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Jewish History and Memory in Paul Celan's "DU LIEGST"

Abstract

In the poem "DU LIEGST" (1967), Paul Celan demonstrates his mindfulness of historical dates as memorials to past traumas—the execution of the conspirators of the plot to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944, the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in 1919, and the be-heading of Danton in 1794. Celan has also written the specific date of the poem into the text, although hidden, and weaves together Jewish tradition and events of the recent past in a lyric exploration of human suffering. Building on the hitherto predominantly biographical readings of the poem, the presence of traditional Jewish texts (Old Testament, the Pessach-Haggada, and the Kabbala) and Christian teaching (New Testament) are analysed in "DU LIEGST," to reveal intertextual levels previously untreated by scholarship. Two discordant levels of biblical intertextuality are evident, that of the Old Testament, with trigger words pointing to the events recounted in Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy, and also that of the New Testament, based on the story of the Christian Messiah. Evidence of these given pre-texts is discussed with reference to the distinctive characteristics of Hebrew and to linguistic structures employed in the Bible, which point to Celan's debt to Judaism and his mastery of Hebrew. Furthermore a mystic-kabbalist interpretation of the poem reveals a surprising number of symmetrical words, dates, and symbolic numbers.

Keywords

DU LIEGST, Paul Celan, trauma, memory, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Danton, Jewish tradition, Jewish texts, biblical intertextuality, Christianity, Judaism, Hebrew

Jewish History and Memory in Paul Celan's "DU LIEGST"

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The poem "DU LIEGST" was written in Berlin on the night of the 22nd to the 23rd of December in the run-up to Christmas 1967. By 1960 at the very latest, and by the time of Celan's Büchner Prize speech, it had become apparent that he responded productively and creatively to certain historical and calendar dates (see Celan, *Der Meridian*). On this occasion he spoke of the task and the potential of art, and of the need to be mindful of historical dates. As both a reader of Büchner and as holder of the celebrated prize, he was referring to that date on which Büchner's Lenz "journeyed through the mountains," a man despairing of the world and trying to confront himself. As a Jew, Celan also refers to his own personal 20th January, the date of the Wannsee Conference, on which the so-called final solution was set in motion:

Perhaps we may say that every poem has its "20th of January" inscribed? Perhaps what's new for poems written today is just this: that here the attempt is clearest to remain mindful of such dates? / But don't we all date from such dates? And what dates do we ascribe ourselves to? // Yet the poem does speak! It remains mindful of its dates, yet—it speaks. Indeed it speaks only in its very selfmost cause. / But I think . . . a hope of poems has always been to speak in just this way . . . *in the cause of an Other*—who knows, perhaps in the cause of a *wholly Other*. (*The Meridian* 408)¹

Celan responded to the date of the Christian Feast of the Nativity by writing a poem at a time in his life when he was acutely conscious of his Jewish identity, even if it was an identity forced upon him by virtue of his birth and cultural-political circumstances and not one

he had adopted freely. Jean Firges reports, as does Celan's friend the Germanist Gerhart Baumann, that everyone who had had dealings with Celan was struck by his preoccupation with number mysticism, his belief in occult symbols and in secret correspondences and correlations between dates and numbers (Baumann 24). If the number of words in "DU LIEGST" is studied carefully, it is evident that the poem's specific date, that of the Feast of the Nativity, is written into the text.

Bearing in mind Celan's liking for dates and numbers, and also taking into account his intense study of the Jewish language and number mysticism of the Kabbala, a closer analysis of the numbers in "DU LIEGST" seems warranted. If the exact number of words is calculated, as Theo Buck has done, the perhaps surprising result is that a complete symmetry of words around the middle stanza is revealed.² Sixty words are divided into five stanzas over fourteen lines in the following scheme: 7, 17, 12, 17, 7. The first line of the middle stanza is seven words long, while the two stanzas framing the poem each add up to seven words:

1	DU LIEGST im großen Gelausche,	5		
2	umbuscht, umflockt.	2	7	
3	Geh du zur Spree, geh zur Havel,	7		24
4	geh zu den Fleischerhaken,	4		
5	zu den roten Äppelstaken	4	17	
6	aus Schweden—	2		
7	Es kommt der Tisch mit den Gaben,	7		
8	er biegt um ein Eden—	5		12
9	Der Mann ward zum Sieb, die Frau	7		
10	mußte schwimmen, die Sau,	4	17	
11	für sich, für keinen, für jeden—	6		
				24
12	Der Landwehrkanal wird nicht rauschen.	5		
13	Nichts	1	7	
14	stockt.	1		

YOU LIE amid a great listening,
enbushed, enflaked.

Go to the Spree, to the Havel,
go to the meathooks,
the red apple stakes
from Sweden—

Here comes the gift table,
it turns around an Eden—

The man became a sieve, the Frau
had to swim, the sow,
for herself, for no one, for everyone—

The Landwehr Canal won't make a murmur.
Nothing
stops.

(Selected Poems 329)

The poem comprises fourteen lines, with a clear thematic caesura between lines 7 and 8. These two distinct sections are marked by a change of narrative perspective from the "Du"-form in German to the third person. The splitting of the poem into two parts is further indicated by the use of different time frames: three different time frames are employed in the second part of the poem, while the present tense is used throughout the first. Worthy of note here, too, is that the avenging God of the Old Testament features in the first part, whereas in the second the seemingly gentle God of the twentieth century is detectable.

