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Paul Celan and the Processes of Survival in Post-Shoah Jewish Writing

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty of Jacksonville State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in English.

By

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Jacksonville, Alabama

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Ari Savage May 3, 2024

Abstract

The following is a study of the poetry of Paul Celan as a representation of psychological and social processes present in the written works of Shoah survivors. It begins with an analysis of the place of writing in Jewish culture, then identifies three primary processes which operate in sequence: alienation, individuation, and integration. By examining Paul Celan's highly personal and autobiographical texts in the context of his life experience as a Shoah survivor it is possible to discern the social and psychological forces at work which compel survivors to express their traumas in written form, and to gain a better understanding of the work of survivor-writers in the greater landscape of Jewish writing.

Table of Contents

Page

Paul Celan and the Processes of Survival in Post-Shoah Jewish Writing

The evil of genocide is beyond the limits of any traditional understandings of ethics. The Shoah (more commonly referred to as the Holocaust), due to its scale and the methods used in it, is an effective example of this malignancy. The endeavor of making meaning, the sum of Western civilization's attempts at constructing a system of values and mores to explain society, was forever complicated and cast into doubt by the industrialized brutality of the Shoah. The world had seen genocide before, though it did not have that specific name, but never on such a scale and with the speed provided by a thorough bureaucratic system and modern technical capabilities in construction and travel turned specifically toward murder. Survivors were left to interpret the vicious mechanisms of hatred and destruction through the lens of their own stories and to reconcile what was before with what had happened through any means available. The most common of the effective methods was, and remains, writing. The survivor's writing demonstrates the fulfillment of three processes: alienation, individuation, and integration.

The context of survival, and of the survivor in the context of Jewish writing, must be explored before discussing Celan's work in detail. This will be the focus of chapter one, covering material including: definition of and selections from the Tanakh; the work of Yiddish-language writers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the philosophy of Martin Buber, and an example of the post-Celan era from Rachel Mennies' collection *The Glad Hand of God Points Backwards.* The philosophical arguments of Adorno concerning the writing of poetry after Auschwitz are also covered here. Moving on from chapter one, the next three chapters cover the specifics of the three survival processes in order.

Alienation refers to the survivor as an exile. They and their culture, in a sense, have been destroyed. Even though by nature a survivor has not perished, their context has been so

irrevocably altered that who they were is functionally dead. Alienation as experienced by Celan will be explored in chapter two via analysis of his poems “Crystal” and “Death Fugue.” The way his post-Shoah worldview had been altered in the immediate aftermath of genocide can be discerned from his poetic output.

Individuation refers to personal expression and sense of self reestablished in a new social context via connections with others and the establishment of a place in that new context. Celan’s new life in France and his evolving but divided sense of self are the focus of chapter three. Celan remained, until the end of his life, determined not to let go of this identity. When he visited Israel in 1969, he chose not to ascend the mount at Masada. Lina Barouch, in her article on the varying approaches taken to translating Celan’s work into Hebrew and on Celan’s own philosophy of translation, argues that he felt it would mark a final transition in his existence, going from a diasporic Jew to a returned Jew. This would mean that he had, in some way, completed the process, closed the narrative of his people’s history as manifested in himself. He would not become fully a member of another culture, whether remade Israeli or the reimagined post-war diaspora of any country and held on to the remnants of his pre-War identity, making of himself a human memorial. However, the operative word in the previous sentence is “human,” and humans are not changeless reminders. They are living things and living things change and are changed by their contexts. His poetics, with its emphasis on witnesses versus the silenced and its intermingling of growth and decay, is filled with his ambivalence about mutability in general. This is dealt with in detail in chapter three, which presents evidence in these forms: biographical details; references to literary trauma theory; and analysis of the poems “*Auf Reisen,”* “In Egypt,” “Corona,” *and “Aschenglorie.”* Chapter four covers the complex bleeding together of individuation into integration, and the unusual nature of Celan’s integration.

Integration refers to cementing one's place in a new context by maintaining one's new ties and bringing into it those perceptions and memories able to be salvaged from the previous self and identity; this is the continuation and fulfillment of individuation. Through these processes the survivor-writer makes the evil that was previously unimaginable something that can be examined, understood (but never condoned), and hopefully prevented from ever happening again. Integration came more fully to other survivors who made an impact on Jewish literary history, such as Eliezer Wiesel, Viktor Frankl, and even Celan's contemporary and adoptive sister, Nelly Sachs. While they may not have always been healthy or happy afterward, they created new contexts for themselves and grew and changed their identities after surviving the Shoah. A careful study of Celan's work reveals places where he has integrated into his new context, and others where he refuses the changes necessary for integration, carving a deeper place for himself as an eternal resident alien in his persona as both witness and victim. His work demonstrates the way he becomes fractured between two versions of himself to integrate into his new context: Celan the human being, and Celan the memorial. Attempts to combine these two result in a human memorial, which is unsustainable.

A human memorial, as opposed to one built of stone or metal, is a nightmare image if one visualizes it literally. A human memorial would be stuck halfway between alive and fossilized. The pain would be excruciating. Even if one regards the concept in the purely figurative sense, a human memorial would need to deny segments of their individual needs, including those that relate to others such as social and familial needs, to remain in sufficiently unaltered condition to memorialize anything. Celan is unique in his need to do this. Wiesel did not have to do it, nor did Frankl, but they were able to separate who they were from what they wrote even when it was deeply personal. For Celan, that separation is not there. He *is* his poetry. Setting aside biography,

especially the issue of the Goll plagiarism charge, some evidence can be seen in *"Rebleute,"* the last poem Celan worked on, which is explored in chapter four. Celan's work is focused around ensuring memory of the Shoah and that these memories continue to evoke loss and rage, but it is also focused around creating a place to stand or hide or crouch, catching one's breath and remembering that survival, some kind of continuation (of oneself or one's work, memory, or legacy) is possible. These topics are treated more thoroughly in chapter four using evidence derived from biographical details, a more detailed examination of concepts from the work of Martin Buber, and an analysis of Celan's "Meridian" speech. Chapter four also utilizes a revisitation of "In Egypt" and "Death Fugue," along with analysis of "Aspen Tree," "A Song in the Wilderness," "With the voice of the field mouse," and "*Rebleute.*"

This thesis concludes with some final thoughts on *"Rebleute,"* some analysis of Sabrina Orah Mark's "Non Vixit" provided for context and the ground of these arguments in a modern context, and concluding remarks on the Adorno-Celan philosophical division as it applies to the survivor-writer such as Celan.

Chapter 1: Celan in the Context of Jewish Writing

The history of the written word among the Jewish people is long enough that extant sources do not necessarily constitute a representative sample of all Jewish written works. However, as the extant works have demonstrated exceptional resilience, they should be considered representative of the overall literary output of the Jewish people as it concerns survival. To be representative of survival something must endure or concern resistance to destruction, and endurance is a favorite topic in Jewish writing throughout the previous six millennia. Before even looking at the literature itself, however, it is necessary to define and defend the concept of a Jewish corpus of written works as it is used in this chapter.

The question of what constitutes Jewish literature, as well as whether that term even has any meaning, has been debated before more than once. In this document the term “literature” is being avoided where possible due to the exclusionary nature of the category, but in this chapter, it cannot be avoided due to its prevalent use in sources debating the subject of what makes a written work Jewish or not. For the purposes of this document, writing can be considered Jewish writing, or Jewish literature, if it is authored by a member by birth or conversion of the Jewish people who considers themselves to be such, and who openly references topics of historical and/or cultural interest to that people. These criteria are broad because the criteria determining Jewishness are broad. Familiarity and shared cultural touchstones, inculcated by upbringing and/or education, take primacy over all other criteria in determining Jewishness. This is even true in Halakha, the religious-legal corpus of customs and traditions shared by various observant Jewish movements. Converts to Judaism are required to undergo a degree of education before formal conversion, and once this process is complete, they are regarded by traditional religious law as no less Jewish than someone who is Jewish by birth. Active engagement with, study of,

and concern for the Jewish people is a sufficient criterion for becoming a part of the Jewish people; it follows that the prerequisite defining a written work as Jewish should also be the presence of an active engagement with the Jewish people.

Notably, the above definition does not include language as a requirement. A work does not need to originally be in any specific language. It simply needs to be authored by a Jewish person and to reference sources produced by, or events that have happened to, Jewish people. S. Levy published an article on this subject making the opposite argument: only language matters. As this was published before the Shoah and at the beginning of the twentieth century, it effectively contrasts the definition used here in the historical context under consideration.

S. Levy, author of the controversial turn-of-the-twentieth-century article "Is There A Jewish Literature?" holds that only works published in Hebrew and in languages derived from Hebrew can be called Jewish; this point is supported by a comparison to English literature referring to all works published in the English language (584-586). Levy insists that the definition must be based on a linguistic rather than a "racial" basis, and that indeed there can be no Jewish literature: there can be only Hebrew literature (587). However, due to cultural and linguistic drift, this definition was already insufficient even in the first decade of the twentieth century. Levy holds that Yiddish works, some of the most prominent surviving works by Jewish authors from that period, can only be considered in the same category as Hebrew literature because Yiddish is derived from Hebrew (588-589). Levy states that the term Yiddish "usually denotes a strange compound of corrupt Hebrew and mediaeval or provincial German" (589). This statement is not strictly accurate and may have resulted from a scarcity of available information at the time, or from a differing interpretation of linguistic data. A more modern understanding holds that Yiddish is a distinct language created via the slow, generational

combination of Ashkenazi Hebrew and Old High German, with elements of Slavic languages present as well. That definition is derived from a longer and more detailed one in *The Penguin Definition of Judaism* by rabbi and historian Nicholas de Lange, but the truncated form is sufficient here (342). Levy does not make this distinction and instead equates Yiddish with all languages written using Hebrew characters (600). Doing so conveys a false sense of the degree to which Hebrew influences those languages in general and Yiddish specifically. Yiddish is written with Hebrew characters, but it is often possible for a German speaker to comprehend a Yiddish sentence spoken aloud, though in such cases German speakers tend to believe the Yiddish speaker has a strange accent or poor training. Yiddish is a Germanic language with a minority number of Hebrew components, though the Hebrew components are often frequently used and important day-to-day words. According to linguist Julia Schultz, something almost identical can at this point also describe United States English via the cultural influence of Yiddish speakers which "comprises not only specialized, technical expressions confined to Judaism, but also words which have become fairly common in present-day usage" (6). Using Levy's criteria, adjusted for a more accurate assessment of the linguistic field, would create a state of unmanageable data saturation, and make discussing Jewish writing in any sense impossible. Determination based on cultural involvement is more efficient.

Celan's poetry serves as evidence that cultural definition is effective. According to his biographer, John Felstiner, Celan was thoroughly educated in Hebrew (7). Celan could have used Hebrew if he felt it necessary and appropriate to his work. Instead, Celan chose to write in his household/native language: German. Nonetheless, Celan's work is highly influenced by his background and his life, making it Jewish due to his Jewish identity and context which are inseparable from his work, and he made a variation of the same argument himself regarding the

impact of the author's time on poetry in general in his *Der Meridian* speech (Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose,* 408). Religion and literature scholar Carsten Dutt writes that Celan, "whose poetic work is deeply anchored in his life and inextricably linked to the terrifying historical events of his time," must be read at least partially in biographical terms (172). Celan wrote

> I HAVE CUT BAMBOO:
> for you, my son.
> I have lived.
>
> This hut to
> be dismantled tomorrow, it
> stands. (Celan 1-6)

This poem, a reference to the Jewish festival of Sukkot which entails the building of a small communal hut for family meals, was written in German. Celan's eventual readers were not presumed to have sufficient understanding of Hebrew to read anything at all in it. However, the poem refers to a festival which, while by no means as universally celebrated as it was during the era when Halakhic law and the law of the land were identical, is a known and established part of the Jewish literary corpus with its roots in the Torah. The audience best equipped to recognize the many references and cultural terms found in Celan's work would be other Jewish people. Celan, though he writes in a non-Hebrew language and using another orthography, writes with Jewish culture and Jewish people in mind. Understanding "I Have Cut Bamboo" and Celan's other poems is much more difficult without a certain degree of grounding in the earliest works of the Jewish people. The Torah must be understood, at least in broad strokes, as it influences every aspect of historical and modern Jewish life. It is also the foundation and the first component of the Hebrew Bible, or Tanakh.

