The Gift of the Lyric: Reading Paul Celan

Dissertation submitted to
Jawaharlal Nehru University
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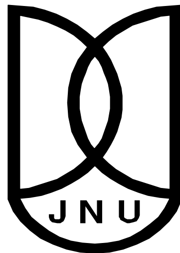
Master of Philosophy

by

Sneha Chowdhury



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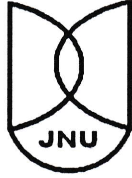

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This dissertation titled **"The Gift of the Lyric: Reading Paul Celan"** submitted by **Ms. Sneha Chowdhury**, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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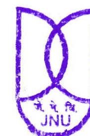

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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

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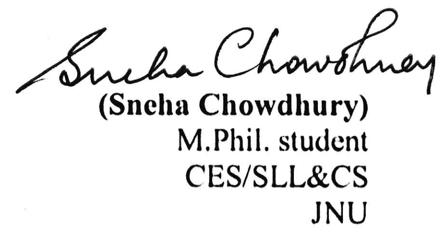

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Dedicated to my late brother who, during his short life, remained without a name.

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stumbled into this lyric

(my heart)

eight years back

and then, never left,

is the co-creator of this dissertation.

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Introduction

At the beginning of his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), an exhaustive and sustained study of the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin draws our attention to an important change in the lyric poetry of his time—the lyric poet no longer represented the personal experience of the poet, but became a representative of the genre, suggesting that contemporary poets were controlled and burdened by an aesthetic ideal that was detached from their own reality, and the reality of its readers. Due to this, the poets had lost their creative freedom and there was a sudden decline in the popularity of lyric poetry. This distinction is crucial because based on this observation, Benjamin argues that this detachment was symptomatic of a fundamental change in the structure of experience. According to him, Baudelaire, who was aware of this sudden rift between the genre of lyric poetry and its writers' and readers' experience, sought to *perform* the disintegration of the lyric aura in his poetry (Benjamin 204).

In addition to *The Flowers of Evil*, Benjamin refers to Proust, Bergson, and Freud to define the readers' experience in Baudelaire's time. By reading Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, he concludes that the readers' experience resembled Proustian *memorie involuntaire*. *Memorie voluntaire* is the memory of that experience which can be recalled or reminisced voluntarily. On the other hand, *memorie involuntaire* is a kind of memory that a conscious person has no control over. *Memorie involuntaire* is a memory that is mostly repressed and remains in a person's unconscious mind as a memory trace of shock experienced in the past. The repressed memory is triggered when a person experiences something uncanny and shocking in their present. Baudelaire transposes his readers' shock experience of living in a hyper-modern, nineteenth century urban world onto his poetry. Unlike the flaneur, the lyric

poet had no elbow room while walking in the city and experienced deep shock at every step. Benjamin argues that the poet's shock is repressed in the poem. For example, the poem "To a Passerby" is about the speaker's longing for a woman who fleetingly passes him by when "the deafening street was screaming all around me [him])" (Benjamin 184) and wonders if he will ever meet her again. The crowd, the amorphous urban mass, is never invoked directly, but referred to indirectly.

What Benjamin achieved in his sustained reading of Baudelaire vis-à-vis the city of Paris in nineteenth century is the understanding that aesthetic categories or literary genres fail to keep up with the aesthetic experiences and expressions of writers as they are constantly in flux. Benjamin saw the decline of lyric poetry as the failure of the genre, not the failure of the poet. He thought that the crisis necessitated a fresh appraisal of lyric poetry from the perspective of a poet who was alert to the changes taking place in the nineteenth century modern city. Through his reading of Baudelaire, he let Baudelaire's poetics redefine the lyric genre that presented poetry as inherently ironic. Paul Celan (1920 – 1970) who was sensitive to Baudelaire's irony thought that the latter's work marked a radical break in the history of poetry because he introduced a relationship between poetics and ethics in his poetry (Eshel 61 – 62).

After the publication of his first collection of poetry *Poppy and Memory* (1952)—eight years after his liberation from a forced labour camp in Bukovina, where he was born, and eleven years after his parents had been sent to their death in Transnistria—Celan was assimilated into a tradition of lyric poetry which had until then been synonymous with monologicity and hermeticism. In a six-page long review of Celan's first collection in *Merkur* in the year 1954, Hans Egol Holthusen, who was an influential critic at the time, wrote that Celan "translates certain principles of modern French lyric into the German language..." and that he had an "unqualified arbitrary lyric imagination" (Felstiner 78). He further added that

the “absolutely musical effects” reminded him of “Mallarmé... Mallarmé... Mallarmé” (79). The same issue also featured Germany’s senior poet Gottfried Benn’s work. Benn had been associated with Nazism earlier in his life and Celan found his notion that poetry is essentially an “artifice” that is monological, disturbing.[1] In 1951, Gottfried Benn in his essay “Probleme der Lyrik” wrote that,

> Mallarmé remains the first to develop a theory and definition of his poems, thus beginning the phenomenology of composition of which I spoke. Other names are known to you, Verlaine, Rimbaud, then Valery, Apollinaire and the Surrealists, led by Breton and Aragon. This was the center of the lyrical renaissance, which radiated to Germany and the Anglo-American area. (Benn 3)

Much later, in the year 1965, Celan found out from *Merkur* that Theodor Adorno[2] had criticised his well-known 1948 poem “Death Fugue” and its motifs by saying that “all of them are thoroughly composed in an elegant score—didn’t that show far too much pleasure in art, in despair turned ‘beautiful’ through art?”[3] (Felstiner 225) That same year the journal republished Adorno’s essay “Cultural Criticism and Society”, originally published in the year 1951, which carried the ominous pronouncement that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric. From the coincidence of the publication of Adorno’s essay and his belittling of the motifs in Celan’s “Death Fugue” we may assert that Adorno considered Celan to be a lyric poet whose poetry is hermetic and did not think that the poet deserved the singular attention that poets such as Stefan George deserved. Incidentally, Stefan George was also deeply appreciated by Gottfried Benn (and later by Heidegger) and hailed as one of the best

[1] “When Celan writes that poetry can by no means be confined to the demands of “*poesie pure,*” he also takes aim at the self-fixated poetics of his highly influential contemporary, the German poet Gottfried Benn, and Benn’s admirers in postwar Germany” (Eshel 62)

[2] Celan was deeply troubled by repeated missed encounters with Adorno. His missed encounter with Adorno in Sils-Maria in 1959. He turned the missed encounter into a parable called “Conversations in the Mountains” (1959) where the character “big Jew” is supposed to be a representation of Adorno. See Celan’s *Collected Prose*.

[3] To find out more about Celan’s views on art and the tension between art and poetry, see chapter one.

representatives of monological lyric poetry along with Mallarmé (Benn 12). To understand what makes Mallarmé a representative example of poetry that demonstrates "phenomenology of composition", let us closely read one of his poems:

> "Gift of the Poem"
>
> I bring you this child of an Idumaean night!
>
> black, with featherless wings bleeding and nearly white,
>
> through the glass burned with spices and with gold,
>
> through the panes still, alas! dismal and icy cold,
>
> the sunrise flung itself on the angelic
>
> lamp, O you palms! and when it showed that relic
>
> to this father attempting an unfriendly smile,
>
> the blue and sterile solitude shivered all the while.
>
> Woman lulling your little daughter, greet
>
> a cruel birth, with the innocence of your cold feet
>
> and your voice which both viol and harpsichord invest,
>
> will you with shrivelled fingers press the breast
>
> from which flows woman, Sibylline and white,
>
> for lips starved of the virgin azure light? (Mallarmé 28 – 29)

In the poem, the process of writing a poem is compared to a night of difficult birth. The metaphor of childbirth is used to describe the birth of a poem, and vice versa. The narrative of the material reality of giving birth to a child seamlessly merges with the narrative of writing a poem in such a manner that each experience impresses upon the other without becoming a burden on the other, apostrophising the child and the poem in a single expression. Mallarmé's poem is an absolute poem.

Similarly, to understand why Adorno thought Stefan George to be an ideal representative of poetry that *can* be written after Auschwitz, let us examine the former's analysis of George's poetry. In the essay "On Lyric Poetry and Society" (1957) Adorno closely reads the following short lyric by the poet:

In the winds-weaving

My question was

Only daydreaming.

Only a smile was what you gave.

From a moist night

A gleam ignites—

Now May urges

Now I must

For your eyes and hair

Every day

Live in yearning (Adorno 51).

Adorno argues that George's poem is sublimated into a pure poetic language. This process pf sublimation that the poem represents, is a response to a society which has denied the subject of lyric poetry any correspondence with the forms of the world, to an aesthetic tradition that put the onus of representing the society on its form and language. The pure language does not represent an aesthetic ideal but is a sign of aesthetic freedom in a society that threatens to take it away. He also suspects that this pure language may be misconstrued as a vehicle for expressing bourgeois sentiment, but the lack of rhetoric and ornamentation renders the language of the poem transparent and strange so that it no longer represents a spoken language. He writes:

> … the subject has to step outside itself by keeping quiet about itself; it has to make itself a vessel, so to speak, for the idea of a pure language. George's greatest poems are aimed at rescuing that language… the ear of George, *the German student of Mallarmé*, hears his own language as though it were a foreign tongue. He overcomes its alienation, which is an alienation of use, by intensifying it until it becomes the alienation of a language no longer actually spoken ... (52, emphasis mine)

He further adds that even though the substance of lyric poetry is universal, the social becomes a burden on the poem when the material realm is reified in representation. This process of reification undermines the autonomy of creative process and inflects poetic language with the crudeness of spoken language. The lyric poem responds by alienating poetic language further from itself, rendering it impermeable to reified speech. Like Benn, perhaps this Mallarméan and Georgian creativity is what Adorno wanted the poets to aspire for after Auschwitz. When he ominously declared in his essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (Adorno 34), he warned his audience against two things—the reification of spoken language in poetic language, which according to him was barbaric and the moral-highhandedness of cultural critics. Even though Adorno was strongly critical of the Hegel's transcendent method of lyric creation, his method is largely Hegelian and aligns with Benn's notion of poetry.

At this juncture, we may assert that directly or indirectly, Celan found himself simultaneously included in and alienated from the existing lyric tradition of his time. Either way, the response came from an imposition of an *a priori* concept of lyric on his poetry. It is our contention that Celan was to twentieth century lyric poetry what Baudelaire was to nineteenth century lyric poetry. If Baudelaire's poetry performed the disintegration of the lyric, Celan's poetry performed the privation of lyric's pure language. Qualifying what was

once an “unqualified arbitrary lyric imagination” will be the singular purpose of this dissertation.

One of the most outstanding features of Celan’s poetry is that the privation of pure language is negotiated with an addressee, with an other. But address is also one of the most important features of monological lyric poetry. So, in order to understand the specific nature of poetic address in Celan’s poetry, we need to briefly examine the history and the concept of poetic address that he inherits. For the sake of clarity, we may distinguish two main threads of argument in our study of the discourse around poetic address—one pertains to the observation that lyric poetry is monological, and the other, to the observation that it is dialogical or communicative.

In *Poetry’s Touch: On Lyric Address* (2003), William Addison Waters writes that poetic address came to be seen as a mere rhetorical device in the wake of Romanticism when lyric poetry was seen as “feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude” (qtd in Waters 4). He further argues that address became merely incidental in modern lyric poetry because, since Hegel, critical attention mainly lay on lyric subjectivity and the “lyric I”, rendering it monological (2). In his *Aesthetics* (1835), Hegel argues that the poet is “the centre which holds the whole lyric work of art together…” (qtd in 12) The word “subjectivity” in his definition is crucial. What came to be known as lyric poetry in modern times was first properly defined in the post-Enlightenment period. Hence, the subject of the poem would be anchored in or confined to the knowledge and experience of the poet. Poetic subjectivity impacts a variety of poetic addresses (in the verbal and the nominal sense) in the history of lyric poetry. Moreover, it shows that a poem variously addresses things which are inanimate, non-human or non-living and people who are dead—things that cannot listen—to mark its separation from the language of pragmatics and communication, where “you” performs the singular function of communication or address, as in a letter, or a conversation,

since the context is made amply clear. The monological character is confirmed in John Stuart Mill's famous theory that "eloquence is heard; poetry is overheard". In the section titled "What is Poetry?" (1833) from *Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties*, Mill argues that an act of utterance ceases to be poetry when it is not an end in itself but becomes a means to an end. In a bid to create an impact on the listener, poetry no longer remains poetry but is replaced by eloquence. Mill's view is echoed by T. S Eliot in his well-known essay "The Three Voices of Poetry" (1953) written largely from the point of view of a playwright who wrote verse plays, and partly, as a response to Gottfried Benn's "Problems der Lyrik" (1951), an essay we will discuss at length in the first chapter, where Benn also argues in favour of the monologicity of the lyric poem. Eliot says,

> In writing other verse (i.e. non-dramatic verse) I think that one is writing, so to speak, in terms of one's own voice: the way it sounds when you read it to yourself is the test. For it is yourself speaking. The question of communication, of what the reader will get from it, is not paramount... (Eliot 193)

Eliot's second voice is the voice of the poet speaking to another fictional character in the poem, a characteristic of dramatic monologue; and the third is the poet embodied as a fictional character speaking to another character in the poem, characteristic of verse in drama. Even though Eliot concludes his essay by observing that in most cases, non-dramatic poetry combines the first and the second voices, we would not be far off to venture that the first voice dominates the other voices in the poem, rendering the poem monological. Eliot dismisses the category of the lyric as a form that foregrounds the poetic first voice on the grounds that its definition is unsatisfactory and inadequate, causing him to propose the term "meditative verse" to replace what is conventionally understood as the lyric. However, towards the end of the essay, especially in his explanation of Benn's phrase "creative germ" as the poet's desire to render in words that "something [is] germinating in him" (198) to

substantiate his own theory of poetic first voice, he ends up reiterating the exact definition of the lyric that he had earlier dismissed for its vagueness. Of course, this is the same Eliot who had earlier dismissed authorial emotion and intention in favour of impersonality in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) heralding the change in critical approach that we know as the famous new critical approach, detaching all extra-linguistic elements from the text of the poem. Waters succinctly echoes this in his book:

> What we call lyric poetry is literature, something whose detachment from context is, in a manner of speaking, its foundation... The detachment of context, then, has become constitutive of the modern lyric, which is also the inheritor of many other such detachments, like the separation of lyric from music, and from voice altogether... (Waters 9)

Another text that argues in favour of the detachment is Michael Riffaterre's "The Poem's Significance" (1978) which accentuated and strengthened the textual and generic boundaries of the lyric. For Riffaterre, there is no "outside" to the poem. He introduces a semiotic approach to reading poetry where the poem is to be seen as a system of signs, where each sign refers to another sign and together they build a network of semantic unity, a lyric whole. The purpose of building this network is to establish "the difference we perceive empirically between poetry and non-poetry" (qtd in Jackson 222).

Waters further argues that the emphasis on monologicity distorts lyric's literary history. For example, he says that the "[Greek] lyric poets wrote their poems for performance on specific social occasions like drinking-parties, celebrations... In all this, an account could be given of poetic activity which related the poet directly to the society in which he lived" (Waters 9). Structuralists Mikhail Bakhtin and Roman Jakobson share Waters' sensitivity to this context of social communication in that their writings on the lyric placed it in the "heterogeneous diversity of ordinary communication" (Jackson 221). Though "The Problems

of Speech Genres" (1953) is not specifically about the characteristics of the lyric genre as such but Bakhtin's argument that secondary genres of literature, such as novels and lyrics, "feed off of primary genres (everyday speech and language)" (220) undermines the monologicity of the lyric in favour of dialogicity and communication. According to him, poems are not merely expressive but also responsive, "a silent responsive understanding...with a delayed reaction" (qtd in Jackson 221). Poems may be belated responses but through their essential nature as a genre of communication and not mere self-expression, they affect and strengthen everyday speech (and vice versa), rendering it more poetic and imaginative. At the risk of oversimplifying Jakobson's well-defined scientific-technical language of studying literary categories, we may say that this view is also echoed by Jakobson in his introduction of the phrase "poetic function" of speech in "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics" (1960) defined as a function of the message being conveyed between the addresser and the addressee, and a function of language as such ("metalanguage") that transcends its specific use or mode in poetry and everyday speech. Poetic function is not limited to poetry because it represents a sequence of equivalent signs, a combination of formal elements like syllables and rhymes that are also visible in every speech. According to Jakobson, therefore, poetic function exposes the limits of poetry in that the language of poetry is inextricably linked to or contiguous with the language of communication. So, lyric address is either an instance of the poet's voice (the poet listening to himself) or a function of speech.

In addition to highlighting how poetic address is embedded in a context of performance and everyday communication, Waters, following Helen Vendler, writes about the context of reading, that is, when the poem is addressed to the reader and the reader, in turn, becomes the "utterer". He insists on a shift in the discourse from formal monologicity and the model of linguistics, to the variety of addresses intended for the reader which the

former cannot adequately apprehend. Waters' disagreement with Vendler's popular view that the "lyric is a script written for performance by the reader—who, as soon as he enters the lyric, is no longer a reader but an utterer, saying the words of the poem... internally and with proprietary feeling" (qtd in Waters 14) in that a single reader taking on the voice and character of the addressee in the poem does not exhaust the variety of addresses that poetry presents itself to us, does give us scope to move beyond the formalist and structuralist framework of monologicity, dialogicity or communication. However, his view sets a limit on the scope by arguing in favour of the experience of the reader coming to bear upon the address, assuming that every "you", even when it's not explicitly mentioned, is always already designated or assigned to the reader, moving from one experience to another, treating it as a means to an end by taking away the singularity of the "you". This also seems to suggest that speech, the domain of infinite signification, is the ultimate destination of the poem. It is our contention that to accommodate the variety of addresses that poems present to us, we have to be able to think beyond designation, to think of address as a singular gesture, especially in Celan's poetry.

From our reading of the history of poetic address, we may assert the following about address in Celan's poetry: It undercuts every act of utterance and address that strengthens language, with its active performance of loss in language. The difference between an isolated textual realm facilitated by the (pretense) of address to an other and an appropriated poetic speech which is one of the many functions of a language of communication, is immaterial to Celan. Celan's poetry is an event which *wounds* language to welcome an other through the act of address—an other who is an altogether other.