The composition is therefore split into two parts of seven lines arranged around an imaginary central axis. The number seven plays a central role in Celan's poetry; he often refers directly to the numeral, and it also features as a hidden means of structure. The privileging of certain number values can be observed, and there are deliberately constructed plays on numbers.³

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I shall return to the poem's sequences of numbers, because the

symbolic meaning of the different numbers and characters adds weight to my argument and my reading of the poem based on Jewish tradition.

Since it first appeared, “DU LIEGST” has been treated by critics as a “memorial poem.” Peter Szondi uncovered its biographical origins, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Theo Buck have put emphasis on its Jewish-historical facets, and Marlies Janz brings to the foreground the memory of the socialist martyrs Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, recognizable as “the man” and “the Frau” in the poem.⁴ I would like to build on the work of these scholars by engaging with “DU LIEGST” from the perspective of Jewish mysticism and investigating the close relationship of this poem to traditional Jewish texts. I want to illustrate how a Jewish counterpoint to the Christian Feast of the Nativity is present in this poem and, more precisely, on the level of the Old Testament: recalled here is the central event in the history of the Jewish people, the Exodus from Egypt.⁵ This act of remembering is not detectable on the immediate level of the poem, but it is recognizable in its biblical tone, style, use of language, and unmistakable signal words.

This poem can be read on several different and overlapping levels in which sites of terror in Berlin, the “Anti-Eden,” are revisited through time corresponding to the Hebrew understanding of time. In his study *Zeit der Zäsur. Jüdische Dichter im Angesicht der Shoah*, Amir Eshel describes the unique way that Jewish poetry approaches the passing of time (161-65). By means of single words, syntactic constructions, and entire sequences, events spanning over a century of Jewish history and heritage are wedded with twentieth-century occurrences. Temporal differences are suspended, events separated by time are linked, and a poetic space of memory, the Zikaron, emerges.

Originally entitled “Wintergedicht” ‘Winter Poem,’ and dedicated to Peter Huchel, “DU LIEGST” is closely related to Huchel’s “Winterpsalm” (1962), in which nature is called to bear witness to the catastrophic historical events in a penetrating lamentation for those listening. In accordance with the biblical call to be watchful (“Erinnerungsgebot”), Celan embarks on a journey to the sites of terror in Berlin and lets them speak to him.

Eshel describes the crime of the National Socialists as two-fold: the mass extermination of the Jews, but also the virtual destruction of their material and oral tradition and, with it, the history and heritage of a people who not only considered themselves to be the Chosen, but also bearers of memory, witnesses to a covenant waiting for the Messiah, and therefore not complete (163f.). Mindfulness of the conditions of the Covenant on both sides, also on God's part, is necessary.⁶ The call to be watchful is complied with in different ways, often unconsciously, and is connected with ancient Jewish folk history recorded in the Scriptures, as well as with more recent historical events and personal experiences. In poetry, this association with collective memory and the people's heritage is often conveyed through what has been written down in the language of the Scriptures.

Celan's assertion that "poetry is mysticism" (Büchler 92) can be interpreted literally as meaning, for him, a place where the human being can confront the "wholly Other" (*The Meridian* 408). Otto Pöggeler has explained that Celan said defensively about his poetry on several occasions that it was not about romantic love but about God (137; see also Koelle 42). As far as Celan is concerned, a poetic text represents the true language of mysticism. The transcendental, a secret, is implicit in and is transported through the vehicle of language; it does not need to be put into language, but already exists within it. This explains the power of language for the mystic, and for Jewish mystics, the *Leschon Hakodesch*—the holy Hebrew language—as the basis of spiritual advancement.

During his childhood and youth, most matters relating to Judaism caused friction between Celan and his father—for instance, the much maligned Hebrew lessons—but his relationship to Judaism was to undergo a profound change in the face of National Socialist persecution. Excluded from the German cultural tradition, many non-practicing Jews categorized as Jewish under the Racial Purity Laws reverted to Jewish tradition, confused about their identity. Paul Celan was no exception. A friend has stated that he only began talking about the beauty of the Hebrew language and the years he had spent mastering it after his experience of National Socialism (Chalfen 140, a dialogue with David Seidmann).

The poems themselves are the most telling testimony to Celan's

active interest in the Hebrew language. It can be demonstrated that he uses Hebrew patterns of word formation and the formal structures of Hebrew in his poetry, and in his correspondence with Nelly Sachs there is evidence that Celan uses associative connections with Hebrew words and their meanings, even though he wrote his poetry almost exclusively in German.⁷

Alongside his reflections on the Hebrew language, Celan began after 1945 to engage intensely with Martin Buber's publications on Chassidism and later with Gershom Scholem's writing on the Kabbala.⁸ He was never drawn to Orthodox Judaism, but as time went by he became markedly more interested in traditional Jewish texts, especially the Kabbala, as is evident from Celan's sizeable collection of Judaica in his personal library.⁹

From the perspective of his Berlin visit, the years from 1965 were those during which Celan was the most intensely engaged with Jewish tradition. By 1967, the year "DU LIEGST" was written, he was 47 and his advanced state of mental deterioration was evident. Three years later he was to end his life, by drowning in the Seine River. Towards the end of 1967 Celan traveled to Germany, which exacerbated the form of depression he was already suffering from. In 1969 he traveled for the first and only time to Israel. In an address to the Hebrew Writers' Association he declared: "I have come to Israel to see you because I had to . . . I think I understand what Jewish loneliness can mean" (*Gesammelte Werke* 3: 203).¹⁰ In the months preceding this visit, Celan had written several poems that take the linking of the generations in Judaism as their theme, and in which his own roots and personal identity within the greater Jewish history are examined.¹¹

Celan's journey to Israel marks the climax and the end of his search for a frame of reference for his existence—namely his life and writing. Traditionally the quest to find such a frame of reference often leads—not only in Celan's work—into the depths of mysticism, because all that is usually left in the aftermath of disaster is the waiting for a God who could not intervene. The notion of an uninvolved, or suffering, God is nurtured in Chassidism and also in some Kabbalistic teaching. This view of God contradicts at least the common reading and understanding of the Old Testament that describes the acts of God and the will of God and Israel.

