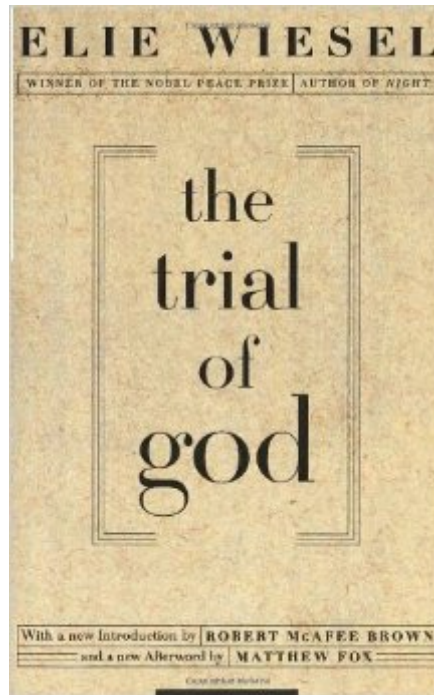


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The Trial Of God: (as It Was Held On February 25, 1649, In Shamgorod)



Synopsis

The Trial of God (as it was held on February 25, 1649, in Shamgorod) A Play by Elie Wiesel
Translated by Marion Wiesel Introduction by Robert McAfee Brown Afterword by Matthew Fox
Where is God when innocent human beings suffer? This drama lays bare the most vexing questions confronting the moral imagination. Set in a Ukrainian village in the year 1649, this haunting play takes place in the aftermath of a pogrom. Only two Jews, Berish the innkeeper and his daughter Hannah, have survived the brutal Cossack raids. When three itinerant actors arrive in town to perform a Purim play, Berish demands that they stage a mock trial of God instead, indicting Him for His silence in the face of evil. Berish, a latter-day Job, is ready to take on the role of prosecutor. But who will defend God? A mysterious stranger named Sam, who seems oddly familiar to everyone present, shows up just in time to volunteer. The idea for this play came from an event that Elie Wiesel witnessed as a boy in Auschwitz: "Three rabbis" all erudite and pious men "decided one evening to indict God for allowing His children to be massacred. I remember: I was there, and I felt like crying. But there nobody cried." Inspired and challenged by this play, Christian theologians Robert McAfee Brown and Matthew Fox, in a new Introduction and Afterword, join Elie Wiesel in the search for faith in a world where God is silent.

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Customer Reviews

As with all of Elie Wiesel's work, the central premise is to explore the question of Jews and their suffering throughout history. "The Trial of God" is an interesting departure from his better-known works, in that it is a drama, a play staged during the Jewish holiday of Purim. Based on events that

Wiesel witnessed while in Auschwitz, "The Trial of God" accuses the Creator of the Universe of being guilty of neglect to his chosen people. And even though the trial takes place in the seventeenth century, the modern world is very much alive in the facts and accusations. The trial takes place in 1649, in a Ukrainian village that has been decimated by a pogrom; only two Jews remain, Berish the innkeeper, and his silenced daughter Hanna. Three traveling minstrels arrive and upset Berish. They want to stage a Purim play for all the Jews in the village, without knowing about the devastation of the recent raids. Berish allows them to enact a play as long as he can choose the subject matter; he wishes for a trial to condemn God over what has happened to the Jews and he will serve as prosecutor. The minstrels accept, but can find no one to play the defense attorney for God, until a stranger (who seems to be known by all) arrives to defend God and his actions (or inaction). Much of the course of the play is devoted to setting up the trial (which doesn't begin until Act Three). Until that time, the reader learns much about the history of Berish and what he witnessed, as well as what makes him so angry towards God. When the stranger arrives to defend God, he does not allow Berish to use the dead as proof or witnesses for one must only think of the living. Tension mounts throughout the course of the play, thanks to news that a mob is gathering once again to kill the remaining Jews.

Even to an agnostic, the idea of putting God on trial seems mad. Perhaps only a survivor of the Holocaust, namely the author and the unnamed Auschwitz inmates that served as the play's inspiration, have the right to call their Creator to judgement. And so they do. Judges and prosecutors readily step forward, but a defender for God is absent until a shadowy figure volunteers. What follows is intense and thought provoking. The accusations are fierce, but the defense deftly, but uneasily rebuts by either placing the blame on humans alone, by asserting that the now-dead victims' feelings cannot be brought to court, and lastly, that the mind of God cannot be probed, that man's goal is to love and obey him no matter what. The last defense is much like what Job encounters. But like Job, the victims of this play are denied any knowledge of why God does or does not do anything - Job is simply stunned into silence by God asserting that his power, knowledge and majesty are infinitely beyond that of Job and therefore he has no right to question God. Any justification for his suffering is never answered. Nor does this play answer why the Jews are persecuted. The trial ends without a verdict, but characteristically the surviving Jews refuse to abandon their faith even to save their lives - even though they wanted to hold their God to judgment. While answering no questions, some very good ones are asked in this play. The weak link of Christian theology is always of reconciling the cruelty of this world, with the idea of a

perfect-loving and powerful God in whose image we are supposed to be created in. The trial shines a favorable light on those who upheld their faith despite persecution, despite their demands for heavenly justice.

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