The earliest surviving Jewish written works are contained in the Tanakh. These texts are functionally identical to the Christian Old Testament, though different translations are favored by different groups within the various Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic traditions. The Jewish version makes a unique distinction, however, in considering this collection of texts in three specific subsections. The degree of authority, and therefore of emphasis and reference in later texts, assigned to a given text depends on the section to which it belongs.

The Tanakh's overall importance to Jewish literature cannot be overstated. Prayers, songs, legal rulings, and numerous other documents dating from the ancient Near East to today, have been derived from quotations from or references to the Tanakh. The Tanakh is culturally representative of a massive historical segment of Jewish culture. It represents the most effective route to a clear glimpse of the survival concept in the Jewish cultural consciousness, and its permutations in the pre-Shoah era. The set of three processes referenced earlier in this document, the alienation-individuation-integration triptych, can be seen in the changing conceptions of self from the Torah to the Nevi'im to the Kethuvim. Alienation refers to the loss of identification with one's own cultural self in response to a traumatic change in circumstances. Individuation refers to constructing a new sense of self. Integration refers to the process of fitting the new identity into the changed world context. The Torah represents the initial, unalienated state of the Jewish people. Over the course of the Nevi'im texts, the promises and guarantees of the Torah are challenged by defeat and destruction. This leads to the alienation of the Jewish people from themselves, followed by a new individuation as the collective cultural identity shifts from undefeated and prophesied rulership of sacred ground to survivors and keepers of sacred knowledge and tradition. The very idea of survival, of being survivors of many calamities,

becomes part of the new Jewish self-identity. Eventually, the Individuated Jewish cultural self can occupy a new role via their Integration into the wider world as a diasporic community.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to establish some language conventions which will apply in this chapter from this point forward. The patron deity of the Jewish people is not named directly, but referred to using pseudonyms, as part of covenantal observance. When referring to this being in the context of the Tanakh the name "Adonai" will be used, as using the simple referent of God contains too strong a connection to Christianity in English. Also, while Adonai is usually referred to in the masculine in modern contexts, there are also depictions of the deity using feminine pronouns historically. Adonai's gender, if such a thing can even be said to apply to such a being, is indeterminate as a result. The singular neutral pronouns "they," "them," "their," and "theirs" will be used as needed due to this lack of determination. With these conventions in mind description and analysis can proceed.

The most authoritative segment of the Tanakh is the Torah. This consists of five texts, which are known in English as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They are reputed in traditional Jewish circles to be either the work of Adonai themself, or of Moses, but for scholarly purposes this cannot be verified, and based on textual analysis there are at least four primary authors for the writings (Jewish Publication Society 3-7). It is likely that earlier oral traditions were compiled and retrofitted over time to create the text, though this statement is controversial in the wider Jewish community. These are the primary sources drawn upon by Jewish authors when discussing flight from Egypt, the life and death of Moses, the origin of the covenant, and many other concepts and narratives essential to the greater corpus of Jewish literature.

The second most authoritative segment of the Tanakh is the Nevi'im, or "the prophets," and contains those most of the text from the Hebrew Bible named for individual prophets, as well as the books of Kings and Judges. These texts concern not only predictions of the future, the most common meaning of prophecy, but also accounts of events that would have been considered historical when they were composed and their proposed meanings in terms of the theological worldview of the Jewish people. The final, least authoritative section (but still considered superior to secular texts) of the Tanakh is the Kethuvim. This translates to "the writings." It contains Psalms, Proverbs, Job, The Scroll of 'The Song of Songs,' The Scroll of Ruth, The Scroll of Lamentations, The Scroll of Ecclesiastes, The Scroll of Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, First Chronicles, and Second Chronicles. For the sake of clarity, it is necessary to note that the five texts possessing the modifier "the Scroll of," also known as "The Scrolls," have specific historical and religious significance in several contexts but are not considered superior or inferior overall to the rest of the Kethuvim. Kethuvim texts are usually interpreted as the sacred equivalent of folk wisdom (Jewish Publication Society 1276-1277). They are valued texts, but whether they are literally true is less important in most Jewish theological frames than the writings contained in the first two divisions.

Taken together the initial phonemes of the three are T, N, and K. Over time these became an acronym to aid in memory, which when pronounced aloud became a name: Tanakh. Spoken acronyms are common mnemonic devices in general, and they are used extensively in Judaism (de Lange 5). Judaism puts a great deal of store in the power of names and the necessity that a name be remembered and carried on through time if it belongs to someone or something virtuous, or blotted out if it belongs to someone or something vicious. What kind of behaviors constitute virtue and vice are variable across the millennia over which the Jewish people have

existed, however, as evidenced by the acts depicted in the works of the Tanakh and of later writers.

The book of Joshua can be surprising to a modern reader familiar with the peaceful sentiments preferred by Jewish writers from the post-Shoah era. One expecting sentiments of the universally preferable nature of peace and abhorrence of violence like those expressed by survivor and renowned author Wiesel in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech might be surprised to find that there are a several accounts of divinely commanded slaughter that could be described by a modern reader as genocide (Wiesel 119). The attack on the city of Hebron, for instance, ends with the destruction of its population (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Joshua 10:36-37). The understanding in the book of Joshua is that Adonai has commanded this, and so it must be; there is no alternative. They command this fate be handed to all inhabitants of the land, as well. Joshua, in its final few chapters, states that all the local populations of Canaan have been destroyed as promised by Adonai (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Joshua 23:9). The Israelites are secure in their self-image as divinely ordained conqueror-heroes.

The book of Joshua is ordered first among the Nevi'im, a place of honor it could have earned based on any of three distinctions. First, it concerns the life and death of Moses' immediate successor. Second, it is chronologically the next in the historical sequence of Tanakh works after Deuteronomy, though there is some possible overlap with Judges (Jewish Publication Society 482). Third, it concerns the fulfillment of the covenant made originally with Abraham in ancient Mesopotamia (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Genesis 12:1-3). The third is most important for this chapter. The covenant, a promise between divine and human, was the foundation of the Jewish identity. Blood lineage was the original qualifier to be part of the promised reward for service to the divine, though provisions for conversion were made later. The rewards for this

service were the social incentive needed to maintain the cohesion of the people. However, the first cracks of alienation are beginning to show in this armor. The book indicates that in several locations people who were meant to be destroyed by divine edict survived and lived alongside the Israelites (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Joshua 16). Nothing in the Torah warns of this, though ostensibly the Israelites could have thought it was a simple delay rather than a lack of fulfillment on Adonai's part. The more prominent issue leading to alienation later was the presence of ethnic violence itself.

With divine retribution or reward as motivating factors, it is understandable one might conclude the destruction via warfare of an entire other civilization is desirable. The specific context of the Ancient Near East made this an even more likely conclusion. Force was the standard way of acquiring territory in the ancient Near East, with various evenly matched powers trading territory back and forth over time and the citizens of smaller powers serving as mercenaries in larger powers' armies. The complicated patchwork of Near Eastern politics, with the ever-present threat of war as motivating factor, is visible in various cultures from that era and that locality, including the Egyptians and Hittites according to Professor Nicholas G. Blackwell of the University of Indiana (198-199). For conflicts between less evenly matched forces, the potential outcomes were worse. If one did not possess the ability to conquer, one would be conquered, and whether death by cultural assimilation via captivity or death by the sword the eventual fate of conquered cultures was the same: mortal. The Jewish people survived the Babylonian captivity only because Babylonia was absorbed by Persia before the eradication of Jewish culture was complete and Persia represented an early example of an empire too large to avoid cultural pluralism (de Lange 28). Nonetheless, the ancient genocides bear little

resemblance to modern ones due to an absence of technological capacity for increased rates of mortality and more aggressive identification of members of populations to be destroyed.

The eventual loss of sovereignty over themselves for the Jewish people contributed to a society wide challenge to their cultural identity. If Adonai is the one true god, or even just the most powerful god among many, how could their chosen people lose so much? This led to alienation within the Jewish people from their own culture and from the very idea of a Jewish identity; the attrition rate was high. Ten of the twelve tribes were entirely killed or absorbed into other cultures. Survivors of the lost ten tribes and their descendants had to rebuild their lives as something entirely different, and their Jewish identities could remain as part of the individuals they would become as they integrated into their new cultures.

Proof that living by the sword could still have terrible consequences even for Adonai's people changed the descendants of Abraham. Being cast into the roles of vagabond and victim repeatedly resulted in an individuation that did not include being warriors; the survivors of the remaining tribes had to embrace a new way of life. Their history did not change, the old role of the Judges and ancient warrior-prophets was preserved in tradition, but no one was in a hurry to go out and start fighting for territory again. According to Jacob Sloan, translator of Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray,* in the diaspora the limited amount of integration allowed in places such as the Czech/Russian Imperial "Pale of Settlement" relied on not angering the peasantry overmuch (Sloan IX-XII). The role of violence in Jewish consciousness changed over the millennia between the writing of the Nevi'im and the era of prominent Yiddish-language writers of the mid-twentieth century such as Sholem Aleichem, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Fradl Shtok. For example, some of Singer's Polish-Jewish cast in *Satan in Goray* are fond of the idea of bringing violence against their oppressive non-Jewish compatriots and wiping them out, but

for the most part that kind of violence is depicted as the behavior of said oppressors (Singer 3-4). Self-defense was, and remains, permissible, but blanket aggression is not. Martin Buber, one of the most prominent Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century and a hero of Celan's, felt that violence was an ineffective problem-solving solution leading only to further decay – but he did not forbid it categorically. The loss of the ancient aggressive methods of territorial control, combined with exarchate rule by Rome and exile, led to thousands of years of reduced status – the effects of which remain visible in lingering written cultural artifacts.

The reduced status of the Jewish people affected even their most basic day to day activities, such as the lullabies sung to their children. According to scholar Eva Metzger, after the diaspora began and throughout the Shoah, lullabies were always in a melancholy, minor key:

> Many authors have offered explanations for the phenomenon of the minor key in most Yiddish folk songs. Most of them agree that it is probably caused by the long history of suffering endured by Jews in the diaspora. (253)

Pogroms, often occurring in cycles coinciding with economic and political turmoil, became the weapon employed against the Jewish people in the Russian Empire. According to research conducted by economist Irena Grosfeld and several colleagues, the permanent status of the Jewish population as effective resident aliens and their role as middle-managers for the nobility led to resentment on the part of the greater populace. That the Jewish population occupied this role due to lack of other employment options seems not to have factored overmuch into the imperial citizens' thinking, making the violence another symptom of the reduced status of the Jewish people in the diaspora (Grosfeld et al. 290). Due to being its victims rather than its perpetrators for so long, by the nineteenth century the Jewish people did not associate this form of violence with themselves. Wiping out one's enemies, including children, with the sword had understandably become a wicked and barbaric concept by that point in history. A rejection of

violence as the first recourse and will of the divine had become part of the society wide version of individuation for the Jewish people. The Jewish consciousness had come to value enduring such horrors rather than attempting to erase those who endured them (as happened in Joshua). Throughout the individual sections of Joshua there are many references to lingering native populations in Canaan among the Israelites, such as the continued presence of Canaanites in Jericho (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Joshua 16:10). Other references to these populations as destroyed utterly convey the view that the party-line was that total extinction had been accomplished and was good. In the individuation of the later Jewish generations, it has become desirable to avoid the behavior that was once considered divinely ordained.

