THIS PLACE OF POETRY:
WRITING, DISPLACEMENT, AND THE POETICS OF THE MOTHER TONGUE
IN H. LEYVIK, PAUL CELAN, AND SARGON BOULUS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Comparative Literature)
in the University of Michigan
2013

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ways in which poetry written by displaced poets in their mother tongues becomes captivated by competing desires and how these desires are transformed into the capacities of the text. More specifically, this study uses close reading to illuminate how writing in the mother tongue, regarded here as an expression of the displaced poet's rootedness (real or imagined) in his culture of origin, becomes a site of a phantasmatic return to an "origin" which is itself beyond language, outside it, or discontinuous with it, and which is therefore a threat to writing. The condition of displacement, I show, stirs in the poet's natural (or naturalized) linguistic milieu a desire for an "origin" that transcends symbolic representation. And yet this desire seeks reconciliation within the boundaries of the text and is confined to the capacities of poetry's formal and thematic devices. How the desire for the "origin" inflects and undermines writing and how the poem negotiates its relation to the "origin" lies at the center of this study, which portrays the ways in which an unattainable source is incorporated in the poem to create a new understanding of writing's limitations and contingencies.

Chapter 1 reads H. Leyvik's transitions between Hebrew and Yiddish in "ממעמקים" ("Mima'amakim," Hebrew for "from-the-depths") as an inquiry, by the multilingual poet, into the mother tongue's capacity to become the language of psychic exploration in a modern world in which tradition lost its allure. **Chapter 2** explores poetry's capacity to voice a trauma by questioning its locus between the unfathomable reality of the Holocaust's aftermath and the darkness inhered in the German language as manifested in Paul Celan's "Tübingen, Jänner" ("Tübingen, January"; in German). **Chapter 3** examines Celan's establishment of the human as

Hebrew's source of sacredness and of prayer as a speech-brought-back-to-its-divine-source as a word of indictment, this in "Mandorla" ("Mandorla"), "Hawdalah" ("Havdalah"), and "Die Schleuse" ("The Lock Gate"). **Chapter 4** discusses Sargon Boulus's poem "Ṣandūq, ʿArūs, fī al-Fajr, Ilá Mīnā'" ("A Trousseau, a Bride, to a Seaport, at Dawn"; in Arabic) as an exploration of the gains and losses implicated in poetry's attraction to its origins.

INTRODUCTION

"For one in our profession, the condition we call exile is, first of all, a linguistic event: he is thrust, he retreats into his mother tongue. From being his, so to speak, sword, it turns into his shield" (Brodsky 108). Jospeh Brodsky's statement in the Wheatland Foundation 1987 Vienna conference, though probably a faithful depiction of a poet's experience, reflects a schism characteristic of the discourse about displaced writers' linguistic practices—and one that, this dissertation suggests, should be regarded with care. The academic and non-academic literature continuously studies and reflects on the linguistic choices of writers who had re-settled, as immigrants, exiles, or expatriates in countries where the vernacular differed from their own language. For the most part, the predicament of such linguistic displacement is measured vis-à-vis the scope of change involved in the geographical transition: writers adopting a new language are closely contemplated for the losses and gains brought about by the renunciation of a mother tongue. The sense of alienation from the original linguistic community; the loss of what was perceived as "an intrinsic relationship between words and things," signifier and signified (Kahn 107); the disappearance of "a trust in [one's] own verbal powers" (E. Hoffman 118)[1] that results from a compromised ability to trace and pronounce shades of meaning; the rigidity of the new language and its lack of inner resonance—these and other effects are every so often mentioned side by side with the benefit of gaining, through the adopted language, a new frame of reference, by which the prospects of enrichment triumph over, or at least mitigate, those of impoverishment.[2] None of these noted effects is surprising: "Most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language," the sociolinguist Joshua Fishman maintains (81).[3]

Language is a culture's primary vessel and abandoning it unsettles, in Fishman's words, "the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality"—indeed, one's entire intellectual and psychological world.

Brodsky's extraordinary metaphor reveals the changed demands posed to language by the writer enduring a separation from his[4] place of origin. What was previously sought for its sharpness and bite becomes a place of refuge, a territory of certainty and comfort. No longer a means of scrutinizing the outside world, the mother tongue becomes a realm of enclosure addressing the needs of an exposed, fragile self: offense gives in to defense. Brodsky here articulates in a more explicit way the crucial function of the mother tongue that emerges (often by implication) in the assertions of the effects of language change. This function is underpinned both by the mother tongue's primacy in life's early stages and by its endurance in adulthood, its becoming a realm of living. To its early prominence this language must owe its evocative power: "words," it is explained, "are first learned as referencing sounds at a developmental stage in which associative triggers are one with the object or subject of reference; that is, they 'equate with' rather than represent" (Aragno and Schlachet 32). Early emotional experiences, pre-symbolic in nature, are often so integrally bound to "the whole sensory milieu and contextual surround of their encoding" that they cannot be "recoded" into later-acquired languages (Aragno and Schlachet 34; and see Amati-Mehler, Argentieri and Canestri 67-68). Through the associative value of its sounds, by intoning the sounds of childhood words associated with experiences "of an as-yet undifferentiated kind," the mother tongue gains emotional intensity that cannot be reproduced in a second language, where the gap between word and thing—where denotation as an event of substitution (rather than of invocation, declaration, assertion)— becomes the staple of expression (Aragno and Schlachet 34).

But it is the mother tongue's endurance in adulthood that renders it the focus of the present research, which centers on poets who, even after migration, continued writing in the languages in which they had pursued their (more or less developed) literary path up to that point. This thread of continuity in their life as writers permits this dissertation to presume the mother tongue's affective and symbolic value as the signifier of home, intimacy, familiarity, and belonging and, at the same time, to be concerned only to a limited degree with reaching (and utilizing) a conclusive definition of this complex term, "mother tongue," by which an exclusive role is given to ill-defined circumstances of inception. The problem of formal definition needs to be acknowledged before the discussion of this research's premises can proceed. It can be easily grasped by turning to the authoritative Oxford English Dictionary, which defines "mother tongue" as "One's native language; a first language" ("Mother Tongue"). This definition lacks considerably. Is a "mother tongue" a language spoken by the actual mother, or the language spoken to the infant in those first stages of life when he or she is still dependent on maternal care—whether from the mother or from another person?[5] Is it the language in which an infant makes his or her first steps in speech—whether he or she later becomes fluent in it? Can "mother tongue" be a language understood even if never spoken? Can it be one's first language of proficiency even if acquired outside home (in the extended family, for example, or in the street)? And what happens when the language heard and learned is more than one? It is relatively easy to agree that a mother tongue cannot be a language acquired through schooling experience or one in which a person is initiated into literacy (see J. Fishman 86, 88), but the other parameters of its definition as a "first language" are either ambiguous or arguable.[6]

