

THE WAY THROUGH THE HUMAN-SHAPED SNOW: PAUL CELAN'S JOB

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To read Paul Celan's later poems is to travel with them, often to get lost with them, as they speed in a restless search for a place. Each poem traces a solitary trajectory through the most uninhabitable landscapes, only staying long enough in any one no-man's-land to sketch the insufficiency as well as the danger of tarrying. Each poem seems born of an initial implosion, a highly charged vacuum that draws it and the "Du" it addresses in quest of common terrain. Such poems demand a special kind of reading, a reading *unterwegs*; for it is only in response to a summons from elsewhere and on the way to this elsewhere that such poems constitute themselves on the page.

"Weggebeizt" presents special problems for the translator and interpreter; it draws not only upon word-roots from *Mittel-* and *Alt-hochdeutsch*, but also upon very specific passages in the *Book of Job*.¹ The reader must be prepared to enter into an encounter with one of the most problematic and mysterious wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible. The following reading of "Weggebeizt" will show how Celan's volatile, synthetic German veers close to *Job*, so close in fact that some of Celan's astonishing neologisms are cryptic translations and glosses of the Hebrew.

*WEGGEBEIZT vom
Strahlenwind deiner Sprache
das bunte Gerede des An-
erlebten—das hundert-
züngige Mein-
gedicht, das Genicht.*

TRIED OUT from the
beaming wind of your language
the various talk of lifted ex-
perience, the hundred-
tongued forsworn-
poem, the noem.

Aus-
gewirbelt,
frei
der Weg durch den menschen-
gestaltigen Schnee,
den Büsserschnee, zu
den gastlichen
Gletscherstuben und-tischen.

Whirled
out,
free
the way through the human-
shaped snow,
the pilgrim snow, to
the hospitable
glacier-rooms and-tables.

Tief
in der Zeiteinschränkung,
beim
Wabeneis
wartet, ein Atemkristall,
dein unumstößliches
Zeugnis.

Deep
in the time-crevasse,
by the
honeycomb-ice
there waits, a crystal of breath,
your incontrovertible
witness.

WEGGEBEIZT vom: etched away, searched out, tried out from.

One is loath to separate the component parts of the opening word. One wants, at first, only to marvel at the surgical precision with which the poet stitched it together. To differentiate finely compressed layers of meaning without breaking the skin, as it were, that unites them, is the accomplishment of a very delicate hand. Michael Hamburger saw fit to translate *Weggebeizt* according to the modern senses of the elements.² *Weg* he took in its prefix form, meaning “away” or “off.” *Gebeizt* he rendered along the somewhat chemical lines as “etched,” though “corroded” or “cauterized” were also possibilities. If, however, *Weg* is taken as a noun (*Atemwende* contains many such noun/participle *Zusammensetzungen*³), then *Weggebeizt* would carry the sense of a path or way having been made, etched through something. There are also older senses of *beizen* that haunt the meaning of *Weggebeizt*: in *Mittelhochdeutsch* *beizen*, meant “to hunt” (as with falcons)⁴ and further back in the history of the language, *beizen* was the *Althochdeutsch* word for “to try,” “put to a test.”⁵

When the modern uses, stressing pain and the biting action of acid, are combined with the older ones, stressing the searching out of a way, the synthetic meaning becomes clearer: a way is being *assayed* or *tried*. This metallurgic metaphor for the juridical trial of someone has a key place in the *Book of Job*. We read it in Job’s self-justificatory plea for a fair hearing from God (23:10):

But he knoweth the way that I take, when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips, I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

The Hebrew word *bochan* means in this passage “to try, search out thoroughly, to prove.”⁶ The same root appears in the noun form *bochon*, “an assayer, one who tries metals.” Not only does Job yearn for a fair hearing before God in this passage, but he also affirms his unwavering commitment to God’s way, an attestation of innocence that recurs throughout Job’s speeches and which culminates in the *Reinigungseid* that summons God’s speech out of the whirlwind. But where Job uses these words as figurative extensions of his argument with God, Celan has turned the trying of the way into an actual event. Celan is taking Job at his word.

Strahlenwind deiner Sprache: the beaming wind of your language.

