

Paul Celan

Studies in His Early Poetry



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Hugo Bekker

Paul Celan

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For
Elizabeth
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Preface

Celan's Early Years

Paul, the son of Leo and Friederike Antschel, was born on November 23, 1920, in Czernowitz, the capital of Bukowina, which had been the eastern outreach of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire until, after the fall of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918, it became part of Romania. Czernowitz was a polyglot town; its main languages were German, Romanian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish. Almost half of its 110,000 inhabitants were Jews.

Finding no opportunity to be active as a trained construction technician, Leo Antschel (1890-1942) made a living as a broker in the timber trade. His Zionist convictions caused him to dream of moving to Palestine. His wife (1895-1942), who had little formal training, came from Sadagora, a Hasidic center near Czernowitz. She was a reader of German classics, and it was she who saw to it that in her petit bourgeois family literary German rather than the local dialect was spoken. Her son was closer to her than to his father.

After the boy had attended a liberal German-language elementary school, Leo Antschel transferred him to the Hebrew-oriented Safah Ivriah (1927-1930), after which Paul switched to a state school, but continued being tutored at home in Hebrew.

After his bar mitzvah (1933), our teenager dropped out of the Zionist group Davidia, and joined an anti-Fascist group composed mostly of Jewish students who put together a left-leaning magazine. Paul seems to have written his first poems around this time.

The Antschels hoped for their son to become a doctor. Because by the time he graduated from high school in the spring of 1938 it was difficult for Jews to enter a medical school in Romania, he went to France to take premedical courses in Tours. Traveling by train, he reached Berlin (November 10, 1938) where he saw what anti-Semitism had wrought during the night (*Kristallnacht*).

Paul returned home from Tours in July of 1939. Going back to France at the end of summer vacation turned out to be impossible when Hitler and Stalin signed their non-aggression pact. France and

England declared war when Germany invaded Poland, and Romania was forced to cede the northern part of Bukowina (including Czernowitz) to the USSR. Russian forces entered the city on June 20, 1940.

That summer Paul met and befriended Ruth Lackner, a young Jewish actress who had separated from her husband, and later took back her maiden name (Ruth Kraft). Young Antschel began to study Romance philology at the local university that fall.

On June 13, 1941, apparently foreseeing what was about to happen, the Soviet state police deported from the Czernowitz area 'undesirable elements' consisting of some four thousand men, women and children. Three-fourth of the deportees were Jews. When Hitler broke his pact with Stalin and attacked the USSR (June 22), Romania, siding with Germany, took back North-Bukowina; its troops entered Czernowitz (July 5), and German forces followed a day later. The Great Synagogue was put to the flame, wearing the Star of David was mandated, hundreds of Jews were murdered. By the end of August that number grew to more than three thousand. Other thousands were deported. The first Czernowitz ghetto ever was established in October.

Owing to authorization permits issued by the well-disposed mayor of Czernowitz, the Antschel family was spared, but only for the time being. When new deportation waves began in June 1942, the Antschel parents were among the victims, and were transported to German-occupied Ukraine. Their son had sought shelter for the night away from home and upon his return found his parents gone. He himself was sent to a forced-labor camp several hundred miles to the south of Czernowitz.

Leo Antschel died in the Ukraine in the fall of 1942, either from typhus or a bullet. His wife was shot soon thereafter ('unfit for labor'), either that same year or early in 1943.

During his forced-labor months, hard though they were, Paul continued to write poetry whenever he could. When the Red Armies began to force the Germans back, alleged negotiations for peace between the Soviets and the Romanian government may explain why in February 1944 the inmates of the forced-labor camps were granted time off, without being given a date for their return. Paul Antschel was back in Czernowitz, which the Soviets entered in April when it became part of the USSR republic of Moldova, and was given a Slavic name (Chernovtsy).

That same spring Paul prepared his first collection of typed poems (Ts 1944), worked as an aide in a psychiatric clinic, translated from

Romanian to Ukrainian for a local paper, in the fall began to study English at the local university, and began a collection of handwritten poems (Ms 1944/45).

It seems to have been Stalin's intent to get rid of the Jews in Bukowina by means of 'voluntary emigration'. Paul Antschel left, and arrived in the Romanian capital in April 1945, where he worked as an editor and translator (mainly from Russian and German into Romanian), and moved in Surrealist circles.

The first time Paul came to the fore as Paul Celan (an anagram of Ancel, the Romanian spelling of Antschel) occurred when a Romanian version of his most famous poem was published in 1947 under the title **Tangoul Mortii** (Tango of Death) before it became known as **Todesfuge**. The origin of this literary monument lies in 1944, that is, before the poet's arrival in Bucharest.

In December 1947 Celan left Bucharest to go to Vienna, where he collaborated with the artist Edgar Jené for whose drawings and etchings Celan wrote the commentary under the title *Edgar Jené und der Traum vom Traume* (1948). This volume was printed a few weeks before *Der Sand aus den Urnen*, the first volume of published Celan poems; it contained two illustrations by Jené.

*

Celan left Vienna in July 1948. He went to Paris, where he was to spend the rest of his life. He continued to write poetry, and translated many poems from many languages. Repeatedly suffering bouts of depression, he put an end to his life in 1970.

Introduction

To date, the secondary literature on Paul Celan has had little to say about his early poetry since most of it did not become readily available until the publication of the Wiedemann edition in 1989. This volume brings the texts of 167 German poems that are arranged in the Czernowitz, Bucharest, and Vienna periods in the ratio 135, 25, seven. Respectively 18, 24, and six of these comprise Celan's first published collection—*Der Sand aus den Urnen* (1948). These numbers explain why by 1989 no more than 26 Czernowitz pieces, 19 Bucharest poems, and five Vienna compositions received any critical attention, and why 33 of these 50 were discussed only once, often very briefly at that. (See Bohrer 323-408¹ and Glenn 1989: 318-30.) The above data also show why before 1989 the critics scrutinizing poems in *Der Sand aus den Urnen* speak of them as early. This designation is somewhat misleading when products of Celan's poetic beginnings are to be dealt with.

The intent to focus on poems of Celan's early years may on occasion entail the need to keep high expectations regarding their poetic quality in rein. The purpose of the studies ahead is simply to discuss representative poems in some detail, without prejudice of any kind, and to draw from them whatever implications we may encounter. We therefore shall endeavor not to allow impressions gained from the poems of Celan's maturity or from the secondary materials pertaining to them to intrude upon our readings. Only when connections between early and later writings seem to be clearly evident shall we draw attention to such links, whatever their nature might be—the recurrent use of a particular motif, a similarity in

¹ Throughout this volume page number(s) will be given after the author's name or after a quotation or reference. If the bibliography gives more than one entry under that name, also the pertinent study's year of publication will be shown, e.g., 1900: 100. If an edition of collected works is involved, the volume in question will be mentioned, e.g., III 100. The number after a poem's title or beginning phrase (always presented in bold face) indicates its place in the collection edited by Wiedemann. The location of Celan's post-Vienna poems in the collected works will be shown by volume and page, e.g., II 100.

overall poetic stance, or whatever it is that sparks attention. Little forays of this sort may help to highlight continuance or may serve to indicate development.

Writing on the American scene about Celan's early poetry comes in this case with a rueful lack of intimate knowledge regarding literary traditions and cultural climates prevailing in Czernowitz and Bucharest of the 1930s and 1940s. We therefore shall have nothing to add in this regard to the information brought by Chalfen and the equally valuable cultural data provided in the books of Wiedemann-Wolf (1985), Colin (1991), Felstiner (1995), and in a number of shorter studies. Hence, in terms of influences other than those flowing from Antiquity and the Bible, our readings will primarily endeavor to be sensitive to the *German* literary elements deemed to be discernible in the early work.

By definition, remarks about literary influences can never be exhaustive even if we knew which books Celan possessed or borrowed. Such observations are therefore fated to seem haphazard, even if each and every suggestion to be made were to incur favorable reception. As a result, statements about influences on and connections between Celan's poems can at best make for a mosaic. Even so, their cumulative effect may bring dividends and serve to show at least in part from where the poet comes and in which direction his way with words is leading him.

If we can promise that Celan's early poetry is firmly rooted in the past, we do not mean to deny that the poet soon learned to go his own way. For instance, whereas the old-vintage awareness of Rilke's influence is evident in the employ of enjambments, in contrast to "[den] über alles geliebten Meister" (Chalfen 65) Celan rarely cultivates the sonnet form, and he rarely uses similes. Perhaps similes to him insinuate a mistrust of words that should be autonomous. Perhaps the poet suspects that similes all too often serve purposes of embellishment. His refraining from such adornments makes for a more sober language than Rilke ever saw fit to make his own.

Since Wiedemann-Wolf has richly dealt with the poetic forms the young poet practiced, we propose to concentrate on the *contents* of his poems, while following within each study as closely as possible the chronological order in which they were written.

Even though each of the coming studies can be read as standing by itself, the cross-references between them, together with the motifs and parallels to which we expect to draw attention, will make for a self-referential and self-revealing network that should facilitate staying

abreast of the implications flowing from the argument of a given moment. That network is destined to become a dense one.

The attempt to rely on close readings in a body of poetry importantly marked by ambiguities and obscurities is not novel. Jackson (1977: 82), for one, is persuaded that it is important to scrutinize poems in their entirety, and to let the voice of the text itself speak. At the hand of key terms and key phrases Pöggeler (1986: 77) speaks in a similar vein. A considerable number of equally recent critics could be cited here. Gellhaus (1993), for instance, has shown how to reap rich harvests from detailed scrutinies. Inherent in these studies is the assumption that their findings can only be refuted via equally close dealings with the primary materials.

The array of readers who have spoken of Celan as an autobiographical poet is rather impressive. Lyon (1964: 55), Vietta (1970: 91-92), Schlesak (1978: 80), Bogumil (1982: 82-83) are but some of them. Janz with her particular perspective at stake—*Engagement*; “die Erfahrung des Faschismus” (1984: 21)—should also be mentioned. Felstiner’s book of 1995 fits here as well. Buck (1977: 1) is the one who puts it tersely: “Für nur wenige Autoren fallen Leben und Dichtung so unmittelbar zusammen wie für Celan”. To be sure, when speaking of autobiography, each of these critics adapts the term to his or her specific way of understanding and interpreting, and therefore applies modifications. We propose to do the same. For instance, whereas the poems involving the mother figure can without ado be called autobiographical, the early so-called love poems call for special consideration in order to qualify. Imbued with the ubiquitous themes of melancholy and death, they seem to have a *literary* quality in that such love seems to have been read about. If, in addition to referring to the literary climate in which Celan writes (see Wiedemann-Wolf 61 ff.), we were to ponder whether the autobiographical cachet in these poems stems from the morbidity pervading them, we would have to follow a line of inquiry that leads into the realm of psychology. Or, to put this differently, what comes to us in these writings is the vocalizing of *perceived* reality, reality of the mind therefore.

Broadening our perspective of autobiography by capping under it Celan’s reading experiences and the way he transmutes them seems to make sense. An example of such reading and adapting pertains to the closing paragraphs of the *Meridian* speech (III 86) in which Celan develops the *Flaschenpost* image borrowed from Mandelstam (G. Neumann 213, note 102; Parry 65-66; Olschner 234-35). Though it

does not serve the purpose of the moment to subject Celan's paragraphs to yet another discussion, we adjust them to our own purpose by means of a perspective not touched upon by the poet himself:

If, as Celan suggests, a poem addresses a 'You' who receives a bottled message at some unspecified time and place, it follows (the not quite identical functions of Mandelstam's and Celan's bottles providing ample proof) that the poet himself often found a bottle drifting over the sea of history with its literary and cultural phenomena. Thus, before Celan can send out his own floating container referring to, say, Vienna and Estremadura (**Schibboleth**—I 131), he himself found such a bottle telling of figures, places, or events. When then his bottle drifts into someone else's view, the finder, eager to comprehend its message to the fullest, wants to know which details in it stem from the sender's own perceptions and associations of thought. Though the dangers involved in these endeavors may be legion, they seem to be preferable to the free-wheeling stance adopted by Holthusen (156), who states,

Indem der Autor eine absolute Freiheit des Phantasierens für sich in Anspruch nimmt, räumt er dem Leser eine nicht weniger absolute Freiheit des Verstehens ein.

Autobiography entails the importance of chronology. Due to the paucity of dates and the ways in which the critics made use of the few available to them, the matter of chronology is vexing. Says Wiedemann 235, "Von den zahlreichen Varianten, die von den einzelnen Texten überliefert sind, wurde der erkennbar letzten in jedem Fall der Vorzug gegeben". There is at least one instance, however, in which the latest variant cannot possibly have been the one the poet himself would have chosen as the definitive one (see p. 115). Furthermore, even though on occasion the differences between the variants of a poem are intriguing (see, e.g., p. 178), in the vast majority of cases they are so minor as to make no difference whatsoever. Our own dating system will therefore go by the moment when a given poem received its essential form and content. The dates to be suggested not only entail 'new' time slots for Celan's poetic development, but also may affect the understanding of poetic details. (See, e.g., **Gemurmel der Toten** [54—p. 102.]). The concern with chronology also has a bearing on the possibility of gaining insights by reading poems that in some way are interrelated in serial fashion.

Needless to say, the discussions to come will not be equally fruitful or persuasive. This lack of homogeneity will no doubt be due to the comparative lack of verve with which a given discussion is developed, to the speculative nature of reading a poetic detail, or to a suspected lapse in Celan's poetic inspiration. Besides, the approach used here will yield more 'value' with one lyric than another. Taken together, however, the discussions to come may shed some light on Celan's early work, particularly on poems that to date have not received any critical attention.

I

The Beginnings, Part I

The three oldest Celan poems known to us to date are **Im Park** (15), **Wunsch** (13), and **Legende** (20). This chronological order is the sole selection criterion for this and the following study. In contrast to many other early poems, these are rhymeless. No inferences can be drawn from this other than those on which Wiedemann-Wolf (157-64) dwells. All three allude or explicitly refer to blood, but the function of this motif differs importantly from one poem to the next. Their respective thirteen, eight, and eleven lines compare to an average of fifteen for the first fifty poems in Wiedemann's collection.

What is intriguing about the earliest poems is the materials that may have prompted Celan to write a given piece, or that display similarities with details in that poem. The remarks to be made show how deeply Celan's poetry is rooted in the literature that went before. If persuasive, they bring testimony to the wide range of readings in which he engaged at an early age.

Im Park (15)

- i Nacht. Und alles ist da:
 der See, die Bäume, der Kahn;
 die Kreise im Wasser..
- ii Weiß
 5 schimmerts vorbei an der Weide:
 ein Mädchen,
 das eilt.
- iii Der einzige Schwan kommt vorüber.
- iv Wie, wenn ein zitternder Stern
 10 sich schälte aus seinem Feuer

und fiel' in den See?
In die Wasserrose?

v Ob das Rotkehlchen stürbe?¹

"Nacht". It stands there, without the benefit of a sentence, seemingly without the benefit of a moon. Because of its pride of place, its consequence is unassailable; it literally domes everything. It does not merit a line by itself, however, but must share it with that laconic and prosaic "Und alles ist da". This side-by-side prevents "Nacht" from acquiring whatever connotations the conceptualizing mind might attach to it; only its darkness is there. Even if "Nacht" were to dominate in the end in some figurative way and were meant to reign, the element of mystery piquing interest is thus blocked.

The manipulated tension vibrating in the opening line is heightened by the sober enumeration in the second. The definite articles read as though someone is bookkeeping and remains aloof about it: "der See, die Bäume, der Kahn". How can the speaker sound so specific in an environment in which vision is dim at best? For all we know, he may in a moment have to rely less on the physical than the mental eye, and even then may have his uncertainties.

The items mentioned could serve in a poem meeting the tastes of a bygone day, in the manner of Eichendorff's *Der stille Grund* (I 323), for example, with its half-sunk skiff whose oarsman may have perished because he succumbed to the lure of nature:

iii Ein Kahn wohl sah ich ragen,
10 Doch niemand der es lenkt,
 Das Ruder war zerschlagen,
 Das Schiffelein halb versenkt.

Celan goes a different route, however, not necessarily because he is insensitive to Eichendorff's forthcoming warning against self-identification with nature, but because he has something else in mind.

¹ Date. In Rosenthal 1982: 227 as # 1 under the title **Woher**. Kraft 145: "vor 1939". Chalfen 74 places it before Mother's Day 1938. Wiedemann 240 mentions **Woher?** as earlier title, and states, "In einem Manuskript erscheint die Bemerkung 'Jardin des Pribendes, am 6. Juni'. Der genannte Park befindet sich in Tours, es muß sich also um das Jahr 1939 handeln". She therefore places the poem as the seventh in her collection. Considering the Tours manuscript to be a rewrite, we date the poem as written before May 8, 1938.

This is evident from a quality in the third line that sets it apart from the preceding one, not just because a semi-colon intervenes: if **Im Park** is indeed a dream-vision (Wiedemann-Wolf 185), it must be the mental rather than the physical eye that, despite the prevailing darkness, detects “die Kreise im Wasser”. Aided by the pensive-making ellipses, those circles bring to mind the closing line of Hoffmannsthal’s **Weltgeheimnis** (II 16: “Nun zuckt im Kreis ein Traum herum”), and there is something mysterious, perhaps eerie, lurking in them. If they result from bubbles rising from below, they connote a bit of poetic realism, of the sort we encounter in the poetry of Droste-Hülshoff, and they may serve as an omen.

“Weiß” of the second strophe merits a line by itself and stands in chiaroscuro contrast to “Nacht”. It turns out to be part of a sentence in which the subject (“s” of “schimmerts”) has no antecedent. This manner of delivery ‘acts out’ the speaker’s dimness of perception and his consequent hesitancy. His lack of sharp focus is insinuated not only by the wording, but also by the form of the strophe. In contrast to the definite articles he just used, he is now reduced to speaking of *a* girl and to breaking up his sentence again: “ein Mädchen, / das eilt”. His lack of certainty is also reflected in “das”; at least, we do not know whether it serves as a personal or as a relative pronoun. This vagueness, the speaker’s step-by-step attempts to discern, and the consequent isolation of “das eilt” draw emphatic attention to the girl’s hurrying. Moreover, “schimmerts” may well imply that the speaker is actually peering at a reflection in the not-quite-mirror-like water (witness “die Kreise”), the way his counterpart is in **Tübingen, Jänner** (I 226: “Erinnerung an / schwimmende Hölderlintürme”). The would-be medical practitioner, we trust, is aware of the function of the retina’s rod-shaped cells that are called into service when light is dim.

The third strophe consists of one line only. Particularly if compared with the hastier measure of the preceding one, its stately cadence suggests that there is purpose with a touch of pomp in that “kommt vorüber”, as though the swan were loftily aware of an ordained rendez-vous to keep. Perhaps we are to assume, a moment belatedly, that “die Kreise im Wasser” are due to the swan floating into view, in order then to pass by and disappear in the same direction as that taken by the girl.

What follows is a merely *possible* development, not even an explicit part of what happens in the eye of the mind, let alone in the physical one, and therefore merits questions and conditional verb forms only. The speaker’s role as narrator is therefore somewhat like

that of Heine's in **Lorelei**, who disengages himself in 'untimely' fashion as though he had a short attention span: "Ich *glaube*, die Wellen verschlingen / Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn" (italics added).

By thus directing our attention to one possible outcome, the speaker's manner of delivery makes for a riddle. So to speak, its two indefinite articles are to be turned into definite ones. For it is "ein Mädchen" and "ein Stern" that are the 'characters' to be identified in this would-be unfinished and therefore nebulous story, nebulous, that is, until we stumble into clarity by means of the lucky find that "das eilt", the line situated exactly halfway the poem, is an anagram of "ist Leda". We have here a variant of what Loewen would call "Versteckspiel" (1987: 180). When discussing **Huhediblu** (I 275), Perels (1977: 161) deals with related matters.

Understanding **Im Park** as a riddle explains the narrator's procedure from beginning to end. It explains the definite articles, which must now be seen as defining what have turned out to be mere props, the focus being on the question of how to identify a girl and a star, "ein" and "ein". This dovetails with what G. Neumann 199 has to say when he discusses Mallarmé's **Autre éventail** and the interest Celan took in it: "[Der] unbestimmte Artikel vor den Schlüsselwörtern im Gedicht dient [einer] verwischenden Tendenz". It is doubtful, however, that Celan knew Mallarmé's work as early as 1938.

"Nacht" can now be given its proper meaning and value as the time in which erotic things may happen. Now it no longer matters whether "die Kreise im Wasser" are seen as caused by rising bubbles or by the swan swimming into vision and then out of it again, because both ways of reading are simultaneously valid. Whereas "weiß", in addition to its contrast to the black of night, now demands to be linked with innocence and purity, it must also be seen as "Reduktionsfarbe, Farbe des Nichtseins und des Todes" (Mitgutsch 254); we encounter it as such in later poems, in **Das einzige Licht** (168—"O weiße Giebel des Todes-ihr Dorf wie um Weihnacht"), in **Aschenkraut** (170—"der Ast überm Herzen schon weiß"), in **Das ganze Leben** (179—"Die Sonnen des Todes sind weiß wie das Haar unsres Kindes"), and in many another composition. Perhaps "der Kahn" must be understood as indeed betokening the death motif—rather, the motif of *possible* death.

The *Kahn* motif occurs in later poems. Although Celan varies its function from one writing to the next, its link with apprehension, danger, or death is evident: **Weit, wo die Zeit** (114) states, "Auf den flüchtenden Kähnen / streifen die Wimpel den Traum von

den Himmeln". **Marianne** (159) has "Ein Kahn im Getreide dein Herz, wir rudern ihn nachtwärts"—toward death. Says the speaker of **Dein Haar überm Meer** (164): "Ich aber malt als ein Kahn die Schwingen mir purpurn / und röchelte selbst mir die Brise und stach, eh sie schliefen, in See". In **Das einzige Licht** (168) the speaker states, "Am Kiel der [...] Kähne nahen sie [die Lampen des Schreckens] kühl deiner Stirn" and "doch eilen die Kähne heran mit den flackernden Lampen des Schreckens". Wiedemann 217 translates the sixth line of the Romanian poem **Azi noapte** (169) as "und das Leben ist der Kahn am Ufer, von Rudern verlassen". This catches the essence of the Eichendorff lines cited above, but gives it extra weight by alluding to the lack of steering power—be it transcendental or otherwise. The speaker of **Nachtstrahl** (205) is quite specific even though he leaves us wondering for a moment about subject versus predicate before we decide that we are dealing with inverted diction (Hölderlin-inspired?): "Ein schöner Kahn ist der Sarg, geschnitzt im Gehölz der Gefühle".² The closing sentence of **Din nou am suspendat** (198) is translated as "Mir bleibt nichts, als meinen Weg fortzusetzen, aber mir schwinden die Kräfte, ich schließe die Augen und suche einen Menschen mit einem Kahn" (Wiedemann 230)—perhaps an allusion to Charon. Whereas several of these citations derive their ultimate thrust from Celan's Holocaust experience, it seems clear that his original preoccupation with the skiff-as-danger/death motif results from his literary readings. In this connection, Eichendorff is not the first for whom the skiff acquires an ominous quality. Says Gryphius in **Abend** (I 66), "Der Port naht mehr und mehr sich / zu der glieder Kahn". Gryphius, in turn, may have borrowed the passivity inherent in this wording from the moment in Vergil's *Aeneas* when the titular hero approaches Dido's Carthage.

Meanwhile, uncertainties still beset us in the penultimate strophe of **Im Park**, due to the star and the water lily. The star may be seen as the speller of human destiny, or may be motivated by the myth

² A similar concept comes to the fore when Celan, much later, translates a Mandelstam poem under the title **Der Hufeisen-Finder** (V 131). This similarity regarding a boat made of the wood of a forest (whether of an "actual" forest or of that of feelings) raises the question of how early our poet knew Mandelstam's work before he dedicated *Die Niemandrose* to him. Felstiner (1995: 128) seems to imply that such knowledge did not come about until May 1957.

according to which Leda's twins Castor and Pollux were placed in the sky as the Gemini, the un-conceived sons as it were providing their sire-to-be with the possibility of streaking down incognito. True, it does not serve the poem as riddle to allude to Castor and Pollux as the outcome of the Zeus-Leda encounter, which, after all, is kept in the subjunctive. That encounter might result in rape and, if judged by the closing line, death. Though far removed from the mythological plotline (from which we do not even find out during which part of the day Zeus and Leda come together), this detail nevertheless harbors a concept fully germane to the Greek tradition in which, if a god communicates with a member of the human race, that individual may die as a result. Note the number of stories in which an Olympian takes care to wrap himself in a cloud or takes on the disguise of some animal in order to hunt down a nymph that has taken his fancy. In the case of Semele wanting Zeus to come to her in divine splendor, not disguised, she dies.

None of the above excludes the possibility that on the plane of **Im Park's** epic event, Zeus, forever seeking to keep his extra-marital doings secret from Hera, might decide to strangle Leda lest she go public with the violence done to her. What thus comes to the fore is the concept of *würgen*, a term that we encounter in later Celan poems where it may relate to suffering, to language being cut off, to speech being throttled, to the writing of poetry becoming increasingly more difficult, to silence ensuing, to words casting shadows, to truth being evasive, to 'yes' and 'no' demanding their simultaneous validity, to the empty spaces between words being meaningful.

Regarding the water lily, we know that already in his teens Celan's botanical knowledge was impressive, and that he cherished reading in dictionaries and encyclopedic materials of various sorts (Chalfen 60). This information is of consequence for the purpose of the moment, for it helps the endeavor to comprehend the use of the water lily motif. The 'Wasserrose' entry in the *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, XX, 44 merely refers to the entry 'Seerose'; other reference works do the same. Perhaps it is this fact from which the only other Celan reader dealing with **Im Park** finds that in "und fiel in den See? / In die Wasserrose?" the poet

auf das Grundwort, auf die 'Rose' [verweist]. [...] Die 'See'- bzw. 'Wasserrose' hat zwei [...] visuelle Referenzen: einmal die Pflanze, die mit dem Kompositum benannt ist [...] ; daneben aber auch ein Projektion der zum Simplex 'Rose' gehörenden Pflanze auf das Wasser. Beide evozierten Pflanzen sind fest in die Gedichtstruktur eingebunden. An dieser Ambivalenz

läßt sich der oft vernachlässigte Unterschied zwischen visuellen und sprachlichen Bildern zeigen: nur in letzteren kann eine Blüte gleichzeitig weiß *und* rot sein. (Wiedemann-Wolf 186)

This line of reasoning clearly dwells on the motif of the rose in order for its color to be white *and* red, so as to establish the desired connection between “weiß” and the red breast of the robin. The continuation of this argument could make for a close link between the rose, the flower of love (in the present context read “of Eros”), and the phenomenon of death, and thus bring about a combination that becomes quite familiar to the reader of Celan’s so-called love poetry, in which the love-death complex is everywhere. Moreover, the importance of the above citation could be enhanced by adding the not necessarily superfluous reminder that the petals of the mystical rose of Judaism are alternately white and red (Schlesak 1990: 351).

We are allowed to ask, however, why Wiedemann-Wolf’s reasoning is not accommodated by a simple hyphen in the text, like this:

und fiel’ in den See-,
in die Wasserrose?

The poem’s orthography suggests a moment of focusing in, of Zeus’ seeing the “See”—his “Feuer” as the masculine principle being drawn to the feminine principle represented by water—in order then to prick his eyes on the “Wasserrose”. We therefore go beyond the above reading by thinking of the flower in terms of color (*rosa*). Whereas the botanical dictionaries classify the water lily as a member of the *Nymphaea* family, the medical books tell us that *Nymphae* designates the vulva’s *labia minora*, and this fact by obvious implication drives home the color connection between the *Nymphaea* (= girl, bride, as Wiedemann-Wolf 187 reminds us) and the robin *and* between Zeus’ hypothetical victim and the “Wasserrose”.

As an extra little boon, this reading allows for a comparison with the closing passage of **Sprich auch du** (I 135):

20 Feiner: ein Faden,
an dem er herabwill, der Stern:
um unten zu schwimmen, unten,
wo er sich schimmern sieht: in der Dünung
wandernder Worte,

even though these lines bear clear testimony to the process of abstraction to which the star motif is subjected in the struggle to use words, if not fully effectively, at least responsibly.

There is more. Given Celan's early familiarity with the botanical, it is possible that when he composes the fourth strophe of **Im Park**, his use of the water lily motif receives its impetus from the often contradictory and on occasion quite hazy data gleaned from the reference works. In them we find under *Nelumbo* that the *Nelumbo nucifera* (Indian lotus) has a pinkish-red flower. True, whereas Celan's wording suggests that his "Wasserrose" rests *on* the water, the flower of the *Nelumbo nucifera* stands *above* it. In contrast to this, its close relative, the Egyptian lotus (*Nymphaea lotus*) has a white flower. These data insinuate the possibility that Celan's "Wasserrose" is a composite of sorts, that the poet endows it with characteristics of the *Nelumbo nucifera* as well as the *Nymphaea lotus*, and in doing so has it all: the color white, the color red, the link between "Mädchen" and "Wasserrose", as well as the one between "Wasserrose" and "Rotkehlchen". To the degree that this line of reasoning sounds far-fetched, it is worthwhile to note that the bud of the water lily species in Edgar Jené's lithograph facing the title page of *Der Sand aus den Urnen* clearly stands above the (frozen) water level, and by that token suggests the *Nelumbo nucifera*. Celan may nevertheless be somewhat cavalier with botanical verities in **Im Park**: the bloom of at least one water lily species withdraws under water when night falls. This matter will have to come to our attention again (see p. 217).

The motif of the robin has nothing to do with Greek mythology; it serves to bring out the possibility of violent death:

Der Vogelname selbst, seine sprachliche Form, ist Motivation genug für seine Verbindung mit dem Todesthema (Wiedemann-Wolf 187).

Who is to say, however, whether or not Celan was familiar with the notion from Germanic mythology as found in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* under the entry 'Rotkehlchen,' according to which the robin attracts lightning? It is but a short step to link such lightning with the fiery tail of a comet. This detail may have been instrumental in Celan's employ of the bird since it provides reason for Zeus, traditionally imaged with lightning bolts, to tear himself "aus seinem Feuer".

This is a detour prompted by the fascinating difference that comes to the fore if we compare Zeus' allegedly potential avidity toward a human female with that of the one-voice speakers toward "Niemand" as expressed in the closing strophe of **Psalm** (I 225):

- iv Mit
 - 15 dem Griffel seelenhell,
 - dem Staubfaden himmelswüst,
 - der Krone rot
 - vom Purpurwort, das wir sangen
 - über, o über
 - 20 dem Dorn.

Celan's readers have made remarks about the ambiguities in this poem, about "Niemand" versus "niemand", and so on. We are in doubt in the second strophe as well:

- ii Gelobt seist du, Niemand.
 - 5 Dir zulieb wollen
 - wir blühn.
 - Dir
 - entgegen[.]

since "entgegen" is 'toward' *and* 'against', makes for a lauding prayer *and* its opposite, perhaps even a raised fist. Similarly, whereas readers have taken cognizance of the sexual connotations embedded in the fourth strophe and rendered its "himmelswüst" via phrases like 'abandoned by heaven' and 'ravaged by heaven', we hazard that it no less denotes the desire of the male principle of the rose to become one with heaven. As such it partakes of *Hitlahawut*, on which Buber elaborates in *Legende des Baatschem* (1927: 134-49). Though not preoccupied with **Psalm**, Rey (1970: 762) lends support to this view: "Aus Liebe zu dem Höchsten hebt sich das Niedere ihm entgegen". With this, "himmelswüst" makes for a paradox, since the term now harbors abandonment *and* partakes of the would-be active sexual sphere. A bifocal value also comes to attach to "seelenhell", this time from within the sphere of feminine sexuality—compare "seelenhell" with *nymphaea* (*labia minora*) as mentioned above.

This suggestion brings out a telling difference between Judaic mysticism and its Christian counterpart. Whereas in each ism the endeavor to attain union may readily be couched in the language of sexual love, in Judaism the human role is an active one that is not in

the same measure achievable by the Christian. In Judaism, the individual can aspire to ravaging, though there seems to be no instance in its literature in which the union is celebrated as actually achieved. (See in this connection Scholem 1961: 123; Wolosky 1986; Bosmajian 187 speaks of “a state of suspended yearning”.) In Christianity, if the individual attains the desired goal, the soul is ultimately *being* ravaged.

This is not to say that in the Christian framework of reference the individual can do nothing but wait. Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* tells of the possibilities to prepare oneself, and the opening lines of the pithiest example available about the mystical adventure clearly indicate the preparatory action involved. This consists of the individual’s endeavor to divest himself of all sensory awareness in order for the union to be unimpeded and therefore possible. Says Juan de la Cruz in **Una noche oscura del alma** (Barret 156):

En una noche oscura
con ansias en amores inflamada,
oh dichosa ventura!
salí sin ser notada,

5 estando ya mi casa sosegada.

In this passage, the house (body) has been emptied of all stirrings coming from without (via the senses), and is therefore in ‘darkness’, so that the persona, the soul, can sally forth undetected to keep its rendez-vous.

Judaism knows nothing of such a purge as a prerequisite. On the contrary, its mystical endeavor engages all the senses to the fullest and keenest. It is therefore difficult to think of a mystic trance ensuing. If there is a union, it turns out to be a union *entre nous*, on earth. In terms of sexual symbolism involving the rose passage of **Psalm**, this means that the style and filament can ultimately only aim at consummation with each other. Ask Buber (1966: 36):

We “unify” God, when living and dying we profess His unity; we do not unite ourselves with Him. The God in whom we believe, to whom we are pledged, does not unite with human substance on earth. But the very fact that we do not imagine that we can unite with Him enables us the more ardently to hope that the world be perfected under the kingship of the Almighty.

On the leash of these speculations, we must demur when reading that “seelenhell” and “himmelswüst” “einander unversöhnlich gegenüber-

[stehen]" (Krämer 126). We argue instead that the "o" of "über, o über / dem Dorn" may be poignantly orgiastic in its connotations, poignantly because we do not know whether the filament carries any pollen which the style is so avid, so "seelenhell", to harvest. To put it differently, the sperm count might be zero. If this were so, we could coin a term and say that the filament is *erdewüst* as well, in an equally double sense as "himmelswüst" is. How, then, can this rose be fertile? And yet, we venture, the singing "über [...] / dem Dorn",³ that is, above and beyond the thorn of sexuality, is a singing beyond Eros, straining and straining. At the very moment of that orgiastic straining toward the "o" as the acme of Eros, Eros becomes indistinguishable from Agape. That "o", then, is the mouth of a Laocoön in agony *and* of a Santa Teresa de Avila in ecstasy. We may have opined that Celan's speakers are mystics without a mystique, but now we know better; with that "o" they *do* achieve a mystique. They may not have the last word, but they do have the last cry. Such seems to be the importance of the mystique of the rose which Celan's "o" etches into the mind as though it were acid. His is a Jewish message that answers on at least one level of reading the questions posed by Schulze (1970: 494) regarding the *meanings* of the terms "seelenhell" and "himmelswüst".

As read here, **Psalm** tells a story of epic proportions, particularly if we keep in mind Buber's paragraph cited a moment ago: the poem tells of ardent striving toward transcendence. Its speakers meet with defeat if we define that transcendence in the manner of Juan de la Cruz. Nevertheless, union is celebrated as an affirmation of the dispensation valid within its own ism. And mind you, this celebration stems from a communal rather than individual belief. **Psalm**, we are saying, is a poem reflecting Jewish tenets, well-nigh capable of transforming lament into a sacrament of praise, a terrestrial one, as are all sacraments.

In connection with this, scholarly elucidations have instilled the view that Persian art depicting the sex-act in harem scenes grants a glimpse of eternity. Hence Buber (1947: 11) does not write in a vacuum, but 'westernizes' against this Near-Eastern backdrop when he discusses the religious-mystical significance of love between spouses, and in doing so celebrates the 'mystique' of the root: "Wenn

³ We can readily accept Meuthen's view of the thorn motif as "eine Chiffre nachparadiesischen Daseins" (248).

ein Mann mit seinem Weibe innig beisammen ist, sind sie von der Sehnsucht der ewigen Hügel umweht". A form of this mystique is at work in Celan's **Psalm**.

Regarding Celan's awareness of things Judaic, it should be noted that the secondary literature has displayed a pronounced tendency to focus on Hasidic-Kabbalistic concepts (see, e.g., Baumann 281; Meinecke 1970: 20; Rexheuser 167; Janz 1984: 21). Limited mainly to taking their cues from materials that do not include Celan's early poetry, they leave wide open the validity of Jackson's view that "le judaïsme de Celan est un 'judaïsme poétique'" (1978: 86). But there often is a difference between the 'color' of the Judaic motifs and themes encountered in the early poetry and that detectable in later poems, particularly in those clustered in *Die Niemandsrose* and thereafter. It is a matter of 'covert' versus 'overt' employ, of 'inadvertent' rather than 'advertent', of 'literary' versus 'experienced'.

We return to **Im Park**. Even though Celan's treatment of the Leda-swam story sets it apart from its source, there is one perspective that allows us to see the poem as standing in a venerable tradition:

In Barbarossa's day a member of the court might entertain a social gathering by reciting or singing a poem of his about love's problems. Some of the listeners, perhaps like-minded individuals all, who know everything about those problems, may glance at the emperor sitting there, probably brooding about Jerusalem having been taken by Saladin. There has been talk about the call for a crusade. The performer ought to write a poem about *that* and the aggravation of love's dolor such an undertaking would entail!

Four centuries later, when a courtier is delivering his just-written sonnet before Elizabeth Tudor, members of her entourage may glance at her and assume she is brooding about Mary Stuart who had been gaming with her for the crown and now, kept in Fotheringhay, is said still to be intriguing even though Babington is out of the way.

When, another four centuries later, a teenager is reciting something, his listeners may have good reason to worry about developments taking place in Germany. Better ask him to recite that little poem once more. It obviously is something about a swan, but the rest is obscure. 'Paul, could we hear it again?'

The venerable tradition is that of poetry serving to entertain. **Im Park**, particularly if understood as orally delivered, may be housed in the tradition of *Gesellschaftsspiel*.⁴

Im Park contains details that do not occur in, say, the story of Leda and the swan as told by Ovid. For one thing, it does not feature Celan's ill-boding "Kahn". For another, Ovid no longer believes the myths with which he regales us and, without inner commitment but ever so smoothly and deftly, simply retells what he finds in his sources, and in doing so demythologizes and modernizes. Celan's speaker does the same, but as a believer, though a believer with a twist. Here is Scholem (1969: 88):

The original religious impulse in Judaism [...] has always been characterized as a reaction to mythology. [...] Jewish worship implied [...] a polemical rejection of the images and symbols in which the mythical world finds its expression.

This ties in with a statement made by Witte when he is about to establish interrelations between poems in *Die Niemandsrose*:

Gedicht als Kommentar heißt [...] einerseits Präzisierung, Sinndeutung eines schon vorhandenen Textes von der eigenen existentiellen Situation her, anderseits Erweiterung des Gesagten durch Anknüpfung an neue Kontexte (1987: 79).

Celan himself will put it more tersely and from a different perspective, in his *Meridian* speech: "[Das Gedicht] erhebt einen Unendlichkeitsanspruch; es sucht, durch die Zeit hindurchzugehen-durch sie hindurch, nicht über sie hinweg" (III 186). It is his "*durch sie hindurch, nicht über sie hinweg*" (italics added) that differentiates him from Ovid.

While demythologizing and modernizing, Celan turns **Im Park** into an unfinished drama (note the division into five strophes—read 'unfinished 'acts'') and invites us to ponder the possible outcome. To make things more challenging, he throws dust into the air by changing his first, invitational title **Woher?** into the declarative **Woher** before using the enigmatic **Im Park**. He leaves the poem proper unaltered, however, so that the answer to the riddle ("ist Leda") remains

⁴ Reference is made to Celan's early exercised penchant to engage in word games of various sorts—See Solomon (220-26), Petuchowski (1978a), Loewen (1987: 172, 180).

available from the composition's earliest inception onward. With his latest title, however, he seems to take his distance from wanting to regale his audience with a riddle and, by applying his generalizing new title, seems to prefer instead to turn his little composition into 'purer' poetry. That the new title made it more difficult to grasp the poem's 'plot' is completely in line with the habits of his maturity, albeit then by means of more hermetically colored devices.

Whether or not Celan's modernization of the Leda-swan myth gives license to say that we see the sexually obsessed mind of a teenager at work (Chalfen 75) is a matter best left for the psychiatrists to ponder. This much seems certain, however: the speaker does know of the power of Eros: "zitternder" suggests that even god Zeus is subject to this force; the adjective denotes his loin-centered avidity; his own fateful star⁵ so to speak turns him into a comet with a fiery tail. Or, to put it quite differently, it would be easy to glean from **Im Park** that it rejects the concept of divinity becoming incarnate because the result could be funest.

Whereas it is remarkable that within fifteen short lines Celan establishes a chain of connections that is virtually a multiple equation involving a pars pro toto here and there ("Ein Mädchen, / das eilt" = 'ist Leda' = "Wasserrose" = *Nymphaea* = *labia minora* = "Rotkehlchen"), there is another matter to be touched upon. If we go by the secondary literature that deals with the way Celan was affected by the poetry of Osip Mandelstam, we encounter the view that the Russian poet draws classical Hellenism into the present (see, e.g., Parry 38). Since **Im Park** was written well before Celan absorbed Mandelstam's influence, the present discussion suggests that Celan's way of giving a modern cachet to ancient motifs and materials owes nothing to the Russian poet. This does not imply a denial of any forthcoming interest in Mandelstam; it leaves intact, for example, the poets' shared tendency to use (whether or not for poetic purposes only) motifs deeply embedded in the Christian tradition.

Whereas Mandelstam's interest in Hellenism and Christianity is as well attested as Celan's use of motifs central to Christian doctrine, it will be one of the tasks of the forthcoming studies to undergird "die unerwartete Tiefe von Celans Beziehung zur Antike" (Böschenstein-Schäfer 1989: 16), and thus to suggest that our youthful poet's

⁵ It is of course un-Greek to say 'fateful'; Antiquity went for astronomy, not astrology.

preoccupation with Antiquity is as prevalent as Mandelstam's, and much more pronounced than the secondary literature to date has revealed.

The tracing of poetic motifs and their development has been said to be revealing and instructive (Friedrich 45). This may particularly apply to Celan whose range of motifs in the early poetry is a narrow one. It allows Bienek (44) to say, "Die Ausschließlichkeit, mit der Celan bestimmte Worte benutzt, hat er nur mit Georg Trakl gemeinsam". It may therefore be rewarding to deal with one or two of the motifs encountered in **Im Park** to see how they fare in other poems. Witte (1987), for one, has testified to the validity and importance of intra-comparative readings that rely to a high degree on the scrutiny of motifs.

In passing we may say that the motif of the night is by far the most frequently occurring one; we encounter it some eighty times in the Czernowitz-Vienna span. Various terms having to do with darkness (*Dunkel*, *Finsternis*, and the like) add an additional four dozen or so. The concordance of Nielsen and Pors indicates the poet's continued interest in this complex in the post-Vienna poems.

Much less common than the night-darkness motif is that of the star; by 1948 it has been used some three dozen times. These stars have nothing to do with transcendental reach. If, as happens when Celan activates his reader's tradition-determined associations, stars seek to prop hope, it turns out to be hope dashed. If we cull from these references the moments when the 'stars' move, the results will be unavoidably truncated because each relevant passage to be cited is disassociated from the environment from which it receives (and to which it imbues) its value. The citations ahead draw attention to a number of poems that so far have not received any critical attention. We must leave unexplored, however, the possible importance of "eine Verwandtschaft mit dem rumänischen Dichter Mihai Eminescu, die sich vor allem am Motiv des 'gefallenen Sternes' zeigt". (Rosenthal 1983: 399).

Prinzessin Nimmermüd (23)

- xiv 27 Daß dort ein gelbes Sternlein fiel?
Was weiß mein Herz für buntes Spiel!

The fifteen couplets of this poem seem to constitute someone's speech that received its impetus from someone else's ballad. Though not disjointed (the closing couplet is identical to the first, and all but one of the even-numbered couplets begins with a 'D'), there is no development, no story, beyond the speaker's attempts to dragoon Nimmermüd into a party for two. While trying to overcome her trepidations and to cajole her into coming with him, he seems to be drawing upon various sources. "Dein grünes Kleid, mein rotes Kleid" of the second couplet, for instance, may derive from a Jewish tradition in which green as the color of a bride's attire suggests fertility (Forstner 126). At the same time, green as a mixture of blue and yellow (each mentioned separately a moment later in the poem) may be seen as complementary to red, which as the color of blood may insinuate the fire of love. The twelfth line, "Der Zwerg am Gartentore nickt", brings to mind a passage in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (173), and it is tempting to view the thirteenth couplet ("Zu dieser Rast? Zu jener Ruh? / Die Ruh bin ich, die Rast sei du!") as an adaptation—imbued with covert eroticism—of Schubert's **Du bist die Ruh**.

Though falling stars tend to come with foreboding, in the present case the line "Daß dort ein gelbes Sternlein fiel?" seems to indicate that the speaker reacts to his partner's (unreported) expression of apprehension upon seeing a falling star, and soothingly speaks of a *starlet*. Whereas the color of that star may add to Nimmermüd's unease (yellow spelling danger),⁶ his use of it may serve to connote love's more than welcome happiness (see Grimm, V, "gelb", 2883), and is meant to have a calming effect in order to invalidate her trepidations. The value of the falling star, then, is ambiguous because it is determined one way by the addressee and another by the speaker.

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⁶ According to Chalfen 115, the Jews in Czernowitz were forced to wear the yellow star soon after German forces entered the city on July 6, 1941. Though the Star of David was mandated in Poland as early as November 23 of 1939, it seems unlikely that Celan knew this when in early 1940 he wrote his seemingly carefree couplets.

Der Sandmann (26)

- ii 7 Ihr wißt nicht, wie hart meine Fahrt war,
und wieviele Sterne fielen...

Denoting the single addressee, apparently a child, “ihr” and “euch” lend an archaic flavor to this poem, in which the sandman of nursery talk is the bringer of death. Like Goethe’s *Erlkönig*, he seeks to lure, but there is something hasty, hence disquieting in his rhythms and cadences, and there is a touch of mystery in the simile involving the wind of the night:

- i 1 Stille: ich komm wie der Nachtwind
kommt auf den Regenschnüren,
mit Schritten, die lautlos und sacht sind,
euch unter die Träume zu führen.

In the first lines of ii (“Ihr greift in mein wehendes Barthaar. / Ihr könnt mit den Sternen spielen”) there may be a quality attached to “Barthaar” that allows for a link with “dein irrender Bart” of **Die letzte Fahne** (177)—note the common-denominator value of “wehendes” and “irrender”, even though in the later poem the beard motif is meant to denote Jewish identity. Compare also the masking potential in “vielleicht, daß ein Bart uns entstellt” of **Aschenkraut** (170).

The falling stars, ostensibly endowed with the capacity to beckon, occur in an environment in which, as in Greek mythology, dream and death are siblings. With the aid of these lines:

- iv 5 bis ihr mich fühlt an der Wand stehn⁷
und rüsten zu purpurnen Fahrten..[.]

the former (“Träume” of i) easily shades into the latter if we note the similarities *and* the differences between the first and last stanzas:

⁷ This “an der Wand stehn” may derive from a passage in Mörike’s **Maler Nolten** 33: “[Da] öffnete sich die Tür, und leise trat die Gestalt des Nachtwächters herein. Er blieb unbeweglich an der Wand hingepflanzt stehen”. This watchman, who is said to be masked, white-bearded, and “gespensterhaft”, readily becomes his companion of the night, Celan’s “Sandmann”.

- v Schwindelt euch, komm ich wie Nachtwind
 kommt auf den Regenschnüren,
 mit Schritten, die lautlos und sacht sind,
 20 euch sorgsam nachhausezuführen...

Incidentally, the adjective in that “purpurne[...] Fahrten” of iv readily spells danger, as it does in other poems.

*

Ballade (27)

- i 3 die roten Rehe erschrecken..
 Ihr Stern taucht tiefer in die Flut[.]

This time the verb does not quite accommodate the notion that we are dealing with a falling star. In a poem in which “ein blauer König [...] ein weißes Wild / für die letzte der Königinnen [sucht]”, the passage may suggest instead that the deer, alerted to danger by the hunter’s call that has just been mentioned, look up and then lower their heads again. In doing so they see ‘their star’ as though receding into the mirroring water. This detail might simply denote the obvious optical illusion involved if it were not for the fact that hunting at night without there being a bright moon in the sky does not make much sense. “Stern”, therefore, may indicate instead the white markings (*Abzeichen*) on the foreheads of the deer, so that “ihr Stern” functions as *pars pro toto* for the animals’ heads being lowered to the water for drinking now that apprehension has abated again.

Even so, the fact that “ihr Stern” occurs in the singular suggests that the speaker does not mean to abandon the connection between “Stern” and (collective) destiny despite the view that “stars, the traditional rulers of human fortune and symbols of cosmic order, are only human constructs for Celan. They no longer control man” (Lyon 1962: 117). Nothing prevents the poet from counting on his *reader’s* thinking along traditional lines, who thus may feel nudged to imbue the star with a dual function. The poet therefore may want it both ways. What this has to do with the dictum that “die Mehrdeutigkeit [der Bilder] [...] der Präzision [dient]” (Szondi, 1972: 111), or with Celan’s own statement of 1958 (“Dieser Sprache geht es, bei aller unabdingbaren Vielstelligkeit des Ausdrucks, um Präzision”—III 167) is a different matter: “Mehrdeutigkeit” and “Vielstelligkeit” combined with “Präzision” leave ample room for ‘precision of ambiguity’. After all, in **Ballade** and many other early poems we are dealing with

deliberately cultivated ambiguity, which does not highlight precision, but is in the nature of playing hide-and-seek. That is the reason why the endeavor to pry open an image for its implications brings us time and again to a moment when we must make a choice if we want to follow at least one possible way of reading to its logical end.

Incidentally, the fact that **Prinzessin Nimmermüd**, **Der Sandmann**, and **Ballade** occupy pages 23, 26, and 27 in Wiedemann's edition and are similarly close, though earlier, in their dates of composition by our own reckoning raises the question whether Celan went through a series of compositional exercises in order to play with variations of the falling-star motif.

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Einsamkeit (80)

i 1 Ich lebe unter tausend weißen Steinen,
die alle Nächte schleuderten nach mir.
Ich häufe sie auf meinem schwarzen Leinen.
Daß du vorbeikommst, wart ich hier.
[...]

iv 14 Doch daß ich irgend dich mit Sternen streif,
laß ich die Steine schwärmen als Kometen,
und meine Seelen häng ich dran als Schweif.

This poem is to be understood as spoken by the mother figure in 1943, after her death. The cited closing lines suggest that she wants to be the inspirational force later celebrated in **Der Reisekamerad** (I 66). Indeed, she will use the very stones above her according to the opening line and make them soar, also on behalf of those who died with her ("meine Seelen"). She thus assigns to herself a hallowing, perhaps a redeeming, function.

The motif of stones flying through the air is akin to "Laß den Stein die Wolke [...] sein" of **Am letzten Tor** (141). This may have been inspired by Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (172), but it is interesting that Schulze in his section "Der weiße Stein in der Luft" (1976: 97-104) cites flying-stone passages from various Paris poems, **Vor einer Kerze** (I 110) as the first, and attributes their origins to *Revelation 2: 17* and/or to materials dealing with alchemy.

Einsamkeit contains the haunting line "Ich seh dir zu, über das Meer hinweg". Celan uses a variation of it in **Am Brunnen** (117: "Wenn sich die Wasser dir und mir verfinstern, / sehn wir uns an-

doch was verwandeln sie? ”), in **Dein Haar überm Meer** (164: “O komm übers Meer!”), and in **Die Jahre von dir zu mir** (206: “Wir sehen uns zu in den Spiegeln der Tiefsee”). The last employ of such (death-related!) images in the pre-Paris materials is the drastic “wir lieben einander [...] / wie das Meer im Blutstrahl des Mondes” of **Corona** (209). Each of these statements receives pungent value from its environment, as does the promise that *may* be contained in “Im Quell deiner Augen / hält das Meer sein Versprechen” of **Lob der Ferne** (207). These images pertaining to the sea are arresting, and are in need of scrutiny (see p. 195 ff).

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Am Brunnen (117)

- ii 5 Wie dir das Blut, wenn Sterne es befahlen,
 ward mir die Schulter einsam, weil sie trug.

Situated in a setting of which the components are in part derived from the lore of Antiquity, these lines involve the dead mother as well. The star motif comes with negative connotations and seems to recall a line in Trakl’s **Winternacht** (I 128): “Ein weißes Sternenhemd verbrennt die tragenden Schultern”. Celan adopted additional motifs from this poem. Granted, it may mean little that Trakl’s beginning phrase (“Es ist Schnee gefallen”) has a parallel in **Schwarze Flocken** (129: “Schnee ist gefallen”) and in the beginning line **Es fällt nun, Mutter, Schnee in der Ukraine** (68), a poem of which earlier versions also went by the title **Winter**. More telling is that Trakl’s star-shoulder combination is immediately followed by “Gottes Geier zerfleiß dein metallenes Herz”. This line echoes a detail in the Prometheus story that also Celan’s ““Gott ist auch so nahe wie der Geier”” of **Der Einsame** (140—see p. 60) conveys.

*

Espenbaum (165)

- iv 7 Runder Stern, du schlingst die goldne Schleife.
 Meiner Mutter Herz ward wund von Blei.

As will become evident in the forthcoming discussion of this poem (pp. 140 ff.), we take the star to be a comet, and a specific one at that. It is a killer.

As already suggested, the final line of **Im Park**, if read as a possible ‘epic’ event, may connote suffocation. To be sure, Celan forgoes the use of *würgen* in this poem, perhaps because for the average reader it is not a term that suits traditional poetic taste. Hölderlin uses it once, in **Der Tod fürs Vaterland** (I 208: “wo keck herauf die Würger dringen”), and so does Trakl, in **Winternacht** (I 128: “Ein roter Wolf, den ein Engel würgt”). *Würgen* does not begin to incur favor until Rilke uses it half a dozen times, though in three of these instances he may merely do so for purposes of alliteration. It is interesting then that in his pre-Paris periods Celan uses *würgen* or terms akin to it on a number of occasions. Note that the following examples could readily be increased if inventory were taken of all the instances in which allusions or explicit references are made to breathing, whether via forms of *atmen* or other means, for instance, the choking effect of a necklace.

Leise, Geliebte, leise (31)

- i 9 Taubenschwärme
fangen
zitternd ein silbernes Spiel an,
das Ringe schlingt um deinen Hals,
und fortnimmt.

As understood here, “fortnimmt” equates with ‘takes breath away’, hence has to do with suffocation and the inability to speak. Even so, there may be an ambiguity here because there is the possibility to see “Spiel” as consisting of the doves’ wheeling around and around and repeatedly coiling and uncoiling “Ringe [...] um deinen Hals”, so that the individual alternates between choking and gasping (see “Der Atem eilt” in iv). The passage is part of a melancholy love poem placed in the autumn when nature is about to fall dormant, and forbodes death (ii: “Die Stunden im Flieder / röten sich”).

There is also the possibility that the speaker is concerned about the doves’ “Spiel” with him, but does so on behalf of the doves themselves (birds of love whose fate he foresees now that their “Spiel”, perhaps their dance of death, begins). This possibility is enhanced if we look at a passage in Rilke’s **Die Tauben** (II 60):

- iii Am Hals gezeichnet mit der Fingerspur
 10 gewohnten Griffs, mit dem die Priester packen,
 doch gleich daneben, im schutzlosen Nacken,
 beruhigt, wie durch göttliche Natur.

These lines, in turn, may be compared with *Leviticus* 5:8:

And he shall bring them [two turtle-doves or two young pigeons] unto the priest, who shall offer that which is for the sin-offering first, and wring off its head from its neck, but shall not divide it asunder.

That Celan's speaker is preoccupied with Rilke seems evident from the affinity prevailing between the penultimate strophe of **Leise, Geliebte, leise**:

- v 32 Schon treibt die Erde
 die Unruh rascher in den wilden Wein,
 der sich vom Tor löst...

and the second strophe of Rilke's **Herbsttag** (I 154):

- 4 Befehl den letzten Früchten voll zu sein;
 gieb ihnen noch zwei südlichere Tage,
 dränge sie zur Vollendung hin und jage
 die letzte Süße in den schweren Wein.

