Audacious Rhetorical Devices in Paul Celan's "Todesfuge" and Nelly Sachs' "O die Schornsteine"

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"Das Funktionieren menschlicher Sprache ist kontextabhängig" ["The functioning of human speech is dependent upon its context"] is a statement Beda Allemann makes in his article "Paul Celans Sprachgebrauch," where he emphasizes the importance of avoiding misinterpretations in textual analysis by carefully considering words and phrases (4). Not only must words be considered within their context, but the context of the author's philosophy also needs to be taken into account. Theodor W. Adorno's writings exemplify the problems that arise when one analyzes Holocaust poetry in the limited context of his early work. Adorno in "Cultural Criticism and Society" wrote "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric (34)."[1] Writers such as Günther Anders in his book *Ketzereien*, have often failed to note that in 1966 Adorno, in his *Negative Dialectics*, revisited the issue of writing poetry after Auschwitz (Anders 242-43). Adorno's later explanation is as follows:

> Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. (362-363)

Historical background is part of a poem's context, as is its language, but equally important to a thorough examination of Holocaust poetry is the contextual role of the critical apparatus used in analysis. The operative question arises: how can one set into words an unrepresentable event?

Paul Celan's poem "Todesfuge" ["Deathfugue"] from 1948 and Nelly Sachs' poem "O die Schornsteine" ["O the Chimneys"] from 1947 help answer this question by presenting the paradoxical nature of the Holocaust through the use of the "audacious metaphor" as defined by Harald Weinrich in his article "Semantik der kühnen Metapher." The theory of the audacious metaphor is not exclusively limited to the use of metaphors; rather it extends to rhetorical devices such as ellipsis, apostrophes, and synecdoches. Through these rhetorical devices

Celan and Sachs redefine terms such as *Milch* [milk], *Wohnungen* [habitations], *Schornsteine* [chimneys], *Grab* [grave] and *Leib* [body], so that within the context of the poem their meaning changes frequently. Weinrich uses the first three lines of Celan's "Deathfugue" to exemplify his theory on the "audacious metaphor," and in turn, this theory is useful for understanding other narrative devices, including the syntax itself.

The two poems are postwar works that examine the problem of representing an event as horrific as the Holocaust with a language that was corrupted by the Nazis. Since the 1940s critics have written about the reflections on language offered by Sachs and Celan. Ruth Dinesen, for instance, claims that Sachs seeks a new form of language that moves towards the metaphysical in order to talk about an event that cannot be expressed with a corrupted language (144). According to Dinesen, Sachs' idea of a new language extended towards her "Vision einer neuen wortlosen Sprache" ["vision of a wordless language"] (147), which is similar to Celan's theories.[2] Allemann claims that Celan did not look at language as a semiotic system that can be deciphered, but as a process, with which one searches for the Other (10). As with Nelly Sachs, Celan did not believe that language is a constant system, but that through the creative process of writing, "system" becomes variable. The unique relationships with language developed by these poets prompt us to ask in particular how they use rhetorical devices such as metaphors, ellipses, and apostrophes, and how Celan and Sachs employ these devices to create new meaning.

Weinrich's theory on the *kühne Metapher* [audacious metaphor] emphasizes that language is not a constant system and that meaning does not only depend on the context in which words are situated, but also on rhetorical devices that are used. Weinrich accompanies his theory on the audacious metaphor with a general overview of the main characteristics of a metaphor. He emphasizes how a metaphor has an inherent contradiction that comes to light when it is considered literally. The intensity of the contradiction determines whether the metaphor is audacious. Furthermore, the relationship between each element in the metaphor determines the degree of the contradiction. Weinrich defines the single parts of a metaphor as *Bildempfänger* (*Sache*) [image recipient (object)] and *Bildspender* (*Bild*) [image donor (image)], while their relationship is designated as *Bildspanne* [image range] (325).