Peter Szondi's so-called Eden study provides detailed information about Celan's life and the genesis of "DU LIEGST." The poem is dated 22-23 December 1967; Celan was in Berlin at the time, and snow was falling. Celan went to a Christmas market where Advent decorations from Sweden ("Äppelstaken") were on sale, and also visited sites of terror such as Plötzensee and the former Hotel Eden, and Szondi had just given him the newly-published documentary study *Der Mord an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht. Dokumentation eines politischen Verbrechens* (Hannover-Drück). Much of the content of the poem that at first seems hermetic can be decoded with reference to biographical data unearthed by Szondi; however, a reading of the poem that is restricted to this approach also limits its semantic possibilities, as Szondi himself has stressed in his unfinished study. Moreover, some individual words and even entire lines clearly stand outside this biographical scheme. If Celan's poetry is approached from an intertextual perspective, further pre-texts can be identified beyond those of his biography and the specific dates of the poems. "DU LIEGST" can, therefore, be interpreted on several levels which are connected primarily by means of trigger words.

Levels of Intertextual Analysis—Pre-texts

1. Biographical level: Berlin stay; calendar date 22-23 Dec. 1967
2. First historical level: Berlin under the National Socialists 1944
3. Second historical level: Anti-Communist uprising in Berlin 1919
4. Biblical level—New Testament (The Story of Jesus): Birth and Death
5. Literary intertextuality level: Büchner's Dantons Tod
6. Biblical level—Old Testament: Exodus—The freeing of the Israelites; Genesis—Eden; Deuteronomy—Zachor/ Be watchful
7. Mystical (Kabbalistic) level: symmetrical words and numerology¹²

As is so often the case in Celan's work, it can be argued that here geographical settings and dates and time frames combine on a meta-level of the poem to address "letzte Dinge"—theological questions

and God—a dialogue in the style of Job’s pleas and the relationship between God and his chosen people.

DU LIEGST im großen Gelausche,
umbuscht, umflockt.

YOU LIE amid a great listening,
enbushed, enflaked.

The “DU” at the opening of the poem can be interpreted as the situation of the lyric “I.” Accordingly, the abundance of biographical background material available on this poem at once prompts a comparison of the lyric “I” with the poet. The verb *liegen* ‘to lie’ and “großes Gelausche” imply a sense of being encompassed, of security, but also one of being overwhelmed and overcome by what the ear perceives. In his lyric poetry, Celan puts great store on verbs that convey the adopting of an upright position, and perhaps the description of “DU LIEGST” as a situation should not be interpreted literally here, but rather read as a pictorial expression of the “I” being overwhelmed by the command which can then be heard in the second stanza by the reader.¹³

We must refer to Grimms’ dictionary if we are to understand fully Celan’s use of the term “Gelausche.” He maintained that he coined no new words, but merely used alienating and technical terms and expressions that have fallen out of use.¹⁴ As far as “DU LIEGST” is concerned, the “große Gelausche” is closely connected to the poet’s treatment of the perception of the voice of God in his poetry. In the poems “EIN DRÖHNEN” ‘A Droning’ and “BEI WEIN UND VERLORENHEIT” ‘Lost, with Wine,’ Celan further problematizes the awareness of, and the means by which God’s voice can be detected (*Die Gedichte* 126 and 206). Only the prophet is capable of understanding the voice of God and acting on it.¹⁵

It is not absolutely clear whether the “DU” at the opening of the poem should be equated with the “du” of the second stanza. It could also represent Martin Buber’s emphatic “DU.”¹⁶ In this case, the “DU” at the beginning of the poem addresses a God who did not respond to the cries of his oppressed people with deeds—in contrast to the lamentation of God’s people in Egypt—here in Berlin,

the geographical setting of the poem. The act of sending would happen as a sign of remembrance of the victims, whereby the setting of the poem in Berlin, arguably the antithesis of Eden from a Jewish perspective, is given in a biblical Hebrew style. Not unintentionally, this is comparable with the cutting off of Eden by naming the rivers surrounding it.

"Busch" and "Flocken" relate to the emphatic "DU." The three-fold repetition "Geh du . . . geh . . . geh" has echoes of the imperative form used in the sending of the prophet Moses, God's scribe, to Egypt. It can also be read as a form of emphatic self-demand possible in Hebrew. If this is the case, the poetic "I" is compelled to seek out the sites of National Socialist terror (Berlin and, more precisely, Plötzensee, the Hotel Eden, and the Landwehr Canal) in accordance with the call for mindfulness of the Zacher, the sending of the prophet, and the resulting miracles of God and the intervention of God in the history of his people. At the same time, however, this is presented parallel to twentieth-century historical events that cast doubt on the validity of the Covenant between God and his people.

