

# Fugue No. 16

G minor

*Well-Tempered Clavier Book I*

Johann Sebastian Bach

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To read this essay in its hypermedia format, go to the Shockwave movie at <http://www2.nau.edu/tas3/wtc/i16b.html>.

The image shows a musical score for Fugue No. 16 in G minor, BWV 825, from the Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I. The score is written for a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The piece is in 3/4 time. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains the first two measures, and the second system contains the next two measures. The first measure of the first system is the beginning of the Subject, marked with a bracket and the letter 'm'. The second measure of the first system is the beginning of the Countersubject, marked with a bracket and the letter 'n'. The third measure of the second system is the continuation of the Subject, marked with a bracket and the letter 'u'. The fourth measure of the second system is the continuation of the Countersubject, marked with a bracket and the letter 'w'. The labels 'Subject' and 'Countersubject' are placed below the respective brackets. The notes are written in a clear, legible font, and the staff lines are clearly defined.

**Motivic Complex:** Fugue No. 16, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I

*To the memory of Tamara*

*Todesfuge*, Paul Celan's provocative title for one of the most disturbing poems of the 20th century, invites another comparison. In this haunting reminder of the Holocaust we'll discover a darker dimension to fugue, and ponder:

- why Celan called his poem a fugue
- how Bach's fugue portrays death
- point and counterpoint
- the resolve to never again
- our *Lebensfuge*

## Why Celan Called His Poem a Fugue

Paul Celan (1920-1970) nearly survived. In 1942 his parents were shipped to a concentration camp in the Ukraine where his father died of typhus and his mother, too weak to work, was shot. Paul remained in Romania, forced to labor for the Nazis until the Russian liberation of 1944. Twenty-six years later this brilliant and tragic man would drown himself in the Seine.

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At his mother's insistence, Paul spoke German at home--the language of politics, literature, and the arts (Schiller, Trakl and Rilke were his idols). While he understood Yiddish and Hebrew, and was fluent in Romanian, French, Russian, and Ukrainian, Celan wrote almost exclusively in German, his *Muttersprache*, reminder of the mother, and all that was beautiful in German culture, that he had lost. Upon hearing of her death, he wrote:

And can you bear it, Mother, as once on a time,  
the gentle, the German, the pain-laden rhyme?

Celan's most famous phrase, "Death is a Master from Germany" (*der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland*) comes from his *Todesfuge* ("Death Fugue") where it is heard four times. Listen to the author's unforgettable reading at: Norton Poets Online (click link at the top). At first hearing, one is mesmerized by the poem's driving dactylic meter, punctuated by staccato repetitions of the word *trinken* (we drink). Now study the translation.

Black milk of daybreak  
we drink and we drink  
in the evening at midday  
by morning at night  
we drink and we drink  
we shovel a grave in the air....

The poem's many allusions to drinking, and dancing, and the playing of music, contrast with the spiritual and physical horrors of the Holocaust. If this fugue has a subject, it is heard in numerous repetitions of "black milk of daybreak," the morning's mix of fog and ashes. Its countersubject is the continual shoveling of graves--in the sky, in the ground, and in the clouds.

While the pathos of *Todesfuge* permits inexhaustible interpretation, our primary interest is in why Celan called it a fugue. How did the musical form "inform" his use of the spoken and written word?

Having alluded metaphorically to its "subject" and "countersubject," I do not mean to imply that the poem's form is analogous, point for point, to that of a fugue. To be sure, it repeats agonizing phrases with continuous variation, but this alone would not make it a fugue. There is something larger at work, something more important than formal mimicry. That something has to do with the fugal purpose, method, character, and essence.

- The **purpose** of a fugue is to reveal the connectedness of seemingly unlike things.
- Its **method** is to develop an idea in never precisely the same way.
- Its **character** is to demonstrate subtle relationships. These are revealed both in terms of new ideas having been born of old, but also in counterpoint with the old.
- The fugal **essence** is experienced in discovery of the new to be of the same "stuff" as the old.

Before considering how *Todesfuge* drinks of the fugue's character, you should study the preceding hyperlink. The "connectedness of seemingly unlike things" is revealed in the fugue's motivic complex. Its countersubject (heard here in the low voice) is the melodic inversion of its subject (high voice), with its head and tail motives having exchanged positions. In other words, the beginning of the subject (m) is the end of the countersubject (w), and the end of the subject (n) is the beginning of the countersubject (u), with u/w being the melodic inversion of m/n.

