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To Speak with the Other—To Let the Other Speak: Paul Celan's Poetry and the Hermeneutical Challenge of *Mitsprechen*

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Abstract: This essay explores the notion of *Mitsprechen* or “with-speaking” in Paul Celan’s poetry. “With-speaking” supposes that voices in the poems actively participate and engage in a dialogue that goes beyond traditional hermeneutic frameworks. Celan’s notion of col-loquy, distinct from the conventional sense of dialogue, challenges the separation between author and interpreter, rendering the traditional concept of intertextuality inadequate. The poems, according to Celan, give voice to human destinies, making texts audible as the voices of others. This vocal dimension of Celan’s poetry has prompted extensive discussion among philosophers, particularly in France. Levinas, Blanchot, and Derrida, influenced by German phenomenology and hermeneutics, critically examine the ethical implications of speaking “about” the other. They challenge traditional hermeneutical practices, emphasizing the responsibility of interpreters to respect the unique and untranslatable character of individual voices. This critique extends to Protestant categories of interpretation, drawing on alternative Jewish perspectives on being-in-the-world and alterity. The text explores the tensions inherent in speaking “for” or “in the name of” others, especially in the context of interpreting Celan’s work, raising questions about maintaining the fundamental difference and distance that otherness implies. The discussion concludes by highlighting Werner Hamacher’s formulation of a new philology that disrupts hermeneutical violence, influenced by the critiques of Blanchot, Levinas, and Derrida, and offering an alternative way of addressing the particular challenges posed by Celan’s poetry.

Keywords: Paul Celan; poetry; philosophy; hermeneutics; Levinas; Blanchot; Derrida; German phenomenology; alterity; Hamacher; philology; Mandelstam; voice; uncanny; Walter Benjamin



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In a 1959 radio talk, Paul Celan sketches Osip Mandelstam’s intellectual background and speaks of a heritage that is Russian, Jewish, Greek, and Latin. In this context, says Celan, cultural traditions “participate” (*teilhaben*) and traditions of religious and philosophical thought “speak also”, “speak as well”, and are literally “with-speaking” (*mitsprechend*)¹ in the poems (Mandelstam 1959, p. 68). The dimension of the *mit* (“with”) and the participatory role assigned to voices in Mandelstam’s poems are equally important to Celan himself as his poems speak to others, address words to the surrounding world (*ansprechen*), and, most surprisingly, allow others to speak as well.²

This mode of speaking, which Celan himself sometimes calls “conversation” (*Gespräch*)³ cannot be equated with a dialogue (*Dialog*) in the Gadamerian, Heideggerian, or even Buberian sense. It is “more than a dialogue”,⁴ Derrida says, since it leads to a questioning of the hermeneutic tradition itself, one that will effectively render obsolete the division between author and interpreter. The poet does not speak as an isolated ego, nor is his poem addressed to an interpreter who is supposed to unravel and decipher its meaning. Even the theoretical paradigm of “intertextuality” does not do justice to this particular aspect since Celan is not concerned with a relationship between texts (and their interpretations), but with human beings that have their say in his poems. He makes them audible as voice, lending them his breath, and addressing an audience that is actively listening to those who are speaking. Some of his poems explicitly call for opening one’s ears: “you hear?”⁵

The specific vocal aspect of Celan's poems and the interpersonal dimension of "with-speaking" will now be examined and presented in detail, as it has sparked intense discussions among philosophers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In France, Levinas, Blanchot, and Derrida, each in his own way closely aligned with German hermeneutics took up the question of what it means ethically to speak "about" the other, what otherness implies, but also how alterity should be faced, especially in texts and writings. Starting with Celan, each of these French authors critically questioned the traditional meta-discursive way of speaking about a text from outside and above: Derrida in close confrontation with Gadamer, and Levinas with reference to Ricœur. All three, however, also posed this question with regard to a critical reflection on Protestant categories of interpretation and alternative Jewish thinking about being-in-the-world and alterity. Each challenged the moral stance of speaking "for" or "in the name of", a way of speaking that is common in traditional hermeneutical commentary. According to each of them, interpreters should be aware of their responsibility as speakers who come *after*, later, and respect the individual, "idiomatic", and therefore irreplaceable and untranslatable character of the individual voice. A responsible commentary would thus maintain the fundamental difference (and distance) that otherness always implies, which leads to a double-bind dilemma: How can you speak about the (dead) friend (who can no longer speak for himself) without speaking in his or her place and thereby denying his or her uniqueness?

Such statements may undermine the very possibility of interpretation. They deconstruct the ideological basis of hermeneutic practice and the accompanying belief that the other can be understood through methodical procedures, that is to say, by setting in motion the famous hermeneutic circle. Following work presented at a Celan conference in Seattle⁶ and also following debates on the work of Peter Szondi in Anglo-American criticism and literary theory,⁷ Werner Hamacher attempted to formulate a new philology that interrupts what Hamacher considered to be hermeneutical violence (done to the text). Strongly impressed by the critiques of hermeneutic interpretation by Blanchot, Levinas, and Derrida, he developed a new philological approach to poetry that takes into account the aporia evoked by the French philosophers and shows an alternative way of addressing the particular, a challenge posed by Celan's poetry (Mendicino and Zechner 2023).

1. Paul Celan: Participative Voices (Poetry I)

Celan's poems follow a tradition⁸ in which poetry invites others to "speak also". The poem *Afternoon, with Circus and Citadel* (Celan 2020a, p. 154; 2020b, p. 315) is a prime example.

Afternoon, with Circus and Citadel
 In Brest, before the flaming rings,
 In the tent, where the tiger sprung,
 There I heard how you, Finitude, sang,
 There I saw you, Mandelstam.
 The sky hung over the roadstead,
 The gull hung over the crane.
 The Finite sung, the Steady, –
 You, gunboat, are named "Baobab".
 I greeted the tricolor
 With a Russian word–
 Lost was Unlost,
 The heart an anchored place.

Some of the allusions and intertextual references in this poem show how others (mostly poets and writers) are allowed to speak. Written in August 1961 after a visit to a circus in Brest, a city in the French region of Finistère which means literally "end of the earth", the

poem echoes many voices—among them those of Osip Mandelstam and Walter Benjamin, but also and above all that of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, whose famous novel *Citadelle*⁹ resonates in the poem's title. Saint-Exupéry is not only given the chance to speak at the beginning of the poem (in the word “citadel”, which is rather atypical and rarely used in German), but also at the end, when Celan describes the “heart” as “an anchored place” (synonym for a fortress, a citadel). In fact, Saint-Exupéry had hoped to build in and through his novel a citadel “in the heart of man”.¹⁰ Through Mandelstam and Saint-Exupéry, France, Russia, fiction, and reality all overlap, perhaps referring to a place connected to the notion of resistance, as the citadel of Brest-Litovsk had become a symbol of Soviet resistance to Hitlerism. In addition, the explicit presence of Walter Benjamin, who had qualified Marx's idea of revolution as “a dialectical leap of the tiger in the open air of history”¹¹ is clearly audible and can certainly be cited as another example of how Celan's poems allow thoughts and ideas (but also personal destinies) to be heard.