The last question, which brings up the challenges posed to "mother tongue" by multilingualism, is relevant to all three poets studied here, three who differ from each other in

their background and in the circumstances of their displacement yet share the "idiosyncrasy" (not-uncommon among twentieth-century intellectuals) [7] of growing up in multilingual environments and being proficient, from very early on, in at least one more language other than the one in which they composed their mature works. H. Leyvik (also Leivick; pen name of Leyvik Halpern, 1888-1962) was born in the town of Igumen (Ihumen), Belarus, in the Pale of Settlement.[8] His traditional Jewish education formed the basis of his Hebrew literacy, and it was Hebrew in which he wrote his first poems. After joining the Bund, the Jewish social democratic workers' organization in Eastern Europe, during the 1905 revolution, he switched, however, to writing in Yiddish (but not in Russian), the language in which he would compose his mature work of poetry and drama. Leyvik kept writing during the years he spent in the Czarist prison and in the Siberian exile to which he was sentenced for his political activity. After having escaped Russia to New York in 1913 he established himself as a poet and achieved worldwide fame (Harshav and Harshav 674-76; Denman 629-31). Paul Celan (1920-1970), born as Paul Antschel at Czernowitz, Bukovina, then under Romanian rule, grew up speaking German, the language spoken by many petit bourgeois Jewish families in the eastern territories of the former Austrian Empire. At school he became fluent in Romanian, a language in which he wrote some of his early poems; he also studied Hebrew and commanded Ukrainian (he graduated, at seventeen, from the liberal Ukrainian Gymnasium) and Russian (to a degree that allowed him to translate Russian poetry). In 1941, a year after its Soviet occupation, the Germans occupied Czernowitz and in 1942 Celan's parents were deported to an internment camp in Transnistria, where they both perished; he himself was conscripted into a forced-labor detail in southern Moldavia until 1944. In 1948 Celan settled in Paris, where he lived until his suicide (Felstiner *Paul Celan*). Lastly, Sargon Boulus (1944-2007) was born to an Assyrian Christian family in the

town of al-Habbaniya in Iraq. Early on he chose Arabic as his writing language, recognizing the limited audience for literature in Assyrian. In 1967, after having lived for a while in the capital Baghdad, he made his way, in a two-month journey by foot through the desert, to Beirut, Lebanon. There he came under the influence of two prominent poets, Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said) and Yusuf al-Khal. Entering Lebanon with no passport, Boulus was forced, however, to leave Lebanon in 1969 but was given permission to enter the US. He settled in San Francisco, where he continued writing and translating, primarily poetry (Obank; al-Shawaf).

Yet despite this linguistic abundance, and for reasons that will become clear, I opted for using this term, "mother tongue," in this dissertation—indeed, though, as a general, non-exclusive name for a language used in adulthood, provided that it can be traced to a writer's early years and can be reasonably assumed to play a significant (if not paramount) role in the writer's closest milieu. The emphasis on the language's endurance in adulthood is not intended, not primarily, to dodge the difficulty of defining "mother tongue" or, at least, of defining it in a way applicable to all three poets, assuming that all the necessary evidence was readily available. We do have, indeed, some evidence of the special role played in these poets' early lives by the particular languages in which they came to produce their mature work: Yiddish was Leyvik's home language, and one that was identified with women, femininity, and the domestic sphere; Celan identified German unequivocally as his mother tongue;[9] Arabic was the language spoken by Boulus's mother.[10] But these only attest to the range of circumstances to which "mother tongue" could apply. The emphasis on a language's endurance in adulthood is meant to transfer attention from a writer's early years to his mature ones, when the language not only bears an intrinsic affective and symbolic value but also encapsulates and embodies an attachment to one's scene of childhood, to a home, family, community, and culture that were left behind—to a past,

in short, that migration has charged with emotional weight. In the adult's life, the mother tongue comes to signify and commemorate people, places, landscapes, and experiences; clinging to it, it seems safe to assume, reflects both an unselfconscious continuity and the cherishing of a remnant left for the displaced poet of his old world: it is the old world carried into a new one. "Reachable, near and not lost," Paul Celan insisted after the war in which he lost his family, "there remained in the midst of the losses this one thing: language. It, the language, remained, not lost, yes in spite of everything" (Felstiner *Paul Celan* 395).[11] It is language's endurance and portability that make it the nomad's possession and its personal history that endears it to him.

This designation of "mother tongue" as that (usually one) early language that has become the language of mature writing (or, reversely: a writing language invested emotionally by dint of its early beginnings) minimizes the complications posed by multilingualism: THE mother tongue is in the present study merely A mother tongue, possibly one of few. That "mother tongue" as a singular entity may be the polyglot poet's imaginary construction—an entity constituted and sustained through writing for the sake of establishing a sense of identity, nativity, or self-authenticity—this, then, like polyglottism itself, is of limited interest here. Multilingual proficiency, and the choice it supposedly forces on a poet or simply allows him to make (assuming, for a moment, that a writing language can be freely chosen, which seems to me to rarely be the case),[12] matter little to the present research, where "mother tongue" is opposed to a later-acquired language rather than to the various languages that had comprised a certain writer's milieu. Either a natural entity or a construct, this language, by dint of its growing affective and symbolic value, creates what I see here as a necessary condition (or "setting") for the appearance of a certain poetic impetus that I explore in this study. What is sought here are the characteristics of a certain literary production rather than of a certain category of languages.

Since this working definition of "mother tongue," substituting for a definition based on agreed, clearly-defined, unequivocal circumstances of inception, poses the mother tongue in one group with other languages a writer was (or might have been) exposed to or had been able to use, the question now rises of why I insist on (or persist in) using this term instead of using one of its cognates, such as "native" (as in "native tongue"). The answer has to do with the two terms' connotative fields. "The very term mother tongue implies a close relationship between mother and speech" (Greenson 22);[13] it creates, very obviously, a close association between a language and the personal and familial context in which it is acquired and put to use. The emotional weight with which a language is invested by dint of this relationship, and which must be felt with particular poignancy by the displaced person (surely by one who, like Leyvik, Celan, and Boulus, embarked on a lonely journey, leaving behind family, friends, and familiar landscapes), I would like my readers to bear in mind when reading this dissertation, where the "writing subject," the actual writer, often fades into an abstract figure. The term "mother tongue" reverberates with the drama of separation, rupture, and loss that informs these poets' work in different ways and that I believe to be constitutive of a certain textual dynamics that I explore in this research. In this—in evoking these personal dramas and underscoring what can be named as a language's "relational context" or "relational dimension" (the language of kinship, here transformed into the kinship of language)—the term "mother tongue" is suggestive in a way that "native" is not. Native, I would like again to cite the Oxford English Dictionary, denotes "belonging to or natural to a person by reason of place of birth or nationality" ("Native, Adj.").[14] Implicated in the adjective "native" is a natural connection, one that relates, particularly, to a place, to a surrounding, or to a collective in which the individual is subsumed. Nativity connects with the indigenous: "native" implies "roots in some specific habitat" (Anderson 123). But even

before leaving their hometowns to settle in new countries, the three poets studied here belonged to minority groups that were never securely and confidently rooted in their places, be it the Jewish population of the Russian Empire in Leyvik's case, the German-speaking Jewish community of the Romanian Bukovina in Celan's, and the long-persecuted Christian Assyrian minority of Iraq in Boulus's. All three poets lived in communities separated from their surrounding by their language as well as by their culture, religion, and/or ethnicity. Their "nativity," their belonging to certain peoples and landscapes, seems to have never been simple, straightforward, and self-evident.[15]

Surely enough, the term "mother tongue" has its own history of "native" affiliations. The term's first appearances, it is interesting to note, can be traced back to the beginning of the twelfth century, where it is equated with the vernacular (and "father tongue," with a learned language or with the language of scholarship). It used to have pejorative connotations: the distinction seems to have risen in bilingual societies where women and their language (the language of nursing infants) were seen as inferior to men and their language. This situation changed in Europe during the middle ages, when the "mother tongue" came simply to mark laymen's norms of discourse, and in the years of the Renaissance and the Reformation it gained a modest degree of dignity thanks to being the language into which religious texts were translated. It is, however, by dint of political trends (identity politics, particularly in border territories) and cultural-philosophical movements (such as European Romanticism) that the mother tongue became, at the late eighteenth century, cherished as the language of the "folk," the symbol and harbinger of modern national movements (Haugen 75-82).[16] This history, however intriguing, is nonetheless irrelevant for the present discussion, as it leaves "mother tongue" still less suggestive of rootedness and habitation. To the writer of these lines, "native" appears inept even as a

depiction of the language rather than of its speaker, for the lack of overlap between the languages here discussed and any "specific habitat[s]." Leyvik's Yiddish was spoken by Jews all across Eastern Europe and was not affiliated with any specific territory; Boulus's Arabic was shared by numerous Middle Eastern provinces, making its denotation much less specified than that of most of the European languages. Even Celan's German, which was to become encumbered by territorial volkism, not only was shared by several European regimes, but rather originally marked, for this poet, the language of German *culture* (the center of which was Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). To the extent that it invokes a "natural" connection to a place, "native tongue" thus seems inadequate in the context of the present research.

