

SHOULD POETRY BE ETHICAL OR OTHERWISE?

Ein Zeichen	A sign
Kämmt es zusammen	combs it together
zur Antwort auf eine	to answer a
grübelnde Felskunst.	brooding rockart.

—Paul Celan, “Mit mikrolithen gespickte”

1. The Ghost of Aristotle

In recent years there has been a good deal of important work on the relation between poetry and ethics.¹ Not surprisingly, one conclusion to be drawn from this material is that the relation between poetry and ethics is highly conflicted, not simply because of the conceptual instability of the terms in question—“Ethics does not exist,” says Alain Badiou²—but also because any effort of conjunction threatens to limit the autonomy that opens the practice of poetry to its multifarious futures. (On my desk, as I write this, is a copy of *TLS* containing a review, entitled “The Poetry of Ethics,” of Geoffrey Hill’s *Collected Critical Writings*. The reviewer, Adam Kirsch, notes that ever since his first book of poems, published in 1959, “Hill has been concerned with the ethics of poetry. What, if anything, makes it morally acceptable to write poetry in an age dominated by suffering and evil?”³ The word “barbarism” has had poetry under surveillance for at least the last half-century.) Like the effort to link up poetry and the political—the critical mandate from the 1970s whose force is still felt both in and out of the seminar room—the articulation of poetry and ethics carries with it, certainly with the best of intentions, an attempt to provide poetry with a justification that it neither wants nor needs. The ghost of Aristotle spooks the whole project. But what if poetry, at least in some of its versions, only gets interesting when it is in excess of its reasons for being?

2. *Le Dire*

A number of writers, myself included, have proposed for better or worse that there are at least two conceptions of the “ethical” to choose from in our current intellectual environment (which is two too few, Badiou would say). One goes back to Kant and has to do with the application of principles or rules as to what is right and good. These rules are either universal or, as in Hegel’s theory, they comprise the *Sittlichkeit*, the moral customs, of integrated communities. In either event the point of ethics is to enable one to rise and remain above reproach in one’s actions, beliefs, and character (at ease with the face in the mirror). Self-possession, or autonomy for short, is the principal ethical ideal. To this normative theory the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas offered an alternative by arguing that the claims other people have on me are in advance of whatever reasons might be used to decide or justify my conduct. I am responsible for the good of the other come what may: that is, my responsibility is an-archic, on the hither side of moral principles and the reasonings that provide their support—which means, among other things, that my relation to others is not one of knowing but, as Levinas likes to put it, one of proximity, as of skin exposed to the touch.⁴ This reversal of subjectivity is crucial. Being approached or addressed by the other, not the *cogito*, makes me what I am, namely someone who exists in the accusative, not so much an *I* as a *me* to whom the other “happens” as an event of transcendence (“otherwise than being, or beyond essence,” as Levinas’s motto has it: outside the grasp of concepts and categories). Kantian ethics appears more utopian (more in tune with bourgeois comforts) than does Levinas’s theory, but a Levinasian would argue that ethical responsibility belongs to the economy of the gift rather than to systems of exchange and their returns on investment (where the good I do for others puts them in my debt). The ethical is, whatever else it is, a critique of these systems, along with their presiding icon: the disengaged punctual ego exercising rational control over its possessions.⁵ The ethical subject, by contrast, is an offering, a movement of one-for-the-other. Sometimes Levinas figures this movement as a Saying (*le Dire*) on the hither side of language, that is, prior to predication or production of the Said (*le Dit*).⁶ Saying is not self-expression (except perhaps in the literal sense of expulsion); in one of Levinas’s favorite similes, it is a turning of oneself inside-out “like a cloak.”⁷

3. The Insincerity of Form

Arguably there is an open boundary (or crack) between poetry and Levinasian ethical theory in the sense that poetry seems to have long since broken with any analytic culture of principles and rules, together with the various concepts of mastery and authority that such a culture sponsors, as in the supervision of universals over particulars. There is no one thing that can be called “poetry,” neither now nor at least since the start of the last century when, as Adorno says, artworlds began producing “things of which we do not know what they are.”⁸ In which case it follows that there are no criteria by which anything could be set aside as nonpoetic—an anarchic state of affairs in which poets like Charles Bernstein have flourished for a seemingly endless number of years. Here is a sampling of brief passages from some of Bernstein’s poems in an early collection entitled, appropriately or otherwise, *Poetic Justice* (1979):

Listen. I can feel it. Specifically and intentionally. It does hurt. Gravity weighing
it down. It’s not too soft. I like it. Ringing like this. The hum. Words peeling.
The one thing. (“Palukaville”)

One problem with a fragment sitting. Wave I stare as well at that only as if this
all and not form letting it but is it. (“Lo Disfruto”)

its the DENsE

stUFF again that shIt i cANt UNDERstAnd when yOu gO oN that way
 (“eLecTric”)

iz worry ray aZoOt de pound in reduce yap crrRisLe ehk nugkinj sJuxYY
senshl. Ig si heh hahpae uvd r fahbeh aht si gidrid. (“Azoot D’Puund”)

all that on a fall that sweats in it upon layers of, and if, the on, just a, silk, soiled,
crying down the banisters, mommy, mommy, the cornflakes, the stale beer in the
hall (““Out of This Inside””)

HH/ie,obVrsxr;atjrn dugh seineopcv i iibalfmgmMw er,, me”ius

ieigorcy¢jeuvine+pee.)a/na.t” ihl”n,s

ortnsihcldseløøpiternoBruce-Oiwvewaa39osoanfJ++,r”P

rHIDftppnee”eantsaneegcintineoep emfnemtn t’e’w’aswen

toTT pr’-kkePPyrrr/ (“Lift Off”)

My weight becomes something that neither holds me down nor gives me
 release the stomach hair eyes all set them-selves in a separate way
 downflow you might say as Susan says shimmering is too strong an end
 note not that this particular bulb or cube doesn’t glow but that figuration
 almost too overwhelms, which cries out for some quieter moment
 (“Faculty Politics”)⁹