In an audacious metaphor the conspicuousness of the contradiction depends upon the distance between "object" and "image." It is this intensity of contradiction that separates an "ordinary" metaphor from an audacious one. Weinrich explains the contradiction as follows:

Die einfache Widersprüchlichkeit einer Metapher ist unabhängig von der Bildspanne. Aber es hängt von der Bildspanne ab, ob wir die Widersprüchlichkeit bemerken und die Metapher als kühn empfinden. Bei großer Bildspanne bleibt die Widersprüchlichkeit in der Regel unbemerkt. Eine kleine Bildspanne hingegen erzwingt unsere Aufmerksamkeit für diese Widersprüchlichkeit und verleiht der Metapher den Charakter der Kühnheit. (319)

[A simple contradiction within a metaphor is independent of the image range. However, the ability to notice the contradiction and to perceive the metaphor as audacious relies upon the image range. As a rule, with a wide image range the contradiction remains unnoticed. A small image range forces our attention to the contradiction and gives the metaphor an audacious character.]

Weinrich uses the "image range" to define an audacious metaphor, specifically the semantic relationship between "image donor" and "image recipient," and he justifies his method by explaining how metaphors constitute the semantic connotations of the poem. As Weinrich asserts,

Metaphern haben eine geringe Bildspanne, wenn der Bildspender dem Bildempfänger oder einem seiner Merkmale semantisch nahesteht, eine große Bildspanne, wenn der Bildspender dem Bildempfänger oder einem seiner Merkmale semantisch fernsteht. Semantische Nähe und Ferne sind grob danach bestimmbar, ob sich ein Oberbegriff leicht und einleuchtend einstellt. (329)

[Metaphors have a narrow image range when the image donor is semantically near to the image recipient or one of its characteristics, a wide image range when the image donor is semantically far from the image recipient or one of its characteristics. Semantic proximity or distance can be approximately determined according to whether a superordinate concept appears easily and obviously.]

Weinrich's introduction of the expressions "image donor" and "image recipient" are informed by Saussurian linguistics. The parallels in Saussure's and Weinrich's terminology are drawn from the individual functions of these terms as well as from their relation to each other. In Saussure's terminology, the "image recipient" would be the "signified," because they are both the object (real or imaginary) that is referred to. The "image donor" is the "signifier," because it refers to the object described. The "image recipient" and the "image donor," or the "signified" and the "signifier" form the "image range" or "sign." Saussure explains it in this manner:

the last two term [signified and signifier] have the advantage of indicating the opposition that separates them from each other and from the whole of which they are parts. As regards *sign,* if I am satisfied with it, this is simply because I do not know of any other word to replace it, the ordinary language suggesting no other. (67)

In Weinrich's theory the "image range" matches Saussure's definition of the "sign" insofar as both show the opposition that lies within the "signified" and "signifier." Weinrich points to the tension implied in the construction of the "sign."

In conclusion, Weinrich summarizes his theory on the audacious metaphor as follows: "Die Kühnheit liegt, wie wir gesagt haben, in der geringen Bildspanne, die uns zur Wahrnehmung der Widersprüchlichkeit zwingt" ["The audaciousness, as we said, lies in the small image range, that forces us to recognize the contradiction"] (335). The context of the metaphor is a factor in showing what function the metaphor has in a text and how the metaphor produces meaning (335). In poetry by Celan and Sachs the metaphors are used to redefine words, and these definitions change depending on where they are located in the poem.