There is another aspect to this term, however, which requires consideration in this early stage of the study presentation. The term "mother tongue," by which I wish to maintain a language's relational dimension on the reader's horizon ("mother" here as a vehicle for the metonymical invocation of an entire world of relations: to people, to objects, to places, to ideas), also introduces a markedly feminine notion of language into the discussion of the literary works of three male poets. How important is this gendered designation of a writer's "first language"? That "mother tongue" in its modern sense is a historical and ideological artifact rather than a trans-historical constant (Yildiz 10) frees one from committing oneself either to the specific narrative of origin and identity that this term offers or to its gendered vocabulary.[17] But this narrative and its vocabulary can also be harnessed for bringing up subjects that may nonetheless prove relevant here, such as the tension, real, imagined, or mythicized, between "mother" (or the maternal, or the womanly, or, even more basically, the feminine, as opposed to "mother" as the pure mark of kinship) and "tongue" at the point of language inception and beyond it, as it is articulated by prevalent narratives of human development.

Why these deserve attention here can be answered in two ways. The first answer has to do with the ambiguity lying at the foundations of these cultural narratives, ambiguity by dint of which what is conceived of as feminine is found both at the center and on the margins of symbolic discourse. Different streams of feminist and psychoanalytical thought that have theorized the relationship between symbolization and subjectivity propose different constellations of "mother" and "language." Some, as Yasemin Yildiz notes (11), "stress the divergence between the maternal and the linguistic," aligning the former with the non-signifying aspects of language that nevertheless condition it and allow its emergence. Notable here is Julia Kristeva's work, which suggests the "semiotic" as that maternal pre-symbolic contribution, derived from the primary flow of bodily drives, that allows the child's initiation into language and forever remains present in it (which amounts, as Jane Gallop rightly notes in her discussion of French post-structuralist feminist thought [319-320], less to asserting the divorce between "mother" and "tongue" and more to deconstructing their conjunction by finding "the difference within" their composite). Other theoreticians reject the idea of the mother tongue's existence as an "expressivity outside the dominant discourse" (to borrow a phrase from Nelson Garner, Kahane and Sprengnether 23), contending, instead, that "[t]he mother tongue, the language we learn at our mother's breast," is a paternal language, being stamped by a patriarchal order (Gallop 322). For these, a kind of "otherness" always-already speaks in and through the familiar, "homey" mother tongue (Gallop), which renders this language an integral part of symbolic discourse rather than its transgression or subversion. The "Name of the Father," by which the influential psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan refers to the law of substitution (of a signified for a signifier) that constitute symbolic discourse and which he identifies with the "Phallus," is

unrelated, in this view, to any actual male figure, but rather represents the position of the signifying subject, male or female, as such.[18]

These varying perspectives on "mother tongue," by which it remains identified at times with the Symbolic (the verbal, the work of signification) and at times with the pre- or non-Symbolic (the non-verbal 'codes' of mother-infant early relationship, a discourse 'close to the body'; Nelson Garner, Kahane and Sprengnether 23), would be of little significance here if it were not for summoning an opportunity to point out the limitations of preconceived notions when brought into new contexts. The literary study takes its object of scrutiny as its first source of conceptualization. For the reading to draw meaning from the text's unique aesthetic attributes, for the interpretation to be receptive, open-minded, non-tendentious, the application force of inherited designations needs to be limited. Which is to say: the feminine (be it what it may) should not be assumed *a priori* to be an attribute either of the language named here "mother tongue" or of the root sought within and through it (the search for origins: by no means Oedipal). In the same way that a language's proper name "does not necessarily translate into a singular body of sentiments that connect it to its speakers" (Ramaswamy 22), so does the designation "mother tongue" not necessarily translate (nor should it translate, for the readers) into a set of assumptions about this language's affiliations (which in this case, might also imply different relationship to language for the male poet and the female one—to the extent that we agree that a man's and a woman's relationship to their mother develops along different lines).[19]

This point needs to be stressed, if only because there emerges an uncanny correspondence between the aforementioned ideas about language and the textual dynamics found in the poems studied here, dynamics that have to do with the tension between language and its "beyond." This, indeed, is the second reason for my lingering on the various constellations of "mother" and

"tongue" in prevalent narratives of human development. The sought-for origin whose name will necessarily recur in the following pages, and which I claim to transcend the capacities of textual figuration, should not be identified either with a real beloved mother (whom the textual study cannot redeem) or with a pre-Symbolic, "true," "semiotic" maternal idiom. Whatever form of abdicated yearning is unraveled in the poems, it would be a mistake to read it as mirroring the longing for families and homelands that the threat of persecution and the loss inflicted by wars made impossible for these three poets, Leyvik, Celan, and Boulus (a longed-for return that corresponds to the poetic impetus but cannot be equated with it); equally mistaken would be the association of this yearning with a search for a maternal non-discursive, non-verbal "language." "Mother tongue" can serve us as a reminder of an actual experience; it can mark a tension between absence and presence, materiality and abstraction (one should note the overlap of these two pairs), the static and the portable, language as a vehicle to preserve attachment and as a means confirming separation. But what cannot be admitted to the text by dint of its non-discursive nature cannot be identified with the actual objects inhabiting the writer's world or with particular theoretical conceptions. Whatever can be said about mother- and other- tongues and about their "beyond" should emerge primarily from the poems. The reader who will bear with me until the end will see that this matter is, however, far from being resolved.

What, then, can be said about the text of the mother tongue? This question stands at the center of the present study. If "the [or *a*] language of origin enables rekindling of early emotional memories" (Aragno and Schlachet 34); if it "retains the whole load [or *a* whole load] of emotional, sensory, and perceptual vicissitudes" of the early mother-child relationship (Amati-Mehler, Argentieri and Canestri 71); if it is a language in which psychic defenses are least effective (see Aragno and Schlachet); if it is held so intimate that its dissolution is experienced as

painfully as the loss of a loved one (see J. Fishman 83)—can a mother tongue be regarded a writer's natural linguistic milieu, his endowed, secured, tenacious, spontaneously-obliging possession? If the "state of being 'not at home' […] means, in most cases, at a distance from one's native tongue" (Suleiman Rubin 283)—can a mother tongue (its "remaining," in Celan's words) be considered a home for the displaced poet, always at his disposal as a refuge (from misunderstanding, from obscurity, from speechlessness)? While it is understandable that a writer's adoption of a foreign tongue, as an event involving transformation and struggle, summons reflections on the nature and the role and the vicissitudes of language, I would like to suggest in this dissertation that occasions of continuity, too, should win attention for what they reveal about this special "possession," the mother tongue, and, more generally, about the desires that encumber language and about poetry's capacity to accommodate them. Differentiating between "language" and "poetry," the abstract vehicle and the realm of materialization, is crucial here: for the unsettling condition of displacement, so I claim here, fashions a literary production preoccupied with the search for an "origin" (uprooting, maintains Jacques Derrida, "unleash[es] the genealogical drive"; *Monolingualism* 59-60) whose endurance would mitigate the effects of a geographical, cultural, and mental caesura, but which transcends symbolic representation. Poetry written in the mother tongue by displaced poets, this dissertation shows, becomes a site of a phantasmatic return to an "origin" which is beyond language, outside it, or discontinuous with it, and which is therefore a threat to writing. And yet the poet's desire seeks reconciliation within the boundaries of the text and is therefore confined to the capacities of the written, to poetry's formal devices. How the desire for the "origin" inflects and undermines writing and how the poems negotiate (with different results and aspirations) their relation to the "origin" lies at the center of this study, which seeks to portray the ways in which a missing, unattainable, or

inaccessible origin is incorporated in the poem to create a new understanding of writing, its limitations, and its contingencies.