Bernstein’s work is, whatever else it is, a persistently comic investigation of the idea that there are more ways of putting words together than can be contained within the standard received model of a (unitary) speaking voice. This is the form *his* iconoclasm takes. His poetry suggests a more complex and decidedly more porous and ludic subjectivity than the linguistic concept of a speaker can contain; it is one that belongs to a history of poetry made of different conceptions of what voices are and where they come from, whether from gods, demons, the other minds in one’s head, a good library, or the channels, circuits, airways, and backalleys of mass (and mis-) communication. All of the above and a good deal more apply in Bernstein’s case, since what characterizes his poetry is not the disappearance of the voice (as one of the graphic stews above might suggest) but its wild, heterogeneous proliferation in forms of pastiche, parody, and manic impersonation—poetic madness as madcap—as in “The Age of Correggio and the Carracci,” whose title has no bearing on the poem, unless we imagine something baroque about Bernstein’s paratactic interruptions. The poem in any event breaks up the idiom of a familiar kind of letter:

Thanks for your of already some
 weeks ago. Things
 very much back to having returned
 to a life that
 (regrettably) has very little in
 common with, a

totally bright few
 or something like
 it. Was
 delighted to get
 a most remarkable & am assuming
 all continues, well
 thereabouts.¹⁰

Bernstein describes his work as “a mix of different types of language pieced together as a mosaic—very ‘poetic’ diction next to something that sounds overheard, intimate address next to philosophical imperatives, plus a mix of would-be proverbs, slogans, jingles, nursery rhymes, songs.”¹¹ To which one should add: puns, jokes, goofy wordplay—“mentality / drives the / spoon”¹²—Bernstein’s poems won’t leave home without them. In an essay on “Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form,” Bernstein refers to such goofiness as “acting out, in dialectical play, the insincerity of form.... Such poetic play does not open into a neat opposition between dry high irony and wet lyric expressiveness but, in contrast, collapses into a more destabilizing field of pathos, the ludicrous, schtick, sarcasm...where linguistic shards of histrionic inappropriateness pierce the momentary calm of an obscure twist of phrase.”¹³

“Insincerity of form” is a curious phrase, but perhaps it only means that form is not “expressive” in the sense that Susanne Langer gave this term in *Feeling and Form*, where the work of art is said to reflect the dynamic structures of feeling—growth and attenuation, conflict and resolution, speed and arrest, and so on.¹⁴ Form for Bernstein is, after all, not formal but materialized: an aleatory mixture of found sounds and incongruous words (“linguistic shards of histrionic inappropriateness”: Bernstein is not Rousseau, or Geoffrey Hill)—

A poem should not mean but impale
 not be but bemoan
 boomerang,

buck(le)

bubble. Malted meadows & hazelnut

innuendos: I'll bet the soda water
 gets the shakes sooner than
 Dan gets to Tampa. "Don't Tampa
 with me or I'll lacerate that
 evisceration of your face so fast
 you'll think my caddle prod was a
 lollipop." "Stay out of my face or I'll
 deploy my assets against whatever
 collateral you've got left after I
 target your abstemious alarm."¹⁵

The word "sincere" derives from a Latin word for "clean." It means, says the OED, "pure, unmixed, free from any foreign element," and in particular free of "dissimulation" (note that for Levinas the word defines the ethical subject: "to be uncovered without any defense, to be delivered over").¹⁶ Bernstein's verse is entirely otherwise—call it "vociferous," or "vociferential," or "ventrilocolloquial": very much like the Shakespeare of whom Samuel Johnson complained that the quibble "has some malignant power over his mind" ("Preface to Shakespeare"). According to the OED a quibble originally meant "ethically dubious matter." One of Bernstein's "Fragments from the Seventeenth Manifesto of Nude Formalism" reads: "Poetry has as its lower limit insincerity and its upper limit dematerialization," which is to say that

materiality is the condition in which insincerity thrives.¹⁷ By contrast a “dematerialized” poetry is one that presumably can rise (and remain) above reproach: lyrical ascent as against the art of sinking.

4. *Unterwegssein*

Or, alternatively, one can invoke the upside-down spirit of Tristram Shandy, who broke the law of gravity that remains foundational for the ethical under whatever philosophical description. Recall the grave Levinas in his early essay, “Reality and Its Shadow” (1948):

Magic, recognized everywhere as the devil’s part, enjoys an incomprehensible tolerance in poetry. Revenge is gotten on wickedness by producing its caricature, which is to take from it its reality without annihilating it; evil powers are conjured by filling the world with idols which have mouths but do not speak. It is as though ridicule killed, as though everything really can end in songs.... Myth takes the place of mystery. The world to be built is replaced by the essential completion of its shadow. This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility. The poet exiles himself from the city. From this point of view, the value of the beautiful is relative. There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague. (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 12).

On reading this Boccaccio’s name comes readily to mind, followed quickly by Adorno’s, among others. The problem, as Plato understood, is that the poet is a light and flighty thing. The task of philosophy, as it has been since Aristotle, is to read poetry seriously, that is, to redeem it (ground it) by way of appropriation or subsumption into categories of the good, the true, and the beautiful (“allegory” is the word for it). Levinas does this in his later work by anchoring poetry to the *gravitas* of *le Dire*, the movement of one-for-the-other that constitutes the ethical subject. It is worth reciting the passage cited in note 4 above: “Saying is not a game.... The original or pre-original saying, what is put forth in the foreword, weaves an intrigue of responsibility. It sets forth an order more grave than being and antecedent to being. By comparison being

appears like a game. Being is play or détente, without responsibility, where everything possible is permitted.”