Celan does not see his poems as hermetic entities, nor as the result of a completely controlled and therefore closed production. In *The Meridian*, he says that “the poem attempts to pay careful attention to everything it encounters” (Celan 2005b, p. 182). In May 1960, asked by the German writer Hans Bender to describe his personal experience of writing poetry, he stated: “the poet is dismissed from his original participation [*Mitwisserschaft*] as soon as the poem actually exists”.¹² The German term *Mitwisserschaft* (*participation, involvement, literally “with-knowing”*) is confusing in this context, since it suggests “complicity” and, beyond that, “connivance”, a certain knowledge of those involved (usually in a crime). What Celan seems to be pointing out with this compound noun (which also contains the particle *mit*) is that the poet has only a partial knowledge of all that is involved in a poem and the “paths on which language acquires a voice”.¹³ The origin of the poem itself remains secret, mysterious, enigmatic, not fully explainable. “Pure origin is a mystery”, but also “Mystery has a pure origine”¹⁴ (*Ein Rätsel ist Reinentprungenes*), writes Celan in *Tübingen, Jänner*, quoting Hölderlin.

There is no “making” of a poem, no “technical doing” (*Mache*), no divine or ingenious mastery of creation (*Schöpfung*). The biblical creation of man by God through the giving of breath¹⁵ (*besprechen*) to dust is transformed by Celan into a phenomenological description of the way voices come to life in a poem. Almost anything can be spoken of (*ansprechen*), can be addressed in a wounded search for reality. Just as God breathes *pneuma* into Adam and thus brings him to life, the poet breathes life into his encounters (places, people, readings, words, events). He gives voice to other experiences, experiences of otherness, of loss, of death, to something that “speaks also” (*mitspricht*). In the *Meridian* speech, Celan says that the poet faces and addresses (*anspricht*) everything that appears to him, thus creating a “despairing dialogue” that allows “the most idiosyncratic quality of the Other, its time, to participate (*mitsprechen*)”.¹⁶

Very early on, in the Bremen speech of 1958 and while translating Mandelstam, Celan describes the poem as a “message in a bottle” (Celan 1958, p. 21), in which the sender and receiver are united in a shared relationship: both must come to terms with an unknown element. In his essay *About an Interlocutor*, Mandelstam attributes the metaphor of the “sealed bottle”¹⁷ to the Russian poet Baratynskij. In a difficult situation (just before sinking), the poet, like a sailor, throws “a sealed bottle with his name and the record of his fate into the sea”. Years later, a person finds the message, reads the letter, and learns the date of the event and the last will of the deceased. That person, according to Mandelstam, is “the secret addressee”.¹⁸ The bottle makes the reader and the poet brothers in fate. In *The Meridian* address, Celan also points to such an invisible bond between himself (as a reader and actual speaker) and writers of the past when he describes using his finger to trace on a “childhood map” the “circular [meridional] paths” (Celan 2005b, p. 185) connecting Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, Karl Emil Franzos, and his own birthplace in Bukovina. Such crossings lead to “something which binds and which, like the poem, leads to an encounter” (Celan 2005b, p. 185). Something becomes visible and palpable through the poem, something like a *meridian* of solidarity beyond the limits of space and time, an echo “in the voices we hear”

of “now silent ones” evocative of a “secret appointment (*geheime Verabredung*) between past generations and the present one” (Benjamin [1940] 2003, p. 390).

The poem *Voices* (Celan 2020a, pp. 95–96; 2020b, pp. 165–69), which opens the volume *Speechgrille*, provides insight into the way Celan conceives *with-speaking* (*mitsprechen*) in his poetry. Eight sections are separated by asterisks. Six of them begin with the italicized word “Voices”, but “it is unclear who is speaking” (Ivanovic 2002, p. 48). Therefore, the voices must be identified each time anew based on their respective context. “Voices from the nettlepath”, (Celan 2020b, p. 165), for example, could be addressed to Sergei Yesenin, whose poem *By the Yellow Nettles* (Celan 1983, pp. 167–69) (1915) Celan had translated and published in the journal *Neue Rundschau* in 1958. The poem evokes the road to Siberian exile lined with nettles on which the poet encounters murderers and thieves, “mouths in twitching black faces”.¹⁹ Their mouths will join the voices of the sinking people in the ark, invoked in the seventh strophe: “Voices inside the ark” (Celan 2020b, p. 167). The ark, in turn, can be traced back to the Jewish interpretation of the Flood which Walter Benjamin evokes as the form of his book on *German Men and Woman* (Benjamin [1936] 1972).²⁰ Indeed, Celan’s poems remind us of Benjamin’s conception of *German Men and Women* as a memorial ark for the drowned and the perished, as, in a note to his translations, Celan had qualified Mandelstam as a perished man, as “a man who has sunk”²¹ (*ein Untergegangener*). Perhaps he is one of the “voices inside the ark”, one of the “sinking ones” (*Ihr Sinkenden*) to whom the call “hear us too” (Celan 2020b, p. 167) is addressed.

In the first section of the poem, Mandelstam also speaks through the “kingfisher”²² (*Eisvogel*, literally an “ice bird”), which can be connected to Mandelstam’s essay *On Dante* (1933),²³ where he states that in the *Divine Comedy* commentary is inseparable from poetic speech: “The commentary (the explanation) is an integral structural part of the Comedy itself. [...] It has an air of inevitability, like the song of the Halcyon that gathers around Batyushkov’s vessel” (Mandelstam [1991] 1994, p. 174).²⁴ Halcyone is the mythological name of the kingfisher. The bird appears under this name in Batyushov’s poem *The Shadow of a Friend*. Celan seems to refer here to both poets.

Also, the last section of Celan’s poem *Voices*, which begins with the words “No Voice”, seems to refer to this essay by the Russian poet. At its end, Mandelstam claims that a new reading of Dante is necessary, one that would focus on the Italian poet’s linguistic “performance” (*Vollzug*) (Mandelstam [1991] 1994, pp. 174–75), on the way the text’s language is voiced. Dante scholars would do well to bear this in mind since, as Mandelstam contends, “poetic matter has no voice. It does not paint with colors and does not express itself with words. It has neither form nor content, for the simple reason that it exists only in performance” (Mandelstam [1991] 1994, pp. 174–75).

The mourning Halcyon is as much a figure (*Gestalt*) of Celan’s poetry as the poetical commentary that has “no voice”. Mourning and poetic reflection are two powerful elements that appear in varying combinations in almost all of Celan’s poems. *Voices* can thus be read, on the one hand, as an ark bearing mouths in twitching black faces (“only the mouths are bound”) and, on the other hand, as a poetological reflection that is no longer a voice itself, but a “belated rustling” (*ein Spätgeräusch*):

No

voice—a

belated rustling (Celan 2020a, p. 96; 2020b, p. 169).

