always fasting. It was Yom Kippur year-round. But there were those who said we
should fast precisely because it was dangerous to do so. We needed to show God that
even here, locked in hell, we were capable of singing His praises. I did not fast. First
of all, to please my father who had forbidden me to do so. And then, there was not
longer any reason for me to fast. I no longer accepted God’s silence. As I swallowed
my ration of soup, I turned that act into a symbol of rebellion, of protest against Him.
And I nibbled on my crust of bread. Deep inside me, I felt a great void opening.”

Although it stands hardly in need of further explanation, Wiesel writes of a defiant loss of
confidence and absolute anger. However, (at least as he presents it in this account shaped by

\(^{184}\) Wiesel, *Night*, 69.
the perspective of memory years after his liberation), he continues to interact with God, even when that interaction is simply rebelling against him.

This tacit acknowledgment of God, even a God that the author does not understand and has legitimate complaints against, demonstrates his changed understanding of what it means to participate in religious acts. Passover, a celebration in which the process of remembering plays a prominent role, proves a valuable candidate for documenting Wiesel's evolving theology in *Night*. Before being taken to the concentration camp, Wiesel describes the Passover as a turning point in his community's state of denial concerning the German threat. He highlights his conflicting feelings wrought by the tension between his present experience of apprehension and the commands of scripture, since "[t]he Bible commands us to rejoice during the eight days of celebration, but our hearts were not in it. We wished the holiday would end so as not to have to pretend."[^185] In fact, after this Passover, Wiesel's experience of the Seder would never be the same. It was "[o]n the seventh day of Passover [that] the curtain finally rose: the Germans arrested the leaders of the Jewish community. From that moment on, everything happened very quickly. The race toward death had begun."[^186] In a later work describing how the Holocaust has caused him to use past tense when he describes how he "especially loved the Passover holiday" as a child.[^187]

Compellingly, if not incitingly, he claims that:

"The meaning of the festival and its rituals has scarcely changed. Only I have changed. I still follow the rituals, of course. I recite the prayers, I chant the appropriate psalms, I tell the story of the Exodus, I answer the questions my son asks. But in the deepest part of myself, I know it is not the same...A lifetime separates me

from the child I once was... It is understandable; Passover was the last holiday I celebrated at home.”

Remembering Passover and participating in present Passover celebrations allows Wiesel to understand ritual as absolutely tied to memory, and the prevailing of memory to life. Despite the damage to ritual resulting from the concentration camps and Nazi-led persecution, it is nevertheless a formative aspect of how Wiesel orders and designates the time periods of his past. With this understanding, it is little wonder that he asks rhetorically “What significance does Passover have, if not to keep our memories alive?”

The impact that remembering has on human life is undeniable, especially as it is discussed and presented in literature that remembers suffering, whether secular or religious. When Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* and Wiesel’s *Night* are considered alongside the liturgical, ritual, and rhetorical qualities bestowed upon memory by ancient thinkers, even these very disparate texts suggest a shared demand that readers become rememberers. The discussion of memory’s importance for a deeper religious understanding of the aforementioned categories is vital if the enduring significance of rituals is to be understood in a way that acknowledges how influential they continue to be today. Literature must enter into this conversation, since both *Song of Solomon* and *Night* testify to the fact that these ancient understandings do continue in varied, yet important ways, and that their continuance is often connected to cultural narratives that struggle with redefining an identity out of suffering. To read these texts is to participate in a ritual, to respond in a liturgy, and to take up a rhetoric, all of which point to the need to remember if a people are to indeed remain able to identify themselves as a people. United by practices of memory established to pass on the imperative of remembering

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divine acts on the behalf of a people, literature and memory perfectly intersect in a manner that makes creation eternally possible.
Conclusion

Future Areas of Research:

As I work with this material on memory by focusing on ritual, liturgy, and rhetoric in biblical and secular texts, I am aware that there are many other fascinating aspects related to this project that I could (and plan to) explore in the future. Due to the necessary limitations of time and the known importance of a clear direction in order to do a satisfying job on the material I am engaging with, I have had to make certain choices about what to cover and what to exclude in this paper. I realize that the understandings of memory presented by Augustine could compose a wholly separate project considering the depth and amount of material necessary to do his ideas, particularly those in *The Confessions*, justice. Similarly, the many questions of time- what it is, how it acts, and how it is conceptualized in discussions of memory- is too a huge topic with so much scholarship that any attempt to address it within these pages would have been severely shortchanged. As a final example, this project began with many questions grounded more firmly in theological terms, and my studies have brought me more and more to questions concerning the communities choosing to remember and charged with remembrance; I especially intend to return to these theological questions in the future, and am convinced that this paper is necessary for that endeavor to be as rich and rigorous as its subject merits.

This substantial yet preliminary exploration of the process of remembering and its textual importance does not come without limitations. As I too engage in re-vision, it is clear that there are profound gaps in my use and treatment of Jewish sources. The importance of Jewish sources on subjects like the Holocaust is invaluable, especially from the perspective of
remembering as a cultural response to suffering. While this thesis underscores the importance of giving communities a voice, my academic and personal background gives me a fuller understanding of Christianity. It is only after completing this thesis that it became clear that my attempts at creating a comparative balance between the two traditions is more heavily biased than intended, and falls short of accomplishing a thorough treatment of memory in Judaism. Nevertheless, it is my hope that this thesis offers one compelling and rich reading strategy that does not (in fact, cannot) draw equations between distinct traditions or texts, but exhibits the mediation of memory through the written word.
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