In his essay, “Paul Celan: From Being to the Other” (1972), Levinas refers us to Celan’s famous address, “Der Meridian,” where poetry is, however obscurely, said to be vocative in character:¹⁸

But the poem speaks. It remains mindful of its dates, but it speaks. True, it speaks only on its own, its very own behalf [*in seiner eigenen, allereigensten Sache*]. But I think—and this will hardly surprise you—that the poem has always hoped, for this very reason, to speak on behalf of the *strange*—no, I can no longer use this word here—*on behalf of the other*, who knows, perhaps of an *altogether other*.

And a bit later:

The poem intends another [*Das Gedicht will zu einen Anderen*], needs this other, it needs an opposite [*Gegenüber*]. It goes toward it, bespeaks it [*es spricht sich ihm zu*].

For the poem, everything and everybody is a figure [*Gestalt*] of this other toward which it is heading.¹⁹

It would be surprising if Levinas did not try to see himself (or his forebear, Martin Buber) in these lines, whose elusiveness allows for a good deal of interpolation. One of Levinas’s purposes in this essay is to pry Celan’s remarks on poetry loose from Heidegger’s poetics of world-making where the poet calls things into the openness being and, in the same stroke, gathers us (humankind) into a conversation.²⁰ Not an easy undertaking for Levinas, because Celan’s writings on poetry are saturated with Heidegger’s vocabulary, as in the following from his Bremen address:

I tried, during those years and the years after, to write poems: to speak, to orient myself, to find out where I was, where I was going, to chart my reality.

It meant movement, you see, something happening, being *en route*, and attempt to find a direction [*Es war...Ereignis, Bewegung, Unterwegssein, es war der Versuch, Richtung zu gewinnen*]” (*Collected Prose*, 34; *Gesammelte Werke*, III, 186).²¹

In “Der Meridian” Celan figures the poem not (just) as an art-object but on the model of Heidegger’s thinker who is on the way (*Unterwegs*) to an elsewhere (u-topia) not obviously marked on any map.²² It can be said that Celan differs from Heidegger because he populates this elsewhere with another person (there are, basically, no people in Heidegger’s philosophy: Dasein, gods and mortals, the faceless crowd, but no one whom anyone would recognize). Specifically Celan borrows someone from the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, who drew a distinction between prose and poetry that seems central to Celan’s poetics. The prose writer, Mandelstam says, always addresses himself (if “himself” is the word) to a familiar audience—his “public”: “ladies and gentlemen.” The poet, by contrast, must not know whom he is addressing. “Without dialogue, lyric poetry cannot exist,” Mandelstam says, but, paradoxically, it is a formal condition of poetry that its audience must remain a stranger—an unknown and anonymous interlocutor. To address someone one knows is to speak predictably, knowing in advance or from experience how to make oneself understood; but to address a stranger is not to know how one will sound or what one will say—for the point of writing, after all, is to catch oneself by surprise: “there is only one thing that pushes us into the addressee’s embrace: the desire to be astonished by our own words, to be captivated by their originality and unexpectedness.”²³ To which Celan adds a screw-turn of his own, figuring the poet as a kind of Orpheus whose audience is made of things as well as people:

The poem becomes—under what conditions—the poem of a person who still perceives, still turns toward phenomena [*dem Erscheinenden Zugewandten*], addressing and questioning them. The poem becomes conversation—often desperate conversation [*verzweifeltes Gespräch*].

Only the space of this conversation [*dieses Gesprächs*] can establish what is addressed, can gather it into a “you” around the naming and speaking I. But this “you,” come about by dint of being named and addressed, brings its otherness into the present. Even in the here and now of the poem—and the poem has only this one, unique, momentary present—even in this immediacy [*Unmittelbarkeit*] and nearness, the otherness gives voice to what is most its own: its time.

Whenever we speak with things [*Dinge*] in this way we also dwell on the question of their where-from and where-to, an “open” question “without resolution,” a question which points toward open, empty, free spaces [*ins Offene und Leere und Freie weisenden Frage*]*—*we have ventured far out.

The poem also searches for this place (*Collected Prose*, 50; *Gesammelte Werke*, III, 199).

Or, as a Heideggerian would say: *Gelassenheit zu Dingen*.

Krokus, vom gastlichen

Tisch aus gesehn:

zeichenfühliges

kleines Exil

einer gemeinsamen

Wahrheit,

du brauchst

jeden Halm. (GWIII.122)

(*Gesammelte Werke*, III, 122)

Crocus, spotted from a

hospitable table:

small sign-

sensing exile

of a common

truth,

you need

every blade.

(*Selected Poems and Prose*, 374.)

Notice that this is not exactly (or only) an apostrophe to the crocus. Rather it is an address to a situation held in common, as from one exile to another, with a piece of advice thrown in: take with you as much as you can, since whatever you leave behind is a piece of yourself. Perhaps there is more to be said, since the crocus is the first to bloom in the spring; and then there is the tradition that extends from Wordsworth’s daffodil to Zukofsky’s eighty flowers. Where do Celan’s flowers fit in? There are certainly more stones than flowers in Celan’s poetry—the two are frequently in conflict, and flowers usually lose—so one should think carefully about the crocus.²⁴ Another crocus, of sorts, will turn up in a moment.

5. The Proximity of Things

In his Celan essay Levinas stops short of claiming any ethical standing for poetry, which he regards as a parallel universe to be addressed in the form of rhetorical questions—“Does [Celan] not suggest poetry itself as an unheard-of modality of the *otherwise than being?*” (*Proper Names*, 45). Levinas is rather more declarative in “Language and Proximity”(1967), where he reconfigures his distinction between *le Dit* and *le Dire* as a distinction between language as *kerygma* and language as *contact*, where the one predicates something of something (*this as that*) while the other is an event of sensibility or proximity in which the visible is no longer an object of consciousness, a phenomenon or sensation, but is an impingement or obsession: “In the ethical relationship with the real, that is, in the relationship of proximity which the sensible establishes, the essential is committed. Life is there. Sight is, to be sure, an openness and a consciousness, and all sensibility, opening as a consciousness, is called vision; but even in its subordination to cognition sight maintains contact and proximity. The visible caresses the eye, and one hears like one touches” (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 118).