"Mima'amakim," Leyvik's poem to which the first chapter is devoted, can serve (in a nutshell) as an example of this process. This poem revolves around the tensions between Yiddish and Hebrew, two of the languages that comprised the linguistic heritage of the majority of East-European Jewish writers in America from the turn of the century up to the Second World War (Wirth-Nesher 4). These tensions are encoded into the poem's first four lines (brought here with their English translation by Harshav and Harshav):

<div dir="rtl">

Mima'amakim—	ממעמקים —
What a word.	אַ װאָרט אַזאַ.
What a word:	אַ װאָרט אַזאַ:
Fromthedepths.[20]	פונדערטיפעניש.

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The translation of the opening word "ממעמקים" ("Mima'amakim," Hebrew for *from the depths*; an allusion to Psalms 130.1) into Yiddish ("פונדערטיפעניש" in the original Yiddish text, "Fromthedepths" in the English translation above) stands in Leyvik's poem for the poet's growing alienation from a Hebrew text that has lost, for him, its force to voice a call "from the depths." This loss is prescribed by the poet's migration from a traditional world ruled by the authority of the sacred text to a modern, secular, and urban world positing original creation (rather than reproduction or imitation), comprehensive exploration, and powerful subjective expression as its ideals. Poetry, in this world, seeks to draw its mandate not from the collectively shared, not from the religious and the ritual, not from the text (this epitome of tradition), but rather from the poet's mental and emotional faculties with all their idiosyncrasy. Yiddish, the mother tongue, is found more appropriate than Hebrew for the task of poetic self-search by

means of excavating psychic depths, of gaining new insights by exploring the enigmas of one's

inner, hidden life. The poet descends:

Out-	פון —
of-	דער —
the-	טי —
depths.	פע —
	ניש.

And yet when Yiddish is harnessed to the task of bringing a poetic revelation of a new

kind, of finding new, profuse sources to invigorate writing, it, too, turns out to be a symbolic

surface crust into which the non-symbolic signs of the psyche cannot be brought. The search for

authenticity beyond language, beyond tradition and its text—the search for a new poetic

authority—fails to achieve the goal of articulating the world of primeval forces. "Out- / of- / the-

/ depths": the syllables that visibly appear to be the stairs of descent into psyche's deepest strata

turn out, in a reading insistent now on semantics, to be the call rising up from the depths to the

ears of him who remained outside the psychical labyrinth. And yet what comes out of the depth

comes out decomposed, disintegrated, stamped by the fate to which all linguistic signs are

condemned by the desire for what lies beyond the signifier. Leyvik uses the poem's graphical

space to articulate an Orphic journey in which the work of art—the poem—materializes only at

the cost of renouncing the odyssey into a realm stipulated on its remaining an enigma. Poetry, if

striving for cohesion, must let go the desire to which "Mima'amakim" gives expression.

What I call "the poetics of the mother tongue" refers, then, to the dynamics of desire,

search, and substitution that I find in the poems studied here, and which may be this study's most

important finding. The attempt, in and through writing, to find or found the mother tongue as an

origin and as the language of the origin—the project, eventually, of constructing roots—forces

the poem into the recognition of its discontinuity with the source and of this source's inability to

speak.[21] This recognition, as Leyvik's poem exemplifies, leads to a redefinition of the poem's relation to this origin either through substituting the latter with a symbolic one (in Leyvik, this symbolic substitute is language itself as a communicative system) or through incorporating this origin into the poem as an absence (which as well can be found in Leyvik, as the detailed analysis will show). In one respect, then, Brodsky's metaphor, which I otherwise consider a mystique (it surely is not a simple naiveté) holds a kernel of truth, as it marks the *writer's desire* (the shield replacing the sword: a changed mission) as that which decreases language's range of powers or exposes its existent limitations. Language does not change its nature when displaced and its immanent "otherness," its nature as a never-to-be-possessed possession (words: this shared property) and the obscuring veil it casts upon the world of objects, loosening our grip on it, cannot account for the textual dynamics of abnegation manifested in the poems. This dynamics, in other words, seems to be related less to the vicissitudes of an always-already compromised ownership (one's "own language") and more to the vicissitudes of this "ownership" as it is pressed to its limits. A *need*, then, is what displacement seems to bring to extreme. Reading poetry of displacement means attending to the desires that encumber language and to the latter's capacity to bear the weight of substitution, but also attending to its inability to be anything but a substitute, one that is astoundingly ordinary, prosaic, and low-keyed. How poetry bears these desires by its own means and what awareness it fosters about writing's nature and limitations stands at the center of my analyses in the four chapters.

That this drama (as I see it) revolves around language helps explain why the "poetics of the mother tongue," as I referred to it in the dissertation title, could not be renamed here "a poetics of displacement" or "a poetics of dislocation." Language, in the poems studied here, is not merely the medium through which a certain desire is expressed, but also the object of this

desire to the extent that it is the poet's means of desiring, i.e. the realm within which desire operates in order to fulfill itself and into which it is eventually resettled, making language also the wall that impedes desire and that is accepted in its stead. At some times, language is an interlocutor (as apparent in Leyvik's poem, though not in the lines quoted above); at other times, it is an agent participating in the poem's "event," creating a poetic reality that itself becomes the poem's object of reference (as apparent in Boulus).[22] Either this way or another, language, its possibilities and impossibilities, is these poems' immediate referent and object of reflection, investigation, and preoccupation, and they all exhibit (each in its own way) a dialogue with language that only obliquely relates to the time and place of their production. Almost none of the poems explicitly addresses the theme of displacement in the concrete sense that this word is likely to invoke; neither do the poems pose at their center the figure of the wanderer, the loner, the exile, the outsider, the restless and rootless and homeless individual—the quintessential figures, in short, of the literature of displacement either in its modern articulation as "literature of exile" or in its postmodern articulation (possible really only for Boulus) as the literature of "transnationalism," "nomadism," "tourism," or "diasporism."[23] At stake in these poems, I mean to say, is less the question of whether the written word can refashion a new home and revisit, transpose, and perpetuate an old one (see Aciman "Forword" 10), less the question of poetry's capacity to record, commemorate, remind, recall, or lament, and more, as I have started to suggest, the question of what happens when writing becomes the site where the threads of continuity to a "place of origin" are sought that will reassure the viability and meaningfulness of the literary enterprise, an enterprise one carried on in the mother tongue in the foreign land. Language forms the domain in which, or through which, "origins" are sought, and the themes of home, distance, separation, travel, transition, nostalgia, alienation, uprootedness, and

marginality, which typify contemporary literary articulations of the experience of displacement,[24] are preset, if at all, only obliquely.