Several of Celan’s poems deal with the silencing of the poetic voice within language, most notably in the cycle of poems *Speechgrille*, but already in previous collections. There are other allusions to the silenced, but still hammering voice in the poem *Today and Tomorrow*—“Beaten through/by silently swung hammers” (Celan 2020a, p. 99; 2020b, p. 167), in *Matière de Bretagne*—“the bell rings” (Celan 2020a, p. 106; 2020b, p. 197)—, and in *Rubble Scow*—“the lung... swells into a bell” (Celan 2020a, p. 107; 2020b, p. 201). The third section of the poem *Voices* explicitly refers to “ropes you hang the bell from” (Celan 2020a, p. 95;

2020b, p. 165). Considering this evolution, the poem *Voices* traces a movement toward a final state of noisy (performative) voicelessness.

2. Maurice Blanchot: Listening to the Voice of the Poem (Philosophy I)

In a 1972 issue of the *Revue des Belles Lettres*, conceived as a tribute to Celan after his suicide in 1970, Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot each pursued a question central to his own philosophical thinking. Blanchot's title "The Last One to Speak" evokes the second line of Celan's poem "Speak, you too" (Celan 2020b, pp. 149–51), which is "speak last,/have your say".²⁵ The volume *From Threshold to Threshold*, in which this poem appears, is dedicated to Celan's wife, Gisèle. In 1953, the couple had lost their first child, François, about whom and to whom the poem *Epitaph for François* speaks: "Both doors of the world/stand open:/opened by you/in the twilight" (Celan 2020b, p. 111).

For Blanchot, "the last one to speak" [Le dernier à parler] refers to the irreplaceable witness as well as to the survivor of said witness. The surviving friend must bear witness not so much to the life of the deceased as to (his) death. Referring to Socrates' saying that we have no knowledge of death, but also to Heidegger's analyses of death in *Being and Time* (it is always the death of someone else), Blanchot strives to go beyond this epistemological endpoint. Knowing that no shared experience is possible at the moment of death, and therefore that putting oneself in the place of the other is impossible, Blanchot claims that we are nevertheless still looking for a companion, for a friend who might bear witness. Shifting the problem from epistemology to ethics, from impossible knowledge to possible action, Blanchot's question is no longer *why* no one can bear witness, but *how* we should behave knowing that witnessing is impossible and still necessary (this, for him, is the duty of friendship). He is therefore careful not to speak "instead" or "in the place" or "on behalf of" a friend who has passed. Scrupulously avoiding any dominant, knowing position, his writing remains remarkably free of explanations and claims to mastery. There is no striving for the right interpretation of the poem, no immoderate claim for exhaustive understanding, no desire to reveal some hidden truth. It is instead a gesture of support that he develops by amicably drawing on the words of the poet.

His homage begins by translating Celan's poetry, rendering it verse by verse into his own "idiom", and thereby encountering it in another language: "ein ins Stumme entglittenes/Ich/un Moi échappé dans le mutisme". And then, further down the page, and only in German: "dass bewahrt sei/ein durchs Dunkel/getragenes Zeichen" (Blanchot [1972] 2002, p. 72).²⁶ The arrangement of the verses on the left-hand side seems significant and points to a retreat, to the wish to let the poet speak first, to listen to his verse and attend to his language. Then, Blanchot's text, his prose, begins: "Ce qui nous parle ici, nous atteint"—"What addresses us here affects us" (Blanchot [1972] 2002, p. 73). Blanchot focuses from the very beginning on the effect caused by the German verse on a community of listeners. "We" are interpolated by this voice, by Celan's speaking. And "we" must bear witness to this, for only to this can witness be borne.

In his reading of Louis-René des Forêts, Blanchot spoke at greater length about the dangers of substitutive commentary and the pitfalls to be avoided. In a paragraph entitled *Rough Draft of a Regret*, he acknowledged, first, that he had made a grave error in attempting to transform des Forêts' poem into prose and, second, that he may well have stifled the poetic voice with his commentary.

"I wrote this commentary (or what seems to pass for a commentary), and while I was writing it, led along by the movement that is the gift of the poem, I closed my eyes to my fault, which lies in transforming the poem (the poems) into a prose approximation. There is no alteration graver than that. These poems by Samuel Wood have their voice, which one must hear before thinking one understands them" (Blanchot 2002, p. 20; 2007, p. 10).

According to Blanchot, the poetic voice must be heard first. Since commentary vainly attempts to reach the ultimate point of poetry, which is unattainable, each reader must listen to the voice of the poem. Quoting des Forêts, Blanchot exclaims: "Samuel, Samuel, is it really your voice I hear/Coming as if from the depths of a tomb?" (Blanchot 2002, p. 19).

Listening to the voice is also referred to in another line as “the duty of vigilant friendship”. A friend must bear witness while remaining mindful of the limits of this task. Friendship is the name of this impossible act of witnessing. And as a witness, any commentary finds itself in a *double bind*: lacking epistemological legitimacy to speak, it nevertheless has the ethical duty to do so, to speak also, after, in the position of the last one, and to bear witness to an attunement to the voice of the dead (of death).

The concern not to distort the poetic voice is shared by the philosophers who have dealt with Celan so far. But there is an interesting shift from Heidegger to Blanchot. In the preface to his 1943 Freiburg Hölderlin lectures, published in the first edition of *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* in 1944, Heidegger refers to the somewhat puzzling metaphor of pure poetic language as a bell: “The poems are in the noise of the ‘unpoetic languages’ like a bell hanging in the open that will be out of tune when a light snowfall comes over it” (Heidegger [1944] 1981, p. 194; 2000). Commenting on this metaphor, Michael Levine remarks that the explanatory speech [must] in each instance “break itself and what it attempts”.²⁷ The pure sound of the bell can never be heard; it only sounds through the muffling voice of the commentator.

Here the difference between Blanchot/Celan and Heidegger/Hölderlin becomes clear. For what concerns Blanchot is less the detuning of the poetic voice through commentary than not being aware that the voice has been silenced. Celan also emphasized this aspect in Heidegger:²⁸ When the hammers in Hölderlin's poem swing freely they no longer reach the metal casing of the bell. They swing silently; only their muteness resonates.²⁹ In the poem *Flower*, we read: “One more word, like this one, and the hammers/will swing free”.³⁰ The attentive reader, according to Blanchot, must listen to this silenced voice, listen to what has muted the poet, and testify to this.

3. Emmanuel Levinas: Speaking to the Other (Philosophy II)

In his essay *Being and the Other: On Paul Celan* (Levinas 1972; 1978, pp. 16–22), dedicated to Paul Ricœur, Levinas sees in the poet's 1960 *Meridian* address a poetic way of realizing his own philosophical project³¹ which consists in an unceasing effort to understand the difference between Greek philosophy and Jewish thought, between Athens and Jerusalem, Homer and the Hebrew Bible, Greek experience and Jewish destiny, or, put into his own terms, between *Being* and *the Other*. In his early essay *The Trace of the Other*, Levinas contrasts the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland for an unknown destination to the myth of Ulysses returning the land of his birth (Levinas [1963] 2001, pp. 261–82).³²

For Vivian Liska, Levinas sees in Celan's poetry the possibility of affirming the Jewish experience of being “free of place” (Levinas [1963] 1976, p. 350) as a human “modality of thought that opens up to an unrecoverable otherness” (Liska 2021, p. 176). In her view, Levinas succeeds in the delicate balancing act of thinking about Jewishness neither in terms of abstract generalizations (which often inadvertently reproduce anti-Semitic stereotypes) nor in terms of particularisms that seek to instantiate a national identity. Her point is to show how Levinas writes against Heidegger's interpretation of poetry as “man dwelling on the earth”, contesting his claim that it is the poet's task to provide a place for man and to ground him on the earth through language. Levinas' criticism of Heidegger also sheds an interesting light on Celan's critical reading of Heidegger and in particular on his modified understanding of the poet and poetry in connection with the question of home and homeland.