Then, without warning, much less explanation, Levinas gives the name “poetry” to this “ethical relationship with the real”:

The proximity of things is poetry; in themselves the things are revealed before being approached. In stroking an animal already the hide hardens in the skin. But over the hands that have touched things, places trampled by beings, the things they have held, the images of those things, the fragments of those things, the contexts in which those fragments enter, the inflexions of the voice and the words that are articulated in them, the ever sensible signs of language, the letters traced, the vestiges, the relics—over all things, beginning with the human face and skin, tenderness spreads. Cognition turns into proximity, into the purely sensible. (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 118-19)

“The poetry of the world,” Levinas says, “is inseparable from proximity par excellence, or the proximity of the neighbor par excellence” (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 119).

No doubt this formulation captures something, namely that poetry is, in some sense, a ground-level mode of responsibility, as when Heidegger speaks of listening as being antecedent to discursiveness.²⁵

It is possible that Levinas crosses over into metaphor when he says that this “relationship of proximity...is the original language, a language without words or propositions, pure communication” (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 119). If this were so it would no longer clear how poetry could be a practice with a history, that is, something made up concretely (materially) of *poems*. We’ll see very shortly the form this problem takes in Celan’s later poetry. What interests Levinas is the paradox that the proximity of others and of things does not diminish their distance; that is, sensibility is not serenity or repose but is, on the contrary, a “restlessness” or anarchy with respect to any order of things (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 120-21). And this is perhaps coherent with the obscurities that beleaguer the relationship between “I” and “You” in Celan’s poetry, where, as Gadamer says in his commentary on *Atemkristall*, “‘I,’ ‘you,’ and ‘we’ are pronounced in an utterly direct, shadowy-uncertain and constantly changing way” (*Gadamer on Celan*, 27). Not for nothing are pronouns called “shifters.” “I” and “you” are restless, but so are Celan’s poems, whose language is arguably no longer a form of mediation but is anarchic in its *Wortaufschüttung* (*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 29)—its weird and wild way of combining and compounding words:²⁶

Kalk Krokus, im	Chalk-crocus
Hellwerden: dein	the coming of light: your
Steckbriefreifeites	indivisible
Von-dort-und-auch-dort-her,	mellowed in the warrant
unspaltbar,	From-here-and-there-too,
Sprengstoffe	high explosives
lächeln dir zu,	are smiling at you,
die Delle Dasein	existence the nick
hilft einer Flocke	helps a snowflake
aus sich heraus,	come out of itself,
in den Fundgruben	at the source-points
staut sich die Moldau.	the Moldau is rising.

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 406)

(*Last Poems*, 149)²⁷

One can only imagine what Levinas would have made of “steckbriefgereiftes” or of the middle stanza with its smiling *Sprengstoffe* and *die Delle Dasein* which (as in Ross’s rendition) should perhaps be allowed its Heideggerian resonance (“the dent of Dasein”). Meanwhile the chalk-crocus here does not appear to be a flower, although perhaps a good horticulturalist could identify it.

6. The Material of Compound Words

Interestingly, a photograph of a chalk crocus (that is, of an image of a crocus inscribed in chalk on a rock) is available at <http://flicker.com/photos/melisdramatic/465548626/>. It is hard not to take the photograph as an intentional allusion to Celan’s poem, given the almost obsessive place stones have in his poetry. Turning a flower to stone is the work of a Medusa-head, Celan’s muse and nemesis—recall from “Der Meridian” Celan’s elucidation of Georg Büchner’s *Lenz*: “‘One would like to be a Medusa’s head’ to...seize the natural as the natural by means of art.... This means going beyond what is human, stepping into a realm which is turned toward the human, but uncanny—the realm where the monkey, the automaton and with them...oh, art, too, seem to be at home” (*Collected Prose*, 42-43). To which he later adds these words:

Poetry is perhaps this: an *Atemwende*, a turning of our breath. Who knows, perhaps poetry goes its way—the way of art—for the sake of just a turn. And since the strange, the abyss *and* Medusa’s head, the abyss *and* the automaton, all seem to lie in the same direction—it is perhaps this turn, this *Atemwende*, which can sort out the strange from the strange? It is perhaps here, in this one brief moment, that Medusa’s head shrivels and the automatons run down? Perhaps, along with the I, estranged and freed [*freigesetzten befremdeten Ich*] here, in this manner, some other thing [*ein Anderes*] is also set free?

Perhaps after this the poem can be itself...can in this now art-less, art-free manner go other ways, including the ways of art, time and again? (*Collected Prose*, p. 47; [*Gesammelte Werke*, III, 195-96])

Art freezes the life out of things. The poem wants to breathe life back into them. No doubt the poem borders the possible/impossible relation of art and life. That is, the poem is not (just) an art-object but, following Heidegger and Mandelstam, a movement both toward u-topia and toward an unknown interlocutor; but, turn and turn about, *kunst-lose und kunst-frei*, it can also move along the path of art—as how could it not? This leaves poetry in a neither/nor condition, or leaves us uncertain as to what it is. Let us say that for Celan it is antinomic, being both immaterial as a breath and as grave as a stone, as when breath crystallizes, as it frequently does in his poetry: witness *Atemkristall*.²⁸ Celan wants to break with Mallarmé’s hermetic thesis that poetry is made of words, not of things we use words to produce; poetry is immaterial language (*Collected Prose*, p. 55: “immaterial, but earthly”), rather like Levinas’s poetry of the proximity of things, which is “the original language, a language without words or propositions, pure communication” (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 119). But of course this is contradicted at once by the brute material fact of Celan’s poems²⁹—

Weggebeizt vom	Eroded by
Strahlenwind deiner Sprache	the beamwind of your speech
das bunte Gerede des An-	the gaudy chatter of the pseudo-
erlebten—das hundert-	experienced—my hundred-
züngige Mein-	tongued perjury-
Gedicht, das Genicht.	poem, the noem. ³⁰

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 31)

These lines are commonly taken as a valedictory in which Celan turns away from his earlier, more conventional (lyrical-poetical-figural) verse toward his characteristically incongruous word-clusters—“das wassergewordene Buch” (*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 47), “blauschwarzen Silben” (*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 61), “Der Kehlkopferschlu_laut / singt” (*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 114), “Der herzschriftgekrümelte Sichtinsel” (*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 174)—that occasionally fragment into sound poetry.³¹

Deine Frage—deine Antwort.	Your question—your answer.
Dein Gesang, was wei_er?	Your chant, what does it know?