In this respect I take Brodsky's words—"For one in our profession, the condition we call exile is, first of all, a linguistic event: he is thrust, he retreats into his mother tongue. From being his, so to speak, sword, it turns into his shield"—at face value: by centering on displacement's effects (or ramifications) as manifested in language. And yet it should be clear, by now, that this study expresses a measure of disbelief in the "homing" effect of the mother tongue implied by Brodsky, disbelief in the (intuitively correct) view of the mother tongue as a true "homing" possession, one that constitutes, even abroad, a secure and secured place of dwelling; a disbelief, then, in the view of the mother tongue as a linguistic milieu to which the poet is related in a natural way. There can be seen in the poems a gesture of (re)anchoring oneself in language—but this (re)anchoring emerges as a compromise, as a reconciliation into which the poems settle following the acknowledgement of the danger posed to writing by craving and striving towards what transcends symbolization. For what resides beyond symbolization is mute and thus incompatible with writing, and it draws the poem towards its negation. The literary work thus becomes a refuge not from the foreignness of another language but rather from what is foreign to all languages. That there is a poem before us attests, perhaps, that the desire for the actual language of a home left behind, for the materialization of this language in the written text, eventually overcomes the apprehension about deferring the source, about writing as an affirmation of distance, renunciation, and withdrawal. Or perhaps the poem before us is an attestation to a recognition that the purity of the sought-for origin is under peril in writing, since writing forces a concrete shape on that which seeks to remain amorphous. One goes back to the poem with the understanding that writing, on the one hand, and what nourishes or propels it, on

the other, pertain to two different orders; the understanding, in other words, that the realm of language may surpass or transcend the individual being but cannot surpass or transcend the human: that poetry is just another territory of the mundane. And thus the moment of the poet's "return" to language ("return," in quotation marks; for whatever is reached beyond language is anyway beyond the poem) is a moment when "mother" as a name for the point of inception eventually becomes differentiated from "tongue," from the language that carries her name, which now becomes a trace and an epitaph.

The dissertation core consists of four chapters. Three of the chapters center on one poem each; another chapter centers on three poems read in conjunction. All the poems, written in languages to which the writer of these lines has a degree of access (all texts are accompanied by English translation, of which one is contributed by myself), were chosen and analyzed separately and before their engagement with the question of origination became apparent in the literary analysis.

Chapter 1, "Into the Depth and out of Language," centers on "ממעמקים" ("Mima'amakim," Hebrew for "from-the-depths") from H. Leyvik's 1937 cycle *Lider tsu der Baremhertsiker Shvester* (*Songs for a Merciful Sister*). The poem stages a poetic investigation of the word "Mima'amakim" (from the penitential verse of Psalms 130.1) in a form reminiscent of the method used in traditional Jewish early education, of the kind taught to Leyvik himself. Emulating the method of *Torah* study, where yet-incomprehensible Hebrew words are learned through the memorization of their translation, Leyvik translates the iconic Hebrew word into Yiddish, the mother tongue of domestic life outside the classroom. The investigation, featuring, then, a gradual transition from Hebrew, the sacred tongue of divine revelation, religious ritual,

and Jewish law, to Yiddish, the poet's mother tongue (as opposed, indeed, to the language of religious study), becomes an inquiry into the capacity of the linguistic sign to speak for the poet's inner world. Leyvik's gradual resort to Yiddish serves a desire for private, individual self-cultivation in the beloved mother tongue, whose precedence and intimacy as a "first language" are perceived as an appropriate means for reaching one's psychic depths—this, at a time that had absorbed into its collection of stock images Sigmund Freud's archaeological metaphor of the psyche as a depth structure whose exploration through language holds the promise for revealing hidden truths. And yet the attempt to substitute Hebrew as the language of textual origins with Yiddish as the language of psychic ones concludes in the poet's recognition of the foreignness of the psyche to writing of any kind. No less than the language of study and prayer, of law and scholarship, of authority and obedience—no less than Hebrew—Yiddish, the mother tongue, turns out to be inscribed by the split between signifier and signified that leaves the psyche mysterious, enigmatic, reachable only through the encrusted layer of language. Whatever it contains of one's ancient, primeval life, remains unavailable to symbolic representation, rendering writing an ever-melancholic project in which writing comes at the inevitable cost of renunciation.[25]

Leyvik's poem manifests the tension not so much between a verbal and non-verbal mother tongue but rather between the desire for artistic consummation *in* the beloved language and a self-search *through* it; between the desire to stay and operate within the range of the symbolic's aesthetic capacities and the attraction to a "beyond" to which the mother tongue might be able to serve as a path by dint of its chronological (and thus psychological) precedence. The sought-for origin is here the psychic root that nourishes poetic activity, but also the primordial life of the poet's very "first language," which becomes identified with an ancient and

authentic psychic reality inaccessible through the symbol. The strain of Leyvik's poem is that of a (primordial) "language" lost in the process of its maturing into the (symbolic) medium of aesthetic expression; it is the strain, then, of the poet's literary (i.e., consummated) voice as the sign of his inner displacement.

Sources of different kinds are sought by Paul Celan, to whom this dissertation devotes two chapters (compared to one chapter devoted to each of the two other poets, Leyvik and Boulus). The reason for this imbalance is the different kinds of "origins" with which Celan engages, which contribute two interesting variants to this study's theme. Chapter 2, "Poetry and the Praise of Distance," centers on Celan's "Tübingen, Jänner" ("Tübingen, January") from the volume *Die Niemandsrose* ("The No-One's Rose," 1963), a poem commemorating Celan's visit to Tübingen, the city of the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin. Commemoration in the broad sense is a central theme of this piece, in which Celan contemplates the relationship between an experiential source (a historical event, a psychic wound) and the poem's meaning and explores the kind of relation poetry should have to this "origins" in order to become a testimony, i.e. an attestation to the real. He thus positions against each other two modes through which the text can relate to the reality outside it. These are the two avenues of progress in speech (as identified by Roman Jakobson): metonymy and metaphor, or continuity and substitution. The first, it seems, Celan dooms to failure: the poem's central image, of poetic speech as a shattered water reflection (an inversion, then, of the Romantic common trope), and a distorted quote from a Hölderlin hymn convey a discontinuity between the world and the word, between the event and its later artistic rendition. It is metaphor, rather, that Celan asserts as poetry's main expressive vehicle and its path to a valid saying: metaphor as that leap (between stanzas, between lines, between a word's different components) from experience to verbalization that allows a silent,

unfathomable event to assume a "voice." Metaphor becomes in Celan's poem a special mode of "carrying over," of relating to a source that, inscribed with trauma, cannot itself "speak"; his poetry is constituted as a speech-removed-from-the-source, a speech coming not from the center but rather from the periphery of the act of meaning-making.

Poetry's compromised ability to bear witness—to serve as a direct referential means—stems, however, not merely from the unfathomability of the event (the Holocaust and its aftermath), but also from the nature of the German language, which Celan explores through the practice of quoting (through engaging, then, with another kind of sources: literary ones). By wrenching a quote from a Hölderlin hymn while quoting with accuracy the meaningless word "Pallaksch" (a word Hölderlin is said to have repeated during his years of mental illness), Celan both associates himself with the German literary tradition to which his mother introduced him from an early age and points to its inner, wrenched core. The darkness of literature, he seems to be suggesting, is not merely the textual inscription of its encounter with an unimaginable reality, but an immanent characteristic of language and art, whose subjugation (even if only in reading) to the experience that "originates it" denies literature's plea for autonomy.