As careful readers of Celan, we must be sure to respect the systematic ambiguities that the poet presses into his words. For example, the passive introduction of *Strahlenwind* as the object of the preposition *vom* forbids us to construe it merely as the agent of *wegbeizen*; that is only one reading. *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache* can also be read as that which is undergoing, or better, has undergone the process of *wegbeizen*; out of this process something has been tried out.⁷

No one at all familiar with biblical idiom can mistake its presence in *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache*. Of all the references to wind as divine speech, spirit, and intention, the mention of it in *Job* is especially important for understanding Celan’s poem. Just as the *Strahlenwind* passes through negating forms of utterance in this stanza, so in the *Book of Job* do we find wind figures absolutely positive in one context and absolutely negative in others. The positive sense is, of course, wind as God’s breath in action. The Hebrew word *ruach* denotes this pneumatic manifestation of God, but it is also used to designate something of no value, a vain thing of naught.⁸ “Do you imagine to reprove words and speeches of one that is desperate,” says Job (6:26) to his would-be comforters, “words which are as wind.” And Job replies to Eliphaz (16:13) with a wind figure intended to deprive his words of substance: “Shall vain words have an end”; this line translates more literally to “shall words of wind have an end.”

The same sense of the emptiness of wind appears in Job's lament (7:7), "O remember that my life is wind."

Both Hans-Georg Gadamer and Peter Horst Neumann have read *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache* as a sort of absolute language, one which, according to Gadamer, has the quality of "die Reinheit und strahlende Helligkeit, die wahre Geistigkeit der Sprache, die nicht nachgemachte und nachempfundene Aussagen vortäuscht, sondern alle solchen entlarvt."⁹ Neumann surmises that "Eine solche Sprache, welche Buntheit und schönen Schein jeder anderen auszulöschen vermöchte, könnte die Sprache Gottes sein."¹⁰ What we have said concerning the double nature of "wind-speech" in *Job*, its unification of the pneumatic and the vain elements in a single word, casts doubt upon simple emphasis of the absolute positive sense of *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache*; and what we have discerned in the syntax of *Weggebeizt vom*, leads us to suspect that *Strahlenwind* is not merely the agent of the trying, searching out process, but perhaps more emphatically that out of which or from which something else is etched. This relative reflexivity has a further implication for the rest of this first strophe: it implies that God too is Job's witness as Job is his witness. In other words, Job's trial is also God's trial. As Martin Buber put it, Job appeals from God to God.¹¹ A more radical formulation would be that Job appeals from God against God—an ethical irony hardly foreign to Paul Celan.

*das bunte Gerede des An-
erlebten—*

the various talk of lifted ex-
perience,

In 11:12 Zophar reduces Job's argument to vain words:

Should not this multitude of words be answered? Should a man full of talk be justified?

This last line was translated by Luther as "Muss langes Gerede ohne Antwort bleiben?" This charge of speaking vain, foolish words without knowledge is leveled at Job repeatedly by his pious friends, and is the charge that he brings against himself in the dramatic about-face, the "repentant" speeches following his meeting God out of the whirlwind. But just as before the empty words of Job and God's absolute word were both expressed by the same wind-stream, so here it would be rash to read *das bunte Gerede des An-erlebten* only nega-

tively. The word-break *An-erlebten* shows rather, that a transformation is taking place. Separation and unification—the primary logical operations—are brought by Celan into a single contorted *topos*. The more the *Strahlenwind* comes into contact with the multitude of vain words the more it searches through them and tries to cut itself away. It is as if the *Strahlenwind* were looking for a counterpart of itself in the profane *Gerede*. I have translated *das bunte Gerede* as “the various talk” because the archaic senses of various, “prevaricating, inconstant,” akin to the Latin *varus*—“bent and crooked”—suggest both the physical and moral transformations undergone in a twisting path of speech.

An-erlebten is a difficult neologism to interpret. There is in German a sub-class of “an”-prefixed verbs, all of which express a rote-like internalization of something which is not, in the first and last instance, *one’s own*. *Anerzogen*, *angelernt* and *angelesen* signify knowledge acquired by such routinized activities as imitation and repetition.¹² *An-erlebten* would then be a paradoxical conflation of second-hand experience (what is not one’s own) with *erlebten*, experience that is one’s own. It is as if the *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache* cut closer to the speaker’s experience than his own words do. “Your language” becomes, paradoxically, what is most “my own.” This is fully in keeping with Job’s last speech, when he says that before he had known only what others had told him, but now he knows God first hand. In 30:23, before confronting God, Job anticipates the whirlwind speech of God, but characterizes it as the source of his travail:

Thou liftest me up to the wind, thou causest me to ride upon it and
dissolvest my substance. . . .

