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Outside the Reign of Logic, Outside the Reach of God:

Hester Panim in the Surreal Art of Paul Celan and Samuel Bak

A rudimentary but often used definition of the “surreal” refers to true events that appear fantastic and dreamlike. History books are on the other side of the spectrum, as they purport to detail only the facts, facts which are real simply because they are published as history. Occasionally, however, the real is so incredible that even factual accounts of it cannot help but lapse into depictions of the *surreal*. The events of the Holocaust mark an historical event so terrible that descriptions of it, even in factual accounts, become surreal because they read like tales of horror. For example, a seemingly technical historical statistic—six million Jews were victims of genocide during WWII—is so shocking that history becomes a landscape of nightmare. This landscape is replete with unanswered and likely unanswerable philosophical and theological dilemmas, the most common being: Where was God during the Holocaust?

Post-Holocaust artists have attempted to depict this nightmare landscape and address this question through various media. Two artists in particular, poet Paul Celan and visual artist Samuel Bak, both Holocaust survivors, have used aspects of Surrealism to represent the nightmares of WWII. Louis Aragon, a founder of the surrealist movement, asserted, “Reality [...] is the apparent absence of contradiction. The marvelous is the eruption of contradiction within the real.”¹ In *Adam and Eve* from Bak’s *In a Different Light* series and Celan’s poem “Tenebrae,”²

classical elements of this surrealist sense of contradiction are used to depict the Jewish concept of *Hester Panim* as an answer to questions about God and the Holocaust. As defined by the Shoah Resource Center, *Hester Panim* refers to “God’s hiddenness. Some believe that God ‘hides’ Himself in order to tolerate sin in the world, and along the way people are hurt by that sin. Others assert that there is no explanation for God’s hiding.”³ This type of absence theology can take many forms, as there “are a variety of notions about the hiddenness of God, the absence of God, the silence of God, and the eclipse of God.”⁴ *Hester Panim* has a long history that is evidenced in the Old Testament books of Job and Esther, and the questions of God’s absence that arise in those books are evident in the vistas that Bak and Celan create. Both depict an absent God and/or a fading God who has chosen to hide from the intolerable acts of Adolph Hitler’s “Final Solution.” Indeed, the very act of attempting to depict a God who is not there is steeped in incongruity. Thus, the works explored below speak to and for one another; the images and ideas that Celan metaphorically paints in “Tenebrae,” Bak literally paints in *Adam and Eve*. The images and words contained therein offer avenues of emotional release for those burdened by the unanswerable queries that inevitably follow the tragedy of war.

Surrealism is a complex and esoteric artistic, literary and philosophical movement founded in France as a reaction to WWI carnage. The surrealists constituted the front lines of a subversive cultural shift that attempted to root out the principles that led to the 37,466,904 casualties of the so-called “War to End All Wars.”⁵ The surrealistic elements of Bak’s and Celan’s work analyzed below are *purposely* less complex, focusing primarily on the contradictory images and psychological “gardening”—as in rooting through the darkest reaches of the psyche—that naturally arise when one tries to represent living horrors. And this is a representation that has given up on the logic and ratiocination that grounds Western philosophical traditions. There is no place more ruled by chaos and the irrational than the dreamscapes of the human mind. Thus, prompted by Sigmund Freud’s work on the subconscious, André Breton stated the following in his 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*:

We are still living under the reign of logic [...] But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest [...] Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly

be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices.⁶

However, the surrealists did not allow their philosophy, their interest in “fancy” and the “forbidden,” to slip into instances of mere nihilistic buffoonery. In contrast, they asserted that the real was to be found within these peripheral worlds: “Surrealism is not flight into the unreal or into dream, but an attempt to penetrate what has more reality than the logical and objective universe.”⁷ Are Bak’s and Celan’s images fantastic, dreamlike, and unreal? Yes, but that does not make the worlds they create any less authentic—perhaps it makes them more so. James E. Young quotes Holocaust scholar Robert Scholes as asserting that “it is because reality [itself] cannot be recorded that realism is dead [...] We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it.”⁸ Bak and Celan are students of this perspective, and they use “fancy” and the “forbidden” to depict the completely illogical events of WWII. They have created art that expresses the search for God in the worlds they have constructed. Their art is *not* reality per se, but it is their constructions of the truths they came to know, truths so terrible that depictions of it fall outside “the reign of logic” and far from the embrace of God.