Chapter 3, "The Holy, the Mundane, and the Sacred" deals with three other poems by Celan: "Mandorla" ("Mandorla"), "Hawdalah" ("Havdalah"), and "Die Schleuse" ("The Lock Gate"), also from *Die Niemandsrose*. The chapter differs from the rest of the dissertation chapters in that it focuses on more than one poem; consequently, in differs also in the method of its analysis, which traces the development of a certain thematic thread along the three poems. This thread, not immediately apparent, has to do with the manifest and latent presence of Hebrew in the poems and with the ways in which linguistic practices allow Celan to redefine his relationship with God after the Holocaust. Hebrew in Celan does not simply signify what cannot

be uttered in German, what does not bear translation, or the mother tongue's inadequacy. It rather poses the poet in a realm of speech that the Hebraic God cannot claim to misunderstand. For Hebrew, in Jewish tradition, is the sacred tongue of divine revelation and creation; it is the language of prayer directed to God in God's own tongue. Celan's revolt thus manifests itself in his refusal to accede to a separation of the sacred from the mundane by which God can recede into Godself and ignore humans' plea for Providence. Celan thus consecrates Hebrew anew as humans' word of indictment.

This process extends over the three poems. The first one, "Mandorla," presents Celan's conceiving of God as an omnipresent absence, impenetrable by human words and blind to human fate. This disavowal leads the poet to reconsider the sacred as a domain shared by the human and the divine and to reconsider prayer as an act of God-affirmation. With no addressee, how can praying, this plea for access into the divine and an affirmation of its sanctity, be carried on? Such questioning will turn out to implicate, in the other two poems, a reconfiguration of the idea of sacredness and of Hebrew as the language of consecration. In "Havdalah" (literally meaning: separation; the name of the Jewish ritual of separating the Sabbath from workday) Celan will use the Jewish ritual to re-commit God to its bond with the human; in "The Lock Gate" he will re-dedicate Hebrew for the consecration of the mundane and re-constitute the prayer as a realm of encounter with God into which humans pour their suffering in God's own language. Celan, in these three poems, turns to Hebrew for the sake of transcending German, his own mother tongue that a voracious God has ignored ("Mandorla"); a language reminiscent of intimate family gatherings and of loved ones, which God has expropriated ("Havdalah," "The Lock Gate"). He brings Hebrew back to its divine source as an accusation at the same time that he re-establishes it as a human property originating in mundane life.

Chapter 4 of the dissertation, "The Ever-Escaping Word," presents a close reading of Sargon Boulus's poem "Ṣandūq, ʿArūs, fī al-Fajr, Ilá Mīnā'" ("A Trousseau, a Bride, to a Seaport, at Dawn") from the 1998 volume *Idha Kunta Nā'iman fī Markab Nūḥ* (*If You Were Asleep in Noah's* Ark). This chapter transfers the focus of the discussion to a more recent past; it also centers on a poem that engages more explicitly than the other poems with the themes of the poet's relationship with his language, the nature of the creative process, and the desires that propel writing. These I begin to read through the key provided by the poem's title, which is re-incorporated in the body of the poem as one of its lines. This incorporation, my reading suggests, marks the poem's desire to constitute and contain its own beginning in order to render itself independent of the ever-evading sign of its poetic "origin." Mysterious and inaccessible, this origin is embodied in a female figure that remains beyond the poet's reach. She is the sought-for bride, the emblem of dwelling, in the hands of whom (so we are told) is given the secret of the "word"; and yet she evades the poem's "plot," never becoming an integral part of it, marked at the end of the poem through her departure. But what is renounced at the level of the "story" is regained at the level of structure when the poem's title (namely, its beginning) is absorbed into the body of the text. The desire for the withheld secret of *poesis* finds its resolution in the structuring of a circular, self-perpetuating poem that, producing and reproducing itself, is made independent of any extra-textual locus of origination. This autonomous construct comes to loom, though, as the poem's own exigency. For the eternally self-writing text implicates not only the satisfaction of self-containment but also the threat of decomposition, of becoming once again poetry's raw material. Self-creation, in other words, implicates that the poem finds within itself not only the point of its origination but also the point of its dissolution—out of which re-writing should ensue.

Boulus's poem, then, is about autonomous (source-less) poetry as necessarily a disintegrative project: about an elusive "poetic" quality whose effects *as an absence* shape the poem's structure. It is also, however, about language as a never-to-be-possessed possession, a never-to-be-inhabited habitation. Language, it becomes apparent, has its own, foreign desires. The poet's search for a home in language, for the mother tongue as a place of dwelling, becomes an attempt to have language itself dwell in poetry as a pure, chaste bride in her newly-made house. But writing is a form of intimacy that can be only consummated in public; it is an act of renunciation, where the private is given (and in actuality, returns) as a public good. The mother tongue, whose uniqueness was stipulated on the singularity of the mother, here becomes a lover tongue, the language of a liberated female who would not accede to the male poet's wish that she be his. She is plural: she is the multiple origin: she is therefore free from the embrace of any one desire, of any desire for her as *the* one.[26]

Finally, a word about method. The method of close reading, employed in all four dissertation chapters, is intended to allow each poem to speak in its unique voice, prior and beyond any theoretical claim. There is no doubt that what I see as the poems' central preoccupation and what I propose as the main finding of this research is prescribed, to a certain degree, by my choice of texts. A hermeneutic circle, by which a developing paradigm affects the analysis of the individual texts, which then bring about the corrective adjustment of the paradigm, which then presents the details in a certain favorable light (and so on and so forth), is necessarily in operation here, as it is in every reading. This circularity is often breached by historical contextualization, which I myself attempt to do (especially in chapters 1-3). And yet I tend to think that literature's inherent value, as well as its aesthetic caliber, reside in its ability to bestow reality with a shape through stressing this reality's particularities rather than in its

capability (literature's) to absorb the social and cultural conditions of its production and reflect them back to its readers. That I attempted to maintain the autonomy of the literary works (an attempt helped by the fact, already mentioned, that the poems were chosen in different points in time and prior to my identifying their shared concerns) should not be regarded as indifference to the context of their production but rather as an expression of my wish to extract this context from the poems themselves and understand how external circumstances come to be pronounced in the poem's unique voice. The same can be said about my use of theory: the decision to not employ (or apply) any one frame of interpretation reflects an attempt to *respond* to what the text *asks*. Out of my view of literature as a site where the reader encounters reality's tensions through their appeasing aesthetic rendition I attempt to show, in this dissertation, how works of literature direct us, each in its own idiom, to pertinent historical, cultural, and literary points of reference and how they come to mean in their own means. Each of the poems studied here says something about the world, the tensions pervading it, and some possible ways to exist in it: about literature as opposed to life and about the meaning of writing as a way of living. By attending to these textual indices I hope to turn the present study into a comment about the value of the practice of close reading itself.

Notes

[1] Eva Hoffman, though becoming a writer only many years after emigrating from Poland to Canada at the age of thirteen, expresses with acuity and depth the experience of linguistic displacement.

[2] "Does living abroad undermine […] the writer's language? Can the writer change languages? If he does so, is this an enrichment or an impoverishment?" John Glad, "Preface," *Literature in Exile*, ed. John Glad (Durham: Duke UP, 1990) xi.

[3] Fishman (a scholar and devotee of Yiddish studies) refers to the loss (i.e. extinction) of minority languages. I here use his insights in a different (not unrelated) context.

[4] All the poets in this study are men.

[5] The question is articulated in Jacqueline Amati-Mehler, Simona Argentieri and Jorge Canestri, *The Babel of the Unconscious: Mother Tongue and Foreign Languages in the Psychoanalytic Dimension*, trans. Jill Whitelaw-Cucco (Madison: International Universities P, 1993) 69.