One example in Paul Celan's "Deathfugue" which Weinrich uses to illustrate his theory is the three-part metaphor, or in other words, a connection of two metaphors in the first line of the poem: "Schwarze Milch" ["black milk"][3] and "Milch der Frühe" ["milk of daybreak"] (236). Weinrich defends his theory from possible critics who would call "black milk" an oxymoron, by arguing that an oxymoron is a metaphor as well. He explains that one notices the contradiction in a metaphor, because one is accustomed to the contradictory nature of metaphors. He posits as an example that if Celan had used the metaphor "traurige Milch" ["sad milk"], one would also have noticed the contradiction, albeit to a different degree (327). According to Weinrich's theory, there is an *Oberbegriff* [superordinate concept] in "black milk," which is the concept of color. To be able to recognize the superordinate concept, one needs to know the meaning of single words in a given metaphor and determine if the adjective or predicate contradict the conventional definition of the noun used. If the adjective used to describe a noun in a metaphor is set within the range of the superordinate concept, it is immediately noticed and results in an audacious metaphor. For example, milk is associated with the color white, which in this poem is challenged by the color black. The metaphor "sad milk" does not challenge any superordinate concept, and even though there is a contradiction present, it is not to the same degree as the conflict evident in "black milk." When a superordinate concept is challenged, the resulting metaphor is called a *Nahmetapher* [near metaphor], because the contradiction remains in the range of the common theme and challenges that perception. Weinrich asserts that "Nahmetaphern sind befremdend und verfremdend und erscheinen uns kühn" ["Near metaphors are strange and alienating, and they appear audacious"] (328).

The poem "Deathfugue" begins with the near metaphor "black milk," which illustrates the paradox that is developed through the poem. Death is set in the context of everyday life, which is in itself a paradox. The consequence of this is that

objects commonly associated with the basis for everyday life, such as milk, acquire new meaning through the poem. Milk is in many cultures associated with a life-giving force and with the color white. This association is broken with the adjective "black," because it is connected to the idea of bad luck, evil spirits, and mourning. In this metaphor there is not only a contradiction to the superordinate concept of color, but there is also a contradiction in the symbolic meaning of these words. The color black, also the color of death, describes milk, which is a contradiction because of the life-giving quality of milk. As mentioned before, the symbolic meaning of this metaphor is not the sole focus of this analysis. However, the paradox which is present not only on the semantic level but also on the symbolic level is a characteristic that runs throughout the poem, putting life and death in a relationship that is paradoxical. This paradoxical relationship is the process that creates meaning in the poem. This process is also what changes the conventional meaning of words within the poem and draws attention to the corruption of language.

The corruption of language is further expanded in the same verse with "Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends" (236) ["Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening" (237)]. The framing of the word "daybreak" by the adjective "black" and the adverb "evening" makes it obsolete, because even though this milk is specifically meant for the morning, the conventions of language are not followed, and the milk is used randomly. The third line "wir trinken und trinken" ["we drink and drink"], challenging and mocking the typical function of this milk through the repetition of the word "drink," emphasizes the illogicalness of "black milk of daybreak."

According to Buck, "black milk" is the central metaphor of the poem. It introduces a paradox, which is further explored with the verse "wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng" ["we shovel a grave in the air where you don't lie too cramped"] (236-237). The expression "Grab in den Lüften" ["grave in the air"] is repeated five times in the poem with a few variations such as "Grab in der Luft" ["grave in the air"],[4] "Grab in den Wolken" ["grave in the clouds"] and its opposite "Grab in der Erde" ["grave in the ground"]. These expressions follow the same pattern of the audacious metaphor and just as the word "milk" is redefined in the metaphor "black milk," the word "grave" is also redefined. Earth, darkness, and suffocation are characteristics that are associated with the grave, but in the new sense of the word a bitter and satirical promise of comfort and space is given. A "we" that is introduced in the first line makes this promise through the digging of the graves.

In the next five lines the theme changes in an abrupt manner, and even though there are no metaphors present, the paradox created with "black milk" is

continued. The juxtaposition of life and death is further exemplified in the line "Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt" ["A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes"] (236-237). This verse is problematic, because with its missing punctuation it can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The description of the man starts out by being an ordinary portrayal of a man living in a house, which is contrasted with the man's activity of playing with vipers or snakes. The snake motif is heavily laden with symbolic meaning, specifically in the Old Testament, where the "snake" is the devil, and in Celan's poem it stands in sharp opposition to fleeting normality. After the introduction of the snake, the normality of the beginning of this line is brought back into the picture, with "he writes," which comes across as unsettling, because meaning is created by contrasting normal everyday life with death. The opposition consists of a man who writes letters while death surrounds him.