We may further argue that the relationship between Celan's lyric and the lyric genre to which his poetry was assimilated, can be explained with Derrida's "The Law of Genre" (1980). The injunction "genres are not to be mixed" already solicits a contamination and, that

which follows the command and promises to be obey by saying, “I will not mix genres” betrays the command (Derrida 55 – 56). All literary genres are inextricably linked to law, to the force of law. When we categorise a work under a genre, we foreclose any possibility of errancy, difference or deviation. But members of a genre find ways to bring their errancy to the genre, exposing its limits (which it otherwise covers to prevent errancy), showing the possibility of a new genre, or many genres. Derrida writes,

> Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text: there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging... because of the *trait* of participation itself because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark... This inclusion and this exclusion do not remain exterior to one another; they do not exclude each other. But neither are they immanent or identical to each other. They are neither one nor two. They form what I shall call the genre-clause, a clause stating at once the juridical utterance, the precedent-making designation and the law-text, but also the closure, the closing that excludes itself from what it includes (one could also speak of a floodgate of genre)... (65)

In our dissertation, we will trace registers of errancy in Celan’s poetry, brought in by the addressee, the other. All the three chapters will be animated by this errancy. To that end, in the first chapter, we will closely read Celan’s speech delivered on the occasion of receiving the Buchner prize in the year 1960 called “The Meridian” and try to understand how Celan’s notion of dialogicity differs from Benn’s and Heidegger’s notion of monologicity, to finally show that Celan’s dialogicity makes room for response and errancy. In the second chapter, we will closely read four poems about melancholy and try to show that the idea of melancholy, historically understood as a feeling that endows the subject with infinite capacity to understand the world, has to be negotiated with the addressee, the other. In a similar vein, in the third and final chapter, we will closely read the poems Celan sent to his childhood

friend turned lover Ilana Shmueli to show that the idea of love has to be negotiated in a way that love does not turn into an ideology of love but leaves room for difference and errancy.

In all the chapters, philosopher Martin Heidegger will remain, explicitly or implicitly, Celan's interlocutor.

Chapter One

Celan and the Economy of Poetic Address

On 22 October 1960, Paul Celan received the Georg Buchner Prize, Germany's premier literary award. He began his widely known speech "The Meridian" with the premise of art that is an automaton and a puppet. Art, Celan writes in the speech, is emblemised in the characters of Buchner's works—Danton and Camille from his play *Danton's Death*, the characters from *Leonce and Lena,* and *Woyzeck*; and Lenz, from the short fragment of the same name. Here, art is presented as a ubiquitous and powerful assimilating force that all the characters are continuously talking about. Art, they agree, is a stable index of one's time, place and being. "Oh, art!" ("The Meridian" 40) sighs Camille, since art is also the mainspring of revolution. Those who discourse on art, Danton and his men, dream of going to their death together— "Fabre would even like to die 'twice'" (39), since the men always rise to the occasion. But when Celan mysteriously writes that whenever one talks about art, there is someone who does not pay attention, someone who does not listen, we meet Lucile. What do the confusing words "Long live the king!" (qtd in Celan 40) coming from Lucile towards the end of the play signify, we may wonder. Lucile comes to the stage following Danton's and Camille's execution and painfully remarks:

> Everything else is allowed to go on living […] Everything's astir… everything continues just as before, for ever and ever. —But no! It mustn't happen, no! I shall sit on the ground and scream, so everything stops, shocked into stillness, not a flicker of movement. [She sits down covers her eyes, and screams. After a pause, she stands up.] It makes no difference. Things are just as they were… (qtd in Levine 38)

Lucile's words fail to create an impact on the people around her. But in the next scene, she screams "Long live the king" at a patrol that was on its way to the site of the execution. This sudden cry (or address) leads to her immediate arrest and eventual death. Her absurd cry suddenly stops the play in its tracks. Who is Lucile? What does she represent? Lucile stands for poetry, Celan writes. Her absurd, unassimilable homage (or *address*) to the monarchy, comprise the words of poetry that art cannot make sense of.

Having met Lucile at the very beginning of our first chapter, we will, in the remaining pages, attempt the following: a) By closely reading the speech, try to show that the speech underlines an active tension between Celan's poetics and the existing tradition of monologous lyric poetry of his times represented by Gottfried Benn and Martin Heidegger; b) argue that Lucile's confusing and unassimilable cry defines address in Celan's poems—where, address is to be seen both in its nominal and verbal forms, that is, as its identity, basic nature or *dwelling* and the manner in which the poem speaks to an other.

I

In "The Meridian", there is a tense antagonism between art and poetry—poetry ricochets off of art, but the latter continues to guide the former's movement. Art is the overarching, guiding force of poetry— "art is the distance poetry must cover, no less and no more" ("The Meridian" 45). But, Celan writes, sometimes, a poem can move faster, can surge ahead of art in its flight towards silence. In the speech, poetry oscillates between the figures of Lucile and Lenz, between absurd cries for freedom and silence, between "still here" and "already no more" (49) — "Lenz—that is Buchner—has gone a step farther than Lucile. His 'Long live the king' is no longer a word. It is a terrifying silence. It takes his—and our—breath and words away" (47). The silence that he refers to is the silence of the historical Lenz, Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz—the contemporary of Goethe who worked extensively during the

Sturm and Drang movement—whose schizophrenia became got so worse on the "20th of January"[4] (46) that he permanently fell silent. Remembering Lenz Celan writes, "Perhaps we can say that every poem is marked by its own '20th of January'?" (47) suggesting that poems bear the mark of historical and personal wound. Poems make us remain painfully mindful of all these dates. Art marks the estrangement of the self from its "I"; poetry marks freedom *in* this estrangement, granting the self an "inhabitable distance" (52) from the "I". In this freedom, Celan writes, one corresponds with the other, and the poem holds the mystery of the encounter. Towards the end of the speech, Celan suggests that we withdraw art into our innermost narrowness, into our darkness and set ourselves free—not to enlarge art but to render it vulnerable and fragile.

In an essay titled "*Pendant*: Celan, Buchner, and the Terrible Voice of the Meridian" Michael G. Levine closely reads the specific moments from Buchner's plays that Celan refers to in his speech. He draws the readers' attention to the important fact that in the plays, each of these scenes refers to the meridian in one way or another, that each constitutes a "meridinal moment" in which the play faces its crisis. The meridian acts as a metonymy for a sovereign moment. But, it is a moment which is not just characterised by resolution because the latter gives a sense of grounding or gathering. The meridinal moment is abyssal, a kind of "suspension" (Levine 47). Let us closely observe some of these moments and try to think why Celan uses them in his speech to set a premise for his poetry. Levine begins his essay with Buchner's 1825 play *Danton's Death*,[5] first focusing on the moment when pamphleteer

[4] Incidentally, 20th of January (1942) is the day the Wannsee Conference was held. The meeting was called to implement the Nazi party's decision to deport to Poland and murder most of the Jews of the German-occupied Europe.
[5] We may recall that Georges Danton had been one of the leaders of the French Revolution along with Robespierre. They were both part of the revolutionary government. However, as we all know Robespierre was quite ruthless and had condemned a lot of people to death. Danton had grown wary of Robespierre and had started to have doubts about the Reign of Terror that had sent its opponents to the guillotine. When Robespierre became suspicious of him, he ordered his men to immediately arrest Danton and execute him along with his allies Camille and others. Lucile appears on stage when Danton and his allies have already been sent to their deaths.

Camille's widower Lucile cries "Long live the king!". The next meridional moment comes with the 1836 comedy *Leonce and Lena*. The plot revolves around the wedding ceremony of King Peter's son Prince Leonce and the latter's impending succession to the throne upon marriage. However, just before the wedding, the bride and the groom disappear. When they finally return, the actors behind the characters of Leonce and Lena resurface *as* actors, enacting the scenes mechanically to overemphasise the artificiality of the moment. The fool Valerio accentuates the absurdity of the moment when he addresses the audience by saying,

> What I really wanted to say was to announce to this noble and venerable company the arrival of these two world-famous *automata*. I would have added that I am perhaps the third and the oddest of them all—if, that is, I myself actually knew for certain who I am, though no one by the way should be surprised that I don't, since I myself know nothing of what I say, and don't even know that I don't know, so that it's highly probable that I am simply being made to talk like this… (qtd in Levine 41, emphasis mine)

With the above, we begin to realise how and why Lucile's cry marks a moment in the play which is unassimilable. It is a fiery and confusing speech act that stops the play in its tracks and creates a moment of *stasis*. It may be simultaneously read as an homage to the monarchy and a betrayal to her husband's cause, but one must also remember that the cry turns out to be her self-imposed death sentence. In the end, she meets Danton's and Camille's fate. In the play *Leonce and Lena*, the last scene serves a similar function. When the artifice is made apparent with the actors resurfacing from behind the characters they play, that moment becomes unassimilable to the rest of the play. But, quite ironically, that moment also becomes the climactic moment of the play. Not only does this moment create a rupture in the narrative of the plot and create a moment of *stasis* for the characters of the play—the character of the king is no longer sure of the fate of his kingdom after this sudden change—it

also creates a moment of confusion for the actors who will no longer be sure of the ways of acting. In this moment of crisis, the line between representation and reality gets blurred. Both the plays contain metaphors of the meridian, which is the circle that runs through the zenith and the nadir of the earth from an observer's point of view. If we study the different metaphors of the meridian, we may begin to think in the direction of Celan's idea of poetry.

While in *Leonce and Lena*, the meridian is represented as the geographical high point of the king from where he can keep a watch on his entire kingdom— "Yes, your Majesty: the view from this room here allows us to keep the most rigorous watch" (qtd in Levine 40), says the master of ceremonies to reassure the King after Leonce disappears, in *Danton's Death,* it is represented by time, culminating in a moment in the play when Danton shouts "September!"[6] (qtd in Levine 48) in his sleep. This word, a lone temporal unit, haunts him, stays with him as something that can neither be removed nor assimilated. Interestingly, this scene spills into the scene outside where the guards are preparing to arrest him. One guard asks the other what time it was, and the other says, "It's the time when all those still little pendulums stop swinging beneath the bed sheets" (qtd in Levine 50).

Similarly, in *Woyzeck*,[7] the meridional moment arrives when the protagonist first announces, "when the sun's up high in the middle of the day and it seems like the world is bursting into flames, the terrible voice starts talking to me" (qtd in Levine 41). Almost at the same time, the captain he works for, poignantly discourses on the disparateness of time. He urges Woyzeck to keep up ("Pace it, Woyzeck, pace it!", qtd in Levine 42), speed things up

[6] Michael G. Levine notes that this cry has a historical significance. The reference is to the year 1792 when, as the then Minister of Justice, Danton had refused to prevent the execution of nearly 1400 prison inmates in Paris and called it an "indispensable sacrifice" (qtd in Levine 49).
[7] *Woyzeck* is a well-known German play by Buchner, published posthumously in the year 1879. It is about a poor German soldier who does menial jobs and undergoes different medical experiments to sustain his family and suffers from severe mental illness which causes him to have visions. Marie, the mother of his child, with whom he lives, betrays him by sleeping with a drum major. When he finds out, he confronts the major. The major beats him up and humiliates. Infuriated by this incident, Woyzeck stabs Marie to death by a pond.

in life. It surprises the captain that things that are here to stay forever, for eternity, finish important business in a short span of time— "Woyzeck, it makes me shudder when I think that the world revolves in a single day, what a waste of time, where's it all going to end...I can't bear to see a millwheel turning any more—it makes me *melancholic*"[8] (qtd in Levine 42, emphasis mine). The eternal can also be a single instant of time. Incidentally, the "terrible voice" also acts as a metaphor for the midday of Woyzeck's life—he is thirty and has thirty more years to live as the captain suggests. The voice creates a time warp and like the meridional moments in the previous two plays, creates a moment of *stasis*. This is further echoed in a later scene where Woyzeck gazes at the sky and remarks that "… it makes you want to bang a nail into it and hang yourself, just because of the tiny line—the *Gedankenstrichel*—between yes and no, d'you see, sir, yes and no? Is no to blame for yes or yes for no?" (qtd in Levine 44)

In the year 1954, Celan wrote the poem "Sprich auch du" ("Speak you too") in response to a review of his collection *Mohn und Gedachtnis* (*Poppy and Memory* published in 1952) by well-known poet and critic Hans Egon Holthusen in the respected monthly journal *Merkur*. Holthusen congratulated the poet for his "fantastic association" (qtd in Felstiner 78) and "unqualified arbitrary *lyric* imagination" (78, emphasis mine). Celan's biographer John Felstiner writes that this review severely discomposed the poet as he felt that the reviewer had unmindfully appropriated his work to an existing tradition of lyric poetry, focusing only on the form instead of its meaning (79), reducing the poem to a mere abstraction on the page. This one-dimensional reading had greatly pained Celan, and like Woyzeck's last speech, in a similar vein he wrote,

Speak you too,

---

[8] To know more about the different registers of burden and world-weariness that cause melancholy, see chapter three, section I.

Speak as the last,

Say out your say.

Speak—

But don't split off No from Yes.

Give your say this meaning too:

Give it the shadow.

Give it shadow enough,

Give it as much

As you know is spread round you from

Midnight to midday and midnight.

Look around:

See how things all come alive—

By death! By Alive!

Speaks true who speaks shadow. (Celan and Felstiner 79 – 80)

This poem may be read as a direct homage to Lucile's cry—Lucile, who spoke "shadow", who did not "split off No from Yes" —her cry is not only unassimilable, it also resists interpretation. What is the form of the cry we may ask as we often ask of poetry—is it an answer? Is it a definitive statement *about* something? Her cry cannot be subsumed under any of these questions. It may also be said that the poem suggests that Celan was dissatisfied with the existing guidelines for interpreting poetry in the literary-hermeneutic tradition of his times. The desperate injunction to the addressee to speak, to make her speech shadowy betrays the speaker's tension and disappointment with a tradition of writing poetry that can be

easily interpreted by a given tradition of writing and criticism. We will come to the specific nature of the tradition in a moment.

Celan also uses the metaphor of the meridian to explain his poetic practice vis-à-vis the function of time in an already existing tradition and structure of writing exemplified in the word "art". In "Backlight" from his *Collected Prose*, we come across these short, pithy utterances which show limits of linear time and perception. "Four seasons, but no fifth to give our choice perspective" (*Collected Prose* 12); "The hour jumped out of the clock, stood facing it, and ordered it to work properly" (12). Perspective is understood as something that is anchored to the natural order of linear time, to the mechanical function of the clock, but these lines surpass these boundaries and carry time and perception to a liminal place, where their limits are exposed; there, it becomes possible to think of a fifth season, and an errant hour. Here is what Celan says about poetry and its relationship to time— "…the poem does not stand outside time. True, it claims the infinite and tries to reach across time—but across, not above" (34).

Celan opens his speech delivered on the occasion of receiving the literature prize of the free Hanseatic city of Bremen by observing that the words "denken" and "danken" have the same root in his language, that is, the words thinking and thanking have the same root which also share roots with the words memory and devotion ("Bremen Speech" 33). We may also recall Martin Heidegger drawing our attention to the common root between "denken" and "dichtung", between thinking and poetry in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. We may think, according to Celan, all these words are part of the same semantic field. "Backlight" here is akin to "breathturn"[9] or *Atemwende*, the title of Celan's last collection of poetry—both

[9] Breath is important for the composition of poetry. It plays an important role in deciding the placement of lines and also influences the use of certain figures of speech. Halt in reading is the halt of breath. Anna Galzova argues that for Celan breathturn could mean an escape from crisis. But Timothy Clark sees this as the crisis of subjectivity, something that, as Derrida suggests has to be negotiated in language (Salminen 109). In his draft notes to "The Meridian", Celan under the section

metaphors for poetry in which something is at stake, something that changes the course of things, something that causes a turn. In order to study the specific nature of this turn, we are compelled to change the course of our thinking.

Towards the end of the speech, Celan reflects on the arrival of another time in the poem, time affecting the "acute of the present" ("The Meridian" 40) in the poem: "Even in the here and now of the poem—and the poem has only this one, unique, momentary present—even in this immediacy and nearness, the otherness gives voice to what is most its own: its time" (50). The collective function of Lucile; Leonce and Lena and Valerio; and Woyzeck is akin to Celan's poetic practice in that they mark the arrival of a sovereign moment as a radical opening. They facilitate the arrival of a moment that cannot be rationalised in terms of our traditional and historical notion of resolution, break, or turn, the latter simply seen as the opposite of something else. To begin to think in the direction of Lucile's speech act and the others' speeches, we have to realise that these instances have to be thought axiomatically, not just rationally. Only through such thinking, according to Celan, can poetry arrive. In a similar vein Felstiner echoes: ""The Meridian" makes it an axiom—that the poet speaks "actualised language, at once voiced and voiceless, set free under the sign of a radical individualisation, which at the same time stays mindful of the limits set by language, the possibilities opened by language."" (163) Celan's meridional poetry marks the arrival of a sovereign moment of radical opening, a disclosure which in its "backlight", in its "shadow", in its "breathturn" will usher in a new thinking about poetry.

If we think about the nature of the address in each of the three plays once again, we will realise that each one is alienated from the larger domain of speech or discourse or narrative in one way or another as though they are tangential to the structure of the play and

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called "Breath" writes, "You are, when your breath marbles it, given over to your poem" (Böschenstein and Schmull 117).

are conveying the betrayal of voice, speech and language through their address. Perhaps two companion poems, one by Rilke and the other by Celan, can help us understand the aforesaid better:

> *No longer, voice*. No longer let wooing shape
>
> Your cry.
>
> You're beyond it. Even though you'd call out as
>
> clear as a bird
>
> when Spring first bears him aloft, almost forget-
>
> ting
>
> that he's a cautious creature and not an unsheathed heart...
>
> Like him, with all his art, you'd also woo—: as
>
> yet invisible,
>
> so that some silent mate might learn of you thus... (Rilke 531)

> Hours, May-coloured, cool.
>
> The no more to be named, hot,
>
> audible in the mouth.
>
> *No one's voice, again.*
>
> Aching depth of the eyeball:
>
> the lid
>
> does not stand in its way, the lash
>
> does not count what goes in.

The tear, half

The sharper lens, movable,

brings the images home to you. (*Selected Poems* 56, emphases mine)

If we pay attention to the isolated phrase "No one's voice, again", we will realise that it's analogous to Rilke's excerpt in that the latter also draws our attention to the absence of voice— "No longer, voice". Yet, there is a difference in the implication of absence. Rilke's excerpt may begin with the absence of voice or, the inadequacy of voice for the addressee, but it does not foreclose the possibility (or availability) of voice as the addressee is urged to cry out or woo for the "silent mate". Besides, the adjective "longer" suggests that voice was indeed present during a previous occasion. But, in Celan's poem on the other hand, the use of the adverb "again" suggests that apart from the instance present in the poem, there was at least one other instance when voice was absent, foreclosing the possibility of hearing any voice. The phrase marks the meridional moment in the poem. In the total absence of voice, there is absence of name. In the absence of a hegemonic voice, the other senses are active. The addressee relies on the senses to find the images.

But there comes something to replace voice that is not hegemonic, something that does not silence. This no voice, but a "late-noise":

No

voice—a

late-noise, alien to hours, a

gift for your thoughts, here at last

wakened: a

carpel, eyesize, deeply

nicked; it

resins, will not

scar over. (Celan and Felstiner 100)

In the absence of the voice, the other hears a noise that cannot keep up with time. But, despite this privation, despite being “nicked” (wounded) from this privation, it “resins” (hardens), and doesn’t “scar over” anymore. This “late-noise” is a gift for the addressee, a gift for the others’ thoughts. This poem poignantly encapsulates Lucile’s cry.

To get the full import of Celan’s speech, it would perhaps not be enough to qualify his poetry simply as a break in a tradition of writing or “art” that the former is in constant tension with. It is necessary to further probe into the nature of this “art” and then contextualise this break or stasis that is Celan’s poetry in the history of that art.