TiefimSchnee,

Iefimnee,

I—i—e.

(Gesammelte Werke, II, 39)

Deepinsnow,

Eepinno,

I—i—o.

(Breathturns, 107)³²

Certainly this is a long way from the iconic “Todesfuge,” which is still regarded as Celan’s signature poem.

“Aboutness” fades from the later texts, as in the following from *Fadensonnen*:

Die Fleissigen	Busy
Bodenschätz, häuslich,	mineral wealth, domestic,
die geheizte Synkope	thermal syncope,
das nicht zu enträtseinde	insoluble
Halljahr,	jubilee,
die vollverglasten	vitrailed
Spinnen-Altäre im alles-	spider-altars in the all-
überragenden Flachbau,	paramount block,
die Zwischenlaute	the semivowels
(noch immer?),	(still?),
die Schattenpalaver,	the shadowparley,
die Ängste, eisgerecht,	dread, ice-just,
flugklar,	clear to fly,
der barock ummantelte,	the baroque-immantled,
spracheschluckende Duschraum,	tonguesluciced shower-room,
semantisch durchleuchtet,	semantically transluminated,
die unbeschriebene Wand	the blank wall
einer Stehzelle:	of a standing-cell:

hier	here
leb dich	you must live through-
querdurch, ohne Uhr.	out, without time. ³³

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 151)

The poem forms a single period without becoming anything resembling a sentence, until perhaps the last (Poe-like) lines. Paratactic phrasing replaces the discursiveness of speech. And the baroque-covered “spracheschluckende Duschaum”—literally, “the language-swallowing shower-room”—is characteristic of the heterogeneous ways in which, in the later poetry, words and things are constellated along the same material plane of existence:

Sie essen:	They eat:
die Tollhäusler-Truffel, ein Stück	the bedlamite’s-truffle, a piece
unvergrabner Poesie	unburied poetry,
fand Zunge und Zahn.	found tongue and tooth.

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 59)

(*Breathturn*, 147)

Bei den zusammengetretenen	At the assembled
Zeichen, im	signs, in the
Worthäutigen Ölzelt	wordmembraned oiltent

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 69)

(*Breathturn*, 170)

die Sprachtürme rings	the language-towers everywhere
in der totzuschweigenden Zeichen-	in the to-be-silenced-to-death sign-
Zone	zone

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 91)

(*Breathturn*, 219)

schlaksig	gangly,
kommt eine über-	a more than
mündige Silbe geschritten	major syllable comes walking

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 142)

Kleide die Worthöhlen aus
mit Pantherhäuten,
erweitere sie, fellhin und fellher,
sinnhin und sinnher

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 198)

(*Threadsunz*, 95)

Line the wordcaves
with panther skins,
widen them, hide-to and hide-fro,
sense-hither and sense-thither

(*Threadsunz*, 203)

Imagine, if you can, “unburied poetry”: cadaverous verse—“Poetry, ladies and gentlemen: an eternalization of nothing but mortality, and in vain” (*Collected Prose*, 52). The “wordmembraned oiltent” meanwhile belongs to the family of “wordcaves” lined with “panther skins.” Plus an ambulatory syllable looking for all the world like Franz Kafka. It would be interesting to read Celan’s poetry just to follow the often tragicomic course of his “winterhard-cold / syllables” (*Gesammelte Werke*, I, 290: “winterhart-kalten / Silben”):

Die Abende graben sich dir
unters Aug. Mit der Lippe auf-
gesammelte Silben—schönes,
lautloses Rund—
helfen dem Kriechstern
in ihre Mitte.

(*Gesammelte Werke*, I, 235)

The evenings inter themselves
under your eye. With lip-
uploaded syllables—lovely,
noiseless circle—
help the creepstar
into their midst.

(my translation)

7. The Ethics of the Impossible

One could say that as Celan’s poetry thickens, the question of poetry and the ethical fades into the distance. But perhaps this would be to take a narrow view because, after all, in its break with principles and rules the ethical is about the limits of my ability or power as a subject (the limits of possibility), which is exactly what Celan’s poetry brings me up against. In his later writings Jacques Derrida, drawing on the work of Maurice Blanchot as well as that of Emmanuel Levinas, came to think of the ethical as an event of

the impossible. An event of the impossible is something like an epiphanic break—what complexity-theorists call a catastrophe—an absolutely singular disruption in the course or order of things, as when I am called upon for forgiveness. Derrida’s idea is, not surprisingly, paradoxical: “If I forgive only what’s forgivable, I’ve forgiven nothing.... If I forgive only what is venial, only what is excusable or pardonable, the slight misdeed, the measured and measurable, the determined and limited wrongdoing, in that case, I’m not forgiving anything.... I can only forgive, if I do forgive, when there is something unforgivable, when it isn’t possible to forgive.” (As if forgiveness were governed, like the gift, by the principle of loss.) The ethical event, in other words, is an advent of the impossible, where the impossible, Derrida says, “is not simply negative.” The ethical means that “the impossible must be done. The event, if there is one, consists in doing the impossible.”³⁴