The change in self-perception from invulnerable, destined destroyers to dutiful survivors appears radical, but can be seen occurring in the Kethuvim with the benefit of hindsight and awareness of later depictions of survival in European Jewish works. *The Scroll of Esther* concerns survival and is part of the Tanakh but blends the early approach of violence with the later preference for endurance. Haman, a vizier in ancient Persia, attempts to have the Jewish people exterminated due to one man refusing to bow to him (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Esther 3:5). Mordecai, the Jewish man in question, would bow only to Adonai. This led Haman to campaign for the extinction of the Jewish people in Persia. However, his actions are thwarted by the intercession of Esther, a secretly Jewish wife of the Persian emperor who reveals her identity as Jewish to save her people. The Jews of Persia are allowed to defend themselves against their aggressors without fear of any retribution from the government of Persia for those killed. The eventual solution is a violent one, but it is moderated by legal sanction and defensive purpose. The festival of Purim is a celebration of the events of *Esther*: a celebration of the unlikely, and of things which are not what they appear to be. A minority population of resident aliens does not

appear as though it would survive a state sanctioned attack; that the Jews of Persia did so and turned it to their advantage is considered a particularly ironic reversal. This text and the accompanying festivities represent the effects of thousands of years of individuation shifting the Israelite self-image from the warrior-scholar-priests of the era of *Judges* to the peaceful scholar-priests of later, more recent identification. Such happy occasions, renewals of the promise that the people Israel would be massive in population and never die out, are contrasted with other texts such as *Lamentations.*

Lamentations is a confrontation with one of the greatest historical challenges to the idea of covenant: the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE (Jewish Publication Society 1587). Without the Temple at which to perform sacrifices it was impossible to fulfill the religious obligations of pilgrimage and the expiation of guilt according to the ancient rites and laws. For Israelite culture in general surviving this event was by no means guaranteed, as the entire basis of cultural solidarity among the various tribes was the covenant with Adonai. However, Lamentations ends with an entreaty to renew the pact between the people and Adonai and restore Israel. The blame for these actions is placed on the rites of Israel becoming hollow. They had become lip service paid without true conviction in the commandments behind them; this is a common theme found throughout the Nevi'im and the Kethuvim. The people will have to embrace a new way of being if they are to be renewed, though this way is implied to be simply a truer fulfillment of the old promises (*The Jewish Study Bible,* Lamentations, 5:19-22). The text is an expression of the desire to endure even if endurance requires change. This desire to endure, combined with a willingness to create new ways of fulfilling the old covenant of worship in the diaspora even without the blood and incense of the Temple, constitutes a desire and a promise

for integration on the societal scale. If people have new ways of fulfilling the old responsibilities, a new access to the same covenant, then they can exist in any context without losing themselves.

The loss of cultural identity, the loss of name and lineage, is terrifying in a traditionally Jewish worldview. To endure in the diaspora, it has been necessary to create new ways of fulfilling old responsibilities. This is integration without acculturation: the Jewish people of the wider world would remain distinct in their Jewishness but would move among and survive within the communities of others. They would find new social roles and occupy them, even if they were not always welcome. In a twentieth century context, their successes and failures in the process are reflected in the often-humorous fictions of Sholem Aleichem such as "Two Dead Men," a tale celebrating Purim in a context thousands of years removed from Persia, and in the mingled joy and bemusement of Fradl Shtok's "The Veil" (74-89; 23-26). The writings of the Jewish people, in their many languages and integrated-but-not-acculturated contexts, had an optimistic slant before the Shoah. Even *Satan in Goray,* as grim as many 21st century horror novels, promises divine redemption (Singer 171). This is a general trait in Modernist literature, and it would be stranger if Judaism did not possess it. However, in terms of survival, this reflects an expectation that it would never be necessary to experience a broad, cultural alienation-individuation-integration process cycle again. The Jewish people saw themselves already as survivors, the whipping boys of the world who would one day be sovereigns, and felt they had attained a form that did not need to change because Adonai would provide.

Theodor W. Adorno, a German philosopher and critical theorist, held that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (quoted in Rosensaft). Celan felt this was a personal attack, even writing a piece of prose in the form of a metaphorical dialogue between himself and Adorno. The work in question, "Conversation in the Mountains," is difficult to comprehend and

the language meanders, arriving at its conclusions via metaphor and plays on words as much as logic. Poet and attorney Menachem Z. Rosensaft argues that normal language is not sufficient to speak about the Jewish condition after Auschwitz. The same argument is also Celan's ultimate counterpoint to Adorno, and the foundation of his poetic quest to depict reality as described in his *Der Meridian* speech. Celan's poetry serves as the best evidence to support that argument due to his frequent and direct engagement with matters of import to survivors.

After the Shoah, the difficulties inherent in traditional theodicy were thrown into vivid relief for survivors and their families. Celan's *"Mandorla"* deals with, among other things, his frustration with Jewish culture's need to cling to the concept of divine salvation. The "almond" had become a symbol of sweetness and joy in Jewish culture by Celan's era (Metzger 254-255). For Celan, "Nothing" dwells in the almond, even as the collective eye of the Jewish people "dwells and dwells" on the Almond (Celan, *Poems,* 7). This "Nothing" is an active presence, and within the nothing dwells "the King" (5-7, 12-13). Adonai is also referred to as "Adonai Melech," or "Adonai the King." The King is in the Nothing; the Nothing consumes the awareness of the people. Due to dwelling on spiritual salvation over temporal improvement antisemitism can fester and worsen – and when it worsens, it brings death. Already, the hair of countless Jewish people, Celan's mother among them, "will never grow gray" (8). For Celan the almond, promised joy to be given by a ruler in some incomprehensible place and uncertain future, is a trap. For Celan, despite his above-mentioned reverence for Martin Buber, there is no "I-Thou" relationship between his people and this conception of Adonai as perfected and final arbiter of justice. If "[R]elation is reciprocity" then there is no relation at all (Buber 67). It is an I-Silence dynamic. This is the same silence felt by Wiesel during the singing of the Kaddish at Auschwitz (33). This is silence rendered loud by the unfulfilled expectation of an answer: the

very essence of the problem of evil. Celan did not only ascribe blame to Adonai for this silence; however, he resented a passivity he perceived among his own people.

Celan resented, even as he mourned them, that his parents did not make a more concerted attempt to flee before their deportation (Felstiner 14). This was complicated by his knowledge that in insisting he remain for his education he played in their initial decision not to leave Romania. Eventually, he came to direct some of his animosity toward himself as well. Like Wiesel in *Night,* Celan was burdened by hindsight. Many people who could escape did so; Nelly Sachs survived by fleeing to Sweden before she could be deported (Felstiner 112). Others, however, did not attempt to escape for reasons related to a failure of foresight. Many among the Jewish people had faith that they had survived many catastrophes and would endure any others that came, without recognizing the chimerical nature of survival: the need to be able to reinvent and preserve at the same time as often as circumstance requires. This idea of survival was at odds with a newer form of the old narrative of chosen: a belief that survival was guaranteed by the covenant with Adonai. The Shoah called the assumption of destined survival into question. Consequently, survival would later change into an ongoing process in the context of the 21st-century Jewish author. This shift in view, the next reimagining of survival, is exemplified in the poetry of Paul Celan as he wrote in the specific moment that change was mirrored in the people themselves. Frankl wrote that though suffering was inevitable, the ability to choose how one met that suffering gave it meaning (114). Frankl came into this understanding after undergoing his own alienation-individuation-integration processes; his conclusions were mirrored in the works of his contemporaries Wiesel and Celan, as well as the poetry of later authors such as Sabrina Orah Mark and Rachel Mennies.

Mennies' book *The Glad Hand of God Points Backwards* contains the poem "The Jewish Woman in America, 2010." In this poem she writes, "My God accepts/ the muddle of our lives: reformed,/ distracted, desirous of strangers/ in other, wilder places. 'As you wish, He says" (Mennies 15-18). Survival is an ongoing process and never ends; each trauma brings change, but change is not necessarily an ending of anything. Celan's work not only preserves a step in the intellectual process, leading from the previous conception of survival to the current, but also constitutes a defined part of that step and defies Adorno's implied injunction.

Chapter 2: Alienation

Paul Celan at the beginning of his post-Shoah career occupies a position that, while not enviable, is not unusual from a historical perspective. He is so thoroughly disenchanted with the world that he begins to feel singular in it: alone and bereft of any future other than an existence as a last holdout of some vanishing archetype. His early works, such as the acclaimed "*Todesfuge*" (Death Fugue), enable glimpses into a mind so thoroughly alienated that he is not simply outside society: he is outside the world. This sensation would stay with him to an extent for the rest of his life, but it was the dominating influence on him just after the end of the war and the camps. His eventual journey through individuation and integration is surprising when one considers the extent of the grief and loss of direction of the early works. An analysis of his early pre-Shoah works will demonstrate how Celan held that grief and carried it into individuation. To begin analyzing these works and their symbols, it is best to start with some details about Celan's life.

So that the scope of this chapter will be clear, here is some clarification before the bulk of the writing is presented. Celan's entire transition from young, unattached European Jewish man to his later status as an estranged, but loving, husband and father is too complex a subject to treat in detail in this one chapter. The chapter will instead focus on a shorter temporal window: the time between his birth and immigration to France, with emphasis on events near the time of the Shoah. Other data about his life will be used for context. Celan is an intentionally biographical poet; his work, by design, cannot be understood without considering numerous factors concerning the events he witnessed and experienced. He did not undergo alienation in a vacuum; he was alienated by context.

Paul Celan held that poetry could only be composed in the author's native language – anything else was deception (Felstiner 46). For Celan, what constituted his native language would be entirely open for debate if he did not insist it was German. He grew up in Romania, though Czernowitz, the area he grew up in, had only been ceded to that country from the Austro-Hungarian Empire just before his birth. Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, German, and Yiddish were all commonly spoken languages on its streets. Celan came to be familiar with most of these languages, even publishing some early work in Romanian before formalizing his poetic ethos. However, because of his mother's love of German and of German lyric poetry, German was the language of his household and became the language he most strongly identified with (Felstiner 4).

Paul Celan's family were somewhat contradictory. His father, Leo, was a traditional, observant Orthodox Jewish man (Felstiner 7). It was thanks to him that a young Paul was sent to Hebrew school from 1927 to 1930 and gained a thorough grounding in the traditions and language of his people. His mother, Fritzi, loved German poetry and high art; she was determinate that grammatically correct German be the only household language (6-7). She was religiously observant, but accounts do not indicate she was passionate about the subject. Many of Celan's poems, with their persistent yet distant feminine figures, are commonly interpreted as referring to his mother. Leo and Fritzi were deported in 1942. Their eventual deaths in German concentration camps, specifically his mother dying directly at the hand of an SS officer, marked Celan for the rest of his life.

Celan was a very learned young man regarding his religion, but not a passionate one. His connection to Judaism was more one of kinship than devotion. He defended the validity of Yiddish to a teacher who was a member of the Fascist Iron Guard movement, but also

discontinued his study of Hebrew entirely after his Bar Mitzvah in 1933 (Felstiner 6-7). Unlike fellow survivor-author Wiesel, there is no evidence he ever dreamt of entering the rabbinate, and his later determination to "blaspheme until the end" should be considered a marked increase in his spiritual engagement compared to his earlier life (Felstiner 156). He did not possess strong religious or nationalist convictions at all when he was young, though he did possess "an affinity with anarchism and socialism" (Felstiner 8). He was studying medicine but gave it up in 1939 to study Romance languages (11). After his family was lost to National Socialism and his home was lost in turn behind an increasingly antisemitic Iron Curtain, the languages of his home were all that were left to him of that place. The East became a romanticized craving Celan never managed to satisfy.

Celan slipped out of Romania and into Austria illegally in 1947 (Felstiner 50). He published his first collection through an Austrian publisher, though he considered the text to have been mishandled to such an extent that he insisted on republishing its poems later with another firm (59). Eventually he made his way to France, where he had previously lived while studying medicine. In Paris he could focus on his writing, but he was even more of an outsider than he had been in post-Shoah, Soviet Romania. He was Jewish, he spoke German, he had been through the camps: all these things marked him as different from the French around him. He was like Joseph in Egypt, a "stranger in a strange land," save that no reunion with his lost family would ever be possible (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Exodus 2:22).

Celan's first published collection is technically "*Der Sand aus den Urnen*," or *The Sand from the Urns* (Felstiner 59). It was published by an Austrian house and did not reach shelves until Celan had settled in France. This collection does contain several of the same poems as his second collection, *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (Poppy and Memory), but the published version

contained several misprints that altered the meaning of his compositions. He briefly became disillusioned with the idea of publishing in general (59). When he returned to releasing his work, he started with a new collection including unpublished material and older works in a new format with revisions (70). This collection includes "*KRISTALL*/Crystal," which reads in English:

> Do not seek your mouth on my lips
> nor a stranger at the gate,
> nor a tear in the eye.
>
> Seven nights higher Red wanders to Red,
> seven hearts deeper a hand raps at the door,
> seven roses later the wellspring rushes. (Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*)

This poem would be noteworthy if only for its excellent juxtaposition of presence and emptiness, but it also contains an element of historical reference: *Kristallnacht*. Celan was aware of that pogrom, though he was spared it as he was on a train from Paris to Czernowitz at the time (10). That he was passing through Berlin is a strange, but noteworthy, coincidence. Celan could have used a different word for his title or simply created a new one – he was never one to shy away from neologisms. However, he chose to use the first half of the name of a recent infamous event knowing that his context would associate him with said event. Celan's narrator-persona commands readers not to seek familiar things in familiar places. The speaker then describes a potent string of symbols in units of seven: red, hearts, and roses. Notably, the first item, "Red," defines the latter two in the popular imagination. Hearts can be black in some metaphors and roses come in many hues, but red is the classic for them both. Red is also the color of blood on broken glass before the air sucks the color out and leaves it blackened to ash. The heart and the

rose form a circuit: the heart drives the blood, and the rose is symbolic of love and blood connecting back to the heart. The number seven is also significant: in Judaism this is the most powerful number in existence other than the number one; "one" represents Adonai. Other divine things, whether blessings or judgements, come in units of seven. Adonai will be avenged sevenfold on the one who harms Cain in *Genesis* (*The Jewish Study Bible,* Genesis, 4:24-26). Seven is the number of days in which Adonai created the world and rested from their labors (2:1-2). Seven is the number of years of famine and plenty seen by pharaoh in a dream and interpreted by Joseph (41:25-32). Curse, creation, blessing, and bane are all associated with seven. The familiar falls away and divinity is asked for amidst the bloodshed, but Adonai is silent. Celan's epitaph for the dead of the pogrom is folded into seven lines if one counts the title. This collection, though it was received as deeply obscure, is filled with meaning if one works to understand their context. Celan insisted all his poetry works this way (Felstiner 112-115).