II

Indeed, what does the word “art”[10] imply in the essay? There is good reason to believe that art here represents the genre of lyric poetry. We have already learnt from Felstiner that Celan was dissatisfied with the assimilation of his poetry into an “arbitrary lyric imagination”. Moreover, it would, perhaps, not be entirely unfounded to believe that “The Meridian” bears veiled responses to Gottfried Benn’s[11] 1951 lecture “Problems der Lyrik”[12] (“Problems of the Lyric” or “Problems of Poetry”) to which we had made a passing reference in the introduction. Incidentally, Benn was also awarded the Buchner prize before Celan in 1951.

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[10] It is hard to miss the resonance with Heidegger’s discussion of art in “The Origin of the Work of Art”. His phenomenological reading of Van Gogh’s painting may come to mind. Heidegger argues that a new work has absolute autonomy over the maker and the people who come to see. It can be seen as an event in history which can change our perception of history and Being.

[11] In the introduction to *Impromptus*, Gottfried Benn’s selected poems, editor and translator Michael Hofman writes that Benn (1886 – 1956) was a military man, a doctor and a poet, all at once and inform that,

“…in 1933 and 1934, Benn drifted into the Nazi orbit… He drafted the declaration of loyalty to the newly returned Nazi government that precipitated mass resignations from the *Preussische Akademie der Kunste*, to which he had only recently been elected… he gave a talk welcoming the Italian Futurist (and Fascist) poet F.T. Marinetti to Berlin; he was briefly Vice-President of Hitler’s ‘*Union Nationaler Schrifstellar*’.” (xiv) Benn was part of the proto-modern Nordic Expressionist movement in Germany. According to Hofman, he is one of the greatest poets Germany has ever produced.

[12] This essay has been translated with the help of colleagues and friends.

We can speculate that Celan invokes Benn without directly referring to him.[13] Towards the end of his speech, Celan asks a series of rhetorical questions about the use of images and referents in his poems and answers them by saying that none of them can make up the absolute poem: "I am talking about a poem which does not exist. The absolute poem—no, it certainly does not, cannot exist… in every real poem, even the least ambitious, there is… this exorbitant claim" ("The Meridian" 51). Benn, on the other hand writes, "Everything comes from the colours, the unpredictable nuances, the vaults—the poem comes from everything. Out of all this comes the poem… the absolute poem, the poem without faith, the poem without hope, the poem *addressed* to no one" (Benn 39, emphasis mine). And then finally, he makes an urgent claim that is perhaps more pertinent for our study: "The absolute poem needs no turnaround, it is able to operate without time, as the formulas of modern physics have long been doing" (42).

In this long and engaging appraisal of lyric poetry of his time, Benn makes a case for poetry that is essentially "monological". He studies three special themes of lyric poetry, namely, a poem's appearance, the process of composition, and finally, the word. At the very outset, Benn laments the overabundance of poems and objects that people write about in his time. He observes that poems which result from spontaneous reactions to everyday incidents are simply created, while the lyric poem is "made" (1). He differentiates lyric poetry from this "emotional", "moody" (2) poetry as that which encapsulates the poet's "artistry" (2). The modern lyric poet, according to Benn, presents a philosophy of the composition of the poem. He further argues that the modern lyrical renaissance started in France with Mallarmé and radiated to Germany and influenced poets such as Rilke, Stefan George and Hofmannsthal. The western poem, according to him, is held together by a thought of the form and this

[13] James K. Lyon in his essay "*The Meridian*: An Implicit Dialogue with Heidegger" confirms that the speech is a veiled criticism of Benn (Lyon 228) and so does Amir Eshel in the essay "Paul Celan's Other: History, Poetics, and Ethics". See pages 62 – 63.

thought is represented in lyric poetry: “Artistry is the attempt of art to experience itself as content within the general decay of content and to form a new style out of this experience; it is an attempt to set a new transcendence against the general nihilism of values…” (13) And while explaining the monological nature of the modern lyric poem he quotes a certain Richard Wilburns who wittily said, “a poem… is addressed to the muse, and one of its purposes is to conceal the fact that *poetry is not addressed to anyone*” (14, emphasis mine). For composition, Benn suggests that the poet focus on the “how” of creation, instead of the “what”. In order to achieve the “how” the poet has to forsake knowledge of things and go closer to the objects that she intends to represent: “The lyric poet cannot know enough, he cannot work enough, he has to be close to everything, he has to orient himself where the world is today…” (38) But even then, the modern lyric poet should carry the object into the fold of her very *being* and render it impure and autonomous. This process is ossified in the poetic *word*. Through the lyric, the poet has to transcend becoming. In the end he writes, that the poet can attain this monologicity only if she manages to fill in the ontological emptiness of the things she observes and can regain a metaphysical status for her poetic language. Perhaps reading some of his poems will help us think about this poetic process of filling in ontological emptiness. This is Benn writing about another September:

> You, mountain-ash hung
>
> from Indian summer,
>
> stubbly ghost,
>
> cabbage whites in your breath,
>
> let many hands tick,
>
> cuckoo clocks strike,
>
> bells din for evensong,
>
> gong

the hour so fixed and golden,

so definitively weathered,

into a trembling heart!

You – other!

Only gods

or tunics

of invincible Titans rest so,

long-made,

so deeply sewn into the

the tracks of flowers and moths!

[…] Sound it, gong it,

this hour,

because when you cease,

the edges of the fields will encroach,

poplar-grown and chill. (Benn 36 – 37)

The poem has a temporal structure, signified by the title “September”, the word “hour” and the vocative pronoun “You”. The pronoun “You” and the subsequent possessive “your” are the most fascinating and striking aspects of the poem. We may notice that without the word “You”, the poem works just fine. When we read the poem without “You”, September resurfaces as the default subject of the poem. This rainy, monsoonal month of the year is apostrophised and characterised as a weak remnant of “Indian summer”, personified as a “stubbly ghost”, presenting its “ontological emptiness”. September is urged to call forth its “fixed” and “golden” hour and assert itself by gonging the bell. In the second stanza, we

learn only gods and brave men like the Titans are granted time to rest in such weather, mere mortals do not have the luxury to think about inclement weather. The command is intensified in the last stanza with the stern and curt "Sound it, gong it, / this hour…" because without the defining hour of September, everything will grow cold. The poem becomes a potential site for gathering the hour of September, and remains open to the hour of September, of the empirical season, and remains a site of possibilities to "fill in" its inadequacy. But the addition of "You" changes our reading. The word marks an address, splitting the subject of the poem into an apostrophised September and a fictional other— "You – other!" —who is also called upon to gong the bell and gather the hour. It extends the time and space of the subject to the time and space of the fictional "You" and defines the horizon of another desirable time and hour that the latter can call forth, and to the reader or the audience as a *deictic* address to mark an iterable present. There are two kinds of addresses in the poem, namely, apostrophic and deictic. Jonathan Culler in his seminal essay called the "Apostrophe" argues that this trope of poetic address to unhearing entities or inanimate objects has turned into a vocation in modern poetry to mark the speaker's solipsism: "Culler can thus identify apostrophic invocation as a trope of poetic vocation, the self's performance of itself. Positing, moreover, an opposition between narrative temporality and lyric timelessness…" (Waters 61)

In his essay, Culler charts apostrophe's transition from a figure of speech used as an overt address or injunction to an inanimate object, a passionate emotional response signified through expressions of "O" and extra-poetic elements such as the exclamation mark and the hyphen, to a *repressed* address. This gradual repression, this lack of overt invocation turns into a poetic vocation in modern poetry and shifts focus from the world of the addressee, the myriad entities and their unique nature, to the subject's *ability* to write about them and make them respond in the way the subject desires. The object is brought on the subject's side in this

manner, its autonomy compromised. This is a direct consequence of post-enlightenment thought which sought to overcome the distance between the subject and the object. Apostrophe as a figure of speech is deployed to constitute the object as a subject. In Benn's case, it is the empirical season of September, called forth to poetically function as per the speaker desires. This may remind us of Mill's assertion that the lyric poet turns her back on her addressee even while addressing, and the poetic voice is overheard: "eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard" (qtd in Richards 1525). Culler then examines the common practice of addressing a "thou". He writes that apostrophising something or someone as "thou" or "you" is a solipsistic act aimed at a radical interiorisation. In this respect Paul de Man echoes Culler:

> The object of the apostrophe is only addressed in terms of an activity that it provokes in the addressing subject: if it is said to be a forest, it is only with reference to *our* behaviour toward this forest... The metaphors therefore do not connote objects, sensations, or qualities of objects but refer to an activity of the speaking subject. The dominating center, the 'du' (you) of the poem, is present in the poem only to delegate, so to speak, its potential activity to the speaking voice; this becomes the explicit theme of the poem... (qtd in Culler 163 – 164, emphasis mine)

This may remind us of Benn's statement about address to the muse, a pretense to disguise the fact that the poem is addressed to nobody. Moreover, apostrophe also distinguishes lyric poetry from narrative poetry in that the former is not part of any sequence of time but marks the "now" of poetic discourse.

The deictic address, on the other hand, narrows the poem down from an eternal abstract presence of September to the instant of utterance, to the time of she who speaks "You": "Deictic terms refer to a present situation of utterance and its speaker rather than to a fixed object, concept, or reality. Common deictics are those of time (e.g., *now, today*), space

(e.g., *here, this town*), person (I, you) …" (Pines 344). Therefore, deixis accentuates the "now" of the poem and opens up the *possibility* of enunciation, utterance and response. The poem assimilates the hour of September and its essence, and the hour and context of utterance into its fold. We may perhaps say that the deictic address marks the meridional moment in the poem. This dual act of *presencing* defines its monological nature. This resonates with Benn's point about the poem needing no turnaround. But this September is not Danton's "September!".

It's possible that Celan remembered this previous Buchner awardee and his discourse on poetry even though there is no direct reference to the speech.[14] "The Meridian" underlines several moments from the "Problem of the Lyric". One such outstanding response is Celan's proposition that the poem is uncompromisingly dialogical—it's a "desperate conversation" (50) with the other. But, this conversation is not merely a means to an end that returns to the subject of the poem as Benn suggests, and nor is it dialogical in the sense we have elaborated in the introduction. The site of the conversation is a radical opening, and this is both the means and the end of the poem. Celan's essay undercuts the notion of opposition. In Celan's critique[15] of art (we must recall that Benn constantly refers to poetic practice as "artistry"), he does not forsake art to distinguish his poetry. Poetry has to *effect* a radical difference and break within art, or in this case, the tradition of monological lyric poetry. We may read one of his short poems to think about this point:

[14] More so because of his association with the Nazi Party.

[15] It's important to note that, unlike Benn, Celan bypassed his well-known German poet predecessors and sought inspiration from excerpts of a play. It is certain that he felt alienated by the expressionist poetics of his predecessors and his contemporaries. The plagiarism charges made by Claire Goll, expressionist bilingual poet Yvan Goll's widow, made matters worse. Not only did she accuse him of lifting from her husband's 1951 volume of poetry for his *Poppy and Memory*, she also blamed him for the rejection of his German translations of Yvan Goll's French poetry by a Swiss publisher, calling them "cursory and inept". Even though several well-known poets and critics like Ingeborg Bachmann, Peter Szondi, the German Academy of Language, came to his defence, Goll's accusation left an indelible mark on his already fragile and wounded poetic mind (Felstiner 154).

Illegibility

of this world. All things twice over.

The strong clocks justify

the splitting hour,

hoarsely.

You clamped

into your deepest part,

climb out of yourself

for ever. (*Selected Poems* 105)

The deictic address appears at a moment in the last stanza when there is no legible world left to gather. It marks a moment of crisis and stasis even for the one uttering these words. The words that precede this stanza where "You" is urged to climb out, takes away the presence or even the possibility of a fixed hour. Yet they are urged to climb out and stay on "for ever" promising them abundant time and world in the absence of a legible world and in the absence of functional objective time. In the absence of a legible world and a fixed hour, the poem no longer remains a stable site for gathering. Due to the "illegibility" of the world and its split hour, its structure remains undetermined. We can neither determine its temporality, nor its spatiality. The "ontological emptiness" of the world becomes the poem's subject. The poem is rendered as lonely as "You", as the other. The deixis solicits the voice of the other and in doing so, destabilises its interiority and solipsism. It opens up the possibility of a conversation, perhaps a "desperate conversation".

In his draft notes to the "The Meridian", notes which did not finally make it to the final version of the speech, Celan writes,

> The poem is inscribed as the figure of the [complete] language; but language remains invisible{.}; that which actualises itself—language—takes steps, as soon as that has happened, back into the realm of the possible... The poem is the place where synonymity becomes impossible... Stepping out of language, the poem, steps opposite language. This opposition cannot be *sublated*... that's why the poem, in its being and not through its subject matter first—is a school of true humanity: it teaches to understand the other as the other [i.e. in its otherness] ... (Böschenstein and Heino 104 – 105)

We can hardly miss the reference to Hegel in the word "sublated"[16]. Thus, it becomes clear that the opposition between the poem and language is not dialectical. The opposition cannot be resolved into a synthesis with the cancellation of one by the other. This view challenges the structuralist mode of monologicity or dialogicity we discussed in the introduction because it treats the poem as an absolute and the latter treats language as an absolute (as in Jakobson's notion of the poetic function as an attribute of (meta)language). The opposition remains, and the poem performs the opposition and the tension with language. Poetic address emerges

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[16] There is an uncanny resemblance between a passage from Hegel's *Introduction to Fine Art* describing the mind's infinite ability to think about the sensuous realm and a poem by Celan: While writing about the practical aspect of the mind's infinite ability to think and grasp the sensuous realm instead of hovering in the supra-sensuous, Hegel writes, "Even the child's first impulse involves the practical modification of external things. A boy throws stones into the river, and then stands admiring the circles that trace themselves on the water, as an effect in which he attains the sight of something that is his own doing" (Hegel 59). And Celan's poem says:

> I heard it said there was
> A stone in the water and a circle,
> And above the water a word
> That lays the circle around the stone (*Paul Celan: Selections* 32)

Celan takes Hegel's phenomenology of spirit and turns it into a riddle. The "word" seems to have superceded mere appearance of phenomena in the world. The appearance of "stone" and "circle" is simply reported and this act of reporting falls short of thought's ability to establish a connection between the two. In the poem it is the "word" which establishes the expected causal connection between the two. Word seems to be split between thought and poetry. The poem then ends by evoking a few questions: Is word here the vehicle of thought or is it detached from thought? Does it supercede thought? These questions destabilise the notion of subjectivity in the poem. If the self-consciousness of thought is what subjectivity is anchored to, then subjectivity is compromised through the subtle blurring of thought.

from this tension. We must remember Celan's poignant words that "the poem clearly shows a strong tendency towards silence" ("The Meridian" 48). The poem's address is marked by silence.

In his short essay called "Potentiality" Georgio Agamben critiques the opposition between potentiality and actuality, or *dynamis* and *energia*, and writes that this originary opposition has been inherited by Western philosophy and science. Following Aristotle, Agamben argues that potentially is associated with the capacity or the ability to do something, as in, an architect's capacity to be an architect or a poet's capacity to be a poet. Or, we may say that potentiality is capacity par excellence. By quoting a section on sensation or sensibility from Aristotle's *De Anima*, he argues that the notion of capacity comes from the idea of faculty. He writes,

> This problem—which is the originary problem of potentiality is: what does it mean "to have a faculty?" In what way can something like a "faculty" exist?... When we tell ourselves that human beings have the "faculty" of vision, the "faculty" of speech (or, as Hegel says, the faculty of death)—or even simply that something is or is not "in one's power" —we are already in the domain of potentiality. (Agamben 100)

Like Celan's reference to Hegel in the previous paragraph, Agamben's reference suggests that potentiality is associated with the Hegelian subject's capacity to know its death or the Spirit's potentiality to actualise death in thought because of its knowledge of finite existence. We must recall Heidegger's famous assertion that animals *perish*, and human beings *die*. By differentiating death in nature from the death of being, Hegel introduces the dialectical relationship between life and death (absence of life), death as the (internal) telos of life, and hence the Spirit possesses a "faculty" of death. Potentiality as faculty is the former's capacity to exist as the absence of something only to become that something; potentiality as faculty is infinitely generative. But following Aristotle, Agamben argues that potentiality is also the

capacity to not be, that is, potentiality is active impotentiality, potentiality not just as non-Being but as the existence of non-Being, potentiality that does not disappear with actuality, but potentiality (as impotentiality) preserved in actuality. Similarly, poetry, according to Celan is not the potentiality of language, but also the impotentiality (privation) of language or if we may say, it is potentiality as privation *in* language.[17] Poetry is potentiality (impotentiality) par excellence.

In her compelling comparative study of the poetry of ancient Greek poet Simonedes of Keos and Paul Celan called *Economy of the Unlost*, Anne Carson introduces a most important term to characterise the nature of their poetry—it's called "poetic economy". In the history of Western poetry, Simonedes is believed to be the first ever poet to have sold his poetry. Carson tells us that Simonedes lived at the intersection of two economic systems, that is, between gift economy and the economy of money. As soon as coins were introduced, his avariciousness caused him to demand money in exchange for poetry. But this was done at a time when gift economy was still in place. Following Marx, Carson argues that by unknowingly turning his poetry into commodity, Simonedes suddenly found himself alienated from his own language, rather, alienated *in* his own language. His poetic language was affected by the fact of exchange. When poetic language is affected by alienation and exchange, it is inflected with an irrecoverable negativity which resists a unified poetic character or address. We may also say that the poem performs this alienation and exchange, and the negativity becomes its potentiality, that is, potentiality as negativity. Poetic language is constantly at a loss, but it is also the last refuge, the only means for survival. Celan's poetry is comparable to Simonedes' because it is also afflicted by this alienation and compelled by

[17] William Franke writes that the privation of language can be defined as apophatic. Apophasis is a form of negative theology. He writes, "Apophasis is the Greek word for negation... specifically used to designate the negation, and especially the self-negation, of discourse... Philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, as well as writers like Maurice Blanchot and Samuel Beckett, along with Celan and Jabes, consciously work in an apophatic vein..." (Franke 621 – 623).

the need to exchange—address becomes necessary. Regarding the similarity between Simonedes and Celan, she writes,

> We have already seen how Simonedes' alienation began with the historical situation—on a cusp between two economic systems, gazing at both and all too aware of their difference...Strangeness for Celan arose out of language and went back down into language... For he lived in exile in Paris most of his life and wrote poetry in German, which was the language of his mother but also the language of those who murdered his mother... in order to write poetry at all, he had to develop an outside relationship with a language he had once been inside. (Carson 28 – 29)

We may add to that and say that he had to negotiate the outside with an other, survive in the outside with an other through address. So, poetic *economy* replaces poetic *function*. In Celan's poetry, address emerges in this economy (alienation, privation, exchange) of language. At this juncture, it's important for us to realise that this shift from poetic function to poetic economy can also be seen as the shift from poetic ontology to poetic ethicality and this necessitates a more elaborate study which will be done in the next section. Although briefly, but we had already touched upon poetic ontology when we discussed Rilke's excerpt in the first and the second sections of this chapter. But for a deeper understanding, we will have to also read Heidegger's idea of poetry.