Though it must be taboo to cull generalizations from the mere passages cited, they nevertheless invite brooding: Rilke in his poem of 1902 masters what we may conceive of as the cadences of religion-colored imagery, smooth and soothing, but not too much so, for there is the alertness of *wachen* to come in iii, which is to lead to the final line's "unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben". Then, by 1913, in **Die Tauben**, the rhythm is marked by an enjambment, the unhurried open vowels of "Tage"-*"jage"* have become the closed ones of "packen"-*"Nacken"*, whose shortness undermines the quietude of the 'u' in "beruhigt" as well as the state of rest inherent in this word's meaning. Celan's cited passages contrast with this. There is no thought-disciplining rhyme, no equivalent lengths of lines seeking to tame the verbal material. Instead there is the isolated position of "fangen" and its alliteration with "fortnimmt" with its connotation of finality. There are not just "Tauben", there is a multitude of them, as though they were crows swooping down, and they "eilen herbei". The sibilants in "fangen / zitternd ein silbernes Spiel an" make for disquiet. Everything spells unrest—and makes for an ironic contrast with the

title's "leise". Only the closing strophe ("Bald löschen alle Rufe aus") holds out the promise of impending quiet, but it is the quiet of death.

Away from the motif of *würgen*, we could have drawn attention to connections between **Leise, Geliebte, Leise** and Trakl's **Verklärter Herbst** (I 37). This poem, of 1912, is so 'un-Traklean' as to read like a tongue-in-cheek emulation of the Romantic period. Like Rilke's **Herbsttag** and Celan's poem, it employs the motif of ripening grapes ("Gewaltig endet so das Jahr / Mit goldnem Wein und Frucht der Gärten"), and like them it alludes in the end to death: "Im Kahn den blauen Fluß hinunter / Wie schön sich Bild an Bildchen reiht / Das geht in Ruh und Schweigen unter".

The title **Leise, Geliebte, leise** may warrant the notion that it leads to "du meine Leise" of **Mit allen Gedanken ging ich** (I 221), which has to do with breath being violently interrupted, this time with the mother-sister complex at stake, and to be read, among other things, as having to do with poetic inspiration.

*

Unterwegs (56)

- i 3 Was für würgende Wildnis flicht
Gitter in Türme,
- ii 5 die wessen Wolkenfaust zerschlug?

Though opaque at first glance (what or who exactly is behind that "wessen"?), this passage features "würgende" in the sense of anguishing terror as much as that of suffocating. See the forthcoming discussion of this poem (p. 107 ff.).

*

Stundenwechsel (83)

- i 3 "Was innen zittert-heb es und befreis,
und wieg, und wiege es nicht ein!"
- ii 5 Der Nacht sind die Kobolde nackt entsprungen.
(Um zu erzählen, wie die Tränenkette würgt?)

Said to have received its impetus from Wilhelm Hauff's *Das kalte Herz* (Wiedemann-Wolf 204, note 87), this poem reads as though meant as a love plaint in which the speaker adopts the role of Hauff's

hero who wants to have his heart back so that he can experience again the feelings of which he used to be capable. In Celan's scenario the motif of the choking chain of tears is no more than a parenthetical remark put in the form of a question, and by that token does not go beyond hinting at woes. Insofar as the goblins represent the speaker's conscience, they are also the ones who bring him awareness, which may come with suffocating tears.

*

Lob der Ferne (207)

vi 15 Im Quell deiner Augen
erwürgt ein Gehenkter den Strang.

Almost every image in this poem is oxymoronic, inverted, or put on its head. In a composition dealing with the problem of writing poetry, the hanged man, the speaker, 'strangles' what is strangling him, that is, the endeavor to find adequate words (see p. 196). The *würgen* motif has thus become totally abstracted and metaphorical. To be sure, Pöggeler (1986: 65), for one, puts it quite differently: "[**Lob der Ferne**] spricht von einer Liebe, die eine bestrickende Verführung ist". Perhaps, however, we are allowed to understand that "Liebe" as love of poetry.

*

Whether explicitly mentioned or merely coming to the reader's mind, Celan's necklace motif is interesting because it does not serve any form of desirable adornment, tends to be abstracted, and denotes suffering. The source of this motif may be mythological. When Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, marries Aphrodite's daughter Harmione, the goddess presents the bride with a precious necklace that turns out to be calamitous for its various owners, particularly the members of the city's royal house. Disasters begin with the couple's daughters: Semele, (see p.198), Ino who commits suicide, Agave who kills her own son Pentheus, Autonoe whose son Melicertes is torn apart by his own hunting dogs. Members of the following generations—Jocasta, Oedipus, Polyneices, et al—are as unfortunate as their ancestors.

II

The Beginnings, Part II

The discussions in this study are intended to be as free of “ideological boxes” (Rolleston 260) as the one of **Im Park** was meant to be.

Wunsch (13)

Es krümmen sich Wurzeln:
darunter
wohnt wohl ein Maulwurf...
oder ein Zwerg...
oder nur Erde
und ein silberner Wasserstreifen...

Besser
wär Blut.¹

It is not only alliterations involving ‘w’ and ‘b’ in the first and second strophes respectively and the anaphoric “oder” that hold the various statements together. What the speaker does not say but wants us to realize lends coherence of a conceptual kind: each of the entities on which the first strophe focuses is housed in or constitutes what we may conceive of as an unpredictably twisting tunnel system. Whereas the first strophe is rounded out by the activity of roots winding about in search of water, ellipses give it a pensive quality resulting in calm prevailing after the active verb of the opening line. The use of

¹ Date. In Rosenthal 1982: 227 as # 2. Kraft 145: “vor 1939”. Chalfen 75 implies the poem is of 1938 or earlier. Wiedemann 239 states, “In einem Manuskript erscheint zur Datierung die Bemerkung ‘Grammont, 7. 5. 1939’. Grammont ist möglicherweise die belgische Stadt mit dem flämischen Namen Geraardsbergen, die Celan während seines Frankreichaufenthaltes besucht haben könnte”. There is no indication that the poet ever was in Belgium, however. It therefore seems likely that Grammont relates to Avenue de Grammont, one of the main streets in Tours that runs close by the city’s medical center. Whatever exactly the reason for this rewrite, it causes Wiedemann to place the poem in May 1939. Our suggested date: before May 8, 1938.

“wohnt” instead of, say, the equally alliterative *wühlt* abets the notion that the speaker is musing. He may not be interested in depicting activities, but may think of their results instead: networks.

The remark about the use of ellipses is not to say that they should at any time be taken as nudging us to join Celan’s speaker in his ponderings. The moment will come when ellipses serve to give presence to silence, to scaffold some truth, to indicate the hush that follows grief because with all great pain a formal feeling comes, to relay continuance, to mark the inability to go on (as a parallel to “Menschen” falling apart into “men” and “schen” in **...rauscht der Brunnen**—I 237), or to emphasize the eloquence of words that nevertheless may know their own failure. Such failure may be far from the speaker’s mind in **Wunsch**, however; without self-doubt, he may *know* that he can make words obey him.

Wunsch is less whimsical than it appears at first glance. There is method and regulation in its arrangement, also if we look at the closing statement in which “Besser” merits a line in its own right and therefore carries weight. On one hand it reads like a value judgment relegating the import of the first strophe, and on the other it introduces the wish that “enacts” the title. As well, the closing statement reaches back, for purposes of similarity *and* contrast, to the verb of the opening line because, without the speaker needing to state it explicitly, the blood is coursing through its own network.

The third line introduces an element of uncertainty since “wohl” raises doubt about the actual presence of the mole and the dwarf. The use of “nur” insinuates that such doubt does not pertain to “Erde / und ein silberner Wasserstreifen”. Hence only the roots and the earth with its water streak are definite givens. The speaker’s affinity is to these, not to dwarf and mole. Why, then, does he bother to mention their merely possible presence? The answer, we assume, hinges on his wanting it both ways; he wants them for what they are to bring to the reader’s mind, and does not want them because his focus is on the roots searching water.

It may be noted that traditionally the legs of the dwarf are *krumm*. To go from “krümmen” to *krumm* and then to “Zwerg” is not an overly long step in this environment. Associations of this kind stay with Celan throughout his work.

What the dwarf brings to mind is a concept as old as the night: it tends toward asexuality (Grimm, XXXII, “Zwerg”, 1097). See, for instance, what Gottfried von Strassburg reveals about his dwarf Melot,

who is depicted as incapable of recognizing a lady in the dark (14508-510).

If in this framework reading about the roots' natural thirst for water evokes the male principle in search of *das ewig Weibliche*, so be it. This is of course an archetypal concept. There is therefore no need for the speaker to know of Jung as yet; things archetypal are simply in the air he breathes.

The sight of dwarf and mole is traditionally or actually severely limited. They can only perceive dimly, perhaps have no more than *Naturweisheit* to rely on—Jung will come to speak of “*Naturweisheit in Zwerggestalt*” (377)—hence must do without cognition and cannot know what the roots know about water, or what human blood *knows*.

Wunsch, then, has as basic thrust that mental depth, imaged by “*Blut*”,² is more important than the hidden world beneath some roots where blindness, darkness, lack of awareness prevails. Within this world things are upside-down in that its denizens have the roots above them. Downright adventurous would be the notion of a conscious link in this regard with Dante when he relates his experience in the circle of envy (*Purgatorio*, canto xxii: 1331-34), where there is an allusion to an upside-down tree. In terms of possible influences affecting Celan, the final lines of this passage in Rilke's **Ich habe viele Brüder in Sutanen** (I 10) may be closer:

- ii 9 Doch wie ich mich auch in mich selber neige:
Mein Gott ist dunkel und wie ein Gewebe
 von hundert Wurzeln, welche schweigsam trinken,
 Nur, daß ich mich aus *seiner* Wärme hebe,
 mehr weiß ich nicht, weil alle meine Zweige
 tief unten ruhn und nur im Winde winken.

It is also intriguing that the motif of the upside-down tree takes Jung's interest (437-40), although his elucidation did not see print until 1954. We therefore have no license to think of the speaker as taking his cue from the dictum that “*der Baum [...] offenbar nach Art des Blutgefäßsystems gedacht [ist]*” (Jung 401). But one thing is certain: the motif of the upside-down tree occurs in later Celan poems, in which it is importantly colored by Judaic concepts.

If it were not for “*wohl*”, the presence of the dwarf in the scene developed would be natural if we remember folklore. However, we

² In an environment concerned with totally different matters, Schulze (1976: 52) paraphrases *Leviticus* 17: 14: “*Des Leibes Leben ist in seinem Blut*”.

must also wonder about more literary antecedents by witnessing Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* 172:

Stumm über höhnischen Geklirr von Kiesel'n schreitend, den Stein zertretend,
 der ihn gleiten ließ: also zwang mein Fuß sich aufwärts.
 Aufwärts:-dem Geiste zum Trotz, der ihn aufwärts zog, abgrundwärts zog,
 dem Geiste der Schwere, meinem Teufel und Erzfeinde.
 Aufwärts:-obwohl er auf mir saß, *halb Zwerg, halb Maulwurf*; lahm, lähmend
 (italics added).

Zarathustra has referred to "meinen Teufel" as "Geist der Schwere" on an earlier occasion (43), and continues to identify the dwarf with it (172-73, 215, 219). The mole, too, is mentioned again (215, 219). Nietzsche's hero also speaks of blood: "Von allem Geschriebenen liebe ich nur Das, was einer mit seinem Blute schreibt. Schreibe mit Blut: und du wirst erfahren daß Blut Geist ist" (41).

If we venture that Celan's use of the dwarf-mole motif may derive from *Zarathustra*—which Celan read as a teenager (Chalfen 76)—it may follow that "Besser / wär Blut" seeks to give wing to the striving mind, to avoid falling victim to the "Geist der Schwere", to celebrate thought thus enabled to soar freely. Because Zarathustra's dwarf sits down on a stone at the gateway called "Augenblick" (173), we may apply Cirlot 134: "the 'guardian of the threshold' must be overcome before Man can enter into the mastery of the higher realm". (This, in turn, brings to mind Kafka's *Vor dem Gesetz*.) The distance between the mind and the natural world also parallels the separation between Judaism and nature (see, e.g., Scholem 1969: 88).

Yet, the verb in Celan's closing line harbors an element of doubt; for the moment, the speaker's striving is no more than would-be successful, the way Zarathustra's struggle to rid himself of the "Geist der Schwere" may at the first mention of this burden turn out to be arduous. This conclusion neither detracts from the view that "der Schluß [von **Wunsch**] aus einer scheinbaren Ruhe aufstören [soll]" (Wiedemann-Wolf 158), nor from "die hintergründig spürbare Pubertät" detected elsewhere (Chalfen 75). In the latter case we should consider, however, that Celan's blood image relays sexuality's throbbings strained through verbalized 'intellectualization'. It enables the speaker to have it both ways: earthly sensuality paralleling Zarathustra's conviction of life on earth as solely validating human existence *and* the overcoming of the "Geist der Schwere". Our reading does detract, however, from the views that **Wunsch** touches upon the theme of death (Chalfen 75)—indeed, the opposite is the case—and

that “Blut [...] anderen, wesentlich harmloseren, *unbelasteteren* Elementen vorgezogen [wird]” (Wiedemann-Wolf 158; italics added). Again, the opposite is the case, since these elements *are* “belastet”, but in a way different from what the author has in mind. Also, regarding the verdict on “das [...] *stark strapazierte* Adjektiv ‘silbern’” (Wiedemann-Wolf 60; italics added), we must argue that in **Wunsch** there is nothing banal about it; it is a color designation, as such makes for a chiaroscuro within the dark earth through which the waterstreak winds its way. To take this consideration one step further: we tie the second strophe’s ‘b’-alliteration to the ‘b’ of “silbernen” in order to lend proper importance to the use of this adjective as representing the feminine principle—to which the speaker’s “Blut” aspires.

Whether or not we accept the influence of *Zarathustra* on **Wunsch**, this much is certain: we find in this or any other early poem no transfiguration of nature. A survey of some of nature’s phenomena leads to the same conclusion. For example, the motifs of wind, cloud, and rain (occurring 43, 34, and 19 times respectively in the 135 poems that according to Wiedemann belong in the Czernowitz period) remain void of ‘individuality’, even when compounds are used—*Morgenwind*, *Abendwind*, and the like. It is as though detachment presides over the choice of these images. Equally neutral in the lexical sense is the rain motif, in part because it functions on a number of occasions in *Regenlieder* that constitute a sub-genre of the Romanian *doina*. Also the cloud, varied though its function may be from one poem to the next, verbally is just a cloud. At least for Celan’s early work, ‘standardization’ prevails—in the verbal sense. Away from this lexical uniformity, for the wind this value lies in the threatening force it likely represents; it rarely is a zephyr. Clouds play similarly ominous roles, with this difference that whereas the wind can be identified with the world and its calamities, the cloud motif represents or hints at supernatural power. Whether we call it God, Zeus, or fate, this power is at best indifferent, and therefore threatening in a differently existential way. As for the rain, it brings death on several occasions. Hence, if in Celan’s early poetry proximity to nature exists at all, it is due to the projection of his speaker’s own sentiments onto nature, which may be weeping, say, in the throes of dolor (whether specified or not)—the noun *Schwermut* alone occurs no less than eleven times in the Czernowitz poems.

In conjunction with the above, it may be rewarding to see what Celan does with the root motif in other early poems. Even though it

plays but a minor role on only three additional occasions, it readily links, in different ways, with concepts of love.

- i 1 Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr.. (35)
- ii Der Mond
taucht in die Täler,
malt in den Mulden dein Bild...
- iii 5 Farne fächeln
Stille den toten Käfern..
- iv Die Wurzeln umarmen einander..
Rübezahl schläft...
- v Die Nacht
10 läutet nicht mehr..
- vi Die Wälder winken den Wolken..
- vii Die Zeitlose holt
Atem für tausend Herbste...
- viii Das Herz der Espe
15 setzt aus.³

Guṭu 333, too, has the opening line as title. This makes sense because its image differs from the nature images that follow. Like the present version, however, Guṭu's fails to answer the question whether the speaker's state is cause or effect, whether the disquieting sound of his cart has ceased so that he can pay attention to his surroundings and be sensitive to the tranquility of a clear autumn night, or whether the prevailing quiet has had a calming effect on him.

According to the scant secondary literature available, **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr** celebrates peace. Things sound idyllic. One reader speaks of "die Liebe [...] als etwas unendlich Zartes, das kaum eine Berührung erträgt" (Chalfen 105). Elsewhere we are told that "Mulden" denotes "Beischlaf" (Firges 84). And indeed, the quick brushstrokes making up the second strophe suggest that we are in the realm of Eros. Whether or not the alliteration in "Der Mond [...] malt

³ Date. Featured as titled **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr** in Rosenthal 1982: 227, # 12. Kraft 145 gives her untitled version the date "Frühjahr 1941". Wiedemann 241 cites Kraft's version and dates the poem as the sixteenth of twenty-seven between 1939 and May 3, 1942. Olschner 154 thinks it to be of 1942-43. Our suggested date: spring 1941.

in den Mulden” constitutes a ‘wedding’ in the wake of which “dein Bild” is engendered—*malen*, whether or not via *mahlen*, readily associates with *mählen*—the strophe clearly does not depict nature for its own sake, but makes it subservient to a leading idea residing within human experience. Also the possessive adjective in the metaphor with which the poem begins and the time element “nicht mehr” make for an ‘autobiographically’ ringing claim.

The point just argued should provide a key to unlock the statements yet to come. There is a problem, however: elsewhere in Celan’s poetry, as in Greek mythology, the moon comes with negative connotations, may even be associated with death, and “Mulden” may function similarly. Witness these lines cited from *Tenebrae* (I 163):

10 Windschief gingen wir hin,
gingen wir hin, uns zu bücken
nach Mulde und Maar.

v Zur Tränke gingen wir, Herr.

These lines are spoken by the dead. Though belonging in a twentieth-century framework, but addressing the Christ figure, they may very well owe their origin to Greek myth. “[B]ücken / nach Mulde und Maar” seems to allude to the action of the insubstantial (“windschief”) shades in Hades. If they want to speak, however *stammelnd* perhaps,⁴ they cannot do so until Hercules who wants to visit has given them the opportunity to drink blood collected in an excavation adjacent to the altar of sacramental animals. To be sure, the suggested connection between **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr** and *Tenebrae* is at best an obscure one, but it gains in plausibility because of the former’s “malt in den Mulden dein Bild” versus the latter’s “Es [Blut, / was du vergossen] [...] warf uns dein Bild in die Augen, Herr”. With this, there is a current detectable in the second strophe of **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr** that goes counter to the concept of tender love to which Chalfen wants to be sensitive. Also, whereas it is comforting that the cart no longer offends the ear, how long will this serenity last? The speaker’s structure may start creaking again.

The third strophe brings the first image that derives from Celan’s well-attested interest in insects, likely those denoting decay and

⁴ This begs to be compared with “Die stammelnden Neger” of *Ballade von der erloschenen Welt* (see p. 116). Also, the noun in “Zur Tränke gingen wir” relates to the opening lines of *Schwarze Krone* (50)—see p. 105.

putrefaction—an interest perhaps influenced by Tudor Arghezi. There may be something would-be idyllic or at least picturesque in this ‘f’-alliterated little vignette, but the final impression it leaves is a negative one: ferns represent the sex-neuter generation of their species, and all they can do in this poem is to fan dead bugs. Besides, “tote[.] Käfer[.]” insinuates *Totenkäfer*, omens of bad things to come according to folklore. As *Irrkräuter*, so *Der grosse Brockhaus*, VI, in the “Farne” entry, ferns are to be avoided because they can bring calamity when stepped on. No matter whether the insects met their demise by walking on the ferns, no matter whether we think in terms of “tote[.] Käfer[.]” or *Totenkäfer*, the scene implies death and decay.

When roots search for water, as they do in **Wunsch**, their endeavor holds out a promise. When they are said to embrace each other, as happens in **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr**, the concept embedded in *umarmen* fails to be generative, becomes narcissistic instead. Elsewhere in Celan’s work *umarmen* on the part of roots has not only a quality of barrenness but also of isolation: the third sentence of **Din nou am suspendat** (198) translates as

Die endlosen Verzweigungen der Luftwurzeln, an die ich je eine Hand gehängt habe, werden sich *einsam umarmen*, den Hohen- wanderern unbekannt (Wiedemann 230; italics added).

The significance of this statement is driven home by the closing sentence of the one-paragraph piece—“Mir bleibt nichts, als meinen Weg fortzusetzen, aber mir schwinden die Kräfte, ich schließe die Augen und suche einen Menschen mit einem Kahn”. We take this to be an allusion to Charon.

That the nature observations in **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr** have little to do with actual nature but are of the mind instead is fully evident in the mention of Rübezahl. This giant’s disquietingly impish doings in nature as well as among humans are suspended for the moment, but they will be re-enacted upon his awakening.

The implication of our reading is clear by now: **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr**, replete with thought-provoking ellipses, begs to be read against the grain of its on-the-surface peace. This view remains valid when we read the following strophes. “Die Nacht / läutet nicht mehr” may on the one hand be understood to say that the night doming nature denotes expectancy, perhaps even breathless expectancy, but it may also have become void of life and awaits the onset of winter and its connotation of death. “Die Wälder winken den

Wolken” suggests a similarly bifocal value: harmony and union of nature versus the beckoning for the clouds to descend like a shroud.

The seventh strophe brings Celan’s first employ of the autumn crocus. Though there is no indication that we should think in terms of the “Mutterblume” of which **Die Silbe Schmerz** (I 280) speaks, it does touch, though unclearly, on the problem of time that preoccupies Perels when he deals with the latter poem, and speaks of “die Schmerzensmutter, zu deren Prädikationen seit alters die Zeitlose gehört” (1979: 56). For it is an inscrutable enigma whether the oxymoronic juxtaposition of time concepts—the timeless one versus thousand autumns—means for “tausend” to designate eternity or a period of long duration.⁵ It is tempting to argue, however, that the flower contains a promise in its very name, and that it will bear fruit in springtime. Then again, because of the value Celan attaches on numerous occasions to the autumn when the world is about to wilt, the passage may enact the story of mythology’s Persephone who is abducted into the underworld, is returned to earth so that nature comes to life again, until she must return to Hades, and winter sets in anew. This musing fails to account for the flower’s poisonous quality, but it is intriguing, and will be remembered, that the autumn crocus, the *Colchicum autumnale*, derives its Latin name from Colchis, the land of Jason-linked Medea of poisoning fame. Somewhat related to this, Olschner 154 finds “daß die Herbstzeitlose für Celan schon früh das Erlebnis des um ihn geschehenden Sterbens verkörperte”.

The final line provides the culmination of this reading; in it, the heart of the world is at stake—Scholem 1946: 46, 56, 68, 79, 107. That heart “setzt aus”. This ambiguous verb serves on both levels of reading. It leads Wiedemann-Wolf 221 to speak of “[die] ruhende Espe”, while Colin (1991: 61) translates the verb as “ceases to be”. Note also Olschner 155:

So schließt denn das Gedicht mit ‘das Herz der Espe / setzt aus’, wo die ewige Unruhe der Zitterpappel widernatürlich oder—je nach Auffassung—losgelöst vom Heilsgeschehen für unbestimmte Zeit aufhört.

It also bears on the viability of reading **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr** for its meta-text that its final strophe is the only one without

⁵ Wiedemann-Wolf 159, note 5: “Die rhythmische Verlängerung unterstreicht den hier temporalen Aspekt von ‘tausend’”. Olschner 155 thinks of an allusion to Hitler’s millennium.

ellipses. Our way of reading these lines makes the finality thus ringing through a pessimistic one.

Finally: within the territory just reconnoitered, the motif of the roots embracing each other is far from being the most revealing one, is in fact rather neutral, but as such has its role to play in a crescendo development (or its very opposite if read for under-the-surface values), from the recent “knarren” to its full-fledged counterpart of calm serenity, though it may be the serenity that comes with death.

The cart motif is uncommon in literature. No associations come to mind other than those relating to themes of the French Revolution (scenes in Büchner’s *Dantons Tod*, poems by Georg Heym), but in none of these cases is the cart taking its occupant(s) to the guillotine said to be creaking. This may be precisely the point, however: the speaker’s opening line may convey that he has come to the end of his trek, and finds himself at peace with it—the way, according to the history books, some individuals in the French Revolution managed to meet their fate with calm and dignity.

Of course, the motif of the guillotine does not actually come into its own until later, in the closing lines of **Huhediblu** (I 277), where it is linked with the love principle in an adaptation of Julie’s death scene in *Dantons Tod* (106):

viii 58 das Julchen, das Julchen:
 daseinsfeist rülpst,
 rülpst es das Fallbeil los,-call it (hott!)
 love.

ix 62 Oh quand refleuriront, oh roses, vos septembres?

In this passage, Celan adheres to Büchner’s rather than history’s truth: Danton’s widow remarried and lived for years.)

In **La contrescarpe** (I 282) we meet with the guillotine’s knife again:

viii 33	Unter Paulownien sahst du die Messer stehn, wieder, scharf von Entfernung. Es wurde getanzt. (Quatorze juillets. Et plus de neuf autres.)
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Whereas July 14 relates to the storming of the Bastille in 1789, “plus de neuf autres” raises the question whether it alludes to the minyan, ten being the number of participants needed to make for a valid Jewish worship service. If this suggestion is acceptable, the motif of dancing seems to link with its counterpart in **Todesfuge** (see p. 167).

*

Wandlung (72)

- i Nicht mehr wie einst und ehe
 du hier warst blüht jetzt die Schlehe..
- ii Die Rispe, die winkende Dolde,
 gehorchen nicht mehr dem Kobolde.
- iii 5 Ich traue mich nicht mehr mit Flöten
 den Schlummer der Gräser zu röten.
- iv Und ich folge nicht mehr den Spuren
 der lautlosen Sonnenuhren.
- v Ich muß nun in Welt und Gewändern
 10 den Zauber der Faltern verändern.
- vi Was brauch ich für Spangen, für Ringe,
 daß mir der Wandel gelinge?
- vii Nicht mehr mit den blühenden Zweigen
 kann ich die Welt zu mir neigen.
- viii 15 Sondern rings um mein Haus
 brech ich die Wurzeln heraus.⁶

The attempt to come to grips with this poem's vagueness breeds frustration. The only thing clear is the juxtaposition between the five “nicht mehr” statements and what once was. There is, therefore, a process of reflection at work, at the end of which the “Ich” comes to a conclusion. To go beyond these obvious remarks we must take a leap and ask: what with the images in which this poem is couched seemingly being so disconnected as to blur any story line, might we be dealing with a series of hazy allusions pertaining to or derived from chronologically ordered events—as relayed by Schwab (155-208)—in

⁶ Date. Wiedemann 246 dates this poem as the seventh of twelve between September 21, 1942, and March 9, 1943. For reasons to be argued elsewhere, we posit an earlier date: between summer 1940 and June 13, 1941.

the career of Hercules? Though it is impossible to set forth a claim with an authoritative ring, we shall attempt an affirmative answer.

In couplets i and ii Hercules is shown as no longer in tune with his environment. (He had periods of insanity, during which he committed unwarranted slayings, including those of his first wife and her children.) The third couplet may be an allusion to his killing in a fit of rage his music teacher Linos.

Sent into isolation as a shepherd in the wake of the Linos event, Hercules has ample opportunity to observe (and undergo the ennui of) time passing by (iv), makes a choice between living a life of ease and a life of virtue, opts for the latter, and ponders how to go about it (v). The sixth couplet ostensibly continues the clothing imagery of the fifth, but in actual fact may allude to the period spent as Omphale's slave when Hercules does women's work and wears women's clothing. This couplet may also refer to the end of his career when Deianira, his second wife, dismayed at the fancy he has taken to the captive princess Iole, sends him a robe daubed in the blood of the centaur Nessus. Donning this robe, Hercules begins to suffer incurably, comes to the realization that he has no control over his destiny (vii), and decides to put an end to his life. This decision would be relayed in the closing couplet.

When now we put the thoughts expressed in **Wandlung** into the mind of its 'present' speaker, they acquire a different color, and lead Chalfen to think of a love song (105). Each component seems to lend itself to this interpretation in that the "nicht mehr" lines refer to a past, a 'happy' time. The poem thus becomes the story of love gone awry, and centers on the individual's endeavor to tear himself loose. When he does so in the end, he uses words that are reminiscent of *Genesis* 30: 14-15 (Ruben gathering roots of the mandrake for his mother Leah in order for her to obtain Jacob's attention). In the case of our speaker, however, the roots are pulled from the ground, not to invigorate love, but to destroy its last vestiges. Even this reading may be an echo of a detail in the story of Hercules, who at one moment pulls out a pine-tree, roots and all. If we then remember that the thyrsus, the attribute of Dionysus and the Maenads, boasts a pine-cone as a symbol of fertility (Hall 303), the concept of love uprooted takes on additional value.

Aequinoctium (127)

“Und in den Nächten, süß vom Herbstgestirn,
wird mein Herz stürzen, deines aber schweben;
dein Weg sich klären, meiner sich verwirren,
mein Aug verlöschen, deines sich beleben;

- ii 5 die Blüte trocknen und die Wurzel blühen;
der Berg sich auftun and die Schlucht sich schließen,
ein Arm versagen, einer sich bemühen,
ein Maß sich leeren, eines überfließen;
- iii mein Traum versickern und dein Traum sich stauen,
10 die Träne reden und die Träne schweigen,
mein Blut nicht glauben und dein Blut vertrauen,
mein Mund sich weigern und dein Mund sich neigen...”
- iv “Ach, dieser Nacht gehört von deinen Sternen keiner?”
- v “Sie warten bis dein Krug sich füllt wie meiner”.⁷

While eminently representative of young Celan’s love poems in terms of its melancholy, this composition nevertheless displays individualizing features. Its opening “Und”—a device found in Rilke as well as Hofmannsthal—insinuates that we listen in on an ongoing exchange. It is not just idle talk lapping around, for it is delivered in cadences that bring to mind a passage in Rilke’s *Cornet* story, but read like a denial of its validity:

Und alle riß er [der Tanz] hin. Das war ein Wellenschlagen in den Sälen, ein Sich-Beegnen und ein Sich erwählen, ein Abschiednehmen und ein Wiederfinden, ein Glanzgenießen und ein Lichterblinden und ein Sich-Wiegen in den Sommerwinden, die in den Kleidern warmer Frauen sind—III 101.

It is instead as if Celan’s speaker has just read *Matthew* 24: 40 or *Luke* 17: 34, which deal with some individuals being chosen, some rejected. As the second speaker in an alleged dialogue ‘she’ merely voices one line, and does so to facilitate ‘his’ closing statement. It is he who thus determines the overall tone.

⁷ Date. Rosenthal 1982: 228 as # 53. Contained in Kraft without date. Wiedemann cites Kraft’s version and puts the poem as the first of five between September 15 and December 2 of 1943. Our suggested date: likely September 1940 (see below), between late summer 1940 and June 13, 1941, at any rate.

Denoting the equilibrium between lengths of day and night, the title does not indicate of which equinox we are to think. Since “wird” of the second line also governs the following infinitives, however, we likely are in the autumn (September 21), the reason why things will worsen from the first speaker’s vantage point. It is from within this sphere that the fifth line receives its due: his bloom will wilt, her root will bloom. Precisely because there is the associative connection between “Blüte” and “blühen”, the opposite ends of this line are farther apart than they are elsewhere. Nevertheless, the speaker in his closing statement awaits the moment when her “Krug” will also be filled, presumably with tears, in order to establish balance for the sake of *aequinoctium*.

*

Though it is not central to any of the above poems, it may be noted that the motif of the root alludes to the life-sustaining or generative process. As such, it links with the love concept, about which some remarks are in order.

Like **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr**, like **Wandlung**, and like **Aequinoctium**, Celan’s early so-called love poems fail to be glowing. They never show partners in bliss, feeling exalted, awaiting all sorts of spring times. From **Klage** (12) onward, they constitute a series of scars instead. They practice grief, are abrasive, and forever preoccupied with death. In these poems, the female partner never comes into her own. If she were to take on any individuality at all, she would bemoan the speaker’s acting as though he is knocking at the wrong door, *Schwermut* and *Tod* being his true companions. Because of his addiction to sorrow, there is no dialogue between partners. He morosely disengages himself, and may even see fit to accuse his partner, as surface reading suggests he does in the tenth line of **Finsternis** (37):

- i Die Urnen der Stille sind leer.
- ii In Ästen
staut sich schwarz
die Schwüle sprachloser Lieder.
- iii 5 Die Pfähle der Stunden
tasten stumpf nach einer fremden Zeit.
- iv Ein Flügelschlag verwirbelt.

- v Den Eulen im Herzen
tagt Tod.
- 10 In deine Augen stürzt Verrat-
- vi Mein Schatten ringt mit deinem Schrei-
- vii Der Osten raucht nach dieser Nacht...
Nur Sterben
sprüht.

Various motifs, ‘empty’ (early post-midnight) hours,⁸ hands of the clock moving toward an unknown future, the flapping of a wing suggesting that love is as substantial as the shadow of a bird in flight, the awareness attributed to ‘wise’ owls about death dawning, they all suggest a variation on the morning song—and turn the title into a sheer, ‘inward’-going metaphor that does not only denote the opposite of dawn’s light, but also the speaker’s mental state. This explains the tenth line, which seems to be an adaptation of the last line of Rilke’s *Östliches Taglied* (I 242):

- i Ist dieses Bette nicht wie eine Küste,
ein Küstenstreifen nur, darauf wir liegen?
Nichts ist gewiß als deine hohen Brüste,
die mein Gefühl in Schwindeln überstiegen.
- ii 5 Denn diese Nacht, in der so vieles schrie,
in der sich Tiere rufen und zerreißen,
ist sie uns nicht entsetzlich fremd? Und wie:
was draußen langsam anhebt, Tag geheißen,
ist das uns denn verständlicher als sie?

⁸ There is a contrast between this first strophe and the closing lines of Trakl’s *Untergang* (116: “Unter Dornenbogen / O mein Bruder klimmen wir blinde Zeiger gen Mitternacht”). If it is all too audacious to think that this “klimmen”, despite the title, hints at the endeavor to achieve transcendence, the fact remains that Trakl’s movement is upward, while Celan’s “Pfähle der Stunden” are descending. This contrast is warranted by the confident assumption that Celan was paging through a Trakl volume when he was writing his *Finsternis*: note the conspicuous number of terms which the Trakl poem *Gestalt die lange in Kühle finstern Steins gewohnt* (304—also consisting of fourteen lines) shares with *Finsternis*: “Eulen”, “leer”, “Schatten” (four times), “Finsternis”, “Geäst” (versus Celan’s “Ästen”), “schwarz”—italics added. In addition, what is the difference between Trakl’s “Untergang” and Celan’s “nur Sterben sprüht”?

- iii 10 Man müßte so sich ineinanderlegen
wie Blütenblätter um die Staubgefäße:
so sehr ist überall das Ungemäße
und häuft sich an und stürzt sich uns entgegen.
- iv Doch während wir uns aneinander drücken,
15 um nicht zu sehen, wie es ringsum naht,
kann es aus dir, kann es aus mir sich zücken:
denn unsre Seelen leben von Verrat.

We must note the difference between the betrayal images, however: whereas Rilke's speaker is willing to 'share' this betrayal, Celan's blames his partner for it. This holds true also when we seek to understand both statements as saying that the light of dawn, which forces lovers to separate, is the true culprit, in Celan's case, is reflected in 'her' eyes, and in Rilke's case deepens love.

Smoothness lends a dreamy quality to **Östliches Taglied**. As a result, its speaker's view that night and day are equally "entsetzlich fremd" and incomprehensible fails to be pungent, and subsides into elegantly worded eroticism. Celan's speaker has none of this, cultivates harshness instead. Indeed, **Finsternis** reads like a deliberate denial of Rilke's formal perfection and his celebration of love. This is also the case when Celan applies Rilke's "Küste"- "Brüste" combination of the first strophe in **Der Tage Trost** (75):

- iii Der Nächte Not entflammt an deinen Brüsten.
- 10 Nun löscht mein Mund der Nächte Not.
Und spült mein Blut hinan an deine Küsten,
wo endlich unsre schwere Sehnsucht loht[.]

but replaces the promise and sweetness of Rilke's feminine "liegen" - "überstiegen" with the leaden joylessness of the masculine "Not" - "loht" pair.

An eminent citizen in the land of dreams is "der von Langenau" of Rilke's *Cornet*, one of the "dreamiest" German prose writings. In it, the realities of war are veiled by an aestheticism that turns Langenau's death into "eine lachende Wasserkunst" (p. 106). Celan was preoccupied with this story as early as 1936 (Chalfen 65). Its very title—*Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke*—with its bivalent "Weise" must have appealed to him as much as its love-death combination. Because of his own poetic orientation vis-à-vis death, however, literature-derived

though it was in his pre-war years, he does not seek to imitate Rilke's aesthetic rendering of it, only borrows isolated motifs and phrases from it in many of his poems. Celan's speakers are too serious about courting death to adorn it with verbal beauty. They therefore do not apply Rilke's dreaminess, but 'dream' of death as holding the promise of deliverance from suffering. Indeed, it is tempting to think that a second **Pfeil der Artemis** could have been written, in which to say that beautifying and being elegant of speech is no longer possible, no longer desirable, for these literary criteria do not square with reality and truth. It is inevitable, a Greek thing, that the voicing of truth and reality necessitates the starkness blatantly evident in **Finsternis**.

Even **Weiss sind die Tulpen: neige dich über mich** (45) may not provide an exception to the gloom prevailing in Celan's love poetry if we are allowed to suspect that its speaker wants us to associate "neige" with the French word for snow with its death-connoting potential. It may be this very intent that caused Celan to change his opening term from "Heiß" of an earlier version (Wiedemann-Wolf 240) to "Weiß". In addition, even though "neige" is spoken to a single addressee, the reader unavoidably associates it with the color of the tulips. Hence, when Wiedemann-Wolf 248 sees white tulips as "Totenblumen", she justifiedly touches upon an old trope.

In his painting called "The Four Philosophers" (Museum Pitti, Florence), Rubens features four white tulips on a shelf next to a bust of Seneca. Two of these flowers are open, two are closed. The former serve as emblems of life still extant (Rubens' own and that of his friend Jan van Wouvere), while the latter commemorate the two who are deceased—Rubens' brother Philip and Justus Lipsius. Celan's opening line thus partakes of an old tradition.

And so, in Celan's early love poems it never occurs to the speaker that lovers can make each other feel beautiful and complete, or to prove the flaw in algebra's 'one plus one makes two, not one'. They are not even, not ever, *afraid* together. "She" may be on his side, but he still walks the night alone, self-absorbed, and with the bitter chagrin of disbelief in love's efficacy. The hope to attain union or self-transcendence brings no transcendence. As a result, these poems evoke in the association-prone reader the vision of Sebastian courting the arrows that come hissing. If later, as in **Psalm** (see p. 11), after straining for a metaphysical rather than a flesh-and-blood concern, a union does come about in the latter sphere, it is couched in the

language of metaphors that precariously tremble between avidity for the one and avidity for the other.

Because meandering through the early love poetry was motivated by the root motif, we should recall that it changes markedly in the post-Vienna years. If we were to cite examples from this later poetry—**Ich hörte sagen** (I 85); **Ein Körnchen Sands** (I 91); **Radix, Matrix** (I 239); **In der Luft** (I 290); **Das aufwärtsstehende Land** (II 70); **Aus Engelmaterie** (II 196); **Beider entnarbte Leiber** (II 213)—it would become evident that in **Wunsch, Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr, Wandlung**, and **Aequinoctium** Celan is as though preparing for what later will be the ‘mystique’ of the root on which Schulze (1976: 46 f.) dwells.

Yet, there are poems in Celan’s early work that seek to tell of true love. They do not concern a potential partner of flesh and blood, however, but express love abstracted, as a concept, the way Sulamith of **Todesfuge** is a concept. The celebration of this form of devotion can readily be couched in the language of love, and may remind us of the striving for the *unio mystica*. The beloved in these poems is as opaque as is the addressee in, say, **Aequinoctium**. She may be Sulamith, perhaps the Shekinah, or possibly a combination of these.

Legende (20)

- i Nach dem rostigen Rätsel der Erde
komm Bruderforsch mit mir mit hellem Spatenstich.
Ich fand nichts. Du findest nichts.
Doch die Erde splittert dabei.
- ii 5 Wenn es dunkelt, nehm ich dich mit mir auf meinen Hof.
Du fragst, wer dort sei?
Es ist meine Schwester, es ist meine Liebste.
Oft dunkelt as, wenn ich noch nicht daheim bin ...
- iii Löse ich, lösest du
10 das rostige Rätsel der Erde
mit blutigem Spatenstich?⁹

⁹ Date. Rosenthal 1982: 26 features this title as # 61. The poem is not contained in the Kraft edition, perhaps not because Celan’s friend might have viewed it as an imitation of a poem by Tudor Arghezi (see below). Whereas Söllner (242, note 7) calls it early, Chalfen 74 places it before Mother’s Day 1938. Wiedemann 240 cites “nach einem etwa 1944 entstandenen bukowiner Typoskript” and dates the poem as the fourth of

The most efficient way to gain access to this poem seems to be via a stopover at **Zwischen zwei Nächten**, Celan's translation of a Romanian poem by Tudor Arghezi (pseudonym for Ion Iosef Teodorescu [1880-1967]) titled **Între doia nopti**, according to Wiedemann-Wolf 99 first published in 1927. It is eminently possible that Celan's translation falls before his Bucharest years. And if it does not, it is still highly likely that he knew the original long before he left Czernowitz: Silbermann (1987: 432) avers the poet's knowledge of Arghezi's work as early as his gymnasium years; Deleanu 215 implies the same.

As given by Wiedemann-Wolf 100, this is Celan's translation of Arghezi's poem:

Zwischen zwei Nächten

- i Ich stieß in meiner Kammer die scharfe Schaufel tief.
Es war ein Wind vorm Hause. Der Regen strömte schief.
- ii Ich höhlt die neue Kammer tief in der Erde aus.
Es strömt der schiefe Regen. Es war der Wind vorm
Haus.
- iii 5 Ich warf hinaus zum Fenster was ich gegraben hier.
Schwarz war die Erde, blau war der Schleier über ihr.
- iv Das Erdreich vor dem Fenster-wie es gewachsen ist:
Der Berg der Welt und oben weinet Herr Jesus Christ.
- v Ich grub, da brach die Schaufel. Sie stieß auf harten
Stein.
- 10 Es war Gott Vater selber, sein steinernes Gebein.
- vi So stieg ich durch die Zeiten den gleichen Weg empor.
In meiner leeren Kammer wars öde wie zuvor.
- vii Da wolllt ich ihn erklimmen, den Berg, und oben sein.
Es war ein Stern am Himmel. Die Himmelszeit vorbei.

This translation employs the old device of linking physical movement with the abstract concept of time (history) as in 'traversing the centuries'. It is also oxymoronic in that the speaker, before wanting to climb "den Berg", 'climbs' "durch die Zeiten" by digging. Such

twenty-five between 1939 and May 23, 1942. Our suggested date: before May 8, 1938.

climbing into the depth of the earth is not an isolated case in Celan's writings; in *Edgar Jené und der Traum vom Traume* he speaks of "Aufstieg in das Untere" (III 161). The device is of course not new; see, for instance, Goethe's *Faust* 6275 ("Versinke denn! Ich könnt' auch sagen: steige!"), or Schiller's **Sprüche des Konfuzius** ("In die Tiefe muß du steigen").

Zwischen zwei Nächten employs the motif of the sharp shovel becoming a broken one. This parallels in **Legende** "mit hellem Spatenstich" becoming "mit blutigem Spatenstich". This double shovel motif may imply that **Legende** received its impetus from the Arghezi poem. The persona in **Legende** is also on a quest, but this time it is a quest of the here and now—"rostigen Rätsel der *Erde*" (italics added)—that lacks the religious quality from which Celan also distances himself in his translation of Arghezi's poem by speaking of petrified bones rather than of relics (Wiedemann-Wolf 101). Nevertheless, it is intriguing to take in Cohen's *Everyman's Talmud* 80 (if only to add to the findings of Petuchowski—1978b): "The Hebrew word [for shovel] is *eter* and the same letters give a root with the meaning 'to pray'".

Whereas the central strophes of **Zwischen zwei Nächten** evoke the image of the weeping Christ, either on Golgotha, the Mount of Olives in the garden of Gethsemane, or on a combination of these, but imaged in any case as "Berg der Welt", **Legende** foregoes these data and, consequently, any possible allusion to the trek up Calvary. Its speaker does not even attempt to probe his nadir as we see in Celan's translation "in meiner leeren Kammer wars öde wie zuvor". Instead, the focus is on the speaker's digging that exposes signs of history's blood.

Also in contrast to the central portion of **Zwischen zwei Nächten**, the middle strophe of **Legende** centers on the image of the sister whom we encounter in other Celan poems, an image derived from the Judaic tradition originating in the *Song of Songs* (Sulamith).

Because "mit hellem Spatenstich" becomes "mit blutigem Spatenstich", and because the speaker's focus is on human sufferings throughout history, the title **Legende** turns out to be multi-valued. On the one hand it may be understood as constituting a denial of the Christian imagery in Arghezi's poem, and therefore its religious values. Such values, **Legende** is saying, are mere legend. To say it with Böschstein-Schäfer (1989: 13) when she deals with **Spät und tief** (208): "So bleibt es bei dem Bekenntnis zur Erde als dem

gegenhimmlischen, antimetaphysischen Prinzip". On the other hand, the title highlights the fact that the persona's delving into history reveals the blood-stained remnants of that history. To the extent that Kafka's nostalgic *The great Synagogue* harbors a glimmer of hope when innocent children unearth the spiritual glories of the past, to the same extent, Celan's speaker may come to abandon hope and view it as a trap.

The attempt to clarify the enigmatic brother in **Legende's** second line entails two possibilities. The brother may be a reference to Arghezi, in which case the writer of **Între doia nopti** is said not to have been digging "mit *hellem* Spatenstich" (italics added), since he failed to dig for realities prevailing on the level of earth. This reading establishes a link with **Der Pfeil der Artemis** (134), which in equally covert and gentle fashion indicates that the poetry of its dedicatee—in *Der Sand aus den Urnen*, Alfred Margul-Sperber—dates from a yesteryear.

It may also be that **Legende**, confronting the problem of writing poetry in which communication is *not* sullied by the grime of history, mentions the brother as the poetic counterpart or alter ego, the meditative self—Baumann 280 would speak of "Selbstbegegnung"—whose task it is to help express poetically what the meditator wants to 'dig' for "mit hellem Spatenstich". There is thus prophecy in the fact that Celan's first consciously poetic program turns **Legende's** spade crimson.

From a somewhat different perspective, there is perhaps something inevitable adhering to **Legende's** earth, something of doom. If on the basis of its orientation toward history in general a young mind dictates that a borrowed shovel be given the sheen of blood, what is that mind going to do when historical events are remembered, when September (from the French Revolution onward), or Estremadura, or Vietnam must be given their due? The answer is inevitable: such a mind has no choice but to traverse the same ground over and over again. How then will Celan's speakers stay the terrors of history, its deserts, the metallic smell of its blood?

Celan did not return to the motif of delving into history in his early poetry. The only exception is found in "schürft ich, wo die Schätze sind" of **Welt in deinen Blick zu bannen** (84). This line, however, seems to be borrowed from Novalis (*Heinrich von Ofterdingen*); at best it touches upon "searching history" only peripherally. Later, in a poem like **À la pointe acérée** (I 251), we encounter only an implication of excavation. In **Das ausgeschachtete Herz** (II 150), the

motif is abstracted in “Milchschwester / Schaufel”—inspired by Sarah Kirsch’s **Der Milchmann Schäuffele** (44)?—and informed by recently experienced events. Or, to put this differently, the last two Celan poems mentioned, insofar as they involve ‘digging’, seek a language that delves into the subconscious in order to become aware—*Gedächtnis*. (Adorno 71 might say that such delving may lead to “eine zerfallene assoziative Dingsprache”). This endeavor, recurring in the later poetry, must lead to the view that ultimately there may be no truths, only personal interpretations. Hence, what began as deliberate ambiguities and paradoxes becomes inevitable, with the ‘horizons’ thus drawn too high to allow for escape.

III

Poppies, Forgetfulness, Dreams, Rebels

It is the task of this study not only to see how Celan deals with the poppy motif in poems that antedate *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, but also to ponder the circumstances in which the individual he puts on the scene is affected by it.

Der Tote (28)

- i Sterne peitschten seinen Blick:
trat ihr Dorn in sein Geschick,
- ii daß er nach den Gräsern greift
Und sein Herz an Winden schleift,
- iii 5 wo Gestrüpp ihn jagt und hält
und sich Nacht zu ihm gesellt?
- iv Grillen setzten sich zur Wehr-
Nun sind keine Grillen mehr...
- v Mohn ritzt Blut aus dem Gesicht:
10 -knie und trink und säume nicht!

At first glance, these couplets contain statements that lack coherence. The speaker's alternating between verb tenses adds to the reading problem. The poet's own uncertainties are suggested by an earlier version in which he employs the present tense in the opening line (see Rosenthal 1982: 227 # 21). Opacity notwithstanding, there is, albeit weak, a parallel: the first line ends in a colon and is followed by what constitutes a question, and the final couplet contains a colon followed by what reads like a conclusion that seems to be a variation of the *carpe diem* topos. There is also pairing of motifs: stars and night, thorn and bushes, grass and crickets. And it is immediately evident, however impenetrable the images appear, that we are dealing with metaphors, as is indicated by the claim that stars lashed someone's

eyes. As a result, that someone's fate was sealed, death being the outcome.

The only explicit time element in the poem is "nun" of the fourth couplet. It separates the present from the past, and marks the moment of dying. We realize in retrospect that "und sich Nacht zu ihm gesellt" of the preceding couplet indicates that death enters the scene and stalks its intended victim before striking. If there remains a link between stars and night, it relies on the function of these entities as metaphors, whatever their exact meaning.

The third line does not use "nun", but it is readily implied: 'so that now he reaches for grasses' invites us to see death's victim as 'grasping at straws' with all its connotations, particularly if we take grass to represent life, as it does in other early Celan poems.

We still do not know who the intended victim in this drama is, though we have become aware that the speaker's entire delivery centers around an event only alluded to by natural phenomena that precede or accompany it.

It is evident that the closing line is not part of the story, but relays the lesson to be drawn from it—note the dash that sets it off. Whereas this potential insight or moral does indeed echo the *carpe diem* topos, it also unveils the language via the realization that the imperatives about kneeling, drinking and not delaying constitute a reminder of how Siegfried of the *Nibelungenlied* meets his demise.¹ Now things make sense, provided we read the composition as consisting of sign language to be understood in terms other than its own, and have peace with the welter of multiple values with which the speaker toys. These ambiguities occur throughout the poem. In it, language seems to create a barrier rather than that it serves as communication tool. The opacity thus is deliberate. Whereas Flaubert paced the floor in search of a precise word for a particular place, Celan seeks double-entendres and calls upon us to unravel them.

It is now possible to view the stars of the opening line not merely as hoary vehicles of human fate, but also as the equally traditional image of eyes used repeatedly in the courtly lyric and thereafter. Perhaps the stars allude to Kriemhild's eyes at the moment when bashfulness and happiness caused Siegfried's face to flush. (See the epic's strophe 292 as well as 614, in which he glows now that he is

¹ Clearly, this quaint combination of activities does not make sense unless we have read the epic and therefore are in a position to think Celan's associations after him.

about to be given Kriemhild.) Siegfried and Kriemhild looked at each other “mit lieben ougen blicken” (strophe 293) while walking hand in hand. According to this, their encounter prompted the development which in the old tale is forecast as early as the second strophe. We are also told that the Siegfried-Kriemhild meeting was a fateful event because Siegfried incurred a ‘thorn in the flesh’ when her eyes exerted a ‘scourging’ effect on his, blinded him (love-blindness). Also, with the stars functioning as Kriemhild’s eyes, we have the motif, common in the Middle Ages, of love entering the heart through the eyes. We thus shall have to contend with the fact that in **Der Tote** first love and then, inevitably, death entered the heart.

There is another way of evaluating the stars—without discarding their meaning as detailed just now. We can relate them to Brunhild and situate them toward the end of the epic’s fourteenth *aventure* when Gunther’s Queen has become aware of the deceptions in her past, first during the Iceland games, then in her bedroom. In the wake of her discovery Siegfried is Brunhild’s ‘thorn in the eye’ (“*ihr Dorn*”—italics added), and she therefore resolves that he, the violator by abstention, must die because he sinned against the code by which kings must live: the strong must ally with the strong in order to preserve societal order.² With this, “Dorn” not only relates to Siegfried, Kriemhild, and Brunhild, but also suggests a link with Siegfried’s spear. What the speaker omits may be as important as what he does say. Though the spear is not even mentioned, in the second couplet it functions on two levels. It acts as a phallic symbol (‘thorn in the flesh’), but also, while retaining this value, becomes the weapon, supplied by Siegfried himself, with which he is slain. All Hagen has to do is throw the spear a short distance at Siegfried’s one vulnerable spot between the shoulder blades where his fated heart, the seat of love, pumps.³ The thorn thus combines Brunhild’s and Hagen’s reasons for wanting Siegfried dead.

We now know for certain that the answer to the poem’s question must be in the affirmative: without excluding any of its connotations, the ‘thorn’ did lead to Hagen’s spear-throw, so that interconnections

² For the argument that Siegfried must die because he failed to take Brunhild’s virginity, see Bekker 1971: 69-100.

³ The speaker makes nothing of the fact that Kriemhild, endeavoring to safeguard Siegfried, has sewn a cross on his outfit to mark his one vulnerable spot (strophe 904). This cross, a cross of love, is the very thing on which Siegfried is ‘crucified’.

prevail between, and multiple equations apply to “Dorn”, unmentioned spear, “Gestrüpp” (medieval *hag!*), and Hagen.

This is Celan’s first employ of the thorn motif. He uses it again in his early poetry, in **Dornenkranz** (40), **Schwarze Krone** (50), **Tulpen** (101), **Abendlied** (104), and **Ein Lied in der Wüste** (153). A glance at the Nielsen-and-Pors index shows the poet’s continued interest in the motif. It is one that, partly because of its association with that of the rose of Israel and because of its obvious connection with that of Christ’s crown of thorns, has the facility of taking on multiple meanings, including that of barbed wire and, as in **Der Tote** and **Psalm** (see p. 11), the ‘thorn’ of sexuality.

Given the affirmative to the poem’s question, the scenario shows how Siegfried, mortally wounded, staggers about as though reaching for grasses. His heart, literally laid open by the thorny spear, is accessed by the bracing winds, as though they are the winds of reality blowing in upon it.

It is intriguing that **Der Tote** only mentions the Siegfried figure, though merely via the enigmatic “er” and “ihn” and a few possessive adjectives, but does not speak of Kriemhild, Brunhild, or Hagen directly. Whereas the first two are represented by “Sterne”, the latter could be equated with “Nacht”. Hagen may be in the habit of going dressed in black, as he is in the landing scene at Iceland’s castle (strophe 402). “Nacht” would thus stand for two entities, the other being death. Another multiple equation could thus be arranged: “Nacht” = Hagen = death.

In conjunction with this, it is noteworthy that Siegfried’s role is a passive one. He ‘suffers’ things to happen to him, as in the second couplet where his activity is beyond his control. Superficially, it is the props of Siegfried’s surroundings that do the acting, and therefore it is nature that brings him to his end. Is it because he sinned against it by refraining? At any rate, the representatives of nature make for allegory. At the same time, we see the pronounced tendency to rely on secondary phenomena by distilling details from a larger source that are not necessarily of prime importance in their original sphere.

There is another double value to be taken into account, in the fourth couplet, which as a nature image sounds contrived and improbable. Since all crickets can do is leap and chirp, it seems awkward to envision them as falling silent because they are killed due to Siegfried’s slumping to the ground. The narrator does not produce a merely decorative phrase, however; he has in mind *Grillen* as fanciful

whims. The speaker thus imposes his understanding of why Siegfried must die. The past tense in “setzten sich zur Wehr” indicates that once Brunhild recognized Siegfried’s ‘whim’, in favor of Kriemhild over her, she decided that he had to die. The desirable balance between the nature image and what it is meant to convey thus fails to be impeccable in this couplet since meaning outweighs the veracity of the image conveying it.

With the ellipses at the end of the eighth line denoting the passage of a little time, the speaker regains the desired equilibrium in the following line, and does it impressively. For it is a bit of a marvel that with the sole term “Mohn” he replaces the far-flung details of Siegfried’s dying in flower-dotted grass (strophes 908, 921, 988, 998), and thus achieves the terseness demanded by his chosen form. Beyond that, he gains in terms of cherished ambiguity. It is not only that the face pales in comparison to the vivid color of the poppy, for the flower’s narcotic effect serves a double function in its own right. It recalls the intoxication of love (“Grillen”) to which Siegfried falls victim when seeing Kriemhild, and will forget his kingly duty to Brunhild. At the same time the flower represents the ‘forgetfulness’ that comes with death. The poppy tells us it is the intoxication of love that entails death.