Celan's earliest piece of well-known work is *"Todesfuge,"* or "Death Fugue" in English. It was originally published in Romanian as *"Tangoul Mortii,"* and is the only original piece by Celan to have ever had its first publication in a language other than German in his lifetime. Afterward, he insisted on the use of his mother tongue for his own poetry. According to Pierre Joris in his introduction to his translation of Celan's work, Celan was concerned enough about preserving the emotional content of his poems to express the preference that the only translators for his work be people who felt the work "spoke" to them (Celan, *Breathturn into Timestead* lxiii). "Death Fugue" did not see another publication until *Der Sand aus den Urnen* and then its second original-language incarnation was in *Mohn und Gedächtnis.* The first three lines read:

> Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
> we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night

we drink and we drink (Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*)

According to German literature specialist Jerry Glenn the "black milk" symbol is not unique, but it is strikingly appropriate (18). The paired concepts of the color black and of milk suggest consumption of something that should be nourishing but is instead tainted with death (Felstiner 27). The experience of life at every point in the cycle of night into day, a cycle in three parts in Judaism – evening, morning, and midday, in that order – is darkened. The final word of line two in the German text, "*nachts*," refers instead specifically to the period between midnight and dawn. This word, by its very position out of sequence, emphasizes lack of reprieve. The next line is "we shovel a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped," and it demonstrates what fills the days of the "we" - the digging of graves (Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose,* 4). A "grave in the air" is a contradictory symbol, but in addition to disposal in mass graves the dead in the camps were burned. Bodies were burned or were buried anonymously, and this led to a loss of their identities – the purging of names that is a cardinal fear in Judaism. Celan once described his work in the labor camps as "shoveling" and added no clarification. Celan was never in the death camps (Axis Romania's labor camps were brutal, but not designed for rapid extermination), so his experience was comparatively mild, though in a situation where one is comparing forced labor to industrialized murder the question of mildness is largely irrelevant. The labor camps were not designed to kill, but neither were they set up with the well-being of their inmates as a priority. Even when his work was on roadways, the official and most frequent work of his camp, Celan would have been surrounded by people in a poor state of health and, when one inevitably died, the occupying Nazi forces were not likely to allow extra time or trips to town to dispose of bodies respectfully. For these reasons one can conclude his work did likely include the digging

of graves, and Celan would describe his work only as “shoveling” due to the inhumane nature of the Nazi’s treatment of both the living and the dead (Felstiner 16).

Celan’s experience was one of working for people he knew wanted him dead. He was in an adversarial situation and dependent on the limited ‘good-will’ of his jailors to survive. Every breath, every drink of water, every bite of food was at their sufferance. His life was sustained only if wicked people saw a use for him as a tool. Knowing this made him feel as though his circumstance was one of consuming death and being consumed by it. Yet these captors too are human. The ones who force Celan and his fellow captives to drink down death are people like them who simply refuse to acknowledge their captives’ humanity.

Celan’s awareness of his captors’ humanity manifests in “*Todesfuge*” through the lines “A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes/ he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair/...Margareta” (5-7). Celan describes this commandant with pets, writing to home, writing to a woman the commandant cares for, and outside at the same time men he refuses to acknowledge as men are fed and watered with misery and pain. The “man [who] lives in the house” has the job of overseeing suffering and wringing every ounce of work he can from people before they eventually succumb to exhaustion, despair, and disease. Celan balances his subjects, the “man” and “we,” skillfully to create contrast between the two, bleeding towards a greater sense of connection but never reconciliation. The poem continues to demonstrate the dehumanization carried out by the archetypal “he” of the poem:

> he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling he
> whistles his hounds to stay close
> he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground
> he commands us play up for the dance (8-11)

The way he commands hounds and Jews, both animals-become-tools to him, is identical – this is the most obvious dimension of dehumanization. His insistence on having joyful music during the digging of graves, a historically attested Nazi atrocity, is another act of inhumanity. In Judaism it is considered inappropriate to do anything in a cemetery except mourning. Even studying sacred texts is prohibited. How much worse then, for a Jewish person, than knowing someone cares so little for the dead that he commands a jaunty tune be played over them? "Dancing on graves" is an old cliché, but it is literal for this subject. This is a distortion of expectation. Celan continues his distortions next by altering time.

Celan now repeats with slight modifications the first three lines – like a musical refrain but heard slanted. The lines read thus with altered words italicized:

> Black milk of daybreak we drink *you* at night
>
> we drink *you* at *morning* and *midday* we drink *you* at *evening*
>
> we drink and we drink (12-14, emphasis mine)

The repeated consumption is the same, but the "it" has become a "you." The relationship has changed. The prisoners are in an I-Thou relationship with the death they drink; its constancy, its apparent inevitability, makes it akin to a divinity to them (Buber 66-67). Time changes, too, in these lines: evening is now transposed with night. This is not as obvious a distinction in English, but in German the two words are distinct and used very differently as mentioned above. The first line contains the word *abends*, which is the possessive form of the word evening; the second line has the possessive of night which is *Nachts*. *Abends* is used to convey any time from the moment the sun starts sinking to midnight. *Nachts,* as mentioned above, is used for periods between midnight and dawn: the physical time corresponding to the proverbial dark night of the soul. This period is listed in the first three lines as in the ending of line two. It blends into the cycle of days

starting at evening if one is not paying too much attention, but if one does pay attention, it is an interruption: it makes a point that even at the darkest moment, the time of deep sleep, death is consumed. This cycle begins at this ending: there is no relief, and the cycle is immediate to the careful reader; the monotonous and unending path into death and through death is visible even in darkness. Its position out of sequence in the first stanza serves as emphasis; here it is present in sequence to convey that same lack of reprieve.

"Death Fugue" proceeds by repetition and addition: some lines recur, and others are altered or added. Lines fifteen through seventeen are repetitions, but lines eighteen to nineteen introduce something new while reorganizing words from line five:

> A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
> He writes when it grows dark to Deutschland he writes your golden hair
> Margareta
> Your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the air
> where you won't lie too cramped. (15-19)

The shoveling of a grave in the air, the contradictory image, returns alongside a counterpoint to the German Margareta: the Jewish Shulamith, whose hair is ashen. Shulamith is a Hebrew name, and Jewish hair was assumed to be darker than that of "Aryan" Germans. This was not always true, but dark is common enough in most populations that Shulamith having dark blond, light brown, gray, or otherwise "ashen" hair would not be unusual. Shulamith is not a simple one-to-one symbol, not simply an example, however. The name is symbolic in Hebrew of the Jewish people themselves, and of the feminine form of God whose presence travels with them. She is not the love of one person, but the love and the personal worth of all the Jewish prisoners. Further, the word *aschenes* here, rendered as "ashen" in English, does not mean ash-colored: it

means literally “reduced to ashes.” The common German words for ash-colored are *aschgrau* and *aschfahl,* but *aschenes* is not a normally used word for any hue. If Celan were creating a neologism to indicate color, he would not have separated the word *aschenes* from *Haar* (hair): Celan’s neologisms followed the same compounding pattern used by other German speakers. It can be read as representing hair color, but I am inclined to agree with Felstiner on this subject: Shulamith’s hair is ashen due to its material state, not its coloration (Felstiner 38, 40-41). Shulamith is present to demonstrate what is different between the “man’s” situation and that of the Jewish prisoners: both have love, but because of the man who writes to Deutschland, because of the black milk they have drunk and that she drinks no longer, the prisoners’ love has turned to ash. Further time inversions occur in later lines, and the descent into a death/life hybrid world continues (Celan 23-25). The man in the house is still writing, and Margarete and Shulamith continue their juxtaposition even though one is only ash and memory now, without even poppy to complement her *Gedächtnis* (26-41). The man has become death, he is a “master from Deutschland” who holds his hounds and releases them on the innocent.

The man’s actions render him into the SS writ large; he is humanity made inhuman and spreads his plastic hate onto all whom he has marked as less human than himself. He rejects the idea of a universal humanity and makes “his” Jews, along with many other groups (though Jews are his special favorites among his hatreds), into the subjects of a deadly embrace. Black milk, bitter almond gas, graves in the ground, and graves in the air, all these things combine in the camps of “Death Fugue,” whether they are mentioned specifically or not. The dance of death is the crushing of the human spirit, and this is what Celan saw and could not release except as a poem. This was a reality he could not convey with simple description but only with language in an elevated, meta-factual state. His work is designed to go beyond the realm of the symbol to an

entirely different truth. His alienation was not helped but hardened by these articulations, however, because no matter what he did, he would always have a fundamental identifier in common with those who took his people's status as human away: *Muttersprache* (mother tongue). He would remain divided against his old ideas about people, his future, himself; his alienation was sealed by his need to write but not alleviated. Eventually one can see signs of individuation in his work, but in this early poem, his alienation is transparent. The poem closes with the women juxtaposed again to express the concept of memory. Shulamith is next to Margareta despite being burned to ashes; she is alive in speech though her body is dust, and this can make her only one thing: spirit. She is the ghost standing next to the soon-to-be bride. She is the blood crying out from the ground, interrupting the happy day of the master's homecoming and wedding. She is the unspoken bridesmaid who died before her hair could turn gray from something other than ash. Celan cannot return to who he was because of this image; the archetypal German couple vis-a-vis the SS ideology stands beside the archetypal Shoah-marked Jewish couple they helped create: a gaunt man beside a silhouette drawn in ashes. "Death Fugue" represents one component of Celan's alienation, but alienation cannot occur in a vacuum.

Celan's alienation comes not from one place but from three: the first home, the camps, and the home thereafter. In his first home he established his context but, as can be expected with every human being, later experienced some disconnection from his society over the course of his life. However, even with occasional moments of disconnection taken into account, such as Celan's friction with his father's orthodoxy, he knew his family and community were present. In the camps he experienced a total interruption socially. Unlike Auschwitz, his experience was focused more on turning him into a tool than turning him into a corpse, but his humanity was denigrated, nevertheless. In the home, thereafter, the alienation became complete: he became

fully the stranger in the strange land. He was in a place with limited connections to a past that had no more concrete signifiers. Even the landscape had been altered, and the maps had been redrawn again anyway – nothing was left to point towards for him to say, “this is where I come from.” His remaining friends and acquaintances from Czernowitz, who were few now due to the Shoah, were the only ones who could ever know of his home and of the context that made him. There were no markers for later acquaintances and loved ones to examine so that they might gain the same understanding. He had already begun to think of himself as the last Jewish person destined to see out the end of his people in Europe, the last doomed to live out the Western exile (Felstiner 57). Now his image of himself as this living memorial, this thing of concrete and tortured flesh, began to form alongside a new life as a father and husband. The conflict between the two would define his period of individuation.

Chapter 3: Individuation

Individuation as a process is characterized by the formation of a distinct identity separate from both the previous self and the generalities of one's new context. This process is most visible in those poems published in Celan's second collection, *Poppy and Memory*, through *Breathturn* in 1967 with their antecedents in earlier poems and atavistic echoes in later ones. His individuation was problematic, however, because he formed not one new identity but two. His attempt to form a functioning post-war identity as a human being was complicated by recurrent and obsessive thoughts about death and injustice. His need to document the reality of these experiences was a function not only of artistic inspiration, but also an attempt at preserving his sanity in the face of the twentieth century's madness. The recurrent and damaging nature of his Shoah recollections, consistent with the experiences of other survivors of mass trauma, caused him to attempt to become an impossible amalgam of a human being and a memorializing object: a human memorial.