Celan and Bak: Holocaust Survivors

Both Paul Celan (1920-1970) and Samuel Bak (b. 1933) survived the atrocities of the Holocaust. However, their physical survivals belie the continued emotional imprisonment that is evident in their complexly stunning artistic creations. As Lawrence Langer eloquently states, “[T]he artist has few illusions about the ease of renewal. The task of escaping the weight of memory imposes a nearly insuperable burden on the imagination seeking to create profuse options for the future.”⁹ The violent acts that Celan and Bak witnessed were never fully purged from their minds, and memories of these horrors serve as the impetus for much of their artistic output. Surrealism, which attempts to plumb and purify the psyche, provides a logical avenue through which to attempt such psychological catharsis. At 22, Celan, a Romanian Jew, was moved from a ghetto to a labor camp where his parents would die. While “freed” from the Holocaust in 1944, Celan’s attempts to grapple with his past ended in 1970, when he killed himself by drowning in the Seine River. Bak’s family was moved to the Vilna, Poland ghetto in 1940. His father was shot just before Vilna’s 1944 liberation. He and his mother were two of the few from Vilna who had survived by war’s end.

Bak's 2001 autobiography *Painted in Words: A Memoir* clearly demonstrates the ways in which events of ghetto and camp life mirror the use of the extraordinary and paradoxical images that dominate surrealist art. Bak writes of an "Exhibition of Art" that took place in the ghetto: "A waiting room for the horrors of the death camps seems an unlikely setting for something meant to liberate the spirit and bring joy. Yet it is not an unusual conjunction, as we know from many books about the Holocaust."¹⁰ As shown in the following excerpt, Bak's autobiography abounds with further surreal images "painted in words," just as the title of his memoir promises. On a train from Lodz to Berlin after the war, the artist reports the following:

The first impression is of total blackness, and then gradually contours start to emerge. Strange animal-like sounds and bizarre smells filter into our small space. We are in a sort of anteroom that gives access to the rest of the car. Two or three Red Army men in heavy coats, reeking of vomit and alcohol, are spread on the floor and snore. I hear distant voices and see some light filtering through the side of a closed door.¹¹

These examples, rife with multi-sensory images that slowly arise from the train's moving darkness, maintain a dreamlike/nightmare quality, showing the ways in which the Holocaust essentially served as fertile ground from which surreal gardens of remembrance could grow.

Celan and Bak have long been seen as *surrealistic*, though not necessarily as surrealists proper.¹² In her 1993 study of Celan, Clarise Samuels asserts that the poet's surrealist style in depicting Holocaust themes "has already been noted and analyzed by a number of scholars. As early as 1954, Hans Egon Holthausen commented on the French surrealists' influence on Celan's lyrics."¹³ Similarly, while Bak was influenced by Cubism during his early career, his interest in the surreal was honed during the late 1960s/ early 1970s. Pam Chadick notes this shift by stating that in "the 1960s he discarded abstraction for a style that required more realistic rendering, but incorporated images that verged on the surreal [...] Bak does interesting things with his motifs and symbols [...] by forcing surprising relationships between the symbol and the world that he creates in these paintings."¹⁴ Although Celan and Bak are not completely aligned with the historical Surrealist movement, both artists certainly used the surrealist tropes of contradiction and spectacular imagery to question both the horrors of war and God's responsibility for them and/or absence from them. This is an act very much in keeping with the

spirit of Surrealism, a movement that eschewed both the concept of a higher power and the primacy of logic within Western discourse.