In this connection, it is noteworthy that the poppy represents not only forgetfulness, but also fecundity because of its prodigious number of seeds (Cirlot 104). We may therefore say that it is fecundity, withheld because Siegfried did not offer his abundance to Brunhild, that is his undoing.

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Celan’s poppy motif has been much scrutinized in the secondary literature. The discussions have centered mainly on **Mohn** (106), a line in **Corona** (209: “Wir lieben einander wie Mohn und Gedächtnis”), and *Mohn und Gedächtnis* as volume title. This collection also contains Celan’s last use of the poppy, which occurs in **Die Ewigkeit** (I 68): “frisch wie der Mohn des Vergessens der Mund, der sie küßt”. We encounter the motif in a number of pieces antedating **Corona**⁴:

⁴ In addition to the poems about to be mentioned there is **Aus der Tiefe** (107) with its “Ranunkel” (= *Ranunkelmohn*, a subspecies). This poem contains motifs conspicuously reminiscent of details in Droste-Hülshoff’s **Der Knabe im Moor**.

Gesang der fremden Brüder (34)

- i Wir Finstern. Für uns
 stammeln die Schluchten ihr schwarzes
 Geläut,
 splittert die Nacht von geschwungenen
 5 Keulen;
 singt unser Schrei
 in den Wimpern der Toten...
 Dann schaufeln wir Mond in ihr Grab.
- ii Euch schläfert Mohn ein?
- iii 10 Von unserem Schlag
 sinken die Birken,
 der Nächte weißes
 Gebein,
 zusammen zu Asche:
 15 siedend zischt es aus unsern Fäusten:
 eurer kleinen Träume schwüler
 Tumult...

After pointing to a midnight cemetery scene, Wiedemann-Wolf 246 finds that

der gesungene “Schrei” der “Brüder” den bereits Toten eine Ausdrucks-möglichkeit zu geben [vermag]. So sind die “Finstern” den “Toten” tatsächlich brüderlich zugewandt.

It would seem, however, that the haziness of various key terms allows for a scenario that binds the two main strophes more tightly together than the view of a cemetery can achieve. This cohesion glimmers through if we read the poem’s images as derived from mythological data. Doing so allows for the possibility that “ihr schwarzes Geläut” suggests not just the clapping of bells, but also the baying of hounds. In the latter sense “Geläut” is realistically aided by its adjective (“schwarz”, one of the many terms in the poem with disquieting sibilants) if we relate it to the bark of the three-headed black dog Cerberus guarding the entrance into the abode of the dead (“Schluchten”). Whereas “Keulen” ties in with “Geläut”, it also links with clubs being swung. More threatening yet, it may denote Zeus wrathfully cracking the night with his thunderbolts and swords of light. This reading lends realism to “splittert die Nacht” and, like the

allusion to black Cerberus, makes the speakers' delivery less expressionistic than surface reading suggests it to be.

Mythology remains in the second strophe if we read it as a reference to bone-white, skeletal birch trees being cut for funeral pyres, their sap boiling and hissing, their ash equated with the former dreams of the dead. There is nothing to prevent those trees from representing the *Buchenland* Bukowina, or their ashes from representing the dead themselves as well.

Other elements favor the Greek tradition as the backdrop for **Gesang der fremden Brüder** if we see the brothers of the nebulous title as representing a tragic chorus. Wearing dark masks ("Wir Finstern"), it chants ("singt") its commentary on events, and also (as in Euripides' *Medea* with its inquisitive rather than reverent handling of myth) deviates from its traditional role by addressing the unnamed, inactive 'dramatic characters' ("Euch schläfert Mohn ein?").

Because of the vagueness of "Für uns", those 'strange brothers' may be seen as driven by an unnamed force. Is it Zeus directing human destiny? The preposition may convey 'for our benefit', but we read it as 'for us (as well)', which indicates the command to the brothers to engage their assigned labor, and denotes a threat to themselves because they are destined to share the fate of the dead. That's why they are "Brüder". Also their "Schrei" is affected: instead of representing a terrorizing shout of possibly mutual encouragement, it signifies the cry of anguish and dread.

The order "schaufeln [...] in ihr Grab"—"Gebein [...] zu Asche" is non-sensical, no matter whether we read the poem as a cemetery scene or from within the mythological sphere. As a sequence of events, however, it becomes eerily modern since it conforms to the destruction during the Holocaust, from the digging of mass graves to the efficient use of ovens. Whereas this modern frame of reference demands that Zeus be replaced by the Christian deity, the brothers remain temporarily employed, first to dig graves, then to haul ashes before undergoing the lot of those addressed in the one-line second strophe.

It being a mythological concept that the moon harbors death, the central line holds out the momentary promise of (blissful) forgetfulness, but does so in the form of a question, and makes death and forgetfulness (oblivion?) virtually synonymous—while keeping dreaming in petto for those who could before meeting their end. The poem thus is about finality, with no possibility of transcendence.

Gesang der fremden Brüder, thus understood, goes well beyond expressionism as practiced by Trakl.

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The “Mond”-“Mohn” combination occurs in **Aus dem Dunkel** (39) as well:

- i Krieger
stießen den Speer in den Mond.
- ii Blute. Auch Mohn
blutet.
- iii 5 Und die Brücke, Schwester, zu dir zerschlugen sie.
- iv Nicht mehr
ist der Stunden Geflüster rings...
- v Nicht mehr
ist es dein treibender Zweig...
- vi 10 Spät
knie ich und ruf und zünd in die Spiegel das Traumbild.

If, via “Mond”, “Mohn”, and “Schwester”, this poem’s beginning contains echoes of Trakl’s **Geistliche Dämmerung**:

- iii 7 Auf schwarzer Wolke
Befährst du trunken von *Mohn*
Den nächtigen Weiher,
- iv 10 Den Sternenhimmel.
Immer tönt der *Schwester mondene* Stimme
Durch die geistliche Nacht. (italics added)

it must be claimed that also Trakl’s “geistliche Nacht” applies to **Aus dem Dunkel**, even though this poem is about love and its title is ambiguous—from within the depth of darkness or emerging from it?

More important than Trakl’s are the traces left by Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* in the motif of the twig floating down the brook to let Isolde know that Tristan is waiting for her in the palace orchard (14423 ff.; 14615 ff.; 14669 ff.). The function of the moon in this episode is also of consequence (14630 ff.). With *Tristan* in mind, we may be tempted to read “der Stunden Geflüster” as an illusion to the suspicion and gossip rampant at Mark’s court before the lovers are

discovered asleep in tight embrace. The sister figure would thus be Isolde, and the entire poem would read as put into the mouth of Tristan after he and Isolde have separated, and all he can do is longingly remember what used to be—"zünd ich das Traumbild". Because of this "zünd", "Traumbild" is like a candle in the title's "Dunkel", the only light available now that the moon is implied to be bleeding empty, with the result that "Dunkel" becomes total.⁵ We might go one step further by wondering whether "Auch Mohn / blutet" suggests Tristan's endeavor to forget about the past⁶ now that he has met the other Isolde, the one of the white hands, and ponders whether to marry her.

Whereas, aided by the archaic motif of the spear, **Aus dem Dunkel** may derive a number of its images from Gottfried's fragment, "Krieger" fails to fit. What these warriors do to the moon (insinuated to have the redness of blood, just like the poppy) suggests warfare.

Aus dem Dunkel was written in the spring of 1941, when Celan, after his ghetto experience, was put to work at the war-ruined bridge that had spanned the Pruth east of Czernowitz. Hence **Aus dem Dunkel** may be as autobiographical as any other Celan poem: the separation from his close friend Ruth Lackner (= Ruth Kraft) brought about during that spring of forced labor may be reflected in "die Brücke, Schwester, zu dir zerschlugen sie".

When in **Aus dem Dunkel** the speaker takes license from the poppy's color to be 'confused' between *bluten* and *blüten*, he is not

⁵ In conjunction with this, it may be of some consequence that in Gottfried's story Brangaene, the confidant of Tristan and Isolde, is called "daz schoene volmaene" (9460 and 11082), and that she as the personification of courtliness suffers for the lovers' sake, and becomes less and less effective in her endeavors to help them against the wiles of the court. As it were, from "volmaene" she gradually turns into *halpmaene*, in order then, having become totally ineffective and superfluous, to disappear entirely. For the implications involved, see Bekker (1987: 217).

⁶ On a number of occasions Gottfried speaks of Isolde as the healer of Tristan's love-sickness. This raises the question whether in the opening statement of **Festland** (57)—"Schwester im Dunkel, reiche die Arznei / dem weißen Leben und dem stummen Munde"—"Arznei" is to be identified with the forgetfulness that comes from ingesting the poppy's 'medicine'. At any rate, the number of similarities of motifs in **Aus dem Dunkel** and **Festland** is conspicuous: "Mond" and "Schwester" versus "Schwester im Dunkel"; "Nicht mehr der Stunden Geflüster" versus "de[n] stummen Mund[...]" ; "knie ich" versus "sank ich in die Knie"; "Blute" versus "blut ich unterm Hemde". Also Tristan's "Traumbild" (memory) has a parallel, in "trink ich den Schimmer vom Korallengrunde".

unique. We encounter the same ‘confusion’ whether or not to use an Umlaut in **Zwischenspiel** (38): “Ein roter Ball / (der Mond? das Herz der fremden Tänzerin?) blutet an dir vorbei-”; in **Im Regen** (51—see below); in **Am Brunnen** (117): “Blühst du der Art von wechselnden Gespielen”; in **Der Jäger** (139): “... als ich in Welschland stak, und bluten ließ die Rebe der Champagne”; in **Ein Knirschen** (173): “Die Kirsche blutet für ihn”. This repetitive device clearly entails the implication that there is no difference between the draining away of life’s blood and blooming, that blooming therefore is a blooming toward death.

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From the above and the forthcoming title *Mohn und Gedächtnis* it is evident that the poppy was important to Celan. We may consider other possible sources in addition to Trakl’s **Geistliche Dämmerung** already cited that gave him the impetus for this motif.

As told by Schwab (1-2), there are details in the Prometheus story that may be of consequence. Prometheus, after he has helped Zeus fight the rebelling Giants and Titans, creates a human male. Athena “bewunderte [seine] Schöpfung [...] und blies dem halbbeseelten Bilde den Geist, den göttlichen Atem ein. So entstanden die ersten Menschen”. These walk around “wie Traumgestalten” until Prometheus teaches them to become fully human. The gods, wanting to be honored by Prometheus’ creatures, arrange to meet him in the meadow of Mecone. The meeting does not go well: Zeus becomes irate when Prometheus inexplicably tries to deceive him. It is as if the rebel falls victim to forgetfulness as soon as he enters Mecone, mythology’s field of poppies. It may be revealing that Mecone is also the place where eternal Olympians and mortals separate.

We encounter the Mecone detail in **Im Regen** (51), a poem of which the opening lines rival Rilke’s ability to employ genitives, and that in contrast to other poems featuring the poppy does not contain an explicit reference to dreaming:

- i Du mit der bröckelnden Stimme der Nacht
hämmerndes Herz in der Mulde:
sagt dein erschrockener Tanzschritt nicht sacht,
daß ich ein Sterben verschulde,
- 5 weil ich wie Harfenspiel kam und mich lang
im *Mohnfeld* mit Dunkel umgab;
weil ich es rührte mit silbernem Stab,

bluten ließ und versank?

Bis mich die ruhmlose Erde beriet.

10 (Nun täuscht mich nicht mehr ihr Geruch.)

Die Spur bin ich bald, die sie stumm übersieht:

ii Murmele nur den Spruch (*italics added*).

The middle section, a rhetorical question, is as convoluted as the poem's beginning, and the interconnections between its phrases lack lucidity. Its nouns turn out to be laden with meaning, however, if we consider the implications flowing from the way their counterparts in other poems function.

"Tanzschritt". It is remarkable that among the fifteen explicit or implied⁷ references to dancing in the pre-Paris poetry there is not a single one in which it marks a joyous occasion from the speaker's point of view. From **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** (17: "Die stammelnden Seelen der Neger ringsum / tanzten rundum") through **Die letzte Fahne** (177: "Sie schlingen ein Seil um die Kronen und laden zum Tanz"), dancing either issues from a compulsion motivated by fear or is a command performance. A stark example occurs in **Die Frühlingsschönen** (78):

i 3 Die hellen Herzen holt der Nebelwicht,
daß jedes vor ihm seinen Tanz vollführe.

Since "Nebelwicht" equates with death, this passage approaches the gruesome "er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz" and "ihr andern spielt weiter zum Tanz auf" of **Todesfuge**.

"[D]aß ich ein Sterben verschulde" invites a look at Shakespeare whom Celan read as a youth. In *Henry IV*, part I, act V, close to the end of the first scene, shortly before the Prince of Wales and Falstaff are to battle rebels against King Henry, there is this exchange:

Falstaff: Hal, if thou see me down in the battle and bestride me, so; 't is a point of friendship.

Prince: Nothing but a colossus can do thee that friendship. Say thy prayers, and farewell.

Falstaff: I would't were bed-time, Hal, and all well.

Prince: Why, thou owest God a death.

⁷ As in "Die Pappeln mit singendem Schritt / ziehn mit dem Kriegsvolk mit" of **Notturmo** (54).

The Prince exits, and Falstaff delivers his soliloquy on honor, subverting the concept completely and reasoning that honor is for the dead.

Citing Shakespeare serves a purpose, even though the speaker in **Im Regen** does not overtly touch upon honor, and even if his “ein Sterben verschulde[n]” may not have been inspired by “thou owest God a death”. Whereas Falstaff rejects the values of the world in which he lives, our speaker may be ready to acknowledge those of his own.

“Harfenspiel”. It is interesting that in the pre-1940 poem **Chanson juive** (later title: **An den Wassern Babels**) the speaker does not use the harp motif even though it is prominent in Psalm 137. He only employs the psalm’s willow before he lapses into abjectly self-destructive thought in which, as in **Im Regen**, a sense of guilt is implied. It is as if the harp must be deprecated because traditional Christian thought is likely to link it with the music of heaven’s angels. This may explain the fact that when Celan does use the harp motif, its traditional value is somehow negated. In **Leise, Geliebte** (31) there could be an idyll in “Die knospenden Finger des Abends / greifen den goldnen Gesang / in den Harfen der Sträucher”, if it were not for the verb’s aggressive quality, and if it were not for the “Schwermut” with which the poem begins and which sets its tone. Similarly, with its four main strophes featuring “Tod”, “stirbt”, “Totenwacht”, and “Tod” respectively, **Hieroglyphe**’s (49) one-line second strophe (“Harfe, dein Schrei!”) is far from comforting. Elsewhere the traditional connotations of the harp are removed: “In die Winden, in die scharfen, / reißt du alle sanften Harfen”—**Schwarze Krone** (50).⁸ These details clarify why in **Im Regen** the speaker can introduce the simile involving harp play to suggest idle endeavor, frivolity, and thoughtlessness, particularly if we consider that an earlier version of the poem speaks of “Dümel” rather than “Dunkel” (Wiedemann-Wolf 61, note 128), implying self-deceptive and presumptuous behavior.

The decapitation motif is not mentioned in the Prometheus story as told by Schwab, but it does occur in the defiant passage with which Goethe begins his **Prometheus** (I 114):

⁸ The only appealing harp sound seems to come from the enigmatic **Zu dritt** (174): “Ein Geweih hat unser Tier wie eine Harfe”. See, however, the forthcoming discussion of this poem (p. 185 ff.).

- Bedecke deinen Himmel, Zeus,
 Mit Wolkendunst!
 Und übe, Knaben gleich,
Der Disteln köpft,
 5 An Eichen dich und Bergeshöhn!
 Mußt mir meine Erde
 Doch lassen stehn,
 Und meine Hütte.
 Die du nicht gebaut,
 10 Und meinen Herd,
 Um dessen Glut
 Du mich beneidest. (*italics added*)

That fourth line may provide the meaning of “weil ich es rührte mit silbernem Stab, / bluten [sic] ließ und versank” of **Im Regen**.

Because the earth’s „Geruch“ is because of its „Mohnfeld“, this retelling of **Im Regen**’s question and what follows now seems viable: until I was confronted with reality, I, like Prometheus, acted thoughtlessly. Mired (“versank”) in the field of forgetfulness, I violated the order established by those in power. Because of my behavior, mortality became part of me; I owe a death. Now that I recognize reality, the poppies can no longer deceive me.

The first strophe’s last line remains enigmatic, however. It may mean that the world pays no attention to what soon will be a mere trace of the speaker after his departure (“ein Sterben”). All that reality has to do is ring in his final moment—“Murmele nur den Spruch”. Thus read, **Im Regen** partakes of defiance, however meekly worded, and proclaims the speaker’s brotherhood with the rebel Prometheus.

If **Im Regen** is indeed a poem about *Umkehr*, from forgetfulness to awareness, we may draw attention to the importance of “es komme [...] der geharnischte Windstoß der Umkehr” of **Spät und Tief** (208). This statement, in turn, must be compared with the equally significant *Umkehr* implied in the repetitious—and ambiguous!—“es ist Zeit” in the closing strophes of **Corona** (209—see p. 203).

The situation depicted in **Der Einsame** (140) is in part the result of Prometheus' former forgetfulness in the meadow of Mecone.

- i Mehr als die Taube und den Maulmeerbaum
liebt mich der Herbst. Und mir schenkt er den Schleier.
"Nimm ihn zu träumen," stickt er in den Saum.
Und: "Gott ist auch so nahe wie der Geier".
- ii 5 Doch hob ich auf ein ander Tüchlein auch:
gröber als dies und ohne Stickerein.
Rührst du's, fällt Schnee im Brombeerstrauch.
Schwenkst du's, hörst du den Adler schrein.

There is little agreement about this composition; death has been seen as represented by "Herbst" (P. Mayer 1969: 20), by "Geier" (Glenn 1977 : 523), and by "Schnee" (Janz 1984: 33).

Because it rings true that "Schleier" and "Tüchlein" have their source in Goethe's **Zueignung** (I 13—Wiedemann-Wolf 268), the last phrase of the Goethe lines "Und wenn es dir und deinen Freunden schwüle / Am Mittag wird, so wirf ihn [den Schleier] in die Luft!" may be seen as having its counterpart in Celan's "Schwenkst du's". Even so, Celan makes the veil motif his own because "der Einsame" functions in a world totally other than Goethe's whose enigmatic lady gives an advice to which Celan's speaker could not possibly live up: "[L]eb mit der Welt in Frieden!" Instead, the dove, the bird of peace, is gone. The mulberry that feeds silk-worms is the tree of Athena, goddess of spinning and weaving. It falls dormant after providing "Herbst" with the means to manufacture the veil and embroider it with "Nimm ihn zu träumen". It must also be of some significance that the wood of the mulberry can be used to dye cloth, such as that of a veil.

There lies a haze over "träumen". It may allude to hope, the one gift left in Pandora's Box when she closes it upon Zeus' advice (Schwab 5).⁹ Such hope is intrinsically ambiguous. Is it accessible or

⁹ Goethe's Prometheus thinks it is foolish to hope:

- ii 5 Ihr nähret kümmerlich
Von Opfersteuern
Und Gebetshauch
Eure Majestät
Und darbtet, wären
- 20 Nicht Kinder und Bettler
Hoffnungsvolle Toren.

can it only be dreamed about? In this Prometheus story, does Zeus' advice to Pandora constitute a gift to the human race, or is it a vicious twist added to the sufferings he brings about? Whatever the answers, "träumen" may contain the *attempt* to fathom reality. For Prometheus this may partly be the effort to visualize the world and the humans with whom he has allied. From his vantage point, suspended from a rock between heaven and earth, the second stitching on the veil spells double woe; the god's nearness is as torturing as is the liver-eating vulture.

Because of "ein ander Tüchlein" we abandon **Der Einsame** as a synopsis of the Prometheus story from his own point of view only. That "Tüchlein" was not only waved by Prometheus—note the past tense of the verb—but also by the narrator. In the case of Prometheus we may think that after his thoughtless brother Epimetheus had given all fur, feathers, and the like to the animals, leaving no protective cover for men, Prometheus showed humans how to spin and weave. He thus could defiantly raise that "Tüchlein" as a token of the arts he taught. That "ander Tüchlein" was thus a thorn in the eye of Olympus' establishment. With regard to the narrator we must remember "Webt ich das Tüchlein" at the end of **Schwarze Flocken** (129). All we therefore must do when glancing at the first strophe again is to replace its "Ich", its Prometheus, with the narrator, adding only emphasis to the indirect object of the second sentence: It is to *me* that the dream-fostering veil is given, to *me*, Prometheus' co-recipient! I am his brother!

The "Tüchlein" is said to be coarser than the veil, and to be unadorned. In Prometheus' world that may be all his creatures can produce; their handiwork cannot display the finesse of the veil. In the world of the narrator the coarseness of the cloth also suggests inferiority, and its lack of embroidery ("ohne Stickerein") must have a specific meaning.¹⁰ If you move that "Tüchlein", snow falls in the blackberry-bush, and if you wave it, you hear the eagle's shriek. For Prometheus this can only mean that he applies the lack of distinction between vulture and eagle in classical Greek (see Böschenstein-

¹⁰ Janz (1984: 214, note 17), offers this: "Das Gedicht [...] setzt gleichfalls die Bewegung eines Stoffes, eines Tuchs, in Analogie zum Schneefall. [...] Das 'Tüchlein', das diese gleichsam magische Wirkung hat, steht *im Gegensatz* zu dem vorher genannten Schleier. [...] Während der Schleier Traum ermöglicht, wird durch die Bewegung des Tüchleins der Traum zerstört, weil sie die Vernichtung von Leben, als Schneefall, vor Augen führt" (italics added).

Schäfer 1989: 8), and therefore can use “Geier” and “Adler” interchangeably. “Adler” is used this time because it is the bird of Zeus, who would severely react to the ability of men on whose behalf Prometheus could wave the cloth. For the narrator the eagle is the *German* eagle; it would shriek if *he* had the audacity to be defiant in public—hence the ‘meekness’ of his “Doch”.

When “Herbst” gave the veil and Prometheus and the narrator accepted it, the two became partners, but their roles are not identical. Whereas Prometheus’ is a case of accomplished and severely punished rebellion, the narrator can only dream about revolting. The latter’s waving of the “Tüchlein” equates at best with the writing of an on-the-surface ‘safe’ little poem.

The function of the “Brombeerstrauch” differs from that of the “Maulbeerbaum”, not just because it has nothing to do with the feeding of silkworms. Perhaps, because its berries turn from white to red, from red to black, it represents the threat of the swastika. The narrator’s existence is affected by it, particularly if death-denoting snow were to fall, not only on the blackberry but, by definition, on any territory where this ubiquitous bush can function as an emblem of German power. Though not mentioned, its thorns’ effect would be similar to that in other poems.

Septemberkrone (137) is one of the most nebulous pieces in Celan’s early work, but it is more coherent than quick scanning suggests. The image of the woodpecker links with “die silberne Axt” and “ein freundliches Gold” because the bird is alleged to be a gatherer of precious metals. It is also associated with the god of war, and as such begins a series of images that derive from mythology. The poem reads like a companion piece to **Der Einsame** with which it shares motifs: “Seidengewebe” (in conjunction with “Maulbeerbaum”), “des Herbstes Runengespinst”, “Schleier”. Perhaps “[ich schmücke] mein lumpiges Kleid” has a thrust similar to that of “Doch hob ich auf ein ander Tüchlein auch: / gröber als dies und ohne Stickerein” and, ultimately, might indicate the writing of poetry. In addition, **Septemberkrone**, like **Der Einsame**, draws mythology into modern time. Both poems are of 1944.

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The combination poppy-forgetfulness that is either explicitly mentioned or alluded to in the poems already cited also occurs in **Traumbesitz** (95), in which Don Quixote tries to be as much of a

rebel as Prometheus is. In fact, details of their stories seem to come together in the poem's opening lines:

- i So leg das Laub zusammen mit den Seelen.
 Schwing leicht den Hammer und verhüll das Angesicht.
 Krön mit den Schlägen, die dem Herzen fehlen,
 den Ritter, der mit fernen Mühlen ficht.
- ii 5 Es sind nur Wolken, die er nicht ertrug.
 Doch klirrt sein Herz von einem Engelsschritte.
 Ich kränze leise, was er nicht zerschlug:
 die rote Schranke und die schwarze Mitte.

After the Mecone event, Prometheus teaches his people the use of fire. Zeus is furious, and orders the smith Hephaestus to create a trouble maker, Pandora, the first woman, and to see to it that she is adorned with a wreath and a veil.

These details may have led to the opening of **Traumbesitz**. Its "Laub" accounts for the wreath as well as the golden band that Hephaestus must hammer to crown Pandora with it. With the verbal-conceptual tie-in that links "Hammer" with "Schlägen", the speaker then shifts to Quixote. Despite his mind being damaged by hammerblows, his heart remains unaffected by them. It is functional when he wants to attack what he believes to be giants disguised as windmills. Whereas Cervantes' Quixote is a melancholy knight in need of glory, Celan's is as 'unfinished' and as "traumhaft" (Schwab 1) as the humans are before Prometheus teaches them.

Thus "verhüll das Angesicht" has acquired a second meaning in addition to veiling Pandora, that of limiting Quixote's vision of reality, where the windmills are. Of course, "verhüll das Angesicht" also suggests that Quixote lowers his visor.

Quixote's hallucinations, the narrator states, were caused by clouds which the knight could not abide—note the past tense denoting a backward glance. Since in an earlier version of **Traumbesitz** (Kraft 88) the second strophe begins with "Ihn täuschen Wolken", we must think of deceiving clouds. They are also for that very reason the clouds befogging Quixote's mind. Melancholy is the constant companion of Cervantes' knight, also when toward the end of his career he gains clarity of mind, for it comes with total disillusionment. In contrast, Celan's Quixote in crippled fashion emulates Prometheus and becomes a rebel against a cruel order. The fifth line thus is somewhat of a parallel to "Eins reißt die Wolke fort, dreist" of

Notturmo (54—see p. 99), and may imply that Quixote is on a metaphysical quest. We may wonder whether we should distance ourselves from the suspicion that Quixote's alleged enemies ultimately represent Novalis' mill of death.

"Doch klirrt sein Herz von einem Engelsschritte". Whereas this little "Doch" indicates how foolish Quixote's action against the mills is, it also lauds the knight. Though it is hollow-sounding, his heart is astir. Because Quixote's state of mind may prevent him from knowing the difference between one "Engelsschritt" and another, between, say, that of a guardian angel and that of the angel of death, it may be impossible for him to gain victory.

When the narrator enters the scene—"Ich kränze leise, was er nicht zerschlug: / die rote Schranke und die schwarze Mitte"—P. Mayer (1969: 20) finds that the closing line "sich auf den Traum selbst [bezieht]", and that "wo nun der Ritter die zerstörische Beziehung im Leid nicht geschaffen hat, der Traum eine vermeintlich unversehrte [schafft]". Janz (215, note 27) views the line as "ein Beispiel für die Reduktion von Handlungen auf die absolute Gebärde", and speaks of "Metaphern der Gegenstandslosigkeit". We must insist, however, that "die rote Schranke und die schwarze Mitte" refers to the bloom of the poppy.

There is some support for this claim. When early in 1944 Celan met Rose Ausländer, he gave her copies of six poems, which Fassel (55-57) reproduces in the order **Traumbesitz**, **Zwischenspiel**, **Gemurmel der Toten**, **Les adieux**, **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr**, and **Unterwegs**. Since the orthography of each of these copies differs from that of earlier as well as later versions, we assume that Celan wrote or typed them with the specific intent of presenting them to Ausländer. It is interesting that whereas **Traumbesitz** is of 1943, the others are of 1941 or earlier. For all we know, Celan chose these five on the assumption that they would appeal to Ausländer's taste and orientation as a poet—love and/or death are paramount in them. The choice of **Traumbesitz**, however, must have stemmed from the poet's expectation that Ausländer would immediately grasp the reference to the poppy which she herself had employed as the central motif in her poem **Lieb und Mohn**—cited here from Wiedemann-Wolf 62:

- i Ach, im Guß und Glanz der Stunde
 ward ich jäh an dich gebannt.
 Lieb und Mohn-o Feuerwunde
 untilgbar mir eingebrannt!

- ii 5 Wie ein Fächer, rot entfaltet,
fachst du wilder Mohn mich an-
und doch ist er mir erkaltet
und um mich schlägt nur ein Wahn!
- iii Wie du wächst, ach bis zum Munde
10 reicht mir deine Schale schon,
und auf deinem schwarzen Grunde
brennt er-er mein Todesmohn.
- iv Ach, ich trinke deines Bechers
Gift und Glut und grelles Licht,
15 und die Flammen deines Fächers
lohen um mein Angesicht!

Even though Wiedemann-Wolf 63 thinks it unlikely that this poem inspired Celan to write **Mohn** (106), the correspondences between Ausländer's "*Feuerwunde*", "*eingebrennt*"/ "*brennt*", "*rot entfaltet*", "*auf diesem schwarzen Grunde*" and Celan's "*Feuern*", "*Brand*", "*in Rot*", "*schwarz von Schwermut*" (all italics added) are of consequence despite the fact that each relates naturally to actual or readily envisioned characteristics of the poppy.

Liebe und Mohn may have registered its effect on other Celan poems.¹¹ Like Ausländer's, Celan's speaker in love poems refers to his fingers by means of *Fächer*, in **Weiss sind die Tulpen** (45—"fächelnde Hände"), **Beim Wein** (99—"Spannt nicht die Hand den versunkenen Fächer?"), and **Im Spiegel** (109: "Bis auch dein Leib in seinem Feuer lag. / und ich den Fächer spannte über ihn"). The closing line of **Der Tage Trost** (75—"wo endlich unsre schwere Sehnsucht *loht*"—italics added) echoes Ausländer's closing lines. Also her "ich trinke deines Bechers / Gift" versus Celan's "aus niemandes Becher / trank ich das Gift" of **Hellgelb** (46) begs attention.

We must go beyond the poppy-reference in **Traumbesitz** lest we conclude that its 'epic' components lack meaningful coherence.

Whether we focus on the flower as forgetfulness or on its black heart, the speaker's statement clearly relates to Quixote who was beset with the 'forgetfulness' of a clouded mind, and whose heart had the blackness of melancholy—compare "sein Herz, das schwarz von

¹¹ For that matter, Ausländer spoke of black milk before Celan did (see Chalfen 133).

Schwermut ist” of **Mohn**. The speaker thus expresses pity, empathy, approval, blessing, and pays gentle (“leise”) tribute to Quixote’s struggle, and perhaps implies that he does so with a poem about Quixote’s cracked mind and consequent ‘forgetfulness’ because he, like Sancho Panza, *believes* in the knight. Though “Ich kränze leise” cannot undo the cruel thrust of “Krön mit den Schlägen”, the speaker does seek to soften those blows, and in doing so brings Quixote a tribute in memoriam.

If we could read that “kränze” as *kränze um* and if we could endow this verb with the meaning *kreise um*, an additional possibility of understanding would demand its due: “kränze” then could imply circling around, the way one circles an opponent too formidable to confront. Though running the danger of turning Quixote into a mere illustrative metaphor, such circling could then indicate that the speaker’s own melancholy is too deep to overcome. Is it at the same time possible that the closing line is meant to allude to the red and the black of the swastika?

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Corona is the last pre-Paris poem in which Celan uses the poppy motif, this time in explicit conjunction with remembrance. It is this combination that invites attention to the moment when Büchner’s Danton delivers a soliloquy:

Man hat mir von einer Krankheit erzählt, die einem das *Gedächtnis* verlieren mache. Der Tod soll etwas davon haben. Dann kommt mir manchmal die Hoffnung, daß er vielleicht noch kräftiger wirke und einem *alles vergessen* mache. Wenn das wäre!-Dann lief ich wie ein Christ, um einen Feind, das heißt mein *Gedächtnis*, zu retten.

Der Ort soll sicher sein, ja für mein *Gedächtnis*, aber nicht für mich; mir gibt das Grab mehr Sicherheit, es schafft mir wenigstens *Vergessen*. Es tötet mein *Gedächtnis*. Dort aber lebt mein *Gedächtnis* und tötet mich. Ich oder es? Die Antwort ist leicht.

Ich kokettierte mit dem Tod; es ist ganz angenehm, so aus der Ferne mit dem Lorgnon mit ihm zu liebäugeln. (Büchner 72—italics added).

To be sure, Danton does not mention the poppy, but to my knowledge he is the first literary figure to voice the “Vergessen”-“Gedächtnis” combination that is implied in Corona’s “Wir lieben einander wie Mohn und Gedächtnis”. This line is followed by “wir schlafen [...] / wie das Meer im Blutstrahl des Mondes”, an image readily applicable to the bloodbath Danton instigated in September 1792.

The notion that Danton’s speech gave impetus to the cited **Corona** lines finds some tentative support in the following:

According to Thuncke 300, Celan read Büchner long before he gave his *Meridian*-speech in 1960, in which he drew his listeners' attention, not to Lucile whose mind is as afflicted as Quixote's, but to her "Es lebe der König". Celan may have been equally impressed by the scene in *Dantons Tod* in which "September" spooks through Danton's mind, causing him to hallucinate (Büchner 74-76). This may be the reason why Celan employs the name of this month four times in his early poems. In the first of these:

Der nächste Frühling (120)

- i Gott kam einen Schatz zu bergen hier im Tal:
 junges Laub vom kommenden April.
 -Leiser als der Mondstrahl sei der Wasserstrahl!
 Über leichten Blättern wandle still.
- ii 5 Gott hat einen Knecht gedungen hier im Ort.
 Ihm ein Wans geschenkt aus grünem Samt.
 -Leichter als die Wolke ist mein Hort.
 Süßer als die Liebe dieses Amt.
- iii Rot fliegt der September durch mein Haar.
 10 Fort! und rasch sei Reif statt Tau!
 Grün wie nie ein Jahr war kommt ein Jahr!
 Aber Mirjams Augen waren blau[.]

the connections between the one-line sentences raise questions; "kam" versus "kommenden", for instance, hinders lucidity. Perhaps reconciliation lies embedded in "bergen", particularly if this verb is meant to bring to mind Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Instead of embroidering on things fit for mining (with its connotation of hoped-for reward for one's labor), however, the speaker thinks of April with its forthcoming greenery. Whereas in the third line he dreams about the loveliness of that spring season, in the fourth he focuses on the present, on September.

The second strophe is enigmatic even though we take it for granted that it has to do with September rather than April. Its "Amt," is it the "Amt of writing poetry? Though the third strophe emphatically returns to the present, to September, its "Aber" fails to harmonize with "Amt", even though Mirjam may be seen as a poet in her own right when she sings, after the Israelites, having crossed the Red Sea on their way to the Promised Land, have voiced the so-called **Song of the Sea** (*Exodus* 15: 1-18). Mirjam chants, "Sing ye to Jehovah, for he

hath triumphed gloriously; / The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea" (*Exodus* 15: 21). Because of this victory over Egypt's Pharaoh, she can rejoice because the order that victimized her people has been destroyed.

Something in this reading of **Der nächste Frühling** does not fit, however. Though Mirjam's praise of Jehovah is in harmony with the speaker's sentiments regarding God as the beneficent force behind nature's envisioned April beauty, and tempted us to see her and the speaker as colleagues in the writing of poetry, "Aber" makes for an irreconcilable contrast with the preceding lines. We must have missed something.

The hyphens in the first two strophes seem to introduce short reflections 'put to the side'. They are Danton's, who from the vantage point of 'red September' (line 9) looks forward to escaping and forgetting about that month if possible. That's why he dreams of April when the world, having been cleansed of the tyranny which his September ended, will be full of promises of a new beginning.

This reading comes with some implications. For one thing, particularly if we listen to *Ding* in "gedungen", Danton is not just God's "Knecht", but his puppet. This Danton, turned into a hunter because of God's gift of a green jacket, took on the task allegedly imposed on him, did so with alacrity, and therefore can say "Leichter als die Wolke ist mein Hort. / Süßer als die Liebe dieses Amt". This from a man who, as depicted by Büchner, has an appetite for women. Clearly, "Amt" has nothing to do with poetry this time, but much with red September. Equally clearly, God does not fare well in this reading (the way the "Meister" in **Puppenspiel** does not—see p. 81). But now we can adequately account for the closing line's contrasting "Aber". Whereas Danton can only dream of April, Mirjam can foresee the future; she is "the prophetess" (*Exodus* 15: 20). That must be the reason why her eyes have the color that throughout Celan's early poetry often comes with foreboding.

It is highly ironic that the young green of April ("grün wie nie") and the green of the hunter's outfit will enable death to harvest: Danton went to the guillotine in 1794, on the fifth of April. It is no less ironic that Danton identifies September with "Mondstrahl" and April with "Wasserstrahl": he himself is unaware that the moon harbors death, and that there is no difference between "Wasserstrahl" and the "lachende Wasserkunst" designating von Langenau's death as if it were "ein Fest"—see Rilke's *Cornet* III 106. Nor is Danton aware that by seeking to lull himself by dreaming of April his "Über leichten

Blättern wandle still” tries to obliterate the disquiet inherent in “unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben” of Rilke’s **Herbsttag** (I 154). In addition, our reading invites the possibility of reading “Reif” as a form of *Reife*, indicating that April will be the ‘ripened’ outcome of the role Danton played in September.

Regarding Danton’s obsession with September, the mention of this month in **Talglicht** will be discussed elsewhere (p. 89). As for this poem’s Jason, who casts (useless) snow at the sprouting seed he had sown by using a dragon’s poisonous teeth, we do not dare to go beyond wondering about a parallel to Danton’s seeding his own discomfort and ultimately his own destruction in *his* September.

There are other elements in Celan’s poetry that are reminiscent of Büchner’s drama. Says Danton in the same scene in which he thinks that it was not he but the walls who spoke “September”: “Puppen sind wir, von unbekannten Gewalten am Draht gezogen” (Büchner 74). This ties in with Celan’s **Puppenspiel** (60), particularly its closing lines (“Mit roten Buckeln grüßen von der Bühne / der Affe Leben und der Affe Tod”), since it is Danton who in an earlier scene opines that “[d]as Gewissen ein Spiegel [ist], vor dem *ein Affe* sich quält” (Büchner 59—italics added). This suggested connection between *Dantons Tod* and **Puppenspiel** gains in plausibility if we recall that Celan in his *Meridian*-speech (III 189) seems to remember his poem when he speaks of the “Triumph von Puppe und Draht”.

Danton again, when accused by his friends of laziness because he does not defend himself against Robespierre’s intrigues: “Ich bin nicht träg, aber müde; meine Sohlen brennen mich” (Büchner 70). We encounter a similar motif in the second strophe of Celan’s **Herbst** (62): “Der Kies der Jahre / ritzt die Sohlen des eilenden Bruders”. That this statement received its impetus from Büchner is based on the assumption that Celan’s first strophe mentions people on the way to the guillotine: “ängstlich / sinkt mit dem Laub der Esche / Gewölk in den Karren der Jammernden”.

Reminiscences of Danton’s burning footsoles may also be present in “von meinem Schritt versengt das hohe Gras” (**Am Brunnen**—117) and in “Wenn wir uns drehen nun, rasch, auf verwundeter Sohle, / brennt noch das Gras unter dir?” (**Spätsommer**—126).

When literary figures appear on the stage, it is evident from the poems cited in this study that Siegfried, Prometheus, Quixote, Danton enter their respective scenes when a form of forgetfulness affects or had affected them because their minds are not or had not been working properly by the standards of their environments and established by those above them in power—whether human or divine. Whereas the narrator strikes an objective stance when profiling Siegfried as love's victim, but nevertheless may leave room for some empathy, he clearly does identify with Prometheus and Quijote, their rebellion, their dreaming. Whichever comes first, neither leads to any form of victory—unless it be a moral one. Such victory would not be altogether different from that of Schiller's Queen of Scots, who leaves her opponent bereft when she exits the battlefield of words in order soon to mount the scaffold.

Danton stands apart from the other figures because of the role he played in September 1792. Celan's narrator cannot identify with him the way he does with the other individuals, the bloodbath brought about in that month being as abhorrent as any other killing field, old or new.

IV

Things (Quasi-) Medieval

A number of early poems reveal Celan's interest in medieval literature. Most of them contemporize as much as do the Greek-myth-inspired **Im Park** and other compositions containing clear references or covert allusions to a literary monument or historical event. Elsewhere the poet is like a tourist who during his crammed itinerary takes a hasty snapshot of a detail belonging to the past. **Ballade vom Auszug der drei** (19), for instance, has "drei gleiche Feinde hatten unser Land verheert / mit argem Nibelungenschwert". Beyond this one metaphor for destruction, the poem has nothing to do with the Middle Ages. Nor has **Zu dritt** (174), despite its "Ein Geweih hat unser Tier wie eine Harfe", nor has the closing sentence of **Abend** (93)—"Laß mich wie einen, der leicht war und leise, knien ohne Speer, ohne Schild", which seems adopted from the episode in the *Nibelungenlied* in which Siegfried is slain. This is plausible since, as we have seen, **Der Tote** commemorates the same event. But again, **Abend** does not focus on the medieval epic; it is another sad love poem.

In general, Celan's readers are less persuasive when they label as medieval isolated images pertaining to weaponry and other 'dated' things. A survey spanning through the Vienna poems yields terms that could indeed be derived from the medieval world: *Axe, Bogen(schütze), Beil, Banner, Brünne, Degen, Fahne, Keule, Klinge, Krieger, Kriegsvolk, Lanze, Pfeil, Rappe, Ritter, Schild, Schwert, Spange, Speer, Talglicht, Turm, Visier*. However, because of the surroundings of items of this sort, some of them suggest periods later than the Middle Ages (**Traumbesitz**—95, **Schöner Oktober**—138). Others have no clear link with any specific historical era. Frequently these images suggest a mythological rather than medieval origin. See, e.g., "Der Schierling streift mir träumerisch die Knie" of **Am Brunnen** (117)—an allusion to Hercules' poison-dipped arrow wounding the centaur Chiron; "wo der Freund der Wolken und der Steppe / aus Regen deinen Strom dir schuf: den gelben Nil" of

Regennacht (135)—a reference to Zeus; “Mit Tauen banden sie mich und knüpften an jedes ein Segel” of **Dein Haar überm Meer** (164)—Odysseus.

Several other lines in the latter poem seem to have originated in the Odysseus story: the hero tied to the mast when the Argo approaches the Sirens, their luring song leading to “O komm übers Meer”, the adaptation of the sack of winds which Aeolus gives to Odysseus (“[Ich] röchelte selbst mir die Brise”). These details become sheer images in the poem, their original interconnected functions now lost to sight, and each taking on a life of its own. It seems to be of consequence that in the myth Circe tells Odysseus that the northwind will take him southward (“gen Süden”), to the blind prophet Teiresias of Thebes, who will tell him how to get home. Since Teiresias has already joined the dead, what distinguishes this journey to Hades from what the speaker in **Dein Haar überm Meer** is concerned about against the backdrop of contemporary events?

That death-connoting “gen Süden” seems to have an equally disconcerting counterpart in the south-looking window of **Das Fenster im Südturm** (123) and in “wir stehen [...] / als brennende Gäste vom Süden” of **Spät und tief** (208).

The functions of weapons encountered most often in the Czernowitz poems (*Pfeil*, *Speer*, *Lanze*, *Schwert*—ten, eight, five, and five times respectively) lend additional support to the view that many early poems are marked by mythological rather than medieval data. (The title **Der Pfeil der Artemis** [134] is an obvious example.) There is some tangential support for this suggestion in that Schwab’s *Sagen des klassischen Altertums* was very popular among Bukowina’s young, and was well-known to our poet (Böschenstein-Schäfer 1989: 8). It was this volume—rather than, say, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* or *Amores*—that provided Celan with details regarding weaponry and other matters, and enabled him to apply the patina of history evident on many occasions. That he engaged at the same time in the most natural way in the retrieval of ‘old’ words is quite in line with his practices of a later day.

There is some ‘proof’ regarding the Schwab-rather-than-Ovid matter. When referring to the dawn, the Roman poet uses “Aurora”, a term readily retained in any translation of Ovid’s work. Schwab, however, invariably speaks of *Morgen* or *Morgenröte* on those occasions, terms that Celan uses often in his early poetry. With him “Aurora” is only found in **In eins** (I 270), in order to refer to a USSR cruiser.

It bears repeating that the early poems do not focus on mythology for its own sake. Neither in **Im Park** nor in **Der Pfeil der Artemis** does Celan allow for such exclusivity. In each case, albeit in different ways and for different reasons, he modernizes.

When discussing **Der Tote** (pp. 47 ff.), we could have pondered: given Celan's ability to remember poetry together with his affinity for Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (hereby proclaimed), is it possible that Siegfried's dying and 'coming to rest next to the poppy' constitutes a correction (*Widerruf*) of the passage in which Gottfried, his tongue firmly tucked in the right place, claims not to know whether his lovers rested 'among the flowers' (13431-35) after Tristan had retrieved Isolde from Gandin's attempt to make her his? This much seems certain: at the moment of this passage Tristan-Isolde love is a celebration of pulsating life. How, then, will things fare when Celan decides to focus on some other detail in the Tristan story?

Taglied (111)

- i Unendlich grün wächst Efeu an den Wangen
der Stille in ihr aufgelöstes Haar:
die weiße Taubenschwinge will er fangen.
Ein Schimmer bleibt, was mir ein Leben war...
- ii 5 Nun lichten sie die Anker in den Tiefen.
Nun lösen sie vom Mast die Fahne der Gefahr.
Nun heben sich die Gräser, wo wir schliefen.
- iii Du weißt, wie ich die Taubenschwinge misse,
die unsichtbar den Efeu überragt.
- 10 Was weinst du, wenn ich jetzt ein Segel hisse,
das langsam dunkelt, wenn es tagt?¹

As it is with **Der Tote**, so it is with **Taglied**: its final line is key to the farewell scene after King Mark, having discovered Tristan and Isolde asleep in tight embrace, leaves to get witnesses. In Gottfried's account the conversation between the lovers takes place shortly after high noon of a hot day,² with Isolde as the main speaker. This time the

¹ Date. Listed as # 86 in Rosenthal 1982: 228. Kraft 147 dates May 9, 1943. Chalfen 110 places the poem in the first half of 1941. Wiedemann 252: "Eine frühere Fassung ist titellos"; she applies Kraft's date. Our suggested date: between September 1940 and June 14, 1941.

words are Tristan's, and the title places the scene at dawn. Celan thus overlays the scheme imposed upon the borrowed tale with a subgenre of the courtly lyric, which typically involves three individuals, a pair of lovers and a watchman. It is the watchman's assignment to alert the lovers at dawn lest they be discovered, although this task may also be performed by a lark, a dove, or other bird.

We encounter the watchman in **Schlaflosigkeit** (77): "Der von den Türmen rief, ist umgebracht". The environment in which this line occurs insinuates the intriguing possibility that it is the speaker who, in the situation in which he found himself, put an end to the guard, perhaps because he was frustrated when told that it was time to end the rendez-vous.

Celan's familiarity with the dawn-song in other than German is evident from **Das Fenster im Südturm** (123), of which the closing term "Magali" suggests the poet's knowledge of Provençal literature. This poem shares several key terms with **Taglied** (see "Schwinge", "Stille", "tiefgrünen", "schimmernd"). Its "Südturm" may well be part of a medieval setting, and the framing function of its jasmine in "Wo der Jasmin den Blick allein läßt, ist das Meer" is similar to that of the ivy in **Taglied**. The mention of the sea suggests that this speaker may also be thinking of sailing away.

The motif of sailing, whether latent or explicit, can be found in other early poems. In the Czernowitz period alone we encounter it in **Prinzessin Nimmermüd** (23), **Vor Mitternacht** (30), **Leise, Geliebte, leise** (31), **Festland** (57), **Beieinander** (64), **Seelied** (85), and **Sindbad** (116). It is noteworthy that these poems circumscribe love and fail to be elating. It is also of consequence that not only in **Dein Haar überm Meer** but in other Bucharest poems as well (see, e.g., p. 193) sailing becomes sailing toward death.

As happens in **Der Tote**, **Taglied** unites data that are far apart in the medieval tale or are not even mentioned, derive instead from Celan's knowledge of the development of the story as narrated by Thomas of Britain. In this sense we see the poet intrude upon the medieval material, and turn Tristan into the omniscient speaker. (In Gottfried's fragment, Tristan knows nothing about the sail motif, which in Thomas' account occurs just prior to the hero's death.)

² We could have said 'a hot day clear all the way to heaven', in order to suggest that Isolde has arrived at *moraliteit* (8004), that is, the ability to please God *and* man, simultaneously. For the implications involved, see Bekker 1987: 269-70.

Like Celan's habit of introducing a motif from Antiquity, such telescoping is far from rare. For instance, **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** (17—see pp. 109 ff.) is reminiscent of the eschatological drama; it touches upon biblical details pertaining to Israelites in the desert, tells of the annihilation of Jews in modern time, and expands their fate into the destruction of the world at large. Elsewhere, as in **Das einzige Licht** (168), the speaker alternates in time and draws references to biblical and other historical matters into the present. Other examples of telescoping, both literary and historical, will come to our attention. They reveal that what we may cap under history is one of the prominent features in the early poetry. Equally conspicuous is the lack of hope in it. See, for instance, the motif of the great flood, whether caused by the Bible's Jahveh as alluded to in **Tallicht** (see below), or by Zeus, as in **Spät und tief** (208: "es komme das gurgelnde Meer").

There are also motifs in **Taglied** that are not to be found in any version of the old Tristan story or any modern retelling of it, be it poem, prose, or opera. These additions raise the warranted question what Celan has in mind when he introduces them. What, for instance, lies behind the ivy motif with which the poem begins?

Ivy may denote longevity, particularly when it is said to be abidingly green. When growing on a grave it may also express hope of life everlasting. The question is, however, whether it is these positive connotations that drive the image as used in **Taglied** to its ultimate value. Because of Tristan's situation, it is impossible to decide that *he* is thinking of longevity or life eternal. The growing ivy may in his frame of reference imply that it is capable of forcing its roots even into the tiniest crevices of solid stone, inevitably destroying it. When then, via "an den Wangen / der Stille"—which, though as oxymoronically impenetrable as stone itself, compels us to think of Isolde's face³—we are told that the ivy grows *into* her loosened hair, premonition arises, and we lapse into the feeling that dread adheres to "unendlich grün".

This unease is not alleviated if we seek other references to ivy. Dionysus with his wreath of ivy and wine tendrils comes to mind,⁴ as

³ Perhaps the phrase serves to show her as completely passive, her face ever more tightly surrounded by the assertive ivy threatening suffocation. Indeed, we may be intended to think of Medusa.

⁴ The present section of this study had been written before Hausner's study on **Taglied** came to my attention. The shared preoccupation with Dionysus is therefore

does Osiris. Both are melancholy figures, Dionysus in part because, though a member of the Olympian family, he suffers life on earth. Osiris' role is no less ambiguous; as god of the Nile he represents fertility, but he is also the ruler of the underworld, and his lot is not a happy one either. The awkward awareness that ivy leaves once served to counteract porriga (with its loss of hair) fails to ease the melancholy wafting in **Taglied's** opening lines.

In the third line the ivy is implied to reach greater height in order to entrap "die weiße Taubenschwinge". Whereas Kuolt and Merkt 420, not thinking of Tristan, see "Taubenschwinge" as a sign of the speaker's desire to regain his freedom, we understand the term as a representation of faithfulness unto death. After all, many doves mate for life. Indeed, "Taubenschwinge" is meaningful in various ways, not just because the dove is also the bird of peace. It represents shyness and vulnerability as well, and is adept at flying up in virtually vertical direction. This, together with its representation of love, suggests that at the moment of the parting Tristan-Isolde love takes wing, perhaps seeks to take on a supernatural quality, seeks, at any rate, to become love aloft. It certainly will be love disembodied because it will henceforth unavoidably be love in abstinence. The ivy may seek to put an end to this love,⁵ but this love is abiding by virtue of the potion Tristan and Isolde drank. Thus, when Tristan departs he leaves behind the core of his life ("Leben"), and takes with him inevitably lasting memory ("Schimmer").

The above gives body to the second strophe, which is a series of activities performed 'out there', away from where Tristan speaks. Contrary to expectation, he speaks of anchors instead of a single one ("Nun lichten sie die Anker in den Tiefen"). His use of "in" rather than *aus* also demands attention. Perhaps the statement is not meant as literally as it sounds; perhaps the line is figurative and means to say that in addition to lifting the actual anchor the action also reveals ("lichten", as in *belichten* or 'bring to light') what Tristan and Isolde have endeavored to keep hidden, but has now been brought into the naked glare of daylight. The line may be hinting that Tristan will henceforth be without the anchoring place called Isolde and without that of courtly life. This reading does justice to the ambiguity of the

accidental, and enhances the possibility that thinking of this mythological figure is warranted rather than esoteric.

⁵ It is now fair to suggest that the ivy may represent the suspicion and envy corroding the minds of the Marks and Marjodocs of Tristan's world.

verb in “Nun lösen sie vom Mast die Fahne der Gefahr”, which may denote taking down as well as unfurling. While “lösen” may function on the level of epic event in either case, it indicates that Tristan is now exposed, not to the danger of being caught, but to that of being victimized by what will be reduced to memory. Already the next line (“Nun heben sich die Gräser, wo wir schliefen”) voices the awareness that not a trace will be left of what used to be. Instead, there will be longing as “unendlich grün” as the ivy. This may be Tristan’s promise to Isolde.

The final strophe of **Taglied** seems to be self-explanatory, except for one thing. With the faithfulness concept (“Taubenschwinge”) presented as beyond the reach of the ivy, Tristan’s love might imply to be enduring beyond the grave. This is not a medieval concept, however. Nowhere in courtly literature do we encounter the notion that human love, however deep and abiding, will continue beyond the moment of death.⁶ Perhaps Isolde’s weeping shows *her* awareness of this.

It may be telling that in Gottfried’s account of the farewell scene Isolde sheds not a single tear. Instead, she stands there as though as petrified as someone who has seen Medusa. Yet, in Gottfried’s story Isolde is nowhere more alive and alert than at this moment. Full of awareness, she sends Tristan away to find his own solution to their problem ever since they drank the love potion, that of how to harmonize, fully and publicly, the demand of love and the need of societal honor. Each is like oxygen: take one of them away, and you snuff out life.

By recasting the original scene and turning it into a variation of the morning song, Celan can dispense with Mark because this subgenre of the courtly lyric typically depicts lovers forced to part at day break to *avoid* discovery. Such lovers dread and often curse the dawn. Celan must have had an avid interest in this aversion to day’s arrival; he uses it often and expands it to trepidation toward daylight in general. Instead of growing shabby from repetition, the dawn motif becomes increasingly sharp and haunting, culminating in lines like “Die Nacht ist die Nacht, sie beginnt mit dem Morgen”⁷ (**Die Jahre von dir zu**

⁶ The only possible exception is found in the closing strophe of Heinrich von Morungen’s **Ez ist site der nahtegal** (DMF 166-68), possible only because worded in subjunctive verb forms.

⁷ From a different perspective, Weissenberger (1976: 149) states, “Der mystische Umschlag wird vollends verwirklicht, wenn die tellurische Wertigkeit von ‘Nacht’

mir—206) and “Wenn auch für dich die Nächte am Morgen beginnen” (**Liebeslied**—221). This complex of motifs comes to the fore in various degrees of explicitness. The following citations testify to the poet’s absorption in the theme and its multiplicity of values. On the figurative plane, dawn creates a twilight country in which metaphors cast perplexing shadows. To a minor degree, the remarks accompanying the citations relay the attempt to understand the thrust of the dawn reference in each passage.

Kein ankerloses Tasten (9):

- i 2 [...] nachts verstreutes Heimweh trägt die Not
 gefalteter Gebete zitternd hin vors Rot
 im Bangen deiner Züge [...]

The ambiguity in these lines—regular or inverted word order?—leaves unaffected the value of “Rot / im Bangen deiner Züge”. It is the light of dawn reflected in the mother’s face and her dread of day augured by this dawn, for it brings closer the moment of separation (see p. 125).

*

Die Mutter, lautlos heilend (14):

- i Die Mutter [...]
 [...]
- 3 macht uns die Lichtung trauter, wie dem Rehe,
 das atemholend Morgenwind begreift.
 [...]
- iii 9 Wir fahren auf, die Steinernen vom Morgen,
 wenn eine Türe vor ihr Atem tritt.