Celan's initial period of adjustment to life in France was difficult. He eked out his existence with a variety of temporary employments and some translation work, writing comparatively little between 1948 and 1952 (Felstiner 60). His experiences of this period are echoed in his writing over the next decades. The poem "*Auf Reisen"* ("On a Journey") draws on the familiar unnamed "you" from many of his poems while also hinting at a feminine subject who is at home in Paris. Celan most likely had several subjects in mind when he wrote this poem. Ingeborg Bachman is a likely candidate – they were lovers during the early portions of their respective careers – as are any number of French acquaintances. It is also possible the "you" of the poem is the displaced mother/sister figure of much of Celan's work. However, whoever she is inspired by set aside, she is like a mirror for Celan's experience:

It is an hour that makes the dust your escort

your house in Paris an altar for your hands,

your black eye for the blackest eyes. (Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, lines 1-2, Line 3 translation mine)

She is so much a part of Paris, his adopted city, that her house there is a holy place dedicated to her like a patron spirit. She is so much a part of the world that her eye is a symbol that stands for all eyes of the same shade. This means she is a native, or at least an established resident alien, of his new country. She is also *Kadosh* – holy – in the Hebrew sense: she is set apart in quality from the mundane world, yet she exists in it. Gender also divides her from Celan:

It is a farm, a team of horses waits for your heart.

Your hair would blow when you ride – that's forbidden.

They stay there and wave, and know it not. (Celan 4-6)

There is an implication here that she is a woman, specifically a married woman from a Jewish background. In Orthodox Jewish culture, a married woman's hair, if she retains it at all, must remain covered in public and the wind should not touch it. If she rides, she may lose her hood or wig, and violate tradition. Women's hair in conservative European cultures had traditionally been covered in public, though this was more common in Celan's time in places like Romania than Paris. The fact that Celan grew up in Romania would mean he possessed memories of the peasant women with their headscarves working in the fields as well as the wigs worn by Orthodox Jewish women. The "you" of the poem's very nature as woman is another part of her mirroring. She is a woman while he is a man – which while not quite a binary in classical Hebrew did generally constitute one by Celan's era. Celan, alone and single at first, would in his early time in Paris have felt very much disconnected. These lines tap into that feeling and

demonstrate his growing feeling for his adoptive city: a key moment in his movement into an individuated state. The subject has people, or at least horses, waiting for her, and Celan has only the dead until he establishes new connections. Yet, the horses "wave," likely with their manes, in the air, without knowing it. The farm is a symbol of growth and of life, the horses are living things that await this woman's heart, the symbolic center of emotion – and she leaves them to wait, apparently indefinitely. She has an array of attachments, but her exact situation is uncertain. Nothing waited for Celan, yet, but his desire for connection was becoming manifest.

This sacred she, this holy "you," has places to go, places to be, but her own place is uncertain. She and Celan are both detached, but differently. Why Celan painted such a convincing mirror image in this poem is unknown, but that he did so speaks volumes about what he experienced in Paris. His alienation became more keenly felt, but then it began to bleed into the individuation process, during his first difficult period in Paris, and this poem reflects those moments clearly. Many of the best-known works of the survivor authors focus on their time in the camps. The time after, the time when survival is not an answer but a question of "what now?" is less often treated. Celan lived in that moment and wrote volumes about it in six lines. Even in this moment, however, Celan was attempting to remedy his disconnection. His initial social choices illumine this desire.

Celan began to form new social connections, including intimate ones with non-Jewish women, after his initial period of social disconnect. These were noteworthy as they would have been seen by his community before the war as tantamount to betrayal. Two poems from this era, "Corona" and "In Egypt," are demonstrative of his initial conflict and final reconciliation with the idea of an intimate life outside the community. The first, most aggressive composition on the

subject is “In Egypt” and analysis of it makes the blurred transition from alienation to individuation distinct.

Celan dedicated “In Egypt” to Ingeborg Bachmann. He sent the poem to her in a letter, personally inscribed with dedication, in 1948 from Vienna before his move to Paris. The dedication read, “For Ingeborg. To one who is painfully precise, 22 years after her birth, from one who is painfully imprecise” (Celan, quoted in Moropoulos 3). His simple awareness of a birthdate and active engagement with Bachmann are both signs of the hesitantly beginning shift from alienation to individuation. While at that point he was still predominantly undergoing alienation, the poem further emphasizes the shift by marking his engagement with his previous life via religious reference *and* with his emerging life via social connection. The frame of the poem itself, in a series of commandments, emphasizes the religious tone:

> Thou shalt say to the eye of the woman stranger: be the water.
>
> Thou shalt seek in the stranger’s eye those thou knowest are in the water.
>
> Thou shalt summon them from the water: Ruth! Naomi! Miriam! (Celan 1-3)

Water contains symbolic links to life and birth in general, and to chaos and darkness, in Judaism. If one wishes to address the dead, the water would be a good place to do so. The women addressed are all matriarchs: the female spiritual and maternal founding figures of Judaism. Miriam is an especially poignant choice as the sister of Moses and due to her association with protection in Judaism. These are powerful women, legendary figures, and to address them is a potent choice.

Celan moves from invocation to ritual address in the next four lines. He begins by combining the four figures, the stranger and the matriarchs, via the language of clothing and body:

Thou shalt adorn them when thou liest with the stranger.

Thou shalt adorn them with the stranger's cloud-hair. (Celan 4-5)

The act of adorning, or *schmücken*, is a more potent concept and term than "clothe" or similar choices. It is a decorative, formal verb, evoking celebration and worship. In addition, through the act of "lying with," a powerful form of bodily intimacy, Celan creates a union of the sacred and the sensual. The compound word *Wolkenhaar*, the decoration being used, could mean either hair that is like a cloud, hair that is a cloud, or hair that moves like clouds, all of which are evocative and cause the simple, physical form of the hair to become numinous. The presence of this image, the matriarchs adorned with the cloudlike hair of the "woman stranger," has set the stage for announcement:

Thou shalt say to Ruth and Miriam and Naomi:

Behold, I sleep with her! (6-7)

This statement, emphasized by the buildup toward it and by the invocation one-by-one of the matriarchs, is poetic evidence of the break from one context and into another. Celan has embraced the woman stranger, the outsider, the gentile, and performed the physical act of love. The present tense of the translation indicates, also, an ongoing process. It is not "slept," but "sleep" - the sexual intimacy is promised to continue. The remaining lines demonstrate a differing, lingering connection to the past via symbolic physical contact with the matriarchs, and a return to the act of adornment, and via the use of past tense in the final line, demonstrate a past that is over and ongoing at the same time (8-12). These are reproduced in final analysis in chapter four, but now it is necessary to move to another poem dealing differently with the same subjects.

In “Corona” we see his connections outside the previous confines of his existence and his challenge to social conceptions evolving in his poetry. In this poem Celan writes:

> Autumn eats its leaf out of my hand: we are friends.
> We shell time from the nuts and teach it to walk:
> time returns to the shell.
> In the mirror is Sunday,
> in the dream we sleep,
> the mouth speaks true.
> My eye goes down to my lover’s sex:
> we gaze at each other,
> we speak of dark things,
> we love each other like poppy and memory,
> we sleep like wine in the seashells,
> like the sea in the moon’s blood-beam.
> We stand and embrace at the window, they watch us from the street:
> it is time, for this to be known!
> It is time that the stone took the trouble to bloom,
> that unrest’s heart started to beat.
> It’s time for it to be time.
> It is time.

Felstiner connects this poem to Celan’s encounters with gentile women, again likely the writer Ingeborg Bachmann (Felstiner 54). Researcher Nikolaos Moropoulos dates “Corona” as the last poem Celan composed before leaving Vienna, confirming that Bachmann remains the most likely candidate for subject. This is the significance of the “Sunday” in the mirror; the gentile Sabbath is painted clearly to differentiate from the Jewish *Shabbat* on Saturday. The frank scrutiny of the people from the street, if this were a literal recounting of events, would be a response to the apparent nudity of the subjects – but this is not a literal recounting of events. The bystanders’ watching represents a divide between them and the lovers, a social rather than a mental or physical divide based on the intimacy of the text: otherwise, there would be no need for the call to action. It would not be “time for it to be time” (17). The difference between “Corona” and “In Egypt” is that Celan is addressing not the matriarchs of old but the society of his own time. Celan challenges the idea that his connections must be circumscribed by cultural

boundaries, whether that idea is being advanced by his own people or by the Nazis. His challenge, and his actions in response to that challenge, form his new individual context and status.

For a Jewish person to have affairs outside of the people is heavily frowned upon at the best of times. Just after the war, with Jewish numbers so depleted, it would have been nigh unthinkable in Celan's situation. He was free, outside of the USSR, and he could have sought out lovers and eventually a wife among his own people. Judaism by birth is conveyed via the matriarchal line; his children by any gentile woman would not be Jews unless they underwent conversion, which despite its status as religio-legally equivalent to birth by Halakhic law was considered inferior by people in many of the more traditional communities – and there are and were still many communities that favor a tradition-oriented interpretation of the faith. For example, according to Rabbi Emeritus Jonathan Miller of Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham, Alabama, those Ashkenazim whose ancestors emigrated from Russia to Mexico remain staunchly traditional and are overwhelmingly members of the Orthodox movement with little to no presence of the more progressive movements. Traditionalist feelings were stronger during Celan's time. Even until the early 21st century status as a convert was something one did not talk about even in many of the more progressive communities (Miller). Being half-Jewish on one's mother's side is acceptable because it carries the full inheritance. Having only a Jewish father could be considered worse than being fully gentile in terms of one's social prospects in the community. The children of Jewish mothers are always welcome back — women across many cultures in hostile or foreign circumstance are expected to make sacrifices such as marrying men of means to stay alive and redirect their children to their communities, but children of Jewish fathers and gentile mothers could be seen as stained. All communities have their lower-status

members, their red-haired stepchildren, and for the Jewish people these have traditionally been those who could claim only patrilineal descent. By stepping outside the community in the bedroom, and speaking publicly about it via poem, Celan is cementing and proclaiming his own new way of being; he will live in active rejection of the old assumptions and social mores, and in doing so build a new family and life outside of the old limits. He is stating his individuation here blatantly.

The line from "Corona," "we love each other like poppy and memory," like pipedreams and nostalgia, is also significant in demonstrating Celan's individuation (Celan 10). Not only is he connected to the outside in an intimate sense, seeking profound companionship among non-Jews, but he and this Ur-lover are caught in both a drugged vision of a better world and reminiscences of one that is dead. These seemingly destructive comparisons are, in this case, the first steps toward moving into a new and better conception of the world. "It is time" for that better world to be real, and for what can be salvaged from those memories to be redeemed. Those words, "poppy and memory," would later become the title of one of his collections. That collection is noteworthy because, among other reasons, it is his first published collection not to be retracted due to publication issues. In finally publishing a collection that he could be proud of, Celan was claiming his place formally as a poet in his new life. The appearance of this collection marks a point when alienation begins to bleed fully into individuation, where previously they existed in admixture.

Unfortunately for Celan, individuation is a restrictive process. While humans can define themselves in multiple ways via multiple connections, these definitions cannot last indefinitely if the manners of connection are opposed. Celan's connection to the victims of the Shoah, one-sided as it was, is manifest throughout his poetic output and only becomes more prevalent over

time. He would vacillate over the decades between periods of hope and despair, sometimes focusing on his present life and at others living purely as an anthropomorphic testimony to the Shoah. This is his individuation as human memorial. References in his poetry as examined above, and examined further belay, make it clear Celan was aware at the least unconsciously of the impossibility of embodying both memory and living things. However, he continued to attempt to straddle the divide via his poetry. His individuation as survivor-poet, complete with a family and a small but passionate living community of admirers, required that he define himself by his responsibilities and the reception of his actions as a living human being after the Shoah. His individuation as a memorial required that he count himself among the lost and speak for them, a status requiring him to spend an exceptional amount of time dwelling in his thoughts of death and in his conception of the identities of witnesses and victims. For a living person this is damaging; for a memorial only failure to serve can be harmful.