Besides forgiveness Derrida offers the example of invention—that is, the invention of a work of art: “Invention is an event; the words themselves indicate as much. It is a matter of finding, of bringing out, of making what is not yet here come to be. Inventing, if it is possible, is not inventing.... If I can invent what I invent, if I have the ability to invent what I invent, that means that the invention follows a potentiality, an ability that is in me, and thus it brings nothing new. It does not constitute an event. I have the ability to make this happen and consequently the event, what happens at that point, disrupts nothing; it’s not an absolute surprise” (“A Certain Impossible Possible Saying,” 233). Likewise if I merely say what can be said, nothing happens (recall Mandelstam on writing to surprise oneself, or Adorno on making “making things of which we do not know what they are”: the event of modernism). In this respect the ethics of invention would consist in doing what cannot be done, as when Maurice Blanchot, in one of his earliest theoretical texts, writes:

The writer finds himself in the increasingly ludicrous condition of having nothing to write, of having no means with which to write it, and of being constrained by the utter necessity of always writing it. Having nothing to express must be taken in the most literal way. Whatever he would like to say, it is nothing. The world, things, knowledge are to him only landmarks across the void. And he himself is already reduced

to nothing. Nothingness is his material. He rejects any forms in which it offers himself to him, since they are something. He wants to seize it not in an allusion but in its own actual truth. He is looking for a “No” that is not “No” to this, “No” to that, “No” to everything, but “No” pure and simple. ... [The] “I have nothing to say” of the writer, like that of the accused, encloses the whole secret of his solitary condition.³⁵

A text which Samuel Beckett happily plagiarized:

B. The only thing disturbed by the revolutionaries Matisse and Tal Coat is a certain order on the plane of the feasible.

D. What other plane can there be for the maker?

B. Logically, none. Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, wearing of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.

D. And preferring what?

B. The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.³⁶

“Language,” Blanchot writes, “is possible only because it strives for the impossible.”³⁷ The true poem is precisely what cannot be written. To which he adds, in an essay on René Char (1946): “The search for totality, in all its forms, is the poetic claim par excellence, a claim in which the impossibility of being accomplished is included as its condition, so that if it ever happens to be accomplished, it is only as something not possible, because the poem claims to include its impossibility and its non-realization it is very existence” (*Work of Fire*, 104). Again: “Poetry is not there in order to say impossibility; it simply answers to it, saying in responding. Such is the secret lot, the secret decision of every essential speech in us: naming the possible, responding to the impossible.”³⁸ No doubt this responsibility is what Levinas would call “an unheard-of modality of the otherwise than being.”

It would not be difficult to locate Celan in this antinomic context—in his “Meridian” address he says quite explicitly, if a bit gnomically, that the poem of which he is speaking “certainly does not, cannot exist” (*Collected Prose*, 51). Poetry is, in Blanchot’s word, *désœuvrement*: worklessness: “A new kind of arrangement not entailing harmony, concordance, or reconciliation, but that accepts disjunction or divergence as the infinite center from out of which, through speech, relation is to be created: an arrangement that does not compose but juxtaposes, that is to say, leaves each of the terms that come into relation *outside* one another, respecting and preserving this *exteriority* and this distance as the principle—always already undercut—of all signification. Juxtaposition and interruption here assume an extraordinary force of justice.”³⁹ Imagine poetry as a defeat of *poiesis*: the fragmentary imperative. As I once tried to show, there is in this embrace of contradiction, interruption, and parataxis a deep kinship between Blanchot and Celan, who wrote in German, to be sure—

Sprich—

Doch scheidet das Nein nicht vom Ja.

(*Gesammelte Werke*, I, 135)

Speak—

But keep yes and no unsplit.⁴⁰

—but whose poetry and poetics are deeply informed by the French intellectual culture in which Blanchot was such a powerful presence.⁴¹ Here are the last lines of “Wer herrscht?” (“Who Rules?”):

Die schwarzdiaphane

Gauklergösch

In unterer

Kulmination.

Der erkämpfte Umlaut im Unwort:

dein Abglanz: der Grabschild

eines der Denkschatten

hier.

(*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 116)

The black-diaphanous

jugglerjack

in lower

culmination.

The hardwon umlaut in the unword:

your reflection: the tombshield

of one of the wordshadows

here.

(*Threadsuns*, 39)

“The hardwon umlaut in the unword”: the line captures as concisely as possible the event of Celan’s poetry.

I’m reminded, in conclusion, of one of Michael Palmer’s Celan-like poems:

Unutterable
pages
of counterlight
in the fluid window
a dog sings songs
asking nothing
we cannot speak⁴²

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¹ See (in chronological order) Krzysztof Ziarek, *Inflected Language: Toward a Hermeneutics of Nearness in Heidegger, Levinas, Stevens, and Celan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994); Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Peter Nicholls, "Of Being Ethical: Reflections on George Oppen," *The Objectivist Nexus: essays in Cultural Poetics*, ed Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), pp. 240-53; Michael Eskin, "A Survivor's Ethics: Levinas's Challenge to Philosophy," *Dialectical Anthropology*, 34 (1999), 507-50, esp. 423-28; Steve McCaffery, "The Scandal of Sincerity: Toward a Levinasian Poetics," *Prior to Meaning: Protosemantics and Poetics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), pp. 204-29; G. Matthew Jenkins, "Saying Obligation: George Oppen's Poetry and Levinasian Ethics," *Journal of American Studies*, 37, no. 3 (2003), 407-33; Tim Woods, *The Poetics of the Limit: Ethics and Politics in Modern and Contemporary Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Press, 2003); Matthew Sharpe, "Aesthet(h)ics: On Levinas's Shadow," *Colloquy: Text, Theory, Critique*, 9 (2005), 29-47; Timothy Clark, *The Poetics of Singularity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005); Leslie Hill, "Distrust of Poetry: Levinas, Blanchot, Celan," *MLN*, 120 (2005), 986-1008; Xiaojing Zhou, *The Ethics and Poetics of Alterity in Asian American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006); Robert Kaufman, "Poetry's Ethics? Theodor W. Adorno and Robert Duncan on Aesthetic Illusion and Sociopolitical Delusion," *New German Critique*, 33, no. 1 (2006), 73-118; Marshall Brown, "The Case for Vertical Ethics," *boundary 2*, 34, no. 3 (2007), 161-88; G. Matthew Jenkins, *Poetic Obligation: Ethics in Experimental Poetry after 1945* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008).

² Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), p. 28.

³ *TLS: The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5494 (July 18, 2008), 11.

⁴ See especially the chapter on "Substitution" in Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), pp. 99-102.

⁵ See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 43: “We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics.”

⁶ See *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 5-9, esp. 5-6: “Saying is not a game. Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages. It is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness [*signifiance*] of signification.... The original or pre-original saying, what is put forth in the foreword, weaves an intrigue of responsibility. It sets forth an order more grave than being and antecedent to being. By comparison being appears like a game. Being is play or détente, without responsibility, where everything possible is permitted.”

⁷ *Otherwise than Being*, p. 48. To which Levinas adds: “The subject in saying approaches a neighbor in expressing itself, in being expelled, in the literal sense of the term, out of any locus, no longer *dwelling*, not stomping any ground. Saying uncovers, beyond nudity, what dissimulation there may be under the exposedness of a skin laid bare. It is the very *respiration* of this skin prior to any intention” (pp. 48-49).

⁸ *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 114. A poem—any work of art—is singular and irreducible, outside the alternatives of universal and particular: not that a poem is untheorizable, but it can only be conceptualized in its own terms—hence the proliferation of prefaces, manifestos, and statements of poetics (writings on poetry by poets) since what Marjorie Perloff calls “the futurist moment.” See *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁹ *Republics of Reality: 1975-1995* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 2000), pp. 145, 148, 154, 174, 177.

¹⁰ *With Strings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 19.

¹¹ “An Interview with Manuel Brito,” *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 25-26.

¹² “Epiphanies of Suppression (3),” *Rough Trades* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1991), p. 19.

¹³ *A Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 220. See Javant Biarujia inventive discussion of this “poetic play,” “Charles Bernstein: Creating a / Creative Disturbance,” *Boxkite #3* (Australia 2006), available at <http://www.pepc.library>. See also Jerome McGann, “Private Enigmas and Critical Functions, with Special Thanks to the Poetry of Charles Bernstein,” *The Point is to Change It: Poetry and Criticism in the Continuing Present* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), pp. 98-124.

¹⁴ *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953). See Steve McCaffery’s essay, “The Scandal of Sincerity: Towards a Levinasian Poetics,” cited in n.1 above.

¹⁵ “Dark City,” *Dark City* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1994), p. 141.

¹⁶ “No Identity,” *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 146.

¹⁷ Charles Bernstein and Susan Bee, *The Nude Formalism* (Los Angeles: 20 Pages, 1989), np.

¹⁸ *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 40-46.

¹⁹ *Collected Prose*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Riverdale-on Hudson, New York: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1986), pp. 48-49; *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), III, pp. 196-98. Compare John Felstiner’s translation of these passages in his *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 408-9, where the poem is said to be speaking “in its very selfmost cause” and “in the cause of the Other.” It has to be mentioned that speaking “in behalf of” or “in the cause of” an Other [*in ein Anderen Sache zu sprechen*] is not exactly vocative but is rather more like a form of representation, taking up the cause or *res* [*Sache*] of another, as in a legal proceeding. See also Jerry Glenn’s translation, which appears as an appendix to Jacques Derrida’s *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York:

Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 180-81. See Bernard Fassbind, *Poetik des Dialog: Voraussetzungen dialogische Poesie bei Paul Celan und konzepte von Intersu* (München: Fink, 1995).

²⁰ See “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” trans. Douglas Scott, *Existence and Being* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1949), pp. 304-05; or, more recently, Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (Amherst NY: Humanities Books, 2000), pp. 56-59.

²¹ See James K. Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

²² There are a number of useful discussions of “Der Meridian,” among them: David Brierley, “*Der Meridian*”: ein Versuch zur Poetik und Dichtung Paul Celans (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 1984); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Catastrophe,” *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 41-70; Jacques Derrida, “Majesties,” *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, trans. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 108-34; Dennis J. Schmidt, “Black Milk and Blue: Celan and Heidegger on Pain and Language,” *Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 110-29; Nicholas Meyerhoff, “The Poetics of Paul Celan,” *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 27, no. 1 (1981), 72-85; Helmut Müller-Sievers, “On the Way to Quotation: Paul Celan’s ‘Meridian’ Speech,” *New German Critique*, 91 (2004), 131-50; Raymond Geuss, “Celan’s Meridian,” *boundary 2*, 33, no. 3 (2006), 210-26. I devote some pages to Celan’s speech in “The Remembrance of Language,” the introduction to *Gadamer on Celan: “Who am I and Who are You?” and Other Essays*, trans. Richard Heinemann and Bruce Krajewski (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), pp. 1-51.

²³ “On the Addressee,” *Complete Critical Prose*, trans. Jane Gary Harris and Constance Link (Dana Point, CA: Ardis Publishers, 1997), pp. 43-48, esp. p. 47.

²⁴ See the poem “Blume [Flower],” from *Sprachgitter*, with Felstiner’s translation:

Der Stein.

The stone.

Der Stein in der Luft, dem ich folgte.

The stone in the air, which I followed.