Whereas the deer sniffing the morning air denotes the animals’ natural fear of venturing forth, “die Steinernen vom Morgen” on the one hand envisions the deer standing at the edge of the clearing, but “vom Morgen” (not *des Morgens*), aided by the following line, alludes to death. The speaker is equating seeing “Morgen” with the effect of beholding Medusa. Because of these connotations, the darkness of “Nächte” denotes safety and shelter. Behind this lies the concept of sleep and subsequent forgetfulness. However, because night is a sibling of death—they are twins in Greek mythology—the would-be

und ‘Morgen’ durch eine direkte Wertumkehrung aufgehoben wird und sich darin das Heraustreten der Liebenden aus ihrer Welthaftigkeit offenbart”.

escape from danger of day into darkness would be that, would-be.
There is no way out.

*

Heimkehr (16):

- i Keine
verheimlichte Stimme sei
entdeckt.
Keine.
- 5 Wie sonst bliebe
das Leben vergrößert vor mir
und verklärt?
Freunden
-daheim werden keine sein-
- 10 ist schon ein Blick
genug
und der Mutter
der Wink vielleicht meiner A stern-
Die weiter forschen,
- 15 horchen nur ob nicht der Tod,
oder ein quälender Tag,
ein nicht hinüber-
dunkelnder in die Nacht,
hinter dem Schweigen sind..
- ii 20 O Sprünge im Herzen.

Written before Celan's return from Tours to Czernowitz in July 1939, this poem has its theatrical moments. The speaker's sense of isolation seems to stem from depression; his consequent self-absorption leaves no room for joyful anticipation. Perhaps supplied with a touch of Hölderlin (lines 5-7), the delivery lapses from the momentary resolve to exercise self-control (lines 1-4) into morbidity. Even the use of "A stern" as a metaphor for the eyes causes concern: as fall flowers they allude to death that actually is mentioned in the following section. In this statement the speaker infers that there is little, if any, difference between death and a day that brings torment and does not end by darkening into night. Day and night seed each other, and either may cause the speaker's silence.

*

Ballade von der erloschenen Welt (17):

- iii 8 Da rücken die Speere heran:
 “Wir sind es.
 Und das eiserne Blau des Morgens.
 Laßt uns die Schwingenn alle
 durchbohren.”

Whereas “das eiserne Blau des Morgens” is the glint of the morning sun on spear tips, the ultimate meaning of this passage is the spears representing modern destructive forces with their pounding goosesteps. See the forthcoming discussion of this poem (pp. 109 ff.).

*

Finsternis (37):

- v 8 Den Eulen im Herzen
 tagt Tod.
 [...]
 vii 12 Der Osten raucht nach dieser Nacht...
 Nur Sterben
 sprüht.

Metaphorically, when the speaker says that death dawns in the hearts of the owls—Athena’s birds of wisdom, mind you—he provides a clear example of the significance of dawn. The lines of the seventh strophe essentially repeat those of the fifth, but add an emphatic reference to the east. The east is not only the site of the dreaded sunrise, it is also the place where Christianity was born. From the speaker’s view there may thus be an additional reason for the concept that what flashes in the east may entail the acrid smell of burning—turning the title into a metaphor for its opposite. (From the perspective of reading **Finsternis** as a love poem, the title is realistic because it indicates the speaker’s dark state of mind.) With night and dawn being equally dreadful, the speaker once again has no escape. It is therefore no wonder that the hissing sibilants in each of the seven strophes culminate in the final “Nur Sterben / sprüht.”

*

Weiss sind die Tulpen (45):

When touching upon this poem's love-death complex on an earlier occasion (p. 41), we could have added that the adjective in its "Und du schließt die Augen vor rosigem Schimmer?" suggests a dawn-song in which, because of day's arrival, love's fulfillment is no longer even questionable.

*

Sonnenwende (52):

i 2 Was werden wir im Osten sehen?

Alone, this line says virtually nothing. It figures in a poem about love, death, and violence, and as such may well anticipate destruction coming from the east—and may deny the Christian concept of redemption implicit in the biblical *Light of the World*.

*

Puppenspiel (60):

viii 9 Vom Aste baumelt jetzt der Neunmalkühne..
 Die Winde stolpern in ein Morgenrot..
 Mit roten Buckeln grüßen von der Bühne
 der Affe Leben und der Affe Tod.

This is the final quatrain of a poem in which the 'characters', directed from above by "de[n] grosse[n] Puppenvater" who works "mit Drähten, Farbe und mit Teer", present a parody of human life. Some, on occasion, would revolt, if possible, against the master's total power. And yet,

v17 Dann geben ihre Hände, ihre Knie,
 nur schwer die vielen fremden Zeichen weiter,
 die alles Andre sind, und doch nur sie,
 auf ihrem Weg zur schwanken Himmelsleiter...

This "Himmelsleiter" brings to mind the ladder of Jacob's dream (*Genesis* 28: 12 f.). The puppets, too, are presented as dreaming, about rising to the level of human existence and the experiences that might bring. Beyond this, the passage may imply the breakdown of communication between man and God ("Dann bäumt sich seltsam weh ihr Puppenstolz / gegen den Draht und gegen seinen Meister" and

“Wir wissen von der Täuschung viel zu viel: / was gibt ihr uns den Wein der Welt zu trinken?”).

A dotted line before the final strophe suggests the duration of the performance, but there is no indication what the puppet play was about. We do know that it often has mayhem and slayings, hence tends to be a *Neuntöter*, a play with corpses. *Neuntöter* or *Würger* is also the name of the red-backed shrike, an insect eater that spears its victims on thorns. It is alleged to be a bird endowed with extraordinary boldness, and because of this could readily be linked with the “*Neunmalkühne*”. If we consider that all the “Meister” is explicitly said to do, accidentally as it were but no less irresponsibly or cruelly, is drop the die of love—“Der Hand am Draht entrollt der Würfel Liebe”—the lot of the “*Neunmalkühne*” was decided by the very role he was forced to take on. Clearly, the “Meister” and the shrike are both *Würger*.

The above colors the last line of this passage in **Mohn** (106):

- i 1 Die Nacht mit fremden Feuern zu versehen,
die unterwerfen, was in Sternen schlug,
darf meine Sehnsucht als ein Brand bestehen,
der *neunmal* weht aus deinem runden Krug[,] (italics
added)

and the equally erotic wording of the closing strophe under the telling title **Spasmen** (II 122):

- viii du wirfst mir den *neunmal*
geschlungenen, tiefenden
15 Grandelkranz zu. (*italics added*)

Additional support for these readings could be obtained from the *ninth* Sefira, the concept of kabbalistic mysticism which according to Schulze (1976: 46) represents sexual power.

And so, it would seem that the “Neunmalkühne”, led to aspire by the puppet master himself, was hanged for playing his role so well as to seem actually human.

We could embroider upon this, but the implications are clear: the denouement of the puppet play is an insult by token of its vulgarity at the end: the puppets take their final bow with their rumps turned to the audience. "Morgenrot" thus acquires negative connotations and

values. Its association with what the audience sees and the rhyming of “rot” with “Tod” make any positive evaluation impossible.

*

Beieinander (64):

- i 1 Alle Stunden spielst du mit den hellen
Dolchen und es wird nicht Tag.
- ii Auf den Kähnen flieh ich, auf den schnellen;
hör wie wild mein Blut erschrak.

Standing not only at the beginning but also at the end of a love poem, these lines alone are ironic vis-à-vis the title, as are intervening images pertaining to twilight, mist, and melancholy. For once, the speaker seems to look forward to the dawn—in order to escape from his partner.

*

Einer (69):

- ii 7 da stürzte sich Tag in die Uhr,
das Leben für ihn zu entscheiden.

The threat of dawn is blatant, even from within the expressionistic environment in which it occurs.

*

Der Tage Trost (75) reads like a saddening morning song.

*

Aubade (97):

- i 13 Die Morgenröte wittern wie ein Tier
dein Aug und meines vor der Tränenschwelle.

If this poem were to be sung, its melody would have to be a moan. The quaint, because plural, subject is about to detect lovers in the dawn-song situation. The addressee, the female partner, conceives of the coming day as darkness and the night as brightness. (This inverted statement is a forerunner of more pointed similar sentiments—see below.) In this situation the speaker opines that he can only reveal himself to her in the dark. As though he were engaged in the verbal obscurity of a *trobar clus* frame of reference, he ends with “Im Dunkel nur bekenn ich mich zu dir”. This line’s verb means to register the biblical ring of *kennen* in the act of love.

*

Rosenschimmer (102):

- i 1 Die wilden Rosen wissen um uns beide:
 wär sonst ihr Licht der leise Gnadenschein?
 Ich tu dir nichts als Morgenwind zuleide:
 du darfst nur schweben und nur trunken sein.

There is nothing new here. An older version gives “leicht ein Wehendes” instead of “nichts als Morgenwind” (Chalfen 105). With “Wehendes” replaced by the allegedly neutral “Morgenwind”, the wind-swayed addressee is placed in the dawn-song situation. The closing of this eight-line poem—“Dein Herz gehört den Rosen meiner Heide. / Ich aber denk ans Blau der Akelein”—while alluding to Goethe’s **Heideröslein**, suggests the speaker is disengaging himself from the implied tryst. It is an open question whether those columbines are meant to denote what for Albrecht Dürer were symbols of deliverance in the religious sense—cf. “Gnadenschein”.

*

Die Märchenfluren (110):

- i 3 ich weiß
 die Schimmel leicht ins Morgengrauen traben.
 [...]
- iii 9 Dann muß ich meine Fluren erst mit Tau,
 dann, über Tag, mit Tränen überfluten...

Even if the horse image is not an allusion to the apocalyptic white horse carrying death (*Revelation* 5:8), these lines suggest that day is worse than the dawn or the night.

*

Taglied (111):

- iii 10 Was weinst du, wenn ich jetzt ein Segel hisse,
 das langsam dunkelt, wenn es tagt?

The closing line is one of the most interesting among Celan’s dawn references. When read against its epic backdrop, it turns out to be many-layered. We remember the event from which the sail motif derives: Tristan, wounded, sends for Isolde, and requests that her ship

carry a white sail if she is coming; if she is not, the sail is to be black. Too near death to see for himself, he is told by his jealous wife that the ship she sees dawning over the horizon (“langsam[...]tagt”) has a black sail (“langsam dunkelt”). That ‘darkening dawning’ leads to Tristan’s dying (“dunkelt”). Isolde, about whom Gottfried earlier stated that she outdoes Helen of Troy because she has the beauty of the dawn, arrives, sees Tristan dead, and dies also.

Clearly, while given more elaborate treatment than in earlier poems, the dawn motif in **Taglied** is obscured. The dawn passages not yet cited reveal a process of increasing abstraction at work as well.

*

Todesfuge (155):

Schwarze Milch der Frühe.

This image is far from receiving its due if we say that the black of the milk is because of the dawn of death.

*

Dunkles Aug im September (183):

- ii 7 Zum zweitenmal blüht die Kastanie:
ein Zeichen der ärmlich entbrannten
Hoffnung auf Orions
- 10 baldige Rückkunft: der blinden
Freunde des Himmels sternklare Inbrunst
ruft ihn herauf.

and

- iii 17 am östlichen Fenster
erscheint ihm zur Nachtzeit die schmale
Wandergestalt des Gefühls.

Blinded Orion can be cured if he goes to the east where by facing the rising sun he will regain sight. The hope mentioned in ii and perhaps wanting to shimmer through (despite the reference to the east) in iii is undone by the poem’s closing line: “Ins Naß ihres [des Gefühls] Auges tauchst du das Schwert”.

*

Die Jahre von dir zu mir (206):

- ii 6 Die Nacht ist die Nacht, sie beginnt mit dem Morgen,
sie legt mich zu dir.

This is the culmination of Celan's dreaded-dawn motif. The closing line seems to be saying that dread brings lovers closer, but lying side-by-side insinuates togetherness in death.

*

Spät und tief (208):

- vi 23 es komme [...]
der mitternächtliche Tag,
es komme, was niemals noch war!

- vii 27 Es komme ein Mensch aus dem Grabe.

With the earlier "es komme die Schuld über uns" (an allusion to Christ's trial), "der mitternächtliche Tag" is a clear reference to and reversal of the moment darkness fell over Golgotha when Christ expired at midday. Though not mentioned, dawn cannot have been rosy-fingered.

Good will is not sufficient if we try to read **Flügelrauschen** (124) as a poem with focus on the medieval sphere. In fact, only "Avalun" hints at the Middle Ages.

- i Die Taube aber säumt in Avalun.
So muß ein Vogel über deine Hüften finstern,
der halb ein Herz und halb ein Harnisch ist.
Ihm ist es um dein nasses Auge nicht zu tun.
- 5 Zwar kennt er Schmerz und holt ihn bei den Ginstern,
doch seine Schwinge ist nicht hier und unsichtbar gehißt.
- ii Die Taube aber säumt in Avalun.
- iii Der Ölzweig ward geraubt von Adlerschnäbeln
und wo dein Lager blaut im schwarzen Zelt zerpfückt.
- 10 Rings aber bot ich auf ein Heer auf Sammetschuhn
und laß es schweigsam um den Kranz des Himmels
säbeln.
- Bis du dich schlummernd nach der Lache Bluts gebückt.

- iv Das ist: ich hob, als sie gewaltig fochten,
den Scherben über sie, ließ alle Rosen fallen
15 und rief, als mancher sie ins Haar geflochten,
den Vogel an, ein Werk des Trosts zu tun.
Er malt dir in das Aug die Schattenkrallen.
- v Ich aber seh die Taube kommen, weiß, aus Avalun.

As in **Der Einsame** (140), the dove is not present, for it carries “aber” (*noch immer*) in Avalun, the Arthurian realm of the dead where peace is thought to prevail. Though P. Mayer (1970: 27) wants to see the dove as Noah’s, there is a telling difference: Noah’s, when it is set free for the second time, returns with an olive twig (*Genesis* 8: 11), thus signals that the earth is about to become habitable again.

It makes sense to draw attention to “säumt” of the opening line. When briefly thought of as ‘hems’, this verb leads us to what “Herbst” stitches in **Der Einsame**—“Nimm ihn [den Schleier] zu träumen”. **Flügelrauschen**, ambiguous already in the title (whose wings, the dove’s or the eagle’s?) can readily be understood as the speaker’s exercise in dreaming of the very sort that “Herbst” advises, but this time it is dreaming of peace.

While and because the dove is absent, “muß ein Vogel über deine Hüften finstern”. This second bird is not Zeus’ swan winging in to darken Leda’s lap;⁸ it is his eagle (line 8). Whereas several of the poem’s images are impenetrable, “halb ein Herz und halb ein Harnisch” indicates that the eagle is not fully prepared to meet its task. Inadequacy, trepidation, or perhaps aversion are in the air. Even so, the eagle is not concerned with “dein nasses Auge”. Despite its knowledge of pain (owing to the “Ginster” with their highly poisonous alkaloid content), the eagle does not raise its wings “hier” (where the speaker is located), presumably not because it has the task of acting as the agent of an entity that is not mentioned. The passage reads like an allusion to Prometheus’ liver being eaten, but the suffering involved (“dein nasses Aug”) is now applied to the speaker himself.

With the dove still in “Avalun”, the eagle stole the olive twig, the twig of peace. It is uncertain, however, that it also defoliated the twig

⁸ The swan-Leda motif does seem to shimmer through in the second stanza of **Aus jenem Blick** 81):

- ii 5 Als ich dich seltsam überflog,
schloß sich dein Aug vom Rauschen meiner Schwinge?
Und als ich mich zu dir hinüberbog,
war ich es oder wars die Nebelschlinge?

and thus destroyed its value. All we know for certain is that this ruinous act took place “im schwarzen Zelt” which was to be the speaker’s “Lager”, the place in which he should be able to put his trust. Because that black tent may have to be identified as the tabernacle with its dark top cover made of sealskin (*Exodus* 26: 14), it may be the one dwelling in that “Zelt” who did what the eagle, being “halb ein Herz”, was incapable of doing. Therefore, the way the “Geier/Adler” of **Der Einsame** is the agent acting upon Zeus’ wrathful command, so its not quite adequate counterpart in **Flügelrauschen** would have to be Jahveh’s.

When the speaker rebelled, it was hardly a Promethean revolt. Instead, “Sammetschuh[e]” may designate ‘(muted) poems I have written’. In the silent struggle ensuing there seems to be a reverse parallel, perhaps a deep one, with “verschläft er die Schlacht” of **Ein Knirschen von eisernen Schuhn** (173).

Dreaming brings no comfort. Since those⁹ with whom the speaker did battle put roses in their hair as trophies—they are the roses commemorated in **Ein Rosenkelch** (142—see p. 144)—there is a call for solace: “ich [...] rief [...] den Vogel an, ein Werk des Trosts zu tun”. Is this bird the dove asked to come, or is it the eagle? If the latter, the plea can only mean ‘bring me escape by bringing me total destruction’. Because of the enigmatic subject in “Er malt dir in das Aug die Schattenkrallen”, there is no answer to the question; “er” may refer to the dove which causes “Schattenkrallen” by not coming, but it may also refer to the eagle not heeding the request, being no more than “halb ein Harnisch”.

Either way, the speaker is justified in pronouncing the closing strophe: with hope still alive despite everything, he has a vision of the dove winging in, but the peace it brings may be that of death. The dove of peace is thus envisioned to be migrating from one region of death to another, from Avalun to the speaker’s location. It is only in this sense that we must agree with P. Mayer 28, where he speaks of **Flügelrauschen** as a poem of “Erfüllung”; he might as well have spoken of *Engführung*, with no possible escape.

It stands to reason that the welter of this poem’s mythological, medieval, and biblical allusions needs to be contemporized.

⁹ This unexpected plural brings the poem’s data into modern time by alluding to armies warring under the *German* eagle.

Die Mönche mit haarigen Fingern schlugen das Buch
auf: September.
Jason wirft nun mit Schnee nach der aufgegangenen Saat.
Ein Halsband aus Händen gab dir der Wald, so schreitest du
tot übers Seil.
Ein dunkleres Blau wird zuteil deinem Haar, und ich rede
von Liebe.
5 Muscheln red ich und leichtes Gewölk, und ein Boot knospt
im Regen.
Ein kleiner Hengst jagt über die blätternden Finger-
Schwarz springt das Tor auf, ich singe:
Wie lebten wir hier?

What the monks see is “September” which, signifying the beginning of autumn, also harbors the concept of life ebbing away. It may be a momentous, historical September. Perhaps it is September of the bloodbath that, if we go by Büchner, came to haunt Danton (see p. 69 f.). If this is so, we have already left the Middle Ages, and a form of kinship emerges between Danton and Jason. The way Büchner’s titular figure is inadequate against Robespierre’s intrigues, so the casting of snow is futile, even though elsewhere in Celan’s early poems the snow image denotes the threat of death. Given the fact that a number of the allegedly isolated images¹⁰ in **Talglicht** refer to death (see below), we posit that the Jason line entails the same, not because

¹⁰ See, e.g., Perels (1979: 61): “Das Gedicht, Schnee im September bietend, spottet nicht nur des Helden, sondern auch der Natur. So geht die Mythenepisode völlig auf im Widerspruch der Motive, die in den ersten zwei Versen das danach entfaltete Verhältnis von Du und Ich exponieren”. Martin (1987: 61) refers to **Talglicht** as a poem in which “sich nach surrealistischen Prezept weitgehend automatisch produzierte Texturen demonstrieren lassen”.

snow is cast, but because mere snow fails to undo the warriors sprouting from the field.¹¹

Though Jason is not the only mythological figure named in the early poetry, the story of his sowing dragon teeth seems to be of abiding interest to Celan. There may be a glimmer of it in “Die Hand voll Schnee, bin ich zu dir gegangen” of **Nachts ist dein Leib** (147), in “Mit schneeigen Zähnen führt einer den Bogen”¹² and “Hundertschaft” (= **Talglicht**’s “Saat”) of **Marianne** (159), and in “Die Schwelle mit Zähnen gepflegt, vor Morgen der Jähzorn gesät” of **Das Gastmahl** (180). In later poems it may be in “als der Giftzahn / die Silben durchstieß” of **Argumentum e silentio** (I 138), which in the final strophe also features “Saat”.¹³ Also “und sie, die ihn [Schwarzhagel (= bullets)] säten, sie / schreiben ihn weg / mit mimetischer Panzerfaustklaue!” of **Hüttenfenster** (I 278) may fit here. If there are additional passages harboring the same motif, they are too recondite to allow quick detection.

In dealing with the Jason image in **Talglicht** we must remember that on one level of reading the poems just mentioned have as backdrop the calamities that befell the Jews (in Witebsk and other places). This leads to the question whether **Talglicht** must be similarly modernized. In this connection, it is noteworthy that Wiedemann-Wolf (219, note 117) views “Muscheln” and “leichtes Gewölk” as Jewish motifs.

The third line’s hand image is laden with meanings. It relates not only to the falling leaves, but also to the arms-bearing, hence death-threatening, hands of the warriors who do not annihilate each other now that Jason casts mere snow among them. It is the hands of the warriors that, linked with “Ein Halsband”, denote suffocation. As a result “schreitest du tot übers Seil”. This image may connect with Nietzsche’s ropewalker, who plunges to his death in *Zarathustra* (16).

¹¹ There is a connection between the Jason line and “Trottendes Tier im Schnee, den die nackteste Hand streut” of **Assisi** (I 108), in part perhaps because the saint’s struggle involving his sex glands caused him to roll himself in the snow (Celano 234).

¹² Many a reader may prefer to read this line as referring to playing a musical instrument, like a violin, rather than as a reference to sowing.

¹³ Petuchowski (1978a: 127) reads the line as Celan’s adaptation of a sentence in the *piyyut*, and understands “Saat” as the mother’s influence on her son’s poetry. Might she have referred to Sulamith instead?

Celan's "Du" is as though dead among the living because of the forest's gift of leaves.¹⁴ This forest, an image in its own right, stands for the warriors, the surrounding world, the world of killers.

If, because of "ich rede von Liebe" and "Muscheln red ich", the beloved addressed in the fourth line seems to be Jewish, she must be Sulamith.

When Wiedemann-Wolf 219 addresses Jewish concerns, she finds that "ein Boot" refers to the Argo,

eventuell aber auch die mögliche Rettung in der Arche. Sowohl der Hoffnungsaspekt in 'knospt'—der die oben geschilderte Saat Zerstörung aufgreift—als auch der "Regen" sprechen dafür.

By relating the boat to Charon's skiff as well, we claim that Noah's ark drifts toward death. This association fits the poem's overall thrust, and it tells us that "knospt im Regen" denotes the *knospen* of death. After all, this is not the only time that rain's beneficent capacity to make things grow leads to the 'blooming' of death—see the discussion of *Unterwegs* (56—pp. 107 ff.).

"Boot" is not our poem's last image laden with meaning, for there is "Ein kleiner Hengst jagt über die blätternden Finger". Even away from Mörike's possibly influential *Denk es, o Seele* (III 114):

- ii Zwei schwarze Rößlein weiden
- 10 Auf der Wiese,
 Sie kehren heim zur Stadt
 In muntern Sprüngen.
 Sie werden schrittweis gehn
 Mit deiner Leiche;
- 15 Vielleicht, vielleicht noch eh
 An ihren Hufen
 Das Eisen los wird,
 Das ich blitzen sehe[,]

Celan's little stallion by fiat of old associations relates to the animal of passion. Though the speaker does not indicate the nature of that passion, we may—no, we must!—relate it to the monks' leafing fingers. These monks, Christ's bachelors, may have their urges (like Francis of legend) and their twinges of regret when—reading about

¹⁴ Cf. "Beim Tode! Lebendig!" of *Sprich auch du* (I 135).

the adventurous career of, say, Jason—they know they must do without many things, including sexual activity. It can therefore happen that “ein kleiner Hengst [...] über [ihre] blätternden Finger [jagt]”, that those fingers turn the pages ever faster, in order to take it all in, however vicariously.

Because of the adjective in “blätternde[...] Finger” the monks become the allies of the forest (nature or the world at large). The claim that they therefore are also the allies of “Saat” comes with implications. For one thing, it draws the poem’s images so tightly together as to undermine the view of Surrealism. For another, it validates the above suggested parallel between Danton’s September and that of **Talglicht**: Jason’s casting snow to defend himself is as futile as Danton’s wish that it were April rather than September (see p. 68 ff.). Snow in September is very early snow. As such, it may serve to convey that nature, the world, is so out of joint as to be calamitous. It thus stands to reason that for the narrator casting snow at the “Saat” in September is on a par with the image of snow falling in the blackberry-bush of **Der Einsame** (see p. 62). No matter what value we apply to the snow, both images threaten death and destruction.

There is more. The monks’ “blätternde[...] Finger”, may be as scaly as serpents—including those in **Todesfuge**—and may at the same time owe their eagerness to religious dedication and enthusiasms, determined as the monks are to keep pure the faith and to blot off the face of the earth those who, because of their adherence to a different *-ism*, are to be destroyed.

We must flesh out our reading of **Talglicht**. Its “Wald” does not only denote the surrounding world, for it also has to do with ‘the forest of language’, whose “Blätter” (words) make for a suffocating necklace. Dedicated to Marina Zwetajewa, **Und mit dem Buch aus Tarussa** (I 287) also uses the forest as a metaphor for language, employs Jewish motifs, and suggests the boat motif (“Ruderhand”, “Ruderknecht”). This “Ruderknecht” as the poet seeking to move the boat of poetry also applies to the boat that in **Talglicht** “knospt im Regen”, that is, “knospt” under the shadow of death. This reading fits with “Muscheln *red* ich” and “ich *singe*” (italics added).

Talglicht has an inevitable ending: when the gate gaps open as black as Mörike’s little horses pulling the hearse are, the speaker can sing of deliverance and, in the past tense, can only wonder, “Wie lebten wir hier?” As Janz (1984: 51) puts it, “Hinter dem aufspringenden Tür tut sich keine zweite Welt auf”. That is the reason why the closing line is spoken with relief. It thus links with “so wardst

du gerettet ins Unheil” of **Das einzige Licht** (168), with the closing line of **Erinnerung an Frankreich** (186—“Wir waren tot und konnten atmen”), with “Die Nacht ist die Nacht, sie beginnt mit dem Morgen, / sie legt mich zu dir”—this denotes death—of **Die Jahre von dir zu mir** (206).

We take it for granted that in **Talgllicht** the speaker is concerned with modern events, with the Holocaust. As a result, the poem’s introductory allusion to a medieval setting and the function we assigned to its monks, when combined with the references to the Jewish and biblical motifs which Wiedemann-Wolf (219) advocates, inevitably drives home the realization regarding the persecution of Jews throughout the history of Christianity. If, therefore, we equate “Saat” with killing Germans, the speaker may conceive of Jason as a sharer: the way the mythological hero casts mere snow, so the oppositional stance taken in one’s poetry against destructive power is futile.

In conjunction with **Talgllicht**’s boat as the boat of poetry, the occasions on which Celan’s speaker is preoccupied with the writing of it go far beyond the instances mentioned so far. The following enumeration may not be complete, and not each citation may meet with general acceptance.

Because of these lines in **Es fällt nun, Mutter, Schnee in der Ukraine** (68):

- iii 11 Von meinen Sternen nur wehn noch zerrissen
die Saiten einer überlauten Harfe...
- iv Dran hängt zuweilen eine Rosenstunde.
Verlöschend[,]

Wiedemann-Wolf 228 states, “Die Verbindung des Rosen-Bildes mit dem traditionellen Instrument des Psalmisten, des dichterischen Sängers, verweist es in einen poetologischen Kontext”. With this, there seems to run a crack through the speaker’s mind: on one side concern regarding the mother,¹⁵ on the other regarding poetry. Which prevails? The closing lines—“Was wär es, Mutter: Wachstum oder Wunde- / versänk ich mit im Schneewehn der Ukraine?”—fail to provide an answer, instead raise new questions: whose “Wachstum” is

¹⁵ **Es fällt nun, Mutter** was written (under the title **Winter**) shortly after Celan heard that his mother had been shot in the fall of 1942.

it, and whose are those “Wunde”? Is that “Wachstum” denoting the speaker’s growth as a poet? Do those wounds denote suffering on behalf of the mother? “[V]ersänk ich mit ...?” as the son or as the poet? **Keine Sandkunst mehr** (see below) may hint at an answer regarding the speaker as poet.

Der Tage Trost (75): “Nun schürt mein Mund der Stunden Lied”.

Schlaflosigkeit (77): “Ich weiß die Sprüche”.

Welt in deinen Blick zu bannen (84): If we view each statement in this poem’s four quatrains as an allusion to the writing of poetry, the closing strophe suggests the inadequacy of the endeavor: “Aber erst entstellt / schweig ich-und bin Welt”.

Zur Laute (86): “Ich seh und singe”.

Erinnerung (87): “Und ich baute aus Dunkel mein Haus”.

Tulpen (101): “Was in den Kelchen geheim / ein Staubblatt mit Schimmer befiehl, / schwört den unsaglichen Reim / für deinen wehen Gespiel”.

Rosenschimmer (102): “Ich aber denk ans Blau der Akelein”.

Aus der Tiefe (107): “Im Auge flammt, was schon die Hände siegeln: / die Nacht, ein Feuer und der Reim”.

Auf nächtlicher Flur (121): “Pflück ich rasch für dein Grab irgendein blühendes Kraut”.

Schwarze Flocken (129): “Webt ich das Tüchlein”.

Der Einsame (140): “Doch hob ich auf ein ander Tüchlein auch”.

Am letzten Tor (141): “Laß [...] mich den Kranich sein”.

Russischer Frühling (143): “Träumerisch hält meine Hand und singt in die wallende Bläue / für alle, die hier liegen, Herr Volker von Alzey”.

Die Schwelle des Traumes (146): “Ich löse die blaue Girlande”.

Regarding this poem’s use of “siebenzehn” (see in this connection p. 166), we refer to **Keine Sandkunst mehr**, in which ‘die blaue Girlande’ of poetry has virtually become an impossibility: even if we are willing to see its closing line (“I-i-e”) as a valid term, it is difficult for the speaker to produce, after the title, seventeen words of poetry.

Ein Lied in der Wüste (153): “Ein Kranz ward gewunden aus schwärzlichem Laub in der Gegend von Akra: / dort riß ich den Rappen herum und stach nach dem Tod mit dem Degen”.

Aschenkraut (170): “Du sangst *auch* ein Lied” (*italics added*). Regarding the closing line of **Zu dritt** (174) as a possible allusion to the writing of poetry, see p. 187.

Nachtstrahl (205): “[I]hr schick ich den Sarg aus dem leichtesten Holz”; “Ein schöner Kahn ist der Sarg, geschnitzt im Gehölz der Gefühle”; “Ich singe vor Fremden”.

Lob der Ferne (207): “Im Quell deiner Augen / erwürgt ein Gehenkter den Strang”.

It is remarkable that with only two exceptions—**Schaflosigkeit** and **Tulpen**—each of the above citations constitutes the end of its poem, and therefore may have to be read, if not as escape into poetry, then perhaps as struggling with language.

There may be other poignant references to the writing of poetry more abstruse than those just mentioned. Perhaps **Das einzige Licht** (168) provides an example. Aided by the opening lines:

Die Lampen des Schreckens sind hell, auch im Sturm.
Am Kiel der laubigen Kähne nahen sie kühl deiner Stirn;
du wünschst, sie zerschellten an dir, denn sind sie nicht Glas?

the title may denote poetic inspiration activated by the approaching “Lampen”, that is, if we take the phrase “nahen sie kühl deiner Stirn” to mean ‘causes you to think’. Dread inspires. If the writing of poetry is situated at the pinnacle of all values, it is the speaker who is the winner. His is the light of consequence; it outshines that of “die Lampen”. Thus understood, the opening lines correspond to those of **Das Geheimnis der Farne** (171): “Im Gewölbe der Schwerter besieht sich der Schatten laubgrünes Herz. / Blank sind die Klinge: wer säumte im Tod nicht vor Spiegeln?” since we assume these lines with their death and mirror references indirectly to relate to the writing of poetry as well.

Even if seen as a reference to “die Lampen des Schreckens”, the title conveys that there is no other light available. Hence there is no escape from the threat that is as evident as glass is transparent. That threat still inspires poetry written in the shadow of death; the boat of **Tallicht** still “knospt im Regen”.

No matter which way the title is read, it remains of consequence that **Das einzige Licht** is a gathering place for self-citations—see p.

V

War

The poems to be discussed in these pages were written against the backdrop of war and ruin befalling Celan's environment during the span 1941-1942.

Notturmo (54)

- i Schlaf nicht. Sei auf der Hut.
 Die Pappeln mit singendem Schritt
 ziehn mit dem Kriegsvolk mit.
 Die Teiche sind alle dein Blut.

- ii 5 Drin grüne Gerippe tanzen.
 Eins reißt die Wolke fort, dreist:
 verwittert, verstümmelt, vereist,
 blutet dein Traum von den Lanzen.

- iii Die Welt ist ein kreißendes Tier,
 10 das kahl in die Mondnacht schlich.
 Gott ist sein Heulen. Ich
 fürchte mich und frier.

A study of the dream topos speaks of nature in this poem as “Komplizin der Krieger [...] . Die Träume [...] sind bereits Gerippe, und selbst eins von diesen wird von der feindlichen Heereswolke als Trophäe davongetragen” (Böschenstein-Schäfer 1987: 225). This statement seems to be based on the assumption that addressee and speaker are one. They are to be kept separate, however, at least in the first stanza, so that the opening line constitutes a warning given by the speaker who *knows* of the need to be vigilant. That is the reason why he is not one of “die Pappeln”. But the warning comes too late, for the poplars, singing and dancing (“mit singendem Schritt”), have already

joined the army passing by. The speaker therefore utters a dark prophecy: “Die Teiche sind alle dein Blut”. Since spoken to the departed addressee, this prediction may be seen as a soliloquy in which we look forward to a character’s better acquaintance.

The motif of uprooted trees is not an isolated one in Celan’s poetry; it recurs in **Landschaft** (I 74), **Ich hörte sagen** (I 85), perhaps in **Die Felder** (I 120). Wiedemann-Wolf 59 thinks the poplar image is motivated by a folk-etymological connection between the masculine *populus*, people, and the feminine *populus*, poplar. It may equally well stem from the mythical detail that when Orpheus was traveling, the poplar trees of his homeland Piéria took such delight in the marvels he drew from his lyre that they uprooted themselves to follow him, singing and dancing. Whatever their exact origin, the poplar trees—proud and straight, and loftily tall as though aspiring to reach the blue above them, or even to uphold it—become poignant images when applied to suffering people. The Orpheus story does not tell what happens to the trees when he enters Hades to retrieve his Eurydice, but we may note that Persephone’s grove is treed with poplars and willows, the latter equally funereal and fruitless.

What follows causes the title to denote more than the traditional hour when the spirit world spooks about. This motif being of old vintage, Celan may have gone to school in the Middle Ages with their many representations of the dancing of the dead, may have studied the Baroque—see, for instance, Gryphius’ **Mitternacht** (I 66)—and/or may have attended Goethe’s **Totentanz**. At any rate, it is quite correct to speak of “das anklingende Totentanzmotiv”, as it is to point to the title of Celan’s poem as music and its link with violent death (Wiedemann-Wolf 55)—a combination that will be fused in the title **Todesfuge**.

According to the account given by Celan’s biographer, in June 1941 the Soviet occupants retreated from Czernowitz because of the approach of German forces. Not only ardent communists, but also Jewish students, the poet’s contemporaries, left the city, among them his friends Erich Einhorn and Gustav Chomed. This event may lie behind Celan’s use of the poplar motif in **Notturmo**. We therefore entertain the possibility that when Celan “traurig den Bahnhof [verließ], wo er von seinen Freunden Abschied genommen hatte” (Chalfen 114), he himself had given a warning, if only perhaps in the form of ‘Take care!’ He now uses it for a line of poetry seemingly addressed to a single individual, perhaps Einhorn (perhaps mentioned in **Schibboleth**—I 131): “Schlaf nicht. Sei auf der Hut”.

In this reading the first stanza's closing line is a morbid statement tying in with the original warning. It may also allude to the lore of Antiquity: in Greek mythology we encounter the motif of digging a ditch around or a pool next to a new altar to accommodate the blood of animals offered to the gods. When modernized, "die Teiche sind alle dein Blut" becomes a reference to blood shed not on the altar of war in a general sense, but on that of the lure of USSR Communism. The attempt to pry open Celan's image this way leads to inferences regarding his political orientation that are different from those drawn by Janz (1984), and would severely limit the *Engagement* argued in her book. As Silbermann (1993: 57) states, "Als die Russen in Juni 1940 in Czernowitz einmarschierten, war Paul längst kein Anhänger der kommunistischen Ideologie mehr".

Whether or not derived from Goethe's **Totentanz**, the second stanza's opening line of **Notturmo** reminds us of a ghostly hour during which skeletons can dance. (Those skeletons must result from the fourth line's prediction having become reality.) If the cloud insinuates the presence or absence of a divine principle—"die Wolke ist ja ein traditionelles Symbol der Gottespräsenz" (Wiedemann-Wolf 56, note 14)—it does not make sense to think of it as acting "dreist". Therefore, in contrast to Böschenstein-Schäfer as cited above, we opt for regular word order, so that one of the skeletons tears the cloud away. We are not told whether behind the cloud there is a presence or an absence. Instead, we are shown the result of the deed: "verwittert, verstummelt, vereist, / blutet dein Traum von den Lanzen". Clearly, those lances are weapons borrowed from an old tradition.

With the skeleton's action perhaps vacillating between the desire for clarity and the denial of divine steering power, that "blutet dein Traum von den Lanzen" stops us short. Despite our simple reading, without having to walk the arete between double meanings, "dein" may refer to the opening line's addressee again, to his faith ("Traum") in Communism. However, this possessive may now also involve the speaker who suffers because of what is behind the cloud, either an Absence or, if there is a Presence, a Presence inactive, or worse, delighting in destruction. Given the possible association of "blutet" with "blüet" (see p. 55 f), we may see a connection between "blutet dein Traum von den Lanzen" and "Es ward ihm verheißen der Garten der Träumer, / und Speere hält er bereit, daß die Rose sich ranke..." of **Ein Knirschen von eisernen Schuh** (173) as well as with this poem's "Die Kirsche blutet für ihn".

In the final stanza Trakl is as if peeking over the speaker's shoulder and dictating. Its first two sentences are ambiguous since we cannot be confident about their grammatical structures. Which two of "Welt", "Tier", "Gott", and "Heulen" are the subjects? If we opt for regular word orders, another question is whether the possessive in "sein Heulen" refers to "Tier" or to "Gott", whether God is identified with the howling of the animal or with his own. This uncertainty matters in view of what preceded: with "Die Teiche sind alle dein Blut" understood to have a mythological origin, the absent addressee of the introductory strophe is insinuated to be like an animal destined for slaughter. This leaves open the question about the identity of the slaughterer.

Though we now know that what the skeleton saw was a Presence, there is no comfort here: God is either howling in agony because of what has befallen his chosen people, his "Pappeln", or he is like a hyena stalking for carrion. It thus cannot be that the cloud was "einfach weggeschoben" (Wiedemann-Wolf 56, note 114). There is also the problem of "kreißendes", regarding which Stiehler (1972: 33, note 51) says that it is uncertain whether the manuscript reads 'kreischendes' or 'kreissendes', and then opts for the former. Wiedemann-Wolf 56, note 116, objects to this:

[Es ist] sehr wohl möglich, aus der Handschrift [...] zu ersehen, daß es "kreissend" und nicht "kreischend" heißt, was auch von der Fassung im Typoskript 1944 bestätigt wird. Freilich sind die beiden Verben etymologisch miteinander verwandt, und dies wird als konnotative Bedeutung genutzt, unterstützt durch das folgende "Heulen". Auch der poetische Schaffensvorgang mit seiner beängstigenden, quälenden Intuition scheint mit dem Geburtsvorgang und Gottes "Heulen" angesprochen".

What, however, if "kahl" is to be given the value of 'barren'? Then again, "kreischendes" comes with its own dire associations. God howls for himself or for the animal, the world, from anguish or ferocity. The closing statement is inevitable in either case, for the speaker is far from feeling cosseted at the bosom of the All-High. With "frier" linking with "vereist", we have a clear similarity between the final thrust of **Notturmo** and that of Nietzsche's **Vereinsamt**:

Versteck, du Narr,
Dein blutend Herz in Eis und Hohn!
Die Krähen schrein
und ziehen schwirren Flugs zur Stadt:

Bald wird es schnein,-
Weh dem, der keine Heimat hat!

There is also a difference, however. Whereas Nietzsche's speaker laments the loss of a (spiritual) *Heimat*, Celan's is equivocal in the end. He allows the possibility of God being attracted to prey and feasting on malevolence, but leaves open the faint chance that God shrieks because of what men do to his creation and his chosen people. Buber (1948: 79) would agree with the latter reading: "World history is not a game played by God; it is God's fate". In either reading, however, the stanza is as cruel as any Trakl image. **Notturmo** and other early poems have been called expressionistic. We put it naively: as exercised by Trakl, Expressionism with its independent, seemingly self-sufficient, side-by-side images relays a 'mood' rather than that it develops a story. It 'circles'. In contrast, Celan's images tend to harbor a message to which those images are subservient. A remark added to the extensive elucidation of **Gemurmelt der Toten** (53) presented by Wiedemann-Wolf (51 ff.) provides a case in point:

- i Unsre Augenhöhlen sind klar
 von Käferlichtern erhellt.
 Mit Lehm, mit verfilztem Haar
 baun wir fort an der Welt.
- ii 5 Wahlspruch der Träne: Versink!
 (Erde, du singender Samt!)
 Asche und Kettenring,
 haltet uns Totenamt.
- iii Der Henker mit hölzernem Arm
 10 köpft unsre Schatten im Turm.
 Knechte, ach Knechte... Erbarm
 dich, Wurm.

This poem reads like a denial of what *Psalm* 51 has to say, and drastically subverts the psalmist's words. To be sure, Wiedemann-Wolf is justified in linking "Totenamt" with the psalm's *Miserere*, its plea for mercy. When then she finds that "der 'Henker' selbst ein Versehrter [ist, der] sich an den immateriellen Resten der Toten [vergreift], ihren 'Schatten'", we must remember that traditionally man's shadow denotes his soul. The citation thus implies that no form

of resurrection, neither of body nor of soul, is possible; damnation is the consequence. (This suggests a connection with a statement in **Todesfuge**—see p. 168.) Since the earliest version of **Gemurmel der Toten** predates 1940 and is as time-bound as Celan's early poems tend to be, "der Henker" is unlikely to allude to a specific human individual. It may be God instead who in mechanical fashion ("mit hölzernem Arm") destroys the speakers' souls.

Schwarze Krone (50)

- i Mit dem Blut aus den verworrenen
 Wunden tränkst du deine Dornen;
 daß die kauernde verkrallte
 Angst in allem Dunkel walte.
- ii 5 Meine irren Hände falte.
- iii Alle Frohen, alle Frommen
 sah ich singend zu dir kommen.
 Du erschlugst sie mit dem Beile.
 O das Gift von deinem Pfeile.
- iv 10 Meine trüben Augen heile.
- v In die Winde, in die scharfen,
 reißt du alle sanften Harfen.
 Trittst den süßen Tau der Tage...
 Wessen Schritt-der Klang der Klage?
- vi 15 Mein verwehtes Tasten trage.
- vii Mit den Schweigsamen, den vielen,
 läßt du fremde Stürme spielen.
 In die Stille, in die Weite,
 wirfst du deine Flammenscheite.
- viii 20 Meinen leisen Schlaf bereite.¹

¹ Date. In Rosenthal 1982: 228 as # 44, with **Mystisches Lied** as title. Kraft: "1941". Chalfen 106 speaks of the twenty-year-old Celan, hence places the poem in the span 1940-41. Wiedemann-Wolf 243 dates the poem as the sixth of thirteen between May 23 and August 2 of 1942. Our suggested date: second half 1941.

The critics are virtually unanimous: “Du” refers to the Christ figure. The only exception is Chalfen, who speaks of a love poem in which the speaker demands “von der Geliebten, daß sie ihm ‘leisen Schlaf’ bereite” (106). Janz (1984:36) pithily speaks of Christ as “zerstörende Gewalt” and identifies “die Frommen” with the Hasidim. Pöggeler (1986: 276) has a similar view: “Das Gedicht [...] spricht Christi Dornenkrone an als eine zerstörende Gewalt, auf die dennoch die Verwirrung ihre Hoffnung setzt”. This sounds much like Böschenstein-Schäfer, who focuses on strophes iii and iv:

Eindrucksvoll ist [...] die Insistenz, mit der jener, der sich anstatt als Retter als Vernichter erwiesen hat, dennoch um Hilfe angefleht wird.[...] Die Intensität dieser Beziehung bezeugt sich in ihrer Verflechtung mit dem Zentralthema der leidenden Mutter (1989: 14).

In this statement the suffering mother is equated with the one in the opening line of **Es fällt nun, Mutter, Schnee in der Ukraine**.

We cite Wiedemann-Wolf (262) who is sensitive to “eine eigentümliche Art von Versöhnlich-ja Innigkeit”. In the refrain-like one-line strophes, she says,

kommt ein Gott-Vertrauen zum Ausdruck, das durch das im Gedicht Gesagte in keiner Weise gerechtfertigt ist, sondern [...] völlig unverständlich bleibt. Angesprochen ist hier ein Gott, der die Erlösungstat Christi als Begründung allen Judenhasses ermöglicht hat.

Then, referring to *Psalm 64* and the story of Job, she states,

Glaube scheint ursächlich mit dem Tod verbunden: Weil die “Frommen” gläubig vertrauen, werden sie erschlagen. Also auch hier ein Hinweis auf Hiobs Konflikt, der ja, weil untadelig fromm, vom Unglück heimgesucht wird. Allerdings ist dies nur ein Aspekt der zweiten [sic] Strophe. Durch den Titel der früheren Fassungen, **Mystisches Lied**, wird für den Pfeil ein anderer Kontext motiviert: er wird als Bild mystischer Penetration verständlich.

There is no denying that the opening statement of **Schwarze Krone** is meant to make us *think* of the title as Christ’s crown of thorns, but this leaves open the question of who the addressee actually is. In this connection, it seems that the cited critics have put an inordinately heavy burden on the third strophe. Given its past tenses, its details antedate those of the other strophes, and it is difficult to see what it has to do with *Psalm 64* or with Job. To be sure, “die mit giftigen Worten zielen wie mit Pfeilen” may *sound* like the source of “O das

Gift von deinem Pfeile" (Wiedemann-Wolf 262), but the biblical subjects are the psalmist's enemies, have nothing to do with divinity.

We propose that the metaphors of iii are derived from Greek mythology in which Orpheus' trees uprooted themselves to follow him because they were enchanted by his lyre's music. Those trees (the "Pappeln" of **Notturmo**) are now modernized in "Alle Frohen, alle Frommen / sah ich singend zu dir kommen".

The strophe's third line may stem from various mythological stories, none of them dealing with Orpheus. Schwab tells on a number of occasions that Greek or Trojan warriors cut trees for the funeral pyres of fallen comrades. Our understanding of the line, when taken together with the singing of "alle Frommen", allows for a connection with "benedeiet von Äxten" and "das Lied von der Zeder" of **Schwarze Flocken** (129).

The third strophe's last line has yet another origin. The centaur Chiron was a good centaur, and a wise one, esteemed by all. Even the gods entrusted their sons to his care and educational talents. He taught Aesculapius how to use herbs for healing purposes, and how to raise the dead. Chiron, though immortal, was accidentally wounded in the knee by one of Hercules' poison-dipped arrows, therefore doomed to such unrelenting suffering that he wished for death. The gods granted his wish and allowed him to expire in exchange for Prometheus being set free from the rock in the Caucasus.

Chiron's poisoned wound seems to have a parallel in "Der Schierling streift mir träumerisch die Knie"—the closing line of **Am Brunnen** (117). This connection is all the more likely since this poem's penultimate line refers to hemlock's close *genista* relative "Ginster", which has its equally poisonous predecessor in **Flügelrauschen**.

If the third strophe thus is a composite of mythological details with death as their common denominator and are put together to create poetry rather than a logically coherent story, they are not details picked at random. Orpheus' descent into the underworld to retrieve Eurydice parallels Christ's harrowing of hell; Chiron's readiness to die as *Stellvertreter* on behalf of Prometheus evokes the concept of redemption as well. Each is a prototypical sufferer. "Alle" thus includes mythological figures whose deaths connote redemptive qualities; they, too, are of the "Frommen" because of their readiness to die on behalf of others. With "alle *Frohen*" (italics added), however, the speaker goes beyond mythology, and contemporizes, so that those of myth turn out to be illustrative of widespread suffering throughout

history. “Alle Frohen” also indicates that the *modern* “alle Frommen” wanted (“*sah ich*”—italics added) companionable integration with “Du”, but were not accepted.

The crown of Celan’s title is thus not exclusively Christ’s. He, the New Testament crown-bearer, becomes one sufferer among many. Validated by the way in which the poet deals with him in later poems, we are compelled to equate “Du”, not with Christ, but with organized Christianity. This reading does not only do justice to Celan’s orientation regarding matters religious, but also to his poem as poem, and to the way in which he constructs it. Hence, *if* we wish to retain Wiedemann-Wolf’s suggestion of the arrow as an image of mystical penetration, we can only do so if we take account of its poisonous quality and understand it as irony. Actually, it is preferable to keep Celan’s Jewish mysticism in petto for poems in which the beloved is abstracted. It was therefore wise of Celan to do away with **Mystisches Lied** as title.

We take a little leap: “Du”, that is, Christianity, has turned Christ’s crown of thorns into a black crown denoting *Jewish* suffering. A look at Grimm’s *Wörterbuch* XXV, section “verworren” 2344-54, leaves ample room for the connotations of “verwornen / Wunden”. The adjective tells of the long history during which those wounds have been and continue to be inflicted.

This reading also compels us to be sensitive to the cruelty of “tränkst du deine Dornen”. The verb applies primarily to the watering of cattle, so that the phrase shares with “Die Teiche sind alle dein Blut” of **Notturmo**, and is on a par with the order of rank to which the camp commandant of **Todesfuge** (155) adheres (“er pfeift seine Rüden herbei / er pfeift seine Juden hervor”). The thorns are similarly relegated, and with a vicious twist. With the wounds understood as old and new Jewish wounds, it is Christianity, “Du”, that clamped and clamps the black crown on its victims, using Jewish blood to slake its thorns’ thirst. Clearly, it is those thorns that draw the blood of the victims. Equally clearly, there is nothing mystical about them, nothing! Instead, they fully explain “verkrallte Angst in allem Dunkel”. This “Dunkel” is not the darkness that came over Jerusalem while the thunder rolled over the surrounding hills when Christ expired. It is the darkness of **Tenebrae** (I 163) instead, a poem that shares meaningful terms and concepts with **Schwarze Krone** (cf. “ineinander verkrallt”, “Zur Tränke gingen wir”. Also “Windschief gingen wir hin” needs attention: it alludes to the movements of the

shades in Hades, and suggests what happened to those whom the speaker in **Schwarze Krone** “sah [...] singend zu dir kommen”).

It is more *our* frame of reference rather than Janz’ own that justifies her drawing attention to the Legion of St. Michael during the fascist regime in Romania (1984: 217, note 36). Because the harp motif in *v* alludes to the diaspora in Babylon bewailed in *Psalm* 137 and is now applied to the speaker’s own day, we may identify “Trittst den süßen Tau der Tage” as the goosetep marching early in the morning to the task assigned.

Because “der Klang der Klage” is the same lament as that at the heart of **An den Wassern Babels** and other poems, we identify the many of *vii*, the “Schweigsamen”, with the multitudes annihilated. The winds of the fifth stanza (random killings by St. Michael’s Legion) have become “fremde Stürme” (systematically murdering German SS). Hence, when Janz identifies “alle Frommen” with the Hasidim, we assume that she would identify the “Schweigsamen” as Jews in general.

If “Stille” and “Weite” denote the realm of the many “Schweigsame[...]”, more than one value may have to be attributed to “deine Flammenscheite”. On the most elementary level this phrase denotes the devastation of those in a vast bleak landscape, and may bring flamethrowers to mind. We also entertain the possibility that “Flammenscheite” is an ironizing allusion to, and a *Widerruf* of, the salvatory validity of *John* 1:5: “And the light shineth in the darkness”. With Christianity being responsible for the black crown with thorns, its “Flammenscheite” evokes the vision of the Christ of glory in a Christian framework *and* suggests that the destruction brought about by “Winde” and “fremde Stürme” turns the crown of thorns into the *Jews’* crown of martyrdom and, ultimately, into *their* crown of glory. Therefore, depending on how we understand its “König” motif, **Mandorla** (I 244) may have to be viewed, despite everything else, as an expansion on the crown-of-glory concept.

Incidentally, the strophic arrangement of **Schwarze Krone** is similar to that of the immediately preceding **Hieroglyphe** (49). This composition also features four main strophes, each followed by a one-liner that reads as though put to the side. The last of these—“Frier mit mir, Baum”—seems to come from nowhere, and raises the question whether that tree is the same as the aspen in **Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr** and **Espenbaum**, which according to Petuchowski (1978a: 115) refers to the Torah.

With the view that “Du” addresses Christianity, there is nothing baffling about the speaker’s pleas in the even-numbered one-line strophes. They are of course not addressed to Christ, but to an absent entity that may be *Niemand* or *niemand* of **Psalm** (I 225).

It is not surprising that the speaker asks for his own “leisen Schlaf” in the final strophe, for Antiquity’s twin of death. The line is on a par with that of **Talglicht**’s “Wie lebten wir hier?” (see p. 92).

It is as interesting as it is significant that in Kraft 52 “vielen” of the sixteenth line is capitalized, perhaps to honor the “Schweigsamen”, perhaps to endow them with their own crown of glory blazing out its “Flammenscheite” in all directions.

Again, **Schwarze Krone** is an indictment of Christianity, but not of Christ whose crown of thorns becomes the crown of Christianity’s victims. From the speaker’s perspective Christ is included among those victims. As Schlesak (1990: 350) states, “Die *Shoah* der Juden ist nur ein Voraus der allgemeinen Apokalypse, Christus immer mittendrin”.

Unterwegs (56)

- i Mit unsern Ketten hebt uns nicht
die Nacht in ihre roten Stürme...
Was für würgende Wildnis flicht
Gitter in Türme,
- ii 5 die wessen Wolkenfaust zerschlug?
Nun ist ihr Ruhm wieder Wunde...
Schwester, vom Trost aus dem fremden Krug
wölkt sich die Stunde.
- iii 10 Aus wimperlosen Tümpeln weht
der Blick der Steppe uns entgegen:
Welchen zerschlägt sie? Welcher widersteht?
- iv Welcher wird Regen?

The title of this opaque poem teases: who is on the way to what exactly, and why? Perhaps the mention of the steppe in iii hints at a partial clarification. Whatever the answers, it seems safe to assume that it is “Nacht”, “Wildnis”, and “Wolkenfaust” that make for

enigma. These nature-derived images are evidently mutually antagonistic forces. Somewhere between them is the individual speaking on behalf of others, a sister figure included. The speaker's focus is not on what the warring entities do to each other, but on the effect they have on those for whom he speaks. Because the first two strophes tell of warfare we may wonder about the possibly historical realism curtailed by the inexplicit language. **Unterwegs** being of July or August of 1941, we submit that a particular backdrop lends coherence to the speaker's account:

Auftakt der kommenden Ereignisse war die Deportierungsaktion der sowjetischen Staatspolizei, des NKWD, am 13. Juni 1941: in einer einzigen Nacht wurden viertausend Männer, Frauen und Kinder nach Siberien verschleppt. [...] Drei Viertel der Deportierten waren Juden. [...] Am 22. Juni trat ein, was die Sowjets befürchtet hatten und die Deportation veranlaßt haben dürfte: Hitlers Armeen überfielen die Sowjetunion. An der südlichen Front griffen deutsche und rumänische Truppenverbände gemeinsam an. [...] Die in das rumänische Territorium hineinragende Nordbukowina konnte von der Roten Armee nicht gehalten werden, und die Truppen zogen sich nach wenigen Kriegstagen zurück. [...] Die rumänischen Truppen zogen am 5. Juli 1941 in Czernowitz ein. Es kam zu Plünderungen, und Juden und Ukrainer wurden ermordet. Schon am nächsten Tag erreichte die deutsche Einsatzgruppe D unter dem Kommando des SS-Brigadeführers Ohlendorf die Stadt. Der Auftrag der SS lautete: 'Energisch durchgreifen, die Juden liquidieren' (Chalfen 113-14).