Memorials do not breathe, eat, sleep, have children, or do any other thing required of living human beings. They are meant to serve as a reminder after all testimony, all witnessing, is complete. Celan writes in *"Aschenglorie"* (Ash-Aureole) "No one/ bears witness for the/ witness" (Celan 24-26). These lines are significant and will be analyzed in detail below, but it is necessary to start from the beginning. This poem contains the conceptual kernel of his divided self:

> ASH-AUREOLE behind
> your shaken knotted
> hands at the Threeways. (Celan 1-3)

"Ash-Aureole" is the translation used by Felstiner, though "Ash-Halos" or "Ash-Auras" might also be suitable for conveying meaning. The concept is striking in any case: ash outlining

damaged, but still living, hands. The compound noun “Threeways” in this case invokes the idea of an “I,” a speaker struggling to define themselves between two possibilities, one of which is a form of negation-as-person. According to Omri Ben Yehuda, a scholar of comparative Jewish literature, Celan frequently used words and compounds with intended meanings conveying negation such as *Niemand* (No One) to create complex, self-negating proper nouns (Ben Yehuda 70). He saw paradox as a way of provoking the reader into deeper thought and creating connections out of absence. His memorial self, an identity that should not be able to exist without the extinction of the living self, is one such construction. Whether consciously or not “Ash-Aureole” demonstrates his act of building up his two new identities and the struggle to choose which to maintain as they became mutually exclusive. He could not be writing this if he were not alive, but he could not speak as authoritatively for the ash haloes if he did not count himself among the perished. The tension of this existence is visible:

> Pontic Once-upon-a-time: here/ a drop/ on
> the drowned oarblade/ deep/ in a petrified oath
> it bubbles up. (4-10)

“Pontic" is in this case a reference to Celan’s Eastern European origins. He was not from the Pontus region, but he was often willing to use broad symbols to describe highly specific phenomena. This is the prerogative of poets and is not unusual. The presence later of a “Tatar Moon” follows the same explanation (Celan 16). The use of the oarblade here is a bit denser to unravel; it is a “drowned” tool that is suspended in a fossilized promise with a drop, presumably of water, “bubbling” up, from the Pontus region. The act of turning the stanza into a unified image is a complex one with a certain degree of difficulty attached, but the concept becomes clearer via analysis of the German form of line ten: *rauscht es auf.* The separable *“aufrauschen”*

does not mean to produce bubbles or float upward; it refers to rushing or roaring movement in an implied upward direction. Considering that a drop is necessarily fluid, Felstiner's choice of "bubble" for the translation is an effective choice, but the implied speed of movement found in the other meanings of *"aufrauschen"* creates a useful contrast to the idea of the "petrified oath."

Th petrified oath is the covenant of Abraham and Adonai, petrified because the end of the age of miracles and lack of visible intervention in the Shoah implies a definite lack of movement. The oarblade, drowned in stone, smothered in petrification, is the people Israel, and the drop is the speaking "I" articulating itself. The drop moves quickly, rushing, but the oarblade is stuck, a tool which cannot be used. The Jewish people's purpose is partnership in creation, the finishing or mending of the world: *Tikkun Olam.* With the death of millions and the continued antisemitism Celan faced, his decision to have the speaker-persona of "Ash-Aureole" adopt a pessimistic view of the great, kabbalistic endeavor is understandable. Skepticism toward the Kabbalah is not new, and as Celan (unlike Wiesel) was never a strong adherent of mystical Judaism his choice is not strange. Buber in philosophy and Singer in fiction wrote, before the Shoah, of the flawed application of mystical theory. Buber felt that communion with the imperceptible divine was a desirable dissolution of identity into eternity rather than a partnership (65-66). Singer's novel *Satan in Goray* holds that mystical attempts at comprehension of the divine, or articulating the divine in human terms, were doomed and would lead those who attempted them to disaster (Singer 170-171). Celan's difference is that mysticism itself is not the problem: the goal is simply impossible. Celan desired a communion with the divine but did not believe it was possible because, in Celan's opinion, the divine had broken faith with the people Israel.

Celan's determination to "blaspheme until the end" is documented, but so is his reverence for the divine (Celan, *Breathturn into Timestead,* lviv; Celan and Sachs). In his personal notes he sometimes wrote "G-d" instead of the full word, a practice intended to avoid profaning the divine name, and a behavior he would only have performed there, in materials never intended for public consumption, if it did not satisfy an *internal* need. Celan believed in Adonai, but his opinions of them were not positive. On some level he could not or would not give up his belief that, in some unknown manner, Adonai must exist. However, he did not trust Adonai to keep their promises. The covenant is dried and lost, a "petrified oath," for Celan, but Adonai themself endures. Celan had belief in Adonai, an abundance of belief, but no faith in Adonai and no hope that they would keep their covenant. This distrust of the divine plays out in "Ash-Aureole" final stanzas.

Celan's lack of faith combined with an abundance of belief are part of his ultimate struggle with identity. This division of spirit, the choked scream ringing through identity and personal conviction, is embodied in the parenthetically bound third stanza:

> (On the plumblined/ breath cable, back then, / higher than on high, /
> Between the two pain knots, while/ the gleaming/ Tatar moon climbed up to us, /
> I dug me into you and you.) (Celan 11-17)

The pressure on the speaker is embodied by the weight of implied ocean depths on the speaker-as-diver. The speaker is under the weight of history and tradition and is held to life by the thinnest of breaths. The two pain knots are Celan's experiences with antisemitism before and after the Shoah; the "you and you" the speaker digs and is dug into are the selves he would cultivate. This division of self into three parts, the unincorporated "I" and the two "you" concepts, are present in and defined by pressure and suffering:

> Ash-
> aureole behind you
> Threeways-
> hands. (Celan 18-21)

The “you” in this case still refers to the two “you” concepts above: the German word used is “*euch*,” and that pronoun is a form of the familiar plural. The “Ash-aureole” in this case are image-echoes burned into the background of the lost life: alienation’s memory at the three-point crossroads of individuation. There is a pessimism to these lines, despite their engagement with one of the two latter survival processes. The image here, the echoes in ash around the sets of hands, are like the shadows left on the walls of Hiroshima. Celan’s “I” and “Yous” are, in some sense, already dead, and only their burnt auras remain. A choice is still required, and it is not between one possibility but three:

> Before you, the easterly
>
> dicethrow, frightful. (22-23)

The word used here is also “euch,” and so the plural continues to apply. The choice between these two future selves and the previous self with its “easterly” attachment to the increasingly antisemitic USSR was temporarily paralyzing, though his final choice was to move on. The reduction in division to only the two selves served to increase rather than decrease the contrast. The final three lines, among the most quoted of Celan’s work, sum up this conflict admirably:

> No one
>
> bears witness for the
>
> witness. (Celan 24-26)

Celan was rendered bitter, numbered among the almonds, by his losses and his own depersonalization at Nazi hands. After Celan’s move to Paris the two selves, memorial and human, were already in danger of fraying before they were even fully conceived, and their mutually exclusive nature did not help. Celan was left with the division between the seen (the victims) and the witness: the one who survives and carries on memory. He was left with this

question, implied in “Ash-Aureole”: who witnesses for me? His answer: no one. The solution to this problem was to transform *niemand* (No one in the standard negative sense) into the noun *Niemand* (No One in the sense of a subject with an Odyssean, paradoxical definition).

To correct his lack of a witness, he had to become his own witness, numbering himself among the victims. Yet, to Celan, the true victims shared the singular quality of death: “Jew’s curl, you will never grow gray.” His poetic works, speaking for and through the dead, were the best solution he could devise as a living man to correct for the deficit in his status among the victims of the Shoah. His work, those parts of it concerned with witnessing and with identity among the deceased, serves as a means of overcoming his own guilt and frustration with his survival itself.

Survivor’s guilt is a common phenomenon in the psychology of living victims of any tragedy or atrocity. Wondering why one has survived when others did not is common, and it is often accompanied by anxiety over choices made or not made in whatever traumatic situation produced the initial trauma. Journalist Gina Cavallaro records instances of this phenomenon among military personnel, but it is prevalent among survivors of any traumatic event characterized by loss of life (64). Celan reported that he saw his father once on the other side of a fence, and that he ran from his father in a moment of weakness when worried about the guards, the memory of which haunted him for years (Felstiner 14-15). This situation is unlikely, but Celan seems to have believed it occurred. He was haunted by the idea that he did not stay with his father and regretted his perceived cowardice for the rest of his life (Glenn 19). Not every survivor feels guilt, or obsesses over choices from their traumas, but considering the introspective requirements for creative work it is by no means surprising that Celan did. His guilt, undeserved though it was, is evidence of post-traumatic stress – the complex set of

symptoms caused by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. While only a doctor can offer a definitive diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), it is diagnosed via symptoms which have been extensively studied by academics such as professor of psychology J.I. Bisson and clinicians alike (Bisson et al.). I cannot diagnose Celan with PTSD, but I can say with certainty that he experienced trauma and that he experienced symptoms associated with the disorder afterward. Many of the symptoms of PTSD relate to disruptions in the regulation of thought, emotion, or belief, including disruptions of identity. Such symptoms can specifically include: “feelings of detachment or estrangement from others,” “persistent inability to experience positive emotions,” “irritable behaviour and angry outbursts,” “persistent negative emotional state,” “vivid intrusive memories, flashbacks, dreams, or nightmares” (Bisson et al.) While some symptoms of PTSD will be examined in more detail in chapter four, the persistent emotional state and intrusive memories are key here. Celan’s guilt, his set of recurring intrusive emotions and thoughts compounded by the memory of his father, is articulated not only through literal statements, but also through the divide between his poetic personas. Guilt was the wedge that forced a division between Celan’s two new selves. The survivor self, the witness self, is a human being of flesh and bone who ate, breathed, had children, and held strong opinions about the social role of poetry. The memorial self, the monument-in-stone-self, spoke from the page as one among the dead, beyond saving, and beyond all human requirements and privileges. Celan, by nature of his experiences, contained both selves – and the stress of maintaining both at the same time was tremendous.

It is possible for a person to be more than one thing at a time. Buddhist doctrine and the works of modern philosophers such as David Hume hold that the self is an illusory construct made up of various impressions and not even a natural whole. People play contradictory roles at

times: dyed in the wool creationists might find it surprising that Charles Darwin was also a Lutheran minister. A certain amount of internal contradiction is normal in humans. However, truly incompatible self-images and drives can prove destructive. Darwin felt some guilt that his findings were not consistent with traditional Christian doctrine; he occasionally referred to himself as “the devil’s chaplain” as a form of gallows humor to ease the inner tension. However, in his case, both the scientist and the theologian within him shared a compatible concern: learning about and appreciating the world around them in its wonders and complexities. Both roles could accept that this process would be complex, difficult, and sometimes painful. He continued in both pursuits because they shared the same drive.

Paul Celan, however, was split between two distinctly incompatible drives: the will to live in the world for himself and his people, and the will to be counted among the dead of the Shoah and let his life be added to the mountain of lost worlds which they comprised. In Judaism it is an old aphorism, derived from the Talmud, that “the one who saves a life saves the world entire.” What does this say of the one who takes a life? What does this say of the one who takes twelve million lives? At least two of these worlds, Celan’s parents, preceded him to the grave. Having lost two worlds his grief was immense: but to Celan, again, “No one/ bears witness for the/ witness.” He had lived. He had been spared. His guilt at being spared prevented him from dealing with his own victimhood as he did with that of others. As a result, his consciousness of his own trauma remained even as he tried to live despite it. This conflict was the primary complicating factor as he pursued integration.

Chapter 4: Integration

The process of integration requires a steady presence in the world and the maintenance of connections established in individuation. Integration, as expressed in Celan's work, begins in the previous process of individuation, which itself began in alienation. The lines are not etched with lasers or acid – they possess fluidity. One process flows into another. Celan's individuation had to be more flexible than usual as it was forced to split into two parts: the living human, and the unchanging memorial. Eventually, when the strain on any object grows too great, flexibility ends, and something must break. This is true in physics, and it is true of phenomena in the human mind. Only one form of Celan could continue to exist; the human side or the memorial side could continue, but not both. By examining poems from the three primary eras of Celan's work as discussed in this thesis, ending with Celan's final poem, the nature of his integration is clarified.

Alienation has been established as present in many of Celan's early poems, and individuation is present in the poems of his middle period. Integration is present in his later works, but the possibility of it exists alongside the seeds of individuation in even the early works. Returning to two previously examined poems, "In Egypt" contains profound similarities to "Corona," a work which establishes the progress toward individuation firmly, but its active sense of confrontation causes it to differ:

> Thou shalt say to the eye of the woman stranger: Be the water.
>
> Thou shalt seek in the stranger's eye those thou knowest are in the water.
>
> Thou shalt summon them from the water: Ruth! Naomi! Miriam!
>
> Thou shalt adorn them when thou liest with the stranger.
>
> Thou shalt adorn them with the stranger's cloud-hair.