We shall return to this pivotal passage. For now it is sufficient to justify the translation of *An-erlebten* as “lifted experience,” the word “lift” with its Old English sense of “air,” has the contemporary meaning “to take from or steal.” Thus “lifted experience” conserves the tension between first and second-hand experience while at the same time it offers the sense of something being dissolved into air. Interestingly, the English word “experience” is derived from “*experi-ri*”—to try—so that all the while, like the transformation of *Anerlebten* into *erlebten*, Job’s insistence on a true hearing and witness is retained—even amidst his mortal dissolution in the wind.

*das hundert-
züngige Mein-
gedicht, das Genicht.*

the hundred-
tongued forsworn-
poem, the noem.

A turbulent motion of unsparing negation and a searching, singling-out process take the shape of violent hybrid forms of speech. "Hundred-tongued" must surely conjure the image of Satan, the Adversary in God's court, whose crafty tongue it was that first challenged God to test Job. The line break between *hundert* and *züngige* performs a cutting away and condensing action that has the effect of a silencing. D. Meinecke and Michael Hamburger have pointed out the affinity between *Meingedicht* and "Meineid"—a false oath;¹³ the *Mittelhochdeutsch* "Mein" carrying the sense of "false," "deceitful," or "fraudulent," hence "forsworn-poem."

As we must by now have come to expect, there are passages in Job to which Celan's lines refer, and, as we shall see, at one point Celan literally translates a word from the Hebrew.

As we already remarked, Job's friends repeatedly charge him with speaking in vain; at times this takes the form of an accusation of uttering false testimony, as in 15:5:

For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity and thou choosest the
tongue of the crafty. Thine own mouth condemneth thee and not
I; yea thine own lips testify against thee.

Passages like this one are important to our reading of Celan's lines because here "true witness" and "false witness" are conflated. Only a searching through of the ways of speech could etch the one out of and away from the other. The line break between *Mein* and *gedicht* seems to implicate the poem itself in this turbulent twisting of the ways.

Still in 24:25 we find the solitary Job maintaining the veracity of his testimony:

And if it be not so now, who will make me a liar and bring my
words to naught?

This is part of the *Reinigungseid* that Job speaks not so much to his friends, but as a direct challenge to God, for he has accused God of letting evil go unpunished in the world and of indifference to mortal suffering. If God were to prove Job wrong and overturn the truth of his

testimony then he would have to show that he does deal justly and that he is not indifferent to the suffering of the innocent. But this is *not*, of course, how God argues in the *Book of Job*. When he does finally answer Job, it is the fact, the event, of contact with divine speech that leads Job to repent of his claim to having spoken truly, not God's argument *per se*. In and of itself God's concluding answer to Job is no argument against him.¹⁴

So concerned with the letter of Job's rhetoric was Celan that he chose to translate a very unusual word from the Hebrew. In fact, Celan's *Genicht* renders a word into German that only appears once in the whole Bible. Ordinarily, *ahl* is used as an adverb of negation like "nicht." Just this once however, in 24:25 *ahl* is used as a substantive, meaning "nothing" or "naught." In like manner, the last word of Celan's strophe is a substantivized adverb of negation. In the context of the poem, the act of bringing Job's words ("my words") to naught is actually carried out. *Genicht* is at one and the same time a kind of utterance and the effect of silencing that utterance.

The windy nothing of *das Genicht* is counterposed to the *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache*. But unlike Gadamer and others, we ought to refrain from evaluating these two poles in terms of true and false, positive and negative. For in the trial of Job a person reduced to the mere breath in his nostrils may bear testimony that is true. Even reduced to wind Job's oath may stand (27:3-4):

As long as there is still breath in me and the spirit (*ruach*) of God
is in my nostrils: my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue
will not utter deceit.