With this, the poem can be paraphrased, to the effect that the night of war did not sweep *us* into its red (Soviet) storms. This could constitute a sigh of relief if it were not for the shackle motif. As it is, the line harbors anguish aggravated by the thrust of the following lines. They attribute "würgende Wildnis" to the Soviets who barred the windows, not to render the towers (Czernowitz) impenetrable, but to turn them into incarceration devices trapping those within. The speaker lapses into the past tense for just a moment: virtually immediately, the towers were destroyed by a "Wolkenfaust". If we remember that this destroyer was aided by the Romanian Legion of St. Michael, "Wolkenfaust" is ambiguous in that behind it may be German ferocity and Romanian Christianity, as well as the wrath of God. "Nun ist ihr Ruhm wieder Wunde" shares in this bivalence. If solely applied to the Germans, the speaker's memory goes back, perhaps as far as November 9, 1938, when, in Germany, Celan witnessed the infamies of *Kristallnacht* and must have wondered about German cultural glory. If we identify "Wolkenfaust" with God as well, who allowed the Germans to prevail, "wieder" may go back much farther, to the

Babylonian captivity, for instance—cf. **An den Wassern Babels** (70). The renown of the “*Wolkenfaust*” has suffered in either case.

That **Unterwegs** addresses the suffering of Jews is guaranteed by the sister figure. She is sponsored by the *Song of Songs*, who for Celan represents Judaism. The speaker seems to want to solace her by promising deliverance: “vom Trost aus dem fremden Krug / wölkt sich die Stunde” speaks of death clouding from the jug. Parallel to the wavering value of “*Wolkenfaust*”—German destructive power *and* God’s?—the cloud from that jug is other than the cloud over the tabernacle during Israel’s forty years of wandering through the desert. It may therefore be inadequate to think of *Kristallnacht*, for now it is possible that “*Wolkenfaust*” functions as a revision of Jewish history old and new, as a denial of God’s promise to be with his people.

The adjective in the following strophe helps to personify nature by means of a *pars pro toto*: the steppe’s pools are presented as lidless eyes. As representatives of nature, these naked eyes are like those of the dead that could not be closed in a final gesture of care. It is therefore a failure to speak of personification of nature: nature itself is dead, is uninhabitable, hence brings death. Its bald “*Blick*” foretells disaster. Anyone entering this scene enters the realm of death. In a delivery that does not even mention the victims, personification of whatever sort is impossible.

The wind implied in “ihre roten Stürme” and alluded to in “weht [...] entgegen” must also be seen as derived from nature. With “*Blick*” serving as the subject of the latter verb, it is difficult to distinguish between the roles of wind and pools. When the speaker in selective fashion uses interrogatives, he raises the questions of how many will be annihilated by the steppe and who are the few who may survive. The closing strophe drives home the lot of those destined to become one with the dead landscape, and to add to it, as rain. The speaker is saying that the dead as rain will fertilize the landscape, and in doing so will make it bloom—like so many of Persephone’s asphodels or, in a more modern framework of reference, like so many white tulips.

Ballade von der erloschenen Welt (17)

- i Der Sand. Der Sand.
Vor die Zelte, die zahllosen Zelte
trägt der Mond sein Geflüster.
“Ich bin das Meer. Ich bin der Mond.
- 5 Laßt mich ein”.

- ii “Nacht”, murmeln die Zelte.
 “Sei Nacht”.

- iii Da rücken die Speere heran:
 “Wir sind es.
10 Und das eiserne Blau des Morgens.
 Laßt uns die Schwingen alle
 durchboren”.

- iv Da regen,
 da regen sich bange die Arme der Krieger:
15 “Uns gaben die gottlosen Engel recht-
 und Fremde häufen hier Finsternis?
 Wir dringen ein!

- v (Doch was,
 doch wer ist im Gezelt?)

- vi20 Ein atmendes Antlitz
 hängt sich hell vor die Zelte:
 “Regengrünes Geschick
 bin ich.
 Und ich bin Gras.
25 Ich wehe.
 Und ich wehe hinein”.

- vii (Doch was,
 doch wer ist im Gezelt?)

- viii Versanken sie alle?
30 Der Sand?
 Die Speere?
 Die arme der Krieger? Das atmende Antlitz?
- ix Versanken, versanken sie?

- x Die stammelnden Seelen der Neger ringsum
35 tanzten rundum und drangen ein:

die Schatten fanden sie, die Schatten
von keinem.

xi Zersprengt ist der Seelenreigen.²

From the title we may assume that this poem does not describe a static condition; a ballad has epic events to relay, and will have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The adjective may stand for ‘extinct’, without any specific connotations. Since according to ancient tradition the world will end in fire, however, “erloschen[...]” may also be taken to mean “burnt out”.

Because of its repetition of “Sand”, the opening line prompts the vision of a desert stretching beyond the horizon without an oasis in sight. As a result, the innumerable tents are merely vulnerable specks in this inhospitable environment. Above these marks of human habitat and making for an eerie landscape stands the moon.

An earlier version of the poem has “Sand” as the subject of the third line (Guțu 332). It is difficult to see what the poet gained when he changed to “Mond”. Desert sand, perhaps representing ephemeral existence, lends “Geflüster” a more realistic auditory quality than does “Mond”; such sand whispers as it moves. By conforming to the sand’s prominence in the opening line, Guțu’s version gives the sand an important role as the speaker of the following lines. Whatever the reason for the change from “Sand” to “Mond”, we must do the best we can with this possibly hasty and perhaps ‘unfinished’ alteration.

The moon in the newer version may be understood as the measurer of time whose quarterly changes rule the tides of the sea. As such it is potentially threatening, for it might bring about a great flood—“Ich bin das Meer”. Its association with darkness may be more important even though it is ambivalent because darkness may spell protection as well as danger. The moon may also entail the concept of the tented desert as a landscape of death, so that apprehension lurks in “trägt der Mond sein Geflüster”. That “Geflüster” may at the same time be seductive.

² Date. In Rosenthal 1982: 228 as # 47. Not contained in the Kraft edition. As a rhymeless poem it would have been placed in her second cycle, the sixteen components of which, with an exception of the first, are dated 1941. Wiedemann-Wolf 240, working with a “nach einem etwa 1944 entstandenen Typoskript”, dates the poem as the second of twenty-seven between 1939 and May 23, 1942. Our suggested date: second half of 1941, perhaps a little later.

The opening strophe represents the created order, the world, with “Sand”, “Mond”, and “Meer” standing for earth, air, and water respectively—with the fourth basic element, fire, possibly embedded in the title. This world seeks cohabitation in the tents, the request being that it (“mich”, not *uns*) be let in. Perhaps, with “Mond” as the subject of “trägt”, the redundancy of “Ich bin der Mond”, if meant to suggest the biblical “I am that I am”, is of consequence.

We could also argue that the moon has no atmosphere so that silence prevails on its windless surface, corresponding to the silence and windstillness of the desert, and bringing out the similarities between the two: each arid, inhospitable, perhaps malign. With the moon as subject of the third line, “Nacht” of the second strophe stops us short. Perhaps the change from “Sand” to “Mond” was indeed a hasty one. As it is, “Nacht” must be seen as a metaphor. Moreover, the tents’ plea for darkness to provide protection against whatever is dreaded, if fulfilled, may result in destruction. In this sense the tents’ begged-for friendship with the night is paralleled by the closing lines of **An den Wassern Babels** (70):

iii 9 Kehr du mit grausem Getös
ein in kauernde Hütten.
Komm unser Blut verschütten.
Den Lehm erlös...

and by “Ich sah ihre [meiner Pappeln] Wurzeln gen Himmel um Nacht flehn” of **Ich hörte sagen** (I 85). At the same time, the words spoken by the tents are flavored by their contrast with God’s creative “Let there be light” (*Genesis* 1:3).

Traditionally, the desert is the region where in the daytime the sun causes the air to tremble and burn like molten gold, where the hermit is in travail and, having been tortured into conviction, rises, girds his loin, and returns to the world, eyes burning, a prophet, in order to proclaim the veracities of monotheism and the consequent need to encapsulate oneself against the world round about and its idols, to chastise the favored of the Lord, the stiff-necked ones who, tired of adhering to an invisible deity, may have built themselves a golden calf. So the tents murmur for night to descend, because they cannot bear the heat that seared the hermit into a prophet the way gold is purified in the crucible.

It is against this backdrop, we must believe, or one like it, that **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** demands to be read. It constitutes

a trek through the deserts of the centuries and, having traversed many of these, brings in the motif of the spears marching in. The temptation to read their “Wir sind es” as containing another echo of “I am that I am” might find support in their identification with the morning that is destined to undo “Nacht” and tear away its protective cover. Whereas “das eiserne Blau des Morgens” simply relates to the glint of light on the spears’ metal, it also contains the seed of a topos made Celan’s own by his repetitious use of it. In thrall as he is to the image of the dawn, it will be charged with man’s existential plight, strain for metaphysical significance, and haunt: The *true* night begins in the morning. Also, the threat in “das eiserne Blau des Morgens” will later be identified with blue eyes and the unspoken color of “Eisen im Gurt” (**Todesfuge**). “Da rücken die Speere heran” may also be compared with “Trittst den süßen Tau der Tage” of **Schwarze Krone**. In addition, the impetus for the third strophe of **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** may lie in a passage in which Schwab (110) deals with the warriors sprouting from the ground that Jason seeded:

Inzwischen war das ganze Feld entlang die Saat hervorgekeimt: der ganze Areshain starrte von Schilden und spitzen Lanzen und erglänzte von Helmen, so daß der Schimmer durch die Luft bis zum Himmel emporblitzte.

This suggestion gains plausibility if we consider that in **Marianne** (159) the result of Jason’s sowing is equally linked with warriors beleaguering tents: “Mit schееigen Zähnen führt einer den Bogen” and “Vorm Zelt zieht die Hundertschaft auf”.

The spears’ statement about piercing “die Schwingen alle” has little to do with the delivery of a ballad, and remains ambiguous in the fourth strophe, even if we assume that “Schwingen” relates to “die Arme der Krieger” that are to be rendered incapable of bearing arms—and evoke the vision of a crucifixion en masse. Those “Krieger” raise their arms as though in supplication (because of the repetition of “Da regen” perhaps as though hesitantly), but in doing so they accommodate the spears’ intent. At the same time, “Schwingen” refers to the wings of “die [...] Engel” as well.

The spears thus turn out to be the enemies of the “Krieger”, the would-be defenders, *and* of the angels. And it dawns on the former: “Uns gaben die gottlosen Engel recht”. The past tense and the adjective in this enigmatic statement demand speculation, in part because we suspect someone has been cavalier with quotation marks, and thereby has obfuscated the intent of what the warriors say. (Guṭu’s

version marks the end of strophe v as the end of the defenders' speech.)

Since temporally "gaben [...] recht" antedates "rücken [...] heran" and "häufen [...] Finsternis", the attempt to understand benefits from reading against a backdrop like this: On June 22, 1941, war broke out between Germany and the USSR. The Soviets had to end their yearlong occupation of Czernowitz, SS commandoes entered the city in early July and began their killings. The angels, messengers of a godless gospel, who until recently associated themselves with what now has turned out to be the common enemy, have had to admit that they were wrong to enter into a pact with the forces that are now warring against them as well. The commandos ("Fremde") are identified with the spears, and they bring "Finsternis". The earlier desired "Nacht" has thus arrived with a vengeance, and we now equate "hier" with Czernowitz. "Finsternis" thus is both knifing irony and mounting terror.

The narrator raises another question with "Wir dringen ein!" This proclaimed intent instills the awareness that the speakers are about to do something forbidden and therefore act "bange"—a case of dread added to the fear latent in the second strophe. There is no indication of what exactly is to be entered.

v 18 (Doch was,
 doch wer ist im Gezelt?)

The parentheses say that this strophe is spoken by the narrator as an aside extraneous to the epic events relayed so far, and is meant to set the listeners' minds astir. They are at the same time spoken on behalf of the "Krieger".

Evidently we are to think of "Zelte" of the first strophe as contrasting with "Gezelt", of numerous tents versus *the* tent, of tents in the desert surrounding, in neat tribal arrangement, this one, all-important tent. The defenders and their enemies have never laid eyes on a presence in this tent. The former, now that they are in "Finsternis", have to know what is in that "Gezelt". In this poem there is no mention of anything visible pertaining to *the* tent, no cloud by day, no column of fire by night, each denoting the Presence as promised to and by the prophet. The speakers of "Wir dringen ein!" are about to commit an act punishable by death, down into She-ol (see *Numbers* 16:30).

In the sixth, the central, strophe one face is said simultaneously to posit itself before any number of “Zelte”. It is a living face (“atmendes”), a supernatural face, shining “hell”—the way the face of God-intoxicated Moses shone when he came down from the mountain (*Exodus* 34:29), although in his case perhaps only with reflected light, Moses whose tongue is afflicted (*Exodus* 4:10) as though he were one of “die stammelnden Neger” of the ballad’s penultimate strophe (see below).

In a purposeful act, the face hovers before the entries, and the tents’ denizens must now be cowering in dark corners because more than ever they want “Nacht” to prevail. This hiding in effect makes for dispersal—each in his own tent—‘diaspora’ comes to mind. A voice suggests omnipresence throughout the created order, holding sway over the rains, each blade of grass. Its words could make the arid desert bloom and turn it into a land of milk and honey. As if spoken by the wind, however, they are terrifying words. “Ich wehe” equates with “I am that I am” (*Exodus* 3: 14). Whereas probing the oxymoron in “regengrünes Geschick” almost causes it to fall apart,³ when the voice pronounces its final sentence it is not a request like that of the moon, but an authoritative decision. The wind is a storm or a zephyr, a threat or a promise, perhaps both. Although “Ich wehe hinein” may cause the sands to move and may denote entry into each tent—cf. “Kehr du mit grausem Getös / ein in kauernde Hütten” of **An den Wassern Babels** (70)—it may also be the assurance of the Presence residing in *the* tent, provided no one has the audacity to enter it (“eindringen”—cf. *Numbers* 4: 15 and 18: 3) lest there be wrath and destruction (cf. *Leviticus* 26: 32).

The seventh strophe, like the fifth, is urgent. Whereas vi could be a potential answer to the question of v, after vii there is no answer, no “Antlitz”. Instead, the eighth strophe poses five additional questions. They are of a different order and in the past tense. Asking whether “sie alle” are gone, the sand, the spears, the arms of the warriors, the breathing face, the questions are left as such, with the first emphatically repeated in ix, apparently because it is important and therefore allowed to occupy a strophe by itself.

In conjunction with the possibly hasty and unfinished change of “Sand” into “Mond” as the speaker in the first strophe, it is interesting

³ Almost, but not quite: the role of rain in **Unterwegs** suggests the possibility that “regengrünes Geschick” is fertilizing in its capacity as well as fateful. Is it, with regard to “regengrünes Geschick”, of any consequence that Osiris as god of the dead wears a green mask?

to note the order in which viii enumerates “Sand”, “Speere”, “Krieger”, and “Antlitz”. In the earlier version of the poem, these voice the speeches cited in i, ii, iv, and vi respectively. This orderly recapping is lost in the later version⁴ because the change from “Sand” to “Mond” in the opening strophe is not carried through in viii. Because the poem mentions the tents four times, they must be of consequence. It is intriguing, however, that viii does not refer to them as the speakers of the second strophe. Are they less important than we felt led to assume? It seems that the answer comes in the penultimate strophe: in hindsight we realize that viii does not mention the tents among the other speakers because they are too *important*. We thus see the line running from “Zelte” to “Seelen”, and from there to “Seelenreigen” of the closing line.

The use of past verbs in viii relays the outcome of fiery battles that must have taken place. As the result of these conflagrations perhaps foretold by the title we are looking at a world extinct. Now that we are confronted with finality, who annihilated whom is irrelevant, for all sides became allies in an orgy of death, and in doing so whirled in collective madness into the maw of She-ol to become its scattered (“zersprengt”) denizens for eternity.

Perhaps, however, it is careless to speak of ‘all sides’ since the opening question of viii does not unequivocally imply the annihilation of the “Antlitz”. “Versanken sie” may connote its willful self-withdrawal without denying the continued existence of “keine[n]”. Such withdrawal would turn the tent dwellers into abandoned toys of the Absent one.

It is mordant irony that “Wir dringen ein” of iv turns into “drangen ein” of x, that the intent to enter *the* tent (“Gezelt”) issued into entering nothingness.

Instead of She-ol we could have said Hades, and might have gained by doing so, for “stammelnden” might then be taken as an allusion to the inability of the shadows (“Neger”) in the Greek underworld to speak. Without Hercules or Perseus to enable them to drink the blood of animals in order to allow communication, they are doomed to remain *stammelnd*. Incidentally, whether we think of She-ol or Hades, the possibility that the dancing blacks are motivated by Heine’s **Das Sklavenschiff** (440) remains unaffected. (See Forster

⁴ Perhaps not lost is what Schlesak 1990: 338 says in a quite different context: “Sand, wie auch das Zerstreute, Nicht-Heilige im Hebr. *chol*, hängt mit der Seelenkrankheit *choleh* zusammen, der Gottesabsenz”.

1970/71 espying a connection between Heine's poem and the motif of dancing in **Todesfuge**.)

Strophe x deviates from Guțu's. The latter has no suspension dots at the end and has "Keinem" rather than "keinem". This urges a comparison with "Niemand" versus "niemand" of **Psalm** (I 225). This seems warranted by support derived from one or two additional intracomparative readings. If we go by the translation of a passage in the Romanian prose **S'ar putes crede** (193), Celan seems to remember **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt**: "Hast du nicht verstanden, daß dir als Wanderer der lepröse Vorhang der blutigen Zelte aufgezwungen wurde? Ah, es war niemand im Zelt?" (Wiedemann-Wolf 225). There is no proof that this "Zelt" equates with "Gezelt" of **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt**, but the mention of what we assume to be the curtain of the tabernacle suggests it does, and the rhetorical question draws attention to an absence—no, Absence!—in either case.

As reproduced by Guțu, **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** contains thirty-six lines in the first ten strophes. Are these numbers of consequence? The first is twice the number of the benedictions in the Kaddish prayer that laments the dead and glorifies God. The second represents the number needed to constitute a valid Jewish worship service, as it does in "wir bechern zu zehnt" in **Marianne** (159). It may be that the ballad's one-line closing strophe—derived from Greek myth, mind you!—denies the values which Judaic thought attaches to the numbers eighteen and ten.

Ballade vom Auszug der drei (19)

- i Die rote Wolke weht um unsre Hand:
Wir flohen alle aus dem gleichen Land.
Drei gleiche Feinde hatten unser Land verheert
mit argem Nibelungenschwert.
- ii 5 Da lachten wir,
da lachten wir und zogen in andere Täler.
Was machts: Die Hütten alle steckten wir in Brand.
- iii Kommt, Schwestern, kommt.
Und schwärzet unsre Nächte.

- iv 10 Ich hatte ein sinnendes Herz.
 Ich hatte ein wildes.
 Ich keins.
- v Kommt, Schwestern, kommt.
 Und schwärzet unsre Nächte.
- vi 15 Da kamen sie,
 da kamen sie und baten: es frißt das Feuer alle unsre
 Höfe!
 Da lachten wir,
 da lachten wir und löschten ihnen das Feuer.
 (Denn wem, denn wem wird noch Wind hier zuteil?)
 20 Da lachten wir und löschten ihre Feuer alle.
- vii In die leere Ewigkeit ziehn wir mit schwelenden Fackeln.

The titles **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** and **Ballade vom Auszug der drei** have things in common, not just because each purports to head a ballad. Each points to an ending, the first by means of “erlöschenen”, the second by means of “Auszug”, terms that focus on finality. The structural devices of the poems proper display similarities as well: direct speeches, identical strophes framing the central one, a final one-line strophe relaying the ultimate outcome.

Whereas the main speakers of **Ballade vom Auszug der drei** equate with mythology’s Furies, their exchanges draw not only upon the *Nibelungenlied* that tells of clashing empires, but also upon the scene involving *Macbeth*’s three witches (strophe iv). There seem to be no biblical allusions this time. If we pretend that the ballad does not draw the past into the present in order to highlight the latter, the poem still has its ambiguities and obscurities. The changes from present to past to past perfect verb forms do not facilitate quick comprehension, nor do the reading marks. Indeed, it is the subject in the opening line that prompts the first question, and the colon that raises additional ones. Is the red cloud a simple metaphor for war and arson, or is it a reference to the Furies’ torches? Is the colon there to indicate that the second line is explanatory? Is this line’s “Land” a strictly geographical term? Why in that case did the Furies flee from it? Was their escape due to their inability to withstand the heat of conflagrations blazing

through? If so, we cannot possibly accuse the Furies of having started the fires. Instead, “Wir flohen alle aus dem gleichen Land” because “drei gleiche Feinde” had put flame to it, “*unser Land*” (*italics added*). This possessive is justified: sired by Uranus, the Furies are the daughters of Gaea, the Earth. “Drei gleiche Feinde” did violence to her, the Furies’ very mother. It is thus inevitable that they vigorously exercised their talent, using their torches to devastate human habitats. There are therefore two forms of destruction in the poem, the one caused by the three enemies, and the one brought about by the Furies.

Asked by the speakers of iii to blacken their nights, the Furies did not immediately comply. The three converse—in the sequence Tisiphone, Alecto, Megaera?⁵ Upon repetition of the plea, they extinguish the fires which had already caused total devastation with the help of the wind fanning the flames. (This holds true even if we are tempted to understand the wind as an allusion to “‘Ich wehe. / Und ich wehe hinein’” of **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt**.) With everything wasted, the Furies’ work is done, and with still smoldering torches they betake themselves into equally empty eternity.

There is no need to recast the above paraphrase, and there is nothing to add other than to point to the third and fifth strophes as pleas that move on two levels. On that of realism, darkness would mean fires extinguished, on the other it would take on metaphysical value much like the self-destructive plea in the closing line of **An den Wassern Babels** (70).

If we were to modernize the events relayed, we would call “unser Land” Bukowina, would call its “drei gleiche Feinde” Russian, German and Romanian, and would hold them directly responsible for the red cloud of the opening line, even though this ambiguous image applies to the Furies’ torches as well.

When early in 1944 Celan prepared his typed collection of poems, **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** and **Ballade vom Auszug der drei** were numbers 46 and 47 respectively according to Rosenthal 1982: 28. When towards the end of the same year Celan began a

⁵ Behind this trio, are we also to think in terms of the Trinity ironized beyond recognition, as in the Father (with “ein sinnendes Herz”), the Son (with “ein wildes”), and the Holy Ghost (with “keins”)?

collection of handwritten poems (Ms 1944/45), the two ballads were not included. Nor did he give copies of them to Ruth Kraft; presumably he was no longer satisfied with them. Perhaps seen as too balladesque, too theatrical, too contrived, they would trivialize the poems written in their wake, **Todesfuge** among them. For example, arms raised as though in supplication in “da regen sich bange die Arme der Krieger” of **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** would now suggest arms raised in agony in the gas-chambers. The elimination of the ballads may also have stemmed from the decision that their numbers-related devices should not detract from their counterparts in **Todesfuge**. It may have been an amalgam of reasons that caused Celan to consign his ballads to oblivion.

Because of the time span in which the poems discussed in this study were written, we conclude that Celan in his early poetry tended to react quickly to historical events befalling his environment.

VI

The Mother Figure

The roles which Celan in his early poetry assigns to his mother allow the grouping of compositions that were written over a period of six years or so. They may reveal increasing 'poetization' of the mother figure. The first two chosen for discussion focus on the necessity or perceived need to leave the parental home and its shelter.¹ In contrast to the antedating pieces (see studies I and II), they rhyme, not necessarily because greater care went into their compositions. They may in fact be perfunctory here and there, but our interest lies with diction, obscurities and ambiguities, motifs, and literary influences.

Kein ankerloses Tasten (9)

- i Kein ankerloses Tasten stört die Hand
und nachts verstreutes Heimweh trägt die Not
gefalteter Gebete zitternd hin vors Rot
im Bangen deiner Züge, dunkeler gespannt.
- ii 5 Die zagen Atemzüge halten in
den Abhang ihres Rankens dein Gesicht;
und den bestürzten hält es leise licht-
gestrahnte Sorgfalt vor die Träume hin.
- iii Doch diese ragen aus dem hellen Ruhn
10 und oft schlägt Purpur ein Gewand um sie

¹ **Auch das Alleinsein reicht nicht aus für Tränen** (11) reads like the second installment on the leave-taking theme, but it does not refer to the mother. Situated beneath a tree of which the foliage sifts the light, the speaker's position and manner of dreaming are remarkably like those of Anselm in the first vigil of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der goldene Topf*.

- von Fahrt und Fährnis, uferlosem Tun...
 iv Die so entfliehn der Rast, erreichst du nie,
 wo Dickicht ist und Schwärmen, steil und bunt-
 Denn du bist Ruhe, Mutter, Schimmer aus dem Grund.²

Celan wrote surprisingly few fourteen-liners in his early days. In addition to the poem to be discussed, we have **Die Mutter** (14), **Welt in deinen Blick zu bannen** (84), **Perlenschnur** (91), **Ferne** (92), and **Aequinoctium** (127). The order of this enumeration may have little to do with the order in which they were written; **Aequinoctium**, for example, antedates **Perlenschnur**.

Kein ankerloses Tasten is the only sonnet in this group with the scheme abba cddc efe fgg, and with masculine rhyme throughout. **Die Mutter** has the rhyme scheme abab cdcd efe fgg. The sonnet form becomes looser as early as **Aequinoctium**, in which there are no tercets (abab cdcd efef g g). **Perlenschnur** (aa bbcc dd eef gf g) cannot claim to be a sonnet; **Ferne** (abab cdcd efe ggf) is, but in **Welt in deinen Blick zu bannen** (abab cdcd efef gg) the number of syllables per line ranges between four and eight. All these pieces precede July 6, 1941. Regarding fourteen-liners written after the Czernowitz period, **Die letzte Fahne** (177) and **Nachtstrahl** (205) are rhymeless and have strophic divisions that have nothing to do with the sonnet.

Kein ankerloses Tasten is a regular sonnet. Whereas the first tercet's "Doch" introduces the speaker's reaction to what is relayed in the quatrains, and the ellipses at its end denote the beginning of a pondering process, the second tercet brings the insight thus gained. The closing line, however, reads like the almost forgotten but just remembered original intent to write a sonnet for Mother's Day—not very different from the Baroque sonnet's tendency to end with the twist of a conceit. Actually, the poem has as much to do with self-observation and even self-absorption as with the mother figure.

Determining the sonnet's form as well is the employ of enjambments; there are no less than four in the quatrains alone. They may derive from the intent to emulate Rilke. As we know from Celan's biographer (Chalfen 60), the poet was steeped in Rilke's

² Date. Mentioned as # 6 in Rosenthal 1982: 227. Given in Kraft 16 with "Muttertag 1938" as postscript. According to Wiedemann-Wolf 21, note 50, **Muttertag 1938** was the poem's title "in anderen bisher bekannten Fassungen"; she dates accordingly, and places the poem as the first in her collection. Our suggested date: shortly before May 8, 1938.

writings well before 1938. With Celan, however, the enjambments are reluctant to work as such (even though Petuchowski 1978a: 125 speaks of the *smoothness* of Celan's enjambments in later poems), due to the rest after a given line's closing syllable calling for a natural stress. Enjambments of this sort, along with the thicket of prepositional phrases, do not make for an easy glide of reading. *Tasten* comes to mind, but we can also say that the resulting measured pace lends lordly touches to the speaker's delivery. This is not to claim that Celan's enjambments are ineffective. At the end of the fifth line, the meaning of "halten in" is emphasized by the natural stop following. With "Atemzüge" as subject, this is an early example of correlating breathing and speaking of the text which Ahlbrecht (43-67) scrutinizes in his chapter on *Fahlstimmig* (II 307).

In **Kein ankerloses Tasten** we have a speaker who has just awakened, and now sees his mother with her hands together in prayer. There must have been talk of his leaving, or the decision to do so has already been made. Taking in the poem's details and possible implications is more difficult, however, due to the vagueness that may reflect the endeavor of the speaker's sleepy mind to clear. Even if we decide that the opening line has normal word order, we are left with questions. With the double negative applied in "kein ankerloses Tasten", is there any groping at all? If not, why bother to bring up the matter? If therefore there must be "Tasten", is it the speaker's? Or, if we are dealing with two hands, whose is the second one? It cannot be the mother's, for her hands are engaged in prayer. Should "Tasten" be understood in a realistic, hand-active sense only, or is there a metaphorizing quality adhering to it as well? Celan must want it all the possible ways. We are therefore as adrift as the speaker and, in need of an anchoring place for a viable way of reading, opt uncertainly for normal word order in the opening line and for the two-hand motif.

According to Lyon (1962: 108), only fourteen hand images occur in Celan's post-Czernowitz poems, but before the Bucharest years we count thirty-five of them. This suggests that in his Czernowitz poems Celan is much more given to working with visual imagery than he is later. It is nevertheless possible that the opening line of **Kein ankerloses Tasten** provides an early example of 'clasping for a hand' as an image for the endeavor to communicate—cf. Hamacher 299.

The motif of two hands touching or failing to touch is as old as the night, particularly in poetry dealing with love—cf. e.g., "Denn beide bebten sie so sehr, / daß keine Hand die andre fand" (each hand trembling around the beaker of love) in Hofmannsthal's **Die Beiden**

(II 13). However, with Celan the motif of hands clearly functions in a different framework.

This is not to say that associative thinking is irresponsible. The critics of Celan's mature poetry tell us time and again that trying to understand via such thinking may be necessary if we want to fathom a poem's details. Associative thinking when reading **Kein ankerloses Tasten** leads to Rilke's *Malte* story in which the narrator tells of the experience he had as a little boy, shortly after his mother had told him about the death of the dog Cavalier:

Einmal, als es über dieser Erzählung fast dunkel geworden war, war ich nahe daran, Maman von der 'Hand' zu erzählen [...]. Es ist ausgemacht, daß ich an jenem Abend einen Ritter zeichnete [...] auf einem merkwürdig bekleideten Pferd. Er wurde so *bunt*, daß ich oft die Stifte wechseln mußte, *aber* vor allem kam der *rote* in Betracht, [...] da rollte er [...] hinunter [...] unter dem Tisch. Endlich kam ich [...], etwas *konfus*, unten an. [...] Eingestellt auf die *Helligkeit da oben*, [...] vermochten meine Augen nicht das geringste unter dem Tisch zu erkennen. [...] Ich [...] wollte eben schon Mademoiselle anrufen, [...] als ich merkte, daß [...] das Dunkel nach und nach durchsichtiger wurde. [...] Ich erkannte vor allem meine eigene, ausgespreizte Hand, die sich [...] ein bischen wie ein *Wassertier*, [...] herumtastete. Aber wie hätte ich darauf gefaßt sein sollen, daß ihr [...] aus der Wand eine andere [...] Hand entgegenkam. Sie suchte [...] von der anderen Seite her. [...] Ich fühlte, daß die eine von den Händen mir gehörte und daß sie sich in etwas einließ, was nicht wieder gutzumachen war (III 192-95; italics added).

This account of what may be *Malte's* impending awareness of death is interesting in its own right, and it is of consequence because a number of details in it have their counterparts in **Kein ankerloses Tasten**. This is true for the two-hand motif, for that of "(herum)tasten", for the occurrence of "bunt" and "rot", and other similarities. There is a link between Rilke's "Helligkeit da oben" (to be understood as insight to be lent by *Malte's* governess) and Celan's "hellen Ruhn". In each instance the speaker "looks back", Rilke's to the light above the table, Celan's to the dreams he has had.

This is not to say that Celan simply paraphrases details. He bends things to his own purpose and design, as he must in view of the different directions followed in the two scenarios. Whereas *Malte's* experience is nocturnal and undergoes a descent away from "die Helligkeit da oben", Celan's persona's is in the morning, and his mind is rising to dawning awareness. So is *Malte's* a moment later if we take our cue from the paragraph that ends his horse-drawing story:

Es ist natürlich Einbildung, wenn ich nun behaupte, ich hätte in jener Zeit schon gefühlt, daß da etwas in mein Leben gekommen sei, gerade in meines, womit ich allein würde herumgehen müßen, immer und immer. Ich sehe mich in meinem kleinen Gitterbett liegen und nicht schlafen und irgendwie voraussehen, daß so das Leben sein würde; voll lauter besonderer Dinge, die nur für Einen gemeint sind und die sich nicht sagen lassen. Sicher ist, daß sich nach und nach *ein trauriger und schwerer Stolz* in mir erhob. Ich stellte mir vor, wie man herumgehen würde, voll von Innerem und schweigsam.

Celan's second line is as opaque as the first—is word order regular or inverted?—and there is apprehension in “Heimweh” which refuses to be read as homesickness. To use a phrase of Ahlbrecht (27), we deal with a form of “Heimweh nach vorn”. “Heimweh” of this sort is also found in **Auch das Alleinsein** (11) and **Vor Mitternacht** (30). Says Rey (1970: 752) in a different context, “Auch Celans Dichtung ist bewegt von jenem metaphysischen Heimweh, von jenem Drang ‘nach Hause’, den wir bei Novalis finden”. To be sure, in the very early **Kein ankerloses Tasten** “Heimweh nach vorn” is not identical to that of Novalis, not yet.

The adjective in the oxymoronic “gefaltete [...] Gebete” relays Celan's interest in grounding his statements in a realistic frame of reference, in order to ‘visualize’. This comes through also in “vors Rot im Bangen deiner Züge” if we take “Rot” to signify the dawn. It is equally clear, however, that it highlights apprehension as well. With this, “Rot” may be seen as the seed of a motif developed in later poems echoing the medieval *tageliet* situation, in which lovers dread and maledict daybreak.

There may be more. While causing “Rot” to stand for the dawn, Celan may also use the concept of the rising sun as a divine principle. This seems to bring us beyond the borderline where, at the exclusion of contextual restraint, over-interpretation begins. But then, the figure of the praying mother represents religious values anyway. As for that, Celan in his maturity can imbue his poetry with the Hebrew-inspired device of prodding us to read from right to left (see Petuchowski 1978b: 645). What then prevents the precocious individual from realizing that “Rot” read backward comes out as “Tor”, and from implying that the mother's prayer is rapping at heaven's gate?³ This possibility suggests a link with the second strophe of **Kristall** (I 52):

³ Celan was put to learning Hebrew before he reached his teens (Chalfen 49).

- 4 Sieben Nächte höher wandert Rot zu *Rot*,
 sieben Herzen tiefer pocht die Hand ans *Tor*,
 sieben Rosen später rauscht der Brunnen. (italics added)

Similarly, the fourth line's "dunkeler gespannt" may not only by means of its contrast to "Rot" signify that the mother's features are partly shadowed, but it may also connect with the light-versus-dark quality of "Schimmer aus dem Grund" of the closing line, particularly if this phrase is imbued with religious value as well (see below).

According to ii, the mother's downward trailing breaths cause dismay, affect not only the speaker's own breathing but also his dreams. Whereas Söllner 238 reads the passage as a reference to the mother's strands of hair partly obscuring her face, it reminds us of the *Gitter* principle that becomes of consequence in Celan's later poetry.

A parallel to the wrapping-around-the-face motif occurs in **Zur Laute** (86): "Das Licht der Pfirsichblüte zaudert, / doch spielt es bald um deine Wange, / daß meiner Spiegel Glas erschaudert- / Ich bin und bange". Asks the speaker in **Windröschen** (103): "Ist, was sie [Buschwindröschen] deinen Wangen übertragen, / nichts, als der Frühling und das Regennaß?" In **Seidelbast** (105) we find "An deinen Wangen laß mich, an den heißen, / verweilen mit dem Duft vom Seidelbast". **Taglied** (111) begins with "Unendlich grün wächst Efeu an den Wangen / der Stille in ihr aufgelöstes Haar". **Schöner Oktober** (138) ends with "Sehr weit [...] / streift schwebend ein rötliches Blatt mein Schwesterlein Annelies". "Und lüftet ein Blatt deinen Wangen zulieb [...]" is the penultimate line in **Die Zeit wird die Rute** (144). Clearly, the motif is laden with apprehension if not dread, and it is interesting that in each instance flowering things or leaves are involved. Equally intriguing is the fact that Celan's plants have healing *and* poisonous properties, as do most of those in other poems. By the time of **Dunkles Aug im September** (183), the motif is abstracted: "Und üppiger quellen / die Locken des Schmerzes ums Antlitz der Erde". The same is true for "An niemand geschmiegt mit der Wange - / an dich, Leben" of **An niemand geschmiegt** (I 245).

"Doch" of iii indicates that the speaker's concern on behalf of the mother does not prevent him from continuing his dreams. There adheres an oxymoronic and recalcitrant quality to his "helle[s] Ruhn" in that there is no quietude of the by now fully alert mind. "Ruhn" must therefore refer to just lying there while thoughts are racing.

Malte's knight-on-horse denotes questing, but no attention is paid to the knight carried by his steed whose redness denotes danger. In Celan's poem, questing is conveyed by that realistic yet metaphorizing "Fahrt" and that (consciously poetic) "Fährnis", and is emphasized by the function of the purple cloak.⁴ Whereas the speaker, like Malte's knight, is physically passive, the purple is active by wrapping itself around his dreams. Malte's under-the-table experience is equally marked by the discrepancy between body and mind (action versus inaction in his case, vice versa in that of Celan's speaker): see how it is Malte's hand that "*eigenmächtig* herumtastete" (italics added).

The poem's closing line does more than juxtapose the speaker's "Ruhn" with the "Ruhe" attributed to the mother—the latter according to Felstiner (1987: 636) echoing Schubert's **Du bist die Ruh**. We must also remember the contrast between the mother's "Ruhe" and the beginning of "Meine Ruh ist hin" of Goethe's spinning Gretchen, for the mother herself must also do without it (cf. "im Bangen deiner Züge"). For the speaker, however, she is "Schimmer aus dem Grund". Whereas "Grund" denotes his mind oscillating between dreaming (of his forthcoming departure) and the awareness of the dangers involved ("Fährnis"), "Schimmer" may be imbued with the Judaic concept of the Shekhinah, the reflection of the divine principle in the created order. This is a fine accolade to the mother, endowing her with inspirational power. Since the Shekhinah does not see (P. Mayer 51), there is a parallel with the eyes of the mother if they are closed in prayer. (We encounter the blind beloved in **Gesang zur Sonnenwende**—182.). The fact that "Schimmer⁵ aus dem Grund" also accommodates the image of a well or spring with its life-giving water will have a bearing on one's understanding of Celan's use of the *Brunnen* motif as dealt with in, say, **Am Brunnen** (117)—the light of the Shekhinah is also reflected light (Scholem 1969: 125). "Schimmer aus dem Grund" may relate to the bright reflection evinced in "das Wort, das über dir glänzt" of **Unstetes Herz** (I 71) and to the inspirational quality of this phrase. It stands to reason that we see "Schimmer aus dem Grund" and the closing line of **Der**

⁴ It may be meaningful that in Schwab's *Sagen des Altertums* Jason is far from the only one to wear a danger-spelling purple traveling cloak.

⁵ Perhaps because readily entailing ambiguity, nouns, verbs, and adjectives involving "Schimmer" come to belong among Celan's favorite complexes; we count no less than eighteen forms of them in the Czernowitz poems alone.

Reisekamerad (I 66 :”Deiner Mutter Mündel bückt sich nach der Krume Lichts”) as intimately akin.

Felstiner (1987: 625) points out that in May 1967 Celan was given one of Scholem’s books on Jewish mysticism and read it with minute attention. Scholem’s chapter on the Shekhinah says that God’s indwelling presence “can reveal itself in an unearthly brightness—this is often called the light (*Ziw*) of the Shekhinah”. It must be argued, however, that Celan was indeed affected by what Scholem had to say—**Nah, im Aortenbogen** (II 202) was written soon after he read Scholem—but that the Shekhinah concept was familiar to him long before: Jewish mysticism was in the air of his young days, and many a trait in Kabbalistic literature had long since taken root in Bukowina.

Drüben (96)

- i Erst jenseits der Kastanien ist die Welt.
- ii Von dort kommt nachts ein Wind im Wolkenwagen.
und irgendwer steht auf dahier...
Den will ich über die Kastanien tragen:
5 “Bei mir ist Engelsüß und roter Fingerhut bei mir!
Erst jenseits der Kastanien ist die Welt.”
- iii Dann zirp ich leise, wie es Heimchen tun,
dann halt ich ihn, dann muß er sich verwehren:
ihm legt mein Ruf sich ums Gelenk!
10 Den Wind hör ich in vielen Nächten wiederkehren:
“Bei mir flammt Ferne, bei dir ist es eng...”
Dann zirp ich leise, wie es Heimchen tun.
- iv Doch wenn die Nacht auch heut sich nicht erhellt,
und wiederkommt der Wind im Wolkenwagen:
15 “Bei mir ist Engelsüß und roter Fingerhut bei mir!”
Und will ihn über die Kastanien tragen
dann halt , dann halt ich ihn nicht hier...
- v Erst jenseits der Kastanien ist die Welt.⁶

⁶ Date. This poem is # 63 in Rosenthal 1982: 228. Kraft 145: “1940 oder früher”. According to Chalfen 76, it was known to Celan’s friends before 1940—without title.

Drüben is the only pre-Tours poem which Celan deemed fit for incorporation into *Der Sand aus den Urnen*. Several Celan readers have dealt with it. Of these, Söllner 238 draws attention to the chestnut-trees arow, “die die Grenze zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits, zwischen ‘hier’ und ‘Welt’ markieren”. Other readers bring in and emphasize the concept of death, but do so in different ways. Says Guțu: “Die ‘Kastanien’ sind die Grenzen zwischen Totenreich und Welt”,⁷ that is, between Söllner’s ‘hier’ and ‘Welt’. Martin has a different twist: “Eindeutig stehen die beiden Pflanzen [Engelsüß und roter Fingerhut] für Heil und Gefährdung”. After citing the two introductory couplets of **Espenbaum** (165), apparently to clinch his argument, he suggests,

Vom Naturrequisit zur *Evokation des Todes* besteht keine objektive Vermittlung. So scheint es, daß die starke Wirkung der Verse auch und nicht zuletzt auf der Fremdheit ihrer Sinnelemente beruht (1987: 57; italics added).

It is not clear, however, whether Martin gleans “Evokation des Todes” and/or “starke Wirkung der Verse” from **Drüben** or from **Espenbaum**. Wiedemann-Wolf 248 finds that “die Attraktivität des Todes thematisch [...] mit dem sprechenden Titel **Drüben** [wird]”. Linking “Engelsüß” and “Fingerhut” with “manch’ schöne Blumen” of Goethe’s **Erlkönig**, she sees “die Fahrt mit dem Wolkenwagen [als] eine Himmelfahrt”.

It seems that these lines of reasoning fail to take account of one or two features of consequence. According to the botany books the foxglove (*digitalis purpurea*) is indeed poisonous, but it also yields digitalis, a powerful cardiac stimulant, hence is not unilaterally funest. We may entertain the possibility that Celan enhances the foxglove’s medicinal value by giving it a metaphorical reach through the promise of stimulating the heart. As for the common polypody (*polypodium vulgare*), it played a role in folklore in matters of the heart such as advancing an amorous affair. Foxglove and polypody thus function in *worldly* matters and mitigate *against* the concept of death, that is, against the view that *Jenseits* relates to the realm beyond the grave. In

Wiedemann-Wolf 96 cites “nach einem auf 1950 datierten Pariser Typoskript”, mentions **Lied** as the title of some unspecified version, and dates the poem as the eighteenth of twenty between March 19 and 23 (sic) of 1943. Our suggested date: fall 1938, before Celan left Czernowitz (November 9) to go to Tours.

⁷ Cited from Wiedemann-Wolf 249, since Guțu’s dissertation is not available to me except for the appendix in which he copies thirty-one early Celan poems.

Drüben, the plants thus may serve dual functions, are luring as well as threatening, and therefore represent the speaker's ambiguous attitude toward life 'on the other side' of the chestnut trees. **Drüben** as given above—"nach einem auf 1950 datierten Pariser Typoskript" (Wiedemann 96)—differs from older versions. Says Wiedemann-Wolf 249 in her informative note 163,

Ich zitiere die Fassung von *Der Sand aus den Urnen*, die sich in manchen Punkten von der des in Marbach liegenden Autographs unterscheidet, die wiederum mit der des "Typoskriptes 1944" weitgehend identisch ist.

With the help of a diagram we point out the differences between the various versions of **Drüben**:

Line	4	5	7	8	11	12	15
<i>Der Sand aus den Urnen</i>	er	mir	dann	dann	mir	dann	mir
Wiedemann-Wolf 248	ich	mir	dann	dann	uns	dann	mir
Kraft 89	er	mir	da	da	uns	da	mir
Wiedemann 96	er	mir	dann	dann	mir	dann	mir

Wiedemann-Wolf's version is thus *not* identical to that of *Der Sand aus den Urnen*—see line 11. More important is a difference in the fourth line in which Wiedemann-Wolf has "ich" versus "er" in the other three versions. That "ich" can only make sense if we take "ein Wind im Wolkenwagen" to be the subject and see the line as its direct speech. Doing so, however, would give the wind three lines to speak—in contrast to its one-line statements in the following strophes and the two-line speech in *Der Sand aus den Urnen* and in Wiedemann's edition. In Kraft's version each strophe has only one line spoken by the wind.

No matter which version of **Drüben** we prefer, we must ask about the speaker's identity. The answer seems unequivocal: these lines are put into the mind of the mother, constitute *her* pondering process. It is *she* who with increasing anxiety thinks from the general "nachts" to the repetitive "viele[.] Nächte[.]" to "die Nacht" which continues to remain dark. This reading propels **Drüben** to our specific attention because it, **Einsamkeit** (80), and **Am Brunnen** (117) are the only pieces in Celan's early poetry that equate the speaker with the mother. This may have been the prime reason why the very early **Drüben** was incorporated into *Der Sand aus den Urnen*. Also, our reading refuses,

as it did with “Engelsüß” and “rote[n] Fingerhut”, to connect “Nacht” with death in a unilateral way. This concept may linger in the poet’s and readers’ minds, but Celan does not make it part of the mother’s thought.

Night’s darkness corresponds to the mother’s darkness of mind, with no escape in sight. The image of the night is not part of “Diesseits” as the realm where death lurks—this in contrast to Guṭu as cited above—but as a metaphor for the mother’s groping for an exit from her dilemma. It is a dilemma in which she struggles with the son’s readiness, if not eagerness, to bid her adieu because of the call from “[den] Wind im Wolkenwagen”. That is why he would pit himself against her:

Dann zirp ich leise, wie es Heimchen tun,
dann halt ich ihn, dann muß er sich verwehren:
Ihm legt mein Ruf sich ums Gelenk!

Only when read as spoken by the mother, **Drüben** is a lucid poem in which she is *not* thinking of death on this side or that side of the chestnut trees. Instead it voices her concern regarding her son’s forthcoming departure.

Die Mutter (14)

- i Die Mutter, lautlos heilend, aus der Nähe,
die uns mit abendschwachem Finger streift,
macht uns die Lichtung trauer, wie dem Rehe,
das atemholend Morgenwind begreift.
- ii 5 Wir treten schmiegsam in die Lebenskreise
und sie muß da sein, läuternd wie ein Tod,
der uns die Nächte hinhält und die Reise
beschleunigt manchmal, wenn Gewitter droht.
- iii Wir fahren auf, die Steinernen vom Morgen,
10 wenn eine Türe vor ihr Atmen tritt
und müssen wartend viele Tränen borgen,

- iv und die sie hergegeben, zern wir mit...
 Daß sie, verwundert, äugt aus ihrem Schweigen,
 ob wir den Fremden auch die Wunden zeigen.⁸

This sonnet must have been written in Tours where Celan went in November of the previous year. This contradicts the mother's being "aus der Nähe" if this phrase conveys what it usually means. Perhaps the preceding comma, quite unnecessary if the speaker means only 'from nearby', provides ambiguity, so that 'from nearby' and 'from afar' are both valid. The speaker feels close to the mother despite geographical separation. His awareness of her is "heilend" despite the geographical distance.

An earlier version of the poem has "weinend" in the opening line. This evokes the Bible-motivated figure of Rachel weeping for her children in the diaspora. This replacement of "weinend" by "heilend" has consequences. It does not undo the Rachel motif, but expands and deepens it via its "heilend" effect. At the same time "heilend" shifts focus from the mother to the beneficiary of her healing capacity which links with "läuternd" of the second quatrain. The speaker thus sees himself as an exile among other exiles, Manuel Singer, for instance, a Jewish Czernowitz classmate who also studied in Tours in 1938-39 (Chalfen 77).

The adjective in "abendschwache[n] Finger" denotes an abstracting process, which retains a vestige of the wind abating toward day's end, in order then to rise again at day break—"Morgenwind". The adjective grazes the principle of darkness which clearly demands its due as a presence. It connotes shelter and safety, while dawn and the accompanying necessity to enter the business of living harbor peril.

The deer simile shows the animals sniffing the morning air before venturing forth. This involves apprehension and hesitation, and it is the mother whose nudging urges the young into the clearing. For the speaker himself this is the clearing of life ("Lebenskreise").

Jarring within the quasi-idyllic scene thus developed is "läuternd wie ein Tod". It provides reason enough to think that the mother may never see this Mother's-Day-poem. It would hurt her feelings, even if explained to her as a simile, and merely a loose adaptation from Rilke's *Cornet* story—"so gemeinsam wie eine Mutter oder einen

⁸ Date. In Kraft 17 with "Muttertag 1939" as postscript. The editors date this way, and so do we: close to May 14, 1939.

Tod" (III 104). That explanation failing to assuage the mother, the speaker could remind her of the dictum from the *Song of Songs* 8: 6: "Denn Liebe ist stark wie der Tod, und ihr Eifer ist fest wie die Hölle. Ihre Glut ist feurig und eine Flamme des Herrn" (like gold purified in the crucible).⁹ Even if the mother accepted this explanation, she would have reason to worry because of the speaker's preoccupation with death: gathering storm clouds cause life's journey to become a rush toward night's safety, but there is the clear implication that ultimately it is a hurrying toward death.

The threat of stormy weather as much as the mother/doe compels the deer to venture forth apprehensively—"Wir fahren auf". There is no escape, however, for 'we' are already "die Steinernen vom Morgen". This necessitates a bifocal view. It relates to the deer at dawn at the edge of the clearing, and is a realistically conceived group monument perfecting immobility. It also links with the Medusa motif, possibly via the speaker's memory of Büchner's *Lenz* story to which Celan refers in his *Meridian* speech: "Man möchte manchmal ein Medusahaupt sein, um so eine Gruppe in Stein verwandeln zu können" (III 192). Thinking of Medusa is justified because "wenn eine Türe vor ihr Atem tritt" signifies the deer being so immobile as to stop breathing, and also refers to death taking breath away. In this sense "die Steinernen vom Morgen" has an echo in the last line of this passage in *Hinausgekrönt* (I 272):

- v 23 Mit Namen und Samen,
mit Namen, getaucht
in alle
Kelche, die vollstehn mit deinem
Königsblut, Mensch,-in alle
Kelche der großen
Ghetto-Rose, aus der
du uns ansiehst, unsterblich von soviel
auf Morgenwegen gestorbenen Toden.¹⁰

⁹ Stiehler (1972: 35) links "läuternd wie ein Tod" with Sulamith and sees this figure as "Vermittlerin zwischen den Leidtragenden und Gott".

¹⁰ Says Saint-Just in *Dantons Tod*: "Die Schritte der Menschheit sind langsam, man kann sie nur nach Jahrhunderten zählen; hinter jedem erheben sich die Gräber von Generationen. Das Gelangen zu den einfachsten Erfindungen und Grundsätzen hat Millionen das Leben gekostet, *die auf dem Wege starben*" (Büchner 78—italics added).

Since “wartend viele Tränen borgen” comes after “die Steinernen vom Morgen” those tears are like Niobe’s when she has turned to stone after seeing her children slain by Apollo and Artemis.

The meaning of the final tercet of **Die Mutter** seems self-evident. Its “Schweigen” brings the poem full circle by returning to “lautlos” of the opening line.

Under a subheading like ‘Ukraine’ we could incorporate into this study discussions of poems such as **Es fällt nun, Mutter, Schnee in der Ukraine** (68), **Einsamkeit** (80), **Schwarze Flocken** (129), **Nähe der Gräber** (136), all written after the deportation of Celan’s parents in June of 1942. They have been discussed by other readers, however, and within the format of this study they do not warrant renewed scrutiny. We shall deal instead with two poems of which the first has not received any critical attention, while the second suggests an understanding different from readings advanced elsewhere.

Steppenlied (55)

- i Wo ist dein Blick wie der Abende Wink,
 der mein versinkendes Augenspiel fing?
- ii Wem folgst du schimmernd und stumm aus der Schar?
 Wer mischt der Regennacht Rost in dein Haar?
- iii 5 Wem tut es weh, den der Steppenwind streift,
 daß meine Hand in die Windstille greift?
- iv Wer wird es sein, der die Schwüre auch hält?
 Wo, sag, war Heimat, und was, sag, war Welt?
- v Flammende Steppe-mein Mantel, mein Mut:
 10 Zünde mein Bild in ihr ratloses Blut.¹¹

¹¹ Date. Kraft 146: “1941”. Wiedemann 55 cites “nach einem Bukarester Typoskript”, and dates the poem as the eleventh of thirteen between May 23 and August 2 of 1942. Our suggested date: July 1942, or soon thereafter.

The alliterations in this poem should perhaps be understood as underscoring its tone of lament. **Steppenlied** is a song of isolation now that the addressee is gone and can no longer bid ‘Good night, sleep well’ to the somnolent speaker. The second couplet centers on the pondered welfare of the one gone. It must be the mother, particularly if “*der mein versinkendes Augenspiel fing*” is seen as a parallel to “*der Mutter [genügt] der Wink vielleicht meiner Asten*” of **Heimkehr** (16), and as leading to “*Von frühern Winken nur ein stolzer stummer [...]*” of **Es fällt nun, Mutter, Schnee in der Ukraine** (68).

The following lines focus on the speaker himself, who feels left behind. What could have been existential distress on behalf of the mother is thus reduced to a worry about himself. In the third couplet there is momentary care about the potentially lethal wind of the steppe, but this concern lapses into the speaker’s lament that his hand “*in die Windstille greift*” (*italics added*). After rhetorically asking who will keep faith toward *him*—ardent assurances of loyalty, actually—the speaker’s following double question does not inquire about the mother’s “Heimat” and “Welt”, but his own. To be sure, this implies that she was his home and his world, and that without her both are lost. The final couplet is strange, not because it is directed to a second addressee, the “*flammende Steppe*”, but because it expresses the expectation that the speaker’s image be etched into the despairing mind (“*ratloses Blut*”) of the mother.

The above, little more than a paraphrase, has a disconcerting parallel in an equally egocentric letter—undated, but of the fall of 1942—sent to Ruth Kraft from the forced-labor camp:

Du schreibst, ich soll nicht verzweifeln. Nein, Ruth, ich verzweifle nicht. Aber meine Mutter tut mir leid, sie war so krank in der letzten Zeit, sie denkt sicherlich fortwährend, wie es mir geht, und so ohne Abschied bin ich weg, wahrscheinlich für immer (Kraft 5).

The son knew of course that his mother’s plight was far worse than his own. The guilt on the part of Holocaust survivors, if shared by Celan, might have a seed in **Steppenlied**. If he reread it later, remorse about its self-centeredness must have been painful.

If read without autobiography in mind, **Steppenlied** is not memorable. The answers to the questions it poses after the initial couplet are all the same: Nobody. The first of these bring to mind Eurydice’s incapability to follow Orpheus to the world of the living.

Espenbaum (165)

- i Espenbaum, dein Laub blickt weiß ins Dunkel.
 Meiner Mutter Haar ward nimmer weiß.
- ii Löwenzahn, so grün ist die Ukraine.
 Meine blonde Mutter kam nicht heim.
- iii 5 Regenwolke, säumst du an den Brunnen?
 Meine leise Mutter weint für alle.
- iv Runder Stern, du schlingst die goldne Schleife.
 Meiner Mutter Herz ward wund von Blei.
- v Eichne Tür, wer hob dich aus den Angeln?
 10 Meine sanfte Mutter kann nicht kommen.¹²

This poem was published three times in 1948, first as **Mutter** in *Die Tat* of February 7, as **Espenbaum** in *Plan* 2: 368 of the same month, then without title in July, after Celan had left Vienna, in *Der Sand aus den Urnen* (34). With its incorporation into *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952) it enters the canon without title.