In his commentary on Hölderlin's poem *Homecoming/To my Kinsfolk* [*Heimkunft/An die Verwandten*], written during the Nazi period, Heidegger wrote: “The first homecoming consists in writing poetry. The elegy *Heimkunft* is the homecoming itself, which happens as long as its word rings like a bell in the language of the Germans”.³³ Two elements of Heidegger's commentary—snow and the theme of homecoming—are taken up by Celan at various points in the cycle *Speechgrille*. The poem *Cologne, am Hof* [*Köln, am Hof*] says: “Exiled and Lost/were at home”;³⁴ the poem *Below* [*Unten*] remembers a conversation “brought home into forgetting” (Celan 2020b, p. 177). And the most relevant poem here

is undoubtedly *Homecoming* (*Heimkehr*), which can be read as a rewriting of Heidegger's notion of the poet's mission (Celan 2020b, pp. 175–77).

Celan will also take up Heidegger's definition of poetry as a shrine without a temple. In a supplementary note to his reading of Hölderlin's *Heimkunft* dated 21 June 1943, Heidegger noted: "What Hölderlin's poems really are, we still do not know, despite the names 'elegy' and 'hymn'. The poems seem to be a shrine without a temple, in which poetry is preserved" (Heidegger [1944] 1981, p. 194; 2000). Celan wrote down in a notebook this strange metaphor of poems as templeless shrines (Heidegger 2002, p. 232) and added the mysterious "-i-".³⁵ In the essay *Why Poets?* from 1946, published one year earlier in the volume *Off the Beaten Track* [*Holzwege*], Heidegger had declared that "language is the precinct (templum), i.e., the house of being" (Heidegger 2002, p. 232). In his copy, read from July to August 1953, Celan underlined this sentence.³⁶ While, for Heidegger, the temple is (pseudo)-etymologically the realm (precinct) of Being, the poet seems to be pointing to a Saying or Speaking that is from now on without a temple, "free of place" (Liska 2021, p. 176). This experience of existential homelessness is in one sense the "transcendental homelessness" (Lukács) of modern man. Yet, it is also the Jewish experience of being landless, without a place to call home, where one can feel safe and secure. In the Bremen speech of 1958, Celan had used the word "tentless" (Celan 1983, p. 186) (*zeltlos*) to define this specific experience of living and writing poetry "exposed to the open in the most uncanny manner" (Celan 1983, p. 186).

Levinas finds in Celan's poems evidence of an ethical openness that is different from an ontological sense of being as existence (standing out of oneself): "Does he not suggest poetry itself as an unheard-of modality, as an "otherwise than Being"? (Levinas 1978, p. 21; 1972, p. 35). This ethical shift underlies Levinas's approach *Towards Celan* (the title of the first section of his essay). Celan's remark that he sees no difference between a poem and a handshake refers, for Levinas, to an irreducible exposure to the other: "in search of the Other; a search dedicating itself in the poem toward the other" (Levinas 1978, p. 21; 1972, p. 35).

By conceiving of Celan's poetry as pure *Saying* (*Le dire*), pure exposure, as language on a pre-logical level, as immediate touch and pure affect, Levinas points to a central question of his own thinking. In *Ethics as First Philosophy*, he argues that ethics is prior to metaphysics. Celan's poems are ethical in this sense: "Things appear, of course: the speech or the said (*le dit*) of this poetic speaking (*le dire*).³⁷ Things appear at last in the very movement that brings them to the other" (Levinas 1972, p. 26). Therefore, for Levinas, "true alterity" takes place in Celan's poems as they offer a space in which reality can be constituted as alterity—that is, without appropriation or identification. His reading of *The Meridian* is thus attentive to forms of otherness whether they appear as moments of rootlessness, loss, or displacement. Very often, he insists on "Celan's own words" (*en termes de Celan*) and focuses on quotations about the other (*der Andere*).

In Celan's poetic language, Levinas discerns a profound ethical dimension that transcends mere existence, delving into the realm of pure *Saying*, untouched by conventional logic. Levinas underscores the ethical primacy of Celan's poetry, emphasizing its capacity to evoke true alterity—a space where reality unfolds without appropriation or identification. In Celan's poetic realm, things emerge not merely as objects of perception but as manifestations of a poetic speaking that inherently directs itself towards the Other.

4. Jacques Derrida: Impossibilities of Speaking for the Other (Philosophy III)

Jacques Derrida's various readings of the poet—*Shibboleth: For Paul Celan* (1984), *Poetics and Politics of Witnessing* (2000), *Majesties* (2002), and *Rams* (2003)³⁸—also lead to specific questions in his own thinking, ranging from the untranslatable to the unrepeatable, the indecipherable, the unreadable, the unique, the idiom, the unpronounceable, the unforgettable, the unlimited, and the undecidable. Such questions have to be seen in the context of his ongoing engagement with German (Protestant) philosophy, especially with Heidegger, but also, in a more explicit way, with German hermeneutics through the work

of Hans Georg Gadamer. Derrida seems to consider nothing less than the unbridgeable gulf between Jewish and Protestant thinking, seeking to make visible the anti-Semitic violence inherent in hermeneutics. In his early readings of Celan, the question of the *for* arises in the context of deconstructing hermeneutic and philological thought as they had been developed in German philosophy, especially in the 1960s.

The title *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan* announces this paradox of a speech that, like the pronunciation of the word *shibboleth*, only reveals the speaker's attachments. This becomes clear when Derrida refers to the historical context: "The Ephraimites had been defeated by the army of Jephthah; in order to prevent their soldiers from escaping across the river . . . , everyone had to say *shibboleth*. Now the Ephraimites were known for their inability to pronounce the *shi* of *shibboleth* correctly" (Derrida 2005c, p. 23). A *shibboleth* has thus also become a metonymy. That is, the word is a word for which the meaning is not important, since its function is to be able to establish an affiliation: "the meaning of the word matters less than, let us say, its signifying form once it becomes a password, a mark of belonging, the manifestation of an alliance" (Derrida 2005c, p. 20).

Gert-Jan van der Heiden has shown the fundamental difference in the understanding of hermeneutics between Derrida and Gadamer as it appears in *Rams*, a text addressed to the recently deceased colleague and delivered on 5 February 2003 at the University of Heidelberg. Van der Heiden goes back to two possibilities of reading the *Theaetetus* dialogue in which the problem of hermeneutics is first posed by Plato, and, in so doing, makes it possible to understand what was at stake in the encounter between Derrida and Gadamer in 1981. The discussion concerning the meaning of *hermeneuein* (interpretation) appears in the ambiguity inherent in the word itself. On the one hand, it means "to give a voice" in the sense that interpreters (like the poets) were portrayed (in Plato's *Ion* for instance) as the interpreters (*hermeneutes*) of the gods, in the sense that they give the gods a voice. This poetic *hermeneuein* is not of the order of understanding. On the other hand, as the gods do not speak for themselves, their sayings call for a hermeneutic explication. This secondary form consists in reducing voicing or speaking to what can be understood, thought, and presented in a dialogue.