So the subject and countersubject are only superficially different, but essentially the same. They who do not understand this essence will hear only differences. They who look more deeply will hear, in addition to differences, its essential sameness.

Thinking as deeply of Celan's words, we discover his subject, *Schwarze Milch der Frühe* (fog), and countersubject, *Grab in den Lüften* (graves), also to be of the same essence. For the victims of Himmler's crematoria, the "black milk of morning" became (tragically) their "grave in the sky." But the fugal character of this poem cannot be contained within the metaphorical dimensions of its subject and counter. There is something more profound. Consider the final couplet.

*dein goldenes Haar Margarete  
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith*

John Felstiner has observed that the combination of golden-hair with Margarete recalls the German romantic ideal of the feminine.<sup>2</sup> Heine's *Lorelei*, the siren whose song and beauty had lured sailors to their deaths at Koblenz, had golden hair and *Margarete* was the heroine of Goethe's *Faust*.

Celan the Romanian, like most Jews of the intelligentsia prior to World War II, admired Germany as a nation of poets, musicians, writers, and philosophers. Margarete's golden hair represents that Germany, the *Deutschland* of Bach, Mendelssohn (of Jewish lineage), and Beethoven. She is the archetype of German romanticism and artistic genius.

This interpretation is supported by the immediate context of Margarete's golden hair, always introduced by a man in the house who plays with vipers and writes. A telling phrase insinuates itself between the man and Margarete: "it grows dark in Germany" (*es dunkelt nach Deutschland*). It is a moral darkness by which a presumed Teutonic genius (not least presumed by Nazi propaganda) is momentarily eclipsed, if not forever stained, by genocide.

By contrast, the *aschenes Haar Sulamith* alludes to the "ashen" hair of the Shulammitte. In Solomon's Song this lovely Jewish girl is called the "beloved," and described in the most sensuous language. Whereas her lover likens her hair to a flock of goats and a royal tapestry, Celan called it "ashen," with a lamentable double meaning. The lover's double-entendre "My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night" comprises perhaps a Biblical inspiration for Celan's *Schwarze Milch der Frühe*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven 1995), p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> The erotic connotations of Solomon's Song are well known. Celan's allusion to this genre of wisdom literature implies a disturbed orgiastic dimension to *Todesfuge*.

In the first verse of chapter six (Solomon's Song) the Shulammitte's friends ask where her lover has gone. To Celan, the lover of German lyric poetry and language, there was again a double meaning. To what extent had Himmler's diabolical "solution" eviscerated all that was ever beautiful in German culture? By chapter's end, the Shulammitte's friends have asked where she herself has gone: "Come back, come back, that we may gaze on you," poignant words for six million lost.

In summary we can see that the fugue's purpose has been artfully accomplished in Celan's *Todesfuge*. The poet has implied that the genius of *Deutschland*, the imagination that produced its treasured music, poetry, and art, was generated of the same intellect that slaughtered three-fourths of Europe's Jews.

Death Fugue's lamentation is not only for the Shulammitte--its tears, terror, and anger are also for Margarete. The fate of one mirrors the other (a most fugue-like construction). They were sisters--each in her own way sacrificed to the sadomasochistic machine of National Socialism.

There remains a question as to whether Celan conceived of the fugue's form *itself* as an archetype for Germany. Fugue means flight, implying that the nation had taken leave of its senses. If one may personify the nation, Germany was in what psychologists call a "fugue state."<sup>4</sup> Fugue is also associated with a rigorous style of counterpoint that is nearly synonymous with German composers, particularly J. S. Bach. By calling his work a fugue has the poet implied that the Holocaust was the product of an "ashen" logic exemplified, in its salutary form (golden), by fugue?

Celan hinted of the answer to that question in his response to Theodor Adorno who declared that writing poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric. His reply took the form of a more terrifying remembrance, what he called, of all things, *Stretto (Engführung)*. In these poetic fugues Celan proved that barbarism recalled in brilliant language is not barbaric, but artistic. That a Jew could employ the language of his tormenter, after Auschwitz, is proof enough that Margarete and the Shulammitte are (or at least one time were) sisters.