Espenbaum has received considerable scrutiny. Virtually all the critics draw attention to the way in which the two lines making for any of its couplets relate to each other. In each the second line parallels and contradicts or negates something posited in the first. If we analyze the frame holding the poem together by deciding how this ‘parallelism in reverse’ is at work from one couplet to the next, the outcome tells a story of sorts.

In i we have the leaves’ “weiß” versus “nimmer weiß” of the mother’s hair. Parallelism in reverse is evident.

In ii, the color of the dandelion links with that of the mother’s blond hair. What is contradicted by “kam nicht heim” must be

¹² Date. Even though Wiedemann-Wolf 22 has reservations about Wagenbach’s dating system, she accepts his 1945/46 for **Espenbaum**. However, with our interest in dates denoting the moment when a given poem received its essential form and wording, we shift Wiedemann’s dates to earlier ones, and therefore leave in this case room for the possibility of 1944 as the year of composition. Martin (1987: 63), too, thinks the poem may be of the Czernowitz period, hence of before 1945.

something in the first line that touches upon homeliness, domesticity, or familiarity. Perhaps these qualities attach to the ubiquitous dandelion. Parallelism in reverse still works even though it calls for some probing and seems somewhat forced.

Our would-be system falters in iii; the contradiction is only possible if we assume that the cloud fails to bring rain, in which case we have no rain versus the mother's 'raining' tears.

The parallelism in iv hinges on the proclaimed roundness of the star and the obvious roundness of the leaden bullet. But if we look for the by now expected contradiction, we must assume that a positive quality graces the star. This is a nebulous assumption at best.

When we consider the closing couplet, there seems to be no room for doubt: the negational/contradictory system has collapsed. We lost. If we want to conceive of the couplets' first lines as "Beschwörungsformeln"—Firges (1959: 59); Silbermann (1993: 29)—their incantational intents are shipwrecked as well.

Not all is loss, however, for we also gained an insight, albeit a dismaying one. While following the speaker's shifts of focus (from "Espenbaum" to "Löwenzahn", to "Regenwolke", to "Runde[n] Stern", to "Eichne Tür"), we noticed how he first looks at the tree and dandelion and fails to derive comfort from them. He then looks to the cloud in the attempt to find solace on a higher level, and fails again. He looks higher still at the star, which stands at the zenith of the natural order, but also aspires to a more ephemeral realm.¹³ Once again he fails and must return to the man-made world as represented by the oaken door.

Something else follows from this. To the extent that we try to read the poem's nature images as 'innocent' because void of any extraneous meaning, we are obliged to wonder why the speaker does not carry through with them until the very end. With the round star he brings in an element apart from nature. A star is not round and has no golden tail.

Now, by the time the poem is incorporated into *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, Celan has changed the sixth line's "weint" of the earlier three publications into the present tense. In doing so he endows the mother with the role of the biblical Rachel weeping for her children. If this change brings in a religious component with specific focus on

¹³ "An jeden Seestern krall dich, meine Seele" of *Festland* (57) may, on one level, be read as another attempt to reach for a transcendental anchoring place.

Jews in exile, we must search for similarly charged statements elsewhere.

Whereas in earlier poems Celan identifies Jews with poplar trees (*populus alba*), he now uses the equally ubiquitous aspen-tree (*populus tremula*) which in the Judaic tradition is the tree of the world, of life (Scholem 1969: 46, 56, 68, 79, 107). Given the connection between “tree of life” and the Torah (Petuchowski 1978a: 115),¹⁴ the aspen tree has seen the centuries pass by so that the true white of its leaves connotes having witnessed everything throughout Jewish history.

If, because of the Torah concept, the speaker sees the aspen as a beacon in the dark, “Dunkel” is deeper than the darkness of night. This darkness must be of the present era, where metaphors do their work—Janz (1984: 31) is correct: the function of nature here is allegorical. This darkness is existential; it annihilated the mother.

The reason the couplet makes no mention of the natural trembling of the aspen’s leaves may be due to the Torah concept. Such trembling would be detrimental vis-à-vis the implacable antagonism of the darkness. But the wise tree, looking into this darkness, may also be petrified. The line is highly ambiguous. Our brooding is warranted by the speaker’s own; it leads him from the first “weiß” to the second. The only question is whether we follow his associations correctly.

Whether or not the shortness of the mother’s life leads to the second couplet via life as grass (*Psalm* 103: 15), the speaker may be sensitive to the potential ‘bite’ in “Löwenzahn”. The name derives from its deeply indented leaves—Latin *dens* + *leonis* led to French *dent de lion*, to German “Löwenzahn” and English ‘dandelion’. Its leaves are green as grass, but carry no hope. It is a plant of which the stem contains toxic, bitter ‘milk’. That’s why despite its world-wide spread we are to think of it as located in the Ukraine, where it stands alone, like an emblem, making the grass ‘bitter’.¹⁵ The speaker may be

¹⁴ In “Kann keine der Espen mehr, keine der Weiden / den Kummer dir nehmen, den Trost dir bereiten?” of *Nähe der Gräber* (136), is there, together with a pars-pro-toto reference to Bukowina’s landscape, an allusion to the Torah as well?

¹⁵ Featuring phrases like “das Meer über uns”, “der Hügel der Tiefe”, “[das Aug], das sie aufschlug im Tode”—all impossible on the level of every-day reality—*Aschenkraut* (170) speaks of “ein giftleeres Grün” as though it would be unusual if grass were *not* poisonous. Regarding green as poisonous, see also the closing lines of *Schlaflosigkeit* (77). This relates to “grün” in *Espenbaum* and in *Russischer Frühling*. See also “regengrünes Geschick bin ich” of *Ballade von der erloschenen Welt* (17) and the now possible double meaning the adjective contains: promise of

thinking of *manger les pisselants*, of *Exodus* 12: 8 (bitter herbs), of Naomi in the book of *Ruth* (1: 20) when she asks to be called Mara (bitter) because the Almighty has afflicted her so. In terms of religious images, Celan may have seen reproductions of early Flemish or German paintings depicting the Crucifixion in which the dandelion is an emblem of bitterness and grief (Hall 90). However, “seiner Heilwirkung wegen wurde [der Löwenzahn] in der Literatur des 13. Jhs. [...] und in der Tafelmalerei des 15. und 16. Jhs. Christus und Maria zugeordnet” (*Der Große Brockhaus*, XI, entry “Leontodon”). Of course, if the speaker is employing this tradition, “Heilwirkung” is ironized.

Burger 26 is of the opinion that green is for Celan the color “der Fruchtbarkeit, des vegetativen Wachstums”. When green serves metaphorical purposes, however, we may ask, fertility and growth of what? In **Espenbaum** it is of death. The grass of the Ukraine may denote life, abundance, and fertility, but that’s where the mother perished. The bitter milk (cf. “Schwarze Milch” of **Todesfuge**) of the dandelion makes the surrounding grass bitter since the mother did not return. The lot of Naomi was bitter even though she returned from the alien land of Moab, but that of the mother was more bitter still. The actual contrast in parallelism in the second couplet is thus deeply ensconced.

If we look for parallelism in reverse in the third couplet, it is more recalcitrant than that of its predecessors. This is in part due to the first line’s verb and its double value, and in part to the question it poses. The critics have taken “säumt” in the sense of lingering. This makes sense, but there is nothing to prevent the verb from standing for embroidering—compare with “Die Welt die ich mit Blut verbräm” of **Sonnenwende** (52), or with “‘Nimm ihn [den Schleier] zu träumen,’ stickt er [der Herbst] in den Saum” of **Der Einsame** (140).

With either meaning of “säumst”, if we assume that the answer to the question is negative, parallelism in reverse is at work as the cloud’s failure is corrected by the mother’s ‘raining’ tears. But what if the answer were affirmative?

With this in mind, if we take “säumst” as ‘linger’ in order for the cloud to bring rain, it is difficult to see how the mother’s tears make

fertility and potentially poisonous quality. Is “Antlitz” in this poem “hell” because it denotes a green mask like that of Osiris, the god of fertility *and* of the dead?

for parallelism in reverse ... unless the rain is taken metaphorically, as it must be in **Unterwegs** (see p. 109).

If now, still with the affirmative in mind, we think of “säumst” in terms of embroidery rendered effective by using a contrasting color, the mother weeps because of the color with which the cloud edges. We would assume that color to be red.¹⁶ So the mother weeps “für alle”, for all the wells, and in doing so weeps for the *Brunnenland* Bukowina. The cloud, then, is to be seen as the bringer of death. The first three couplets’ nature images harbor values well beyond those images. The fourth couplet’s round star is a manipulation of the nature image itself. Reading the first line as the speaker’s attempt to hitch a prayer to the star entails bitter irony. Corresponding to the bullet, its roundness suggests it to be, not the sun or the moon as previous readers have suggested, but a comet streaking down from heaven. Specifically, it is the star of Bethlehem that brought good tidings to the world, but for the mother and countless others is a killer just like the cloud. Gold relates to lead as cause relates to effect.

Thus read, the fourth couplet reversely echoes the closing lines of **Einsamkeit** (80):

- iv Doch daß ich irgend dich mit Sternen streif,
 15 laß ich die Sterne schwärmen als Kometen,
 und meine Seelen häng ich dran als Schweif [,]

and we see a connection with the convoluted question in language-choked **Huhediblu** (I 276) when its speaker asks about “den / Achsenton tief / im Innern unsrer / *sternrunden* Wohnstatt Zerknirschung” (italics added).

Earlier readers of **Espenbaum** deal with the oaken door of the final couplet in various ways. Lyon (1962: 18) sees it as the door of memory. This is Forster (1969: 384):

Dann kommt die eichene Tür, der Höhepunkt dieser Assoziationsreihe; die Frage, die an sie gerichtet wird, können wir nicht beantworten, wir wissen nicht, was für Schergen sie aufbrachen, oder ob sie gar als behelfsmäßige Totenbahre aus den Angeln gehoben wurde.

¹⁶ As we shall see (p. 147), the combination water-blood is detectable in **Ein Rosenkelch** (142) as well.

Whereas Böschenstein-Schäfer (1970a: 252) sees the door as a reminder of the mother's absence without any connection between "dem Zeichen und dem Bezeichneten", Kyri 107 speaks of a symbol of "Festigkeit und Geborgensein, aus den Angeln gehoben" and "das Vertraute und Heimliche des Hauses [...] vernichtet". Witte (1981: 138) says,

Die letzten Zeilen sprechen aus, daß es der Tod der Mutter war, der die "eichne Tür" der Realität aus den Angeln hob und den Blick auf die in Melancholie erstarrte Natur eröffnete.

Obviously, all these statements rely on the assumption that someone lifted the door from its hinges. If we were to assume this, the question would be a parallel to "Schwarz springt das Tor auf" of **Talglicht**. However, if the star of Bethlehem is seen as the implacable enemy of the Torah, the image of the door must derive its significance from the same religion-oriented framework.

As told by Schwab, there are in Greek mythology occasions on which the lifting of a door or gate is contemplated, most often to facilitate entry into an enemy's city. There is only one instance in which the intent is carried out, by Hercules, because he is in need of a table. This is not helpful, nor is the story of Sampson carrying the gates of Gaza up mount Hebron (*Judges* 16:3). But there is also the Bible-motivated tradition in which Christ crushes Satan beneath hell's door and frees those who merit deliverance (Hall 100), Adam, Eve, the prophets, and others. Understanding the round star as Christianity's star over the birth in Bethlehem leads to the view that the question in v is an allusion to Christ. Both are denied, the first because the star with its golden tail came blazing down to wreak destruction as a leaden bullet, the second because the question must be answered negatively: 'Nobody lifted the door from its hinges; it would take a Messiah to do so, and the Messiah is not yet'. The mother's retrieval is thus impossible. Read this way, the ending of **Espenbaum** connects with that of **Spät und tief** (208): "Es komme ein Mensch aus dem Grabe".

Espenbaum is a Jewish poem by a Jewish poet about a Jewish mother. Celan could have written it during his Bucharest years—Wiedemann 264, note 199, speaks of it as a latecomer. As understood here, the poem's lack of surrealistic features would make sense. This would be a poem with a backward look, not only to commemorate the mother, but also to remember the Bukowina world and its folksong traditions. **Espenbaum** is a farewell, to the mother who as such is

bound to become more nebulous, and to the land where evil befell.
These considerations hold, even though the poem is of 1944.

VII

On the Way to *Todesfuge*

This study could have as sub-title ‘the way poems end’. The serialized reading thus implied is akin to that applied by Witte (1987) when he deals with poems in *Die Niemandrose*, and to that of Loewen (1987: 172) whose scrutinies of **Zürich, zum Storchen** (I 214), **Selbdritt, selbviert** (I 216), and **Soviel Gestirne** (I 217) yield the insight “[daß] die Gedichte einander Kontext [geben]”. Celan’s self-citations warrant reading for such connections. Under “the way poems end” we broaden the perspective by considering his application of structural devices in addition to recurring motifs.

The way poems end concerns the problem of how to write poetry in German. It is an agonizing problem, not only because it is German, but also because that German, qua language, is all that is available as a medium with which to create poetic order, perhaps also order of the mind, and communication. If we go by what Petuchowski (1978a) has taught us, such language is at least partly rooted in Judaic concepts about words as mediators between the world and an order above it, somehow, somewhere. This may lend significance to Celan’s interest in Greek mythology, of which the traffic between gods and humans may lead to efforts to interact with God. Such endeavors may repeatedly fail, but language can do no more.

The closing couplet of **Nähe der Gräber** (136: “Und duldest du, Mutter, wie einst, ach, daheim, / den leisen, den deutschen, den schmerzlichen Reim?”) is the only passage in Celan’s early poetry that states the speaker’s dilemma unequivocally. We will argue that the same problem can be found in other poems, in which it is less obvious perhaps, but for all that more poignant. The time distances between these poems’ compositions imply that the problem of writing poetry, in German, persists.

This serialized reading implies that **Todesfuge** will not be treated as the grand monolith that it is. The discussion of features in it that are deemed to be of consequence may lead to suggestions incapable of incurring general acceptance. While reading details *from* the poem rather than *into* it, we do not mean them to be adamant.

Rosen im einsamen Helm: von den schwärzlichen Wassern
der Erde
um eines, ein seltsames, fühlt ihr, vermehrt, steigt euch der
Duft in die Stengel.
Tau fiel nur spärlich und rings, schwer und mit fremder
Gebärde,
heben sich-triefend wovon? -die Schwingen der furchtbaren
Engel,

Eben glitt Laub in ein Grab, das keine der Schwestern euch
schmückt,
lieblich wie einst als dem Tod selbst sie Sommer entboten...
Ihr, aus den Gärten entflohn, seid mit mir in das Dunkel
gerückt...

10 blendet kein Strahl mir das Aug und kein Feuer versengt mir
die Braue,

Erblickt, die vor schwarzen Rosen sich fürchtet, die blaue.¹

¹ Date. Chalfen 129 seems to imply that this poem was written in early 1943, after Celan had been informed of the death of his parents. Wiedemann 256 cites “nach einem bukowiner Manuskript”, and places the poem as the ninth of fourteen in 1944. Our suggested date: early 1943.

Scanning this poem raises more questions than the reader can readily answer. Because the speaker seems to be groping for something, whatever it may be, the reader must make his way through a labyrinth.

We could be tempted to read **Ein Rosenkelch** as a companion to the earlier **Mohn** (106):

- i Die Nacht mit fremden Feuern zu versehen,
die unterwerfen, was in Sternen schlug,
darf meine Sehnsucht als ein Brand bestehen,
der neunmal weht aus deinem runden Krug.
- ii 5 Du mußt der Pracht des heißen Mohns vertrauen,
der stolz verschwendet, was der *Sommer bot*,
und lebt, daß er am Bogen *deiner Brauen*
errät, ob deine Seele träumt in Rot.
- iii Er fürchtet nur, wenn seine *Flammen* fallen,
weil ihn der Hauch der Gärten seltsam schreckt,
daß er dem Aug der Süßesten von allen
sein Herz, das schwarz von Schwermut ist, entdeckt.
(italics added)

of which the title also focuses on a single flower, while several of its terms occur in **Ein Rosenkelch**: “Sommer bot” (in conjunction with the “Flammen” of the poppy’s petals) versus “Sommer entboten” (in conjunction with “Feuer”); “deiner Brauen” versus “[meine] Brauen”; “Gärten” versus “Gärten”; “sein Herz” versus “mein Herz”. In the case of the “Gärten” parallel we could speculate that “weil ihn der Hauch der Gärten seltsam schreckt” could have led to the poppy’s escape from the gardens and would thus have equated with **Ein Rosenkelch**’s “aus den Gärten entflohn”. We may also wonder whether the value of “seltsam [schrecken]” is similar to that of “um eines, ein seltsames [...] vermehrt”. If these similarities suggest that **Mohn** and **Ein Rosenkelch** are parallels, it may be of consequence that **Mohn** has been understood as a love poem—Chalfen 105; Janz (1984: 27); Wiedemann-Wolf 64. If this judgment is correct, we must point out that “allen” of the penultimate line is capitalized in the earlier Kraft version (102). Recalling a similar reduction from “Vielen” to “vielen” in **Schwarze Krone** and “Keinem” to “keinem” in **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt**, we must ask whether the earlier version of **Mohn** is more than a love poem addressed to some

nebulous female counterpart. It may center instead on *the* beloved, the sister of the Judaic tradition who came to us as early as **Legende** (see p. 42). This, in turn, leads to the question about the possible connection with the sister motif about to be encountered in the poem now to be discussed.

Already its title raises questions. Its article may be just an indefinite article, or there may be a selective quality about it, so that we are to wonder about one specific rose. The speaker draws attention to the calyx as though to evoke the image of a container holding the petals. Perhaps we must see it as a jug or urn, together with the connotations that accompany these containers in twenty-two of Celan's early poems. The first has gathered significance as the "Krug" in which tears and woes have been collected, the second links with death. Or this calyx is like a chalice held aloft because it is meant to convey the adaptation of the Christian Eucharist. In short, "ein Rosenkelch" may be a 'luminous' title radiating in all directions, and therefore akin to the "Flammenscheite" of **Schwarze Krone** insofar as this term suggests the halo of collective Jewish martyrdom (see p. 105 f).

It seems certain that "ein Rosenkelch" is an emblem. This view receives support from the plural with which the poem begins. These roses are not said to be resting on their calyxes or to be standing in a jug or urn, but "im einsamen Helm". Because of the adjective, it must be the speaker's own helmet. This helmet may be doffed, perhaps to bring a salute after some war-like activity, not only to gain clarity of vision, hence insight, but also to gather the roses in a gesture of preservation. The helmet may still be donned for self-protection during a continued confrontation. There is also the schizophrenic notion that we may have to think of the helmet as doffed *and* donned. At any rate, the roses bloom in the privacy of the speaker's mind, hence must be sheer metaphor. "Kelch" of the title may therefore readily represent jug *and* urn *and* chalice, all simultaneously.

Our scenario accommodates the convoluted sentence following "Rosen im einsamen Helm", particularly if we recall that 'the blackish waters of the earth' are like the darkening water in **Am Brunnen** (117)—"Wenn sich die Wasser dir und mir verfinstern". This poem alludes to the spring called Mnemosyne which, together with the spring Lethe (Forgetfulness), is located at one of Hades' entrances. It is this Mnemosyne, this Remembrance—also the mother of the Muses—from which in **Ein Rosenkelch** wells, "um eines, ein seltsames, [...] vermehrt", "Duft in die Stengel" of the roses. The

memories of things as yet unspecified but important, we may be certain, are thus retrieved, as though via a subterranean connection leading from Lethe to Mnemosyne. The collective title *Mohn und Gedächtnis* is thus pre-empted.

The press of memories resulting in the welling moisture keeps the roses blooming. Because the water's fertilizing quality is increased "um eines, ein seltsames", the roses seem to be force-fed. This is why they, full of awareness ("fühlt ihr"), may be blooming frenziedly, bloom and bloom and bloom, perhaps in a fashion as squandering as that of the poppy in *Mohn*, and not altogether unlike that of the rose ardently blooming despite everything in the closing strophe of *Psalm* (I 225—see p. 11 f).² If these roses bloom in ecstasy, theirs is the ecstasy that also befalls the speakers of *Todesfuge* when, in the grip of death, they chant and dance—see p. 167.

That we are in the realm of abstracting imagery seems certain from the mention of the terrible angels. Their wings cannot be dripping from the scantily fallen dew but are dripping nevertheless because they are the blood-gory wings of mythology's Furies engaged in "Gram zu verteilen euch allen".

Because of the past tense in "Tau fiel nur spärlich", "Gram zu verteilen" antedates the rising of the "Duft". It is therefore possible to think that "um eines, ein seltsames, [...] vermehrt" relates to the moisture being tinted with blood—note the correspondence with our reading of the third couplet of *Espenbaum* (see p. 140).

There is a period rather than a comma between "euch allen" and the equally dative enumeration of the variously colored roses. Not a sentence, "Den gelben, den weißen, den roten" reads like a series of epithets applied to a collection of variously colored roses. Wondering whether they are the very same as the "Rosen im einsamen Kelch" is fruitless, at least for the moment.

Whereas the dew image partakes of the dread-of-dawn syndrome (see pp. 77 ff.), the sixth line suggests that it is fall. The variation in the parallel between "Eben glitt Laub in ein Grab" and "Dann schaufeln wir Mond in ihr Grab" of *Gesang der fremden Brüder* (34) is but slight. This time the grave is also a mass grave, and it is left unadorned by the sisters. Are they the Furies who are not in the habit of tending the graves of those they have haunted and hunted down? Or

² If we were to arrange a survey of Celan's employ of the rose motif, our accents could not be the same as those found in Wiedemann-Wolf's informative section on roses (226-39).

are they the surviving yellow, white and red sisters of the roses interred? More confusing still, are they in the mass grave? There clearly is a problem here. If those roses are to be identified with the Furies, they began their activity “einst”, when they bade summer welcome. The Furies are avengers, however, they do not act as instigators. It may therefore be that “Schwestern” refers to those roses who “einst”, in the summer, welcomed the arrival on the scene of what turned out to be death itself—compare the discussion of the first strophe of **Notturmo** (p. 97) even though we spoke there of the lure of the communist gospel. See also the discussion of the third strophe of **Schwarze Krone** (p. 104).

While ignoring for the moment whether the speaker is thinking of a specific summer, possibly a monumentally historical one, we venture that by now the helmet with roses must be envisioned as decorating the mass grave. What the sisters left unadorned, the speaker adorns. In doing so, he retrieves from forgetfulness, and constructs a memorial.

In the eighth line the speaker addresses roses that have escaped the calamities that began “einst”, in the summer. The first phrase derives from Hölderlin’s **Die Eichbäume**:

- i 1 Aus den Gärten komm’ ich zu euch, ihre Söhne des Berges!
 Aus den Gärten, da lebt die Natur geduldig und häuslich,
 Pfliegend und wieder gepflegt mit den fleißigen Menschen
 zusammen. (I 147)

There is an important difference, however. Whereas Hölderlin’s speaker visits the oaks and lauds their freedom, in the end he reluctantly returns to the gardens because he cannot do without civilization, though it limits freedom. Celan’s roses, in contrast, have *escaped* from the gardens, from ‘civilization’ of the post- “einst” moment when death became the celebrant in an orgy of destruction in which many roses perished. It is inevitable that these roses, if they actually escaped and therefore are still alive, are, like the speaker, branded with black memories. However, it is equally possible, if not more likely, that these roses escaped “aus den Gärten” by dying, and therefore are, again like the speaker, “in das Dunkel gerückt”. Whereas for the roses that “Dunkel” equates with death, for the speaker it must have the value of agony brought about by his memories.

We must assert that “die schwarze” is the rose of Israel, the black sister of the *Song of Songs*, hence Sulamith of **Todesfuge**. Since she

functions in a conditional sentence, we only know that the speaker loves her, but there is no indication of her actual existence. In fact, “Erst wenn die schwarze nicht fehlt” suggests that she is not among those in the mass grave, may have gone up in smoke instead. Thus understood, we may venture that the speaker’s voiced memory of her is the Jewish counterpart of a requiem.

Whereas the following lines fit into the scheme envisioned here, the closing one, separated from what preceded by means of a period, stands in isolation,³ perhaps to indicate that the ones addressed include us, the readers. We may escape the line’s tortured syntax indicating the speaker’s pain by paraphrasing without losing anything: ‘Erblickt die blaue, die vor schwarzen Rosen sich fürchtet’. With the imperative’s value heightened by its privileged position, we are drawn to attention. The blue flower (the color of love according to Lyon 1962: 176) alludes to Novalis’ flower, that of poetry. This leaves open the question whether “die blaue” is also meant to allude to the blue-eyed representative of an order in dread of, and dreadful to, the ‘unnatural’ black rose. There is also the question whether because of “erblickt” we are to think of a deliberately crippled parallel with ‘Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world’.

The Novalis flower is not among those that escaped from the gardens. It was appropriated by those who grafted new properties unto it, and in doing so turned it into a flower other than the one of which Novalis speaks. The dictates of the ‘civilization’ of “einst” altered the flower’s original function, in the same way those dictates appropriated not only Bach’s organ but also Goethe’s Gretchen (see below). At the same time we are asked to behold the blue flower that the speaker himself has just brought into bloom as a tribute to the “Rosen im einsamen Helm”, which are thus saved from oblivion by means of the same language spoken by the victimizing ‘civilization’. We may say that the closing line testifies to the speaker’s pain because his is a poetic tribute written in German.

The identification of “die schwarze” as the rose of Israel and Sulamith of **Todesfuge** raises the question about additional ‘contemporizing’ elements in **Ein Rosenkelch**. Given its speaker’s narrow focus on roses throughout, the possibilities seem scant. We must consider, however, that “einst” may refer to July 1942, when

³ The Wiedemann edition contains 27 poems in which the closing strophe consists of a single line. There is reason for surprise that Celan did not apply this device to **Ein Rosenkelch** as well.

Our reading of **Ein Rosenkelch** has come full circle and is back at the title. Its “Kelch” is a single calyx; above it blooms a single black rose. It is a jug, in which the tears and agonies welling from remembrance are added to the tears and agonies of “einst”. It is an urn, belonging on a grave—if that grave could be found. It is a chalice, held up in a commemorative rite, holding the blood of the dead. That’s why the closing line instills the vision of the speaker’s hands as lifted in the form of a chalice while trembling under the weight of the task that was to be met in perfection. The calyx is all these things.

Judged by the information available, **Ein Rosenkelch** did not play a role in Celan's early publication plans. He must have deemed it an unviable candidate for perpetuation, together with many other early poems. He did not even give a copy of it to Ruth Kraft. Perhaps his assumed dissatisfaction was because the poem's images are too hazily interconnected to make for inter-integrity. We might apply the "slippage" of which Wellbery 93 speaks. It is inevitable that this state of affairs entails the reader's inability to come to a concise conclusion regarding the identities of the poem's all-important "Schwestern".

Russischer Frühling (143)

- i Gestürzt ist der Helm voller Blut: welche Blume soll
blühen?
Die rote, die ich dir gab? Die blaue, die ich bekam?
Die Nacht, so stolz noch von Himmeln, so leise von
irdischen Mühn, rettet das Gold für den Kelch, der die
Hämmer der Schläfen vernahm.

- ⁴ Date. Kraft 148 dates 1944. Chalfen 134 dates spring 1944. Wiedemann cites “nach einem auf 1950 datierten Pariser Typoskript”, and dates the poem as the third of fourteen in 1944. Our suggested date: spring 1944.

“Gold” of the fourth line relates to the twelve coffers of gold that Kriemhild takes with her when she sets out for Etzel’s land (strophe 1280).

The sixth line’s “entsetzliches Aug” is motivated by the description of Hagen in strophe 1734 (“eislich sin gesihene”). “Kriemhilt [...] in ein venster stuont” (strophe 1716) has led to “wenn sie ans Fenster tritt” of the twelfth line.

Perhaps “Schimmernd häng ich mein Herz ins Wappen, das ich euch weih” (line 18) is inspired by the moment when Gotelint, her eyes tearing (‘schimmernd’?), takes the shield off Bechelaren’s wall and gives it to Hagen (strophes 1698-1701).

The reference to singing and the mention of Volker von Alzey at the end stem from the episode in which Hagen and Volker stand guard throughout the night, and the fiddler’s music brings comfort to the Burgundians by taking some of the dread out of the dark (strophes 1833-35). When Volker has joined Hagen in that realm of destruction from which there is no return, his music-making becomes lethal: “sin videlboge im lute an siner hende erklanc” (1966) and “er begonde videlnde durch den palas gan” (1976). In 2000-03 we read:

Do der wirt des landes kom für daz hus gegā,
do kerte er sich hin widere und sach Volkeren an.
“owe mir dirre geste, ditz ist ein grimmiu not,
daz alle mine recken suln vor in ligen tot.

Ach we der hohgezite,” sprach der künec her.
“da vihēt einer inne, der heizet Volker,
als ein eber wilde, und ist ein spilman.
ich dankes minem heile, daz ich dem tiuvel entran.

Sine leiche lutent übele, sine züge die sint rot:
ja vellent sine doene vil manigen helt tot.
ine weiz niht waz uns wize der selbe spilman,
wand’ ich gast deheinen so rehte leiden nie gewan.”

It may be tempting to accept this verdict:

Das Gedicht **Russischer Frühling** tut etwas Ungeheuerliches: es besingt *mit* Volker von Alzey die toten Nibelungen im Hunnenland, nachdem diese in Feuer und Rauch den Durst mit dem Blut aus Helmen stillten. (Pöggeler, 1993: 73; italics added).

We shall have to argue, however, that the truth lies elsewhere.

Together with **Der Tote** (see p. 47 ff), the above enumeration not only indicates Celan's careful reading of the medieval epic, but also his free way of dealing with the order in which its events take place. It is also noteworthy that so many of these borrowings involve Hagen even though his name is not mentioned. Kriemhild will use the gold to buy the loyalty of Huns in order to employ them against her arch-enemy. Her standing in the window as though waiting for the arrival of friends is motivated by her intent to avenge Siegfried's death by destroying Hagen. Gotelint's gift of the shield, the natural symbol of protection, comes with ominous undertones, particularly because Hagen is the only one of the visiting Burgundians to *ask* for a specific gift. In fact, it is tempting to read much of the first three strophes of **Russischer Frühling** as though spoken by Hagen. Doing so would allow us to read "Wünscht sie mit mir, daß die Gräser mich flüsternd erkennen[?]" as an indication of this speaker's awareness that Kriemhild wants his death as much as he himself is ready for it. However, equating Hagen with the speaker would not explain all the poem's lines and ambiguities.

If now we see the title as though for the first time, it tells us nothing. Even the low-hollow sound of that "u" in the adjective is aimless. Entering the poem is a different matter, for the opening line raises the question whether the blood-filled helmet has fallen to the ground or whether, via a false passive verb form, it is filled with blood. In either case, the blood is implied to have nourishing properties; from it a red or blue flower will bloom. The former would have to be a red rose, the flower of love. Since this flower actually existed—"die ich dir gab"—the second part of the opening line asks which flower will bloom this time, the red one or the blue one. The speaker takes it for granted it can only be one of the two. If we assume that his preoccupation with the red (rose) versus the blue flower is meant to direct our attention back to **Ein Rosenkelch**, we gather in retrospect that we should be emphatic: **Ein Rosenkelch** is a love poem sung to the black sister, the "dir" of **Russischer Frühling**'s second line.

From *within* **Russischer Frühling**, the speaker, not able to believe that the red and blue flowers might bloom simultaneously, asks whether his forthcoming delivery will make for another red rose, another love poem, or for another blue flower, another flower of poetry—German poetry.

Whereas the speaker leaves his question and goes on, we must attend once more to that “Gestürzt ist der Helm voller Blut”—listen to that ‘dating’ because archaic genitive. If we think of “fallen to the ground”, we are reminded of a motif encountered in medieval literature: a knight in combat, once he loses his helmet, is fated (see, e.g., Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* 7020). The phrase foretells a deadly outcome in the pithiest way possible, in the same way that we are foretold the destruction of entire nations as early as the second strophe of the *Nibelungenlied*. This motif also invites considering the “barhaupt” reference in **Ein Knirschen von eisernen Schuh** (173) and its possible implications. This, in turn, might prompt comparison between this rider and the one in **Ein Lied in der Wüste** (153) who does wear a helmet and, perhaps like Quixote in **Traumbesitz** (see p. 63), has his visor lowered.

We also note that the vowels with primary or secondary stress in the first half of the opening line are repeated in its second half: “Gestürzt ist der Helm voller Blut: welche Blume soll blühen?” Aided by the colon, the vowel parallelisms between “gestürzt[es] [...] Blut” and “blühen[de] Blume” emphasize a cause-effect relationship—compare Wiedemann-Wolf 193, note 51. It is because of the blood that a flower will bloom. With this, nothing prevents the possibility of reading “die rote” as the flower of love *and* the blood-drenched one. The latter possibility puts an antipodal distance between the red flower and the blue one. The speaker’s question is therefore poignant: Shall I be singing in memory of and in dedication to the bloodied black rose, or shall I dedicate myself to writing poetry in this, the German, language?

The indecision becomes ambiguous in the following line, in which “Nacht” is aspiringly “stolz noch von Himmeln”, but also dejectedly “leise von irdischen Mühen”. Could this combination be a variation of lines in Gryphius’ **Mitternacht**? In this passage

Suchet ein fleißiger Sinn noch zu wachen? der durch bemühung
der künstlichen hand /
Ihm die auch nach uns ankommende Seelen / Ihm / die an itzt
sich hier finden verbunden?
Wetzet ein bluttiger Mörder die Klinge? wil er unschuldiger
Hertzen verwunden?
Sorget ein ehren-begehrende Seele / wie zuerlangen ein höherer
stand?

Sterbliche! Sterbliche! lasset diß *dichten*! Morgen! ach! morgen
ach! muß man hin zihn! (I 67)

the italicized verbal noun, ambiguous because denoting the writing of poetry as well as the coming forth with idle endeavors, indicates what may befall Celan's speaker when he ponders which flower might bloom. If this Gryphius-Celan affinity is acceptable, we may draw a parallel between Celan's vision of a wrathful deity (not encountered blatantly in **Russischer Frühling**, however), and Gryphius' closing lines:

Doch wie der glänzende Morgen eröffnet / was weder Mond
noch Fackel bescheint:
So wenn der plötzliche Tag wird anbrechen / wird was geredet /
gewürcket/ gemeynt.
Sonder vermänteln eröffnet sich finden vor deß erschrecklichen
Gottes Gerichte.

Clearly, Gryphius' speaker dreads the dawn of Judgment Day—**Dies irae**. The aspiration contained in Celan's "stolz" thus may allude to the writing of poetry, in the dark of (metaphorized) "Nacht".

It is not at all certain that "Nacht" is the subject of "rettet", however; "das Gold" may serve also, and in fact makes eminent sense if we are willing to relate it to the coffers of gold that Kriemhild takes with her when she leaves Worms to marry Etzel. By using this gold to buy loyalty in her new land, she prepares her revenge ("rettet [...] die Nacht") which is to consist of filling the chalice with the bloody outcome of her undertaking. This reading accommodates the following phrase: "der die Hämmer der Schläfen vernahm" harbors not only the concept of the helmet as a collective noun for the helmets worn by the Burgundians prior to Hagen's advice to drink. It also allows the possibility that the speaker donned his own helmet, as he does in **Ein Rosenkehl**, when preparing to struggle with his contrary thoughts—red flower or blue flower? Hence "die Hämmer der Schläfen" is a metaphor for a mind so beset as to cause the temples to throb.⁵

⁵ At the same time, as Oelmann 316 points out, "Gold" in "Gold und Vergessen" of **Argumentum e Silentio** (I 138) stands for *Gedächtnis*. There is nothing to prevent the same value from applying to the metal's function in **Russischer Frühling**, particularly not if, as *Gedächtnis*, "Gold" is understood as Kriemhild's memory of her dead Siegfried.

When in his section on the hammer motif Vietta 125 finds that

erst die Fassung in der *Atemwende* eindeutig erkennen [läßt], daß es sich [in **Die Zahlen** (II 17)] um einen biologischen Vorgang handelt: das Pulsieren der Schläfenvenen”,

he is not in a position to draw the earlier **Russischer Frühling** into his considerations. (See also Pöggeler 1986: 280.)

More clearly than in **Ein Rosenkelch**, “Kelch” (line 4) evokes the Eucharist—the Christian Kriemhild replacing Christ when he fills the cup with wine (blood in the present context). “Kelch” refers to the speaker’s helmet as well (“der die Hämmer der Schläfen vernam”), and may also be the form imposed on the poem in the process of being written.

Because **Russischer Frühling** depends for much of its effect on the deliberate use of ambiguities, we may expect that the second and third strophes are also hinting at more than one possible reading, not just because they are questions with answers left open. Some of their motifs may be revealing. “Duft” may simply be a breeze wafting in, in this environment presumably from the west, but it may also insinuate the ‘[wehen]’ “Duft” (see “weht”) from blood still warm because just shed. (See the poem’s opening phrase as well as the parallel motif in “steigt euch der Duft in die Stengel” of **Ein Rosenkelch**.)

Using geography as loosely as he does the order of epic events, the speaker changes Kriemhild’s place of origin from Worms to farther west, as her first marriage was to someone whose father had his royal seat in Xanthen in the Netherlands. Since he moves the locale where the Burgundians and Huns destroy each other in the opposite direction (to Ukraine where multitudes of Jews were killed), the speaker achieves greater distance between the two worlds than his source indicates, perhaps in order to suggest that they are irreconcilable and at the same time comprise the map of a war-torn Europe.

The poem’s following question could be an adaptation of the dream-and-death of Rilke’s *Cornet* story, particularly its closing paragraphs. This time, however, there is irony (“der *getreue*, der *flandrische Tod*”—italics added). The phrase alludes to Hagen biding his time, who is destined to become the veritable sower of death. Contemporizing, the speaker indicates that death is everywhere, and that Flanders has been one of its rich reaping fields.

In the third strophe the speaker is again carefree with geography. With Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in mind, he reduces the Forest of Arden to a single tree in another blood-soaked region of Western Europe.

This tree “aus den finstern Ardennen” he then calls “ein aufrechtes Kreuz”, the adjective of which has its own ambiguities. It may simply designate an erect cross as seen on many a grave. It may also be a cross held aloft, as it was during the journeys to the Holy Land (when many Jews were murdered), with crusaders’ eyes fixed on it for inspiration. At the same time “aufrecht” may have the meaning of ‘true’. In this sense “ein aufrechtes Kreuz” functions as a denial of the redemptive symbol of Christianity: the cross of Golgotha carries death to entire nations. This cross will be here “heut nacht”, and will be nailed to untold numbers. As ‘a true cross’ it is an affirmation of what that cross means from a *Jewish* perspective. Perhaps we should take one more step by identifying the cross “aus den finstern Ardennen” with Hagen, “[den] flandrische[n] Tod”.

As ambiguous as the image of the cross is that of grass. In a question, but actually not a question at all, grass may seek to function as a sign of life, but as such is undercut by lurking death—see the grass motif in **Espenbaum** (p. 139) and elsewhere. This alleged question involves Hagen, who acts as Kriemhild’s ally in engaging in mutual destruction. That is why from “wenn sie ans Fenster tritt” we must surmise the image of a Kriemhild sniffing the air like a hound eager for its quarry.⁶ That’s why she stands at the window as though frozen into immobility by Hagen’s “entsetzliches Aug”.

The adjective describing Kriemhild’s apparel at the end of the third strophe depicts her as an alien in Ukraine. It therefore serves a purpose to remember her hesitation when she ponders whether to accept the marriage proposal of a pagan king (strophe 1248). When she does accept, it is she, not Etzel, who becomes the driving force responsible for an orgy of death. While she thinks of herself as Christian, her marriage brings to mind the (recent) alliance between Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s USSR. It is therefore an understatement to say that antagonism prevails between “in abendländischer Tracht” and “unter jüdischen Gräbern” mentioned a moment hence.

Since the critics have dwelled primarily on the two final strophes of **Russischer Frühling**, only a few additional remarks are called for, if only to see where our reading leads now that we have tied it to that of **Ein Rosenkelch**. One thing is immediately evident: with one exception, the fourth strophe foregoes the use of additional medieval motifs.

⁶ The Kriemhild-as-hound simile is meant to relate her to the hounds of **Todesfuge**.

The exception is in “Bleib nicht, mein Lieb, wenn Kajutscha nun anfängt zu singen!” This line evokes the moment in the *Nibelungenlied* when Dietrich von Bern, just before the slaughter in Gran’s banquet hall is about to begin, protectively puts his arm around Kriemhild’s shoulder, and leads her and Etzel to safety (strophe 1995). The line also contains a (conceptual) parallel with “Ihr, aus den Gärten entflohn” of **Ein Rosenkelch**.

The fact that in the context of the epic “mein Lieb” refers to Kriemhild does not correspond to the distance between “in abendländischer Tracht” and “unter jüdischen Gräbern”, not even if we see Kriemhild as an icon of medieval German literature. The speaker obviously has shifted ground and has telescoped history to take us into modern time. Russian cannons roar. The new addressee, about to be called “Geliebte”, hence unequivocally a single female figure, remains opaque. If we try to be specific, several possibilities emerge simultaneously. She is Sulamith of the *Song of Songs*, ‘personified’ as the black rose in **Ein Rosenkelch**. She is the mother of the third couplet of **Espenbaum**: its “Meine leise Mutter weint für alle” corresponds to “Allein unter jüdischen Gräbern, weiß ich, Geliebte, du weinst”. Nothing prevents this “Geliebte” from also representing Rachel weeping for her children. She is all these, and more if we consider the strophe’s second line: “Knie, es wird Zeit nun zu knien in den Orgelstimmen von einst”. This is an adaptation of “O laß uns knien, die Heil’gen anzurufen!” spoken by Goethe’s Margarete to Faust (4453) after the cathedral scene in which the organ *dröhnt* the **Dies irae** and terrifies her. The roar of cannons (= war) and the thunder of the organ (= Christianity) thus become one. This “dröhnt” is also meant to relate to “den Kelch, der die Hämmer der Schläfen vernahm”, which indicates the agony of the speaker who began with the ‘innocent’ question whether a red or a blue flower was to bloom. It is not clear whether the kneeling is a crouching to avoid war’s projectiles, kneeling in abject subjugation to divine wrath, kneeling on the part of someone willing and even eager to embrace death, or kneeling in reverence to the dead about to be mentioned. It must be all of these.

Whereas the thought of struggling with Jacob’s angel (= God according to *Genesis* 32:28) has nightmarish implications for the speaker, the closing strophe begins with the poem’s final question. It is an inquiry addressed to the self about the abiding quality of the speaker’s dedication to the spirit of German culture as represented by a medieval monument and Gretchen.

“Schimmernd”, says the speaker, eyes shimmering, the way Gotelind’s are when she presents Hagen with Nudung’s shield, “schimmernd häng ich mein Herz ins Wappen, das ich euch weih”. He brings testimony to his devotion, and he does it to “euch”. Does this pronoun refer to “dir” of the second line *and* to “mein Lieb” *and* to Gretchen? Does it refer to the Jewish graves? Does it refer to “[den] friesischen Strand” and “[die] rheinischen Fluren”? It must be the former four. Or must it?

The closing sentence is as ambiguous as any other in **Russischer Frühling**. Whereas whatever action takes place is said to be “träumerisch”, we have no certainty about the subject. It may be “meine Hand” as in ‘my hand stops writing’. It may be the same subject as in ‘my hand stops and sings’, in which case Volker stands in the vocative. In terms of grammar it may even be that ‘my hand’ is direct object, and that Volker is the agent of the verb forms. Kuolt and Merkt (424) opt for the latter reading:

[I]n der traumhaften Erscheinung Volkers, der einerseits für die Toten singt und andererseits die Hand des gegenwärtigen Ich hält, spiegelt sich die Hoffnung auf Versöhnung.

Instead, I believe, when the speaker’s hand is unable to go on and stops ‘dreamily’, Volker, equally dreamily,⁷ sings “in die wallende Bläue” the way Katjuscha sings, and in doing so celebrates the orgy of death to which his fiddle contributed so ably.⁸

Whereas “für alle, die hier liegen” relates for Volker to the thousands destroyed in Etzel’s land, the speaker, if he could sing, would do so “für alle, die hier liegen [...] unter jüdischen Gräbern”. It thus is impossible to speak of reconciliation. The alleged attempt to bring together two worlds, Volker’s world and the speaker’s world, has failed.⁹

⁷ This begs to be compared with “er [...] träumet der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland” of **Todesfuge**.

⁸ This singing shared by Katjuscha and Volker brings to mind the way in which in **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** the forces imaged by godless angels and spears “co-operate” to engage in mutual destruction (see p. 113).

⁹ Stiehler (1972: 15), however, is another one who speaks of Celan’s identification with Volker.

- i 1 Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
wir trinken und trinken
wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng
- 5 Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der
schreibt
der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein
goldenes Haar Margarete
er schreibt es und tritt vor das Haus und es blitzen die Sterne
er pfeift seine Rüden herbei
er pfeift seine Juden hervor läßt schaufeln ein Grab in der
Erde
er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz
- ii 10 Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken dich
abends
wir trinken und trinken
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der
schreibt
der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein
goldenes Haar Margarete
- 15 Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith wir schaufeln ein Grab in den
Lüften da liegt man nicht eng
- ii Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen ihr andern singet
und spielt
er greift nach dem Eisen im Gurt er schwingts seine Augen
sind blau
stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andern spielt weiter zum
Tanz auf
- iv Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
- 20 wir trinken dich mittags und morgens wir trinken dich
abends

wir trinken und trinken
 ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den Schlangen

- v Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus
 Deutschland
 25 er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch
 in die Luft
 dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng
- vi Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
 wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus
 Deutschland
 wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken und trinken
 30 der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge ist blau
 er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau
 ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenkt uns ein Grab in der
 Luft
 er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet der Tod ist ein
 Meister aus Deutschland

vii 35 dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 dein aschenes Haar Sulamith.¹⁰

It is not the purpose of this section to bring yet another full discussion of **Todesfuge**, but to deal with details that either have not received much attention or may allow readings different from earlier ones. As this attempt at schematization seeks to show, there may be a deliberate structural principle at work in the poem; it pertains to *spielen*, *Margarete*, and *Sulamith*:

¹⁰ Date. Wagenbach 3 dates 1945. Martin (1982: 203): “[...] nach Alfred Kittners zuverlässiger Aussage spätestens im Sommer 1944 entstanden. Allerdings hieß das große Gedicht damals noch **Todestango**”. Assuming that the poem was written in Bucharest, Wiedemann 258 posits 1945. Felstiner (1984b: 27) implies 1944. Simon 474: “um 1943/44”. Goltschnigg (1985: 50) opts for the middle of 1944. Colin (1991: 43): “Alfred Kittner also reports having read the **Todesfuge** and having heard Celan recite it in Czernowitz in the spring of 1944”. Our suggested date: first half of 1944. This date is of possible consequence regarding the question whether Celan knew Weinglass’ **Er** (of 1944) before he wrote **Todesfuge**—see in this connection Stiehler (1972) and Wiedemann-Wolf 79.

- | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----|----|------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| i | 5 | der spielt mit den Schlangen | | | |
| | 6 | | der schreibt [...] | dein goldenes Haar | Margarete |
| | 7 | er schreibt es | | | |
| | 9 | | | spielt auf nun zum Tanz | |
| ii | 13 | der spielt mit den Schlangen | der schreibt | | |
| | | | der schreibt [...] | dein goldenes Haar | Margarete |
| | 15 | | Dein aschenes Haar | Sulamith | |
| iii | 16 | | | ihr andern singet und spielt | |
| | 18 | | | ihr andern spielt weiter zum Tanz auf | |
| iv | 22 | | dein goldenes Haar | Margarete | |
| | 23 | | dein aschenes Haar | Sulamith | |
| | | er spielt mit den Schlangen | | | |
| v | 24 | | | spielt süßer den Tod | |
| | 25 | | | streicht dunkler die Geigen | |
| vi | 32 | | dein goldenes Haar | Margarete | |
| | 34 | er spielt mit den Schlangen | | | |
| vii | 35 | | dein goldenes Haar | Margarete | |
| | 36 | | dein aschenes Haar | Sulamith | |

This scheme suggests that strophes iv, v, and vi are meant to hark back to ii, iii, and i respectively. The irregular order may be meant to reflect the twisting and coiling of serpents. In the first *six* strophes the indicatives “spielt mit den Schlangen” in the first column and the imperatives using the same verb (together with “singet” and “streicht”) in the fourth show the victims in the ‘embrace’ of the first and the final serpent-phrases (lines 5 and 34), and the second and fourth (lines 13 and 23) as though tightening the serpents’ hold.¹¹ The serpents thus serve the camp commandant’s intent to have full possession. Even so, if now we look at the occasions on which

¹¹ Is it warranted to draw attention to the fact that Athena, the goddess of war, is behind the deaths of the Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons?

i 5 Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen
der schreibt
6 der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein
goldenes Haar Margarete
7 er schreibt es und tritt vor das Haus [...]

ii 13 Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen
der schreibt
14 der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein
goldenes Haar Margarete
15 Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith wir schaufeln ein Grab [...]

iv 22 ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
23 dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den Schlangen

vi 31 er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau
32 ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
33 er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenkt uns ein Grab [...]
34 er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet [...]

When Margarete's name occurs again (line 14), the man's possession of her seems to hold true, and the mention of Sulamith immediately following suggests that both are his, though for different reasons. These reasons are not altogether different from those which, according to the biblical dictum, cause one to be chosen, the other to be rejected (*Matthew* 24:40; *Luke* 17:34)—hence the separation suggested by the capitalization of “Dein aschenes Haar” (line 15—italic added). And yet, there is now a wavering quality about the man's full possession of Margarete, in part due to the lack of punctuation, but mainly to the lack this time of “er schreibt es” immediately after the mention of her name. The man may or may not be writing to *her*.

When Margarete is mentioned for the third time (line 22), writing is not mentioned at all. Instead, “Margarete” and “Sulamith” are both between “ein Mann wohnt im Haus” and “er spielt mit den

Schlangen". Since playing with serpents suggests playing with a woman's tresses (see Wiedemann-Wolf 85), the man in the house plays with both Margarete and Sulamith. In this sense he treats Margarete and Sulamith equally, though for different reasons. Both are his, though on different grounds. The vision of Margarete becomes blurred. Whereas Sulamith has the speakers' allegiance all along, they may now identify with the Margarete of line 22 as well.

The mention of Margarete in line 32 suggests her to be moving to the side of the speakers: "uns" in "er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns" immediately following her name not only includes the speakers, but invites us to include Margarete with them. It is this development in the subtly altering values surrounding the name Margarete that warrants the speakers' bestowal of a 'blessing' upon her as well as upon Sulamith in the final strophe.

Tentative support for this reading may come from parallelisms between **Espenbaum** and **Todesfuge**: "Meine *blonde Mutter*" and "Meiner Mutter Herz ward wund von *Blei*" of the one and "dein *goldenes Haar Margarete*" and "er trifft dich mit *bleierner Kugel*" of the other—all italics added.

The name Margarete thus serves a dual role. That is why in the first six strophes that name occurs twice as often as Sulamith's, and the fact that the closing strophe is number vii may be meaningful in its own right in view of the significance this number has in Judaic thought (see, e.g., P. Mayer 1970: 78). In this connection, it may be good to call upon Mosés when he speaks of *Gespräch im Gebirg* and implicitly has something solacing to say, something of rebirth:

Sie [die Sabbatkerze] taucht auf im Gedächtnis als letzter Schein jener Welt, die verschwunden ist, 'sie und ihr Licht', als Sinnbild der unwiderruflichen Schönheit all dessen, was erloschen ist; zugleich aber weist sie auf die Erfahrung jenes Tages hin, 'der der siebte war, [...] der siebte und nicht der letzte', also auf die Vorstellung von der *Ambivalez* der historischen Zeit: wenn der siebte Tag nicht der letzte ist, dann deshalb, weil die Zeiten nicht erfüllt sein werden, weil es kein Ende der Geschichte gibt; doch ist diese der Zeit anhaftende Unvollkommenheit andererseits gerade die Garantie für die Fortdauer des Lebens; selbst die Katastrophe, wo die Zeit zum Stillstand gekommen schien, war nicht der letzte Tag, nicht der letzte, 'nein, denn da bin ich ja, auf dieser Straße[...]' (56; italics added).

We should also note that the two lines of the final strophe of **Todesfuge** 'share' the thirty-four preceding them, so that each phrase

dein goldenes Haar Margarete

dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

The Kaddish is the prayer to which also **Die Schwelle des Traumes** (146) seems to allude via the quaint “siebenzehn” rather than ‘siebzehn’, and therefore in problematic fashion (see Voswinckel 201; Bollack 136-37; Schlesak 1990: 338), perhaps to bring out the function of the numbers seven and ten in Judaic thought:

- i 1 Mit schwieligen Händen liest du mir auf die Körner der
Stille.
Es war meine Seele ihr Sieb, gefüllt sind nun *siebenzehn*
Krüge:
die Stadt, wo du weilst über Nacht. Im Fenster schwankt
die Kamille:
ich aß hier zu Abend vom Staub ihrer Blüte...Erträge
- ii 5 auch sie dieses Schweigen wie du? Und sind nicht zwei
Schwestern zuviel?
Ich geh noch vors Haus zu forschen nach Wasser im
Sande:
leer bleib der letzte, der *achtzehnte* Krug, dem die Blume
der Wiesen entfiel.
Wie seltsam dahingilbt dein Haar! Ich löse die blaue
Girlande.(italics added)

Seeing a conjunction between this poem and **Todesfuge** would come with benefits, particularly since they were written shortly after each other in 1944. It allows us to see “Ich geh noch vors Haus” of the one as a variant of “[er] tritt vor das Haus” of the other. More importantly,

the question involving the perplexing “zwei Schwestern” of **Die Schwelle des Traumes** now suggests the possibility of naming them Margarete and Sulamith. Our attempt to understand **Todesfuge** implies that the question about those sisters may eventually be answered in the negative—two sisters is *not* too many—and that “sie” and “du” of the preceding question allude to Margarete and Sulamith respectively. The eighteenth “Krug” remains empty in order not to evoke the Kaddish, and “die blaue Girlande” is the garland of poetry commemorating *both* sisters.

There may be a connection between the speaker’s preoccupation with the values of seventeen and eighteen in **Die Schwelle des Traumes** and the fact that in **Keine Sandkunst mehr** (II 39) he barely produces seventeen words of poetry, and that only if “I-i-e” constitutes a word. If this connection is justified, we may ponder whether struggling with a Jewish-religious problem and struggling with words of poetry in this poem is a matter of cause and effect. **Keine Sandkunst mehr** thus would hint at a partial answer to the question in the final line of **Es fällt nun, Mutter, Schnee in der Ukraine** (68) if we read its form of *versinken* as a reference to the waning of poetic ability (see p. 93). Also the closing couplet of **Nähe der Gräber** (136) may fit here.

The serial reading of **Ein Rosenkelch**, **Russischer Frühling**, and **Todesfuge** relays a development during which Celan seeks to work through the agony of writing poetry, in German, about matters that for ever branded his mind. Among those was the problem of what stance to take vis-à-vis the literary culture evolved from that language, whether to abandon it or call it his own. After struggling for the answer he ‘saves’ Goethe’s Margarete, the one who faints under the thunder of her own ‘death fugue’, her own **Dies irae**, and is also cast to suffering.

There is an intriguing parallel between **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** and **Todesfuge** that may have played a role in Celan’s decision to consign the former to oblivion, preventing it from paling its counterpart in **Todesfuge**. The way in the ballad the important *Zelt* motif occurs four times, while that of *Gezelt* is encountered twice, so in the first six strophes of **Todesfuge** we encounter “Margarete” four times, “Sulamith” twice. The ratio in favor of the *Zelt* motif stems from the speaker’s preoccupation with those tents as the shelters of his main characters, the Jews as nomads.

There is no doubt that Celan was keenly aware of Trakl's **Psalm** (I 55) when he wrote **Todesfuge**. As Janz 1984: 216, note 33, points out, Trakl's penultimate line leads to Celan's motif of playing with serpents. Because of this, Trakl's closing lines raise questions, first in their own right, second because of what Celan did and did not borrow from them:

- Alluding to Hades as well as Golgotha, this passage combines mythological and Christian data in “Gottes goldene Augen” in the sense that the adjective derives from the Olympians’ (and their human descendents’) characteristically shining eyes. God’s golden eyes may have to be understood as serpent-like.

Is Trakl deliberate when he makes each of his four strophes fall short by one line of the number ten, thus comes to a total of thirty-six in order to apply a coup de canard to the significance of numbers in Judaic thought? When dedicating his poem to Karl Kraus, does he count on the recipient's recognition of the irony involved in his use of numbers?