Certain trigger words employed in the first stanza point to the Torah as the *pre*-text, in particular the treatment of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. On a *pre*-text level that runs parallel to this, Moses' leading the Israelites out of Egypt is recalled, and here too the Zacher—the everlasting memory of this decisive event—the saving intervention of Yahweh in the history of his people. The opening and final lines of "DU LIEGST" are connected by irregular but nevertheless discernible rhyme. They are also linked thematically by the verb "stockt" and the pictorial evocation of rushing water and the rushing in of the Red Sea, meaning that the poem is couched, so to speak, in the Old Testament. There is an association here with the God of the Old Testament who intervenes on behalf of his people. Nevertheless, as in so much of Celan's poetry there is a thematic caesura, underpinned here by Celan's employing of a central axis device. In this way, a passive God is present as the poem closes, one who no longer appears to react to terror and violent deaths.

The mood at the opening of the poem depends on a positive or negative reading of the term "Gelausche." *Grimms Wörterbuch*

lists several variant meanings of the verb *lauschen*. In its most negative context, the noun “die Lausche,” loosely related to the English term “eavesdropping,” denotes a place or situation where this act of listening occurs (“Ort des versteckten Lauschens”; Grimm 6: 354).¹⁷ In the poem, the subject appears to be lying in wait or in ambush, in effect hiding in the foliage (“umbuscht”) or, in winter, perhaps surrounded by snow (“umflockt”). The term is borrowed from hunting and can be roughly translated as lying in ambush (“versteckt auf etwas harren”), and it is further illuminated by the description of *lauschen* as a form of dialect (Mundart) with restricted usage, derived from *das lussen* (*lúszén*), meaning “*ein ursach sùchen*”. A closer look at the usage of the word historically reveals that the connotations of the verb *lauschen* have become increasingly positive over time, and that it carries a forgotten meaning in its compound form.¹⁸ To be more precise, *lauschen* has an obscured, almost conflicting meaning, as do many lexical items in Hebrew when they are analyzed etymologically.¹⁹ On the evidence of Celan’s creative use of the German and Hebrew languages, it is highly probable that he plays on the different levels of meanings of single words.

For instance, “Gelausche” has a variety of meanings: the hidden (or at least not openly displayed) “ursach-sùchen” (enquiry—Celan’s confrontation with the sites of terror), acoustic reception (hearing a call), and possibly also the sense of being seduced (“Eingellullt-Sein”) into temptation, deceit, and hypocrisy (through society, politics, and religion). It is in accordance with the prophet’s fate that no one can defend themselves from their perception of God’s voice, either from within and from the outside. As recounted in Exodus 3.6 and 14, God reveals himself as the God of history and of the generations (Yerushalmi 21).²⁰ This revelation is made when God’s voice speaks to Moses through the “burning bush,” when only Moses is permitted to hear what he has to do (Exodus 3.2). In Judaism listening is held in higher esteem than seeing (the notion of the “graven image”). This is closely related to God’s calling to Moses from the bush and to the clouds and columns of fire protecting his people in the desert. Later, the image of the cloud reappears as a tangible sign of God’s presence and as a visual localization of God’s voice, for we are in effect surrounded by possibilities of acoustic perception. The meanings of *Umgeben-* or *Umschlossen-*

sein can be read positively as a feeling of security or, in their most negative connotation, as being taken captive (*Gefangennahme*), or being forced to do something against one's will (*Bezwungensein*). The meaning conveyed in the first two lines of "DU LIEGST" is embodied by the term "Überwältigung," which also has both positive and negative connotations.²¹

"Gelausche" is associated acoustically with the sound (*rauschen*) of the rivers referred to in the poem, primarily the Landwehr Canal, but the Spree and the Havel are also named:

Geh du zur Spree, geh zur Havel,
geh zu den Fleischerhaken,

Go to the Spree, to the Havel,
go to the meathooks,

Here and for the first time, the poem is provided with its geographical context, and in biblical Hebrew style. In accordance with a reading of the poem that draws on the description of the Exodus, the Biblical *pre*-text reads: "Geh du nach Ägypten . . . zum Pharao" "Go up out of Egypt . . . to Pharaoh"; and Celan's poem echoes this: "Geh du zur Spree, geh zur Havel." According to Thorleif Boman, the giving of a geographical setting by means of providing information about natural boundaries such as rivers and seas corresponds to Hebrew thought (136) When Celan draws parallels here between the places where God's people have been oppressed, it is highly likely that he had the Hebrew Bible text in mind, a section he already knew well through, for instance, the preparation he underwent for the Bar Mitzvah. It is also worth recalling Celan's letter to Nelly Sachs in which he discusses how he broke new ground in his German-language poetry by drawing on the Hebrew (see above). The Hebrew word for Egypt is *mizrajim* (a "dual" word or grammatical category denoting two or a pair) and describes the splitting in two of Egypt by the River Nile ("das durch den Nil in zwei Hälften geteilte Land, bzw. das eingegrenzte Land" [Fürst 777]). The pairing of the rivers Spree and Havel makes the reference to the city of Berlin unmistakable. There are clear parallels between Egypt and Berlin, both being

locations where God's people have been oppressed. Egypt has been described as a place of "flesh pots," and Celan further underpins the setting of the poem as Berlin by referring to meat-hooks ("Fleischerhaken"). These two locations can be considered border areas, and both are divided as well as contained.²² Tormented by survivor's guilt—for being unable to avert or lessen the fate of God's people, be it as a somewhat skeptical prophet²³—the dearest wish of those who survived is to be transported back in time to National Socialist Berlin. By being sent to Plötzensee *today*, the site of National Socialist terror in Berlin, one is led to a place of remembrance. In other words, the act of being sent to this site of commemoration evokes the command never to forget.