Aus-
gewirbelt

Whirled [whirlwinded]
out

Where the first strophe dwelt upon the violent conflation of true and false ways of speech even in the process of separating them, the second records an ultimate break. The setting of *aus* by itself, severed off from the verb, emphasizes a centrifugal motion outwards. Some residuum has been salvaged from out of the multitude of vain words and out of the purge of the previous stanza. God speaks out of the whirlwind storm in *Job*, and here again Celan constructs his active and continuous metaphor by taking a biblical figure and re-casting it: to speak out of the whirlwind becomes the same as wrestling

something out of it. We have made it a point in this commentary that, unlike most of the other readers who have stressed *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache* as an absolute language of truth, the *Strahlenwind* is involved (in the Miltonic sense of this word) in the negative and false forms of speech that it etches its way through. No surer sign of this involvement can be seen than the difference between a “strahlen” motion and a “wirbeln” motion. The latter has a twisting, turbulent movement that the former does not have. Perhaps it is this change in manner and direction of the wind of *deiner Sprache* that gives us an *Atemwende*.

frei
der Weg durch den menschen-
gestaltigen Schnee

free
the way through the human-
shaped snow

This strophe has, as a whole, the character of a clearing, the winning of a direction. *Aus, frei, der Weg durch* are encapsulations of the wandering motif in *Exodus*. At no point in the *Book of Job*, though, does God announce himself as the liberator of Israel. Shadai is recognized as an all-powerful creator God, who is “just” in an abstract and transcendent way, but a far cry from the God of *Exodus* who hears the lament of the slaves in Egypt, delivers them, and leads them through the wilderness. It cannot be stated strongly enough that the transformations of the first stanza are not just undergone by the mortal side of the God/man relation—God too has been searched and tested. On the other side, the solitary fate of Job has become fused to the collective one of Israel. Unlike the redemptive act in *Exodus*, the way is not made through a desert wilderness here, but through a snow wilderness. These silent shrouds of snow and ice, bereft of all but the faintest traces of life, number high in Celan’s poems, early and late.¹⁵ All speech dies down in these windswept ice-scapes; and yet there is a mute receptivity about the snow that muffles the spoken word. Reading Celan’s single-word lines here, one is reminded of the hush amidst mountain snow that Webern’s sacred music evokes.

The line-break between *menschen* and *gestaltigen* displaces the object of *durch* from “human” to “human-shaped snow.” This shift suggests that in passing through the human form, the wind takes on the contour, the image, of the human without being identified with it. And like an etching process there is a dissolving of a substance (the human) and the creation of an image that bears the shape, in the way that snow

takes the shape of the thing that it covers. It should not come as a surprise that these very cold images should follow the “hot” ones of the first stanza. There is a technical form of wind action known as “wind etching,” also called “wind frosting,” that sand particles carried by winds perform on stone and mineral surfaces. In Celan’s poem it is not sand that is carried by the wind (though this is hinted at later by the formation of an *Atemkristall*), rather it is the dissolved substance of the human.

To what end, though, is this mortal dissolution carried out? Returning to the whole verse of 30:23 we read Job’s anticipation of death:

Thou liftest me up to the wind, thou causest me to ride upon it and
dissolvest my substance. For I know thou wilt bring me to death
and to the house appointed for all living.

For comparison’s sake, it might be instructive to counterpose Job’s yearning for death, his anticipation of God’s wind piloting him to Sheol, with Gadamer’s rather aestheticized view of this journey in Celan’s poem:

Es führt die Höhenwanderung im winterlich unbetretenen
Gebirge zu einer gastlichen Stätte. Wo man fern genug von den
Aktualitäten des menschlichen Treibens ist, ist man dem Ziel
nahe, dem Ziel, das das wahre Wort ist.¹⁶

If Celan’s poem is a re-rendering of *Job*, as we have been reading it, then the goal of the journey would be one of the most *menschlich* of all—death, especially yearned for by the suffering Job. As we shall see, in Celan’s careful re-reading and re-writing, *Job is granted his wish*.

<i>den Büsserschnee, zu</i>	the pilgrim-snow, to
<i>den gastlichen</i>	the hospitable
<i>Gletscherstuben und-tischen.</i>	glacier-rooms and -tables.

Original language of the kind forged by Celan always presents the translator with difficult choices: if he chooses to highlight one sense of a word, often he must place in the background other semantic resonances of perhaps equal importance. Michael Hamburger’s

“penitents’ snow” for *Büsserschnee*, while keeping to the lexical sense of *Büsser*, loses the active sense of the snow taking the shape of the wind-swept person wandering through it; this is largely because Hamburger turned *Büsserschnee* into a possessive compound. “Pilgrim snow” is an attempt to render this active re-shaping.