Celan and the Absence of God in “Tenebrae”

Paradoxically, but true to form, the surrealists declared that traditional modes of artistic production, both in writing and art, were defunct. This contradiction, some would say hypocrisy—of a writer *writing* that writing is dead—was not lost on the surrealists’ contemporary critics. But however much the surrealists believed that art no longer existed, the fact is that they *did* continue to write, and most would agree that they did so with quite a degree of finesse. In reality, such declarations were more a way of ensuring that art would become fused with the happenings of everyday life. Georges Hugnet asserted that poetry had slipped from the page to “to the center of life. It is no longer an art, a spiritual state, but life, spirit.”¹⁵ Paul Celan’s “Tenebrae” relies on surreal contradiction to make meaning and to create spirit both in the communal sense and with the faint expectation of renewal. In “Tenebrae,” Celan, a Jewish poet,¹⁶ appears to be addressing a Christian “Lord.” David Wolpe notes that “metaphorical language [poetry] is intrinsically suspect when it comes to theology” because it signifies an attempt to depict something beyond the capability of humans to comprehend, something that “transcends” language.¹⁷ However, he concludes that although metaphor is inadequate, it is the primary communicative option that we have as human beings, explaining that “as we cannot speak without recourse to metaphor, we cannot theologize without it [...] the metaphor of eclipse is part of the congeries of images about God’s silence, hiddenness and inactivity which run through Jewish tradition and have become exquisitely apposite in the wake of the Holocaust.”¹⁸ Celan, consequently, appropriates Christian metaphorical language in addressing the concept of *Hester Panim* and in bringing this language to the “center of life.” Since the God of the covenant has abandoned His people, the speaker’s only recourse is to address another God. In essence, Celan “mobilizes the trope of humanity’s separation from the messiah” through the language of poetry.¹⁹ Conversely, there is also the conflicting sense that the God of the covenant still exists somewhere, as demonstrated by the fury directed at that entity. Therefore, a simple Deistic theological perspective will not work here. Rather, the speaker, and speakers, of this poem find affinity with their brother Jesus Christ, another Jewish man who was tortured, sacrificed, and seemingly abandoned by his Father.

The very title of this poem refers to the Christian Tenebrae service that takes place during the Holy Week before Easter. Tenebrae—which in Latin means “shadows”—attempts to reconstruct the emotive elements of the passion and crucifixion of

Jesus Christ. In Celan's *Tenebrae* service, the death of Christ is compared to the deaths of Jews as they send out an alert to God: "We are near, Lord,/ near and at hand" (lines 1-2).²⁰ To be near to God is to be close to death or deceased already. The second stanza of the poem juxtaposes the events of the Holocaust to Christ's passion, while also alluding to the murder of Jews in gas chambers:

Handled already, Lord,
clawed and clawing as though
the body of each of us were
your body, Lord. (lines 3-6)

Although the reference is subtle, the Lord here is quite possibly a Christian God, as it was his son Jesus Christ who was made into flesh/ "body" and brutally "handled" by the Romans. In *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, John Felstiner notes that Celan adapted the fourth line of this poem from "Gerald Reitlinger's ground-breaking study *The Final Solution*" in which, "at the end of an already horrifying paragraph, a cluster of Jews pressing against the gas chamber door, suffocating, is described as 'even in death clawed into each other.'"²¹ The speaker²² expresses rage that is evident in his warning to God that the suffering are "clawing" their way to He who allowed them to be so brutally "handled" by the Nazis.

The third stanza of "*Tenebrae*" completely circumvents the traditional landscape of religious worship, thereby exemplifying how Celan uses contradiction to direct fury toward as well as deny God. He revisions pious souls at prayer as angry souls demanding that their negated deity pray to them: "Pray, Lord,/ *pray to us*,/ we are near" (lines 7-9, emphasis added). This stanza was controversial from the start, causing Celan's Catholic friend Otto Pöggeler to advise that he remove the "sacrilegious" line quoted above.²³ In fact, Celan did initially take Pöggeler's advice, but eventually decided to restore it before final publication. The implication, again, is that the Jews are "clawing" their way to the God who has abandoned them. God, therefore, is advised to pray to them, perhaps for forgiveness. In "Washing of the Word, Washing of the World," Beth Hawkins aptly notes that what "emerges in the space of destruction [the Holocaust] is a conditional covenant that paradoxically renders the previous conditions—i.e. that the keeping of the Torah necessitates protection—null and void."²⁴ For a Jew during and after the Holocaust, God's negation of the Biblical covenant would seem a likely supposition. In return, God is negated.