The interplay of the man's everyday activities and death are themes not only present in this poem; they recur in Celan's works. In his afterword ["Nachwort"] to an anthology of Celan's poems, Allemann explains that "Die Symbiose von Leben und Tod bleibt eine große Voraussetzung der Dichtung Celans" ["The symbiosis of life and death are a large precondition of Celan's poetry"] (158).[5] However, in "Deathfugue," the relationship between life and death is not symbiotic, it is paradoxical. Death and life have changed positions: death has become the norm. This position change is achieved through the syntax with its metaphorical implications.

Death becomes the norm, and life is devalued. This devaluation of life is set against the background of the man stepping in front of his house looking at the stars. The seemingly peaceful scene, where the man whistles for his dogs, is disrupted by the next verse, which satirically equates the Jews with the man's dogs. The parallelism is established through the syntactical structure of the second and third line: "er pfeift seine Rüden herbei / er pfeift seine Juden hervor" ["he whistles his hounds to stay close/ he whistles his Jews into rows"] (236-237). These lines almost mirror each other through their parallel structure, with the exception of different nouns, which lead to the conclusion that the Jews have been objectified and are, like the man's dogs, something to be possessed.

The juxtaposition of life and death is repeated and further concretized with the comparison of two women: "dein goldenes Haar Margarete / Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith" ["your golden hair Margareta / your ashen hair Shulamith"] (236-237). The man writes letters to a German girl, who is identified by the last line as a golden haired girl named Margareta. "Margareta" alludes to the German literary tradition of Goethe's *Faust*, and the Jewish literary tradition is introduced with the line "your ashen hair Shulamith." Buck describes that "Neben dem literarischen

Hintergrund der Faustdichtung und dem gängigen Klischee des deutschen—und natürlich blonden—Gretchens' wird hier die lyrische Traditionslinie des exemplarischen jüdischen Frauenbilds im 'Hohenlied' eingebracht" ["Next to the literary background of the Faust poetry and the familiar cliché of the German—and naturally blond—Gretel, the poetic tradition of the exemplary Jewish women is introduced with the 'Song of Songs'"] (25). Even though Shulamith introduces the Jewish tradition, it is the introduction of a tradition that has come to an end, because the adjective "ashen" indicates that Shulamith has been incinerated. The process of naming Shulamith in this poem introduces another paradox. At first Shulamith, and therefore the Jewish tradition, has been destroyed; however, the act of naming this tradition in the poem gives it a new literary presence.

The last verse of this stanza—"er befiehlt uns spielt auf zum Tanz" ["he commands us play up for the dance"] (238-239)—reiterates the hopeless situation of the "we" and their imminent death. The death dance has a long tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. Kuno Franke explains that "Die populärste Darstellungsform dieser Universalherrschaft des Todes war seit dem 14. Jahrhundert die Vorstellung eines Tanzes geworden, zu dem der Tod die Lebenden auffordert und, wenn sie sich weigern, zwingt" ["The most popular display of the universal dominance of death since the 14th century had become the idea of the dance. Death invites the living to attend this dance, then forces them to attend, should they refuse the invitation"] (1). The idea of the dancing death is repeated in Celan's poem with the line "er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland" ["he shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from Germany"] (238-239). Death ceases being an abstract concept and becomes concrete when named a master from Germany.

Death is set to the foreground, and the image of the dancing death is repeated in the verse "er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch durch die Luft" ["he shouts scrape your strings darker [then] you'll rise up as smoke to the sky"] (238-239). In an 1885 woodcut by Alfred Rethel titled "Der Tod als Erwürger," an image of death is portrayed holding two pieces of bone, one against his chin like a violin, and the other as the bow to play the violin. The line quoted creates a cause and effect situation through the conjunction "then." He (the man) gives the order to play, causing the "you" to die and be incinerated. The theme of darkness and death leads to the destruction of musical aesthetics.