For Socrates (as well as for Gadamer, but also for Ricœur), the second meaning is the one that defines the philosophical dialogue as an exposition of truth. Its ultimate goal is to find truth and to understand. What is said by a person is more important than the person him- or herself, and only what is said must be interpreted. Therefore, "Protagoras's voice can be interpreted without genuine loss" (van der Heiden 2012, p. 268). It *must* even be interpreted in both senses and for two reasons: his voice has to be represented since he is dead and his opinions have to be interpreted since he is no longer there to explain them.

Theodorus represents the opposite position (which also seems to be Derrida's point of view): By refusing to lend his voice, he underlines the impossibility of doing justice to Protagoras (only Protagoras can explain what he meant; his presence is irreplaceable). No one can speak in his name; every appropriation would be an expropriation. This position includes a critique of the first one as a tendency to reduce voicing or speaking to what can be thought and presented in dialogue as its subject matter. Philosophical speaking is actually a monologue (although qualified since the famous *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* as "dialogue of the soul with itself"). And this monologue effaces the otherness through identification and appropriation.

Like Blanchot, Derrida focuses on the impossible task of speaking "for" a dead friend. How can you avoid appropriation? How can you avoid speaking in the name of another? Speaking at the funeral of Levinas, Jacques Derrida points out that friendship is nothing more than the impossible task of bearing witness for a friend and the uniqueness of his voice. "Speaking *for* someone" becomes a challenge that goes beyond the simple dimension of speaking. In his commemoration of Paul de Man, Derrida also points out this problem of speaking for the other: "It speaks the other and makes the other speak, but it does so in order to let the other speak, for the other will have spoken first" (Derrida 1989, p. 38). Here we find many important aspects of speaking for the other in Derrida: The other

has spoken first but can no longer speak due to his death. This death is an irrecoverable loss. Therefore, “speaking for” aims to let the other speak, while at the same time not forgetting this interruption which is to be remembered, to be witnessed. “Speaking on behalf of the other is not an appropriation of the other’s voice or of the other’s opinions; instead, it should be a kind of speech that cannot account fully for what it says. Only in this way, by saying more than what it says, can it carry and keep the trace of other” (van der Heiden 2012, p. 275). Speaking for the other is, according to Derrida, never bringing the other’s view into accord with what is intelligible, but instead a testimony to what resists understanding: the singularity of the other and irreducible otherness of its voice.

5. Werner Hamacher: Suspending Hermeneutic Violence (Philology)

A lecture given by Werner Hamacher in Heidelberg in 2005 and published in 2009 under the title *Für—die Philologie* begins by noting that “[t]here is an anti-philological affect” (Hamacher 2019, p. 9). The assertion draws on many sources of inspiration, including Blanchot, Levinas, and especially Derrida, and their respective critiques of hermeneutics. One thinks here of Derrida’s critique of Gadamerian hermeneutics in *Rams* and his deconstruction of Ricœur’s conception of translation in “Qu’est-ce qu’une traduction relevante?” [What is a ‘Relevant’ Translation?]. The violence of forced assimilation through translation disguised as hospitality (Ricœur speaks of translation as a “duty of hospitality”) is thematized and discussed by Derrida through Shylock’s forced conversion to Christianity in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*.³⁹ At stake in the deconstruction of Ricœur is also the identification of a Protestant hermeneutic tradition blind in many respects to its own anti-Semitism.

Many times, violence has been done to Celan’s poems through acts of interpretation, as, for instance, when Gadamer in *Who am I and who are you* identifies the “smoke from fountain songs” in the poem *White grey* as a chimney fire.⁴⁰ In Schubert’s famous *Lied Am Brunnen vor dem Tore*, the lime tree in question is situated near a fountain,⁴¹ its “rustling”⁴² (*rauschen*) branches calling the speaker to find rest and peace in death. In Celan’s poem, this romantic longing for death has been transformed into a remembrance of those who were turned into smoke in the ovens of the extermination camps (*rauchen*). The “ear, cut off” that listens, and the “eye, cut into strips” evoke Van Gogh and Bunuel/Dali and their disturbed and disturbing cuts. Gadamer is deaf to these “co-speaking” experiences of suffering.

While still alive, Celan experienced many moments of violently distorted readings. In a draft of a letter dated 26 January 1962, probably addressed to Adorno,⁴³ he describes his Jewishness being taken away from him like clothes, an unmistakable allusion to Kafka’s story *A Country Doctor* where it is said: “Take his clothes off, then he’ll heal, / and if he doesn’t cure, then kill him. / It’s only a doctor; it’s only a doctor”.⁴⁴ The same letter cites three examples of how his Jewishness is ignored in order to inscribe him in a Christian context.⁴⁵

Hamacher is aware of these implicit and explicit critiques addressed against hermeneutics and especially of the violence of appropriative reading and writing. Toward the end of his speech, Hamacher reads an unpublished poem by Celan that refers to Walter Benjamin’s essay *On the Critique of Violence*. How can a poem, a text, be read without doing violence to it, without mutilating and appropriating it? For Hamacher, philology, like poetry, can be this specific moment in which cycles of violence (domination) are suspended. This messianic moment of justice which Hamacher sees at work in Celan’s poem *Häm* and the Benjaminian motifs from *On the Critique of Violence* to which he refers in order to legitimate a new notion of philology. The *for* of Hamacher’s title “*for philology*” does not stand for substitution but means instead a form of support similar to the idea of friendship developed by Blanchot and Derrida. In Werner Hamacher’s exploration of the hermeneutical challenges surrounding Paul Celan’s poetry, the theme of violence in interpretation emerges as a central concern. Drawing from a multitude of critical voices, including Blanchot, Levinas, Derrida, but of course also of Peter Szondi whose critiques have not been discussed here for reasons of space, Hamacher elucidates the profound implications of misreading and appropriation. Celan’s own experiences of misinterpretation, wherein his Jewish identity

was systematically erased or distorted, serve as poignant examples of the violence inherent in certain modes of interpretation.

Hamacher's engagement with Celan's work goes beyond mere analysis; it embodies a quest for ethical engagement with the text—a striving to read without violence, without mutilation or appropriation. In this pursuit, Hamacher sees philology as a potential site of interruption in the cycle of violence, akin to a messianic moment of justice. Through his examination of Celan's poem "Häm", with its evocation of Walter Benjamin's essay "On the Critique of Violence", Hamacher suggests that philology, like poetry, can offer a space where violence is suspended, where a genuine encounter with the other or with otherness becomes possible.