### **How Bach's Fugue Portrays Death**

If all that we've read so far could be likened to Sulamith's ashen hair, in this portion we'll think about Margarete, in the golden age of the high baroque and the music of J. S. Bach. Our purpose is to establish how Celan's fugue relates to Bach's, and vice versa. It is a fascinating relationship--both to topic (death) and form (fugue).

Like Celan, Bach lived in a time when death touched everyone, and often. He was born in the second generation after the Thirty Years War, a tumultuous period during which the population of the Holy Roman Empire declined from sixteen million to fewer than ten million. After the war, Bach's ancestors endured waves of plague.

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<sup>4</sup> A fugue state is a form of amnesia induced by mental trauma. The victim knows what he is doing, but cannot remember it after returning to normal. In the 1940's Nazi Germany was not only *in* such a state, but literally a fugue State.

Johann Sebastian himself was not untouched. His parents died when he was ten, and his wife, Maria Barbara, at 35 years of age. Only half of his 20 children survived to adulthood.

It is understandable then that death becomes one of the great themes in Bach's music, not only because the composer himself grieved the loss of loved ones, but because his office required him to write funeral music for bereaved members of his congregations.

But why associate (you may ask) this particular fugue with morbidity? The answer is that Bach himself connected its subject with the death of his uncle, Tobias Lämmerhirt of Erfurt. In 1707, fifteen years before the *WTC*, Bach composed funeral music for Lämmerhirt, using the same subject in a setting of: *It is the ancient law, man thou must perish* [4]. Compare.

*Es ist der alte Bund*, BWV 106 (1707)  
gm fugue *WTC*, Book I (1722)

Because of its relationship to the *WTC*, it will be helpful to examine Cantata BWV 106 more closely, especially its central fugue. Like Celan's poem, it is quite literally a "death fugue."

Before continuing this analysis, I wish to thank Jeffrey Thomas and the American Bach Soloists for granting permission to reference excerpts from their recording of Cantata BWV 106. This beautiful performance, and others, can be obtained by visiting their website.

The cantata begins with a Sonatina--a short work for instruments. This peaceful music reminds us that the dying, and they who mourn, need comfort. For the Lämmerhirt family this comfort would come in the form of Scripture passages that, by Lutheran tradition, they would have asked Sebastian to set to music.

The choir's first entrance reminds us that "God's time is the best time," from which the cantata derives its name: *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*. This teaching, from Psalm 139, affirms a belief that life has a natural span, from conception to natural death, and that God's purpose is for it to be lived fully, without interruption, for the duration of its given length.

The tenor continues with "O Lord, teach us to number our days" from Psalm 90, to which the bass replies, "Set your house in order," a reference to Jesus' parable of the rich fool who died while building bigger barns to accumulate his wealth.

The fifth movement is the very fugue that Bach would later rework in Book I of the *WTC*. Here Bach has set the words, "It is the ancient law, man thou must perish," from St. Paul's admonition in Hebrews 9. This fugue, one of the most symbolically rich in Bach's sacred oeuvre, contains layer upon layer of symbols. The German *der alte Bund*, translated "ancient law," is etymologically very close to *highest* law. Bach has called this law into question by assigning the word *alte* to the *lowest* pitch of the subject. "Man thou must perish" is set to repeated pitches, indicating certainty. Note well the excruciating dissonances on the word *Sterben* (perish).

As in Celan's poem, the most potent symbol of Bach's fugue is found in the form itself. He has used the most "legalistic" form of his day to represent the law. Contrapuntally, the fugue is academic, compositionally unforgiving, rooted in centuries of tradition, and stodgy.

Following the exposition, Bach abandons academics for the style of modern opera. The soprano sings "Yes, come, Lord Jesus" from the end of the Apocalypse. The soprano voice, through which Bach often represented the soul, can be heard as the deceased uncle Tobias, and by extension all believers, unafraid of the *alte Bund*, welcoming the resurrection.

The soul's tenuous dance with the *alte Bund* is clarified by the ensemble's recorders who interpolate a chorale: *Ich hab mein Sach Gott heimgestellt*. While the ensemble does not sing these words, the tune would have helped the grieving Lämmerhirts to recall them nonetheless:

My cause is God's, and I am still,  
Let Him do with me as He will;  
Whether for me the race is run,  
Or scarce begun,  
I ask no more--His will be done!  
--tr. Catherine Winkworth

The fugue continues with a brilliant trio of contrasting styles, Scriptural allusions, and intertextual connotations: fugal voices in a counterexposition (the ancient law), soprano (the soul), and recorders (the bereaved). Ultimately it is the soul that survives as it becomes separated from the other voices and concludes its journey alone.