It would have taken some familiarity with the Hebrew original of “house appointed for all living,” which Celan could easily have managed since crypto-translation of Hebrew terms abound in *Atemwende*,¹⁷ to know that the Hebrew *bayit moaid*, house or meet-house, has the idiosyncrasy of referring both to an appointed place and to an appointed time, and it is used in other biblical contexts to refer to gatherings and festal assemblies.¹⁸ Celan’s hospitable rooms and tables give us the sense that this glacial meeting place *expects* its pilgrim visitor to come at the appointed hour. This idea of Job’s finding a haven in Sheol, the biblical Hades, is expressed earlier in 14:13:

O that you would hide me in Sheol,
conceal me till your anger pass,
Then set me a time and remember me.

Marvin Pope points out that “Job here gropes toward the idea of an afterlife. If only God would grant him asylum in the netherworld, safe from the wrath which now besets him, and then appoint him a time for a new and sympathetic hearing, he would be willing to wait and even endure the present evil.”¹⁹ The only problem with our Jobian interpretation of this part of Celan’s poem is that Celan locates the house of all living in a glacier-world,²⁰ a land we associate with the rare air of the mountains, with the hoarfrost of heaven, rather than the netherworld.

We have already mentioned that Celan’s poem enacts the trial of Job in a different way than the original, the most critical difference being that Celan has interpreted the ironic or otherwise rhetorical challenges of both Job and God as real events. There is thus a hint of Celan’s strange, spellbound glacier world in God’s famous snow and ice imagery:

Hast thou entered into the treasures [stores] of snow and hail
which I have reserved against the time of trouble?

Celan's *gastlichen Gletcherstuben und-tischen* fuses together the house of all living and a place in God's dominion that God ironically holds out as being inaccessible to Job.

From Christian and Jewish sources we hear tell of a banquet that is set for the end of days when the redeemed are to gather with the messiah and with their long-dead ancestors. It is impossible to read of the hospitable rooms and tables without hearing the New Testament "my mansion is of many rooms." And it is equally impossible to read these lines without recalling the Chasidic legends of the Passover *seder* prepared from time immemorial and all ready to begin, but for the delayed arrival of a mysterious guest, whose place is still empty at table.

Tief
in der Zeiteinschränkung,
beim
Wabeneis

Deep
in the time-crevasse,
by the
honeycomb-ice

God's dramatic answer to Job (38:18) contains the following in its barrage of rhetorical questions:

Hast thou walked in search of the depth? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? The waters are hid as with a stone and the face of the deep is frozen.

At one level, God's counter-challenge to Job is no answer at all: the rhetorical questions merely overwhelm the small mortal in an ironical *ad hominem*: "who are you to bother me about the justice of your suffering; were you there when I created the universe? Do you know the secrets hid in the hoarfrost of heaven?" Here again, the secret places God holds out as transcendent, which mortal Job can never know, are recast by Celan as within Job's reach, meant for him precisely. To the question "hast thou walked in search of the depth?" the poem anticipates just such a search. To the forbidding question "hast thou entered into the treasure stores of heaven?" the poem expects just such an entrance.

Celan's version of God's speech purges it of its rhetorical function while, at the same time, it draws a kind of redemptive significance from the figures themselves. By taking it literally, Celan

translates figurative language into a first order reality instead of leaving it a second order representation. One should be careful about labeling this kind of literalism a symbolism. It is more accurate to call it an antisymbolism or even a reverse symbolism, because it treats the material of representation as a reality in itself. Previous studies have variously pointed to a kabbalist influence in Celan's scrupulous attention to the literal. It should be well noted, however, that the literal breakdown of words in scripture and the reconstruction of meaning from out of this literalism is no monopoly of the mystics in Judaism; this treatment of scripture was a strong feature of rabbinic commentary on the bible. Even the staunch rationalist Maimonides used this procedure of ideation through literal breakdown of Hebrew terms—he just pointed this method toward rationalist instead of theosophical ends. Celan is thus in keeping with this peculiarity of Jewish speculation: his literalism is poised to interrogate the word-secrets of the Torah.

It is, then, very unenlightening to pluck the strand of mysticism from Celan's poem without considering the biblical fabric into which it is woven. Interpretations of "Weggebeizt" under headings like "Mystische Paradoxie" actually understate the powerful interrogation of scripture that courses through this poem and so many others—one may speak of the *midrashic* element of Celan's poetry as well as the mystical element.