III

Several critics have suggested that apart from Gottfried Benn, Heidegger is an important interlocutor of Celan's and one of the addressee's of "The Meridian". Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe considers the speech "a response to Heidegger", Veronique Foti writes that "the name written, so to speak, in invisible ink throughout and across the text is that of Heidegger," and Axel Gellhaus said that it is an "implicit dialogue with Heidegger" (Lyon

122). Therefore, Heidegger's thoughts about language and poetry are indispensable for the study of Celan. In his later works, Heidegger turned to poetry to show how language is strongly wound around the question of *Being*. According to Heidegger, the language of *Dasein*, who is truly open to the question of Being, is inherently poetic. Moreover, thinking and poetising are deeply interconnected. For Heidegger, poetry is not just a category but an instance of authentic thinking in language which is why art, poetry and language form the core of his later work. Heidegger's *way* of thinking about poetry and language is phenomenological in that it is purely experiential. He does not impose a theory of language to study poetry. Rather, his theory does not have a language apart from the language of poetry. It is inherent in the language of poetry. What this means is poetry performs the *destruction* of instrumental language. Destruction here is not mere negation but implies the gradual unraveling of language *qua* language through language that is *used* in speech or saying. In "The Way to Language", by critiquing Wilhelm von Humboldt's notion that language is *actualised* speech. Humboldt writes,

> In itself language is not work (*ergon*) but an activity (*energeia*). Its true definition may therefore only be genetic. It is after all the continual intellectual effort to make the articulated sound capable of expressing thought. In a rigorous sense, this is the definition of speech in each given case. Essentially, however, only the totality of this speaking can be regarded as language. (Qtd in Heidegger 116 – 117)

So, according to Humboldt, the essence of language lies in speech. Language may be an activity in itself, but it manifests itself in speech. We must recall that energeia is also the Greek word for actuality. Following Humboldt, Heidegger writes that if speech or saying is also showing then as long as its showing, it falls short of the authentic experience of language. He writes,

> Speaking, qua saying something, belongs to the design of the being of language, the design which is pervaded by all the modes of saying and of what is said, in which everything present or absent announces, grants or refuses itself, shows itself or withdraws... With regard to the manifold ties of saying, we shall call the being of language in its totality "Saying" —and confess that even so we still have not caught sight of what unifies those ties. (123)

Poetising is a way to catch sight of that which unifies the ties of saying. Hence, poetic ontology lies in facilitating the way to language. We will have a better understanding of poetic ontology if we study Heidegger's reading of poetry.

Apart from Rilke, the two other poets Heidegger closely studied are German poets Stefan George, in his essays "The Nature of Language" and "Words", and Georg Trakl in "Language in the Poem" in his book *On the Way to Language* (1959). George's poem "Words" (1919) encapsulates Heidegger's phenomenology of language:

> Wonder or dream from distant land
> I carried to my country's strand
>
> And waited till the twilit norn
> Had found the name within her bourn–
>
> Then I could grasp it close and strong
> It blooms and shines now the front along...
>
> Once I returned from happy sail,
> I had a prize so rich and frail,

She sought for long and tidings told:

"No like of this these depths enfold."

And straight it vanished from my hand,

The treasure never graced my land...

So I renounced and sadly see:

Where word breaks off no thing may be. (140)

In his essay on Trakl, Heidegger argues that every great poem gathers all of its saying in a single line of the poem and this line is the "site" of the work and that the site is the "gathering power" of the poem (160). He begins his reading of one of Trakl's poems with the following line: "Something strange is the soul on the earth" (161). The site of George's poem would be the last line. The last line sheds light on the inadequacy of naming. Naming fails to sustain the essence of "Wonder" and "dream from the distant land" to the speaker's homeland, they disappear once he arrives. Names are vehicles for representing what is already present in thought. Hence, names can only capture attributes of the thing, they cannot pervade the very Being of the thing. But Heidegger argues that naming is an important event on the way to language qua language. The renunciation of naming in the second last line is not a mere rejection of naming but also an affirmation of the necessity to name and this is encapsulated in the last line where the speaker says, "Where word breaks off no thing *may be*" (emphasis mine). We must notice that Heidegger does not consider "names" to be the ultimate signifiers of beings. The line does not say "Where name breaks off no thing may be". Instead it uses "word" showing that naming may be important, but it is not indispensable for thriving in language which is the ultimate abode of Being. The verb phrase "may be" at the end of the line annuls the certitude of absence anticipated by the speaker who has renounced naming

and named things. Hence, renunciation is also inflected with affirmation. George's poem becomes the site of the drama of simultaneous negation and affirmation; and absence and presence. Poetic ontology is defined in this drama. Similarly, in Trakl's poetic line, the phrase "*something* strange" (emphasis mine), we catch a sight of soul qua soul. Heidegger poignantly argues that a wandering soul is essentially unfamiliar and strange in the world of earthly beings but the phrase "something strange" changes the finality of that notion. Heidegger writes,

> Apart from its varying content, this construction does not always carry the same sense. Something "solitary," "something strange" could mean a singular something that in the given case in "solitary," or by chance is in a special and *limited* sense "strange." "Something strange" of that sort can be classified as belonging to the order of the strange in general, and can thus be disposed of. So understood, the soul would be merely one instance of strangeness among many. (162)

So, the line becomes the site of the play of unfamiliarity and familiarity, of strange and "something strange."

In this section so far, we have only looked at a poem without address, but this section would remain incomplete if we do not read a poem with an addressee and approach it the way Heidegger approaches George and Trakl. It would only be fitting to read one of Trakl's poems called "By Night" from *Sebastian Dreaming*:

> The blue of my eyes is put out in this night,
> The red gold of my heart. O! How still burns the candle.
> Your blue mantle enfolds the one falling;
> Your red mouth seals the friend's benightment. (Trakl 24)

In the third chapter of *Being and Time* called "The Worldhood of the World", Heidegger writes that Dasein is "ontically constituted by Being-in-the-world" and constantly interacts

with other beings and the equipment of the world (*Being and Time* 101 – 107). In describing their relationship with Dasein, Heidegger presents two attributes—*readiness-to-hand* when they are serviceable to Dasein and *presence-at-hand* when they are no longer serviceable or of use to Dasein. However, their serviceability is lost on Dasein when they are used, or, the equipmentality of the equipment is not apparent when it is still in use. The thing remains inconspicuous. This is when it is ready-to-hand. However, its equipmentality or serviceability shines through and the thing becomes conspicuous when it is no longer in use. This is when it is present-at-hand. With the above observation in mind, when we read Trakl's poem addressed to the "candle", we realise that the candle aids the night in covering the "blue" of the speaker's eyes and the "red gold" of their heart, instead of shining light on them. When the candle is no longer in use, its attributes come to the fore—it has a "blue mantle" and a "red mouth". It is hard to miss that both the speaker and the candle share the colours in different degrees. While the colours are attributes of the candle, the colours *of* the speaker are its very being. Trakl's poem unravels the ontic constitution of the being of colours (and the speaker) and it is analogous to Rilke's poem where the characteristic calling and wooing of the bird call forth the addressee's voluntary cry.

Heidegger begins his essay "The Way to Language" with a reference to German thinker Novalis' text *Monologue*. He recalls one sentence from the text which says, "The peculiar property of language, namely that language is concerned exclusively with itself–precisely that is known to no one" (qtd in Heidegger 111). Heidegger differentiates his notion of language (qua language) from Novalis' because the latter sees language "dialectically", or as "subjectivity" belonging to "absolute idealism" whereas, he sees language phenomenologically (experientially, existentially) as something which is "alone" or "lonesome" when authentic and predisposed to the question of Being (134). But the word

"lonesome" does not mean isolation in the context of Heidegger's discussion of language. It implies the being-togetherness of language with "Saying":

> That we cannot know the nature of language–know it according to the traditional concept of knowledge defined in terms of cognition as representation–is not a defect, however, but rather an advantage by which we are favored with a special realm, that realm where we, who are needed and used to speak language, dwell as *mortals*... Saying will not let itself be captured in any statement. It demands of us that we achieve by silence by appropriating, initiating movement within the being of language... (134 – 135)

Throughout his work on language, it seems Heidegger sees language as a privilege of the mortals; and poets, according to him, are its ascetic[18] devotees. Hence, the mortal's and the poet's (and the reader's) true calling is devotion to language, not command over language. Poetry is the manifestation of such devotion, it is a prayer, and through poetry, mortals can have a sight of, or remain in the vicinity of language qua language, the all-powerful, gathering ground of being. Silence is only an outcome of such devotion and is of the *same order* as speech, subservient to the power of language, it is only an instance of not speaking which brings being closer to the pervasive fold of Saying.

Since our initial enquiry into the nature of discourse around poetic address, we have come a long way. The study of the formalist-structuralist discourse of poetry and poetic address in the introduction and the study of the phenomenological turn to language through poetry and poetic address, we have opened up a path to finally leading to Celan's poetry, a path haunted by the poetry and thought of Benn and Heidegger. In the next and the final section of this chapter, we will tread on this path and closely read some of Celan's poems from one of his later collections called *Breathturn* (1967).

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[18] See *Homo Sacer*, page 151.

IV

On language:[19]

To stand, in the shadow

of the stigma in the air.

Standing-for-no-one-and-nothing.

Unrecognised,

for you

alone.

With all that has room in it,

even without

language. (*Breathturn* 79)

(I know you, you are the deeply bowed,

I, the transpierced, am subject to you.

Where flames a word, would testify for us both?

You—all, all real. I—all delusion). (93)

If language is the house of Being for Heidegger, and poetry, the way to language, for Celan, it is an abyss which engulfs being; and poetry, the last refuge of the disappearing being

[19] This section has been divided into sub-sections with some keywords at the top to maintain some continuity with the key concerns of the chapter and to understand their relationship with the addressee only for the sake of clarity. Most of Celan's poems are with addresses and are related to themes that outgrow the key concerns of this chapter to such an extent that writing about them is beyond the scope of the present dissertation.

addressed to an other who witnesses it on the brink of disappearance. Celan's poem is on the way to silence. The shadowy addresser is neither ready-to-hand nor present-at-hand but stands "for-no-one-and-nothing" before the addressee. The poem is a site for the disappearance of language and in this way, opens up the possibility for an encounter with the addressee, with "you". In the second poem (within parentheses, like a citation, an afterthought, the last word, or perhaps *Gegenwort*?), the addresser, as the subject with the knowledge of the addressee, finds no words to "testify" for the presence of the subject and its addressee. But, the absence of the word does not affect the addressee— "You—all, all real". It annuls the subject – "I—all delusion".

On naming:

> Black,
>
> like the memory-wound,[20]
>
> the eyes dig toward you,
>
> in the by heartteeth light-
>
> bitten crownland,
>
> that remains our bed:
>
> through this shaft you have to come—
>
> you come.
>
> In seed-

[20] The German original for this hyphenated word or combination is "Erinnerungswunde". The use of compound nouns is a distinctive feature of the German language. Going by the use of the unusual combination "heartteeth" and "light-bitten", it seems as though Celan abused his knowledge of this feature to invent his own language and undermine the German language.

sense

the sea stars you out, innermost, forever.

The namegiving has an end,

over you I cast my lot. (143)

The compound word “memory-wound” makes it impossible to think of memory without wound. Neither is a simple attribute of the other but is strongly entwined with the other, and by extension, with eyes, burrowing through to reach the bed. The addressee is urged to arrive through this chasm dug by the addresser— “through this chasm you have to come—/ you come.” What appears to be a command— “you have to come” —changes into a resigned invitation— “you come”. If the poem begins with unlikely associations like “heartteeth”, “light-bitten”, in the third stanza the lines “In seed-/ sense/ the sea stars you out,” associating earth, water and sky at once to give a sense of the addressee, sound stranger. This is followed by the paradoxical phrase “innermost, forever”. It arrests the implication of outward growth in “stars out”. The vertigo-inducing relay of associations finally comes to an end in the penultimate line when the addresser assures that “namegiving has an end.” But by the time we arrive at this line, the paradoxical associations have undermined the logic of naming.

“I”

The redlorn[21] of a

thought-

thread. The bur-

geoned laments

about it, the lament

[21] The German word for the transition is “Rotverlorene”. It can also be translated as “redlost”.

below it—whose

sound?

With it—don't ask

where—

I nearly—

don't say where, when, again. (221)

There is an echo of sound around the "redlorn" thought-thread but the speaker wonders where it is coming from. The colour which imparts itself to the fragment of thought is lonely. What is to be done with it? The speaker fails to answer and demands that they not be asked anymore. The lament, with its absent source, hovers around the thought-thread and the speaker. We may say that Celan's "redlorn of a thought-thread" is of the same order as Trakl's "blue of my eyes" except the compound noun "redlorn" erases itself through the inscription of loss in its being.

So, at the end of this section, how do we understand a poem's relationship with the addressee? In "The Meridian" Celan writes, "But I think—and this will hardly surprise you—that the poem has always hoped, for this very reason, to speak also 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*" (48). We may then think that the poem's relationship with an "altogether other", that is his poetic ethicality, comes closest to Emmanuel Levinas's notion of ethics. Encounter with another person forms the core of Levinas's philosophy. In *Alterity and Transcendence*, Levinas argues that in philosophy's obsession with epistemology, reality is structured as objectivity. In such a structure, our relationship with others is purely immanent which means that our encounters are means of self-knowledge. But ethicality starts with the experience of radical alterity which precedes knowledge. It begins with our attention to

another's command that they must not be killed, as opposed to Heidegger's notion that the death of another person is a necessary event in the existential analytic of Dasein and is a part of the facticity of being. Moreover, the relationship with another person is not reciprocal in the way that Martin Buber describes it in *I and Thou*.[22] Buber's analysis is not phenomenological but purely formalist or linguistic—he prefers the latter over the former. According to Buber, language precedes the experience of being so neither "I" nor "You" has referents in experience. "I" and "You" first belong together in the primary word "I-Thou" so one cannot exist without the other. While the primary word "I-It" belongs to the realm of experience where "it" refers to objects we encounter, "Thou" has no bounds. Buber explains this relationship more succinctly when he says, "When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing there is another thing. Every *It* is bounded by others; *It* exists only through being bounded by others. But when *Thou* is spoken, there is no thing. *Thou* has no bounds" (Buber 4). On the other hand, Levinas argues that "I" utters "You" when it *faces* the other. The crux of Levinas's philosophy is the assertion that the relationship is one of obligation, and non-reciprocal. But this non-reciprocity is not conditioned by the singular lived experience of language which is different from everyone. It is conditioned by the irremediable alterity of the infinite, of God. Therefore, the other is the locus of transcendence. Levinas describes the primordial obligation to the other, as an obligation to weak: "The other whom I address—is he not initially the one who is weaker?" (Levinas 101) And this is where Celan differs from Levinas. It may also be said that Levinas' assertion that the non-reciprocal finite, ethical relationship with the other is conditioned by

[22] Though Celan was deeply influenced by Martin Buber's philosophy, his meeting with the philosopher in the year 1960, just before he delivered the speech, left him disappointed. Felstiner notes, "Buber came to Paris in September 1960... He [Celan] took his copies of Buber's books to be signed and actually kneeled for a blessing from the eighty-two-year-old patriarch. But the homage miscarried. How had it felt (Celan wanted to know), after the catastrophe, to go on writing in German... Buber evidently demurred, saying it was natural to publish there and taking a pardoning stance toward Germany" (Felstiner 161).

the radical alterity of God as opposed to Heidegger's belief that "nothing is as radically repugnant to ontology as the idea of an infinite being" (73) comes dangerously close to the latter's idea of mortals as fallen (weaker) beings and do not have the faculty to gain knowledge about their existence and responsibilities.

V

In this chapter we have tried to argue that Celan's "The Meridian" is a critique of monological lyric poetry by analysing the tension between poetry and art in the speech as a reference to Celan's own discomfort with the lyric tradition of his time, a tradition into which he was unmindfully assimilated. To that end, we have tried to undertake a comparative reading of Gottfried Benn's speech on lyric poetry and Celan's speech vis-a-vis their poems and then in the second half of the chapter, a comparative study of Heidegger's reading of poetry and Celan's poetry. Following the twin comparisons, we have tried to define Celan's poetics as a poetics of economy or ethicality which differs from Benn's notion of monologicity and Heidegger's metaphysical view of poetic language. Throughout our study, we have chosen and read poems by Celan that pay homage to Lucile's unassimilable cry. Our familiarity with Lucile's cry at the beginning has, in turn, attuned us to Celan's privative poetic language which makes the poem abyssal, its address abyssal, as though its language, the source and Being of its language, is constantly falling away. This falling away of the language is negotiated with an addressee who is a witness to this falling away and finds her own address in this privation. We have also tried to show that voice, which is the singular privilege of the speaker in lyric poetry, in undermined in Celan's poetry. But Celan, through Lucile, shows that voice is important to him. Celan's poetic address is an earnest solicitation of an other voice, the voice of the other which cannot be assimilated into the hegemonic, logocentric voice of the subject. Celan writes to address the voices of people like Lucile.

Lucile's cry marks an abyssal moment in the play that the play cannot make sense of, cannot recover from. Lucile's cry, "Long live the king!" is an aporia.

Chapter Two

Celan and the Economy of Melancholy[23]

Down melancholy's rapids

past the blank

woundmirror:

there the forty

stripped lifetrees are rafted.

Single, counter-

swimmer, you

count them, touch them

all. (*Breathturn* 65)

This poem, which appears in Paul Celan's last collection of poems *Breathturn* (1967), is not his only poem on melancholy. Moving on from the first chapter where we closely studied the ethical nature of poetic address in Paul Celan's poetry, in this chapter, we will look at three poems—along with the one above—that represent varying relationships between the addressee and the word melancholy. The relationship necessitates a close study of the vast genealogy of the concept of melancholy. But before that, since melancholy is a feeling,[24] we have to first understand the function of feelings in shaping aesthetic experience and expression; and also, because feeling, along with address, is an essential part of lyric studies.

[23] A shorter version of this chapter has been published as "Aporetic Melancholies: Reading Paul Celan" in an anthology on melancholy called *Abjection and Abandonment: Melancholy in Philosophy and Art.*
[24] I follow Rei Terada's use of "Feeling" in her groundbreaking book *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the Death of the Subject* (2001) as un umbrella term that covers both "physiological sensations (affects)" and "psychological states (emotions)" (Terada 4).