[6] The complexity of reaching a conclusive definition is manifested in varying ways in which the US Census Bureau defines "mother tongue" in its questionnaires, as mentioned in Joshua Fishman's analysis of mother-tongue claiming in the USA in the years 1960-1979: "Through to 1940 it pertained to the respondent's own mother tongue […]. From 1940 to 1960 the relevant question asked for the language spoken in the respondent's household during his childhood. In 1970 and 1979 the wording was changed again and asked whether the respondent had heard any language other than English spoken in his household during his childhood." Fishman, however, does not ascribe changes in mother-tongue claiming to changes in wording alone. See Joshua A. Fishman, "Mother Tongue Claiming in the United States since 1960: Trends and Correlates Related to the 'Revival of Ethnicity'," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 50 (1984): 95, endnote no. 3.

[7] Multilingualism is increasingly acknowledged to be the norm rather than the exception prior to the emergence of the nation state and. The age of globalization, which has witnessed waves of mass immigration, renders multilingualism again more common and visible. SeeYasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonoligual Condition* (New York: Fordham UP, 2012) 2-3 and the sources cited in her footnotes nos. 3, 4.

[8] The Pale of Settlement: Territory within the borders of czarist Russia wherein the residence of Jews was legally authorized. See Yehuda Slutsky, "Pale of Settlement," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), vol. 15, 577.

[9] When asked how he could go on writing in German Paul Celan replied: "Nur in der Muttersprache kann man die eigene Wahrheit aussagen, in der Fremdsprache lügt der Dichter" ("Only in the mother tongue can one speak his own truth. In a foreign tongue the poet lies"). Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979) 148, brought here in John Felstiner's translation as appearing in his biography of the poet, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2001) 46.

[10] His father spoke Assyrian. See Sinan Antoon, "Remembering Sargon Boulus (1944-2007)," *Jadaliyya E-zine* (2011), 28 October 2011 <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2925/remembering-sargon-boulus-%281944-2007>.

[11] Felstiner designates German as Celan's "only medium of return and restitution," pierced, however, by the paradox of language as that which both reveals and displaces what it points to. "Sie, die Sprache," Celan says, and Felstiner stresses the gender of the word—"She, the language"—which connects it, to his mind, with the poet's mother. Being, however, the language of the Third Reich, German was "at once treasured and traumatic" for Celan. See John Felstiner, "The Mother Tongue of Paul Celan: Translation into Biography," *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and Gender*, eds. Susan Groag ed Bell and Marilyn ed Yalom (Albany: State U of New York P, 1990) 167-68, 80.

[12] Boulus, for example, explains: "as a child I was writing in Arabic, although I have written certain things in Assyrian. But I soon realized that Assyrian is a very limited language in the sense of an audience." See Margaret Obank, "'It Just Grabbed Me, This Magic of Words, of Music': Iraqi Poet Sargon Boulus Talks to Banipal's Editor," *Banipal: Magazine of Modern Arab Literature* 1 (1998): 15.

[13] "Margaret Mead has stated that even in societies where the women speak a different language from the men, the mother's language is first taught to all the children by the mother and only later do the boys learn the father's language." See Ralph R. Greenson, "The Mother Tongue and the Mother," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 31 (1950): 22.

[14] The emphasis weakens, though, in the OED definition of **native speaker** as "a person for whom a specified language is their first language or the one which they normally and naturally speak, esp. a person who has spoken the language since earliest childhood, as opposed to a person who has learnt it as a second or subsequent language." See *Native, Adj.*, December 2012. Oxford University Press, Available: http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/125304?rskey=u8GuVH&result=2&isAdvanced=false, 11 February 2013.

[15] The same holds true for their life after migration. After fleeing Russia, Leyvik spent his life amidst the Yiddish-speaking immigrant community of New York's Lower East Side; Celan, after having settled in Paris, was no more than one individual in the city's mélange of immigrants; and Boulus was to become a member of a dispersed community of Assyrians and Arabic-speakers in Europe and the United States.

[16] And see Benedict Anderson (154): "What the eye is to the lover—that particular, ordinary eye he or she is born with—language—whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue—is to the patriot." Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006), 18 February 2013 <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.01609.0001.001>.

[17] On this narrative, a "linguistic family romance" in which language, constructed as emanating from the mother's body (not her speech), is harnessed for guaranteeing male authority over language and linguistic production, see Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonoligual Condition* 10-14. Also see Forster for a discussion of multilingualism as a norm in writing during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque, up to the emergence of Romanticism. "It is clear that people in earlier centuries had a much less developed sense of what linguists have come to call 'language loyalty' than most of us have today," He asserts. See Leonard Forster, *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (London: Cambridge UP in association with U of Otago P, 1970) 19.

[18] A view pronounced by Lacan himself in his XX Seminar; see Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. Bruce Fink, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1999). About the Name of the Father as the principle of substitution see François Regnault, "The Name-of-the-Father," *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Including the first English translation of 'Position of the unconscious' by Jacques Lacan*, eds. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus (Albany: State U of New York P, 1995), vol., 65-66.

[19] Such as assumed by several streams of within psychological and psychoanalytical thought. See Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether, "Introduction," *The (M)Other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, eds. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985) 18-25.

[20] English translation by Benjamin Harshav and Barbara Harshav, eds., *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 742-45.

[21] I use the terms "origin" and "source" interchangeably, but the former better suits my argument to the extent that origin is self-caused and creative whereas the source is a transmitter and an imitator. What is sought in the poems is a point of initiation rather than the mediation or formerly-existing "content."

[22] For a definition of ars-poetic vs. self-reflexive poem, see Ruth Kartun-Blum, "Introduction," *Poetry as Its Own Mirror: An Anthology*, ed. Ruth Kartun-Blum ([Tel Aviv]: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1982) 11.

[23] James McFarlane positions "[t]he wanderer, the loner, the exile, the restless and rootless and homeless individual" as the prototypical subject of modernist literature. See James McFarlane, "The Mind of Modernism," *Modernism, 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 82. Caren Kaplan, while critiquing Malcolm Bradbury and McFarlane's view of modernism as produced by exiles who translate their displacement into aesthetical gain, still acknowledge the centrality of these figures as tropes in later (i.e., postmodern) critical discourse. See Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 29-33.

[24] Caren Kaplan notes: "The prevalence of metaphors of travel and displacement in [the] body of critical work suggests that the modern era is fascinated by the experience of distance and estrangement." See Kaplan, *Questions* 1. I would maintain that the prose and poetry of these times are as well replete with these.

[25] Leyvik was one of many Jewish poets for whom language was a major concern. As Daniel Morris notes, the place of Yiddish in American poetry is among the most prevalent themes in the works of modern, secular Jewish American poets (side by side with the themes of the Holocaust, immigrant experience, Diaspora life, anti-Semitism, the family, and the Bible). More interesting, but perhaps equally unsurprising, is the presence, in these poets' work, of "[t]he emphasis on a lost or erased origin that maintains its spectral power over the secular Jewish culture of America, as well as the acceptance of an unstable, linguistically oriented sense of self that exists in between clearly delineated spaces." Morris finds these foci of interest in Charles Bernstein and in Marjorie Perloff. See Daniel Morris, "Introduction," *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, eds. Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2010) 2-3, 7.

[26] The identification of language with a female figure that is not a mother is of course extremely suggestive, as it not only undermines this language's singularity but also hints at another family plot (or phantasy) as underlying the myth of the first language's uniqueness and indispensability.