The title of Hamacher's lecture, "Für—die Philologie", encapsulates this dual function: it is both a plea for philology—a call to approach texts with care and respect—and a definition of philology as being "for" the text or the author.⁴⁶ Just as Heidegger's question "What is this—Philosophy?" encompasses both an act of inquiry and a quest for definition, Hamacher's title embodies a similar complexity, signaling a profound commitment to the ethical imperative of reading and interpreting texts with integrity.

In essence, Hamacher's exploration of Celan's poetry serves as a powerful reminder of the ethical responsibility inherent in interpretation. By embracing a notion of philology that is rooted in care, respect, and a suspension of violence, Hamacher offers a compelling vision of engagement with poetry—one that seeks to honor the integrity of the speaking voice, while also acknowledging the complexities and challenges inherent in the act of interpretation.

6. Paul Celan: The Unknown That is Speaking Also (*mitsprechend*) (Poetry II)

In his correspondence with René Char published in 2015, an unsent letter from March 1962 captures Celan's thoughts about his fellow poet. He admits to not having understood everything in Char's poems, but reflects that no one is ever in a position to do so. The reason for this, Celan says, is that in poetry, something Unknown inhabits not only the poem or the reader but also, and from the very outset, the poet himself.

"You see, I have always tried to *understand* you, to *respond* to you, to take your work as one takes a hand; and it was, of course, *my* hand that took *yours*, there where it was certain not to miss the encounter. To that in your work which does not—or not yet—open up to my comprehension, I responded with respect and by waiting: one can never pretend to comprehend completely—: that would be disrespect in the face of the Unknown that inhabits—or comes to inhabit—the poet; that would be to forget that poetry is something one breathes; that poetry breathes you in" (Char and Celan 2015, pp. 151–52).⁴⁷

In his unsent letter to Char, Celan implicitly refers to *Argument*, the introduction to *The Pulverized Poem (1945–1947)* in which Char asks how we can live without the Unknown in front of us.

Argument

How can we live without the unknown in front of us?

Men of today want the poem to be in the image of their lives, composed of so little consideration, of so little space, and burned with intolerance. [. . .] Born from the summons of becoming and from the anguish of retention, the poem, rising from its well of mud and of stars, will bear witness, almost silently, that it contained nothing which did not truly exist elsewhere, in this rebellious and solitary world of contradictions. (Char [1948] 1991, p. 95)

This Unknown leaves traces in the poem, insofar as it is, consciously or unconsciously, "with-speaking". (*mitsprechend*) In the presentation of *Hypnos Wakening*, dedicated to Albert Camus, Char writes that the notes he took under extreme circumstances were "shaped by the event"⁴⁸—"elles sont affectés par l'événement" which Celan translated as "in welchem Maße die Ereignisse *mitsprechen*" (were shaped by the *with-speaking* events).⁴⁹

The experience of being inhabited or pre-shaped by something Unknown when you write a poem, by a Freudian *uncanny*, by something you cannot identify that comes from beyond or before you or that is even ahead of you, by something that definitely exceeds you and therefore cannot be controlled by you, that “participates” and puts you in a purely receptive position (i.e., neither active nor passive), this experience is one Celan will have had all the time. In *The Meridian*, he affirms that poems are “consequently exposed to the open in the most terrible way” (Celan [1992] 2003, p. 22). The question “to what dates do we ascribe ourselves?” (Celan [1992] 2003, pp. 36–37) also expresses the fear of what the poem will give voice to,⁵⁰ of which community of speakers “polyphony” will involve.⁵¹

The non-violent exposure of the poem is accompanied by a terrible fear of giving space and even voice to a hostile takeover, to an appropriation and even an abuse of the poetic word. This fundamental and existential openness of the poem should not be confused with the structuralist conception of an open work of art exposed to the arbitrariness of interpretation. It is rather the idea of a radical exposure to a forthcoming or literally unknown intervening that will take part in the poem, that will have spoken with, through, and within it. Like Derrida, Celan claims a poetic monolingualism. He speaks in one language, in *his* language, but, and this is where Celan differs from Derrida, he speaks with many voices. In his poems there is always “more than one” voice that will have spoken (Weissmann 2022).

In his essay *About an Interlocutor*, Mandelstam critiques Balmont’s lack of and even disdain for addressing an interlocutor in his poems, adding: “Balmont’s You never finds its addressee; it whizzes past him like the arrow that flies from an all-too-tight string” (Mandelstam 1991, p. 11) (*wie der Pfeil, der von einer allzu straffen Sehne schnellte*). Celan’s verse in the poem *Below a Painting* about Van Gogh’s *Wheat Field and Raven* echoes Mandelstam: “Später Pfeil, der von einer Seele schnellte” (late arrow, shot from the soul) (Celan 2020b, p. 175).⁵² Obviously, the words are slightly altered: Celan says *Seele* instead of *Sehne*. Mandelstam’s critique that Balmont emphasizes the “you” so strongly that the poem will miss its interlocutor—the string of the bow is too tight, so the arrow will whizz past its target—is dropped in Celan’s poem. The poem speaks only about the experience of being hit by a painting as by an arrow shot from the soul. Van Gogh’s difficulty in painting lines like arrows in his late work is the subject of an essay by Meyer Shapiro, which was based on a statement by the painter himself: “The lines of the roofs and gutters shoot off into the distance like arrows from a bow; they are fired without hesitation”.⁵³ In Celan’s poetic universe, the hermeneutical challenge of wrestling with speaking voices is both intricate and profound. As we traverse the corridors of his verse, we encounter a dialogue echoing through the ages, where the interlocutor becomes not just a recipient of words but a vital participant in the poetic exchange. Mandelstam’s critique of Balmont’s detached “You”, finds resonance in Celan’s reflection on Van Gogh’s *Wheat Field and Raven*. Yet, Celan subtly diverges, weaving a tapestry where the soul becomes the fount from which the arrow of expression is launched, bypassing the constraints of overly tight strings. The essence of Celan’s poetry, as articulated in his notion of the poem seeking an “addressable reality”, is a journey toward communion, toward a dialogue where the addressee, too, will find his voice. In this convergence of speaking and listening, Celan unveils the transformative power of poetry, where each verse becomes a vessel carrying the potential for an encounter, an invitation to engage in a shared exploration of the human experience. The bottle-poem moves towards “something standing open, occupiable, moves towards an addressable you perhaps, an addressable reality” (Celan 1983, p. 186). Through the interplay of voices, Celan’s poems invite to partake in the very essence of poetry—an experience that transcends the mere exchange of words or their interpretation. In this sense, according to Celan, the addressee of the poem will “speak also”.