The following stanzas repeat and vary the themes and metaphors of the poem. The repetitions within the poem are also transposed ideas, but always situated in a slightly different context. This form of repetition is not limited to Celan's poem, rather as Buck explained, some of these metaphors have their origin in

other primary sources. The appropriation and repositioning of these metaphors illustrate the process of creating new meaning. In the poem words are constantly redefined, exemplifying how language is not a constant system. The metaphor "black milk" is repeated in the beginning of the second stanza: "Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts" ["Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night"] (238-239). In this stanza, the metaphor "black milk" is repeated through the position of the word "daybreak" and framing by the adjective "black" and the adverb "night." The paradox of the word "daybreak" is emphasized by the adverb "night," a variation of "evening." Through the constant redefinition of words such as "milk" or "graves" the poem emphasizes that language is a process that continually changes.

In his "Nachwort," Allemann states that "Die Celansche Dichtung ist reich an Gegensätzen im ganz handgreiflichen Sinn von Umschlägen ins Gegenteil und paradoxen Wendungen" ["Celan's poetry is rich in oppositions in the quite palpable sense of transitions to the opposite and paradoxical turnarounds"] (152). The redefinition of everyday words, such as "milk" and "grave," and the devaluation of life, achieved through audacious metaphors and audacious syntactic structures, gives new meaning to death. The characteristics that define an audacious metaphor are also present in the structure and logic of the poem itself. Peter Szondi explains that "Wer Celans Schrift zu 'lesen' gelernt hat, weiß, daß es nicht darum geht, sich für eine der verschiedenen Bedeutungen zu entscheiden, sondern zu begreifen, daß sie nicht geschieden sind, sondern eins" ["Those who have learned to read Celan's writing know that the point is not to decide on one of the different meanings, rather to understand that they are a single meaning, not separate ones"] (389). Because of the constant shifting in meanings and the missing punctuation, several interpretations of this poem are possible. The "Deathfugue" illustrates language as a process that defines words by always redefining them. Notably, life and death are set against each other and thereby redefined. "Black milk" introduces the paradoxical structure of the poem and illustrates how life has been devalued and death has become the norm. Even Celan's own attempts to reposition the work within a cycle of poems changes the emphasis and meaning attributed to the poem. The repositioning of words, the conjoining of multiple meanings, and even the relocation of the poem itself are crucial points to consider in any analysis of Celan's poetry.

These characteristics are also present in Nelly Sachs' poem "O die Schornsteine" ["O the Chimneys"], where meaning is created by redefining words through rhetorical devices that are characterized by paradoxes. Nelly Sachs' book of poems *In den Wohnungen des Todes* [*In the Habitations of Death*] consists of four cycles: "Dein

Leib im Rauch durch die Luft" ["Your Body in Smoke through the Air"], "Gebete für den toten Bräutigam" ["Prayers for the Dead Bridegroom"], "Grabschriften in die Luft geschrieben" ["Epitaphs Written in the Air"], and "Chöre nach der Mitternacht" ["Choirs after Midnight"]. Mark Gelber explains that the book of poems "is a quartet" where "each of the four subtitled sections comprise a unified group of poems" (7). The first poem, "O the Chimneys," located in "Dein Leib im Rauch durch die Luft," is, according to Gelber, "characterized by a series of lamentations, thirteen in number" (7). This poem introduces the reader to an understanding of Nelly Sachs' book by defining the term "Wohnungen des Todes" ["habitations of death"].