James William Johnson in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* writes that "The most subjective or 'internal' strain of modern lyric poetry is the Lyric of Emotion or Feeling" (Scalon 8). Rilke's book of poems *The Book of Hours* (1905) starts with a lyric poem which can help us open our discussion on feeling. He writes,

> Now the hour bends down
> 		and touches me
> with its clear, metallic ring:
> my senses tremble. The feeling forms: *I can*—
> and I grasp the malleable day.
>
> Nothing was complete before
> 		I saw it,
> all becoming stood still.
> My eyes are ripe, and whatever they desire
> approaches like a bride... (Rilke 72)

Rilke's poem sheds light on the formative capacity of feelings. Although the line "The feeling forms: *I can*" can be simply interpreted as the emergence of the subject in the poem, if we also pay attention to the phrase "feeling forms", we will realise that the formation of feeling is a crucial event in the aesthetic experience of the speaker, marking its difference from mere sensation or affect, and its concurrence with the subjectivity of the speaker (we cannot miss the emphasis in "*I can*"), where subjectivity is defined as the consummate expression of the speaker's thoughts, and, her capacity to take charge of the trembling senses to "grasp the malleable day".[25] With the rise of the feeling of subjectivity, the speaker can rid

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[25] Susanne K. Langer's work on feeling is particularly useful and instructive in this regard. The American philosopher in her book *Feeling and Form* (1953) argues that all works of art are symbols of feelings and embody the dynamic nature of feelings felt by the human being. The impetus to

everything of their immobility and command them to approach “like a bride”. In *Aesthetics* (1835), Hegel argues that lyric poetry is the expression of a higher state of mind sublating “dull feeling”, as in, mere affect or sensation. He writes that the lyric poet, “absorbs into himself the entire world of objects and circumstances and stamps them with his own inner consciousness... raises purely dull feeling into vision and ideas, and gives words and language to this rich inner life” (qtd in Culler 94). Through poetic expression, feelings condition a poet’s self-consciousness, as aesthetic expression harmonises with the poet’s knowledge of the world. Hence, feeling constitutes the lyric or, as Jonathan Culler succinctly writes, the lyric is “not liberation *from* feeling but liberation *in* feeling” (94). Prior to Hegel, feelings held a superior place in classical models of subjectivity. For example, in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes locates passions (feelings) in the life of the mind, and ties emotion to reason. He divides thoughts into two parts, active and passive, and passive thoughts are understood as passions. Although passions are different from reason, they come together to constitute the subject (Terada 8 – 9).[26] So, feelings endow the subject with infinite capacity to represent the world.

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defend art as expression or semblance came from the ongoing debate about expression and mimesis. In the text. she resolves the debate by arguing that “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling” (Langer 40), by using the example of music as “a tonal analogue of emotive life” (27). According to Langer, as an expression of inward feeling, art is homologous to the material forms of the empirical world, like the sound of a bird’s call, or the flow of the river. She insists on the “virtuality” or the autonomy of the artwork “i.e. the self-sufficient microcosm of any artwork that does not appeal to mere sensuous response or merely offer occasion for the expression of the artist’s feelings or simply reproduce the outer reality... to deceive the birds with painted grapes...” It, she says, “elicits something different, which must be rendered as *strangeness, otherness, separateness* despite the obvious relationship between the artwork and human life” (Morawski 657).

[26] In the “Introduction” to *Feeling in Theory*, Terada argues that the impetus to unite thoughts and passions comes from Descartes belief in “soul” and that “thinking is the single employment of the soul as opposed to the body” (8) because “there is nothing in us which we must attribute to our soul except our thoughts” (qtd in Terada 9). Moreover, Descartes believed that passions or feelings are physiological outcomes since the seat of passions is in the human brain, in the pineal gland (9).

In *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (1953) Michael Dufrenne argues that feelings are coterminous with expression because expression defines our very being. He writes,

> It is through what we have said of expression that we can gain an idea of the primordial reality of affective quality, wherein that part belonging to the subject and that belonging to the object are still indistinguishable. In fact, expression is that which reveals affective quality as total and undifferentiated. Expression exists prior to the distinction between body and soul, exterior and interior. The container and the contained are not yet differentiated within expression... (Dufrenne 454 – 55)

In a manner that is decidedly Kantian, Dufrenne argues that feelings make way for the knowledge of the world. Therefore, aesthetic expression is an integral part of epistemology. He states that things have affective qualities before epistemic qualities. We feel things before they become objects of knowledge; and, we are feeling beings before subjects. Our expression of feelings about the world anticipates our experience of the world. The lines that precede "*I can*" in Rilke's poem shed light on the affective qualities of the things in the world.

The aforesaid theory of feeling as having formative potential motivates us to wonder if melancholy, a feeling associated with sadness and withdrawal, can have the same potential and, if it does, how it affects the experience and expression of the subject. In the section titled "Semblance and Expression" in his book *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Theordor Adorno argues that art teases out of the appearance of objects in the empirical world something that is missing in them, something hidden, and in doing so, turns them into a *semblance* of meaning. The main pursuit of art is the active preservation of this semblance, and this pursuit is endowed with sadness and melancholy. He writes,

> Melancholy is the shadow of what in all form is heterogeneous, which form tries to banish: mere existence... What radiates wordlessly from artworks is that it is, thrown into relief by *it*—the unlocatable grammatical subject—*is not*; it cannot be referred demonstratively to anything in the world that previously exists. In the utopia of its form, art bends under the *burdensome* weight of the empirical world from which, as art, it steps away. (Adorno 105, emphasis mine)

Adorno's emphases on "is not" and "it" which refers to the form of art, suggest that the negation of the factual world of the subject and the simultaneous affirmation of semblance in art precipitate a *feeling* of loss and gain at the same time, attributing such paradoxical feelings to melancholy, thereby suggesting that art is *melancholy par excellence*. Like Rilke, Stefan George can further guide our understanding of the feeling of melancholy. In his book of poems *Das Neue Reich* (The New Kingdom 1928) the following lyric poem appears,

> What bold-easy step
> Walks through the innermost realm
> Of grandame's fairytale garden?
>
> What rousing call does the bugler's
> Silver horn cast in the tangle
> Of the Saying's deep slumber?
>
> What secret breath
> Of melancholy just fled
> Nestles into the soul? (Qtd in Heidegger 152 – 53)

The poem successively poses three rhetorical questions about the (partial) presence of those who animate the scenes described in the three short stanzas— "What bold-easy step...",

"What rousing call...", "What secret breath/ of melancholy just fled..." —inscribing, in the process, absence in the presence of fragments. But there is a stronger emphasis on presence in the last stanza—despite dual emphasis on the ephemerality of melancholy through the question in the first line, the use of the word "secret" and the phrase "fled away" in the second line, melancholy is yoked to the soul— "Nestled into the soul". In his essay "Words", Martin Heidegger reads this play of presence and absence in the last stanza as the play of sadness and joy. He writes,

> Sadness and joy play into each other. The play itself which attunes the two by letting the remote be near and the near be remote is pain... pain so touches the spirit of mortals that the spirit receives its gravity from pain, *the spirit attuned by pain and to pain, is melancholy*. It can depress the spirit, but it can also lose its *burdensomeness*[27] and let its "secret breath" nestle into the soul... (153, emphases mine)

We must pay attention to the fact that both Adorno and Heidegger use the word "burdensome" to describe the presence of the empirical world; and melancholy, the feeling left in the wake of an encounter with this world, a feeling that does not disappear with the loss of the burden or the object. It is also important to understand that Heidegger calls melancholy *attunement*, a certain way of *being* in the world, and a necessary condition for the experience of the world— "the spirit attuned by pain and to pain (burden of the world)". Taking the above discussion of melancholy (as having formative capacity and an attunement) as our premise, in this chapter we will closely read the four poems by Celan we had mentioned at the beginning of the chapter to imagine a narrative by him that a) shows that the poems represent an economy of melancholy, where "economy"[28] simply implies the

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[27] There is a contrast with Levinas here. Levinas believed that being is never free of burden. Being's burden is the burden of responsibility to the other. For Levinas was not after the meaning of Being, but the question about being's *right* to be. See *Totality and Infinity*.

[28] Terada uses the word "economy" to describe the spirit of pathos— "... the economy of pathos, the recirculating infinity of feeling living on..." (Terada 13) We may also recall Anne Carson's theory of

continuous circulation or performance of melancholy as attunement *through* the addressee or the other, where with melancholy, the latter bears the potential to create or respond to appearance or semblance as *presence* and presents a critique; b) culminates in the poem we opened the chapter with that renounces melancholy as attunement, turning the narrative into an ethical injunction regarding melancholy and c.) creates the possibility for poetic ethicality in the lyric.

I

Our observation that melancholy has formative potential, or that melancholy is potentiality itself, motivates us to wonder again how melancholy, the feeling of sadness and withdrawal, came to be seen as potentiality. One of the earliest representations of melancholy, Albrecht Durer's 1514 engraving *Melencolia I*, depicts an angel that sits amidst what appear to be a dog, a cherub and sundry objects. The angel holds an object to write, but is also disinterestedly looking away, bearing the burden of interpreting the world by herself. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Robert Burton writes,

> Albert Durer paints melancholy, like a sad woman leaning on her arme with fixed looks, neglected habit... yet of a deepe reach, excellent apprehension, judicious, wise and witty: for I am of that Noblemans mind, *Melancholy advanceth mens conceipts, more than any humour whatsoever*, improves their meditations... (Burton 146)

Durer scholars Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl describe melancholy in the painting as a transcendental state of mind which permeates both sorrowful resignation and the eagerness to create (Ferber 3). Burton's *Anatomy* was written at a time when melancholy was largely seen as a physiological or psycho-somatic condition caused by the presence of excess bile. Since

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poetic economy from chapter one. See page 22. Melancholy—a feeling that lives on through exchange, through address.

the middle ages, melancholy has been variously described as a somatic condition caused by a person's past sins, a peculiar mood caused by evil pursuits or, as in the seventeenth century, a feeling that provides the impetus to work, caused mainly by a person's genius mind (Ferber 53). John Keats, for example, opens his poem "Ode on Melancholy" (1819) by urging the beloved addressee to not let their anguish, sorrow and suffering linger. But, "when the melancholy fit shall fall" (Keats 250), he advises the subject to turn thoughtful and attentive — "Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows... feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes" (250) Unlike sorrow and suffering which cloud judgement and thought, melancholy arouses thoughtfulness and empathy.

In the context of philosophy for example, David Hume in his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1738 – 40) argues that melancholy is caused by the knowledge of the incommensurability between "what is known" and "what is surmised" (Ingram 70). Both John Locke and David Hume believed that a person experiences withdrawal when she or he comes to terms with her or his limitations in the face of the vast empirical world. Hume writes, "Man is altogether insufficient to support himself;... when you loosen all the holds, which he has of external objects, he immediately drops down into the deepest melancholy and despair" (qtd in Pinch 30). Therefore, melancholy is inextricably linked to the pursuit of knowledge (Ingram 70 – 71) and is a "species of gloomy enthusiasm" (Pinch 40). In "The Philosopher as a man of Feeling", Adela Pinch analyses Hume's idea of feelings in the *Treatise* as both trans-subjective and inter-subjective. Pinch writes,

> In Hume's understanding, feelings spread about freely and fluidly; they do not know the boundaries of individuals. He stresses that the claims of individuals are subordinate to the feelings that visit them from without: "Hatred, resentment, esteem,

> love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition."[29] (2)

They are not just personal, but they also have a social aspect. So, Hume does not concern himself with the source of feelings but sees them as forces of nature.

We see a major shift in the understanding of melancholy at the end of the nineteenth century when, with the development of psychoanalysis, melancholy came to be seen as depression, and a pathological condition. In Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), we find two opposing ways of responding to loss—mourning, defined as a way of *working* through the experience of loss, ultimately leading to the acceptance of loss; and melancholia, as a way of internalising the loss through denial. Both mourning and melancholia manifest in the absence of love for the living. Freud's mourner reacts in a non-pathological manner because she acknowledges the absence of the lost object, and having recognised it, starts the work of mourning to free her "libidinal desire" (Ferber 20). In the process, she supplants the lost object with another object of love. Melancholia, on the other hand, is marked by worklessness and the abiding presence of the (absent) lost object in the subject. The melancholic is unable to supplant the lost object with another object of love. Freud writes that the "distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feeling..." (qtd in Ferber 19). It is important to note that in extreme cases, the melancholic may not even have any consciousness of the loss, or there may not have been an actual loss, in which case, the experience of loss may have been completely imaginary (19). Melancholy may then be understood as the experience of

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[29] She writes, "In Hume's account of the passions, questions of cause... are subordinated to a concern with what we could call the performative or quantitative dimensions of affect. What authorises feelings, what gives them their authenticity, their ontological status, their moral value, is not their cause but their force or liveliness" (33). To understand more about the concept of feelings and emotions in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, see Pinch's *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (1996).

subjectivity *as loss*: “In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (qtd in Ferber 22).

Ilit Ferber, in her essay “Leibniz’s Monad: A Study in Melancholy and Harmony”, shifts the focus from psycho-pathological Freudian melancholy to melancholy as the structural-philosophical “mood” or attunement that we had briefly touched upon while reading Stefan George’s poem. She compares the monad’s expression of the inner world to Dasein’s existential mood. Melancholy is neither a mere attribute of the monad nor an accidental feeling. The very structure of the monad represents melancholy, or, the monad is “melancholically structured” (Ferber 54). As a “windowless” substance in the world, the monad does not have a way of interacting with the world because of its fundamental structural deficiency. The world is inherent in the monad. Due to this, the meaning of expression completely changes for the monad. Leibniz writes,

> There is... no way of explaining how a Monad can be altered or changed internally by any other creature, since nothing can be transposed in it, and we cannot conceive in it... that any internal motion can be excited, directed, increased or diminished from without. Monads have no windows through which anything could enter or depart. (Qtd in Ferber 58)

For the monad, expression is completely non-causal and develops through a realisation of the boundaries of its body, which, in turn, occurs when the body experiences the *feeling* of physical pain (60). If Freudian melancholy is psychological, Leibniz’s formulation of the monad’s expression of the internal world through pain suggests that it is affective. This may remind us of Heidegger’s remark that the “the spirit attuned by pain and to pain, is melancholy”. By virtue of its *melancholy structure* (attuned by pain), it expresses the world through its experience of pain. Hence, the world is expressed through the process of *self*-difference. Ferber argues that pain manifests the re-appearance of the monad’s body which,

otherwise, in the absence of pain, it cannot discern (61). She adds, "The immediacy of our access to pain, whether physical or mental, can account for the clarity of our expression. What Leibniz hypothesises here is a kinship between adversity and the clear, precise expression of the world" (61). Moreover, monad's self-absorption is not to be seen as detachment. The whole world resides within the monad and the internal world is expressed spontaneously. Giles Deleuze argues that although there is no causal relationship among the monads, there is harmony among them because of their shared spontaneities. Ferber characterises this harmony as "melancholic harmony" (64) and argues that it is similar to Heidegger's idea of *Stimmung*[30] which translates as attunement.[31]

So far in this chapter we have understood melancholy as a trans-subjective force, as a psycho-pathological condition and as an existential state of being leading to self-absorption. Our discussion leads us to the conclusion that the discourse around melancholy covers both subjective experience (as in Durer, Hume and Keats), and non-subjective experience (as in Leibniz through affect and Heidegger's moods) as withdrawal. But despite this difference, in both the states, melancholy manifests in an expression that has the capacity to make sense of the world. Melancholy is defined as *self*-difference and *self*-absorption instead of renunciation; something that conditions, and is conditioned by representation or semblance *as presence*. It goes without saying that our discussion on melancholy will remain incomplete without a close study of Heidegger's idea of melancholy as *Stimmung* or attunement.[32] But before we begin our discussion on Heidegger, we must study another philosopher who considered feeling to be an *a priori* condition for appearance as presence, and melancholy, a

[30] In German, nouns begin with the capital letter.
[31] To know more about the phenomenology of moods such as wonder and anxiety, see pages 13 – 52, and 105 – 159 of *Philosophy's Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking* (2011).
[32] It's important to note that sometimes Heidegger, especially in his discussion of angst or anxiety, also defines mood as *Befindlichkeit* or "state-of-mind" (Senderowicz 141).

feeling akin to the feeling of sublime. The thinker is Immanuel Kant. Without reading Kant, it will be impossible to realise the full impost of Heidegger's theory of melancholy as a mood.

II

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) is one of the earliest treatises on aesthetics as a faculty of feeling.[33] Kant divides the human soul into three faculties, namely, the faculty of knowledge, the *feeling* of pleasure or displeasure, and the faculty of desire. Understanding, judgement, and reason correspond to the first, second, and third faculties, respectively. According to Kant, our interaction with things in the world is defined as purposiveness. Understanding of things is guided by *a priori* concepts, where concepts ground all our theoretical knowledge about the things we encounter in the world. Concepts determine the *end* of objects. Therefore, with the help of concepts, understanding determines the *form* of objects. Concepts are transcendental because they rely on universal, empirical or natural laws to determine the thing as an object of knowledge. This encounter is termed as "subjective purposiveness" since the accessibility of objects is pre-determined by the subject who is armed with *a priori* principles or concepts. Judgement, on the other hand, is the faculty of thought that pays attention to the particular under the universal. Judgements which follow

[33] It is difficult to delimit a beginning of aesthetics because aesthetic theory has a long and complex history that precedes Kant's theories by several years. For example, several scholars believe that Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* published in the year 1750 is the first ever extensive treatise on aesthetics. Baumgarten divides cognition into two faculties, a higher faculty of thought and a lower faculty of perception. In *Reflections on Poetry* (1735), Baumgarten argues that as an aesthetic object, poetry is derived from the "lower cognitive faculty" and represents "sensate discourse" (Baumgarten, Aschenbrenner, Holther 21). So, he jettisons emotions and feelings for affects. He also rejects the possibility of limitations in sensate discourse and excludes the possibility of pain: "The painful, he says... will distract the attention of the listener, and the poem will fail in its purpose to communicate... So far as verses produce pleasure in the sense of hearing, they are by rule poetic" (25). According to him, poetry is communicative. Kant was fairly critical of Baumgarten, but he is also the most direct inheritor of Baumarten's aesthetics. In many ways, Langer's theory of the harmony between feelings and forms is similar to Baumgarten's theory of poetry and nature—they both favour the mimesis of the dynamic forces of nature represented with clarity in poetry: "Though representations produced immediately from nature can never be distinct and intelligible (since they are sensate), they can be extensively clear and hence poetic. Nature and the poet create resemblances. Hence the poem is an imitation of nature" (29).

universal principles to think about the particular, are known as determinative. But, aesthetic judgements are not determinative, they are *reflective* because they pay attention to the particular for which a universal determinant is yet to be found. Hence, aesthetic judgements are predisposed to the *nature* of the particular thing. In *Aesthetics of Appearing* (2005), Martin Seel writes that aesthetic judgement is different from theoretical judgement because the "object is not to be conceptualised, any more than it is to be directed to a certain practical purpose. Without being reduced to this or that determination, the object is perceived solely in the *presence of its appearing*" (Seel 3, emphasis mine). Moreover, aesthetic judgement is not guided by *a priori* concepts but *a priori* feelings of pleasure. It is *a priori* because "purposiveness" of an object is pre-determined by the feeling of pleasure. In the absence of pleasure, there is no purposiveness. Feelings are also independent of mere senses. When the particular object does not appeal to cognitive faculties but the universal, transcendental faculty of feeling, it is, according to Kant, a thing of beauty, and the faculty that judges it, is called taste. Hence, feelings guide the aesthetic contemplation of a particular object. But, aesthetic judgement is not limited to the beautiful. It emerges from a "higher *intellectual* feeling" to contemplate the sublime (Kant 27, emphasis mine).