The soul appropriates Jesus' words from the cross, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit," and is assured that "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Jesus' words to the believing thief, crucified at his side). In counterpoint with this promise of eternal life, the alto intones the chorale: "In peace and joy I journey hence, as God wills it; consoled in heart and mind, calm and quiet; as God has promised, my death shall be but slumber" (listen for the *long* sleep of Bach's *Schlaf*). The cantata concludes with Doxology of praise, and a final fugue: "through Jesus Christ, Amen."

### **Point and Counterpoint**

So what's the point? Aside from the obvious connection--both Celan and Bach made symbolic use of the form--are we not perilously close to corrupting one by association with the other? I think not. Associations have been implied, many times, by others. Serious questions have been raised, and they deserve as serious an answer.

Our purpose is to think clearly about one of the most heartbroken relationships of western civilization--that of Christians to Jews.<sup>5</sup> Here, again, the

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Noll (Wheaton College) has written that, "indictments of Christianity as a malignant force in history do not arise out of thin air.... The role of Christians in promoting the destruction of others, while acting self-consciously in defense of what believers openly claim as

fugue can help. If one is the point, then the other is its counterpoint. So let us look again for answers in the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

Listen again to the fugue's beginning, paying special attention to the animation. Observe how the subject rises from the page to turn itself inside out and upside down, then lay itself down again as the countersubject. The animation reveals two things: (1) one is generated of the other and (2) each is superficially different, but essentially the same. One could not exist without the other having gone before. But there is a third relationship that I wish very much for you to see: (3) they also have the ability to accompany each other. It is in the nature of a fugue for its subject and counter to be harmonious--in counterpoint.

Parallels to the Judeo-Christian experience are obvious. In spite of sometimes-profound dissonance, we are voices in the same fugue. Space will not permit a reminder of everything we share, nor how we are different. Suffice it to say that we share much, yet purposefully maintain important distinctions. We should hope neither to blur the distinctions nor hype the common ground. But, where relationships have been strained (particularly where strain has swirled around Bach himself), we should strive for reconciliation.

While Johann Sebastian died two centuries before the Third Reich, his music has nevertheless come under a cloud. Had such unspeakable atrocity not been perpetrated against Jews in World War II, it is doubtful that his music would have become vulnerable to suspicion of anti-Semitism. This charge received national attention in 1995 when students at Swarthmore College refused to participate in a performance of the *St. John Passion*.

The Swarthmore incident, provoked as it was by misinformation and fueled by media attention, nevertheless posed serious questions about Bach's attitude. Partly as a result of this incident, Swarthmore professor Michael Marissen produced an apologetic, *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism, and Bach's St. John Passion*.<sup>6</sup>

Two years later Christopher Leiden interviewed Marissen and Julian Wachner on NPR's *The Connection* (click "listen to show" button at the bottom). In this broadcast Marissen compares Bach's treatment of the Passion narrative with that of his contemporaries, revealing Bach to be one who refused to participate in the common practice of Jew baiting (one reason why none of Telemann's forty-four passions are performed today). The accusation against Bach has been entirely predicated upon the drama with which he set the Gospel texts which, through numerous musical interpolations, he takes pains to imply culpability on the part of every Christian in the crucifixion of his own Christ.

For my Jewish friends, Bach's passion music may be one of our irreconcilable differences. But, when weighed against all else that he wrote, it is such a small difference. No Christian will ever stop being thankful that Mendelssohn resurrected the *St. Matthew Passion*; no Jew will ever regret the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

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Christian principles, cannot be denied." *Must Christianity be Violent?* edited by Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs, Brazos Press, 2003 as quoted in *Touchstone*, March 2004, p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> Oxford University Press, 1998.

## The Resolve to Never Again

For me, the relationship between Bach and the Shoah is vivid and personal. In 1997 my wife and I visited Thuringia and Saxony, Bach's homeland. We began in Eisenach, the town of his birth--you've never heard such birdsong as in Eisenach! We ended in Leipzig, where we placed flowers on his grave.