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Notes

- 1 Celan ([1992] 2003, pp. 64, 66): “Der geistesgeschichtliche Kontext der Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms, an der neben Russischem auch Jüdisches, Griechisches und Lateinisches teilhat, die in ihnen mitsprechende religiöse und philosophische Gedankenwelt, ist bislang zu großen Teilen noch unerschlossen”.
- 2 The phrasal verb “mitsprechen” consists of two parts: The prefix “mit” means “together with” or “together”. It refers to the idea of involvement or participation in something. The basic verb “sprechen” means to communicate orally or to speak words. “Mitsprechen” therefore means to speak or participate in verbal communication together or with others. This can imply varying contexts. On the one hand, it can evoke participating in an ongoing communication by also saying something or commenting on it. On the other, this verb could also bring to mind expressing opinions or views in a debate. Finally, in certain situations, it can mean speaking words or texts together with others, for example, in a choir. As Celan points out, “The intellectual context of Mandelstam’s poetry, its Russian, but also Jewish, Greek and Latin heritage, its religious and philosophical thought, is still largely unexplored”. Celan ([1992] 2003, p. 64). Collecting and publishing the annotations in his philosophical books made some of these voices visible. Cf. Richter et al. (2004). Translation modified.
- 3 Celan (2005b, p. 182): “The poem becomes—and under what conditions!—a poem of one who—as before—perceives, who faces that which appears. Who questions this appearing and addresses it. It becomes dialogue—it is often despairing dialogue”. Celan’s *Gespräch* points to a conversation rather than to a dialogue as it involves more than two speakers. Also, he emphasizes the poem becoming a conversation, whereas in the case of the philosophers mentioned, the text functions as a fictitious interlocutor. The poem becomes a conversation to let others (the dead) speak and carry on their voices. See the following footnote.
- 4 Derrida (2005b, p. 120): “What the poem lets speak at the same time (*mitsprechen*: lets speak *also*, says Launay’s translation, and the *mit* of *mitsprechen* deserves stress [. . .]), what the poem lets speak with it, lets partake in its speech, what it lets converse, con-voke (so many ways to translate *mit-sprechen*, which means more than a dialogue) [. . .]”.
- 5 (Celan 2020b, NoOnesRose, p. 247): “With wine and lostness”.
- 6 The symposium organized by Amy D. Collins in Seattle in 1984 shows how Celan’s poetry had come to pose a challenge to earlier reading habits. Derrida presented his first version of *Shibboleth* there, and Stéphane Mosès his magisterial reading of Celan’s *Conversation in the Mountains*. See (Colin 1987).
- 7 (Hays 1983). The volume presents several of Szondi’s texts in English translation and collects the proceedings and discussions of the meeting in Paris in the summer of 1978. One of the aims was to “reexamine the critical lines of communication between Germany, France and the United States” especially with regard to the relation of the critical subject to its text and historical situation, a question raised by Szondi. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i213370>, (accessed on 3 March 2024).
- 8 Schläffer (2015) describes such a tradition which begins with a Sapphic ode to Aphrodite and extends to the present day. Rilke and Hölderlin belong to it with their invocations, but also Villon in French poetry or Shakespeare’s sonnets, some of which Celan translated.
- 9 The novel was published in a complete version posthumously in 1958. A first, incomplete version was published in 1948. Before World War II, Saint-Exupéry was a commercial pilot, working airmail routes in Europe, Africa, and South America. He joined the French Air Force at the start of the war until France’s armistice with Germany in 1940. He then travelled to the United States to persuade its government to enter the war against Nazi Germany. During this time, he wrote three of his best known works, then joined the Free French Air Force in North Africa and disappeared on a reconnaissance mission on 31 July 1944.
- 10 Saint-Exupéry ([1948] 2000, p. 43): “Citadelle, je te construirai dans le cœur de l’homme” (Citadel, I will build you in the heart of man).
- 11 The leap of the tiger, which Celan saw in the circus, coincides with what Walter Benjamin qualifies as Marx’s idea of revolution: a dialectical tiger’s leap “in the open air of history”. Benjamin ([1940] 2003, p. 395). Celan read Benjamin’s *Writings* in the two-volume edition of 1955. The *Theses* contain one single annotation by Celan. Cf. Alexandra Richter et al. (2004, p. 287).
- 12 Celan (1977). Cf. also Celan (2005a, p. 504).
- 13 Celan (2005b, p. 184). Celan (1983, vol. 3, p. 201): “Wege, auf denen die Sprache stimmhaft wird”. See the contribution of Stéphane Mosès on the Seattle Symposium in 1984 “Wege auf denen die Sprache stimmhaft wird” Colin (1987, pp. 43–57).
- 14 haEnigma is what has purely sprung forth.
- 15 The poem *Psalm* from the volume *NoOnesRose*—which is entirely dedicated “to the memory of Osip Mandelstam”—rewrites the biblical scene of Genesis 2:7 (“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” into: “noOne conjures our dust” (Niemand bespricht unseren Staub). Celan (2020a, p.136; 2020b, p. 263).
- 16 Celan (2005b, p. 182). The German noun “Mitsprache” (having a say) is mainly used in the composition “Mitspracherecht” (right of participation, right to have a say, to speak up and speak for yourself). All of these meanings resonate here, especially the literal meaning of a having a say.
- 17 In his Essay *About an interlocutor*, Mandelstam refers explicitly to the similarity between the address of a letter in a bottle and a poem. Mandelstam (1991, p. 9).