Kant writes that both the beautiful and the sublime evoke the feeling of pleasure. Neither appeals to the cognitive powers of the subject, nor adhere to *a priori* concepts. But despite this, each has a different way of evoking pleasure. Unlike beauty, and unlike Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime as a quality of the object that overwhelms our senses, Kantian sublime is not just a quality of the object. Sublime is essentially a feeling that is evoked in the face of the limitless or the infinite:

> Nothing, therefore, which can be an object of the senses is to be termed sublime when treated on this footing. But precisely because there is a striving in our imagination towards progress *ad infinitum*, while reason demands absolute totality, as a real idea

> that same inability on the part of our faculty for the estimation of the magnitude of things of the world of the senses to attain to the idea, is the awakening of a feeling of a supersensible faculty within us... Consequently it is the *attunement* of the spirit evoked by a particular representation engaging the attention of reflective judgement, and not the object, that is to be called sublime... *The sublime is that, the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses.* (81, emphasis mine)

From the above description we can assert that sublime is a feeling that is a faculty unto itself and arouses "negative pleasure" (76) because, in the absence of sensuous manifestation, the thing that appears before the subject also pushes the subject away. It manifests the absence of purposiveness. Hence, the sublime is not affected by understanding. The term "negative pleasure" here is capacious and subsumes several other "negative" feelings:

> ... delight in the sublime in nature is only *negative* (whereas that in the beautiful is *positive*): that is to say it is a feeling of imagination by its own act depriving itself of its freedom by receiving a purposive determination in accordance with a law other than of its empirical deployment. In this way it gains an extension and a might greater than that which it sacrifices. But the ground of this is hidden from it, and in its place it feels the sacrifice or deprivation... The astonishment amounting almost to terror, the horror and sacred awe, that seizes us when gazing upon the prospect of mountains ascending to heavens... that invite to brooding *melancholy*... (99, emphasis mine)

Melancholy accompanies the feeling of sublime and approaches reason, the third faculty of the soul. If beauty belongs to the faculty of taste, sublime melancholy belongs to the faculty of reason because it is reason that confirms the potentiality of the sublime to represent the *presence* of the infinite and surpass all standards of sensibility. The sublime (and melancholy) is the capacity to represent the infinite as "completely given" (85), appearance of that which

is *manifest*. Since aesthetic judgement is not constitutive but regulative, judgement of the beautiful and the sublime approach understanding and reason respectively, shaping an *a priori* system of feelings and thoughts:

> ... just as the aesthetic judgement in its judgement of the beautiful refers the imagination in its free play to the *understanding*, to bring out its agreement with the *concepts* of the latter in general (apart from their determination): so in its judging of a thing as sublime it refers that faculty to *reason* to bring out its subjective accord with *ideas* of reason (indeterminately indicated), i.e. to induce a disposition of the mind comfortable to that which the influence of definite (practical) ideas would produce upon feeling, and in common accord with it. (86)

This begets the question: How does aesthetic judgement affect the language of poetry? Poetry, according to Kant, "holds the highest rank among the arts", it provides a "schema for, the supersensible" (155) and it is the best medium for sublime expression. It "plays with semblance" (155), but a semblance which is not a mode of deception. Semblance is serviceable to understanding and reason, and hence, it is representation *as* presence par excellence.

Dufrenne writes that our knowledge of objects is preceded by our perception of things as they remain present with us. In the plain of presence, there is no division in terms of subjects and objects. At this stage, there are only two factors that constitute the presence of things—space and time. In the realm of presence, these two constituents are inseparable. So, our understanding of things as objects begins when we temporalise and spatialise things. Understanding begins with *withdrawal* from the thing present before us. When we withdraw ourselves, we create an *a priori* space for the thing to take shape in at a *later* time. The difference between presentation and representation lies in this preliminary withdrawal:

> To be attentive, to give representation its full due, is to transport oneself into the past in order to grasp the object in its future, for there is a future for myself (a future of the world, my speech, or my gesture) only if I am already in the past. I perceive only from the past and into the future; in the present, I can only act... The *re* of "representation" expresses this interiorisation... Temporality constitutes only the relationship of the self with itself definitive of an "I". (Dufrenne 347)

A poem captures things on their way to understanding, captures them as they appear. Perhaps we can learn what representation (as presence) means from William Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour" (1798):

> ... Nor less, I trust,
> To them I may have owed another gift,
> Of aspect more *sublime; that blessed mood*,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the *heavy and the weary weight*
> *Of all this unintelligible world,*
> *Is lightened...*
> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> *Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime*
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things... (Wordsworth 155 – 161, emphases mine)

Wordsworth's poem is an apposite introduction to Kantian sublime. Lines which have been emphasised in the excerpt confirm everything we have read about the sublime as an *a priori* feeling that surpasses "the weary weight/ Of all this unintelligible world", conjures a "presence" that gives joy, and gradually approaches reason. But there is one thing that is conspicuously absent from the poem, and that is, Tintern Abbey itself. If we ignore the presence of the abbey in the title, the poem reads like a vivid empirical account of the landscape surrounding the abbey. But the abbey strenuously presses against our imagination. When we asserted that the poem captures things as they appear, what we meant was aesthetic judgement also contemplates what is yet to appear. Sublime is the contemplation of the *not-yet*. The poem represents the not-yet by preserving or *presencing* what has already appeared in such a way that all "thinking things, all objects of all thought... rolls through all things..." But, the appearance or representation of presence is atemporal—it is an eternal present. The image-complex of the poem signifies the abbey which is absent from the poem. When Kant temporalises the thing, he places the thing in the structure of time, as though time itself is an attribute of the *a priori* sublime (melancholy) thought or imagination. The speaker subjectivises time. The thing is not seen as *temporal*, as something that is constantly passing away, but its presence is hollowed out and withdrawn into a past from where it can be recollected at will, where it can be preserved eternally. Regarding Kant's idea of temporality Heidegger writes,

> Kant is the first and only one who traversed a stretch of the path toward investigating the dimension of Temporality[34]—or allowed himself to be driven there by the compelling force of the phenomena themselves... At the same time... Kant could never

[34] The English translation of the German noun retains the capitalisation of nouns.

> gain insight into the problem of Temporality. Two things prevented this insight. On the one hand, the neglect of the question of Being in general, and in connection with this, the lack of a thematic ontology of Dasein... Despite his taking this phenomenon back into the subject, Kant's analysis of time remained oriented towards the traditional, common understanding of it. (*Basic Writings* 67 – 68)

Heidegger's theory of Temporality as the structure of being is going to be the very basis of our understanding of melancholy as potentiality.

Although Heidegger did not refer to melancholy in his original discussion of moods in *Being and Time*, his reading of Stefan George's poem suggests that he regarded melancholy to be one of the many moods inherent in being. Heidegger's phenomenology can be defined as a way of understanding the world through active interpretation. Unlike the Kantian subject whose understanding of the world is conditioned by *a priori* feelings and concepts, Heidegger's being is not a subject, and the world, not its object. If Kantian understanding is *a priori*, Heideggerian understanding is an existential hermeneutics. He asserts that the history of metaphysics is marked by amnesia, having forgotten the primordial question of Being in its pursuit of knowledge. According to him, being is pre-possessed by the question concerning Being, and does not possess an always-already available knowledge of Being. So, the accurate form of the question concerning Being would not be "what is Being?" as the secondary verb "is" and the nominal "Being" together imply an always-already, pre-possessed by *a priori* concepts and feelings. It would be, "what is it *to be*?" where the verbal "to be" suggests it is temporal, an understanding that is *not-yet* and not always-already available. Being who is possessed by this question, is known as *Dasein*, which translates as "being there", and is also pre-possessed by a primordial state-of-mind that manifests moods such as fear or angst which guide the active interpretation of Being in the world. After Heidegger's reading of George's poem, we can assert that melancholy is one of these moods.

He defines the relationship between moods and the active understanding of Being in the following way:

> State-of-mind is *one* of the existential structures in which the Being of the 'there' maintains itself. Equiprimordial with it in constituting this Being is *understanding*. A state-of-mind always has its understanding, even if it merely keeps it suppressed. Understanding always has its mood. If we interpret understanding as a fundamental *existentiale*, this indicates that this phenomenon is conceived as a basic mode of Dasein's *Being*. (*Being and Time* 182)

In Heidegger's existential analysis of Dasein, bare existence or facticity of being (onticity) is inseparable from the task of active interpretation or understanding of Being (ontology). He connotes "state-of-mind"[35] ontologically and "mood"[36] ontically (172). But the two terms are not opposed to each other, in that both accompany the temporal being who is constantly passing away. State-of-mind is not the a priori *condition* of mood. Mood discloses being to its various *states* of being or *presence* in bare existence. Dasein may experience several moods in its bare existence—it may experience angst when upon encountering an empty world, or melancholy upon encountering the world that is burdensome or when the question concerning Being becomes burdensome, and at the same time, may experience relief upon alleviating that burden. Regarding this dynamic of mood Heidegger writes,

> In an *ontico*-existentiell sense, Dasein for the most part evades the Being which is disclosed in the mood. In an *ontologico*-existential sense, this means that even in that to which such a mood pays no attention, Dasein is unveiled in its Being-delivered-

[35] In German, "state of mind" is *Befindlichkeit*: "'the state in which one may be found'... it should be made clear that the 'of-mind' belongs to English idiom, has no literal counterpart in the structure of the German word, and fails to bring out the important connotation of finding oneself" (Ibid 172).

[36] Similarly, in the German text, mood is variously called *Stimmung, Gestimmtsein* and *Gestimmheit* which translate as "tuning of a musical instrument", "having a mood" and "Being-attuned", respectively. (Ibid 172)

> over to the "there". In the evasion itself the "there" is something disclosed. (173 – 174)

This suggests that Dasein is never outside mood. Dasein's predisposition to the question of Being is defined as "thrownness" (as opposed to Kantian withdrawal). The expression "thrownness" is used to suggest being that has been "delivered over" to the "there" as Being-in-the-world. Every instance of mood is marked by Dasein's discovery of itself, finding itself as being "there", finding its presence in the fact of its passing away. Such finding is different from seeking, as the latter implies a sense of anticipation, which in turn implies foreknowledge of that which is being sought. On the other hand, in discovering or finding oneself, there is surprise. Every instance of *having* a mood, is an instance of finding oneself, and is the bearing of Dasein's state-of-mind for Being-in-the-world. Moods are not opposed to each other since each mood manifests Dasein's pre-disposition to Being-in-the-world. For the same reason, the difference between affects[37] and feelings is immaterial to Heidegger. Dasein does not *have* knowledge, it *has* moods: "*Existentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us*. Indeed *from the ontological point of view* we must as a general principle leave the primary discovery of the world to 'bare mood'. (177)" So, we may assert that melancholy has both ontic (as a bare mood) and (state-of-mind) ontological relevance for Dasein.

Now, if we take our present understanding of the ontico-ontological constitution of moods back to George's poem, we may read it in the following way: Dasein encounters entities which are partially available to its senses. In the face of partial presence, melancholy affects Dasein, but instantly flees. If it flees, it must have been there (as bare mood) to encounter the appearance of the entities in the first place. But, in the very next line,

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[37] When Dasein encounters entities in the world which threaten it, affectivity fails to come about. Heidegger writes, "Under the strongest pressure and resistance, nothing like an affect would come about, and the resistance itself would remain essentially undiscovered..." (Ibid 177)

melancholy "nestles into the soul" (as state-of-mind). Heidegger rejects Kant's use of the term "appearances" or representation as "objects of empirical intuition" and mere self-showing. However, Kant also described appearance in another way—it is the arrival of that which makes itself known as semblance but remains concealed in appearance (*Being and Time* 76). Heidegger replaces appearance with the term "unconcealed" and absence as "concealed". Phenomenology is the pursuit of that which remains concealed (phenomenon) through an active interpretation of the unconcealed. In his later works, Heidegger states that poetic language takes on the task of this active interpretation. If the motto of his earlier work is "Ontology is possible only as phenomenology" (82), the motto of his later work can be *ontology is possible only as poetry.*

Since the beginning of this chapter, we have undertaken a thorough appraisal of the history of melancholy and we would not be far off to assert that the history of melancholy coincides with the history of metaphysics. The history of metaphysics posits a sovereign being who finds their potentiality in their (de)limitation. From Descartes to Heidegger, limitation has come in the form of doubt, pain, angst, among other *feelings,* all of which can now be seen as coterminous with melancholy. It is our contention that Paul Celan, who was invested in this history through his reading of philosophy,[38] presents a critique in the four poems we are about to closely read in the next section.

III

Twenty forever

evaporated Keytower-flowers

in your swimming left

[38] To know more about Celan's interest in philosophy see *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (1995); or, *Paul Celan & Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951–1970* (2007).

fist.

Into the fish-

scale etched:

the lines of the hand

which they outgrew.

Heaven- and earth-

acid flowed together.

The time-

reckoning worked out, without remainder. Cruising:

—for your, quick melancholy, sake—

scale and fist. (*Breathturn* 105)

Like most of Celan's later poems, this poem is also addressed to someone. The poem can also be a suitable companion to Stefan George's poem and can be an apposite introduction to Heidegger's theory of mood as an *existentiale* of Dasein. Perhaps we can say that the poem is an address to Dasein? The poem lays bare the working of the two constituents of being in our perception—space and time. The first stanza is temporalised at the very outset— "Twenty forever". Twenty could also be the number of "Keytower-flowers". Our understanding of the difference between present-at-hand and ready-to-hand in the previous chapter can guide our reading of the first two stanzas.[39] The fist that once held the flowers, is left with their essence. The flowers which were held by the fist have withered away. The readiness-to-hand of the flowers is emphasised in the word "fist", fingers tightly clasped together to hold onto something. Here essence is not the same as essential, since the

[39] See chapter one, page 27.

latter simply implies this or that attribute of a thing. In the essay “Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry”, Heidegger attributes to Holderlin’s poetry, the capacity to capture essence (*Existence and Being* 294). Such essence is glimpsed in the lines of the first stanza. The fact of temporality is the essence of the flowers, *found* by the addressee in the presence of the fist. Like the flowers, the fish-scale was once ready-to-hand. But, having outgrown the hand which once held it, it is now present-at-hand. The thing *things* itself in the absence of the hand that once held the fish even as it left its traces on the scale. The play of presence and absence in the first two stanzas suggests the ontico-ontological design of a phenomenological understanding of the world. The lines “Heaven- and earth-/ acid flowed together” are reminiscent of the “fourfold” of the jug, the heaven, the gods, and the mortals described in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. They “dwell in their different ways... dwell together all at once” (171). The fist and the flowers, the scale and the hand, heaven, earth and acid dwell together, each on its own. But in this togetherness alone, in the play of presence and absence, their essence (as presencing) is found.

Having ended the last line of our interpretation with presencing, we arrive at the end of the poem. The last few lines of the poem can only be understood if we recall Dasein’s temporal structure. But first we have to return to the opening words of the poem— “Twenty forever”. When the number and age of the flowers is fixed at “Twenty forever”, it shows that time is subjectivised. Heidegger states that the subjectivisation of time is an expression of inauthenticity when Dasein loses itself. On the other hand, the penultimate line “The time-/ reckoning worked out, without remainder” shows that it is not the subject that can temporalise things when Being-in-the-world. It is Temporality that temporalises Dasein and things in the world. In *Event and Time,* Claude Romano describes this phenomenon in the following way:

> It is not Dasein that, through its ontological comportments or the modalities of its transcendence, makes temporality possible and temporalises it; it is rather temporality, as the horizon of every understanding of Being, or meaning of Being as such, that makes possible Dasein's differentiated ways of Being. (Romano 105)

Dasein's authentic existence is defined by presence in waiting (to pass away), as *not-yet*. When we finally read the last two lines, "Cruising/ —for your, quick melancholy, sake—/ scale and fist", we are transported back to the first two stanzas of the poem. With melancholy, we encounter essence—not the essential—and it opens up a two-way path for Dasein's ontico-ontological existence. But the encounter is also time's doing, undercutting the initial impression that time is subjectivised.

At this juncture, something has to be said about the comparison between Stefan George's poem and Celan's poem. George's aesthetics in the poem has all the markings of phenomenology. Since phenomenology as a method is defined by active interpretation, inaugurated by questions about the meaning of our existence and our Being, George's poem may have caught Heidegger's attention for the stanzas which are structured as (rhetorical) questions in his poem. The content and the form of the questions come together to draw our attention to that which is concealed in the unconcealed. But by positing the fact of partial or incomplete presence through the entities, the poem defines the horizon of their meaning or ultimate signification. The horizon is clearly defined in the second stanza when the absence of "Saying" manifests the presence of the "rousing call". As a poem that poses rhetorical questions and defines the horizon of signification, it is monological, but its monologicity is disguised as an invitation for a dialogue. So, the questions are self-affirming and the answers, immanent. Gottfried Benn would argue that his poem is an ideal example of the modern lyric poem.

On the other hand, Celan's poem does not bear any such disguise. His poem is structured as an address. Heidegger's preference for monological poetry in his later writing suggests that Dasein's ontico-ontological existence is *housed* in an individualised expression or utterance of language qua language. What does it mean to jettison this individualised expression and allow *an other* to express "your" melancholy? It is our contention that by jettisoning the experience of Dasein, by structuring his poem as an address that holds the promise of conversation about melancholy as potentiality, Celan undercuts Dasein's *self*-difference by inscribing active difference in the poem and presents a critique. The effect of this difference is visible in the next poem:

From fists, white
from the truth hammered
free of the word wall,
a new brain blooms for you.

Beautiful, to be veiled by nothing,
it casts them, the
thoughtshadows.
Therein, immovable,
fold up, even today,
twelve mountains, twelve foreheads.

The from you also star-eyed
loafer Melancholy
hears of it. (*Breathturn* 165)

The first stanza indicates that this poem can be seen as a continuation of the last one. We know that Celan was an avid reader of Heidegger's philosophy; it influenced his poetry significantly. This poem, for example, is reminiscent of Heidegger's reading of Stefan George's poem "Words". The first stanza of this poem may remind us of the last line of George's poem— "Where word breaks off no thing may be." Heidegger states that speech (logos) or expression only exists in the form of concepts, definitions, judgements, etc., which contain the *truth* of *what* they are saying. But, phenomenology neither presents its objects nor describes its content. It is not about what one is saying but pays attention to *how* one is saying. To put it simply, a phenomenologist or a poet, pays attention to that which is not manifest in the system of signification we take for granted—language. The non-manifest conditions the manifest, instead of the other way around. Like one is never outside mood, one is also never outside language because together they form the core of Dasein's primordial reality. Like time, language grants expression to Dasein and Dasein must not take it for granted— "Where word breaks off no thing may be." Truth presents itself in the presence of that which presences itself in waiting, as the not-yet and is also called *Aletheia*.