The next two stanzas refer back to stanza two, in which elements of daily life in the camps are depicted amidst a hectic landscape:

Wind awry we went there,
went there to bend
over hollow and ditch.
To be watered we went there, Lord. (lines 10-13)

The image here evokes the harsh conditions under which one was expected to work in the labor camps. In fact, the Romanian camp in which Celan worked was eventually closed due to extremely bad weather conditions. The exact details of the poet's time in the forced-labor camps are sketchy. Felstiner notes the following: "Shoveling!' is what [Celan] would say when asked [...] what work he did [in the camp]."²⁵ In the stanzas above, the shoveling has already been done. Jews were forced to shovel to create a final (un)resting place for the bodies of their murdered brethren. The speaker and his companions, the "we," look down into the depths of the earth waiting to be "watered" like flowers—a reference to being drenched with their own blood in front of a Nazi firing squad. As Samuels writes, Celan often used the flower trope as part of his surrealist repertoire:

The flower motif reminiscent of spring and life is combined with [...] images of destruction, death, and the Holocaust. This contradiction is a reminder of the fact that the German death camps of the Holocaust often possessed bizarre contrasts with nature and civilization that included garden paths and music within the camps, as well as the camps' surrounding countryside. This bizarre incongruity, which defied words, existed as an aura, palpably present yet always intangible.²⁶

This seemingly inherent contradictory aspect of life in Nazi camps, as ably noted by Samuels, is confirmed by Bak's memories of WWII (see passages quoted above from his memoir), again confirming that the reality of the Holocaust is most suitably reconstructed through a surreal filter due to the seemingly incompatible elements of life during the war.

Celan's surreal vista is further darkened, or reddened, as the speakers, the "we" of the poem, are watered with blood: "It was blood, it was/ what you shed, Lord" (lines 14-15). Jews, persecuted because of religious beliefs, are found bathing in the blood of a Christian God who made His son flesh with the knowledge that he would then

be tortured and sacrificed. Although the image itself seems illogical, this is a logical comparison made by a speaker, or speakers, attempting to comprehend his people's own incomprehensible torture and sacrifice. He continues with a description of the blood that "gleamed":

It cast your image into our eyes, Lord.
Our eyes and our mouths are so open and empty, Lord.
We have drunk, Lord.
The blood and the image that was in the blood, Lord. (lines 17-20)

In this stanza, "Tenebrae" becomes a prayer to an absent Judaic God through its repeated call to a Christian Lord who shed his own blood for the salvation of humankind, an event reenacted in countless Christian ceremonial masses. In fact, Celan asserts that the Jews *are* Jesus Christ (a somewhat logical comparison since Christ was himself Jewish). There is no differentiation between the ultimate iconic image of self-sacrifice, Jesus Christ, and the victims of the Holocaust. Christ resides in the lifeless eyes of the massacred Jews; they swallow him, drink him, both his literal blood, via the sacrament of communion, and the image of him crucified. This use of dogmatic contradiction is not unique to Celan. For example, in 1938, Jewish artist Marc Chagall painted *The White Crucifixion*, depicting Christ amidst "a pogrom" in which "some cottages have been turned over, their possessions scattered and owners killed ... [and] Christ, [depicted on the cross, wears] a Jewish prayer-shawl."²⁷ The historical use of Christian iconography by Jewish artists is noted by Felstiner and expounded upon in relation to the New Testament when Christ asks during his final hours: "'Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani' that is, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'"²⁸ This question, of course, is met with the sourness of a sponge soaked with vinegar. Like Christ, the Jews cry out to a seemingly disinterested God; in response, they are only fed more bitterness.