Thou shalt say to Ruth and Miriam and Naomi:

Behold, I sleep with her!

Thou shalt most beautifully adorn the woman stranger near thee.

Thou shalt adorn her with sorrow for Ruth, for Miriam and

Naomi,

Thou shalt say to the stranger:

Behold, I slept with them!

"In Egypt" re-establishes concepts of family, community, and connection during individuation and demonstrates how these are maintained and strengthened via integration. The speaker's confrontation with the matriarchs and insistence on demonstrating profound connection to both an outsider-lover and to the matriarchs themselves serves as a demonstration. Not only does Celan's sense of disconnection and alienation lead to the confrontation found in the poem; it leads to the experience of forming new connections and the potential promise of an ongoing life beyond the wounds of the past (but never forgetting them). In the line "Behold, I slept with them!" Celan demonstrates that his former connections are dissolved except in memory and though he will not forget them he is now *receptive* to novel connections. The past lives on in the survivor, but otherwise it is over. The speaker, ostensibly Celan, is receptive to a new life.

New perceptions and experiences lead to the reconciliation of old sufferings and the advent of a new self-definition (Frankl 119-120). Different eras in Celan's post-Shoah life corresponding to the three processes exist, and though they do bleed together to a degree, it is necessary to review them in order before discussing integration in depth. Social connection and its loss are key features of all three of the survival processes Celan underwent.

The first and most defined of Celan's survival processes is alienation. This process affects the later integration process by setting up the division between his death-oriented and life-oriented perspectives. Celan's most obvious poem of familial devotion is "*Espenbaum" (*Aspen Tree) and makes direct references to Celan's mother in every one of the even-numbered lines (Celan). However, "*Ein Lied in der Wüste,"* (A Song in the Wilderness) contains the broadest connection Celan makes to family, blood, and home as destroyed concepts in *Mohn und Gedächtnis.* Discussing the poem sufficiently requires including it in full here:

A garland was wound out of blackening leaves in the region of Akra:
I reined my dark stallion around and stabbed out at death with my
Dagger.
From the deep wooden vessels I drank of the ashes from wells there at
Akra,
And charged straight ahead at the ruins of heaven with firmly set
Visor.

The angels are dead and the Lord has gone blind in the region of
Akra,
And no one will guard for me those who have gone to their sleep and
Are resting.
The moon has been hacked into bits, the flow'r of the region of Akra:
Like dark russet thorntrees they blossom, those hands wearing rings
That are rusting.
So now at the last I must bend for a kiss when they're praying in

Akra...

O scant was the breastplate of night, the blood through its buckles is

Oozing!

Now I am become their smiling brother, the ironclad cherub of Akra.

And still do I utter the name and still on my cheek feel the blazing, (Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose,* 1-18, 20; 19 translation mine)

The entire region of Akra is lost, but the last four lines contain references to the flowing of blood, brotherhood, naming as a sacred act, and the loss of status as a normal human and assumption of status as a symbol (17-20). It is the most obvious sign of Celan's personal alienation available in his earliest collections. Returning to the concept of PTSD as discussed in chapter three, Celan's work manifests one of the symptoms identified by Bisson et al., specifically "feelings of detachment or estrangement from others." In his suffering Celan loses his sense of connection to his now-destroyed past context but becomes family to all others who suffered as he did, and his speaker stands for them armed and armored as an angel at the gate. This is how he embodies reciprocity, in the sense of reciprocity defined by Buber as complete and fundamental relation, to the dead (14). Yet, Celan's speaker is not from the "region of Akra." This place is not identified as home, and home is never mentioned. Akra is, in the Buber sense, never given the necessary traits to constitute a "thou" versus an "it," it is not treated with compassion, but those who live there are the divine "thou" and regarded compassionately (8-9). Every "thou," every "you," when encountered via a compassionate relation which dissolves the individual, when the I and the thou are made one via trust, also relates to the divine – and therefore to all of reality (Buber XV). The world and each individual component, in the sense

used by Buber and admired by Celan in Buber's work, when encountered directly and not through the lens of personal preoccupation, is divinity. The speaker remains distinct from the people of Akra, and only feels compassion *for* them rather than trusting and relating to them on such a level that the speaker would substitute "they" for "we." This lingering distinction characterizes Celan's search for a divine dialogue, for an enveloping of "thou," as filtered in this early work through historical reference to an artistically altered group.

"A Song in the Wilderness," like "Death Fugue," demonstrates Celan's ability to find commonality with others on massive scale but, unlike "Death Fugue," it also contains the phrase *So ward ihm lächelnder Bruder* (Celan 19). This phrase translates to "So I am become their smiling brother," and refers to a profound sense of transformation and adoption (Celan 19, *Selected Poems and Prose*, translation mine). Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of *Poetry as Experience* includes the concept of naming as relation – by naming the people of Akra as kin and themself as kin, the speaker is engaged in fundamental relation (95-96). Lacoue-Labarthe's relation is almost an inverse of Buber, as he felt naming is an act which alienates, but the context here marries the two disparate elements in Celan's quest for a new communal experience – if only via his poetics. The speaker, by the poem's end, has become a brother to the people of Akra, and despite the lingering degree of separation between them, they are close to a fundamental, true relation. This creates a sublime, but straining, sense of reality. Poetry constitutes this strangeness, what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls "a brutal revelation" when writing about Celan in his *Poetry as Experience*, an otherness of perspective Celan provides to express the tension left by his psychological wounds (54). Further, Celan's poetic voice describes becoming one with a people, yes, but also serving them: the people of Akra are stricken with harsh circumstances and unlikely to smile. They cannot defend themselves or they would not need

defending. The speaker smiles for them because they need someone who can keep smiling despite horror, is “ironclad” for them because they need someone who can stand in defense despite violence and is their brother because of all the family that has been lost. A broken people become the speaker’s family and the speaker is made whole. This is the promise of the early Celan’s poetic mission, but the dream may have been overly ambitious. In leaving behind alienation for individuation, Celan unfortunately still carried the scars of loss and his emphasis on standing for others complicated his ability to stand for himself.

Individuation, in the sense treated here, refers to connecting both the survivor as a living being and then the survivor’s subsequently changed life circumstances and status to a new sense of self. Celan was able to connect himself, as a person, to his new society. These connections were often complicated by lingering psychological symptoms that would now be associated with post-traumatic stress (first mentioned and defined in chapter three), but connections did exist. He was able to function as a husband and father, for a time. His later estrangement from his family, in part due to bursts of rage of a type associated with PTSD, does not erase how he managed to start and maintain a new family life (Felstiner 243). However, his estrangements and his outbursts of rage did make integration, the maintenance of ties formed during individuation, much more complicated.

The most prominent barrier to integration for Celan, as expressed in his work and in surviving records of his correspondence, came from the continuing presence of antisemitism in the world and his understandably decreased ability to endure it. The reaction to Celan’s work in Germany was a source of considerable stress for him. Book critic and former *The New Republic* editor Ruth Franklin writes, “much of the critical reaction ranged from uncomprehending to outright anti-Semitic” (Franklin). Critics, some of whom were former Nazi party members,

accused his work of being meaninglessly fantastic and unconnected to reality (Franklin). Celan remarked, "Now and again they invite me to Germany for readings. Even the anti-Semites have discovered me" (Celan quoted in Franklin). His decades-long resentment over the Goll affair fits the definition of "Intense or prolonged psychological distress to cues" as another PTSD symptom (Bisson et al.). The conflict between his reception by his fellow German speakers and his idea of his own work meant that though Celan's work contains an implied, continuing search for an I-Thou relationship, the world itself appears to deny him as the devaluing of his work, the devaluing of the Jewish voice, continues.

Celan's disillusionment with communication is expressed in "With the voice of the field mouse":

> With the voice of the fieldmouse/ you squeak up to me, /
> a sharp/ clip, / you bite your way through my shirt to the skin, /
> a cloth, / you slide across my mouth/ midway through the words/ I address to you,
> shadow, / to give you weight. (Celan, *poetryfoundation*)

This poem, from Celan's collection *Sprachgitter,* uses soft symbolic languages to deal with painful, and harsh concepts. The voice is soft, but the bite brings blood (1-4). This "you" brings silence as it speaks with softness, cutting off words intended to give weight to something weightless and lacking substance (7-10). Celan's reaching out with his words, his seeking communion, is destroyed by soft, yet biting, voices every time. The persistent presence of antisemitism overwhelms him even as he seeks to connect. This poem, not published until after Celan's death, is emblematic of his feeling of the tug of war between his perception of the world's evil and his need to connect.

Externally, Celan's integration is flawed – divided against itself. By turns he is upbeat and pursues ambitious goals, but later he complains of being experimented on in asylums and hangs on to life itself by a thread. Each set of behaviors is representative of one persona integrated into society. The upbeat man, the one who spoke of making Aliyah and living in the newly established State of Israel, was integrated into the greater society of France/Europe by his role as a father, husband, translator, and teacher. The tragic figure Celan later came to embody, the man in-and-out of mental hospitals in the nineteen sixties, the variation of the tormented artist, this version was integrated as idea into the artistic community of Europe by his accidental adherence to the archetypal figure of tortured genius famous throughout the Western world (Felstiner 230-231). This tortured figure, the surface level perception of Celan's internal struggle as expressed by a combination of severe illness and minor personal foibles, was the chrysalis from which the singular memorial-self would emerge. His suffering was very real, but to place him in this archetypal category is reductive – his journey through the paths of trauma was purposeful and directed, a way to alleviate suffering and provide voice, not simply an example of the effect of depression on a human life.

The source of Celan's contradictory external personas was the internal division between Celan's belief in his role as survivor/witness and his role as victim. It is entirely possible to be both a victim and a survivor of horrific events simultaneously. Murder is the most obvious way to destroy a life, but the damage inflicted on traumatized survivors, and continually re-inflicted by the intrusive recall and learned pessimism of trauma itself, hosts its own horrors. As established throughout this thesis, Celan's poetry is marked consistently by images and concepts drawn from his traumas. In the places where it is not so marked, it is marked instead by his

navigation of the world after the traumas of the Shoah or other, personal losses. Celan's poetic philosophy reflects these patterns of traumatic representation.

To bridge the gap between the world as distorted by horrors and the external world of objects and entities, Celan created a philosophical framework in which poetry existed as the mechanism to close the distance. Celan's attempt to recreate a unified human condition in his own mind and express it via poetry is visible in his "Meridian" speech:

> The poem wants to reach an Other, it needs this Other, it needs an Over-against. It seeks it out, speaks toward it.
>
> For the poem making toward an Other, each thing, each human being is a form of this Other. (Celan 409)

These statements indicate that a poem constitutes a relationship, a speech beyond normal speech, between the poet and the reader. The speech is designed as a refutation of the idea of Celan's poetry as *deliberately* obscure (407). Celan's insistence that "the poem does speak!" is also his insistence that poetics constitutes connection, bridging the shattered reality of the survivor with the realities of each human "Other" to which the poetry is exposed (408). Reality, in this sense, is defined by the sensory and narrative memories of individuals – and status as a survivor versus an untouched person indicates an insider/outsider dynamic resulting in two dissimilar realities. The creation of bridges between the insider and the outsider, those who experienced the realities in Celan's poems and those who read them, was the driving force in Celan's post-Shoah life.

Celan's efforts at reconciling not cultures but *realities*, at creating a unified vision of the paradoxically forward moving yet broken path of time after the Shoah, are visible in his work and indicate a desire for integration. Only a continuing presence in society could allow Celan's efforts to bear fruit. However, Celan's literary output was bound tightly to his identity. For

evidence one need only revisit the Goll incident. Glenn held that Celan was affected to a degree exceptional even in terms of the situation at hand, such that he even expressed animosity toward the then-deceased poet Yvan Goll for his wife's conduct (16-19). Accused by Claire Goll of plagiarizing her husband's work, despite having been loudly and nearly immediately defended by almost everyone who could be called a peer, Celan maintained intense, bitter feelings toward the incident for the rest of his life. Celan was not inclined to forget any slight or any kindness, but he took insults to his work to heart on a level indicating a personal attack rather than a professional one. To Celan there was little to no difference between attacking his body and attacking his output.