Zeitenschrunde is a synthetic word with affinities to other time terms in Celan's later poetry. (Compare, for instance, with *Zeitloch* in "Die Posaunenstelle" from the *Zeitgehöft* collection.) Time is imaged as a passageway through a liminal zone both at the end and outside of time. Time appears in the form of a *lacuna* that is an entrance-way as well as an exit. By making that which is at the limit of time reside in its very deepest depths, Celan gives a temporal dimension to the mysterious depth of which God speaks in *Job*.

Though not itself the goal of the search, *Wabeneis* pulsates with an expectation of arrival; it connotes a translucent preserve, a womb of ice, where there is preserved, as cold as it may be, something as warm as milk and honey. If it were possible to speak of warmth at the heart of arctic cold, of a truly hyperborean poetics, surely the place where it can be found is in Paul Celan's work. In this suspension between time and the timeless, a heavenly search and an earthly pilgrimage are to meet, each expecting the other.

wartet, ein Atemkristall,

there waits, a crystal of breath,

“Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? . . . [T]he face of the deep is frozen.” Since this contains an allusion to the secret of creation, Celan has placed the life-engendering *ruach* in the depth of the time-crevasse. From the dialectical searching of the way that we have traced in the previous stanzas, which brought about a tried unity between the wind-speech of God and the dissolved life of Job, there is no way to tell whether the *Atemkristall* is Job’s or God’s exhalation. But we may recall Job’s desperate wish that he be hidden in Sheol until God’s anger passes, there to wait for a new hearing; and we may recall also how Celan has translated this wish into an ice-bound refuge, one we associate with the ice and hoarfrost of heaven. Further evidence for Celan’s having drawn *Atemkristall* out of the Hebrew is the fact that *kerach*, the word used for ice in Job, like the Greek *κρυσταλλος*, is also used to mean (glass) crystal.²¹

There is a desperate expectation-horizon in the conclusion of “Weggebeizt.” *Wartet* is like a pedal point announcing and waiting for an imminent resolution. All hinges on a Genesis that has still yet to be: the real Genesis that comes at the end. The actual point of contact, of arrival, is left hanging between “now” and “at any moment.”

*dein unumstössliches
Zeugnis*

your incontrovertible
witness.

The final stress on the witness that cannot be overturned, whose testimony is incontrovertible, has a Hebrew antecedent. The Hebrew word for witness *ayd* is related to a root meaning “reiterating, emphatically affirming.”²² This root is probably kin to the temporal adverb *ode*, which expresses continuance and perpetuity through time.²³ It is not absent from *Job*, nor is it likely that traditional as well as modern interpretations of Job’s *Zeugnis* were missed by Paul Celan. In 16:10-22 there is a very famous invocation of the witness:

O Earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place.
Also now behold, my witness is in heaven and my record is on
high. . . . O that one might plead for a man with God as a man
pleadeth for his neighbor.

Rabbinic lore, certainly well established by Maimonides's time, ascribes the role of witness to an interceding angel in God's "court" who gives testimony on behalf of the person who is brought to trial by God. On the other hand, Martin Buber concludes his essay on *Job* with the double or bi-polar nature of the witness in *Job*: "and in all his revolt [Job] was God's witness on earth; as God was his witness in heaven."²⁴ The bi-polar interpretation is much in keeping with the ambiguous grammar of *dein unumstössliches Zeugnis*, which, unlike *deiner Sprache*, cannot be a property of *Du*, but rather refers to an other who witnesses *for Du*. This reading also accords nicely with our emphasis on the *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache* as both agent and object of the turbulent trying of the ways of speech. There is an irony here that cuts to the central problem of the *Book of Job*: that Job may have been a truer witness for God than God himself, appealing as Job does from God against and to God.

It is the poem that has taken Job's cry and God's words and turned them in a purge against themselves. In this trying of the way of speech, the wind-blast of the omnipotent Shadai is turned and etched into the breath of a finite creature.