This poem, offered to readers as a bizarre Tenebrae service, ends as it began, with a collective "we" addressing God in an unexpected manner: "Pray, Lord./ We are near" (lines 21-22). The speaker makes a final demand of the Lord who has abandoned the Jews in the horrid landscape that unfolds in the second, fourth, and eighth stanzas. In between these stanzas God is beseeched to notice their suffering, but they, like their Jewish brother Christ, are left forsaken. Whether or not God is hidden, eclipsed, or disinterested, his people are approaching him. They have been "handled" and "clawed," and they know they will die. Some are already dead. When alive, they were always already near death.

Bak and the Absence of God in *Adam and Eve*

Although one must be careful when attempting to understand the artist through his/her art, Samuel Bak's reference to himself as a "God-fearing atheist" is pertinent here.²⁹ The phrase epitomizes one of the main components of this study: *Hester Panim* via the contradictory depiction of an absent supreme deity. Scott Ruescher's review of Bak's show, *In a Different Light: Genesis in the Art of Samuel Bak*, summarizes the series as a whole, while capturing the artist's use of Surrealism:

[I]n painting after painting, [Bak uses] appropriated depictions of Adam himself, in the unmistakable guise of a hunted-down European Jew [...]. In Bak's bizarre paintings, [he] strip[s] down Michelangelo's sensual settings of the *Genesis* stories and dress[es] them back up in ghastrier garb [...]. Adam, a pallid, stubble-faced, burr-headed, gaunt, and hopelessly impassive figure, no longer relishes a languid nonchalance, and no longer counts on an imminent touch from the warm hand of God [...]. Bak makes liberal use of surrealist symbolism to drive home his never-exactly-subtle visionary point about the Holocaust as proof of humanity's estrangement from the divine.³⁰

In *Adam and Eve*,³¹ part of this series, Bak, like Celan before him, works with religious iconography to depict the effects of the Holocaust on both the human psyche and the Jewish relationship with God. Indeed, an "estrangement" bordering on complete abandonment dominates the austere landscape that Bak creates. Ferdinand Alquié, philosopher of the surreal, affirms that in "Surrealism [...] the imaginary comes ceaselessly to break the framework of the given, to surpass it," but that the end results are always, inevitably, compared to the real.³² Bak breaks the frames of reality ("the given") by depicting conditions of a brutal reality amidst a conflux of extraordinary and unsettling images. Thus, his *Adam and Eve* serves as a striking counterpart to Celan's "Tenebrae."

While the creation of Adam is an aspect of both Judaic and Christian dogma, Bak, like Celan with the *Tenebrae* service, borrows from Christian/Western iconography; in this case, he utilizes Michelangelo Buonarroti's *The Creation of Adam*, from the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City. In *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, Langer explains that Michelangelo's painting "is charged with tension between human expectation and divine wish. The focal point is the narrow space dividing God's resolute finger from Adam's languid hand, awaiting the spark of vitality that will give life."³³ Eve, meanwhile, is securely wrapped in God's arm amidst a chorus

of fleshy cherubim. *Adam and Eve* is indicative of Bak's distinctive iconography which "draws on strong and well-known European pictorial traditions" in which "we find the real refigured as the surreal [...] suffused with the unmistakable nightmarish smoldering of the historical moment after Auschwitz."³⁴ Bak's use of easily recognizable icons is quite brilliant on two levels. First, it draws the viewer in because most are already familiar with Michelangelo's classic Renaissance image. Next, it reworks the image to expose the lie of protection promised by the covenant, thereby exposing the viewer to the (sur)reality of iniquity let loose on earth.