As for Celan's borrowing from Trakl's **Psalm**, it is interesting that the player with serpents in **Todesfuge** is *not* called a magician. The commandant does not know the implications of the way in which language works. He uses the imperatives "spielt" and "singt", but at the very moment his commands become more than brutally explicit ("spielt süßer den Tod"; "streicht dunkler die Geigen"), at that very same moment something slips away from him. The dancing and singing take place upon his order, but as a dance of death it is nevertheless a *Jewish* dance, and as a song it is nevertheless a *Jewish* chant (see, e.g., Menzel 436: "Geste des Gebets, der Ekstase"; Stiehler

1982: 31, note 46). And so, “der Mann” is too one-sided in his intent to have the awareness needed to be a magician.

In a similar vein, the critics have pointed out that nowhere in **Todesfuge** is the player with serpents called a “Meister aus Deutschland”. *Death* is the master; the player with serpents is its minion who can shout for a command performance but is not a director beyond “streicht dunkler die Geigen”. He may think of himself as a “Meister”, but in actual fact he knows nothing of double values in language and their consequent ambiguities. He can dream, even does so in quasi-poetic fashion—“träumet”. This verb carries a heavy burden, not only because of its contrast to the man’s monosyllabically barking-biting verb forms preceding, but also because of its haziness. Is the man dreaming about Margarete’s golden hair? If so, we barely need Celan’s elucidation in a letter of May 19, 1961:

Und hier, Walter Jens, hier ist, unmittelbar neben dem Archetypischen [...] archetypische Verwandlung: Haar (und hier, bei der Gretchen-Gestalt, denkt man ja auch an Zöpfe) verwandelt sich oft (im Märchen ebensogut wie im Mythos) in Schlangen (cited from Wiedemann-Wolf 85).

The man may also be dreaming about new ways of getting at ‘his’ Jews. The cadence of “träumet” may be meant to emulate the undulating ‘dancing’ movements of serpents who become hypnotized when the fakir plays his flute. The man may be dreaming about the beneficent role he plays on behalf of the fatherland. He may be doing all these things. This much seems certain: “träumet” harbors awful connotations because in the commander’s mind dream, death and music are all one, like a trinity—as they are for the killer Volker of **Russischer Frühling** who, fiddle-sword in hand, dreamily sings “in die wallende Bläue”.

From one perspective “träumet” is vicious beyond words because it follows closely upon the multivalent “er schenkt uns ein Grab in der Luft”. On the level where images do their work, “schenkt” turns our attention to the pouring of “schwarze Milch” of the opening line. At the same time, “er schenkt uns ein Grab in der Luft” may allow for the implication that in the man’s framework of thinking and dreaming the speakers receive his ‘present’ of eternal damnation (“ein *Grab* in der Luft”—italics added). Thus “träumet”, **Todesfuge**’s final verb, closes the poem proper because we read “dein goldenes Haar Margarete” and “dein aschenes Haar Sulamith” as epithets.

As for Volker, the one who in **Russischer Frühling** is presented in ‘formal’ fashion as “Herr Volker von Alzey”, in terms of influences working in **Todesfuge** he must be given primacy over the ‘frivolously staged’ poem **Jung Volker** in Mörike’s *Maler Nolten*, despite the motifs it shares with **Todesfuge** (see Wiedemann-Wolf 84). This claim on behalf of the epic’s Volker does not simply stem from the occurrence of his name in **Russischer Frühling**, but from the death-music complex embedded in the title **Todesfuge**.

It may be telling that when highlighting Volker’s role the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* shows him joining Hagen to safeguard the Burgundians during the treacherous night: “[si] giengen uz dem huse für die tür stan” (1832) and “Under die tür des huses saz er [Volker] uf den stein” (1834). This motif may have its reflection in the **Todesfuge** phrase “er [der Mann] tritt vor das Haus”.

It is also of consequence and informative about Celan’s way of reading the *Nibelungenlied* that Volker’s comrade-in-arms, Hagen, is nowhere directly mentioned in Celan’s poetry. In **Der Tote** as well as **Russischer Frühling** he is only alluded to, in each case in immediate conjunction with death. Indeed, he is identified with death. This death-avid Hagen has nothing to do with music; on the contrary, he brings death to it. After beginning the blood-bath in Gran’s banquet hall by killing the child Ortlieb, he turns against the musician Werbel, one of the messengers sent to Worms to invite the Burgundians for a festive visit:

1963 Er [Hagen] sach vor Etzeln tische einen spilman.
Hagen in sinem zorne gahen dar began.
er sluoc im uf der videlen ab die zeswen hant:
“daz habe dir ze botschefte in der Burgonden lant”.

“So we mir miner hende”, sprach Werbel der spilman.
“her Hagene von Tronege, waz het ich iu getan?
ich kom uf groze triuwe in iuwer herren lant.
wie klenke ich nu die doene, sit ich verlorn han die hant?”
Hagene ahtet’ ringe, gevidelte er nimmer mer.

From within the epic it is clear: Hagen is “ein Meister aus Deutschland”. If we were to modernize him, we might envision him in Berlin, or in Berchtesgaden.

Our way of trekking through **Todesfuge** mandates a recapitulation. The dual role of Margarete is the reason why within the ‘embrace’ of

the first and the final serpent phrases her name occurs twice as often as Sulamith's. The closing strophe has a hallowing quality, and constitutes an 'in spite of everything'. It also is a pre-empting *Dennoch* vis-à-vis Adorno's forthcoming dictum about writing poetry after Auschwitz. With the view that the poem ends in a declaration of love and devotion, we may say that a redemption of sorts has taken place, not in the realm in which divine forces hold sway, but in that of poetry. This is why Margarete and Sulamith can stand side by side in the end. What with the meaning of the name Margarete as gleaned from the dictionaries, in the closing strophe we see how, at a high price, two pearls are redeemed, the white one and the black one. It is in this sense that **Todesfuge** is as autobiographical as any Celan poem.

Because it sounds inadequate for the moment and therefore frivolous, this claim comes with meekness: **Todesfuge**'s closing strophe should put an end to the commandant's dreaming, for it ultimately checkmates him (see p. 223).

VIII

Poetic Devices and Their Consequences

This study will draw attention to features in Celan's early poetry that either invite additional remarks or have not yet been touched upon. They concern a variety of things: ambiguity and obscurity, title changes and the implications flowing from them, text alterations, various forms of irony, self-citations, allusions to biblical passages, motifs stemming from the lore of Antiquity more deeply hidden than those suggested before. The enumeration of these matters is only roughly chronological because there are many poems containing several of them.

Particularly the remarks about biblical and mythological influences will pertain to poems written in Bucharest and Vienna. Because studies of these compositions are already numerous, suggestions about details are meant as supplements. In some instances the forthcoming observations may be speculative, failing to establish certainties. Insofar as they are found to be persuasive, they reveal the poet's tendency to become increasingly recondite.

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Ambiguity and obscurity

Obviously, throughout Celan's early work, ambiguity rates high in his arsenal of poetic devices. Raising many possible interpretations, it entertains at first, inviting the reader to become the poet's 'cocreator'. Causing values to waver, it brings about the feeling of standing on unsteady ground. It also has a story to tell. When we witness it increasingly turning 'inward', it makes for trenchant drama. We shall encounter additional examples of autobiographical experiences in which ambiguity has boomeranged. It must be ambiguity and consequent obscurity that led to the view regarding "die

Unzulänglichkeit der traditionellen sinnerschließenden Lyrikinterpretation" (Čibikov 93).

Title changes

Celan's forced-labor experience ended in February 1944. He returned to Czernowitz, and began his first typewritten collection of poems (= Ts 1944). When preparing later that year Ms 1944/45 and also thereafter he made numerous title changes. Presented in the order in which the poems are arranged in the Wiedemann edition, these are the alterations detected:

Während der Reise becomes **Landschaft** (10); **Woher?** becomes **Woher** before it becomes **Im Park** (15); **Liebeslied** becomes **(Liebeslied)** before it becomes untitled **Weiss sind die Tulpen** (45); **Mystisches Lied** becomes **Schwarze Krone** (50); untitled **Die Nacht blüht blau: für wen? für wen?** becomes **Sonnenwende** (52); untitled **Unter die stürzenden Lasten** becomes **Einer bei uns** before it becomes **Hier bei uns** (58); **Mutter** becomes untitled **Es fällt nun, Mutter, Schnee in der Ukraine** (68); **Chanson juive** becomes **An den Wassern Babels** (70); untitled **Ich lebe unter tausend weißen Steinen** becomes **Einsamkeit** (80); untitled **Schwarz legt nun der Einsame den Finger** becomes **Zur Laute** (86); **Lied** becomes **Drüben** (96); **Trinklied** becomes **Beim Wein** (99); untitled **Hörst du: ich rede zu dir** becomes **Ein Krieger** (100); untitled **Tulpen, ein stummes Gestirn** becomes **Tulpen** (101); **Anemone nemorosa** becomes **Windröschen** (103); **Todeslied** becomes **Abendlied** (104); untitled **Von diesen Stauden mit dem rötlich-weißen** becomes **Bois gentil** before it becomes **Seidelbast** (105); untitled **Die Nacht mit fremden Feuern zu versehen** becomes **Mohn** (106); untitled **Wenn nun, mich der Ranunkel zu verbinden** becomes **Aus der Tiefe** (107); untitled **Es regnet, Schwester** becomes **Regenlieder** (108); untitled **Unendlich grün wächst Efeu an den Wangen** becomes **Taglied** (111); **Der Garten** becomes **Die Gärten** (112); the possibly plural **Fenster im Südturm** becomes **Das Fenster im Südturm** (123); **Schnee ist gefallen** becomes **Schwarze Flocken** (129); **Mythentod** becomes untitled **Die Zeit tritt ehern** before it becomes **Der Pfeil der Artemis** (134); untitled **Es trommelt der Specht an den Ast** becomes **Septemberkrone** (137); **Finale** becomes **Am letzten Tor** (141); **Todestango** becomes **Todesfuge** (155); **Bruder Hein** becomes **Aschenkraut** (170); untitled **Ein wasserfarbenes**

Wild becomes **Die letzte Fahne** (177); **Deukalion und Pyrrha** becomes **Spät und tief** (208).

It may be informative to consider, mainly from the perspective of 1944, the implications of some of these changes. Remarks about details in the poems proper are meant to highlight those implications.

Während der Reise and **Landschaft** (10) are the successive titles of one of Celan's very earliest pieces. Because of its definite article, the first seems to refer to a specific trip. The second title, given to the poem in 1944, is vaguer than its predecessor, for it simply designates a landscape through which the speaker is moving. Issuing from Celan's travel by train to Tours in November 1938, the poem was written shortly before or shortly after the poet's arrival in Berlin on the day following *Kristallnacht*. If before, the poem seems to do little more than describe a rather somberly monotonous, sparsely populated landscape. If after, the scenery's details could be considered ominous. The question whether the ravens (birds of death as well as Odin's all-seeing reporters of events past, present, and future) "bald / die Sterne kommen hören" could, by 1944, be understood as a reference to the stars that spell human destiny, but also as an allusion to the Star of David worn by many. "Ein Teich, verdunkelt" could now be viewed as precursing the death-ponds of **Unterwegs** (56—see p. 109). The suggestion that the opening line ("Es steht gekrümmt ein Birkenstamm") may have been inspired by a Yiddish folksong (Chalfen 79) gives license to speak of a contrast between a 'surface description' under the first title and the apprehension lurking behind it under the second. Relying on his readers' thoughts of recent history, Celan had ample reason to expect that by 1944 his poem of 1938 might be read as prophecy. By then its mill motif ("Zwei Mühlen noch, ein Spiel dem Wind; / mit langen Armen beide") could readily be linked to its counterparts in **Traumbesitz**, **Das Gastmahl**, and **Spät und Tief**. In addition, Celan's readers could equate those long arms with arms stretched high in supplication despite the contradiction involved because the mills' arms might also evoke Novalis' "Mühle des Todes". All these resonances vibrate under the new title, its "Reise" implying being on the way to one's destiny.

Woher? - Woher - Im Park (15). As already suggested (p. 13), these titles, each in its own way, cloud the air. The first is invitational and is no less thought-provoking than the declarative second. The third, however, obscures because it generalizes. We could be dealing with any park, and there is no overt indication that we should look behind the façade of words for a 'message'.

Liebeslied - (Liebeslied) - untitled **Weiss sind die Tulpen** (45). The value of the first title is questionable in the second because of the parentheses—see Wiedemann-Wolf 242. In these two versions the poem begins with “Heiss”. “Weiss” of the untitled version intensifies the pull between love- and death-concepts (see p. 41), and in doing so emphatically conveys the ‘reserve’ regarding love that was already evinced by the parentheses of the second title.

Mystisches Lied - Schwarze Krone (50). The reason why this poem at one time was called mystical is incomprehensible. As understood earlier (see p. 105), the new title expands the power of the biblical crown of thorns by applying it as a black one to multitudes of sufferers, if not as a symbol with new meaning, then as a metaphor denoting the halo of collective martyrdom.

Chanson juive - An den Wassern Babels (70). The first title is general when compared to the biblical-historical flavor of the second, which clearly draws attention to *Psalm* 137. They head identical compositions that deviate from the biblical source, in which the motif of the harp is of consequence, while that of an envisioned wrathful deity is absent. Although the poem stops just short of emphatically contemporizing, its second title leaves ample room for the view that the speaker’s delivery against the backdrop of Babylon must be applied to his own day.

Lied - Drüben (96). “Lied” tells us virtually nothing even if vis-à-vis the poem proper it were seen as ironic. The new title relays spatial distance and turns out to harbor contradictory values, that of luring and that of danger lurking (see p. 129), hence is ambiguous.

Trinklied - Beim Wein (99). The first title derives from a subgenre of the medieval lyric, and as such holds the traditional promise of heading a *carpe diem* celebration that is likely to be ribald. With most of it addressed to a barmaid, the poem meets that promise. A statement like “weiß ich dich scheu meinem Willen genügen, / heiß schon von spielender Säumnis beglückt” is baldly sexual. The closing lines—“Was meine Schwermut gelöscht hat im Becher, / brennt und gebärdet sich riesig an dir”—are overtly lascivious. It would seem that this poem’s “Schwermut” functions as a mere prop and, whether deliberately or inadvertently, evokes the image of a satyr lusting after a nymph. The second title generalizes and gives the poem a modernizing cachet in which the speaker’s melancholy is still a lure.

Todeslied - Abendlied (104)

- i Die Rufe, die zum Bleiben überreden,
bestehen nicht vor dem verborgnen Ruf.
Denn meine Träume lebten von Reseden.
Mein weißes Reh hat einen güldnen Huf.
- ii 5 Nun, wer verrät für dreißig Silberlinge
mich an das Kreuz, dem ich entraten bin?
Dem fremden Engel spann ich selbst die Schwinge.
(Von dir wird es sehr weit sein bis dorthin...)
- iii Ich werd mich nicht im Dornenbusch behaupten?
10 An meinen Schritten rätselte die Nessel
Von meinem Golde nimm, von dem geraubtem...
- iv Schließt sich das Aug? Und fällt von mir die Fessel?

The first “Ruf” is bested by the second, which is the call of death. There is a trace of Trakl (“Reseden”) as well as an adaptation of the medieval motif of the deer as a guide to the afterlife (see in this connection p. 186). There are obvious references to biblical data in the second quatrain, which also speaks of the angel of death harnessed by the speaker himself.

Even though the addressee in line 8 is seen as the speaker’s female partner, it would be an aberration to classify **Abendlied** as a love poem. If devotion is an ingredient in this environment, it can only be love of death. This view receives support, not only from the clear references to death in the quatrains, but from the tercet as well.

In contrast to the images in the quatrains, those in the tercet are nebulous. We venture, however, that its first line received its inspiration from the story in which Abraham saw a ram “caught in the thicket by his horns” and “took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son” (*Genesis* 22:13). It follows that the speaker has nothing to do with Isaac, but much with the ram, that the question must have “No!” for an answer, that the speaker is a victim as much as the ram is the victim of Abraham’s devotion to Jehovah. This, in turn, leads to the awareness that Jehovah’s angel who prevented Abraham from offering Isaac (*Genesis* 22:11) has been replaced by “de[n] fremden Engel”, the one of death. On a more

mundane level, “Dornenbusch” and “Nessel” of the following line relate to life as it is to be lived (and suffered) until the end.

The “Nessel” image may stem from the passage with which Gottfried von Strassburg begins the story of Isolde’s ordeal by fire:

Ich spriche daz wol überlut,
 daz keiner slahte *nezzelcrut*
 nie wart so bitter noch so sur
 also der sure nachgebur
 noch nie kein angest also groz
 also der *valsche husgenoz*.
 ich meine daz zer valscheit:
 der vriunde vriundes bilde treit
 und in dem herzen vint ist,
 daz ist ein vreislich mitewist.
 wan der teit alle stunde
 daz honec in dem munde,
 daz eiter, da der angel lit (15047-59; italics added)

If this Gottfried-Celan comparison rings true, does it follow that the false housemate and “eiter” of this passage apply to Celan’s nebulous addressee? If so, the “Fessel” motif becomes ambiguous, denotes (would-be) escape from the partner *and* wanting to defect to death. The latter possibility seems to come fully into its own in “das Spiel, das wir spielten als Traum auf den Schiffen der Lust” of **Das ganze Leben** (179), in which the wish for death is equally yoked with the Eros concept (see below).

The change from **Todeslied** into **Abendlied** makes for blandness; at least, it obscures the direct thrust of the earlier title. Did Celan, in the spring of 1944, change the title because he did not want the first to blunt the impact of his contemplated or already (partly) composed **Todesfuge**?

Untitled **Schnee ist gefallen-Schwarze Flocken** (129). The adjective turns the title into an oxymoronic metaphor, and in doing so causes a natural phenomenon to subserve the speaker’s state of mind.

Mythentod - untitled **Die Zeit tritt ehern - Der Pfeil der Artemis** (134). Because of the deprecatory quality of the first title Celan may have changed it when he decided to dedicate the poem to Alfred Margul-Sperber. (Kraft’s version is still untitled.) The metaphorical new title is clearly ambiguous vis-à-vis the poem’s content.

Finale - Am letzten Tor (141). Both these titles smack of metaphor. Though the ring of finality remains intact in the second title and is supported by the content of the poem, “am letzten Tor” seems to relate to the fiftieth gate of Judaic thought, even though the poem proper subverts the Jewish meaning and value of this phrase. Seemingly addressed to the departed mother, the closing line—“Laß den Stein die Wolke, mich den Kranich sein”—links with “Ich lebe unter tausend weißen Steinen” and “laß ich die Steine schwärmen als Kometen” of **Einsamkeit** (80), and perhaps with Schiller’s cranes as the high-flying revealers of truth in **Die Kraniche des Ibykus**.

Bruder Hein - Aschenkraut (170). The second title only seemingly blunts the first. Its broad metaphorical value (see Wiedemann-Wolf 212) replaces a symbolic name. Overt becomes covert.

Deukalion und Pyrrha - Spät und tief (208). The elimination of the first title de-emphasizes mythology in favor of biblical data and—by telescoping and thereby obscuring time—modern events.

It is evident that Celan’s new titles tend to generalize, contemporize, abstract, and obscure. To be sure, obfuscation is not limited to title changes. In **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt**, for instance, the main ‘characters’, the tents, are not mentioned when in the eighth strophe the other role players are. Indeed, the tent dwellers, Jews as desert nomads, are never mentioned as such. The same fate befalls the victims of **Unterwegs** (56). Insofar as the ‘plot’ of **Finsternis** (37) is a variation of the dawn motif, the title has little to do with the darkness of night, but much with daylight breaking in, and is therefore an abstracting metaphor for dread. Obfuscation is also detectable in the change of “Ihn täuschen Wolken” into “Es sind nur Wolken, die er nicht ertrug” of **Traumbesitz** (95—see p.63).

As for obscuring also, we have already seen that **Im Park** (15), **Der Tote** (28), **Traumbesitz** (95), **Taglied** (111), **Der nächste Frühling** (120), **Der Einsame** (140) are but some of the poems that upon first reading are nebulous. Only if we happen to remember a specific detail in the cultural goods that have come down to us are we able to lift a tip of the language veil in order then to realize that in those poems we respectively meet Leda, Siegfried, Quixote, Tristan, Danton, and Prometheus. In the final analysis, however, the presence of a particular figure can only be alleged, however informative we may think some detail(s) to be. Such ultimate lack of certainty partly stems from the speaker’s tendency to project himself on the scene and to identify with this or that cultural figure. (Because of Danton’s role

III Bleib nicht, mein Lieb, wenn Katjuscha nun anfängt zu
 singn!*

Knie, es wird Zeit nun zu knien* in den Orgelstimmen von
 einst.*

Dröhnt es nun laut,* und ich muß mit *Jakobs* Engel noch
 ringen?

Allein unter jüdischen Gräbern, weiß ich, Geliebte, du
 weinst...

The change of the fourth line's "mit" (I and II) into "unter" in III also has consequence: "mit" deepens the momentary doubt about the identity of the following "Geliebte", who thus is insinuated as perhaps still among the living, but "unter" links the line with the opening of **Einsamkeit**, (80) in which the dead mother is the speaker—"Ich lebe unter tausend weißen Steinen".

Irony

Whereas in Celan's early work Leda, Siegfried, Quixote, Tristan, Danton, Prometheus remain without names, there are five Czernowitz poems that end with one: **Saitenspiel** (79) with "Ruth", **Das Fenster im Südturm** (123) with "Magali", **Schöner Oktober** (138) with "Annelies", **Russischer Frühling** (143) with "Volker von Alzey", and **Todesfuge** (156) with "Sulamith".¹

We assume that "Ruth" refers to Ruth Kraft, in a poem that speaks of "Dunkel im Faltengewand" (read 'blackness of the speaker's heart'), of guilt collecting in jugs, and of other ingredients that mock the promise of music contained in the title **Saitenspiel**. This form of irony is not isolated. We have seen that also in **Finsternis** title and "epic" content (about dawn coming) are at variance, as they are in **Beieinander** (64—see p. 83).

According to Kraft 137, "Magali" at the end of **Das Fenster im Südturm** stems from the first line of a Provençal song ("O Magali, ma tant amado, mete la tèsto au fenestroun").² We therefore surmise that Celan's speaker is ruminating within an envisioned medieval sphere. While doing so, he applies a Trakl-like touch ("Pfeile wehn in schrägen / tiefgrünen Sträußen nieder in den Rosenhag"), and ends

¹ Only three or four of the poems written in Paris close with a name as well: **Assisi** (I 108) ends with "Franz", **Vom grossen** (II 35) ends with "Esther", and **Ich schreite** (II 401) ends with "Luv". We could also include the rabbi Löw of **Einem, der vor der Tür stand** (I 242: "Reiß die Morgentür auf, Ra—"). This may lead to the notion that the difference between the ratios—five out of 143 Czernowitz poems versus three or four out of 525 written in Paris—show Celan to be more given to individualizing clarity in his early poetry than he is later. For that matter, the Paris poetry tends to be more recondite in other ways as well.

Incidentally, when Chalfen 148 wonders whether and Schlesak (1990: 341) asserts that the name of Francis of Assisi's first biographer, Thomas of Celano, has to do with our poet's adopting the name Celan, they may not be convincing. Thomas is much more interesting as the assumed composer of **Dies irae** as we now know it, not only because it terrorized Goethe's Gretchen, but also because as the day of wrath it comes into its own in many Celan poems in which destruction turns that day into a modern one.

² The endeavor to find a copy of this poem or a medieval French version to see how its content compares with that of **Das Fenster im Südturm** turned out to be fruitless.

iii Ist auch dein Mund ein Nest von Schlangenbissen
10 und von der Lanze blutig noch mein Knie:
Hier wird dein Herz, dem schwarzen Stern entrissen,
mir leicht sein, wie ein Mondstrahl, Magali.

As for “Annelies” in **Schöner Oktober**, no other literary or historical figure comes to mind than Anna Luise (1677-1745), the daughter of a pharmacist and married to Leopold of Anhalt-Dessau. When he was not campaigning, Leopold oversaw the construction of defenses in his domains (perhaps reflected in “es richten Soldaten die Gräber am südlichen Wall”). Because of the possible modernity of “Kanonen”, our wondering about “Annelies” is tenuous and leaves open the question why Celan might feel kinship with this historical figure. Perhaps he read about her unhappiness in her private life. Or he may have seen the fall of Dresden—in the wake of the battle of Hesseldorf in December 1745, when Leopold’s wife had already died—as an ominous sign of Prussian expansion.

i Den Fähnlein der Sterbenden dämmert ein goldener
 Funken
es richten Soldaten die Gräber am südlichen Wall.
Vom sonnigen Baum sind die Blätter wie Herzen
 gesunken.
Wie schön du bist, Herbst! Wie schwärmerisch, Pauke,
 dein Schall!

ii 5 Mit rötlichem Laub und mit braunem getarnt die
Kanonen!
Von freundlichen Stätten sich schwinge ein farbiger Tod!
Und schützt uns der Wald auch nicht mehr und will uns
das Feuer nicht schonen:

so finde das sickernde *Blut* hier unten ein brüderlich Rot.

- iii Die *Fähnlein* geschwenket, ihr Buchen! Begrüßt sei die
feindliche Salve!
10 Hier fiel schon gar mancher für das-ach weiß ichs und
falle für dies?
Sehr weit, in den Gärten daheim, beim Beet, wo längst
welk ward die Malve,
streift schwebend ein rötliches Blatt mein *Schwesterlein*
Annelies (*italics added*).

Wiedemann-Wolf 72 thinks that this poem relates to the battle of Grodek (fall of 1914), which Trakl, working there as a paramedic, commemorated in his poem **Grodek** (I 167). It is difficult to see a close relation between the two compositions, however. Their similarities do not go beyond tying images of war with those of nature. Whereas **Grodek** has room for heroism and thus lets the genuine concern of Trakl's speaker shine through, **Schöner Oktober** is ironic and sarcastic. If we consider that Trakl employs the sister figure in a considerable number of other poems, the comparison between **Schöner Oktober** and **Grodek** is a weak one. Regarding the former, the battle of Hesselndorf instead of the one of Grodek remains viable, precisely because by December 1745 Annelies had already been touched by a death-connoting "rötliches Blatt".

The above leaves ample room for the influence that seems to have been exerted on **Schöner Oktober** by Rilke's *Cornet* story, particularly its ending. Not only the twice mentioned "Fähnlein", but also the reference to autumn—see the story's "es muß also Herbst sein" (III 94)—abets this view. Moreover, an earlier version of the poem has "Brüder" rather than "Buchen" in the ninth line, and brings to mind the moment when "der von Langenau" and "der kleine [französische] Marquis" separate: "Und sie können nicht voneinander. Sie sind Freunde auf einmal, *Brüder*". (III 97—*italics added*). Whereas the idea of brotherhood is still detectable in Celan's poem in "ein brüderlich Rot", it is ironized because this phrase on the one hand denotes "das sickernde Blut" and on the other, if we go by "ein rötliches Blatt" of the closing line, seems meant to link with the color of "Wald" in the fall season.

If, then, Celan has Rilke's story in mind when he writes **Schöner Oktober**, the result is irony so transparent that it fails to grip. This remains true when we read the poem as a deliberate rejection of the

aestheticism in Rilke's story, particularly when it shrouds Langenau's death in beautiful language.

Self-citations

The previous studies have brought ample evidence not only of Celan's habit of citing and paraphrasing others, but also of his tendency to cite or paraphrase himself. This phenomenon, marked by the interweaving of images, hardly needs renewed elaboration, but it is interesting to note what happens in a poem like **Das einzige Licht** (168). Here, the death-denoting boat of several earlier poems recurs. "Du hörst auch schon triefen die Milch, daß du trinkst aus den Scherben / den Saft, den im Schlaf du geschlürft aus den Spiegeln des Winters" reads like an echo of the opening lines of **Todesfuge** (see below). "O Schlittenflug durch die Luft" seems to hail from **Die Schneekönigin** (130). "[D]och du [...] / erklimmst als ein Knabe den Baum, dort hältst du nun Ausschau" is a reminiscence of the chestnut trees that play a role in **Drüben** (96): the tree image conveys confinement again, but now a deadly one. After returning from the "Schlittenflug" (dreamed-about flight to freedom) the speaker is trapped within Czernowitz. "Vielleicht, daß die Schläfe dir birst" suggests a development beyond "die Hämmer der Schläfen [vernehmen]" of **Russischer Frühling**.

Whereas in their original contexts the cited phrases seem lucidly meaningful, harnessed together in **Das einzige Licht** and interwoven with 'new' images (e.g., "O weiße Giebel des Todes-ihre Dorf wie um Weihnacht!"), they constitute a dense cluster of self-references/allusions. As a result, now that they are rubbing against each other, the outcome is a poem with a surrealistic tint. In it, everything pivots around the "Lampen des Schreckens"—instilling poetic inspiration (see p. 95).³

³ The gathering in of 'old' images and motifs in **Das einzige Licht** also occurs in Celan's Romanian prose pieces—356 printed lines distributed over eight compositions. The mirror, the house, the beloved's loosened hair, the banner's folds, the night, the shadows, the eyes, the tree leaves, the bird, death, and others, they are all there. And they raise questions. Should we take issue with these strewn-about repetitions? Is the poet coasting, as though waiting, not quite knowing in which direction to go? Even though critical opinions about this prose vary from 'completely surrealistic' to 'not quite surrealistic', does he ever feel completely at home with the tenets of the poetic faith involved? Or are these writings so many 'performances', to

An extra word prompted by “Du hörst auch schon triefen die Milch, daß du trinkst aus den Scherben / den Sanft” may lay bare a poetic device that is of consequence precisely because Celan uses it rarely. It involves the motif of the jug, which occurs in sixteen Czernowitz poems. First appearing in **Auch das Alleinsein** (11) which, like **Das einzige Licht**, employs the Jewish image of shards, it is the container in which tears and ashes are assembled, and from which people drink. Toward the end of the Czernowitz years the jug seems to have exhausted its former purpose. We may use an existential and even metaphysical metaphor by saying that the last of these jugs has broken by the time of **Ein Lied in der Wüste** (153), in which the speaker mentions drinking from wooden bowls the ash of the spring of Akra. Though these bowls function in part to accommodate the quasi-historical scene, the fact that they occur in the plural suggests that the speaker was reduced to using them over an extended period. With this, it is tempting to read the opening of **Todesfuge** as implying that no jugs are called into service because, woe-filled to overflowing before, they now could not possibly do justice to the enormity of drinking black milk. The fact that no drinking vessel is mentioned also de-emphasizes drinking as actual drinking, and turns it into sheer metaphor. This, given the abundance of Christian concepts the poet adapted, allows the association with drinking from the cup of the Eucharist, but in doing so alters the algebraic sign which Christianity attaches to it. What the speakers do not utter is thus as important as what they do say. Incidentally, whereas the jug motif occurs anew in two of the Bucharest poems (**Marianne** [159] and **Das Geheimnis der Farne** [171]), the speakers are without drinking vessels in **Aschenkraut** (170) as well: “Wir höhlten die Hände zu schöpfen den sickernden Sturzbach” reads like an allusion to drinking from Antiquity’s blood-containing altar-adjacent ditch near the entrance into Hades (compare “den sickernden Sturzbach” with “das sickernde Blut” of **Schöner Oktober**). Whereas

be seen as efforts to fit into the Bucharest milieu? Are the literary interests of Celan’s circles in the Romanian capital too ‘frivolous’ for someone whose **Todesfuge** dealt with matters still burning in his mind, and involving his “Pappeln”? (This is one motif that Celan does *not* use in his Romanian writings.) When we read this prose, are we looking into a strictly temporary stopping place from which to venture forth, when the time is ripe, into new, as yet uncharted, territory? According to Felstiner (1995: 44), Celan himself saw his Bucharest years as a period of transition.

“Wem trinken wir Träume noch zu, als dem langsamen Rad?” of **Das Gastmahl** is pure metaphor (see below), the implication of drinking without the benefit of a utensil may also lie embedded in “Wir trinken, was einer gebraut, der nicht ich war, noch du, noch ein dritter: / wir schlürfen ein Leeres und Letztes” of **Die Jahre von dir zu mir** (206).

The Bible

Even though poems like **An den Wassern Babels** and **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt** contemporize by telescoping time, it is obvious that they rely on data derived from the Old Testament. Because of our reading of its first couplet, **Espenbaum** should also be mentioned here, as should **Russischer Frühling** because of its “Jakobs Engel”. **Ein Lied in der Wüste** also fits because of its references to Akra, the hill just to the south of the temple of Solomon (see Glenn 1973a: 52).

There seems to be a connection as well between “Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen ihr andern *singet* und spielt” (italics added) of **Todesfuge** and *Psalm* 137:3: “For there [in Zion] they that led us captive *required of us songs*, / And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, / *Sing us one of the songs of Zion*” (italics added).

It is revealing of Celan’s becoming abstruse that particularly in Bucharest poems biblical allusions are so deeply hidden as to handicap easy recognition. It is the task of the following remarks to argue in favor of their presence.

The title **Zu dritt** (174) sounds like a reference to the medieval so-called ‘Anna selbdritt’ of the visual arts, which depicts Anna, her daughter Mary, and Mary’s baby Jesus—the almost traditional Holy Family in which Joseph appears instead of his mother-in-law. If thinking of ‘Anna selbdritt’ is justified, so that the concept of Christ’s forthcoming redemptive act comes to mind, see what Celan does with it:

- i Manches Dunkel hat ein Tier zuviel:
 zu uns beiden kommt das außgestoßne.
 Wir sind drei und haben keine Nacht.
 Wir sind drei und suchen einen zweiten.
- 5 Wir sind drei und keiner von uns schläft.

Again there are three ‘characters’: the speaker, the one whom we assume to be the female addressee, and “ein Tier”. They do not constitute a family, let alone a holy one, but they are nevertheless bonded by the adjective, indicating that the speaker and his companion are as *ausgestoßen* as the animal. We take recourse to retelling the strophe:

Aided by the colon, which promises clarification, the opening line tells us that sins (“Manches Dunkel”) must be atoned. Therefore, so the divine command, the high priest, after having offered one of two he-goats for a sin-offering,

shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a man that is in readiness into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness (*Leviticus* 16:21-22).

The three are fully alert, “haben keine Nacht” in which to find shelter from what is haunting them in their isolation. They seek “einen zweiten”, a masculine entity. It has to be the other goat, the biblical one meant for slaughter as a sin-offering (*Leviticus* 16:15). Due to the absence of this goat, the three do not sleep, cannot sleep; their plight makes escape from reality into forgetfulness impossible. If the search for the second goat does not succeed, atonement is impossible. Is any form of deliverance available? The second strophe brings the answer:

- ii Ein Geweih hat unser Tier wie eine Harfe:
 daß ich spiele, mußt du gehen.
 Daß ich lebe, mußt du bleiben.

There is the vision of an animal appearing on the scene, but it is the vision of a deer.

No matter whether they are called *Hirsch*, *Reh*, *Tier*, or *Wild*, deer appear in eight of the Czernowitz poems. Six of these occur in hunting situations, and the two that do not clearly allude to death. In **Zu dritt** the harp motif endows “unser Tier” with the ability to beckon. That appeal has a barb, however, for according to medieval lore the deer, usually as a *Hirsch* with a harp between its antlers, is man’s guide into the afterlife.

The two closing lines are among Celan’s most ambiguous. If we assume that they are spoken to the speaker’s partner implied in “uns

beiden", "spiele" seems to relate to "playing" with the beckoning animal while "lebe" refers to continued living with the beloved. We prefer a different reading, however. The two closing lines are preceded by a colon that promises clarification, and their indentations suggest the possibility that the speaker now addresses the harp-carrying animal. The lines thus may convey that "spiele" is meant to benefit the human partner, and that "lebe" stands for living under the shadow of death, hence for the possibility of writing poetry under that shadow.

It may have to follow from the attempt to understand **Zu dritt** that "noch ein dritter" of "Wir trinken, was einer gebraut, der nicht ich war, noch du, noch ein dritter" of **Die Jahre von dir zu mir** (206) alludes to **Zu dritt**'s harped "Tier" as death's herald, and that the one who did the brewing equates with the destructive power at work 'behind the scene' in Germany. Thus understood, "trinken" establishes a connection with the opening lines of **Todesfuge**, as does "wir schlürfen ein Leeres und Letztes".

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Das Gastmahl (180)

This title heads a seemingly surrealistically worded poem containing an adaptation from the Jason story: "die Schwelle mit Zähnen gepflügt, vor Morgen der Jähzorn gesät". This is odd, this alteration of plowing the threshold with teeth rather than spreading them over a just plowed field. Whatever the meaning of the line, its obscurity has a counterweight in the penultimate line: "wie anders sei noch geschlafen als stehend, inmitten der Kelche?" This statement, we suggest, refers to people in overcrowded boxcars on the way to a deadly destiny. If this implies that the allusion to Jason is abstracted and subservient to the commemoration of twentieth-century events, so be it. The question arises who in this nebulous setting are the hosts, who are the guests of the banquet. The former are identified, not too covertly, in "eh von der Mühle sie hier sind", and the latter are those for whom sleeping may only be possible "stehend". This, in turn, explains the line that comes immediately before the one with the "Kelche" reference: "So hüllet euch denn in die Mäntel und steigt mit mir auf die Tische". We may understand the first half of it to be the (obscuringly modernizing) abbreviation of an erstwhile command: "And thus shall ye eat [...] with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat in haste" (*Exodus* 12:11). We thus find

ourselves in a scene of the biblical Passover in which the Israelites are to be ready for travel when eating their last meal in Egypt. This divine instruction now comes in the form of an exhortation, in which the speaker urges those of the “Kelche” to mount the banquet table with him, in order to offer themselves as sacrifices. This call to self-destruction is as blatant as the plea in **An den Wassern Babels**.⁴ Equally clearly, those “Kelche”, as calyxes, have their counterparts in **Ein Rosenkelch** and **Russischer Frühling** and, as chalices, evoke the Eucharist, but are as Jewish as the dancing and singing of the speakers in **Todesfuge**.

The speaker’s advice to mount the banquet table with him is more than a flat denial of “Jehovah [...] will not suffer the destroyer to [...] smite you” (*Exodus* 12:13). Hence it is inadequate to speak of irony now that the eating of the Israelites’ last meal before they are to set out for the Promised Land (*Exodus* 12:25) has become the promise of deliverance, “out of the land of Egypt” (*Exodus* 12:17), “out of the house of bondage” (*Exodus* 13:3) via the speaker’s call to self-destruct. *Death* is the Promised Land.

Our reading has it that “das Gastmahl” not only harbors pungent irony, but also heads a poem of which the second line demands another look. The speaker ‘forgets’ to mention Jason, but the teeth he sowed are still there. They should be ‘harmonized’ with the Passover meal, even though the eating and drinking of that meal are only metaphoric in the forthcoming product of the mill (Novalis’ mill!) and in the verb of “trinken wir Träume”.

Whereas in the biblical Seder ritual the unleavened bread was not eaten until the posts and lentils of the Israelites’ doors had been daubed with the blood of lambs (*Exodus* 12:7), in **Das Gastmahl** it is the thresholds to which the speaker draws attention. Because of the teeth, the thresholds cannot be overstepped (cf. “None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning” as found in *Exodus* 2:22). Because of the teeth, those thresholds are incarceration devices trapping those who are eating their Seder meal.

With the Seder ritual in mind, we may be inclined to assume that “Jähzorn” has to do with the terrible quick sword that, come midnight, is to smite all “the [Egyptian] firstborn in the land” (*Exodus* 12: 29). However, by the end of the poem it has become evident that this wrath

⁴ This is Camille Desmoulins speaking after he has been driven to the square where the guillotine is waiting: “Meine Herren, [...] ich will *mich zuerst servieren*. [...] Das ist *ein klassisches Gastmahl*; wir liegen auf unsern Plätzen und verschütten etwas Blut als Libation” (Büchner 107; italics added).

must be conceived of as directed against the speaker and his addressees, the ones who will be crowded in the train's cattle cars. "Jähzorn" denotes German ferocity, the rage of God, both.

One more obscurity in **Das Gastmahl** begs attention. Whereas the grain needed to make bread is suggested by the forthcoming activity of the mill, and (metaphorized) drinking is explicitly mentioned, the Seder's lambs are kept out of sight. We may be certain, however, that these lambs "without blemish" (*Exodus* 12:5) would be visible if we could look into those tightly locked cattle cars. Perhaps we may add that the Christian 'Lamb of God' has become a Jewish multitude. Yes, **Das Gastmahl** and **Schwarze Krone** (see, e.g., p. 105 f) have much in common.

The scope of this study discourages thinking about additional obscurities and bitter ironies in **Das Gastmahl**. We therefore must leave several questions unanswered. Does "Moos" in "es schießt wohl empor uns ein Moos noch, eh von der Mühle sie hier sind" simply stand for moss denoting an interval of time lapping by? Because of "gemünzt" in "wird anders der Traum noch gemünzt als hier, wo wir würfeln um Lust", are we to think in terms of a small coin—its name derives from the Hebrew *me'a!*—that serves to 'purchase' the dream which in vicious irony is thus insinuated to be of no consequence whatsoever? Does the verb in "wir würfeln um Lust" equate with dicing, winnowing, or both?⁵ Does "leuchtende" in "leuchtende Truhen", if associated with "Wunder" of "Vergessen und Wunder", stand for enlightenment and clarification? Does "Truhen" equate with chests or with coffins? In the latter case, the fact that they will be superfluous is as bitterly ironic as the poem's closing line: "Wem trinken wir Träume noch zu, als dem langsamen Rad?"

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Die letzte Fahne (177)

Not necessarily because of the chronological order of Celan's poems, but for the sake of reading compositions in sequence, it makes sense that **Das Gastmahl** follows closely upon **Die letzte Fahne** (177).⁶

⁵ "Lust" must equate with wanting to defect to death in either case.

⁶ The fact that in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* **Ein Knirschen von eisernen Schuhn** intervenes, as, together with **Gesang zur Sonnenwende**, it does in *Der Sand aus den Urnen*, adds to the benefit that can be derived from reading a cluster of poems as a series.

They are companion pieces, not merely because being hunted down precedes being forced into crowded cattle cars, but also because there are verbal correspondences: “Moos”, “Traum” and “Träume”, “Mäntel” and “Tische” in the poem partly discussed just now versus “die *moosigen* Bälle des Wahnsinns” (italics added), “Traum”, “Mantel”, and “Ebenholztische” in **Die letzte Fahne**. There is also a connection between “Getreide” plus “trinken” in the one and “Schrot” plus “Wein” in the other. These pairs also share in that they allow, even compel, the secondary thought of the Christian concept of the Eucharist. To be sure, “Schrot” is ambivalent. When understood as coarsely ground grain rather than as buckshot, it conveys the unrefined rustic scene of an exuberant party celebrating the expected success of the forthcoming hunt. Of course, whereas “Schrot” as grain is feasted on by the hunters, as buckshot it is meant for the one hunted, and threatens him in either case.

That we are looking at a Holocaust scene is brought home by “die Rose der Fremde”. This rose is the ‘alien’ and ‘unnatural’ black rose of **Ein Rosenkelch** (see p. 149 f.).

For the present purpose, as important as any of the similarities and parallels mentioned are the ironies of **Das Gastmahl** and **Die letzte Fahne** as titles. As understood here, “die letzte Fahne” serves several purposes. The banner draws attention, first, to the hunters for whom it is the sign of success because their last prey is about to stand at bay. It also represents a (grey and therefore “wasserfarbene[n]”) beard that is in danger of betraying its owner, windblown (“irrend”)⁷ as it is from behind the tree behind which he is hiding, partly disguised by green-painted lashes and the petrified numbness of a mask that may be seen as a pathetic attempt to submerge oneself in (untrustworthy) nature. This is the last beard (“die letzte” of the title), the beard of the last Jew about to be laid low.

Ambiguity and irony hold when we take account of the poem’s closing line: “o wasserfarbenes Vlies, unser Banner am Turm!”. If “Vlies” is meant as an allusion to the Golden Fleece that caused Jason to sail the Argo to Colchis (the land of poisoning Medea), it raises the question about its color. We therefore take recourse to *Judges* 6:3637, in which Gideon speaks to God:

⁷ At the same time, nothing prevents this “irrend” from meaning ‘not knowing which way to turn’.

If thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as thou hast spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor; if there be dew on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the ground, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as thou hast spoken. And it was so.

Gideon, chosen to slay the Midianites and Amalekites, thus gets his wish for a “wasserfarbenes Vlies” fulfilled. And for the Jew behind the tree, is “wasserfarbenes Vlies” a promise about to be granted to him as well? If so, with “Vlies” and “Bart” and “Banner” understood to be one and the same for the Jew, the next question is whether the banner is to be seen, simultaneously, as the hunters’ trophy hoisted “am Turm”, *and* as the Jew’s sign of ‘victory’. In the latter case, the exclamation mark in “unser Banner am Turm!” reads like a sigh of relief now that death is at hand. The thrust of the phrase is thus similar to the relief implicit in “Wie lebten wir hier?” of **Talglicht**. At the same time, it is eerily akin to “So hüllet euch denn in die Mäntel und steigt mit mir auf die Tische” of **Das Gastmahl** (see above). The speaker thus wants “Fahne”-“Bart”-“Banner” to mark victory for the hunters *and* for the Jew.

Our search for meanings in **Die letzte Fahne** made for a labyrinth of intersecting values charged with supreme irony, particularly because we find it impossible to forget God’s willingness to heed Gideon’s request for a sign of divine aid.

We take the crowns in “Sie schlingen ein Seil um die Kronen” (with its subjects being like cowboys roping cattle) to be the same as the Jewish crown of martyrdom of **Schwarze Krone**,⁸ and are tempted to suggest a connection with the “König” motif in **Mandorla** (I 244), and see “[sie] laden zum Tanz” as a parallel to the dance motif in **Todesfuge** and other poems. There may be a touch of Eichendorff’s luring “Wohl irrt das Waldhorn her und hin” (**Waldgespräch**—I 86) in “[sie] waschen die Hörner im Quell”⁹ -so lernen sie Lockruf”.

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⁸ See in this connection how Schulze (12976: 31) equates “Rose” and “Krone”, and sees them as symbols “für die Schechinah als Gegenwart der schöpferischen Kraft Gottes und als ‘Gemeinde Israel’”.

⁹ For the significance of bodies of water throughout Celan’s early poetry, see below.

Also **Gesang zur Sonnenwende** (182) may contain a biblical allusion. Its “der dich maß und dich wog” reads like the *mene tekel* of *Daniel* 5: 25.

Antiquity

Das ganze Leben (179)

The ‘epic’ elements in this poem are slight. The speaker and a woman loved each other; a child was born. He abandoned her, but her “Haar [...] im Baum” (an ephemeral remnant of her existence) remains in his memory. Because of that memory, she became “ein Gesträuch vor den Toren”, an impediment, while he trysted with another woman, with whom he was “die Welt”. Clearly, these givens lead into a territory in which abstracting metaphors function, from “die Sonnen des Halbschlafs” to “mit erloschenen Augen”.

In contrast to Kalow 96 who speaks of “Halbschlaf eine Stunde vor Morgen”, we take “Morgen” to be what it is, a temporal modifier functioning in a simile. The order “Halbschlaf”-“Tiefschlaf” is therefore a natural one. The former, called “blau” (Trakl’s “blau”?), normally denotes that part of falling asleep during which thoughts drift about in haphazard fashion, but in this poem are neatly contained in one-line sentences. When, via “Grab eines Vogels” and the dagger motif, we come to the end of the strophe, that order is not a comforting one.

It will not do to explain the opening line’s “Sonnen” as simply denoting the speaker’s meandering musings. There is a power behind that plural noun that does not harmonize with the workings of a somnolent mind. “Sonnen” must therefore have a quality as yet not discernable. But those suns “wachsen rasch”, that is, quickly gain intensity, acquire a searing quality that causes the mind to dwell on a dead bird and on daggers, hence shock into the awareness of death and danger.

The fourth line brings data of consequence. It personifies the suns, for they are as capable as the speaker of experiencing the lure of “das Spiel”. While semantically linking with the “Locke” mentioned in the second strophe, “lockt” obviously must be taken in the sense of luring. Equally important, “Lust” brings in the Eros concept, even though it turns out to come with a twist when we seek to give the line’s nouns

their proper values by comparing them with their counterparts in other poems:

“Traum” and “Lust” recur in the immediately following **Das Gastmahl** where they clearly relay longing for death. Because in **Dein Haar überm Meer** (164) and elsewhere sailing is sailing toward death, we infer that “Schiffe [...] der Lust” of **Das ganze Leben** has the same meaning.¹⁰ “Lust” thus welds Eros and death into one.

“Spiel” as well as the tress of hair occur in the opening strophe of **Dunkles Aug im September** (183):

Und üppiger quellen
die Locken des Schmerzes ums Antlitz der Erde,
den trunkenen Apfel, gebräunt von dem Hauch
eines sündigen Spruches: schön und abhold dem Spiel,
5 das sie treiben im argen
Widerschein ihrer Zukunft.

Since “sie” of this passage refers to “Locken”, there is a parallel with the commandant of **Todesfuge** who plays with serpents and, according to a Celan letter (see p. 168), may be envisioned as playing with the tresses of his victims. The just cited passage thus expands the fate of the Jews into that of the world at large, and in doing so links with **Ballade von der erloschenen Welt, Ballade vom Auszug der drei, Spät und tief**, and other poems that, like **Dunkles Aug** (see below), contain mythical data pertaining to destruction.

The view that also **Das ganze Leben** brings images derived from Antiquity is already warranted by the dagger motif: “Am Kreidefelsen der Zeit begegnen auch ihnen die Dolche”. When taken together with “Traum” of the preceding line, it links with “Dolche[...] des Traumes” of **Halbe Nacht** (163), a poem which also contains the phrases “daß getanzt sei von Dunkel zu Dunkel” and “die Tänzerin kommt nun”. For the purpose of the moment it is of consequence that dancing with daggers is depicted on the shield that Olympus’ smith Hephaestes crafts for Achilles (Schwab 518). Like “Lust”, the dagger motif seems to allude to the Eros concept, particularly if we go by its employ in the ‘love poem’ **Beieinander** (64).

¹⁰ It must be of consequence that, whereas in earlier poems the *Kahn* image (see p. 4 f.) tends to involve the speaker as an (isolated) individual, in “Schiffe der Lust” he conceives of himself as a member of a community.

Also regarding mythology in **Das ganze Leben**, there is “Ich weilt als ein Nachtwind im käuflichen Schoß deiner Schwester”. This detail harks back to the story of how the union of the wind and Nyx (the night) produced Eros, not the one with quiver and bow, but the one with wings of gold who is of a more archaic—and more threatening!—nature than his younger namesake.

Admittedly, there is the final stanza of the song in Mörike’s *Maler Nolten* (p. 317):

iii Da kam der Wind, da nahm der Wind
 10 Als Buhle sie gefangen,
 Von dem hat sie ein lustig Kind
 In ihren Schoß empfangen.

The mother of this child is “ein schön, frech, braunes Weib”. There is also “das braune Mädchen” (a gypsy sitting at the edge of a “Birkenwäldchen”—p. 50). These phrases may have to do with the closing lines of Celan’s **Im Spiegel** (109): “Und bei den Buchen meiner Heimat säumt / das braune Mädchen aus dem Kaukasus...”

Incidentally, it is tempting to ponder the affinity between Celan’s early poetry and the statement that Nolten’s “ganzes Denken und Empfinden nur ein trunkenes Loblied auf Tod und Verwesung [war]” (p. 441).

Already prefigured by “die finsternden Sonnen” of **Schwarze Flocken**, the gradation in **Das ganze Leben** from “Die Sonnen des Halbschlafs sind blau” to “Die Sonnen des Tiefschlafs sind blauer” relays a development in which those images come to a crest in “Die Sonnen des Todes sind weiß wie das Haar unsres Kindes”. “Das Kind kommt tot zur Welt”, so Kalow 96. However, since “das Haar unsres Kindes” has no verb, it would seem that the speaker leaves open the question whether the child *is* or *was*. If he has the present tense in mind, he may be relying on Hesiod; says Kerényi (1951: 222) when speaking of the iron age (to be compared with “Kreidefelsen der Zeit” and the Hitler era?):

Über das fünfte Geschlecht konnte sich Hesiod nur beklagen. Seine Schilderung ging in düstere Wahrsagungen über, beginnend damit, daß die Kinder mit *grauem* Kopf zur Welt kommen [werden]—italics added.

It is perfectly possible that “weiß” is the speaker’s improvement on Hesiod’s *grau*. White is indeed the color of death, but the active verb

in “stieg aus der Flut” does not seem to denote the floating up of a dead child. Instead, the phrase brings to mind Botticelli’s birth of Venus and by that token alludes to the love concept.

Because Oelmann 271 detects a reference to the birth of the goddess of love in “Aus Meerschaum gesponnene Finger taucht sie ins Aug uns” of **Halbe Nacht** (163), we advocate that a similar allusion may be present in “die Locke quoll dir von Meerschaum” of **Das einzige Licht** (168). **Das ganze Leben** also shares with **Halbe Nacht** the dagger motif and that of the eye, and with **Das einzige Licht** those of the bird, the tress of hair, the tent, and the eye implied in “Ausschau [halten]”. **Halbe Nacht** and **Das einzige Licht** share the Jewish motif of shards, which does not occur in **Das ganze Leben**. It is nevertheless evident that these three poems are related by virtue of their images.

There is no mythology detectable in “als du aufschlugst ein Zelt auf der Düne”. The image seems to be of a Judaic cast instead. All we know for certain is that “Zelt auf der Düne” is sea-adjacent, and by that token takes on importance (see below).

Comes the poem’s closing line with language more precarious than that of any of its predecessors: “Es zückte das Messer des Glücks über uns mit erloschenen Augen”. That “Es,” as the child, could serve as subject, but it could equally well be the place holder for that oxymoronic cut of “das Messer des Glücks”, in which case “mit erloschenen Augen” applies to “uns”.

There is one perspective, here deemed to be a compelling one, that provides coherence between the “Flut” image and the oft-occurring motif of sailing toward death: “aus der Flut [steigen]” antedates such sailing. The child therefore emerges on the speaker’s side of the “Flut”. That this (live) birth immediately begins its journey toward death underscores the combination of knife and happiness. This, in turn, demands an inquiry regarding the identity of the addressee, the speaker’s former partner. This reading also implies that the verbal interweaving of the concepts pertaining to love and death lends meaning to the adjective of the poem’s title: Life is lived under the signs of love and death. Perhaps we may add that life has always been that way, from mythology all the way to the present day.

The earlier claim that “Schiffe der Lust” denotes sailing toward death leads to an inquiry about Celan’s imagery pertaining to the sea (here “Flut”):

The sea is the domain that separates, even if only temporarily, the realm of the living from that of the dead. “Ich seh dir zu, über das

Meer hinweg” (spoken by the dead mother in **Einsamkeit**), “O komm übers Meer” of **Dein Haar überm Meer** with its own myth-derived images (see p. 72), and “Wir sehen uns zu in den Spiegeln der Tiefsee und reichen uns rascher die Speisen” of **Die Jahre von dir zu mir** are but three of the available examples. It is the proximity of the sea from which Celan’s speakers derive words of poetry. Particularly in **Das ganze Leben** with its sun-references, this sea is like that of Rimbaud (193): “l’éternité / C’est la mer alliée / Avec le soleil”—whose eternity is now the eternity of death.

A poem like **Mit zeitroten Lippen** (I 136) does not provide an exception to the claim that from the sea steams the “Todesluft” of which Böschstein-Schäfer (1970a: 258) speaks in her study of allegorical features in Celan’s work. This “Todesluft” acquires specific meaning if to the widely different approaches to **Mit zeitroten Lippen** provided by Lyon (1962: 165), P. Mayer (1969: 143), and Menninghaus (69) we add the suggestion that this Paris poem may have been inspired by the quatrains of Haushofer’s **Der Vater**:

- i Ein tiefes Märchen aus dem Morgenland
 erzählt uns, daß die Geister böser Macht
 gefangen sitzen in des Meeres Nacht,
 versiegelt von besorgter Gotteshand,

- ii 5 bis einmal im Jahrtausend wohl das Glück
 dem einen Fischer die Entscheidung gönne,
 der die Gefesselten entsiegeln könne,
 wirft er den Fund nicht gleich ins Meer zurück (p. 47).

This, in turn, would imply that the brother motif in **Mit zeitroten Lippen** alludes to Haushofer as the ‘co-fisher’, and that Celan’s “der Mund aus dem Meer / taucht schon empor / zum unendlichen Kusse” signifies the kiss of death. Because Haushofer’s *Moabiter Sonette* were written while he was a prisoner of the Nazis who killed him on the night of April 23, 1945, we prefer **Der Vater** over the story of the fisherman and the genie of *Arabian Nights* as Celan’s possible source.