Dein Aug, so blind wie der Stein.	Your eye, as blind as the stone.
Wie waren	We were
Hände,	hands,
wir schöpften die Finsternis Leer, wir fanden	we scooped the darkness empty, we found
das Wort, das den Sommer heraufkam:	the word that ascended summer:
Blume.	Flower.
Blume—ein Blindenwort.	Flower—a blindman's word.
Dein Aug und mein Aug:	Your eye and my eye:
sie sorgen	they take care
für Wasser.	of water.
Wachstum.	Growth.
Herzwand um Herzwand.	Heartwall by heartwall
blättert hinzu	adds on petals.
Ein Wort noch, wie dies, und die Hämmer	One more word like this, and the hammers
schwingen im Freien.	will be swinging free.

(*Gesammelte Werke*, I, 164)

(*Selected Poems and Prose*, 105).

See Rochelle Tobias, *The Discourse of Nature in the Poetry of Paul Celan: The Unnatural World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

²⁵ See “The Nature of Language,” *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 75-76. For an example of how poetry’s “ground-level mode of responsibility” looks in practice, see G. Matthew Jenkins’ reading of Susan Howe’s Poetry, “The Nearness of Poetry: Susan Howe’s *Nonconformist’s Memorial*,” *Poetic Obligation: Ethics in Experimental American Poetry After 1945* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), pp. 159-81.

²⁶ On Celan's compound words, see, for example, "herzschriftgekrümelte" (*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 174), which Pierre Joris translates as "the heartsriptcrumbled," *Threadsun*s (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 2000), p. 159, while Nikolai Popov and Heather McHugh translate it as "broken / into heartsript," *Glottal Stop: 101 Poems* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), p. 62. In their note to this poem Popov and McHugh have this to say:

Here and elsewhere Celan's idiosyncratic compounds (*herzschriftgekrümelte*, *Zündschlüsselschimmer*) pose an intractable problem. In English compounds are a poeticism redolent of the 1890s. Even in German where compounding is a common language pattern, and where there is a tradition of Baroque compounding, Celan's compounds are exorbitant; one might even suspect his excesses of vindictive intentions. His compounds often destroy reference as such and focus on what makes it possible for language to exceed its instrumental and/or utilitarian uses. It is, of course, possible to follow Celan to the letter and do excessive compounding in English (we have G. M. Hopkins), but that leads nowhere because translation changes the ground from and against which Celanian compounding derives its power and inventiveness. Compounds thus leave a choice between bad and worse solutions. Most translators (into English and, especially, into French choose to render Celan's compounds as genitives, such as (the) A of B. We, too, have had to resort to that solution more often than we'd like (p. 130).

²⁷ There is a translation (of sorts) of "Kalk-Krokus" by the New Zealand poet Jack Ross:

CHALK-CROCUS at
 daybreak your
 multidimension/locational WANTED
 poster vital statistics
 stop
 bombs

smile at you
 the dent of Dasein
 helps the radar out

 the Manukau

 silts up the vaults.

The poem is available online at <http://titus.books.online.fr/Percutio/Percutio.htm#Celan>.

²⁸ The title of a small collection of poems, illustrated by his wife Gisele Celan-Lestrange (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990).

²⁹ See Charles Bernstein, “Celan’s Veils and Folds,” *Textual Practice*, 18, no. 2 (2004), 201: “Celan provides little comfort for those who seek a model for spiritual or transcendental lyric.” Bernstein proposes that we read Celan, not in isolation (as we almost always do), but in the context of contemporary North American poetry, with its attention to the materiality of language and the seriality of form.

³⁰ *Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1995), p. 95. Compare Felstiner’s:

Etched away by the
 radiant wind of your speech
 the motley gossip of pseudo-
 experience—the hundred-
 tongued My-
 poem, the Lie-poem (*Selected Poetry and Prose*, p. 247).

³¹ See Paraji Räsänen, *Counterfigures—An Essay on Antimetaphorical Resistance: Paul Celan’s Poetry and Poetics at the Limit of Figurality* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Printing House, 2007). See also Harold Rhenisch, “Anti-Lyric: Translating the Ghost of Paul Celan,” available at <http://www.haroldrhenisch.com/translation.html>.

³² See Shira Wolosky's discussion of this poem in "The Lyric, History, and the Avant-garde: Theorizing the Poetics of Paul Celan," *Poetics Today*, 22, no. 3 (2001), 651-68.

³³ *Fathomsuns and Benighted*, trans. Ian Fairly (Riverdale-on-Hudson: The Sheep Meadow Press, 2001), p. 105.

³⁴ "A Certain Impossible Possible Saying of the Event," trans. Gila Walker, *The Late Derrida*, ed. W. T. J. Mitchell and Arnold Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 231. See also Derrida, "To Forgive: The Forgivable and the Imprescriptable," *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 21-51. See François Raffoul, "Derrida and the Ethics of the Im-possible," *Research in Phenomenology*, 38 (2008), 270-90.

³⁵ "From Anguish to Language" (1943), *Faux Pas*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 3.

³⁶ *Transition*, no. 5 (1949), 98.

³⁷ "Kafka and Literature" (1949), *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 22.

³⁸ *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan B. Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 48.

³⁹ "The Fragment Word," *The Infinite Conversation*, p. 308. Compare "The Absence of the Book": "The more the Work assumes meaning and acquires ambition, retaining in itself not only all works, but also all the forms and all the powers of discourse, the more the absence of the work seems about to propose itself, without, however, letting itself be designated. This occurs with Mallarmé. With Mallarmé, the Work becomes aware of itself and thereby seizes itself as something that would coincide with the absence of the word: the latter then deflecting it from every coinciding with itself and destining it to impossibility" (p. 424).

⁴⁰ “Sprich auch du,” trans. Michael Hamburger, *Poems of Paul Celan* (New York: Persea Books, 1989), p. 99.

⁴¹ See the two chapters devoted to Blanchot and Celan in Gerald L. Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 81-101 (“Blanchot/Celan: *Unterwegssein* [On Poetry and Freedom]”), and pp. 145-72 (“Blanchot/Celan: *Désœuvrement* [The Theory of the Fragment]”).

⁴² *Sun* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1988), p. 35.