The very act of appropriating a Christian image of God announces Bak's fracturing of traditional Judaic practice. Unlike Christianity, Judaism does not offer an abundant catalogue of divine images. The absence of imagery in Judaic tradition is partly due to interpretations of the Second Commandment, which warns against idolatry. In "'Make yourself no graven image': The Second Commandment and Judaism," Carl S. Ehrlich expounds upon the Jewish prohibition against creating images of God—although he does note ruptures within this "aniconic" tradition.³⁵ He states, "[Historically, in Christian Europe] the Jewish community interpreted the Second Commandment in reaction to the iconography of the Church, which in Jewish eyes contained more than a trace of idolatry."³⁶ In contrast, Bak paradoxically uses these very Christian idols to depict an abandoned Jewish people. In appropriate surreal (paradoxical) fashion, however, Bak depicts God without actually depicting him at all.

Michelangelo's Christian/Renaissance representation of God as dynamic being, giver of life, and all-powerful entity is nothing less than inert in Bak's version. A juxtaposition of these two paintings is remarkable. The robust and lively Adam and Eve from *Creation* are replaced with pale, emaciated, sorrowful figures who are no longer protected by God (again, strikingly similar to the speakers in Celan's poem). Bak's Adam appears near death as he points and looks at something beyond the images on the canvas. Eve is presented above, lethargically pointing at Adam through a break in the wall. Langer makes the astute observation "that those familiar with Bak's earlier work will instantly recognize [...] the wall from a chamber of death."³⁷ In the distance, crematoria are actively puffing out smoke—from the remains of murdered Jews—that combines effortlessly with the threatening sky. Indeed, death permeates this entire nightmare landscape. The vivid, rich, and varied hues of *Creation* are replaced with the shades of red that drench Bak's *Adam and Eve*. Just as Celan's Jews are watered with blood in "Tenebrae," so are Bak's.

Again, we return to the query that confounds historians, theologians, philosophers, and survivors: Where was God during the Holocaust? In *Adam and*

Eve, he is as good as gone, reduced to a mere outline, to a fading memory on the death chamber wall. The finger of vitality that first ignited humankind points not at man but, again, at something beyond the canvas. The two “divine” hands represented—the top one connected to the outline of God, the bottom one to a makeshift arm made out of wood—are wearing gloves. With His hands gloved/bound, God is not available to transfer the spark of life that galvanizes Michelangelo’s *Creation*. Indeed, the bottom hand is completely ineffective because it has been securely nailed to the death chamber wall—an image that Langer correlate’s with Christ’s crucifixion, thereby showing this painting’s further affinity with “Tenebrae” and Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*. The grand incongruity, and one that secures Bak’s use of contradiction, is the implication that a supposedly all-powerful God is not *able* to revitalize his people.

As observed in Celan’s poem, the use of unexpected and complex imagery results in a barrage of rational quandaries that form the basis of *Hester Panim*: Is God absent? Eclipsed? Disinterested? Did he ever exist? The positioning of hands in *Adam and Eve* attempts to address these questions. The “narrow space” between God and man in Michelangelo’s *Creation* has become a seemingly insurmountable chasm in Bak’s revision. Adam and Eve scarcely have the strength to lift their hands. To point at Adam, Eve must rest her small frame against the wall. In return, the Adam she points at barely has the strength to gesture at something that remains unseen. In contrast, God’s hands are infused with the strength to point rigidly, but he points away from Adam and Eve, and the outline of his head shows that he also looks away from them. The implication may be that God, indeed, does have the strength to attend to his people. However, he chooses not to. If this is the case, then perhaps the reds in this painting are not blood so much as representations of anger directed at a disinterested deity. With God absent, nonexistent, or disinterested, Adam and Eve are the only remaining “real” figures in Bak’s painting. However, they find no solace in each other. Eve’s coquettish look in Michelangelo’s *Creation* is replaced with a downcast stare in *Adam and Eve*. Adam, meanwhile, appears too weak to lift his eyes up to his female counterpart. Abandoned by God, they remain distant from each other. There is no divinity, and there is no humanity. Their hands, those appendages that should connect human beings to each other through the power of touch, are flaccid and unseen by their respective and prospective partners. Meanwhile, the “hand of God has lost its way.”³⁸ Adam and Eve are ultimately alone in this landscape, separated from God, possibly *by* God, and distant from each other.