Due to the nature of his subject matter and his relation to it, singular integration was not possible. Celan instead divided his integration along two forking paths and refused to make any definitive choice between them. The father and active member of the Jewish community was the on the path of humanity; the tragic genius and psychically scarred ghost of a man whose poems sounded from the asylums was the on path of memorial. While Celan walked both paths simultaneously he lived as a human memorial, but such a condition is not sustainable. Humanity requires connection to other people and/or to the concept of humanity itself: preferably both. Celan's identification with others, his memory and affirmation of his own humanity, is harder to trace in his work than his memorial side, but it is present. It is undeniable in his elegiac "Epitaph for François." Celan wrote this brief poem after the death of his first child, François who died a few days after being born (Felstiner 72). The narrator bears with uncertainty through the two doors of the world "this Green into your Ever" (Celan 7). Green, the color of both growing things and of old graves, is carried into the Ever – the eternal non-being of the subject which punctuates the temporary status of his being. This poetic awareness of place indicates Celan's

focus on humanity and the present. While his subject is dead, his death is not related to the Shoah and the child's brief life would not have occurred at all if Celan had not survived. Celan's collaboration with other creators to produce works combining visual and textual components also provides evidence – those he worked with were not walking the stony path of memorial as he was.

The path of memorial, Celan's ultimate obsession, can be defined as a desire to identify fully with those for whom he spoke. Celan's emphasis on this identification-drive may have contributed to his need to remain in Europe and his unwillingness to emigrate to Israel, though he remained personally aware of his innate distinction from the dead as a living being. Based on the analysis of German-Jewish literature specialist Dr. Lena Barouch, Celan's unwillingness to ascend the mound at Masada during his visit to Israel was evidence of an internal conflict in his relation to Judaism and Israel as they existed at the end of his lifetime (298). While his reasoning is not recorded in his own words in any form I could find, his internal needs as established in this thesis provide an explanation I argue is the best available.

Masada, where the Sicarii rebels are said to have committed mass suicide rather than surrender to Roman rule, represents the ideal of Jewish independence and being able to ascend to the top of the mesa, to stand where they stood, is an honor and a valued experience for a Jewish person. To be able to stand there in the State of Israel, just after its creation, was a marker of the changed status of the Jewish people. Celan chose not to experience that moment, not to stand where the Sicarii stood, because it would have too strongly cast him into the role of living, human survivor and pre-empted his ability to speak for the dead. This is the best available explanation for his refusal to ascend: to do so would have severed the human and the memorial.

The tensions of Celan's merged human memorial identity were complex and a source of considerable strain. He wrote "Once, when death was mobbed, you took shelter in me" (Celan, *Last Poems*). With death taking so many, when endless numbers vanish, the speaker serves as their refuge. Yet, the dead cannot virtuously dwell within the living. If they try, they become like the Dybbuk, or "cleavage of an evil spirit," the possessor-entity of Jewish scripture and folklore (*The Jewish Study Bible,* I Samuel 16:14-23). The dead cannot exist within the living without becoming monsters, in defiance of nature and the divine, and though Celan had little desire for obedience to Adonai, he understood that combining the dead and the living was paradoxical. This led to his sense of strain – his speaker can be a shelter for the dead, for a time, but such a state is not sustainable. This is why the first word, *einmal,* "once," anchors the poem in a specific past place and moment. Celan would repeat this pattern, anchoring the dead within himself and his work, constantly throughout his career.

Celan's poem "There Will," part of his final posthumous collection, depicts its speaker in this state – anchored among the dead – but uses images of broken objects to produce the effects it desires instead of traditional death imagery. Celan writes "Out of a shardstrewn/ craze/ I stand up" (Celan 5-7). The speaker stands among ruins but is not ruined or inactive: the speaker creates. The speaker's hand "draws the one/ and only/ circle" (9-11). The speaker creates, and in so doing the shardstrewn craze, where the subject stands, becomes a site of meaning and not just decay. However, the speaker is "only" singular; a single circle is drawn. The speaker will remain singular; only one circle will be drawn. Celan was not isolated physically or socially; though he did eventually have to live separately from his family he still interacted with other people. He was isolated mentally and emotionally (Felstiner 263). Celan's experiences during the war created an emotional abyss (Glenn 19-20). This is a common reaction to oppression.

Poet and interdisciplinary theorist Syd Zolf analyzes the enforced sense of disconnection often experienced by victims of systematic oppression and violence in *No One's Witness: A Monstrous Poetics*. The text focuses on the final stanza of "Ash-Aureole" but is relevant to Celan's work in general. Traumatic events can trigger disconnection via a loss of faith in the world: oppressors count on that disconnection to weaken their victims (Zolf 23-25). A potential treatment for these effects was proposed famously by Viktor Frankl via logotherapy: focus upon actions one must take for reasons that are personally compelling. In the quest for meaning, a task, something which feels like it *must* be done by the one undertaking it, can become the best way to rebuild what one's oppressors have destroyed (Frankl 108-109). However, for Celan's task, his memorialization, the treatment had the opposite effect. Due to the nature of Celan's work, his sense of isolation could only increase even as he labored to give voice to the silenced. Even when his poetry reached a level of recognition sufficient to result in it being studied in schools his sense of isolation did not relent. If anything, due to misunderstandings of his work, it increased (Felstiner 258). The better Celan became at his task, his avenue of potential reconnection, the more isolated he felt.

Isolation in the midst of others is a common concept in literature. The phrase "alone in a crowd" is quite common in English. Trauma, and its severance of the individual from society, triggers this sensation. Celan's final collection is filled with this concept. The title, *Zeitgehöft,* or *"Timestead"* in English, is made up first of the word for "time" and second of a word which refers to either a homestead or courtyard. These places exist either outside the urban focus of contemporary existence, or between the external and internal domestic realities of modernity as expressed in architectural terms. *Timestead* evokes a place existing at the threshold of many conflicting drives, conflicting futures: a comparatively calm spot amid the entropic whirlwind

that is existence for an individual struggling with trauma response. Though these poems deal with many of the same themes as his earlier work, his linguistic and aesthetic complexity have increased. According to literary scholar Joshua Pederson, in work evincing the presence of trauma in the writer, one should look for signs of enhanced memory and perception due to the effects of stress on the mind over time (339). While some individuals force traumatic thoughts out of their minds, others focus on them to the extent that they become clearer and sharper than all other memories. The place Celan kept his suffering became the courtyard where dwelt his two conceptions of self, where they began to differ irreconcilably, and from which only one came forth.

Celan's final poem contains evidence of his final state of mind.

VINEGROWERS dig up/the dark-houred clock, /deep upon deep,

You read,

the Invisible, / summons the wind/ into bounds,

you read,

the Open ones carry/ the stone behind your eye, / it knows you, come the Sabbath.

Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*).

The first three stanzas evoke time, darkness, and wind – any of which can signify renewal or destruction, where "you could reverberate/ [or] you could/ decay" (Celan 1-7, The Dresden Dolls 2). The stone is an inevitable weight, carried behind the eye, following the speaker who is known 'come the Sabbath' - in the time outside of time (10-12). In traditional Jewish thought *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) exists outside of normal time: it is set apart, which is the basic definition of holiness in Judaism and not so far removed from the idea of sacred time in the Catholic Christian tradition. Experiencing *Shabbat* is to approach an "I-Thou" relation to Buber's boundless

divinity outside of yet encompassing time and space entire. In this state of set-apartness, in this state that is called holy, one can be consumed by a terrible clarity. To be known can be a relief – or an accusation. Either can be necessary for making necessary adjustments in one's life as one pursues the sustaining process of integration. For Celan, his attempt at integration was marked by his division, as mentioned previously, between a state of living, changing humanity and a state of unliving and unchanging memorial.

In April of 1970, Paul Celan fell from a bridge into the Seine River and drowned despite being a strong swimmer (Felstiner 287). Whether deliberate or not, this event marked an end to his conflict. He integrated not as living man but as a monument to the dead speaking through his poetry.

Conclusion

In his personal context, Celan's death could be considered the cut-off point of his survival processes, but in the context of Jewish society in general he persists. In losing the human being and embodying the memorial, he can endure in a new sense and his integration is complete. The last poem analyzed in chapter four, *"Rebleute,"* serves as evidence of this persistence. *"Rebleute"* can be translated as either "Vinegrowers" or "Grapegrowers," but "Vine People" is closer to its literal meaning. The Washburn and Guillemin translation uses "Grapegrowers" and is the one being referenced most closely after this point besides the original.

The poem stacks descriptions of grape growers digging "dark-houred" clocks from deep in the ground atop unseen forces ordering the winds beyond their borders, with "open" people whose eyes conceal stones recognizing Celan's favored "thou" on "the Sabbath" *(Last Poems,* 205). The winds are stilled, the day of rest is come, a clock is unburied, but its hours are dark: time is over but will start again. Felstiner, in his article "Mother Tongue, Holy Tongue: On Translating and Not Translating Paul Celan," as well as his biography, makes note that Celan specifically used the modernized and Christianized spelling, Sabbath, rather than a true transliteration of the Hebrew, and as result evokes a separate set of potential emotional responses in the reader (134). In this last poem Celan indicates the inevitability of new concepts accumulated by cultures and that even survival is an ongoing process. In this way he is the forerunner of such writers as Georgia-based poet and descendant of Shoah survivors Sabrina Orah Mark, whose work has embodied the concept of survival-as-ongoing-process throughout her career rather than arriving at it as her output would conclude. Mark's poem "Non Vixit" (Latin: he did not live) serves as evidence even as it asks for it:

> Late one night I enter the laboratory. There is only one animal. There is less of it now and more of other animals, but there is only one animal. Something is waiting for me inside this experiment. I want for it a language. I want for it a little evidence. There is only one animal. I study it from far behind the magnifying glass. It is biting on a Z with many zeroes after it. There is less of it now and more of other animals, but there is only one animal. Ladders we carry to see how far the ladder takes us. Machines we build to feel the sadness of machines. When I pull the cord there is only one animal. Do not be afraid, you are its world. (31)

This poem is drawn from a collection specifically written with the memorialization of Shoah survivors in mind, so its statements about humanity in general are also about Judaism specifically.

"Non Vixit" juxtaposes the concepts of brutal medical experiments, care for the ill, and the distance felt between people in a society. The setting of the laboratory evokes both the healing principles of medicine and the horrors of human experimentation ("only one animal" implies the singularity of the human being as the only sapient animal). The process of medical experimentation without consent strips away the perception of the victim's humanity, but still humanity remains, but still "there is only one animal." No matter what we build, no matter how many machines, we will never understand their sadness because it is only our sadness reflected back. No matter how many zeroes are bitten, no matter how much humanity in general alienates itself, it remains humanity: there is only one animal, and there is no need to fear: its world and it are the same. The way Mark couches her statements in a personal, idiosyncratic form, creating a highly individual style utilizing surreal images, is a characteristic cultural and social theorist

Julian Koch associates with Celan (185-186). His influence lives on in how it visibly impacts current Jewish writing.

Celan is an important figure in the study of Jewish writing after the Shoah because the division in him, the struggle between survival as a living person and survival as a dissolute, bodiless icon of witnessing, reflects a tension between different conceptions of survival present before and after the Shoah. Before the Shoah, survival in Jewish writing depends on a combination of miracles, obedience to law, patience, and ingenuity. Singer's *Satan in Goray* demonstrates this perspective. There is an idea that at any point all calamities will end and the world-to-come will arrive. Attempting to hasten this process, thinking too much of the future and not of the now, is a problem. After the Shoah, and long after Celan, the conception completed a transformation that was ongoing in his lifetime and can be seen in his work, fully developed in the last poem he wrote. Survival is no longer a concept applied solely to enduring a specific calamity, but instead the ongoing process of the Jewish people's existence despite the horrors visited upon them and the changes that have been necessary after each.

Survival, in the early eras of Judaism, marked a reference to singular events. One catastrophe would occur, followed by another, each one survived and remembered differently, each one hopefully the last. The times in-between catastrophes were seen as distinct. In Celan's work one can discern that, for the survivor especially and for the Jewish people generally, the distinction is a false one. Survival marks the survivor and affects their life going forward. In the work of Celan, and of Wiesel, and of Frankl, and many others, we see that to survive is not a singular undertaking – it is the unending process of living despite hostile conditions. This defines all of humanity, but in the work of those Jewish writers who survived the Shoah it is writ large in a way seldom found elsewhere.

Adorno insisted that poetry after Auschwitz is barbarism, or the antithesis of the civilized and humane. Celan's message, sometimes called cryptic or even hermetic, is instead quite simple: if a people continue to exist, if their perished are not forgotten, nothing is destroyed. Thus, barbarism does not triumph. Celan survives through his poetry. Society is served by both the living and those they remember, so Celan endures even as he is lost. Paul Celan is dead; long live Paul Celan.

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