Before analyzing the poem, a look at the introductory epigraph is necessary. It reads as follows: "Und wenn diese meine Haut zerschlagen wird, / so werde ich ohne mein Fleisch Gott schauen. / Hiob" (118) ["And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet [without] my flesh shall I see God. Job 19:26"] (119).[6] This biblical epigraph about Job's suffering introduces the poem. Job lost all possessions, his health, and his family, yet he withstood God's test of his faith. In Sachs' epigraph, Job claims that even if his flesh would be destroyed he would see God without it. Sachs ridicules Job's suffering by using the epigraph as an introduction to the suffering of the Jewish people. Gelber notes concerning the epigraph, "This quotation [epigraph] establishes a direct connection between the past sufferings of the 'body of Israel,' which Job's experience clearly represents, and the present suffering of 'Israels Leib'" (8). However, the suffering of the Jewish people presented in Sachs' poem is senseless, which Gelber derives from the absence of God in the poem. Gelber argues that because of the absence of a divine force, "a disturbing tension is created between the ostensible significance of the inscription [epigraph] and the language of the poem itself" (8). The tension between the epigraph and the poem is reiterated with apostrophes[7] and phrases that are contradictory in nature. Weinrich's concept of the audacious metaphor can also be used to explain the audacious logic of the epigraph, for to be able to "see," one needs to have eyes. That Job will see God without a body is a contradiction that lies within the superordinate concept.

Sachs' poem begins with the apostrophe "O die Schornsteine" ["O the Chimneys"] (118-119). The absence of a punctuation mark leaves the function of the line open. The beginning of this poem is a lamentation, which the *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur* describes as being one of the characteristics of an "apostrophe," noting that lamentations in this form are used to remember the dead (207). Jonathan Culler adds that the apostrophe "makes its point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself"

(135). This apostrophe and the subsequent ones can therefore not be interpreted individually, but have to be looked at within the context of the entire poem.

In the next verse, "Auf den sinnreich erdachten Wohnungen des Todes" ["On the ingeniously devised habitations of death"] (118-119), the redefinition of the word "habitations" is presented in the form of an ellipsis. An ellipsis, a metaphor, and an apostrophe have in common that their basic structure contains a paradox, and through these paradoxes meaning is created. The difference between these three rhetorical devices is that the metaphor operates through the linguistic structure, the ellipse through the syntactic structure, and the apostrophe through the addressee. The audaciousness arises when the contradictions lies within the "superordinate concept" as with "habitations of death."

"Habitations of death" is an audacious metaphor. The Grimms' *Deutsches Wörterbuch* attributes several meanings to the word "Wohnung" ["habitation"]. One characteristic is that it is a place where living people, specifically a family, live (1230). "Habitations" connotes something positive, inviting where "living people" stay; however, the living quarters in this poem have been redefined and are not for life but for death. The contradiction that is present lies within the "superordinate concept" which is "life."

The word "habitations" has also been redefined through the syntactic opposition created in the verse. The positive connotations have been nullified by the word "death." The paradox is constructed through this re-definition and amplified by the word "sinnreich" ["ingeniously"]. The prefix "sinn" in German can have many nuances, however in this poem, it is connected to the biblical meaning, which arises from the epigraph. According to Grimm, the meaning of "sinn" is "allgemein für das innere [W]esen eines [M]enschen, unbestimmter als [S]eele" ["in general the inner being of a person, more indeterminate then the soul"], and it stands as the opposite of the body (1103). Transferring this definition to the poem, these "habitations of death" are filled with souls devoid of their bodies. Through the genitive opposition "death" a contradiction within the "superordinate concept" is created that makes the conventional definition of "habitations" obsolete.

Life and death are juxtaposed in this poem and life is slowly being replaced by death. The "death" image is emphasized with the lines "Als Israels Leib zog aufgelöst in Rauch / Durch die Luft" ["When Israel's body drifted [dissolved] as smoke / Through the air"] (118-119). "Israel's body," a metonym for the Jewish people, is no longer physically present but has dissolved into smoke traveling through the air. The combination of "body drifted [dissolved] as smoke" has the characteristics of an audacious metaphor. If the "body" of Israel has been dissolved into smoke, it is no longer a "body." "Israel's body" has seized to exist; however,

by naming it the poem gives it presence. The presence of this loss is similar to the paradox Celan constructs with "ashen hair Shulamith."