A one-way retrospective reading of "Weggebeizt," from the poem back to its biblical source, would relegate it to a kind of dependence on the source, a dependence that would cloud the integrity of the poem. There is always the danger of *over-mediation* in the reading and interpretation of Celan's later poetry which misses the astonishing event of the poetic utterance itself. "Weggebeizt" underscores the problematic relations between an immediate original language and its subsequent transformations, between source, destination, and end-point. Celan set his German in a painful process of deformation in order to bring it into contact with the language of Job: the result is a poem that gives the effect of being charged and coursed by a sacred language. Taking the direction traced by our reading *unterwegs*, we can see the language of *Job* as the source of the *Strahlenwind* and of the poem. But if we view the source from the vantage of its destination we must also say that the source becomes hidden once it is expressed in the ray or beam, that the source, even, ceases to be once the ray twists into and through the turbulent *Wirbelwind*-motion. We can know the source, finally, only through contact with its manifestations. In this way the source disappears, search as we may for it in the *Strahlenwind deiner Sprache*.

NOTES

1. All biblical citations are drawn from the King James version unless otherwise indicated. Parentheses add alternate translations when they may highlight a parallel in "Weggebeizt." [Editor's note: "Weggebeizt," in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), II, 31.]
2. Michael Hamburger, trans., *Paul Celan: Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1980), p. 189.
3. *Atemwende* contains such constructions as *Wundgeheilt*, p. 47; *feuergepeitscht*, p. 43; *wortblutgeboren*, p. 59; and *kohlegezinkten*, p. 58.
4. Ernst Graf von Harrach, *Die Jagd im deutschen Sprachgut* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk, 1953), p. 20.
5. Rudolf Schutzeichel, *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1969), p. 103.
6. Francis Brown, Briggs, and Driver, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) p. 103.
7. In theological terms we might understand this simultaneous activity and passivity of the same entity as *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*—a distinction that Spinoza makes great use of and which has an unmistakable kabbalist aura.
8. Brown, *Lexicon*, p. 924.
9. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wer bin Ich und wer bist Du?* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 107.
10. Peter Horst Neumann, *Zur Lyrik Paul Celans* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1968), p. 81.
11. In Nahum N. Glatzer ed., *The Dimensions of Job* (New York: Schocken, 1969) p. 61.
12. I am indebted to Rainer Nägele for the elaboration of this insight.
13. Hamburger, *Paul Celan*, p. 20.
14. In his interestingly idiosyncratic "Silence and Speech as Action," Paul Goodman tackles the most daunting aspect of *Job*, the fact that "the poems of the end . . . do not refute the hero's reasoned dissatisfaction with the consolations and criticisms of his three cronies." Goodman's "solution" is to show how the metaphysical status of the text changes from reasoning to presentation and action-speech. "God does nothing but present himself, and he has no argument but the encounter itself. . . . The power of the poem makes credible the incident of the Whirlwind. In the story, in turn, Job is not persuaded by a reason but moved by a fact, and so repents." In Paul Goodman, *Creator Spirit Come!: The Literary Essays of Paul Goodman*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (New York: Dutton, 1979), pp. 43-46.

15. See Peter Horst Neumann, *Wort-Konkordanz zur Lyrik Paul Celans 1952-1967* (München-Allach: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, [n.d.]).
16. Gadamer, *Wer bin Ich*, p. 108.
17. Cryptic translation from Hebrew is the subject of a much larger study to which the present essay may serve as a *prolegomenon*. To consider one other example from the many in *Atemwende*, the following short poem is a gloss of a biblical verse, Isaiah 51:16:

WEGE IN SCHATTEN-GEBRÄCH
deiner Hand.

Aus der Vier-Finger-Furche
wühl ich mir den
versteinerten Segen.

The parallel verse—"And I have put my words in your mouth and in the shadow of my hand I have hid you, planting the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth"—uses the word *yad* for "hand," a term that can also mean a sepulchral monument. Celan ties the sepulchral sense of *yad* to the sense of the hand in 51:16, bringing forth and planting the heavens and the earth, as it shields Israel in its shadow. By making use of the sepulchral sense Celan both quotes and undermines this biblical verse.

18. Brown et al, *Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 109.
19. The Anchor Bible, Volume 15 (New York: Doubleday, 1965) pp. 105, 108.
20. There exists a folk etymology for *büssen*, in which it takes on the meaning "to cure by magical incantation." So that the spell-binding quality of Celan's *Büsserschnee* and the hospitable glacier sanctuary may receive their magic, at least in part, from this usage.
21. Gensenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, trans. Tragelles (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 743.
22. Brown, *Lexicon*, p. 729.
23. Brown, *Lexicon*, p. 728.
24. In Nahum N. Glatzer ed., *The Dimensions of Job*, p. 65.