zu den roten Äppelstaken
aus Schweden—

the red apple stakes
from Sweden—

The reference to the "roten Äppelstaken," part of a decoration customary in Sweden during Advent, introduces an element of the Christian Feast of the Nativity into a poem that up to this point can be considered exclusively Jewish (as a Pessach poem). The instruction to go "zu den roten Äppelstaken aus Schweden"—to the festive decorations at the Christmas market—challenges expectations about whom we are anticipating in Advent. Szondi discusses how Celan registered "this pre-Christmas atmosphere that governs everything with the bewildered susceptibility of a people who are unacquainted with the celebration and that has for centuries lived in a land with no such atmosphere of its own" (392).²⁴ In the poem the waiting for the Messiah appears in conjunction with the apple, the symbol of temptation in the Garden of Eden. In his early notes on the poem, Celan even employed the term "Paradeiserl."²⁵ This is in keeping with the Jewish view of Jesus, who is not the Messiah, the Redeemer, who leads his people into Paradise. Given its associations with Eden, references to the apple must also be read here as symbolic of sin. The country of Sweden is not only to be understood

den—[ein] Eden—für jeden” ‘Sweden—an Eden—for everyone’ (194), but also as a country of Jewish exile.

Es kommt der Tisch mit den Gaben,
er biegt um ein Eden—
Here comes the gift table,
it turns around an Eden—

The reference to a table laden with offerings points unmistakably to the Feast of Christmas. Moreover, the act of waiting for the coming of the Redeemer is implied in “Es kommt.” Christ redeemed the sins of his people and left this world for the Promised Land, closed off since the act of original sin (see Luke 23.42). However, is the Feast of Christmas to be seen as the time for the Redeemer to come? It is significant that God’s gift of the child Jesus is replaced here by what is for many the meaning of Christmas today, “der (Fest-)Tisch” (a table laden with gifts).²⁶

From this point in the poem, all the hopes of redemption and for the fulfillment of God’s promise are nullified. This is achieved by marrying biblical events and God’s promise with recent historical events, in particular the losses of human life in the twentieth century. The search for the active God of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people, as well as the hopes of Christians to be taken into Paradise by their Messiah, are shown to lead nowhere. The table of offerings, representing the Christian Messiah, does not lead into Paradise but rather circumvents it (“biegt um ein Eden”). Also worth pointing out here are the references to “Eden,” “Äppel-,” “Mann,” and “Frau,” because they are all associated with original sin.

Der Mann ward zum Sieb, die Frau
mußte schwimmen, die Sau,
für sich, für keinen, für jeden –

The man became a sieve, the Frau
had to swim, the sow,
for herself, for no one, for everyone—

The man and woman here are representatives of humanity, this section alluding to Christ having been (“ward”) nailed to a cross to save the sins of his people.²⁷ According to the Covenant of the New Testament, Christ did not die for those who do not believe (“für keinen”). As a representative of the twentieth century, Karl Liebknecht died as a socialist martyr, sacrificing himself for what he believed in. He was shot dead at the Hotel Eden, according to eyewitness accounts “durchlöchert . . . wie ein Sieb” (Hannover-Drück 99). The fate of the woman, here Rosa Luxemburg, who was thrown barely alive into the Landwehr Canal, can also be read as a counterpoint to Jesus, the man, and as the representative of Christianity, as the Bride of Israel. Forced to move through the water, she is the unclean animal (“die Sau”) and has apparently committed a sin, for since the Great Flood water has served as a means of God’s judgment. In the Covenant with Noah, God promised he would no longer allow human lives to be lost in the floods. In contrast to this is God’s promise in Isaiah 43.2: “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee”; and we also learn of metaphorical acts of saving life from the watery depths, as in Psalm 18.17: “He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me.” Conspicuous, too, is that water and the enemy are often referred to in tandem, also in the plea in Psalm 69.15: “let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters.” In the first Plague of Egypt, the rivers turn into blood and the treacherous Egyptians perish when the walls of water close in (Exodus 14.26).

Der Landwehrkanal wird nicht rauschen.

Nichts

stockt.

The Landwehr Canal won’t make a murmur.

Nothing

stops.

There is also an intertextual reference to Georg Büchner in the last stanza of the poem. Barbara Wiedemann has drawn attention

to the notes Celan scribbled in the margins of his personal copy of *Dantons Tod* in the passage where Lucile speaks out in the face of her impending and painful loss:

The river of life would stop if a single drop were spilled. That blow would give the whole earth a wound. —Everything moves. Clocks tick, bells peal, people walk, water trickles, everything—except in that one place. No! It can't be allowed to happen. I shall sit on the ground and scream until everything stops in fright and nothing moves any more. (*Danton's Death* 70)

In German the last line reads "*alles stockt, sich nichts mehr regt*" (Celan, *Die Gedichte* 833; my emphasis). As far as Lucile is concerned, everything should come to a complete standstill, but in reality nothing actually does. The waters should stop flowing and the path of the river be stemmed, yet the waters of the Landwehr Canal continue to flow as before. Canal waters are not fast moving and will continue to flow silently even when a victim of violence is submerged in them: "*Der Landwehrkanal wird nicht rauschen.*" In contrast to the Red Sea, the Landwehr Canal does not cause the enemy of God's people to perish beneath its waters; on this occasion God does not intervene on behalf of his chosen people. The release of God's people from Egyptian slavery was achieved by means of divine intervention, and all that was asked of the Israelites was that they believe in the power of the blood shed for them. The Covenant between God and Israel in the Old Testament and the Covenant of the New Testament, which is based on the belief in the power of the blood shed for Christians by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, are the main Covenants of the Bible. The poem rejects both Covenants, or at least casts grave doubt on them. The bond between God and mankind was dissolved through their act of disobedience (the apple) in Eden. For Christians, original sin was redeemed by Jesus on the Cross. This prompts the question of how God's pledges may be equated with the Shoah, in which some six million of his people lost their lives. In Exodus it is said that God hardened ("*verstockte*") the hearts of the Egyptians, who found themselves later between the ("*stockende*") walls of water of the Red Sea and who perished when he commanded the waters to return. The ref-

erence “nichts stockt” is closely associated with biblical terminology, and in the poem it means that God did not act in National Socialist Berlin.