Sachs' verses cynically sharpen the tradition of the Diaspora: the Jewish people continue to move even in death, because they have no place to rest. This is exemplified in the line "Als Essenkehrer ihn ein Stern empfing / Der schwarz wurde / Oder war es ein Sonnenstrahl?" ["Was welcomed by a star, a chimney sweep, / A star that turned black / Or was it a ray of sun?"] (118-119). "Israel's body" does not find a resting place, and even if it is accepted, everything darkens. The poem breaks with the traditional notion that in death we are all equal,[8] emphasizing the impossibility for the Jewish people to gain acceptance even in death, at least until the next stanza—"O die Schornsteine!" ["O the chimneys!"] (118-119)—which signals the acceptance of such a break by ending with an exclamation mark.

The meaning of the "chimneys" varies from verse to verse. The "chimneys" have evolved from being "habitations of death" to being "Freiheitswege für Jeremias und Hiobs Staub" ["Freedomway for Jeremiah and Job's dust"] (118-119). Jeremiah and Job are synecdoches for the Jewish people. "Job's dust" refers the reader back to the epigraph, reminding of Job's plight and his hope of seeing God. The Old Testament book of Jeremiah describes Jeremiah as a man who wrote letters to people forced from their homes. While incarcerated, he persists in his work for God and is eventually forced into exile, where he dies. In this verse we have Jeremiah and the dust of Job, which finds its freedom through the chimneys. "Freedom," a laden word implying a goal that one strives for, has been redefined in this poem and leads to a bitter tone of desperation. The chimneys are described as being paths of freedom for the Jews. The word "freedom" is used in a cynical way, indicating freedom from suffering only after the Jews have been murdered and incinerated.

Following the redefinition of "freedomway," the lyrical voice poses a rhetorical question: "Wer erdachte euch und baute Stein auf Stein / Den Weg für Flüchtlinge aus Rauch?" ["Who devised you and laid stone upon stone / The road for refugees of smoke?"] (118). The answer for this question is obvious, but it is only alluded to in the poem. This rhetorical question has not only an ironical component to it; it also carries a sense of hopelessness through the word "refugees." "Refugees" makes the question ironical, because smoke does rise to the top and escapes through chimneys, yet this seeming means of escape refers to the incinerated Jewish people and their escape through death. Life is not a choice in this poem, only death. Through the shifting meaning of "chimneys," life and death have been conflated, illustrating once again through this variation in meanings that language is not a constant system.

The previous stanza redefined the chimneys as being ways of freedom for the Jewish people. Nevertheless, this definition is changed with the line "O die Wohnungen des Todes" ["O the habitations of death"] (118-119). This verse has the same structure as the previous exclamation, with the difference that the word "chimneys" is substituted by the word "habitations of death." "Chimneys" have become the "habitations of death." Nevertheless, this new definition does not stand for long, and in the middle of the stanza it changes to "O ihr Finger" ["O you fingers"] (118-119). The "finger" is a synecdoche[9] for a person, which makes this new apostrophe a personification of "O the chimneys." The ability to rely on language alone is lost by the use of "finger," because meaning is established not only through the word, but also through the gesture of the elevated "finger." The "finger," or the "chimneys," also become a threshold between life and death, where death has become the norm and the means of escape for the ashes of the Jewish people. The lamentation reaches its climax in this last stanza, because the speaker is pleading directly with the "chimneys." However, this plea is filled with a sense of doom rather than with hope.