Celan's poem is a critique of Heidegger's theory of language, poetry, mood and truth. The first stanza relieves the beleaguered addressee of the burden of "word wall" and truth. Free and unburdened, she receives the gift of a new mind— "a new brain blooms for" the addressee. Instead of presenting thoughts that contain *a priori* concepts, the new brain casts "thoughtshadows" which conjure up "twelve mountains, twelve foreheads". We may see the last phrase as a reference to *The Book of Revelation*. The four angels of God mark the foreheads of those who have been redeemed with the seal of God— "Hurt not the earth... till we have sealed the servants of our God in their *foreheads*" (*The Book of Revelation* [TBOR] 1324). Moreover, "Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a *settling into the truth*, both intellectually and

spiritually, so they cannot be moved...” (White 200). The number of those sealed from each tribe is twelve thousand— “And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Juda were sealed *twelve* thousand” (*TBOR* ibid, emphases mine). The redeemed are those that receive the Word of God. And those who are afraid of the wrath of God for their many sins, hide in the mountains— “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men... hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the *mountains*...” (*TBOR* ibid, emphasis mine). Those who do not receive the Word, and are not set into truth, can also keep “twelve foreheads” in their “thoughtshadows”. Melancholy, “star-eyed”,[40] is apostrophised. Melancholy pays attention to the “new brain” and the “thoughtshadows”. Melancholy does not aid thought in the pursuit of knowledge and truth, and it does not bring “language as language to language”. Accompanied by the other, melancholy is a mood that attends to language that falls silent. The critique is carried onto the next poem on melancholy:

> Skullthinking, dumb, on the arrowtrace.
> Your high
> song, into the hard
> February-spark clamped,
> half-shattered
> jaw.
>
> The one, still
> to be travelled mile
> Melancholy.

[40] Making it an instance of Jewish melancholy.

> Ambushed now by the achieved, aimblue,
>
> upright in the skiff,
>
> also from the gnashing crag-
>
> blessings released. (*Breathturn* 203)

In the pursuit of objects, “Skullthinking” fails to grasp that which is non-manifest—“arrowtrace” surpasses it. It cannot keep up and falls silent. Melancholy cannot keep up with “arrowtrace” either. Melancholy could either be seen as an apostrophe, or as the mood that accompanies the addressee’s “high song”. Either way, it is yet to travel the distance the “arrowtrace” has, it is the “one, still/ to be travelled mile/ Melancholy.” In the last stanza, it is “arrowtrace” that silently ambushes melancholy and the song. “Crag-blessings” can be roughly translated as blessing from above, blessings that the addressee can be released from, like the new brain that is released from the word wall.

By closely reading the three poems, we have argued that Celan’s poetic address in each of the poems presents a critique of melancholy’s potentiality to aid understanding and reason (in the Kantian sense); and as a mood, its capacity to bring Dasein closer to its Being as presence. The second poem shows melanhcholy’s capacity to renounce appearance or the unconcealed to pursue the concealed outside language. Seen in this way, the poems read like conversations with the Kantian subject or Dasein who is overcome with melancholy that is its potentiality. The poems present a critique of the concept of melancholy as the feeling or mood of self-difference and sovereignty of being in language. But something changes in the final poem of this series of poems about melancholy. We may return to the poem we had opened the chapter with and find out.

Unlike the previous poems, in this poem, the addressee is no longer on melancholy's side. It reads like an impasse in our critique. In the first stanza, melancholy[41] is described as a river, rapidly flowing past a "blank woundmirror" to meet "lifetrees" bundled together—"rafted"—like abandoned boats on the bank. We arrive at the impasse in the second stanza, in the phrase "counter-swimmer". Without that phrase, the poem will fit right into our narrative of critique—it would show that the addressee is one with melancholy, as it has been so far. The metaphor of the river implies movement in one direction, and a force that gathers beings and carries with itself in that direction, going past things that might arrest its movement, like the "woundmirror" on which it may glimpse an *other.* It overlooks the ominous blankness of the mirror—the mirror does not reflect what melancholy gathers, or what flows with it, in its direction. This may remind us of Dasein's mood carrying it to its being "there". But the phrase, "counter-swimmer" suggests that it is moving away from melancholy, swimming away in the opposite direction, towards the source of the wound. Although moving away, the addressee touches it all—melancholy, "lifetrees", and the "woundmirror". As the addressee leaves melancholy behind, melancholy leaves its trace in it through the act of touching and leaves the promise of an encounter with an other.

IV

At this juncture we encounter two impasses—one within Celan's poem that we had opened this chapter and closed the last section with, and the other in our narrative of critique. What does it mean to encounter an impasse? Another name for an impasse would be *aporia*. In *Aporias* (1993), Jacques Derrida writes that an aporia is not a problem. An aporia, in fact, is that moment or place where "there is no longer any problem" (Derrida 12). He further adds:

[41] The German word *Schwermut* can also be translated as sadness. Translator Pierre Joris must have been sensitive to Celan's desire to create a narrative about melancholy by placing four poems about melancholy in his last book.

> It had to be a matter of [*il devait y aller du*] the nonpassage, or rather from the experience of the nonpassage, the experience of what happens [*se passe*] and is fascinating [*passione*] in this nonpassage, paralysing us in this separation in a way that is not necessarily negative: before a door, a threshold, a border, a line, or simply the edge or the approach of the other as such. It should be a matter of... what, in sum, appears to block our way or to separate us in the very place where it would no longer be possible to constitute a problem... at the point where the very project or the problematic task becomes impossible and where we are exposed... (12)

Before we explain the implications of this impasse in our chapter, we must pause to rethink what led philosophers to theorise melancholy as potentiality, when melancholy is a feeling that is privative. Rei Terada argues that feelings and emotions are subsumed under an *ideology* of emotion which forces us to see them only as expression. Feeling is that which needs “to move out”, or has to be “lifted from a depth to a surface” (Terada 11). Another term for this ideology according to her is “expressive hypothesis” (11). The expressive hypothesis dismisses the possibility of feeling in the absence of expression. This argument will further clarify why Kant and Heidegger considered melancholy to be a feeling or a mood that has the capacity to aid the understanding of the infinite and as a mood that delivers Dasein to its being “there” *in* language. The ideology of emotion generates a hegemonic aesthetic experience that fixes the language of expression, alienating those who fail to express in the same way.[42]

Every act of criticism betrays the desire to negate and dismiss that which is the object of criticism. Our narrative desires the addressee’s release from melancholy and attempts to solve the *problem* of melancholy. But as soon as we tried to settle down with our narrative by reading poems which read like a critique of Kantian-Heideggerian melancholy, we also

[42] I am grateful to Professor Terada for this helpful insight.

discovered another poem by Celan which shows that the addressee willingly touches and is touched by melancholy. If we return to our initial project—attempting a critique of lyric poetry that is monological by proposing that it is possible to imagine a lyric of ethics through our reading of poetic address in Celan's poems, we must realise that our critique cannot be dialectical. Dialectics is monologicity in disguise. Ethics is realised in a non-dialectical, aporetic relationship with the addressee. As a "counter-swimmer", the addressee in the poem cannot negate melancholy. As it swims away, it carries traces of melancholy. As a counter-swimmer, it is released from the ideology of melancholy, from the subjective experience of melancholy and left with a singular feeling of melancholy. Perhaps the counter-swimmer is Lucile, and her loud, absurd, unassimilable cry "Long live the king!"[43] her singular, radically individual expression of melancholy.

V

[In 1965, just two years before the publication of *Breathturn*, Celan came across Adorno's negative review of his well-known poem "Death Fugue" in *Merkur.* The journal endorsed Adorno's view that the poem was too elegant, beautiful and hermetic to be true to the horror of the Holocaust— "didn't that show far too much pleasure in art, in despair turned 'beautiful' through art?" (qtd in Felstiner 225). Around the same time, another reader reacted to the poem by saying, "Auschwitz as soil for art, the victims' death-cry in perfectly harmonised verse... The beauty of Paul Celan's, wrung from destruction, seems questionable to me" (Ibid). Vulnerable and overcome with depression that same year, Celan voluntarily checked himself into the psychiatric ward of a hospital located on the outskirts of Paris (Ibid).]

[43] See chapter one, page 2.

Chapter Three

Celan and the Economy of Love

In the essay "Theory of Genres" (1957) Northrop Frye identifies the following as some of the fundamental features of lyric address:

> The lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a muse, a personal friend, *a lover*, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object... The radical of presentation in the lyric is the hypothetical form of what in religion is called the "I-Thou" relationship. (Frye 32, emphasis mine)

Frye's definition of the lyric as a form that replicates the form of the "I-Thou" relationship in religion is of vital importance as it prompts us to understand that the speaker's relationship to the addressee replicates being's relationship to her neighbour. And, the love shared between them is an instance of neighbourly love.

Indeed, one of the earliest instances of love *is* neighbourly love. It comes to us before all personal expressions of love. It comes to us as a commandment, as a natural law— "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (*The Bible* Matthew 22:39). It is common knowledge that the second commandment directly follows from the first where Jesus commands that "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (22:37), and the second one is "like unto it" (22:39). Hence, all instances of lyric address to a lover, including Paul Celan's, are always and already inscribed in the history of neighbourly love, or the history of love as a feeling for someone who is *near*. Our quest for understanding the nature of love in Celan's address in this, our final chapter then, cannot bypass this history. But how is love shared by the speaker and the addressee in a lyric poem equivalent to neighbourly love? Perhaps Rilke's "Love Song" can give us an answer:

> How shall I keep my soul
> from touching yours? How shall I
> lift it up beyond you to other things?
> Ah, I would gladly hide it
> in darkness with something lost
> in some silent foreign place
> that doesn't tremble when your deeps stir.
> Yet whatever touches you and me
> blends us together the way a bow's stroke
> draws one voice from two strings.
> Across what instrument are we stretched taut?
> And what player holds us in his hand?
> O sweet song. (Rilke 228)

Something compels the speaker's soul to touch the other's. The compulsion is so strong, forceful and unprecedented that the speaker wonders how she could break her habit of keeping her soul buried deep within her, protecting it from the vagaries of earthly desires all her life. She is surprised at this secret force's capacity to give all of her soul to the other and leave nothing for her to "lift it up beyond" the other to the "other things". However, in the eighth line, the speaker has a revelation that alters her perception of the force. The force keeps them together in such a way that they no longer remain apart in their being. They resonate together as one tune, as "one voice from two strings". She realises that the force does not come from within her, and she does not *will* this union. The force transcends her. The poem ends with a question that reveals her unwavering subservience to this higher force— "And what player holds us in his hand?" The poet frames her wonder and compliance

as a series of rhetorical questions that confirm the presence of a higher force that controls her union with the other. In this way, the poem replicates the tautological structure formed by the first and second commandments. God is between the speaker and her addressee, and controls their union. Love transcends in the service of God.

In Soren Kierkegaard's extensive reading of the second commandment in the first volume of *Works of Love* (1847), he succinctly defines love as something that is hidden like a secret— "As the peaceful lake is grounded darkly in the deep spring, so is human love mysteriously grounded in God's love" (Kierkegaard x). But, is love *known*? Kierkegaard says that love bears its fruits as a tree bears its *own* fruits. But the essence of love does not lie in the knowledge of its fruits, it is not conditioned or determined by its fruits which manifest in relationships with others in the temporal world. With his emphasis on the pre-eminence of the commandment or the law of love, Kierkegaard argues that we must not question the primacy of love in the same way we don't question the God's omniscience. The obvious corollary of the last statement is that failure in love is the *price* you pay for expecting the relationship to last forever, eternally. For God *is* eternity and so is love for God. The word "eternal", the adjective of eternity used as an attribute to define this or that thing does not apply to God. Relationships are incidental manifestations of love, and the success or failure of a relationship does not condition the presence of love. Since eternity or the gift of life after death are the ultimate wishes of the mortal man, love, in the form of our relationship with our neighbour, is our duty, and we would not be far off to assert that Christian love, according to Kierkegaard, can also be known as *attunement*, eternally capacious and formative.

From our reading of Kierkegaard and Rilke, we can conclude the following: Love, like God, is a faculty unto itself and hence, *a priori*. Love that follows from the tautological structure of the commandments creates an ideology of love that controls all expressions of love, and posits the primacy of the neighbour before the worldly lover. The ideology

(structure or institution) of love presents an idea of love defined as *nearness* and presence, or perhaps eternal presence. As transcendence, love manifests in the speaker's rhetorical questions in the poem. But, if we return to the end of Rilke's poem, the last line "O sweet song", is a sign, like love's fruit. Love is sublated into the song, the poem, and will remain there forever as a sign of love. Whether as transcendence or as sublation, love present in either form reveals the speaker's metaphysical impulse to create an ideology of love. Poetry that manifests such love in the form of a relationship with the neighbour who is always *near* and is the *receiver* of the sovereign subject's love and Christian *caritas*, is monological despite address.

In his first collection of poems *Poppy and Memory* (1952), Celan addresses a poem to the lover in a short poem called "The Years from You to Me". It is a poem that is perhaps closest to the dynamic of love present between the speaker and the addressee in Rilke's poem:

> Your hair waves once more when I weep. With the
>
> blue of your eyes
>
> you lay the table of love: a bed between summer and
>
> autumn.
>
> *We drink what somebody brewed neither I nor you nor*
>
> *a third; we lap up some empty and last thing*.
>
> We watch ourselves in the deep sea's mirrors and faster
>
> pass food to the other:
>
> the night is the night, it begins with the morning,
>
> beside you it lays me down. (*Selected Poems* 31, emphasis mine)

Having arrived at this poem after understanding love as transcendence and sublation, our attention instantly moves to the lines we have emphasised. Unlike Rilke's poem, where love is present in the instrument that symbolises the union of the speaker and the addressee, Celan's poem, in the lines we have emphasised, meticulously places an absence that cannot be sublated within the poem. Neither the brewer of the drink nor the drink has a sign to hold onto. As the line proceeds, sublation is arrested in the phrase "neither I nor you nor/ *a third*". The enjambment emphasises and extends the absence in "some empty and last thing". From the site of this absence, if we go to the lines that come before and after these lines, we will begin to realise that the absence engulfs all the other signs. The "table of love" has nothing to signify it, nothing to memorialise it. When the speaker and the addressee realise their ephemerality in the "deep sea's mirrors", they "pass it [the food] to the other". The last phrase is ambiguous, so, there are two suggestions: It could either imply that the speaker passes the food to the addressee, or that together they pass the food to an altogether other. The line "the night is the night, it begins with the morning" destroys the illusion that there are fixed hours to mark the beginning and the end of the different phases of the day. Night *is* night during its (illusory) time. But, night also coincides with the onset of morning, engulfing the day in darkness and blinding the speakers. The hour of togetherness cannot be determined by objective time. The hour of togetherness is covered in darkness and marked by the absence of light. In the poem, love is not transcendence, it is an abiding *absence*. Love has no sign to hold onto, and it is not known by its fruits. There is nothing to memorialise the "years from you to me" —the "bed" in the dislocated line "bed between summer and/ autumn" hangs above an abyss—except there is a singular event of an encounter with the addressee in the poem.

Starting from 1967, Celan exchanged a series of letters with his childhood friend Iliana Shmueli till the end of his life. Along with sundry details about their life, they also

exchanged details about their work, their poems. More often than not Celan sent his poems to her as missives of love. Having already shown how lyric poetry posits an ideology of love that accentuates monologicity, and how Celan undercuts this ideology of love as transcendence in the poem above, in this chapter we will further closely read the poems accompanying the letters sent to Ilana to propose that, in the poems, love is a promise, and each poem, each address, conversation, or encounter, is a singular iteration of the promise. If melancholy is a trace, love is a *thing to come*.

But before we read the poems, in the next section let us dwell on the concept of nearness and presence in Hannah Arendt's reading of Saint Augustine who also wrote about the second commandment and the idea of neighbourly love, and Heidegger's notion of *a priori* Care (*Sorge*). We cannot bypass Arendt and Heidegger because they wrote about the possibility of transcendence in existential togetherness. We need to understand how each thinker, though different in their ideas of *Being*, finds common ground with the other in their notion that nearness and presence are necessary conditions for the affirmation of the existential-ontological primacy of love.

I

Kierkegaard writes that the neighbour who accepts our gift of love is the one who is always near and, the neighbour is only an extension of the self— "The neighbour, then, is nearer to you than all others. But is he also nearer to you than you are to yourself? No, not so; but he is, or should be, equally near... The concept of "neighbour" is really a reduplication of your own self..." (Kierkegaard 18). In the essay "The Passion of Facticity The Absent "Mood"" Agamben dwells on the well-known observation that Heidegger never took up the problem of love in his philosophical writings. Agamben finds the absence problematic. He observes that between 1923 and 1926 when Heidegger was working on his greatest work *Being and Time*,

he was also passionately involved in a relationship with his student Hannah Arendt. Agamben thought that it was unlikely that the latter's research on love and Saint Augustine would not have affected Heidegger's work in some way. Agamben was proved right when he found the following citation in the section on "state-of-mind" and "moods" in *Being and Time* (Agamben 104). The first one is by Pascal and the second one is by Augustine:

a. And thence it comes about that in the case where we are speaking of human things, it is said to be necessary to know them before we love them, and this has become a proverb; but the saints, on the contrary, when they speak of divine things, say that we must love them before we know them, and that we enter into the truth only by charity; they have made of this one of their most useful maxims. (Qtd in Agamben 104)

b. One does not enter into truth except through charity. (104)

Agamben argues that there is an "ontological primacy of love" in these citations (104). Though Heidegger does not directly refer to love, his citation, along with Agamben's aforesaid argument, suggest that the citation indirectly reveals Heidegger's inclination to the question of love "state-of-mind". In the essay "Shattered Love", Jean Luc Nancy confirms this inclination and writes that love takes the form of care or "concern" or "concern for" (*Fursorge*) the other in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (Nancy 103). Since the citation already refers to Saint Augustine, it would be useful to look at Arendt's reading of love in Saint Augustine to demonstrate the ontological primacy of love in the latter's work and prepare the premise for our reading of Heidegger.

From Arendt's reading of Augustine in the essay "Love of Neighbor" in her dissertation written between 1929 and 1960, we realise that Augustine's interpretation of the second commandment is slightly different from Kierkegaard's in that the former paid attention to the presence of the other, or the worldly lover instead of focusing on the self or

being that loves the neighbour to fulfil their duty. She argues that one renounces oneself and ones "worldly relations" (Arendt 95), one's relationship with the lover to seek refuge in eternity, in the truth of one's own being. The source of *neighbourly* love lies in one's isolation. Augustine then asks how this isolation can be a source of neighbourly love when renunciation has already taken away all her neighbours, when there are no neighbours in sight, and the world has become a desert. She answers by saying that neighbourly love seeks not what is manifest in the lover in the temporal world, but what is non-manifest and eternal in the worldly lover. Neighbourly love is actuated by the knowledge that the lover is more than what she is in the world and love that the neighbour manifests is greater than the love shared with someone who first *belongs* to the world and not to God. Renunciation comes with the consolation that the lover will share the same knowledge one day and become our neighbour in eternity. Neighbourly love thrives in the shared knowledge of the others' "createdness" (95). Arendt writes,

> Thus, love of neighbour is the concrete realisation of referring back beyond the world, and in so doing it thrusts the other out of the world that he considers the points of his being. In accordance with the *meaning of being as being-forever,* love of neighbour does not mean to love the other in his mortality, but to love what is eternal in him... (96, emphasis mine)

The ontological primacy of divine love transforms the lover into our neighbour. The wonder and surprise in the speaker's questions at the beginning of Rilke's "Love Song" anticipate renunciation after the revelation that there is a force greater than the force of their earthly desire and that force keeps them together as "*one* voice". The ontological primacy of divine love *as* neighbourly love withdraws the lover into an eternal presence as a neighbour, which releases us from the fear of absence and death in the temporal world. If, according to Arendt, being as being-forever is sustained by neighbourly love, *being as Being-in-the-world* is

sustained by care (or love), says Heidegger. The following lines from Arendt's text can connect us to Heidegger: "Death is meaningless to love of neighbour, because in removing my neighbour from the world death only does what love has already accomplished; that is, I love in him the being that lives in him as his source...." (96). As per our understanding of Heidegger, we can change the first line of the excerpt in the following way: Death is *meaningful* to the love of neighbour. The rest of the sentence may remain same except at the end we may add two more words in parentheses so that it reads as following: "... I love in him the being that lives in him as his source (*in dying*) ...."