Returning to the role of the number seven in “DU LIEGST,” Celan had written “DIE MIR HINTERLASSNE” ‘what was handed down to me,’ a poem based on the number seven in all its permutations, in September 1967, two months earlier:

DIE MIR HINTERLASSNE	3		
balkengekreuzte	1	5	
Eins:	1		
			17=1 and 7
an ihr soll ich rätseln,	5		
während du, im Rupfengewand,	4	12	
am Geheimnisstrumpf strickst.	3		

(*Die Gedichte* 291)

The wordcount of the poem totals 17, that is the number 1 next to the number 7. The number 1, as left behind (“hinterlassen”) for the poetic narrator, is, however, crossed by a line (“balkengekreuzt”), which turns it—again—into the Arabic numeral for 7. If the number 1 is considered as a Roman numeral, crossing it horizontally will create a symbol, namely that of the Cross (Krämer 154). But the associations with the Cross and thus Jesus once more lead the reader back to the number Seven, which symbolizes both the Christian Messiah and the New Testament; furthermore, the Hebrew letter Zayin (ז), which is also the character denoting the number 7, can also be seen as a number one bearing the “Balken” as given in the poem. Thus, the poem “DIE MIR HINTERLASSNE” invites the reader to contemplate the permutations and correlations found in the relative space between the numbers 1 and 7 and all their respective symbolic values.

Whether the seventh line of the poem “DU LIEGST” (“Es kommt der Tisch mit den Gaben”) signifies fulfillment or redemption is left open to interpretation. In accordance with Christian teaching, the answer is clearly that it does, but in Celan’s poem, the following line “er biegt um ein Eden” reveals that these do not lead to Paradise, the Promised Land, which accords with the Jewish view of Jesus.

If the poem is seen as consisting of two parts, the second one of—again—seven lines follows after this section. The seventh line from this point, also the end of the poem, is “stockt.” The multitude of meanings within Hebrew semantics can be illustrated by taking a closer look at the verb *šabat* and its connotations. Among its meanings are “to rest,” “to celebrate,” “to stop/falter” (“stocken”), or “to end/finish” (*Das Alte Testament* xiv). On the Seventh Day of Creation, and in relation to the weekly rhythm of work, *šabat* means “to rest.” The Old Testament relates how the concept of the Sabbath is revealed to the Jews. For them this day was seen as existing outside the boundaries of ordinary time (Yerushalmi 54).

As far as a reading of the poems based on the number of words in the different stanzas and verses is concerned, it appears that the number 7 has a double function: it is the symbol of the Christian Messiah and the New Testament, as well as the symbol of the Covenant between God and his Chosen People. The words for both 7 (*sheva*) and for “to swear an oath” (*shava*) are closely related in Hebrew (Fabry and Ringgren 974-1027). Accordingly, the characteristics of protection and security and the binding nature of the Covenant (Kasper 521-25) was depicted by the number 7 in Jewish circles, perhaps even as an illustration of the binding nature of the Covenant’s validity for this era. Central to Judaism’s perception of itself is that the people of Israel are related to God by means of the Covenant. It is not Faith and Mercy, the cornerstones of Christianity, which lead to God, but rather loyalty and adherence to the Scriptures by those who are bound by the Covenant. This dual function of the symbolic number 7 is hinted at by the total number of characters of the poem, as there are 60 words and 17 punctuation marks, which add up to a double seven—77.

The construction of the poem “DIE MIR HINTERLASSNE” already supports the assumption that the number of words can be interpreted symbolically both as 17 and also as the individual characters 1 and 7. This can be seen as a parable for the tensions between the Jewish and Christian traditions, with 1 symbolizing monotheism and 10 the Torah, and 7 both Christ and the New Testament. Any questions regarding these particular correlations between 1 and 7 are thus probably represented by the number 17.

With his poetry, Celan appeals to us to be ever-mindful—mind-

ful of all those who have been the victims of human-engendered disasters. The act of remembering those who perished is not always present on the immediate level of the text. Those who, unlike the poet, did not survive are given a voice and the memory of them is preserved. In the case of “DU LIEGST,” it is clear that—irrespective of our interpretation of the various intertextual levels—the fundamental question it poses about Jewish theology in the aftermath of the Shoah remains open.

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Notes

1 “Vielleicht darf man sagen, daß jedem Gedicht sein ‘20. Jänner’ eingeschrieben bleibt? Vielleicht ist das Neue an den Gedichten, die heute geschrieben werden, gerade dies: daß hier am deutlichsten versucht wird, solcher Daten eingedenk zu bleiben? / Aber schreiben wir uns nicht alle von solchen Daten her? Und welchen Daten schreiben wir uns zu? // Aber das Gedicht spricht ja! Es bleibt seiner Daten eingedenk, aber—es spricht. Gewiß, es spricht immer nur in seiner eigenen, allereigensten Sache. / Aber ich denke ... daß es von jeher zu den Hoffnungen des Gedichts gehört, ... gerade auf diese Weise *in eines Anderen Sache* zu sprechen—wer weiß, vielleicht in eines *ganz Anderen Sache*” (*Der Meridian* 8).