Although we did not visit the nearby camps, we were aware that to many Jews the Bach cities are associated with scenes of appalling cruelty. When the Americans arrived in Ohrdruf, where a ten-year-old orphan had been sent 250 years earlier to live with his brother, they forced the townsfolk and prominent Nazis to view the crematorium and stacked bodies in the camp courtyard. Bergen-Belsen is on the Lüneburg heath, where an entranced youth was introduced to the *stile antico* of Palestrina, and music in the French *manier*. Buchenwald is five miles north of Weimar, the city of Bach's first professional appointment. The synagogue in Dornheim, the darling town where he married, was one of those destroyed on Kristallnacht. Mühlhausen, the city of his first cantata, is the site of Dora-Mittelbau, and Leipzig, where he composed the *B-Minor Mass*, *Art of Fugue*, *Passions*, and Book II of the *WTC*, housed an industrial satellite of Buchenwald.

Our return flight departed from Munich, where we arrived a day early. Having a little free time we decided to pay our respects at the Dachau concentration camp. My vivid recollection is of the memorial, with NEVER AGAIN inscribed in five languages.

One area of common ground for all people, especially Christians and Jews, is our determination that such sadness and suffering will happen *never again*. Never again should there be a *Todesfuge*.

But if the fugue teaches us anything, it is that every subject heard again will be with variation: trumpeted as something never seen, novel, exciting, or beneficial to the many, a cure for cancer or Parkinson's disease, or the getting for your child of that extra eugenic ounce. It may be Mengele's twins among a half million human embryos in cryogenic limbo, or Sophie's "choice".<sup>7</sup> It may not be inflicted upon a race but a religion--Christians in the Darfur--or the old, or the children of Beslan, the terminally or mentally ill, the handicapped--when does a right to die become a duty?<sup>8</sup> Many thoughtful people fear that these developments are but the echo of old ideas that received their exposition long ago.

In 1995 Pope John Paul II used the phrase "culture of death" eight times in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (Gospel of Life). Especially the more affluent cultures, he said, are dominated by powerful interests too concerned with

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<sup>7</sup> In a recent case that stunned even the most ardent supporters of choice, Amy Richards wrote (the *New York Times Magazine*) of her decision to abort two of her triplets and leave the third to be born. "When I found out about the triplets, I felt like: It's not the back of a pickup at 16, but now I'm going to have to move to Staten Island. I'll never leave my house because I'll have to care for these children. I'll have to start shopping only at Costco and buying big jars of mayonnaise." (As quoted in *Touchstone*, Jan/Feb 2005, p. 14.)

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Kentucky's recent decision to euthanize a mildly retarded and terminally ill black man, a charge of the state; or the staggering decision of the Dutch to give minors the option of euthanasia.

efficiency, leading to a "war of the powerful against the weak." Individuals, who by reason of illness, age, or handicap, are perceived as compromising this efficiency, are "looked upon as an enemy to be resisted or eliminated," and a "conspiracy against life" is unleashed. While it often begins with individual choices, this conspiracy engulfs whole families and societies to their detriment.

Fr. Gonzalo Miranda, dean of the School of Bioethics at the Pontifical University in Rome has commented: "It is a culture in which death is seen as a solution to problems that we do not know how to handle in another way...because we have lost generosity, the ability to support the one who suffers."<sup>9</sup>

In his fourth reference to the "culture of death," John Paul asks Christians to create a culture of life, reminding them (in Moses' words) of their Jewish roots: "See, I have set before you life and death...therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live."

### **Our *Lebensfuge***



This analysis began with a sobering reflection on genocide as expressed in Paul Celan's *Todesfuge*. But let us heed the Holy Father's words and turn our minds toward the opposite, something more hopeful, a *Lebensfuge*--the fugue of life. Life brings death, and, in the eternal cycles of nature, death brings life--not so much opposites as different sides of the same coin. Like the fugal complex, each appears to be antithetical to the other, yet they are somehow irreducibly joined. One cannot have life without death, nor death without life. But had you considered that no human being ever chose either of these for himself? None of us chose to be born, we were chosen. And no sane person, when offered immortality, would choose to die. Of course I am writing here of a natural death, not willfully cut short by one's self or others, and a natural life, not engineered for competitive advantage or prettiness. The reader will allow me to conclude, I hope, with a personal reflection.

Shortly after my mother died, I backpacked into the Grand Canyon. It was very hot, and I was out of shape. On the second day, nearly a vertical mile below the rim, I sat on a boulder at Hance Rapid, took off my boots and plunged my feet into the freezing Colorado River. Exhausted and discouraged, I thought that I didn't have the strength to hike out.