- 18 Mandelstam (1991, p. 9). There is another famous poem in French literature that uses the same metaphor: *La bouteille à la mer* from Alfred de Vigny. Cf. Epelboin (2010), <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/etudlitt/2010-v41-n2-etudlitt3987/045157ar/> (accessed on 3 March 2024).
- 19 Celan (1983, pp. 167–69). Common golden nettle blooms between May and July in an area extending from northern Spain through central Europe to the west coast of the Black Sea and the Russian foothills of the Ural Mountains.
- 20 Walter Benjamin had published in 1936 under the pseudonym Detlef Holz a series of letters entitled *Deutsche Menschen* [*German Men and Woman*]. As say the dedications in the copies given to his wife Dora and his friend Siegfried Kracauer, the book was conceived as an ark “according to the Jewish model”, at the moment “when the fascist flood began to rise”. Wizisla (2007, pp. 45–67).
- 21 Celan ([1992] 2003, p. 63): “This is to show how much Mandelstam’s poems, risen out of the ruin of a ruined man are relevant to us today”. Celan ([1992] 2003, p. 65).
- 22 Celan (2020b, p. 165): “When the kingfisher dives, / the second saws”.
- 23 Ivanovic gives an insight into Celan’s lectures of Mandelstam’s essays. “Kyrillisches, Freunde, auch das. . .”. Die russische Bibliothek Paul Celans im Deutschen Literaturarchiv Marbach, edited by Ivanovic (1996, pp. 81–91).
- 24 Konstantin Batyushkov (1797–1855) was a Russian elegiac poet and admirer of Petrarch, Arioso, and Tasso. He succumbed to mental illness in 1821, a topic Mandelstam takes up in the poem “Batyushkov” (1932). <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Russian/MandelstamEssayDante.php> (accessed on 3 March 2024) (translation by A. S. Kline, 2022).
- 25 Blanchot’s essay “The Last One to Speak” first appeared in the *Revue des Belles Lettres* (1972) before being reprinted as a book and subsequently collected in *Une voix venue d’ailleurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002) 69–107. An English translation by Joseph Simas was published in *ACTS: A Journal of New Writing* 8/9, 1988, 228–39.
- 26 Citation of the poem *Streak in the eye* [Schliere] from the cycle *Speechgrille*: “that a sign/carried through darkness be salvaged”. Celan (2020b, p. 181)
- 27 Michael Levine, *Atomzertrümmerung* (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2018) 78–79.
- 28 Richter et al. (2004, p. 365), reading annotation 394. The book conserved in the Marbach archives of German literature does not contain any annotations, only the dedication of his friends, who had given it to him for his 33rd birthday. However, since Celan explicitly refers to the text in a notebook, he presumably read the text in another copy.
- 29 The poem *Streak in the eye* [Schliere] from the cycle *Speechgrille* ends evoking a sign that is “tuned as/a mutely vibrating consonant” Celan (2020b, p. 181).
- 30 Celan (2020b, p. 187). Already in the cycle *Poppy and Memory*, there is an allusion to the silent bell. The poem *Count the Almonds* says: “Only there [. . .] did the hammers swing free in the belfry of your silence” Celan (2020b, p. 81).
- 31 For a reading of Levinas’ and Blanchot’s contributions, see Hill (2005).
- 32 The essay was first published in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 3 in 1963.
- 33 *The Said (le dit)* and *the Saying (le dire)* are fundamental categories in Levinas thinking. See Flora Bastiani, “Le Dire et le dit: la possibilité du langage dans la philosophie d’Emmanuel Levinas”, in *L’ambiguïté*, edited by Pierre Marillaud (CALS, 2012).
- 34 Heidegger ([1944] 1981, p. 194): “Das erste Heimkommen besteht im Dichten. Die Elegie Heimkunft ist das Heimkommen selbst, das sich ereignet, Solange ihr Wort als die Glocke in der Sprache der Deutschen läutet”.
- 35 Celan (2020b, p. 205). The couple of words “verloren” (lost) and “unverloren” (unlost) are frequent in Celan’s poetry, as f.i. the verse “Lost was Unlost” in the poem *Afternoon with Circus and Citatel*. In the Bremen speech, Celan insists two times that only language was, in the midst of the losses, “unlost” Celan (1983, p. 185).
- 36 For an interpretation of the “-i-”s as an “implex” in the sense of Paul Valéry, cf. Alexandra Richter. “Les annotations «- i -» dans les lectures de Celan”, in Richter (2020, pp. 174–78).
- 37 Richter et al. (2004) 365, reading annotation 394. In an early poem from the period of *Poppy and Memory*, “Wie sich die Zeit verzweigt”, the word “shrine” is also mentioned. Celan (2020a, p. 63).
- 38 Collected in Derrida (2005a, 2005b, 2005c). On Derrida and Celan, see Crepon (2006), a text that was first presented at the *Collège international de philosophie* in my seminar on Paul Celan’s philosophical library. See also (Fóti 2006; Levine 2008; Michaud 2010).
- 39 About the opposition between Derrida and Ricœur regarding the hermeneutics of translation, see my contribution (Richter 2017a).
- 40 Gadamer (1973, p. 60): “Rauchende Kamine menschlicher Wohnungen” (Smoking chimneys in human dwellings). On the different hermeneutic readings of Celan by Gadamer and Szondi see Richter (2021).
- 41 “Am Brunnen vor dem Tore/da steht ein Lindenbaum”: “At the well before the gate/a lime tree stands”. The text from Wilhelm Müller become famous through Franz Schubert who put it into music in 1827.
- 42 “Und seine Zweige rauschten/Als riefen sie mir zu [. . .] Nun bin ich manche Stunde/Entfernt von jenem Ort/Und immer hör’ ich’s rauschen”—“And his braches rustled/calling to me [. . .] Now, though I be many hours/away from that place/still I hear the trees rustling”.

- 43 Wiedemann (2000, p. 547): “What was instigated against me is repression—*au sens le plus fort du terme* [in the strongest sense of the word]”.
- 44 Kafka (1996, p. 258). Celan’s translation of Mandelstam’s poem from 1916 “Diese Nacht: Nicht gutzumachen” [This night: There’s no making it good again] (Celan 1983, p. 95) takes up the last sentence of Kafka’s story in its title and wording: “there’s no making it good again—not ever”. (Celan 1983, p. 260).
- 45 The Protestant classical philologist Walter Jens from Tübingen had interpreted the poem *Matière de Bretagne* in regard of the Passion of Christ in a paper published in the journal *Merkur* in 1961. An Italian literary magazine sent to Celan by his publisher had written that Celan showed “an art of Christian inspiration [...] full of mystical elements”. And an announcement of a volume of translations of David Rokeah by various German poets and writers claimed that all of them lacked knowledge of Hebrew, including Celan. Wiedemann, *Paul Celan—Die Goll-Affäre*, 552–53. When, at the end of *The Meridian*, Celan thanks the audience only for their “presence” (instead of their “attention”), he clearly references their blindness and lack of attention. In Darmstadt, he speaks “as a Jewish warrior” (letter to his wife Gisèle), insistently repeating the address “Ladies and Gentlemen”, alike Kafka in his *Talk on the Yiddish Language* (1912). Cf. Richter (2003, 2017b). Kafka (<https://german.rutgers.edu/docman-lister/events/423-kafka-intro-talk-to-yiddish-4>, accessed on 28 December 2023).
- 46 About the difficulty of finding a voice as a reader, cf. Alexandra Richter, “Mais le poème parle! — Parler du poème. La voix du poème, la voix du commentaire”, in (Richter 2015, pp. 69–83).
- 47 Paul Celan, René Char, *Correspondance 1954–1968*, Gallimard, 2015. Letter 74 from 22 March 1962, pp. 151–52: “Voyez-vous, j’ai toujours essayé de vous comprendre, de vous répondre, de serrer votre parole comme on serre une main; et c’était, bien entendu, ma main qui serrait la vôtre, là où elle était sûre de ne pas manquer la rencontre. Pour ce qui, dans votre œuvre, ne s’ouvrait pas—ou pas encore—à ma compréhension, j’ai répondu par le respect et par l’attente: on ne peut jamais prétendre à saisir entièrement—: ce serait l’irrespect devant l’Inconnu qui habite—ou vient habiter—le poète; ce serait oublier que la poésie, cela se respire; oublier que la poésie vous aspire”.
- 48 *Feuilles d’Hypnos* (Celan 1983, pp. 436–37): “elles sont affectés par l’événement”. Celan’s translation: “in welchem Maße die Ereignisse mitsprechen”.
- 49 Twenty-six poems start with the preposition WITH.
- 50 In the poem *Todtnauberg*, the question is raised: Whose hands do we shake? Whose name will be written in Heidegger’s guestbook, who will sign it after Celan? In *the Meridian*, Celan insists on the tragic trajectory of January 20, the date on which Lenz went mad, which became, prospectively, the date on which the extermination of the Jews was decided at the Wannsee Conference.
- 51 In the *Meridian* address, Celan refers to quotations marks as “rabbit ears, listening, somewhat timidly, on themselves and the words” Celan (2005b, p. 184).
- 52 Celan (2020b) *Threshold Speech*, 175. Also in the volume *Speechgrille*, only three poems after *Stimmen*. Celan (2020a, p. 98).
- 53 Cf. commentary in (Celan 2020a, p. 743).

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