2 Theo Buck has pointed out Celan’s preoccupation with symmetrical words but does not treat the use of numbers in this poem (156)

3 Firges (29) points to a single full-length study in Dutch that deals with numbers, formal structures, and combinations of numbers in Celan’s poetry: Paul Sars, *Paul Celan, gedichten: keuze uit zijn poëzie*, met commentaren door Paul Sars en vert. Door Frans Roumen (Baarn: Ambo, 1988).

4 Szondi 390-98 and 428-30; Gadamer 110-34; Buck 138-65; Janz 190-200.

5 Particularly striking is the marrying of the traditional-historical and contemporary history with the Talmud regarding the Pessach-Haggada: “In
<https://newpagepress.org/studies/vol31/iss1/art8/>
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jeder einzelnen Generation ist ein Mensch verpflichtet, sich selbst so zu betrachten, als ob er aus Ägypten gezogen sei" (Mischna Pesachim 10.5; see Yerushalmi 57).

6 See Psalm 44; also Jeremiah 2.2: "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown"; also Deuteronomy 8.18: "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish."

7 Reichert points to parallels between Hebrew and Celan's poetry:

[I]m hebräischen Verb [kommen] Aspekte zur Sprache (...), die zuin-
nerst einer Celanschen Sprachintention entsprechen: der empha-
tischen und der kausativen, oder anders: der Inständigkeit des Be-
gründetseins dieses Sprechens. Formal gesehen zeigt sich der Appell-
charakter der Sprache Celans natürlich an dem übermäßigen Ge-
brauch, den er von Imperativen und ihnen ähnlichen Ausdrucksfor-
men macht. Auch dafür gibt es Analoges im Hebräischen: nicht nur
die häufig gebrauchten (männlichen und weiblichen, verkürzbaren
und erweiterbaren) Imperativformen, sondern noch andere, eigens
ausgebildete appellative Formen, die wir nicht kennen, so den Jussiv
als Modus der Aufforderung, der Willensäußerung, des Wunsches und
der Bitte (das ›Es werde‹ der Schöpfung ist eine Jussiv-Form), den Pro-
hibitiv für Verbote, den Cohortativ zur emphatischen Selbstaufforde-
rung. (160)

With regard to Nelly Sachs in their correspondence: "Meine liebe Nel-
ly, es war so gut Deinen Brief in Händen zu halten und von Dir selbst an
das Licht erinnert zu werden, das in Zürich überm Wasser und dann in
Paris aufschien. Einmal, in einem Gedicht, kam mir, über das Hebräische,
auch ein Name dafür" (Wiedemann 94).

8 Scholem has lectured widely on Jewish mysticism, his scholarly work engaging with Kabbalist writing, and he has translated key Kabbala texts. The philosopher Martin Buber has collected stories of the Chassidim (“Geschichten der Chassidim”) and translated them into German. “The Chasid” is “the pious one,” and Chassidism is a form of Jewish folk piety with Kabbalist elements, informed by the serving of God on a day-to-day basis.

9 Nelly Sachs was one of the first to associate Celan’s poetry with the Kabbala, for example in comparing a volume of poetry entitled “Sprachgitter” with the Kabbalist text Sohar: “Lieber Paul Celan, Ihr ‘Buch der Strahlen’, Ihr ‘Sohar’ ist bei mir. Ich lebe darin. Die kristallinen Buchstabenengel—geistig durchsichtig—in der Schöpfung tätig jetzt—augenblicklich” (Wiedemann 23).

10 “Ich bin zu Ihnen nach Israel gekommen, weil ich das gebraucht habe . . . Ich glaube einen Begriff zu haben von dem, was jüdische Einsamkeit sein kann.”

11 In the poem “IN MEINEM ZERSCHOSSENEN KNIE” (*Die Gedichte* 524), dedicated to Celan’s father, the murdered father “steht” or is embodied in the son as in the the poem “MEIN GISCHT,” “von deines Vaters Väter / Unruh und Stolz her, Sohn / wächst du” (509), which can be seen as a dialogue with the last stanza of Richard Beer-Hofmanns “Schlaflied für Mirjam” (1897): “Schläfst du, Mirjam?—Mirjam, mein Kind, / Ufer nur sind wir, und tief in uns rinnt / Blut von Gewesenen—zu Kommenden rollts, / Blut unsrer Väter, voll Unruh und Stolz. / In uns sind Alle. Wer fühlt sich allein? / Du bist ihr Leben—ihr Leben ist dein—/ Mirjam, mein Leben, mein Kind—schlaf ein!” In contrast, in the poem “FÜR ERIC,” which ends with the expression of mutual protection handed down from generation to generation, father and son are united in the first person plural “stehn.”

12 Mysticism is the belief in or experience of a reality surpassing normal human understanding or experience, especially a reality perceived as essential to the nature of life. It is a system of contemplative prayer and spirituality aimed at achieving direct intuitive experience of the divine. This can be aided by reference to a collection of canonized texts, namely the Kabbala. The literal meaning of this term is “transmission,” and pictures and vi-

sions feature strongly in combination with linguistic and light symbolism. Through meditation, subjects should become closer to the divine.