The verdant sash which trail's from God's entourage in *Creation* is transformed into a white flag that leans against the death chamber wall, though its positioning is such that it appears to be in Adam's hand. Does the flag symbolize that Adam has given up? Is he waving the proverbial white flag of surrender? Are he and Eve subtly whispering, "We cannot take any more! Cease fire, Lord!?" If, indeed, those cries whisper through this conflux of bizarre icons and post-Holocaust images, God has not heard them. He is looking and pointing elsewhere. Indeed, He appears as if He will fly off and away from a deserted people who remain mired in a chaotic land. Christ's words in Matthew 27 again resound: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Conclusion: Depicting Absence

Despite ongoing debates over whether or not it is appropriate to write of and depict the Holocaust, those re-imaginings continue to occur in writing and the visual arts (especially in film). Our continued fascination with the Holocaust shows a desire to understand both how and why such a tragedy occurred. There is an apparent human impulse to believe that with enough study, with enough rational investigation and knowledge, we can understand anything. The surrealists did not believe this, yet despite protests to the contrary, they did not give up on using textual and visual artistry to grapple with tragedy and the unknown. The questions remain: How could the Germans let this happen? How could the world let this happen? How could *God* let this happen? Does God really exist? Is the Holocaust proof that He doesn't? The poetry of Celan and the art of Bak serve as ideal examples of how the unspeakable and unseeable can powerfully become spoken and seen. To understand Celan's poem is to understand Bak's painting, and vice versa. In both cases, success of the artist lies in the dynamic representation of *Hester Panim* and the questioning of God. In these cases, the answers are not joyful; rather, they are woeful, violent, angry, and bathed in blood—exactly like the Holocaust itself. In "Tenebrae" and *Adam and Eve*, readers and viewers meet the undead. In the former they are "clawing" their way to God demanding answers, while in the latter they are adrift in a chaotic morass from which God is either fleeing or hopelessly absent. Aspects of Surrealism—the subconscious, contradiction, and the irrational—combined with an appropriation of Christian imagery, have provided a sieve through which these artists can purge their unconscious minds to depict unconscionable acts and unexplained absences.

Ideally, it is hope, forgiveness, and triumph of the human spirit that will be the ultimate outcomes of history's past, present, and future atrocities. That is not

the case here, not in Paul Celan's "Tenebrae" nor in Samuel Bak's *Adam and Eve*. The implication that God, or lack thereof, is implicated in history's genocides is unabashedly depicted by the artists. They have not fully answered the question, "Where was God during the Holocaust?" No one can answer that with any certainty. Yet their attempts to do so can be utilized as avenues for contemplating the irrationality of war, a concept that contemporary audiences are painfully familiar with, as warfare and genocide were certainly not buried in the rubble of post-WWII Europe. In the end, Celan and Bak have partially answered the question by alluding to where God was not and to what He was not doing during WWII. God was not protecting Jews from Nazi carnage in Auschwitz-Berkinau, Ravensbruck, Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor, Dachau, Theresienstadt, etc. Consequently, the reds of anger and blood are suitable hues through which to paint—in words and images—the surreal landscape that the Holocaust wrought, and they are suitable hues through which to contemplate the absence of God.

Notes

1. Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 1944, trans. Richard Howard, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1989), 22. Also note that here and throughout the essay, instances of bracketed ellipses ([...]) indicate that material has been omitted from the original source.
2. "Tenebrae" was originally written in German; the translation in this essay is by Michael Hamburger. See note 16 below for full citation.
3. Shoah Resource Center and Yad Vashem, *Jewish Philosophical and Theological Responses to the Holocaust*, http://yad-vashem.org.il/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206385.pdf, (4 June 2009), 1.
4. David J. Wolpe, "Hester Panim in Modern Jewish Thought." *Modern Judaism* 17.1 (1997): 26.
5. U.S. Department of Justice, *WWI Casualty and Death Table*, http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html, (4 June 2009).
6. André, Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 9-10.
7. Ferdinand Alquié, *The Philosophy of Surrealism*, trans. Bernard Waldrop, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 84.
8. James Edward Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 17.
9. Lawrence L. Langer, *New Perceptions of Old Appearances in the Art of Samuel Bak*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 18.
10. Samuel Bak, *Painted in Words: A Memoir*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 29.

