

**Jerome Rothenberg's *Gematrias*  
the hybrid poems of irreversibility**

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THE SEVENTH STATION: DACHAU

heart

dim

& sore

his hands

slow

& heavy

& so he looked,

his glory

weeping

(Jerome Rothenberg, *Gematria Complete* 152)

“a particular sort of nomadic, migratory, and anti-narrative energy”

(Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 279)

“this movement resists the already charted and controlled narrative lanes,  
and skirts the systems of theory, doctrine, and orthodoxy”

(Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 281)

While numerical gematria and coded temura come easily in a language like Hebrew which is written without vowels, the possibility of similar workings in English shouldn't be discounted. Gematria-generated poems can also be composed by translation from Hebrew [...]. The fact of translation may, in fact, add to the apparent "distance & power" of the combinations, a direct relationship that twentieth-century poets like Reverdy saw as the basis of the poetic image.

(Jerome Rothenberg, "Gematria" *Pre-Faces* 159)

For myself the numbers have been a presence beneath speech, but I have known them also, being Jewish, in the letters of the alphabet I work with. My father drew them with his finger on the kitchen table. And I have lain awake like him & counted numbers in sequences that play on mind & body until the rhythm of numbers, letters, shapes, & forms is inescapable—as still another source of naming.

(Jerome Rothenberg, "The Poetry of Numbers " *Pre-Faces* 157)

THE VOICE (1)  
will answer

THE VOICE (2)  
A voice.

(Jerome Rothenberg, *Gematria* 43)

THE FIRST GEMATRIA

ENOUGH

or too much

(Jerome Rothenberg, *Gematria Complete* 15)

THE THIRD STATION: BUCHENWALD

deliver me  
from them

your cattle  
rising

your assembly  
lords of fat

deliver me  
from color

(Jerome Rothenberg, *Seedings* 103)



This irreducible work of the trace not only produces an unrestricted economy of same and other, rather than a relatively restricted dialectic of negation and sublation, in all philosophical oppositions. It also places our selfhood (ipseity) in a relationship of *différance* with what can only be “named” radical alterity (and thus necessarily effaced).

(Gayatri Shakravorti Spivak, *Postcolonial*, 424)