13 In the discussion of the verb *stehen* above, its meaning in the poem "In den Schlaf, in den Strahl" and the importance given to it by employing a *figura etymologica*, commonly used in Hebrew, "für erstandenes Stehen" (*Die Gedichte* 520f.). Compare this to Job 37.14—*Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God*—as an example of the aural perception and understanding of acts and miracles performed by God, actions that formed the history of his people.

14 See Reichert 162. This statement by Celan is contestable and probably arises from his frustration at the lack of attention given by critics to his choice of vocabulary.

15 Vgl. Revelation 1.15: . . . *and his voice as the sound of many waters*. On Mount Sinai, the people of Israel hear only thunder, whereas Moses is the only one who can hear a meaning in the acoustic phenomenon.

16 In *Das dialogische Prinzip* Martin Buber describes the relationship between human beings as an "Ich-Du-Verhältnis" 'I/Thou relationship,' but one in which the relationship between God and the individual is expressed by the *wholly other* DU.

17 Grimm 6:354: ". . . wenn einer an künstlichen lücken in hecken oder zäunen auf die hasen paszte und diese da erschlug oder fieng."

18 This can be traced back to the Old High German *hloskên*, derived from *hlosên* (*audire, auscultare*), which survived into Middle High German and beyond as *loschen* and *luschen*. *Loschen* in Middle High German is related phonetically (*losn*) to *zuhören*. The Yiddish form *Lòschn* denotes language (in Hebrew *laschon*, denoting tongue or language). The verb *lauschen* also acquires another meaning: *lohen/flammen* (see Grimm 6:356: *Flock(feuer) = schnell auflodernd*). Besides *hloskên*, the Old High German form *lüzên* (*latere*) exists, connected to the meanings *betrügen, verführen, and heucheln*, and continued into Middle High German with *lúzen—lauern*: "dieses im mhd. häufige wort rettet sich nur selten als lauszen in die nhd. ältere

schriftsprache, . . . vielmehr, da mhd. loschen und lûzen als sinnverwandt zusammen und eng verbunden gebraucht werden . . . bildet sich aus den beiden wörtern eine mischform heraus” (Grimm 6:353). After the sixteenth century the word *lauschen* came increasingly into use, thereby losing its negative connotations. Since the eighteenth century its usage has been restricted to literary and poetic language, referring to an expression of attentive listening (to someone or something), while its related meaning has fallen out of use: “niedrige nebensinn des böswilligen aufmerkens” (Grimm 6:355).

19 Due to variations in their vocalization, the root forms of some single Hebrew words, usually comprising three consonants, make for an enormous semantic spread.

20 See for example Exodus 3.6,14: “Da sprach Gott zu Moses: Ich will sein, der ich sein will! [Ich bin, der ich bin / Ich werde sein, der ich sein werde] Und er sprach: So sollst du sprechen zu den Söhnen Israels: ‘ICH-WILL-SEIN’ hat gesandt mich zu euch! Und es sprach weiter Gott zu Mose: So sollst du sprechen zu den Söhnen Israels: JAHWE, der Gott eurer Väter, der Gott Abrahams, der Gott Isaaks und der Gott Jakobs, er hat mich gesandt zu euch! Das (ist) mein Name auf ewig und das (ist) mein Gedächtnis [meine Benennung] von Geschlecht (zu) Geschlecht. Geh hin . . . Also will ich ausstrecken meine Hand, und ich will schlagen Ägypten mit allen meinen Wundern, die ich wirken werde in seiner Mitte, und danach wird er freien Lauf lassen euch” (*Das Alte Testament. Interlinearübersetzung*).

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. Go, . . . And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.

21 Psalm 139.1 presents this dichotomy, that the all-pervading and overwhelming presence of God can be viewed in opposing ways: “Herr du hast

mich erforscht und erkannt. Du kennst mein Sitzen und mein Aufstehen, du verstehst mein Trachten von fern. Mein Wandeln und mein Liegen— du prüfst es. Mit allen meinen Wegen bist du vertraut. Denn das Wort ist <noch> nicht auf meiner Zunge—siehe Herr, du weißt es genau. Von hinten und von vorn hast du mich *umschlossen*, du hast deine Hand auf mich gelegt. Zu wunderbar ist die Erkenntnis für mich, zu hoch: Ich vermag sie nicht zu erfassen. Wohin sollte ich gehen vor deinem Geist, wohin fliehen vor deinem Angesicht?”

‘O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast *beset* me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?’

22 The only colour referred to in the poem (red) is closely related semantically with the word *mizrajim* as a description of the reddish skintone of the Egyptians (see Fürst 778).

23 The role of the Prophet corresponds to Celan’s understanding of himself as a poet.

24 “. . . alles beherrschende Vorweihnachtsstimmung, mit der verwundernten Empfänglichkeit dessen, der einem Volk angehört, das dieses Fest nicht kennt, und der seit Jahrzehnten in einem Land lebt, in dem es von keiner ‘Stimmung’ begleitet ist.”

25 *Paradeiser* is Austrian German for tomato, so a “Paradeiserl” (diminutive) is a small tomato (“paradise apple”) and is associated with “paradise.” On the genesis of the text, see Celan’s *Schneepart* 59-62.

26 The table laden with gifts or offerings can also be understood as the table of the Eucharist. This, however, does not change the fact that Eden is circumvented—“um ein Eden biegt.” Another reading of “biegt um,” relating to the German *verändert*, with the sense “verändert ein Eden” ‘alters an Eden,’ is also possible here.

27 The archaic verb form 'ward' echoes the presence of God in the Old Testament "Und es ward" ("It came to pass . . .") through the grammatical form of the *passivum divinum*.

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