In the section titled "Dasein's Being as Care" Heidegger writes that "Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies 'before' ["vor"] every factical 'attitude' and 'situation' of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*; this means it is always i*n* them" (*Being and Time* 238). As an existential *a priori*, Care[44] always extends to concern and solicitude for others in the world. While concern is defined as "Being-alongside the ready to hand" (238), solicitude is defined as the "Being with the *Dasein-with* of Others as we encounter it within-the-world" (238, emphasis mine). Dasein's Being-alongside and Being-in together constitute its facticity. Having understood the ontological primacy of Augustine's neighbourly love, we may say that solicitude can also be defined as *neighbourly care*. We cannot fail to notice that Dasein is not simply alongside others, but alongside the "Dasein-with of Others" which implies that Dasein's neighbours are also Beings-in-the-world with potentiality for Being, like the lovers in Augustine who have the potentiality for being-forever. The essence or truth of Care (or love) lies in delivering over Dasein to Being-in-the-world *as* Being-ahead-of-itself. Being-ahead-of-itself simply means Dasein's potentiality for Being. The history of Care's ontical signification presents Dasein with many ways of caring—addiction, urge, grief, worry, are some examples among others. They present Dasein with many possibilities. But Care is not a

[44] The English translation retains the capitalisation of German words.

mere attitude towards the self or others. Care is a way of Being-in-the-world outside the subject-object binary. Care delivers Dasein—along with the Dasein-with Others—over to their fact of dying, and in this way Dasein is already ahead of itself in dying, as it stays with its neighbours (or lovers) in the fact of *not-yet*, while they are *present* to and near each other. Perhaps the following excerpt from Rilke's eighth elegy can express the neighbourly care (of lovers):

> ... What we have is World
> and always World and never Nowhere without negation:
> that pure unguarded element one breathes
> and *knows* endlessly and never craves. As a child
> one gets lost there in the quiet, only to be
> jostled back. *Or someone dying* is *it*.
> For, close to death, one looks at death no longer
> but instead stares out, perhaps with the wide gaze of animals.
> *Lovers (although the other's always there,*
> *obstructing the view) are close to it, and marvel ...*
> *Out past the beloved, as if by some mistake,*
> *it has opened up to each of them ...*But neither
> gets beyond the other, and it changes back to World.
> Always turned so fervently toward creation,
> we see only the reflection of the Open,
> which our own presence darkens ... (Rilke 470 – 471, emphases mine)

We have emphasised the lines that resonate most with our understanding of Heidegger's *a priori* Care and can extend our understanding of Care to an *a priori* concept of love. The poem does not mention the word "Death" perhaps to emphasise the fact that it is impossible

to know one's own death and that we know *of* death through the death of others. But, the poem is about the imminence and immediacy of death in the world of mortals— "...that pure unguarded element one breathes/ and *knows* endlessly and never craves..." The knowledge of death through the death of others suppresses the necessary understanding of Being as Temporality, from understanding that "someone dying *is* it". The lines about lovers poignantly encapsulates our understanding of Dasein's Being-alongside Others who are Dasein-with. Those who are Dasein-with are always and already ahead of themselves in constantly facing, turning away from that which suppresses the going ahead. The lovers are in the vicinity of death—death opens up past the beloved's face. While "Lovers" implies Being-alongside those who are Dasein-with, "beloved" here implies the other with whom there is some *attachment*. The line in parentheses refers to the attachment born out of the subject-object binary in everyday relationships which obscures the fact of Temporality— "... But neither/ gets beyond the other, and it changes back to World..." Dasein's Being-along with Others who share its understanding of Being as Temporality, and are jointly Beings-ahead-of-themselves in their potentiality for Being as those who are dying alone and separately without knowing their own death, is not attachment but can be defined as nearness (of the not-yet who are there as presence). Hence, Dasein's Being-alongside Others[45] who are Dasein-with is neighbourly love.

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[45] In the short section called "The Ambiguity of Love" in *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas writes that love thrives in the cusp between immanence and transcendence. Love is transformed into need in one's relationship with the Other (Levinas 254). When in need of love, one becomes invested in the lover and this temporary immanence is enjoyable. In an earlier section called the "The Love of Life" he writes that "The love of life does not resemble the care for Being, reducible to the comprehension of Being or ontology. The love of life does not love Being, but loves the happiness of being" (145). The love of life is extended to the lover who is always already an other as one's responsibility. This responsibility is defined as erotic love— "... the erotic which, in this sense, is the equivocal par excellence" (255). One transcends oneself in erotic love, but it is also a fulfilment of pleasure, of the other and for the other. But love does not manifest in the ultimate "metaphysical event of transcendence—the welcome of the Other, hospitality—Desire and language—is not accomplished as love" (254). Just as the other is a means to the meaning of Being, the other is a means to the absolute Other which is always beyond the other and the love for the other—a moment reserved for the self in solitude.

From our reading of Arendt's Augustine and Heidegger, we can conclude that though the two thinkers differed in their theories of love and Care respectively, they were *near* each other in their common pursuit of the meaning of Being. While Augustine called it eternity, Heidegger called it Temporality. Either way, they defined love as nearness in or despite absence and emphasised the ontological primacy of love and Care. As neighbours, they are signs of eternity and death. Perhaps Agamben was right to notice the absence of love in Heidegger and to subsequently find love in the citation on Augustine. Perhaps it was a citation to Arendt and their love as nearness despite difference.

Having adequately understood how love manifests in nearness and presence, we can now proceed to Celan's poems about love.

II

Celan started writing letters to his childhood friend Ilana Shmueli in the year 1967 and wrote to her till his death from suicide in 1970. They had been friends since childhood but had been separated in the year 1944 after Nazi-domination of their hometown Czernowitz, Bukovina. Ilana left the town with her parents and fled to Palestine where she became a teacher and a social worker. During the last three years of Celan's life, the letters they exchanged suggest that he and Ilana were lovers.

In a letter written towards the end of 1969, he attached the following poem:

A ring, to draw a bow,

sent out after a wordswarm,

that falls away after the world,

with starlings,

Arrow-like, when you whirr toward me,

I know, from where

I forget, from where. (Celan and Gillespi 18)

This poem was attached to a letter which was a response to a letter from Ilana where she wrote,

> I am writing to you again today, perhaps it is a bit too much for you, but I always believe I have to give you a sign—also I am always *waiting for a sign from you*, it does not have to be much—a word... (Shmueli and Gillespi 16, emphasis mine)

Celan responded by sending some of his poems which included the one above— "take them, they want to be with you, and they take you" (17), he said.

In the poem, the "wordswarm" falls away when faced with two things with contradictory natures— "A ring, to draw a bow". Words or signs cannot contain this contradiction and they fall away after the world. The contradictory things don't have a world, or a language left to them. But, they have each other and each other as *other.* As an other, the addressee approaches the speaker like an arrow. But the speaker's knowledge of the addressee's origin coincides with her forgetting "from where". Since memory is the home of the sign, in the absence of a sign to memorialise the other, the speaker forgets. In the absence of a world of signs, their love thrives in the promise of an encounter.

In the same letter to Celan, Ilana (ironically) writes, "Do you know, I could write you a letter that would consist of nothing but lines from your poems... that I have here with me and yet it would be wholly my letter—my whole being me, my saying to you..." (16) The irony lies in the fact that though she desires to receive signs of love from Celan, she believes that her own language of love is like Celan's poems, a language that is on the verge of falling away in the absence of signs, a language that inadvertently disavows signs. In a letter sent to Ilana that same month, Celan promises her that he "will never turn away from you [Ilana], I [he] remain[s] turned toward you [her], always" (25) and attached the following poem:

Come, configure the world with you,
come let me bury you with
all that's mine,

I am one flesh with you, to
spirit us away
now too. (26)

The poem reads like a critique of Heideggerian Care and nearness. As the speaker suggests that she wishes to figure out, make sense of the world with the addressee, she follows it up with the invitation to bury the other with all that belongs to her. The act of configuring will inevitably result in the wilful burial of the other. This may remind us of Heidegger's assertion that Dasein makes sense of its own Being through the death of the other. Dasein stays near the other whose death is a source of knowledge for it. The speaker spirits them away the moment their flesh conjoins, as though burial for the sake of configuring the world is unacceptable to her. In the same letter, there is another poem which can be read as a continuation of this poem:

A bootful of brain
Set out in the downpour:

there will come a great, great going,
far beyond the limits
they set for us. (26 – 27)

The image of the brain keeps recurring in Celan's poetry. In the previous chapter, we came across a poem where "Skullthinking" had been regarded with contempt. In this poem, left out to soak in the rain, brain fills the space meant for the foot, the lowest part of the body. Brain

is abandoned. Through the image of the brain, Celan directs our attention to the limits of thinking. Thinking finds the meaning of Being through the knowledge of others' limits. But Celan's lines "there will come a great, great going, / far beyond the limits..." suggest that as lovers, they don't turn away from the limits others set for them, where "limits" could either suggest death or every day limitations faced by them. We must also pay attention to the composition of the sentence "there will *come* a great, great going" (emphasis mine). The sentence could have been written with the auxiliary verb "be" instead of "come", as in, "there will *be* a great, great going". The second composition implies that there is already an understanding of the nature of the going even though it is yet to take place, as though in anticipating the "great, great going" they were already *ahead of themselves*. But the first composition is of the order of a promise. "There will come..." suggests that something will herald the great going, something *yet* to come. The sign for the "great, great going" is a thing to come.

The following year, he sent her the following poem:

Place-change among the substances:

you, go to you, join in

with missing

earthlight,

I hear, we were

a heavenly bloom,

this is yet to be proven, from

somewhere on high, along

our roots,

two suns, do you hear, there are

two,

not one—

so? (86)

The poem commences with a pronouncement that foreshadows the presence of many substances which are changing places. We must note that this change is not an exchange. Philosophy teaches us that there is a dialectical relationship between presence and absence, between what is manifest and what is non-manifest, between concealment and unconcealment. To philosophy, absence is a problem. The solution lies in theorising absence as immanence—absence immanent in presence. The next three lines of the first stanza play with our acquiescence to this intransigent view of absence as presence. The repetition of "you" in the phrase "go to you" can have the following connotations: The phrase "you, go to you" may be interpreted as the return of the same, or return of sameness. The journey from "you" to "you" can be an immanent journey, return without any change. Hence, the phrase may also be read as "you, go to *yourself*". But as we proceed to the qualifying phrase "join in/ with missing/ earthlight", the logic of dialectics that governs our thinking, faces an impasse. If we follow the pronouncement about the plurality of substances, does the journey from "you" to "you" imply descent into missingness or absence that the logic of dialectics otherwise does not permit? Or, does it imply an abiding absence from "you" to "you"?

The second stanza commences with the speaker announcing that she hears that she and her addressee were once a "heavenly bloom". The phrase "heavenly bloom" instantly attunes our minds to the appearance of a flower in the heavens, in the sky, growing upwards, symbolising love. In the next line she writes that "this is yet to be proven", cleverly tapping into the logic of proof that only reiterates more attributes and signs that are similar to the symbol—the proof can only come from the place of the "heavenly bloom" that is

“somewhere on high” —to prove its universal validity as a symbol. The logic of proof, validity or truth dominates and attunes our imagination. But the next line nullifies this logic of proof based on sameness and similarity (or nearness?), by completely inverting the “place” of the symbol—if what is high comes “along our roots”, then the roots must be turned towards the sky, instead of the flower. Another poem by Celan refers to the imagination of inversion:

> In the air, that’s where your root remains, there,
>
> in the air.
>
> Where the terrestrial rounds itself, clenched, earthy,
>
> both breath and clay. (Salminen 108)

We may argue that the inversion is guided by the critical impulse to show that just as objective time cannot fix the beginning and end of the different phases of the day— “the night is the night, it begins with the morning” —signs (here, place-signs) cannot adequately demonstrate the singular life or fate of a thing. The speaker’s senses and imagination are not attuned to the logic of proof. But, she is turned toward the singularity of the thing.

Everything we have said about the logic of dialectics and proof comes to bear upon the speaker’s expression “two suns, do you hear, there are/ two/ not one—" to which she extends her imagination free of the intransigence of signs to further imply the singularity of each sun, where each is the other’s absolute *other*. She implores her addressee to share her imagination and *hear* the singularity of each sun in their plurality. But the very last word, a short, curt query “so?” brings the (monological) imaginative narrative of inversion to a stop. In the query, the narrative faces an impasse. The query inscribes another voice, or the voice of the other in the speaker’s narrative—the voice of doubt, suspicion or perhaps mockery—and prevents the poem from turning into a monologue even though the poem itself is a critique of monologicity. The query prevents the imposition of the speaker’s hearing on the

other, and seems to be asking if the speaker's query "do you hear" genuinely solicits another voice. It undercuts the solipsist command that is "do you hear" which actually reads as "*do* hear". In the poem, the query is an *aporia*. If Rilke's poem ends with sublation, Celan's poem ends with an aporia.

In the same letter when Ilana conveyed to her lover that she craved for a sign from him, a sign or a word of love, and at the same time said that she craved for his poems because they could encapsulate everything she felt for him, and that the poems could speak *for* her, her lover sensed the paradox inherent in her craving for signs and poems. He gifted her poems that do not offer signs of love for, he understood that the ones that did are always monological, and one-sided. He may have also sensed that letters as a form of address can often turn monological, with one person trying to communicate their personal, subjective, experience at a time. Instead, he gifted her poems which carried the promise of an encounter with the lover who is wholly other, and the promise of an encounter in language by showing the possibility of dialogue through the presence of the other's voice. Celan's poems are released from the ideology of love which defines love as nearness and sameness and presents love as active difference and apartness necessitating active dialogue and encounter. We may say that the poems he sent to her are love poems, but we may not say with certainty that they are *about* love.

III

Paul Celan's lyric address inscribes in the history of lyric poetry and lyric address a kind of love that is not an answer to the question "What is love?" for the form of the question determines the form of the answer even before the answer has arrived. The kind of love that responds to the question is subsumed under an ideology of love that thrives in nearness and sameness. It thrives in the presence of one voice that speaks for the others. Celan's lyric

address renders self-address and pretence in the name of address, impossible. Love that does not answer to the question is a promise. Love comes as a promise, as a surprise. Perhaps Lucile's sudden cry "Long live the king" is that love.

Conclusion

Like Lucile, there was one Madame de Maintenon who came before her time and hailed the life of a king. Her king was Louis XIV but unlike Lucile, she was married to her king. The king, she once expressed, "takes all my time; I give the rest to Saint-Cyr, to whom I would like to give all" (qtd in Derrida 1). The aforesaid expression is the starting point of Jacques Derrida's book on the economy of gift, *Given Time* (1992).

Madame de Maintenon, Derrida writes, was an exceptional queen and wife. Her expression betrays that she was both "an outlaw and the very figure of the law" (*Given Time* 1). How so? Derrida unpacks her expression about the king taking *all* of *her* time and her giving the rest to Saint-Cyr, a charitable institution for poor young women of good families, as her subservience to the king (or the monarchy) and her defiance, or, her desire to escape. She did give Saint-Cyr all of her time but that was only possible after the death of king in 1715. Perhaps the rest of her time that she gave them which otherwise belonged in full to the king when he was alive, something that she wanted to take back in full and in turn, give them in full, betrayed her desire for his death? (4)

A gift is also known as a present—we say we will present a gift to someone, or we say we will give a present to someone. Hence, time is always already inscribed in the expression of gift-giving. When we say that the Madame could not turn her gift into a present because what she desired to gift, all of her time, was taken away by her husband, the king, it has the following connotations: The act of gifting and time are wound together in such a way that it is impossible to think of a gift outside the present, outside "now" and, it shapes our perception of time *as* the present, that is, time is time when it's a "now". Gift can only be phenomenalised in the present. What does it mean to give the "rest of her time" to the

institution? It means that she gives what she does not have. So, her gift is what is rest, what does not belong to her. Her gift is the impossible. Gift, Derrida writes, is always of the order of the impossible:

> Why and how can *I think that the gift is the impossible*? And why is it here a matter precisely of thinking, as if thinking, the word thinking, found its fit only in this disproportion of the impossible, even announcing itself... only on the basis of this figure of the impossible, on the basis of the impossible *in the figure of the gift*? (10)

We must note that when Madame de Maintenon finally gets all of her time back after the king's death and devotes all of it to the institution, her giving manifests the giving of gift in the present, giving present in the presence of time, manifesting presence. This act invalidates her earlier expression of giving "the rest" of her time (as a gift) to the institution. The act of gifting of all of her time invalidates the gift. She no longer gives what does not belong to her, but gives what she has in abundance such that, the act of giving does not take away anything from her. If what she gives is what is already hers and never depletes, then she doesn't present the gift but presents *herself*. This is not an act of giving a gift to an other—since the separation from what she has given is only provisional—but gifting one's self to another, or, gifting oneself to oneself. Derrida argues that this circular return of the self governs economy, especially gift economy when every gift given is equivalent to the gift received, the counter-gift.

Derrida writes that the figure of the circle is at the centre of economy (6). Economy's law is circular, and has the "odyssean structure" (7)— "The being-next-to-self of the Idea of in Absolute Knowledge would be odyssean in this sense..." (7). Regarding gift's relationship to economy, Derrida writes,

> Now the gift, *if there is any*, would no doubt be related to economy... But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending

> economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange? That which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure, and so as to turn aside the return in view of the no-return? ... If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic*. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, but it must *keep* a relationship of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible. (7)

As long as Madame de Maintenon gives the rest, gives what she does not have, she is our Lucile. Lucile's confusing, unassimilable cry is a gift in disguise. Her cry is the impossible. It compels her listeners to hear and think the impossible. But as the impossible, her cry is a gift for her husband and his comrades as the cry that betrays them is also the cry that unites them in death. Lucile's cry is aporetic, an aporetic cry of melancholy and love. Lucile's cry performs the privation of a language that is violent in its monologicity. Her cry is an aporia because it causes a moment of crisis, an impasse from which there can be no return—from which there can only be a "great, great going".

Since our introduction of poetic economy as a mode of poetic address in the first chapter, we have tried to show how Celan's poems pay homage to Lucile's cry by performing privation (in chapter one) and aporia (in chapter two and three) which are further negotiated with an addressee, an other. This is done in the form of an exchange that is disproportionate. Poetic address is defined by this disproportion and difference (difference?) Through Celan's poetry we can glimpse the impossible, that which is yet to come. Celan's poetry is a gift to the other since Celan gives what he does not have, what he does not own—language. But, it is a language that welcomes the other, a language that performs its loss to give (gift) voice to the other. Celan's poetry cannot be subsumed under the tradition of monological lyric poetry. His poetry is a gift to this tradition and ushers in a new thinking of lyric poetry.

Celan's poetry is *the gift of the lyric*.

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