11. Ibid., 408.
12. According to Nadeau, Surrealism began in 1885 and lasted until 1939, finding its defining moment in the post-WWI 1920s. Others propose that Surrealism ended with Breton's death in 1966, while still others assert that the surrealist project never ended. Regardless of Surrealism's proposed "death," Celan and Bak were never official members of the movement.
13. Clarise Samuels, "Surrealism and the Holocaust: An Inquiry into the Epistemological and Ideological Structure of Paul Celan's Language" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1990), 2.
14. Pam Chadick, "In Pulverem Reverteris: An Encounter with the Paintings of Samuel Bak," *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 14 (2002): 143.
15. Alquié, 16.
16. There is some controversy over the categorization of Celan as a Jewish poet. In *Holocaust Visions* (see full citation below), Samuels notes critic Arthur Hoelzel's belief—analyzed in a 1987 essay "Paul Celan: An Authentic Jewish Voice?"—that since Celan was neither religious nor acquiescent to his family's heritage, he should not be seen as a Jewish poet. Hoelzel ultimately concludes that Celan's Jewishness is relevant within the Judaic "history of sorrow" and the events of the Holocaust.
17. Wolpe, 25.
18. Ibid.
19. Derek Hillard, "The Rhetoric of Originality: Paul Celan and the Disentanglement of Illness and Creativity," *The German Quarterly* 75.4 (2002): 403.
20. All line citations from Celan's poem are taken from the following source: Paul Celan, "Tenebrae," trans. Michael Hamburger, *Art From the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Langer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 606.
21. John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 103.
22. For the sake of simplicity, the speaker will, with a few exceptions, be indicated with singular masculine pronouns. Of course, one can assume that the speaker is Celan himself, either professing for and/or with a group of other Holocaust victims.
23. Felstiner, 103.
24. Beth Hawkins, "The Washing of the Word, the Washing of the World: Paul Celan and the Language of Sanctification," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 20.4 (2002): 50.
25. Felstiner, 16.
26. Clarise Samuels, *Holocaust Visions: Surrealism and Existentialism in the Poetry of Paul Celan*, (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), 153.
27. Isaac Kloomok, *Marc Chagall: His Life and Work*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 87.
28. Matt. 27:46 (New International Version).

29. Fran Bartkowski, "A Visit with Samuel Bak," *Tikkun* 18.3 (2003): 89.
30. Scott Ruescher, "Twists of the Wrist: Bak's Recent Paintings Reviewed," *ArtsEditor*. (Dec. 2000), http://www.artseeditor.com/html/december00/dec00_bak.shtml, (4 June 2009).
31. The Museum of Art at the University of New Hampshire currently holds Bak's *Adam and Eve*, and an image of the crayon and oil painting can accessed through the main page of their Web site: <http://www.unh.edu/moa/collectionnew.html>.
32. Alquié, 124.
33. Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 145.
34. Bartkowski, 89.
35. It should be noted that the ultimate goal of Ehrlich's article is to refute scholar/philosopher Martin Buber's claim that ancient Jews were more "ear" than "eye" people. Therefore, the quote from Ehrlich refers to relatively recent Judaic traditions, especially those from Europe, as it is from this Christian/Western tradition that Bak borrows his images.
36. Carl S. Ehrlich, "'Make yourself no graven image': The Second Commandment and Judaism," *Textures and Meanings: Thirty Years of Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst*, <http://www.umass.edu/judaic/anniversaryvolume/articles/18-D1-CEhrlich.pdf>, 9.
37. Langer, *Using*, 145.
38. *Ibid.*, 146.

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