Looking at my tired feet, they reminded me of Mom's. Three weeks before she died, I had held them in my hands, messaging them gently. Now looking at my feet, I saw how much they resembled hers. Then I heard a voice, as if to whisper, "You *will* climb out of here, on those two feet...they are good feet, I gave them to you, and they'll carry you up like they carried you down."

In that moment I learned one of life's more important lessons, that love is stronger than death. Our departed loved ones are always with us, especially our parents. And we will be always with our children. Through our parents, we are

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<sup>9</sup> As reported in a *Zenit Daily Dispatch* by the Global Catholic Network.

loved by ancestors whom we have never known. And, in cherishing our children, we love the great-grandchildren we may never see.

This little foot belongs to my grandson, Isaac. He got it from my daughter, Sarah, who inherited hers from me. It is a good foot! And those tiny fingers (previous page) that curl around those of his father, betray our interconnectedness--how we need each other! At three months, Isaac discovered his toes, in short order always in his mouth.<sup>10</sup> Last week he learned, with infinite patience and concentration, how to wedge a cheerio between his thumb and forefinger. What a smile when at last he got one into his mouth! I wish that my mother could have held her first great-grandson. But then I remember that I can hold him for her, and that she can hold him through me.



Someday I'd like to hike with Isaac to Hance Rapid. At five months, he looks like a hiker to me! I can see him, supple and strong, with fifty pounds on his back, carefully finding his way down the Redwall below Horseshoe Mesa. By then I'll be in my sixties, but backpacking the Canyon with Isaac is my dream. I would like to introduce him to the mystery and beauty, and the physical challenge, of this magnificent place.

If our subject is like the feet and fingers of a newborn, then the fugue of which I write is life itself, how we step from conception to old age, enabled by our ancestors and equipping our children.



**Painting by Holocaust survivor, Tamara Deuel**

Tamara Deuel is a child survivor of the Holocaust, her parents both murdered by the Nazis. She has graciously allowed her paintings, in their memory, to be featured in this movie. In poetry, Tamara thanks her father and mother for choosing to give her life. The second half of her poem is a *Kaddish*, a prayer, asking God to grant her own children a full life, without suffering. Her artwork is a moving expression of the life fugue. She has made it freely available so that the horror she experienced may happen *never again*.

Nobel Laureate, Imre Kertész, also survived. In the same year that Tamara and her sister escaped a death march to the gas chambers, the fifteen-year old Kertész was imprisoned at Auschwitz. He was transferred to Buchenwald and freed by the Americans a year later.

Kertész won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2002 (*Kaddish for a Child Not Born*). This novel begins with a terse NO to a child. Its main character, B, proceeds to converse with this child and others who don't exist--his own children who, by his own choice, will never be born: "Were you to be a dark-eyed little girl? With pale spots of scattered freckles around your little nose? Or a stubborn

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<sup>10</sup> These photographs were taken by Isaac's Aunt Leah, soon after he was born.

boy? With cheerful, hard eyes like blue-gray pebbles?"<sup>11</sup> In this autobiographical novel, B's refusal to beget children leads eventually to the breakup of his marriage, and B's description of authoring the book as "shoveling my grave in the air" (a quotation of Celan's *schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften*).

Every survivor of the death fugue must be heard, in the words of Graeme Hunter, "with respect." But Kertész's "prayer" is chilling. Unlike Tamara, who qualifies the opportunity to raise a family as "a privilege for the few who had survived," and who prays for her children's protection, Kertész's prayer is "an incantation to make a possible child into an impossibility."<sup>12</sup>

This study has revealed the symbolic power of fugue to make connections. In it we have also heard the story of four people who experienced incredible loss, and how they reacted to it. Bach wrote fugues. Celan survived the Nazis to die in a *Todesfuge* of his own desire. Kertész's character B wills not to lend voices to the *Lebensfuge*. Tamara Deuel writes poetry and paints, in memory of her loved ones. In their varied responses to the counterpoint of life, each one has also joined the same--artfully and with passion. In the poem, painting, novel, and fugue, we hear the voices of our own life fugue, helping us to come to terms with our own strettos of suffering and grief.

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<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Graeme Hunter's review, "A Fugue of Death," *Touchstone*, June 2003, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.