The hopelessness that is present in Nelly Sachs' poem is also present in Paul Celan's poem, through the juxtaposition of life and death, where life has been devalued and death has taken its place. In these poems life and death have changed positions through the redefinitions of words, such as "milk," "habitations," "grave," "chimneys." The redefinition of these words lacks subtlety and is made noticeable through the use of the audacious metaphor in the case of Paul Celan, and audacious syntactic structures in the work of Nelly Sachs. The meanings of these words are dependent upon the context of the poem in which they are situated, a topic Celan addresses in his speech "The Meridian," where he remarks, "But the poem speaks! It is mindful of its dates, but it speaks. True, it speaks only on its own, its very own behalf" (48). The poems "Todesfuge" by Celan and "O die Schornsteine" by Sachs speak with their own language to show how language is a process. The process in which meaning is established depends upon the rhetorical devices and the context in which words are situated. This rhetorical contextualization is particularly pertinent to Holocaust studies and to understanding how the Nazis corrupted language and attempted to alter the meanings of words that related to their atrocities. As Celan stated in his acceptance speech for the literature prize of the city of Bremen,

> Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. Went through and could resurface, "enriched" by it all. (34)

Jeziorkowski notes with regard to Celan, Sachs, and the corruptibility of language, "Wenn irgendwo eine poetologische Parallele zwischen Texten von Nelly Sachs und Paul Celan einen Sinn hat, dann hier an der Artikulationsgrenze" ["If a poetic parallel between the texts of Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan makes sense anywhere, then it is here at the border of articulation"] (155). Buck describes Celan's situation as "Die Sprache also blieb ihm. Was sich änderte war die Sprachkonzeption" ["Language remained intact for him, what changed was the conception of language"] (15), and this "conception" was for Celan as for Sachs a process that kept evolving throughout their writings. The process by which words change meaning through audacious rhetorical devices, and by which Celan and Sachs convey their own meanings, remains a primary example of the ongoing struggle to represent the unrepresentable through language.

Notes

[1] This quotation has caused much controversy, especially when discussing Holocaust poetry. Rolf Tiedemann explains that "An exemplary instance of the difficulties of speaking theoretically about what the murderers termed the 'Final Solution' can be found in the misunderstandings that have accumulated around what is Adorno's best known saying: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.' This statement was misunderstood not just by poets who were afraid that they were to be deprived en masse of their vocation" (xv).

[2] Unless otherwise noted among the works cited, translations from the German are my own.

[3] According to Buck, several texts could be seen as the source for this metaphor. As examples he lists poems by Rose (Scherzer-) Ausländer and by Alfred Margul-Sperber. He also explains that one can trace the origins of this metaphor to the Old Testament (25). Even though the metaphors in this poem can be traced back to other poems, Buck does not see this as appropriation, rather as a way to re-contextualize metaphors (26). Considering this re-contextualization in Celan's poem is complicated, because when Celan first published the work in 1948 it was the closing poem in the book *Der Sand aus den Urnen.* Celan later moved "Deathfugue" to the cycle of poems *Mohn und Gedächtnis* and placed it in the middle of the book, which brought more attention to the poem (24).

[4] The English translation does not show the variation.

[5] Kolago analyzes in detail other musical characteristics of Celan's poem; however, my analysis of the poem refers only to the fugal characteristics of variation and repetition.

[6] I have added the word "without" to the English translation, because it is essential to the original meaning.

[7] According to the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* an apostrophe is a "figure of speech, which consists of addressing an absent or dead person, a thing, or an abstract idea as if it were alive or present" (Preminger 82). Sachs' apostrophe can be said to have an audacious logic due to the interweaving of life and death.

⁸ Through the medieval *danse macabre* everyone was equal before death. While these two poems by Sachs and Celan allude to this tradition, in both works the democratization of death has vanished.

⁹ The *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur* describes a synecdoche as establishing meaning through concepts that are associated with the definition of the word it is trying to describe (Wilpert 804). This stands in opposition to the audacious metaphor, because it tries to oppose the conventional associations of words.

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