In contrast to the sea, the “Irrsee” of **Lob der Ferne** (207) represents the condition of the living. Because death is not overtly contemplated here, that “Irrsee” is laden with meaning; it accurately reflects the speaker’s view: bodily existence itself is an “Irrsee”. In it, one searches in vain. The words it yields, bound to

time, are doomed to be flawed. The “Irrsee” is therefore the wrong place in which to fish for adequate words, no matter how zealous the endeavor. In order to succeed, one needs “das Meer” for true inspiration. It is his being bound to the condition of the living that causes the speaker to choke when hanging in the noose of *Irrsee*’s language.

As understood here, “Irrsee” must be contrasted with the sea of the immediately following “Im Quell deiner Augen / hält das Meer sein Versprechen”, of which the verb ambiguously conveys ‘keeps its promise’ as well as ‘withholds its promise’. The first of these renderings retains the ambiguity. With either value attached to “hält”, the speaker knows that only inspiration provided by the sea *might* yield reliable words, those that emanate from the awareness of death.

Our reading of “Irrsee” grants a tardy understanding of “*bildlose Erde*” (italics added) of **Einer** (69), which is spoken by someone who died. We may also draw attention to “*die täuschende Welt*” (italics added) of **Abend** (93).

Though adding nuances of consequence, the delving for mythological data in **Das ganze Leben** do not lead to the core of the poem, perhaps not because they are to subserve a different sphere: the addressee, should we call her Sulamith? If so, we must wonder about the possibility of the speaker’s Eros experience with the partner with whom he was “die Welt” seeking to shade into Agape for Sulamith whose “Haar im Baum” continues to haunt him after he abandoned her. This would have consequences:

When Ignatius of Loyola writes his *Exercitia spiritualia* in which he confidently points the way leading to the *unio mystica*, he partakes of the meditative tradition. When Andreas Gryphius writes his sonnet-cyclet **Morgen, Mittag, Abend, Mitternacht**, he stands in the same tradition,¹¹ but this time it is heavy with seventeenth-century Lutheran *Angst*. His aim is to drive the soul to God, but he can only end his cyclet with galloping hexameters that read as though they were the horses of the Apocalypse. With Sulamith in mind, we might read **Das ganze Leben** as an equally anguished poem, though anguish more covert and, on the surface, altogether secular. Even so, is there a hesitant ray of hope trying to come through because the speaker might return to his first beloved, a hope owing to and at the same time in spite of “das Messer des Glücks”?

¹¹ See Bekker 1973: 28 ff.

*

Dunkles Aug im September (183) and Spät und Tief (208)

When Hades has abducted Persephone into the underworld, her mother Demeter abandons her role as beneficent goddess of the harvest. Famine stalks the earth, until Zeus settles matters by ordaining that Persephone will return to her mother in the spring and stay with her until the harvest is done. Hades succumbs to his brother's decision. "Ehe aber Hades Persephone entließ, gab er ihr einen Granatapfelkern, dem ein geheimer Liebeszauber zugeschrieben wurde, zu essen" (Schwab 689). Hades thus sees to it that his Queen will be happy to rejoin him before the arrival of winter. The pomegranate, then, is the apple of love, but also the apple of death.

This mythological detail informs the opening passage of **Dunkles Aug im September (183)**:

i Und üppiger quellen
 die Locken des Schmerzes ums Antlitz der Erde,
 den trunkenen Apfel, gebräunt von dem Hauch
 eines sündigen Spruches.

The pomegranate actually does turn brown as it ripens, but with Celan serves as an image, twice removed from its origin, of an earth whose color is the result of a sinful dictum coming from a deity who pronounced doom over the world and brought about the mythological flood to which the speakers in the older version of **Spät und Tief** allude—"es komme das gurgelnde Meer".

That in **Dunkles Aug im September** we are indeed in the realm of Greek mythology becomes evident in the poem's middle section, which focuses on the hope that blind Orion will soon return from the east where his vision will be restored when he directs his eyes to the rising sun.

Whereas blind Orion is also mentioned by name in **Der Jäger (139)**, "wie kannst du die Huld ihm verwehren des Augs, das geblendet ihn anblickt" of **Gesang zur Sonnenwende (182)** seems to refer to this famous hunter as well. The line is nevertheless riddlesome because of another mythological detail immediately preceding but not in any obvious way connected with it. "Der dir hob aus dem Schoße dein Kind mit dem Flammenhaar der Umnachtung" seems to allude to the moment when Zeus

serves as midwife to deliver his son Dionysus because the mother, Semele, is dying from the fire engulfing her due to Zeus appearing before her without disguising his divinity. Allusions to mythological details put side by side create the flavor of Surrealism.

We add a detail to the mythological data which Böschenstein-Schäfer (1989: 7 ff.) incorporates into her elucidation of **Spät und Tief**: the pomegranate is also present in this poem's "Wir essen die Äpfel der Stummen". Particularly if understood as coming from Deukalion and Pyrrha after Zeus' flood has undone all other humans, the line shows these speakers' devotion to those who have died ("Stummen"). On behalf of those sighing in the underworld, they eat in memoriam—and ingest death!

Of course, **Spät und Tief** is not just the retelling of an old story. Celan changes the original title in order to modernize and provide generalized validity.¹² In doing so he employs motifs from sources other than Antiquity's. Rilke peeks through in "sinnendes Fahnenrot" (*Cornet* III 105), as does Novalis, in "Mühlen des Todes".

Trauer (214; Wiedemann-Wolf's translation of the Romanian poem **Tristețe**), alludes to a number of Olympians: "der in der untergegangenen Seerose schlafende See // kommst du [...] vereisen, schwarze Schwester". The "See" represents Poseidon asleep after he has violated that rose (=Persephone). His offended black sister, Persephone's mother Demeter, who in mythology wears black peasant clothes after she has lost her daughter, becomes neglectful of human needs, this time by letting the earth turn to ice.

Persephone will have to come to our attention again.

*

¹² Luther 187 sees the apple as the one eaten by Eve, and he credits Eden's serpent with the ability to come forth with "goldene Rede", which we equate with "Hauch eines sündigen Spruches" of **Dunkles Aug im September**. According to Petuchowski (1978a: 128 -29), "goldene Rede" shows Celan's ambivalence toward the German language.

Chanson einer Dame im Schatten (203) and Corona (209)

When seen as a fellow in suffering, one's hero can cast long shadows. That is why details derived from the Prometheus story outnumber those pertaining to other mythological figures. Nowhere mentioned by name, Celan's favored rebel seems to take pride of place as well in **Chanson einer Dame im Schatten** by occupying the longest and central strophe:

- iv 15 Es ist einer, der hat meine Augen.
 Er hat sie, seit Tore sich schließen.
 Er trägt sie am Finger wie Ringe.
 Er trägt sie wie Scherben von Lust und Saphir:
 er war schon mein Bruder im Herbst;
 20 er zählt schon die Tage und Nächte[.]

of which the penultimate line harks back to the brotherhood established with Prometheus in **Der Einsame** (see p. 61). The endeavor to make sense of the entire strophe thus calls for a recast of this sort:

- 15 There is one who has eyes as brown and melancholy as
 my own.
 16 He has had them since the moment the doors to the
 abode of the gods were closed to him.
 17 He wears my eyes on his finger like rings.
 18 He wears them like shards of pleasure and sapphire:
 19 He became my brother in the fall season that functioned
 in **Der Einsame**.
 20 He is already counting the days and the nights.

Regarding "Scherben von Lust" we posit that Prometheus, after allying himself with the earth's population, became and remained an exile from Olympus. When chained to the Caucasus, he saw the end of existence as the only way out. ("Lust" thus equates with its counterparts in **Das ganze Leben** and **Das Gastmahl**.) Because he was of divine origin, however, and therefore doomed to live forever, his longing for death broke into shards.

As for "Scherben von [...] Saphir", the gem may simply denote the color of bluish-brown slate-like rock. Zeus, having sworn that

Prometheus would be attached to the Caucasus for eternity, was persuaded to let him go free provided he would

fortwährend einen eisernen Ring tragen, an welchem sich ein Steinchen von jenem Kaukasus-Felsen befand. So konnte sich Zeus rühmen, daß sein Feind noch immer an den Kaukasus angeschmiedet lebe (Schwab 4).

At the same time, because “Saphir” refers to “meine Augen”, the line also conveys Prometheus’ (rebellious and defiant) proclamation of being on the side of humankind as represented by the speaker. Similarly, since also “Scherben von Lust” refers to “meine Augen”, the other ring connotes that Prometheus’ as well as the speaker’s “Lust” (= longing for death) equates with longing in vain.

Reading **Chanson einer Dame** as a poem with Prometheus as its central figure depicts him as a vagabond in “Er trägt’s unterm Arm wie ein Bündel” of the sixth strophe. This descendant of the gods, this exile from Olympus, has become a vagrant indelibly marked by those shards. This Prometheus is a brother under the skin of Ahasver.

The attempt to understand the fourth strophe of **Chanson einer Dame** may cast some light on the immediately preceding “Der nennt ihren Namen nicht”, which may stem from an additional detail in Prometheus’ career: While being tormented,

ließ [Prometheus] sich durch keine Drohungen des Zeus bewegen, die dunkle Weissagung, daß dem Götterherrscher durch einen neuen Ehebund Verderben und Untergang bevorstehe, näher auszudeuten (Schwab 66).

In this passage, “Ehebund” alludes to Zeus’ forthcoming liaison with the nymph Thetis, the mother of Achilles.

The name of Persephone as the Queen of the realm of the dead may not be spoken. This mythological detail raises the question whether it connects with various strophes’ closing lines:

i	5	Wer nennt ihren Namen zuerst?
iii	13	Der nennt ihren Namen nicht.
v	23	Der nennt ihren Namen zuletzt.
vii	31	Der nennt ihren Namen zuerst.

If it does, we know who “die Schweigsame” of the opening line, the one who decapitates tulips, is. (Are they the ones of **Weiß sind die Tulpen**?) He who conceives of her as a beneficent reaper is a winner (of insight); he who does not is a loser. Who steps forward to declare

his acceptance of her? Who dares to rebel against established tenets by mentioning her name “zuerst”?

These questions give color to the second strophe which also denotes brotherhood: “Es ist einer, der trägt mein Haar”. This touches upon the speaker’s ephemeral existence in order then to emphasize this perishability with the help of a line (“Er trägts wie man Tote trägt auf den Händen”) seemingly adapted from “Auf seinen Armen trägt er [Langenau] die Fahne wie eine weiße, bewußtlose Frau” of Rilke’s *Cornet* (III 105).

Whereas the following line (“Er trägts wie der Himmel mein Haar trug im Jahr, da ich liebte) defies comprehension,¹³ the strophe’s final one (“Er trägt es aus Eitelkeit so”) seems to say that Prometheus is still a rebel who continues to ally himself with humanity as represented by the speaker. “Eitelkeit”, we take it, indicates self-pride and -awareness, and insinuates that on behalf of the living Prometheus refuses to acknowledge death’s *raison d’être*—“Der nennt ihren Namen nicht”. This reading allows the fourth strophe’s final line—“Er zählt schon die Tage und Nächte”—to say that Prometheus is determined to continue his alliance with time-bound humanity.

“Es ist einer, der hat, was ich sagte” is nebulous because its “was” is nebulous. But he, the vagabond, the Greek Ahasver, carries it from “Schwelle zu Schwelle”, from one calamity to the next, enduringly—“er wirft es nicht fort”.

The closing strophes foretell that Prometheus, who was too proud to acknowledge defeat, will lose, will have to step up to the window to admit the inevitable—“Der nennt ihren Namen zuerst”. She, the silent one, the one who decapitates, is the winner.

Our preoccupation with Prometheus leaves open the question regarding the *speaker*’s position vis-à-vis “die Schweigsame”. Perhaps he, the courier of death in many earlier poems, feels the need to ponder anew during the (sun-lit?) months of Vienna whether to be faithful to her or whether to deny her.

In the above we read the title’s “der Dame” as a dative rather than genitive, and do not identify this lady with “die Schweigsame”. The poem, instead, is understood as a song to a female figure as unnamed

¹³ Might it be that the speaker presents himself as once having been favored because he adhered to Judaic values? If so, the implication would have to be that love of those values no longer applies, that he abandoned them. See in this connection remarks made above about the addressee in **Das ganze Leben**.

as “die schweigsame” Persephone. We may have to think of Sulamith again.

Whereas “ins gierige Wasser der Fenster geschleudert in leuchtenden Truhen” of **Das Gastmahl** (180) allows for a connection with “das gurgelnde Meer” of **Spät und Tief** (208), it contrasts with the window motif of **Chanson einer Dame**. In **Das Gastmahl** the window indicates a threat from without, in **Chanson einer Dame** it serves from ‘within’, that is, it represents the need to contemplate pledging one’s adherence in public. For Prometheus this would be an acknowledgment of the name that is not to be spoken. For the speaker it may be avowing adherence to Sulamith, that is, the pronouncement of solidarity with the remnant of the Jewish community.

The window occurs in **Corona** (209) as well—“Wir stehen umschlungen im Fenster”. Whatever this entails, it is not only the window that echoes a detail in **Chanson einer Dame**. Whether or not via **Der Einsame**, **Corona**’s opening line (“Aus der Hand frißt der Herbst mir sein Blatt: wir sind Freunde”) is clearly akin to “er [Prometheus] war schon mein Bruder im Herbst”. Also, “er zählt schon die Tage und Nächte” is as preoccupied with time as is **Corona**’s repetitive “es ist Zeit”.

This repetitiveness lies at the core of our reading problem. When, having trekked through **Corona** until its final “Es ist Zeit” and wanting to believe that it is indeed time to make an important acknowledgement, we do not quite succeed. Already heralded by “es ist Zeit, daß du kommst und mich küssest!” of **Die Hand voller Stunden** (162), **Corona**’s final strophe may relay a shrinking back from “es ist Zeit, daß man weiß”, particularly if that impersonal “man” refers to the speaker himself rather than to the public in the street. Hence the call in **Spät und Tief** for its speaker’s own *Umkehr* is as yet unfulfilled. We therefore yield to the temptation to read the final “Es ist Zeit” as *Es ist Zeit, daß es Zeit wird, daß es Zeit ist*. The ‘impossible’ motif of the stone coming into bloom—representing the speaker himself—thus receives its motivation.

There are other reasons for the inability to give unwavering credence to the meaning of **Corona**’s closing strophe. The second strophe (“Im Spiegel ist Sonntag, / im Traum wird geschlafen, / der Mund redet wahr”) resists understanding. The first of these lines may have to do with the traditional Judaic hope having (once again) been dashed because the Messiah failed to arrive on the previous Sabbath. The second statement, however, brings the feeling of standing on quicksand. If “im Traum wird geschlafen” is actually as impossible as

the stone preparing to bloom, how can “der Mund redet wahr” be true? Does the speaker intend it to be true or are we *meant* to feel beset with doubt?

Our attempt to understand **Corona** affects the title. If its strophes are read as constituting a poem that bears witness, *corona* takes on the shine of a crown or halo. If they are understood as conveying the speaker’s hesitancy to witness, *corona* is like an aura, a vision of what ought to be.

With **Die Hand voller Stunden** understood as a forerunner, our reading of **Chanson einer Dame im Schatten**, **Spät und Tief**, and **Corona** as interconnected poems reveals the preoccupation with a deep problem, basically that of deciding on an answer to an all-important question. What is to be done with the recent past? Acknowledge it and take it on, or try to forget it and start anew?

Conclusion

Several remarks should be added to the readings suggested so far. In addition to the changes discernable in Celan’s employ of ambiguities that begin to boomerang and obscurities that harbor more and more bitter irony, there is the matter of increasing terseness. This tightening process becomes particularly evident in the Bucharest poems and thereafter, especially when a poem is read independently. Even reading poems as a series may fail to bring out all their nuances. Many an image stands there, seemingly independent and isolated, and taking on the quality of unfathomable metaphor. Side-by-side statements of this sort are, on the surface at any rate, readable as disconnected items stubborn in sound, upon first reading as more surrealistic than they actually are. Only when we try to find meanings by comparing motifs with their counterparts in other compositions, only then may we get glimpses of coherence allowing us to dream that we understand.

Despite the allusions pertaining to the Bible, Antiquity, et al, it is evident that during the Bucharest years Celan’s speaker is concerned with the Holocaust. This preoccupation with recent history differs from that of the Vienna months. From **Chanson einer Dame im Schatten** onward, these seven poems concern the ‘present’. Though they touch upon the past, they do so in order to consider the position to be taken vis-à-vis that past. Shake it off, and try to forget, try to be hopeful, and go on? Or take it on, make it part of oneself, and

nevertheless go on? Is it possible, is it warranted, to forget about “[die] Dame im Schatten”? Such are the questions to which the Vienna poems seek answers. In this sense they are fully autobiographical.

Celan’s early poetry draws attention to his preoccupation with the truths revealed by history—with history understood as including the experiences that came the poet’s way from his readings and, above all, the Holocaust. History tells truth. For Celan, if there is a source that fails to touch upon it, he bends the plot in order to bring out that truth, as he does in **Im Park** by letting us know that divinity becoming incarnate spells calamity (see p. 14).

As perceived by Celan’s speaker, history proper does not provide a retreat. Measuring the velocities of its terrors, he sees what Benjamin’s angel will come to see, massif upon massif, nothing but ruin and desolation. The past is therefore not more spacious than the present. When this orientation is crossed by ponderings about occasionalism, they lie at the heart of the attempt to achieve a transcendental leap resulting in the awareness that God is not even a deep depth behind a cloud, is unresponsive, full of wrath, undeserving of accolades, a destroyer, a killer.

With the truths of history firmly rooted in the mind, that mind is like a mirror troubling the depth of the corridor, the one of time spanning from the distant past (Antiquity and the Torah) to the present with its “wer säumte im Tod nicht vor Spiegeln?” (**Das Geheimnis der Farne**—171). Also the future is colored by Celan’s way of understanding history—cf. the death-connoting thrust of “schön und abhold dem Spiel, / das sie [Locken des Schmerzes] treiben im argen / *Widerschein ihrer Zukunft*” (italics added) of **Dunkles Aug im September** (183).

When the speaker gives voice to the reality contained in the mirror, reflects it, it acquires an analogical thrust by revealing the workings of his mind. The presiding spirit of Celan’s early work thus is that of the word bridging between the mirror and what it sees. This language gives names to thought but cannot replace it. With layers of memories becoming increasingly difficult to arrange in language or even to model thought, matter of the mind is not so much given verbal overtones as that the attempt is made to undergird it with history’s truth. A self-consciousness comes to the fore here that imprints Celan’s poetry with the Faustian element of striving. As a result, the bridge makes us aware of the space gaping between mind and poetic

word, and it testifies, not to unification, but to the lack of and perceived need of it.

What Celan's mirror sees is far from soothing. What we called history repeatedly tells him that the world is worse than out of joint. The trek from **Während der Reise** (the earlier title of **Landschaft**—10) to **Auf Reisen** (210) with its death-related “Staub” tells us so with remarkable consistency.

It is in the mind, then, that jugs overflow and break into shards; that blood saturates the soil making the flowers of death bloom; that love is wedded to death; that September is the month of the guillotine; that the Witebsks, Estremaduras, Madrids, Vietnams have always occurred.

But of course, what happened in those places belongs to the Paris years.

It is rueful that much had to remain unsaid.

Appendix

The Lithographs in *Der Sand aus den Urnen*

It would seem that Celan's interest in the visual arts is discernible well before he writes the poems **Unter ein Bild** (I 155—van Gogh), **Weissgrau** (II 19—van Gogh), **Mächte, Gewalten**, (II 209—van Gogh), and **Einkanter** (II 392—Rembrandt). In the very early **Die Mutter** (14), for instance, “die Steinernen vom Morgen” suggests the eye of a sculptor. **Umsonst malst du Herzen** (154) touches upon the art of painting. The following deliberations with focus on the poet-artist collaboration at work in the preparation for the press of *Der Sand aus den Urnen* deal with the question whether early in his career Celan is a ‘giver’ as well as a ‘receiver’, effects as much as he is affected.

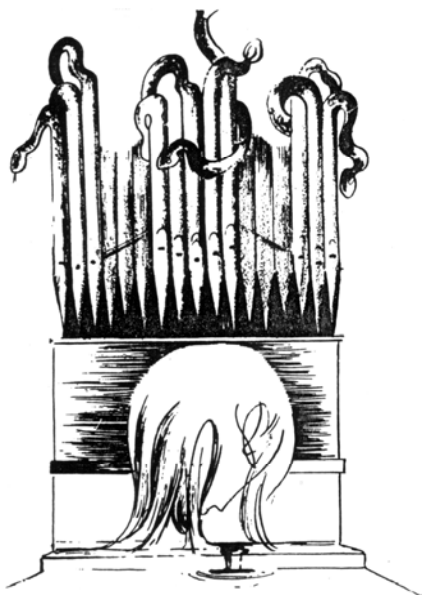
This volume features two nameless lithographs by Edgar Jené, of which the first faces the title page, and the second comes immediately before **Todesfuge**, the last poem in the collection. We call these illustrations I and II respectively. They are also contained in *Edgar Jené und der Traum vom Traume*, for which Celan wrote the commentary, and which was printed shortly before *Der Sand aus den Urnen*.

The interests shared by Jené and Celan must have developed very quickly after Celan's arrival in Vienna in January 1948. As early as February 2 the poet speaks in a letter to Margul-Sperber of Jené as the pope of Surrealism and of himself as its sole cardinal (*NL* July 1975: 50).

The first illustration in *Der Traum vom Traume* (see III) has no title. It shows a colonnade that looks neither Greek nor Roman. Tilting somewhat to the side, it seems to be ancient. On either side of its entrance stands a column, one topped with a jug, the other with an urn. At the end of the colonnade stands a structure that is flanged in the same way the columns are. It looks like the top of a broken pillar

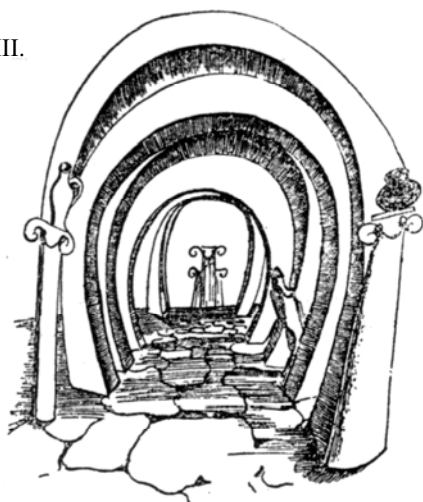


I.

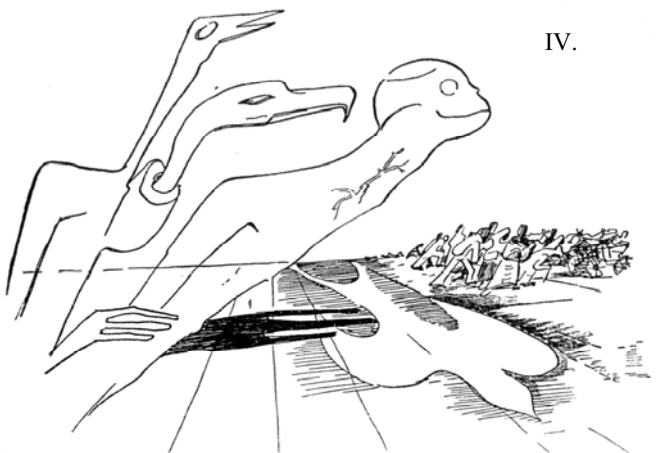


II.

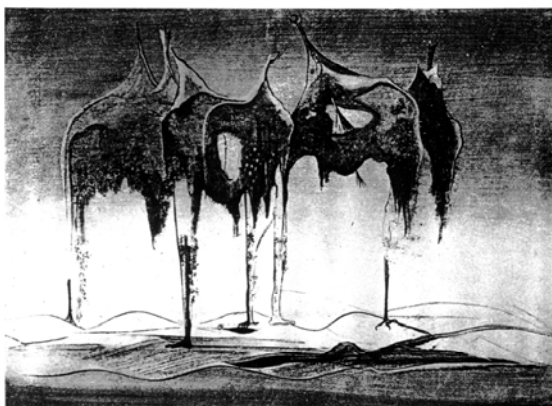
III.



IV.



V.



VI.



and resembles a high altar. The overall composition suggests not only the ruin of an old civilization, but also seems to associate with Anselm Kiefer's **Shulamite** (of 1983). In this painting we are looking at a catacomb with smoke-blackened arches that, as we 'walk into' the painting, gradually turn from vaguely Romanesque to pronouncedly Gothic. At the end of the catacomb there is an altar-like structure with flames on it. They seem to be gas flames. This altar is reached by going through the architecturally represented history of Christianity, and it suggests that throughout its eras Kiefer's **Shulamite** has been martyred as the burnt-offering on Christianity's altar. Since there appear to be seven flames, the menorah comes to mind. Though Kiefer obtained his title from the poem **Todesfuge**, the composition of his painting may have been influenced by Jené's drawing of the colonnade. Since Jené paid no attention to chronology when arranging his lithographs and other drawings for the press, this colonnade, which is not dated, may well be of 1948. If it is, it may be meant to illustrate Jené's impression, after he had read some of Celan's relevant poems, of the poet's way of looking at the recent past, at the ruin of Jewish civilization.

Eight of the thirty reproductions in *Traum vom Traume* are of lithographs, of which the third, our II, is called **Todesfuge**, the fourth, our I, **O Blume der Zeit**. The latter title derives from the closing phrase of Celan's **Umsonst** (154), the twentieth of the 48 poems constituting *Der Sand aus den Urnen*. Jené must have been generously adaptable, perhaps even self-effacing, given to art rather than ego. We may speculate that his reproductions in *Der Sand aus den Urnen* are without names because Celan wanted it so, perhaps in order to render the first illustration's significance applicable to his entire collection of poems by not allowing the eye to dwell exclusively on one of the drawing's flowers. Similarly, he may have wanted to do without *Todesfuge* as title for II lest it cause his readers to focus on the organ rather than the composition at large.

At least three of Jené's lithographs—**Sie flüchten** (see IV), **Das rote Meer geht über Land** (see V), and **Lasset uns schwören im Schläfe** (see VI)—are said to be of 1947, before the artist and Celan knew each other. If the title **Sie flüchten** were seen as an echo of Celan's "Wir flohen alle aus dem gleichen Land" of **Ballade vom Auszug der drei** (19), there would be a reversal involved: Celan's line is spoken by the three Furies featured in his poem (see p. 118), but in Jené's drawing the title applies to the people fleeing before the eyes of three bird-like figures to whom, if we could, we would give

German, Soviet, and Romanian identities. The bird in the foreground is seen to have swallowed what look like human figures, and the one apparently in the middle is an eagle or a vulture with an outstretched talon that casts a shadow larger than itself and touches the outline of a white dove flattened on the ground, as though trampled by countless feet. This detail raises the question about a possible connection with the dove and the bird of prey in **Der Einsame** (see p. 60 f.) and **Flügelrauschen** (see p. 86 f.).

Das rote Meer geht über Land, by Celan restated as “Das Blutmeer geht über Land” in the text he wrote for *Der Traum vom Traume* (III 160), may have its semi-counterpart in “wir lieben einander [...] // wie das Meer im Blutstrahl des Mondes” of **Corona** (209). The sea in the lithograph is represented by a black, cloud-like structure with equally dark strands coming down from it. Ominously looming over a bleak landscape, it reminds the beholder of the deadly cloud in **Espenbaum** (see p. 140), and at the same time visualizes and underscores the function of the sea in Celan’s early poetry (see pp. 195 ff.).

Lasset uns schwören im Schläfe may be a recall of “wir schwören sie [die heiligen Schwüre des Sandes] laut von den Dächern des traumlosen Schlafes” of **Spät und Tief** (208).

This line, in turn, may tie in with the closing paragraph of Kafka’s *Das Stadtwappen*:

Alles was in dieser Stadt an Sagen und Liedern entstanden ist, ist erfüllt von der Sehnsucht nach einem prophezeiten Tag, an welchem die Stadt von einer Riesenfaust in fünf kurz aufeinander-folgenden Schlägen zerschmettert werden wird. Deshalb hat auch die Stadt die Faust im Wappen (307).

The city’s doom is thus forecast in its own coat of arms.

Support for this suggested connection derives from the facts that Kafka’s story begins with “Anfangs war beim *babylonischen Turmbau* alles in leidlicher Ordnung” (306; italics added), and that in *Der Traum vom Traume* “Laßt uns also versuchen, im Schläfe zu schwören” is immediately followed by “Wir sind ein *Turm*, aus dessen Spitze unser Gesicht hervorbricht, unser *geballtes Steingesicht*” (11-12; italics added). Indeed, when Celan continues:

Wir sind höher als wir selber, ein anderer Turm sind wir über dem höchsten der Türme, und wir können uns selber übersehen. Tausendfältig besteigen wir

uns selber. Welcher Möglichkeit: in Scharen uns oben zum Schwur zu sammeln! (11-12)[,]

it becomes intriguing that in Kafka's story we never see the building of the tower, and that Celan creates as it were a "speech tower" in which he captures the fist-tower combination suggested in Jené's drawing.

The drift of these remarks is evident: the lithographs that in *Der Traum vom Traume* are titled—including those of 1947—may have received their names after Celan and the artist met in early 1948. Meinecke (*UPC* 21) may be of a similar opinion:

Manche Ausdrücke in Celans Gedichten sind auch die Titel von Jenés Lithographien, so in etwa **Ein Segel verläßt ein Auge**, genau **Der Fremde**, **Die Todesfuge**, **O Blume der Zeit**, **Morgen**, **Gestern**.

When she deals with lithograph I, Beese 62 wonders whether "das Bild von Celans Gedicht [**Umsonst**] angeregt ist oder das Gedicht vom Bild". We hazard instead that for the two lithographs to be featured in *Der Sand aus den Urnen* Celan may have asked Jené to read **Umsonst** and a number of other poems (**Russischer Frühling** among them) in order for the illustrations to be drawn in a specific way—see below.

Beese raises the question whether the desolate landscape in I consists of stone or of ice. If we opt for an ice-and-water scene rather than a rocky landscape, we do so to avoid repetitious statements that would be needed if we were to do justice to both possibilities. Besides, for the present purpose the answer to Beese's question may be of minor consequence, the important thing being that in either case, against all odds, a flower manages to bloom in this environment; it leads Elischer 20 to speak of "Zeit als Ödnis".

It bears pointing out that 22 of the 48 poems in *Der Sand aus den Urnen* refer, explicitly or indirectly, to flowers, and that sixteen additional ones contain references to vegetation as well. The earth brings forth again, though there is merit in pointing to the thought-provoking fact that virtually all the plants occurring in Celan's early poetry have poisonous as well as healing properties, either in homoeopathy or allopathy.

Thinking of I as an 'icescape' accommodates the presence of the flower in the foreground, which looks like a water lily. With this view also, we can conceive of an iceberg floating in the background against a dark sky and in an equally dark body of water, so that the horizon is

barely discernible. The hair-like strands hanging from the top of the iceberg as well as from the figure in the foreground share the darkness of the water, and suggest that a melting process is taking place or at one time took place.

Partly behind the iceberg, partly behind the foreground figure, and partly below the horizon is the sun. It is uncertain whether it is a setting or a rising sun, whether we are looking to the west or the east. If we opt for a setting sun, does the end of the day forbode renewed icing, new dangers, new threats, deepening despair? If, on the other hand, we conceive of a rising sun, other questions arise. Does the dawning of a new day come with the promise of new possibilities? Are we looking forward to further thawing? Is there room for hope therefore? Is the sun a 'nevertheless' in a landscape of desolation? These juxtaposed chains of possibilities stem from willed ambiguity, perhaps from the intent to relay anguish barely stayed by hope, and in either case are in the viewer's mind crossed by the values that in Celan's early poetry mark the dawn-nightfall complex in which death lurks in light as well as darkness.

Celan burdens the east with such connotations in his post-1948 poetry as well, in **Hüttenfenster** (I 278: "den Wander- / Osten, die / Schwebenden, die / Menschen-und-Juden"), **Aschenglorie** (II 72: "das vor euch, vom Osten her, Hin- / gewürfelte, furchtbar"), and **Solve** (II 82: "Entosteter, zu / Brandscheiten zer- / spaltener Grabbaum").

As understood here, to look east is to look at the beginning of Christianity, and to find it as dreadful as any other ill omen. However, for the sake of equilibrium we point out that the critics dealing with references to the east in the Paris poems have identified it with the Bukowina homeland (Meinecke 1970: 123; P.Mayer, 1969: 185; Pöggeler 1986: 83) rather than with biblical Israel.

It is remarkable that in his early years Celan never refers to the west unequivocally, and does so in his later poetry only in **Aus Engelsmaterie** (II 72: "vom Osten gestreut, einzubringen im Westen, gleich-ewig-"). This statement, related to *Isaiah* 43:5 (see Schulze 1970: 500), in which east and west are figured as the sower and the reaper respectively, with Celan becomes something other, becomes the death of Jews. This paucity of references to the west may be due to the fact that formerly chapels on the western side of ecclesiastical establishments tended to be dedicated to Michael in the hope that he, the warrior-archangel, would provide

protection against the west from where Christianity thought evil threatened. This dearth may also be because Michael lent his name to the Romanian Legion.

If thus there seems to be no merit in viewing Jené's lithograph as denoting a dawning promise, does it follow that we are looking at the setting sun, and that the lithograph is Jené's alone? Not yet, for there is Glenn (1977: 522-25) when he studies the motifs of nightmares and dreams in Celan's poetry.

In 1948, Glenn says, Celan's use of dream imagery undergoes a significant alteration (522). Whereas in the span 1944-47 dreams are associated with evil and danger (523), the poet's attitude toward dreams changes considerably when he writes *Der Traum vom Traume*: regarding **Ein Segel verläßt ein Auge** he says "Wir besteigen es [den Turm] schlafend: so sehen wir was zu träumen bleibt" (10). A moment later Celan states: "Was Edgar Jené [...] Gestalt annehmen läßt-ist es nur hier zuhause? Wollten wir nicht auch den Alp der alten Wirklichkeit erkennen?" Thus sleep, Glenn argues,

has become a time when new relationships can be established; dreams are no longer representations of the old nightmare but have [...] become harbingers of a new reality (524).

Then, referring to poems written in Vienna, Glenn speaks of

affirmative dreamlike images [...] they are no longer nightmares but are compatible with sleep, with a peaceful communication with the irrational, the unconscious (524).

Since in Paris Celan begins to focus on nightmares again, Vienna emerges as a respite, due perhaps to the poet's entry into a new world, a possible escape from the past. For a brief time, then, there may be hope, imaged by a rising sun. It may be only hesitant hope, but it may be hope nevertheless, despite the ambiguities elsewhere in lithograph I.

There are uncertainties other than those pertaining to the sun. They are even evident in the water lily blooming in the foreground. This flower provides an example of how a motif, once used—in **Im Park** (see study I)—may submerge in order then to reappear and be employed anew. In the Romanian poem **Tristețe** (157), the opening lines, translated under the title **Trauer** (214), bring us this:

Die Träume, den Sturmwind des morgengeröteten Abends,
 den in der untergegangenen Seerose schlafenden See,
 kommst du mit deinem Schweigen zu vereisen, schwarze
 Schwester dessen, der dir als Krone gesetzt hat
 5 den zackigen Himmel aus Schnee auf die Schläfen.

That this poem comes with reminiscences of **Im Park** is suggested by a passage in the closely related one-strophe **Azi noapte** (169) which, translated under the title **Heut Nacht** (217), reads

5 *ein gefrorener See*, in dem um die *Krone* aus Schuppen sich
 die *Ertrunkenen* streiten,
 und das Leben ist *der Kahn am Ufer*, von Rudern verlassen
 (italics added).

The first of these lines echoes motifs encountered in **Tristete**, while the second is a reminder of the abandoned boat in **Im Park**. For that matter, the addressee in **Azi noapte** may be the same as the one who in **Tristete** is identified as the black sister in the garb of Greek mythology, but ultimately may have to be seen as the sister of the Judaic tradition.

In terms of ‘realism’, the second line of **Tristete** - **Trauer** is intriguing for several reasons. It manipulates things in a way that smacks as much of François Villon as does the title **Eine Gauner- und Ganoenweise gesungen zu Paris emprès Pontoise von Paul Celan aus Czernowitz bei Sadagora** (I 229). Celan employs this device in a number of poems (e.g., **Hieroglyphe**—49: “Die Äste, die Abendwind malten”), but particularly during the Bucharest years, for example, in **Lob der Ferne** (207), and thereafter—see e.g., the closing lines of **Tau** (II 191): “der Herr brach das Brot, / das Brot brach den Herrn”. Nevertheless, “[der] in der untergegangenen Seerose schlafende See” makes eminent sense if we relate it to the botanical phenomenon of the species of water lily that recedes below the water by nightfall—see below. At the same time, our reading establishes a link between the water lily of **Im Park** and its counterpart in **Tristete**. It is a link in the realm of Eros, that is, if we view the latter poem as having received its impetus from details from Antiquity and merged into the poet’s own ‘plot’ involving Demeter (the poem’s “Du”), Poseidon (her brother, the violator of Persephone, and identified with the sleeping water), and Persephone herself (the water lily). The latter

is in the habit of disappearing, Persephone because winter is coming, the lily because night approaches.

As for the water lily in Jené's illustration,¹ some of its features demand attention. It blooms well above the (frozen) water, and its dark stripes suggest it to be a particular sub-species, the so-called red Indian lotus (*nelumbo nucifera*). What Jené drew thus supports the 'realism' of the second line in the **Tristețe - Trauer** passage cited above, for it is this particular plant that blooms above the water, closes at the end of day, retreats below the surface in order at daybreak to emerge again, turned toward the rising sun. These facts do not clarify whether the lithograph shows the flower closing preparatory to submerging, or whether it has just emerged because of daybreak. It may be vital to the lithograph's intent that this ambiguity remain, a mix of despair and hesitant hope.

Rising from the same field as the water lily is a figure with a seemingly hexagonal base. If it is a huge crystal, it may represent Celan's abiding interest in geology, and may suggest that it is from the earth alone that memorable forms arise. Perhaps, though, the shape of the base represents man's attempt to give structure to formless materials, as a sculptor or shaper of language would. If as a mark of human activity the base suggests the development of culture, it may in part be an ancient culture, perhaps that of monotheism in a world in which pagan deities flourish. Because the top of this cultural monument looks as though beheaded, there is no contradiction involved, just a paradox, if we see it as also affected by modern man—history thus 'visualized'. For above the base and diagonally slanted toward the viewer is a flat, irregularly shaped, light-colored surface that looks as though something has been sliced off. Attached to this surface are the dark drippings already mentioned. As Beese 63 suggests, black holes in the surface somehow suggest eyes or eye-sockets. Ambiguity persists, may denote weeping and/or hint at blindness.

The structure directly above the base looks like a human hand holding a plant somewhat wilted, as though torn out. It seems to belong to the *Liliaceae*. Of the flowers belonging to this family Celan has by 1948 only employed the tulip and the autumn crocus. We are not dealing with a tulip, however, since the two dark-colored

¹ There is no indication that Jené knew Romanian. If the poems just mentioned indeed had a bearing on his way of drawing the water lily, he must have relied on information provided by Celan.

attachments situated at the lower end of the stalk are tubular in shape. We therefore take the flower to represent the autumn crocus, the *Herbstzeitlose*.

With the *Herbstzeitlose* we have arrived at a motif that has been discussed by a number of Celan readers. Their elucidations are based primarily on findings obtained from the post-Vienna poems. The poems antedating them that either clearly or possibly use the same motif are:

Mein Karren knarrt nicht mehr (35):

- vi12 Die Zeitlose holt
Atem für tausend Herbste...

*

Aus der Zeit (44):

- i 6 Die Blumen, die Blumen
des nächsten Frühlings
finden uns nicht.

*

Einsamkeit (80):

- ii 5 Den Sonnenuhren raubte ich die Stunden.
Und nur den Blumen ließ ich ihre Zeit.

*

Ich weiß vom Fels (82):

- ii 5 Ich weiss von Sternen, denen ich nicht glaubte:
es ist ein Weg, ein Weg an Herbstzeitlosen hin...

*

Die Schwelle des Traumes (146):

- ii 6 Ich geh noch vors Haus zu forschen nach Wasser im
Sande:
leer bleib der letzte, der achtzehnte Krug, dem die Blume
der Wiesen entfiel.

*

Umsonst (154):

- i 5 die Halme der Schwermut verteilt er im Heer und die
Blumen der Zeit.
- [...]
- ii 11 'O Halm', vermeint er zu hören, 'o Blume der Zeit'.

*

Erinnerung an Frankreich (186):

- 1 Du denk mit mir: der Himmel von Paris, die große
Herbstzeitlose...

Perhaps in **Auf Reisen** (210) "ein Gespann für dein Herz", via *Herzgespann*, is meant to lead to the sub-species *Mutterkraut*, which in its turn associates with *Mutterblume*—cf. "die Zeit- /lose im Aug, die Mutter- / Blume" of **Die Silbe Schmerz** (I 280).

The *Herbstzeitlose* has been linked with the mother figure, with that of the sister, that of the Shekhinah, and that of the biblical Rachel weeping for her children. We therefore venture that, as presented in the lithograph, the autumn crocus, like the water lily, represents a love principle. Whereas Kaern 99 might speak of "die Blume" as "Wegweiser", and Lyon (1962: 18, 179) sees "the flower of time" as the ephemeral blossom of love, we wonder about the validity of a possible equation—to be worded carefully: the way the water lily seems to belong in the realm of Eros, so the autumn crocus may relate to that of Agape. To be sure, we would have to apply some shadings to this Eros and this Agape because the distinction between them is blurred, due at least in part to the fact that we also saw the tulip as having its value in the realm of love but did not specify that love in detail, and saw fit to view the rose functioning in the later poem **Psalm** (I 225) as partaking of both Eros and Agape (see p. 11).

By turning toward the sun, the water lily in the lithograph at the same time 'bows' before the figure holding the autumn crocus. Is this a matter of Eros declaring itself subservient to Agape, or simply of a flower put before a monument the way we put flowers before a gravestone?

The sun may indeed be rising, and a healing may have begun, however brief its duration. Also, our readings have it that the name **O Blume der Zeit** given to the lithograph in *Der Traum vom Traume* does not apply to one specific plant, but to the illustration in its entirety. To summarize: Celan's use of the motifs of water lily and autumn crocus comes to fruition in the lithograph which sheds light on

the way the poet wants his poetry in *Der Sand aus den Urnen* understood. As he states in a letter of December 1951: "Auf Schritt und Tritt blühte die Welt. Und noch aus den Verzweiflungen wurden Gedichte" (Chalfen 155). For Celan, this retrospective statement may have been particularly applicable to his Vienna period.

It is tempting to accept the suggestion that the figure holding the autumn crocus presents the profile of whatever is left of a face bent down over the right shoulder (Beese 63). Lithograph I thus shares a motif with the second, the difference being that in the first the figure is turned toward the viewer, while in the second the head is seen from the back. The illustrations may cause us to wonder whether Benjamin's angel of history would descend, if only he could, in order to make whole what has been violently separated.

If we believe that when designing the first lithograph for *Der Sand aus den Urnen* Jené may have welcomed Celan's input, it is logical to assume that he was equally receptive to the poet's ideas regarding the second. This illustration shows seventeen organ pipes—a meaningful number from Celan's perspective. Eleven of those pipes have airholes, and from each of their tops coils a serpent. In front of the organ is the back of a woman's head turned sideways and down over the right shoulder. Below the face blood pools, seemingly on and beneath the keyboard. We do not know the source of this blood, but it brings violence and suffering to mind. Since we do not see the organist's hands, we do not know whether she is actually playing the instrument; if she is, she may or may not have been forced to do so.

Regarding the source of the organ motif we could simply refer to the title of the poem **Todesfuge**. But we must also listen to Wiedemann-Wolf 84, note 191:

Meines Erachtens ist die Verbindung von Noltens Bild [in Mörikes *Maler Noltens*] von der unheimlichen Orgel-spielerin, das in der Schlußvision zum lebenden Tableau wird, mit Edgar Jenés Illustration zur **Todesfuge** [...] bisher nicht bemerkt worden. Diese Lithographie [...] verweist zu deutlich auf Mörike, als daß sie als zufällig angenommen werden könnte.

Initially, Mörike's organ figures in a drawing depicting a night scene; thereafter it is an actual organ located in the castle in which much of the story's action takes place. It is the salient details in the description of the sketch that Celan had in mind if he indeed helped Jené find ideas for the illustration that was to accompany the poem **Todesfuge**:

[Die] offene Seite rechts [in der Skizze] läßt einen Teil der tiefliegenden, in Nebel glänzende Ebene übersehen; dagegen erhebt sich zur Linken im Vordergrund eine nasse Felswand, unter der sich ein lebhafter Quell bildet, und in deren Vertiefung eine [...] Orgel [...] gestellt ist; vor ihr [...] sitzt [...] eine Hauptfigur (Mörike 7).

This is followed by data on figures engaged in a dance of death, after which the speaker returns

zu der anziehenden Organistin [...]mit gesenktem Haupte [...] und es ist, als sinne dieser Geist im jetzigen Augenblicke auf die Möglichkeit einer Scheidung von seinem zweiten leiblichen Leben (Mörike 8).

The entire description, its atmosphere, the suggestion that the figure before the organ may be about to die a second time, it must all have been compellingly apt material to serve the illustration for **Todesfuge**. This suggestion can be supported by other details in Mörike's story. The organ player in the drawing turns out to be a gypsy in real life, therefore a member of a race hunted down during the Holocaust. When then one of the characters has a nightmare and soon thereafter dies, it is not only that the gypsy's gift of prophecy is revealed in an image apt to draw the attention of anyone contemplating the composition of an illustration for **Todesfuge** ("Konstanze Josephine Armond wird auch bald die Orgel mit uns spielen"—72), but also that she is a Medusa of sorts. Other characters on whom she lays eyes die as well, the titular hero included. The latter's father, a pastor, and therefore a local tone-setter of organized Christianity, abhors the gypsy and wishes her dead. By the end of the story this wish is fulfilled.

We may now entertain the possibility that Celan asked Jené to (re)read some of the passages in *Maler Nolten*. Such reading would not enable the artist to incorporate into the lithograph each detail pertaining to the gypsy figure. He had for instance no way of indicating whether she was to bring a command performance (as the speakers in **Todesfuge** are), and if she was, whether she was capable of doing so. This much is certain, however: Mörike's organ, whenever played, turns out to be calamitous for one character or other. This seems to be no less certain: the female figure in front of the lithograph's organ is meant as a composite, of Sulamith as the embodiment of Judaism and Mörike's gypsy. Whether this outcome registered in exactly the same way in Celan's mind is a different

matter; nothing prevented the poet from seeing the head as representative of additional individuals, the mother among them.

One of these figures must be Goethe's Gretchen, not just because of one of the two functions we assigned to Margarete of the poem **Todesfuge**. As stated during the discussion of **Russischer Frühling** (p. 157 f), details pertaining to Gretchen are detectable in "Knie, es wird Zeit nun zu knien in den Orgelstimmen von einst", and this "Orgelstimmen", while in its setting functioning as a metaphor for cannons blazing destruction, leads straight to the organ of the lithograph.

Attention should also be drawn to the moment when Faust has a vision:

- Faust: Mephisto, siehst du dort
 Ein blasses, schönes Kind allein und ferne stehen?
 Sie schiebt sich langsam nur vom Ort,
 Sie scheint mit geschloßnen Füßen zu gehen.
 Ich muß bekennen, daß mir deucht,
 Daß sie dem guten Gretchen gleicht.
- Mephisto: Laß das nur stehn! dabei wird's niemand wohl.
 Es ist ein Zauberbild, ist leblos, ein Idol.
 Ihm zu begegnen, ist nicht gut;
 Vom starren Blick erstarrt des Menschen Blut,
 Und er wird fast in Stein verkehrt,
 Von der Meduse hast du ja gehört.
- Faust: Fürwahr, es sind die Augen eines Toten,
 Die eine liebende Hand nicht schloß.
 Das ist die Brust, die Gretchen mir geboten,
 Das ist der süße Leib, den ich genoß.
- Mephisto: Das ist die Zauberei, du leicht verführter Tor!
 Denn jedem kommt sie wie sein Liebchen vor.
- Faust: Welch eine Wonne! welch ein Leiden!
 Ich kann von diesem Blick nicht scheiden.
 Wie sonderbar muß diesen schönen Hals
 Ein einzig rotes Schnürchen schmücken,
 Nicht breiter als ein Messerrücken!
- Mephisto: Ganz recht! ich seh's ebenfalls.
 Sie kann das Haupt auch unterm Arme tragen;
 Denn Perseus hat's ihr abgeschlagen.-
 Nur immer diese Lust zum Wahn! (4183 ff.)

What Faust sees relates of course to Gretchen's forthcoming decapitation. Even though Mephisto for reasons of his own prefers to pass that vision off as a non-sensical bagatelle and relates it to Medusa instead, Gretchen demands her representation in the woman's head

situated beneath the lithograph's organ pipes. The illustration thus constitutes an emphatic reclamation of her:

'She is ours, the few who are left, not yours, you who tried to put an exclusive claim on her, in doing so made her subservient to your racial hatreds, thus victimized and barbarized her, indeed, thus mutilated her, one of the glories of human culture, culture worthy of the name, culture therefore beyond your ken. And while reclaiming Gretchen, we reclaim the gypsy Elizabeth as well, and proclaim our solidarity with her and all those of whom you thought they were yours exclusively, to do with whatever you liked, and/or whom you caused to serve false purposes, the way you did with Bach's music and with Novalis' blue flower'.

For that organ is Bach's organ from which serpents creep, those with which the commandant plays in the poem **Todesfuge**. There are eleven of them in the lithograph. Could it be that, because of Judas' suicide, we are to think in terms of eleven disciples-turned-apostles spreading the good tidings? Is that why these eleven serpents are there, funest in their own right, and crawling from organ pipes from which also came the terrifying tones of **Dies irae** causing Gretchen to faint in terror?

Lithograph II may be seen as the visualization of a commemorative act, as the visualization of a song of lamentation.

As it is with the woman's head before the organ, however, so it is with the serpents. Just as the head represents multiple figures, literary, religious, and otherwise, and harbors multiple and contradictory concepts having to do with destruction and retrieval, just so the serpents, and with them the organ, have double functions. The serpents have 'acted out' the role that in the poem **Todesfuge** is actually the commandant's (who 'merely' plays with serpents as though he were Trakl's God—see p. 167). From a different perspective, those same serpents "act out" a second role assigned to them in the lithograph. The role of healing is part of the serpents' symbolic power—ask Asclepius, who can even raise the dead. Not only the woman's head, but also the serpents have multiple value. The organ's pipes also have dual symbolism, for now they may be understood as capable of emitting, not only a death fugue or **Dies irae**, but the Kaddish prayer or **Kol nidre** as the Jewish counterpart to **Dies irae**. Thus Bach, too, for reasons similar to those applied to the retrieval of Goethe's Gretchen, is re-appropriated by the lithograph. In this manner, to put it in the language of sheer metaphor, the camp commander has nothing left to play with; his toys are taken away from

him, and his career has come to an end. In this sense lithograph II constitutes a celebration.

The line of reasoning we followed brings us back to a suggestion made during our discussion of the poem **Todesfuge**, to the effect that its Margarete is revealed as a dual-role figure, first as the commandant's sweetheart or wife, then as the Gretchen of Goethe's *Faust*. In the latter capacity she is victimized because of the adoption forced upon her by the gospel of racial purity. What the poem does not say is that this Gretchen will be decapitated via the application of justice—which she herself considers to be divine as well as worldly justice. Indeed, it is the dread of divine justice that terrorizes her when the chorus in the cathedral takes volume and sings the **Dies irae**. Goethe, of course, saves Gretchen by means of a deus-ex-machina device, not in life, but in death. In contrast to this, we can see the Celan-Jené duo, Celan explaining, wanting to be understood, wanting art to leap to art, the visual aiding the verbal, and Jené taking it all in: about the need to retrieve Gretchen by means of the verbal and visual arts working together. Jené, sensitive artist, complies. The forthcoming criticism will bear down on the verbal component of the collaboration, a component deemed all too artful. Before that happens, Celan, perhaps gratefully and enthusiastically, dedicates his **Erinnerung an Frankreich** (186) to Jené.

In addition to the head representing the mother, the Shekhinah, the biblical Rachel, the sister of Judaism, the gypsy of Mörike, the Gretchen of Goethe fame—and with the latter two possibly German literature in general—somewhere there is the head of Medusa, the killing one of mythology as well as the preserving one. The references to Medusa in the foregoing studies arose spontaneously and in each case focused on her deadliness without the intent to build to the present moment. Now we must draw emphatic attention to Medusa's opposite quality by referring to Büchner's Lenz as quoted by Celan himself in *Der Meridian* (III 191):

Wie ich gestern neben am Tal hinaufging, sah ich auf einem Steine zwei Mädchen sitzen: die eine band ih Haar auf, die andre half ihr; und das goldne Haar hing herab, und ein ernstes bleiches Gesicht, und doch so jung, und die schwarze Tracht, und die andre so sorgsam bemüht. Die schönsten, innigsten Bilder der altdeutschen Schule geben kaum eine Ahnung davon. Man möchte manchmal ein Medusenhaupt sein, um so eine Gruppe in Stein verwandeln zu können, und den Leuten zurufen.

What for Lenz could be no more than a wish is realized in the lithograph. It is this preserving Medusa who demands her due now that from the spring Mnemosyne, Memory *and* mother of the Muses, *Gedächtnis* is given an anchoring place. As Weigel 273 puts it, “Die Medusa kann als mythische Urszene des Gedächtnisses gelesen werden”. It is from this perspective that Celan may have realized that Mephisto as quoted was quite correct, even if in a way this minion himself did not have in mind: it is Medusa who turns Faust’s vision into a monument for all times. This very same Medusa is at work, not only in Celan’s poetry, but also in his collaboration with Jené. This Medusa fixes in the collective memory, seeks to immortalize.

Abbreviations

<i>AeS</i>	<i>Argumentum e Silentio. International Paul Celan Symposium/Internationales Paul Celan Symposium.</i> Ed. Amy D. Colin. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987.
<i>APR</i>	<i>American Poetry Review</i>
<i>AsnSL</i>	<i>Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen</i>
<i>Buko</i>	<i>Bukowina. Studien zu einer versunkenen Literaturlandschaft: Berichte der internationalen Tagung "Die deutschsprachige Literatur der Bukowina."</i> Eds. Dietmar Goltschnigg and Anton Schwob. Tübingen: Francke, 1990.
<i>CJb</i>	<i>Celan-Jahrbuch</i>
<i>CL</i>	<i>Comparative Literature</i>
<i>DMF</i>	<i>Der Minnesangs Frühling.</i> Ed. Karl von Kraus. 35th ed. Stuttgart: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1970.
<i>DU</i>	<i>Der Deutschunterricht</i>
<i>DVj</i>	<i>Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift</i>
<i>ÉG</i>	<i>Études germaniques</i>
<i>ÉL</i>	<i>Études littéraires</i>
<i>GLL</i>	<i>German Life and Letters</i>
<i>GR</i>	<i>The Germanic Review</i>
<i>GRM</i>	<i>Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift</i>
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gesammelte Schriften</i>
<i>GW</i>	<i>Gesammelte Werke</i>
<i>HJb</i>	<i>Hölderlin-Jahrbuch</i>
<i>JBDS</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft</i>
<i>Luk</i>	<i>Literatur und Kritik</i>
<i>MAL</i>	<i>Modern Austrian Literature</i>
<i>ML</i>	<i>Midrash and Literature.</i> Eds. Geoffrey H. Hartmann and Sanford Budick. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>NdH</i>	<i>Neue deutsche Hefte</i>

<i>NL</i>	<i>Neue Literatur. Zeitschrift des Schriftstellerverbandes der sozialistischen Republik Rumänien</i>
<i>NR</i>	<i>Neue Rundschau</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>STCL</i>	<i>Studies in Twentieth Century Literature</i>
<i>TCL</i>	<i>Twentieth Century Literature</i>
<i>TNR</i>	<i>The New Republic</i>
<i>TuK</i>	<i>Text und Kritik</i>
<i>ÜPC</i>	<i>Über Paul Celan. Ed. Dietlind Meinecke. 2nd ed. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1973.</i>
<i>YFS</i>	<i>Yale French Studies</i>
<i>ZfK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kulturgeschichte</i>

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