CHAPTER ONE

Into the Depths and Out of Language:

H. Leyvik's "Mima'amakim" ("Fromthedepths")

Mima'amakim   ממעמקים[1]

#			#
1	*Mima'amakim*—	ממעמקים —	1
	What a word.[2]	אַ וואָרט אַזאַ.	
	What a word:	אַ וואָרט אַזאַ:	
	Fromthedepths.[3]	פונדערטיפעניש.	
5	What do you mean,[4]	וואָס מיינסטו מיט זיך	5
	Fromthedepths?	פונדערטיפעניש?	
	What do you mean to me,	וואָס באַטײַטסטו פאַר מיר	
	Fromthedepths?	פונדערטיפעניש?	
	Why are you chasing[5] me,	פאַרוואָס יאָגסטו מיך,	
10	Why are you racing[6] after me	פאַרוואָס פאַרפאָלגסטו מיך	10
	From childhood,[7]	פון קינדהייט אָן,	
	From *Heder*-school,	פון חדר אָן,	
	From white midnights—	פון ווײַסע חצות-נעכט אָן —	
	Fromthedepths?	פונדערטיפעניש?	
15	*Mima'amakim*—	ממעמקים —	15
	I am calling[8] to you	איך רוף צו דיר	
	Fromthedepths;	פונדערטיפעניש;	
	I am praying to you,	איך בעט צו דיר,	
	I am stretching my hands to you[9]	איך שטרעק מײַנע הענט צו דיר	
20	Fromthedepths;	פונדערטיפעניש;	20
	I want to be known[10] to you.	איך וויל זײַן דערקאַנט צו דיר,	
	I want to be near to you,	איך וויל זײַן נאָענט צו דיר,	
	I want to touch you,	איך וויל דיך אָנרירן,	
	I want to reach you,	איך וויל דערגרייכן דיך,	
25	I want to raise[11] myself up to you—	איך וויל זיך אויפהייבן צו דיר —	25
	Fromthedepths.	פונדערטיפעניש.	
	Mima'amakim—	ממעמקים —	
	What sound[12] are you?	וואָס פאַר אַ קלאַנג ביסטו?	
	What do you bring[13] with you—	וואָס טראָגסטו מיט זיך —	
30	Fromthedepths?	פונדערטיפעניש?	30

English	Line	Yiddish	Line
What do you possess in you—		װאָס פֿאַרמאָגסטו אין זיך —	
Fromthedepths?		פֿונדערטיפֿעניש?	
You're saying it once—		זאָגסט עס איינמאָל —	
Say it again,		זאָג עס נאָכאַמאָל,	
Sing it again,	35	זינג עס נאָכאַמאָל	35
And then again:		און טאַקע נאָכאַמאָל:	
Mi-		מי —	
Ma-		מאָ —	
a-		אַ —	
ma-	40	מאָ —	40
kim—		קים —	
Whose cry is it?[14]		װעמענס געשרײַ איז דאָס?	
Who convulses in it?[15]		װער פֿאַרגײט זיך אַזױ?	
Whose song is it[16]		װעמענס געזאַנג אַזאַ	
Fromthedepths?	45	פֿונדערטיפֿעניש?	45
You're saying it once—		זאָגסט עס איינמאָל —	
Say it again,		זאָג עס נאָכאַמאָל,	
And then again—		און טאַקע נאָכאַמאָל —	
Out-[17]		פֿון —	
of-	50	דער —	50
the-		טי —	
depths.[18]		פֿע —	
		ניש.	

1. <u>Inner Translation in "Mima'amakim"</u>

"Mima'amakim" ("ממעמקים," Hebrew for "from the depths")—an allusion, clearest in the second stanza, to the penitential verse of Psalms 130.1, "Out of the depths have I called to thee, O LORD"[19]—builds on the trope of the *Heder* (Hebrew for "room") method of study common in traditional Jewish early education, of the kind to which Leyvik was submitted as a child (and see line 12 of the poem). In this educational system, boys as young as three meet with a teacher (a *melamed*) in a group for learning the *Torah* (the Hebrew Pentateuch). Unable yet to comprehend the Hebrew text, they study it through recitation, pronouncing each word's syllables and then repeating the word's translation, provided to them by the teacher, into the language they know from home. Among East European Jews, this language was commonly Yiddish (represented, in the poem's translation above, by the English words).[20] Yiddish was the language of instruction

whose ultimate goal was mastering the Hebrew text, and this pattern persisted through the later stages of male student education. Moving back and forth between the languages was thus habitual in devotional study. It has also become a part of textuality in the case of bilingual prayer books (intended mostly for women, who customarily did not master Hebrew, or for "men who are like women," as some texts maintain, referring to the uneducated)[21] and the printed *Taytsh* books, the Yiddish renditions of the Pentateuch, in which the Hebrew text was framed by a Yiddish translation printed in a different font (Harshav *The Meaning* 14; Harshav *The Other* 36-37; Shandler "Beyond" 100-01).[22]

The instrumental division of labor between the language of the sacred text and the language of its explication has characterized Jewish society since Hebrew lost its colloquial function in antiquity. From this "division of labor," however, a hierarchy ensued that defined the center and periphery of the milieu of Jewish culture and bestowed each language with a different symbolic status. Hebrew was privileged over the vernacular to the extent that a source is privileged over its translation[23] and God's word over humans'. The language of the *Torah* and of the prophets—the *loshn-koydesh* ("the sacred tongue")[24] of divine revelation, religious ritual, Jewish law (*Halakha*), and rabbinic discourse; the "repository of the Divine mystery" (Halevy Donin 18)—Hebrew was the language of the most valued texts of a society in which these texts' preponderance was unquestionable; its superiority to all other languages was never in doubt (Harshav *The Other* 43). In Jewish literacy, every other language[25] could only be considered a vehicle, secondary in importance and foreign in essence (a "la'az," that is, a gentiles' language); every translation, an interchangeable derivative and a step away from god's speech and from sanctity.[26] Yiddish, the cherished *mame-loshn* (mother tongue, as it was commonly named) spoken by the majority of East European Jews from the Middle Ages and on,[27] was allotted the

realm of everyday life. It was the language of the domestic sphere, of trade and the marketplace, of speech and written communication, of folklore and women's prayer books (Harshav *The Other* 43-44). Yiddish lacked, moreover, the aura of purity owned by Hebrew as the language of a (supposedly) single, primordial textual source. A language of varied sources (some of which, like German and Slavic languages, were clearly non-Jewish), porous, receptive to its surrounding, and devoid of clear boundaries (due to its frequent borrowing from other languages), Yiddish lacked the ontological primacy of the pure origin, of the origin as pure.[28] An instrumental division of roles thus became constitutive of each language's symbolic status (i.e. prescriptive rather than merely descriptive).

The transition from Hebrew to Yiddish (and vice versa) may thus be read as the crossing of the boundaries erected between the domains that came to be identified with each language. Though the poem, as will later become evident, works to blur these boundaries, noting them here is valuable for underlining what is or might be at stake in the encounter between the two languages, in translating "Mima'amakim" into "Fundertifenish" ("Fromthedepths"): a transition from the written to the oral (from text to utterance, from recitation to spontaneous speech), from the religious to the secular, from the formal, solemn "language of the father" (Hebrew as the language of law: of discipline, obedience, and punishment) to the intimate, soothing mother tongue, from the sacred to the mundane, the practical, and the sensual. The boundary is also ideological, to the extent that the different religious, social, and historical affiliations of Hebrew and Yiddish became associated with certain politico-ideological trajectories. Leyvik's own literary path manifests this entanglement of language, religion, and ideology.[29] The poet, who made his early literary steps in Hebrew, switched to Yiddish under the influence of the Bund, the Jewish social-democratic workers' organization in Eastern Europe that came to be associated

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with secular diasporic Jewish nationalism and promoted Yiddish as the language of the masses. At the same time that he adopted Yiddish as his poetic language, Leyvik also ceased to observe religious customs (Harshav and Harshav 674-76; Denman 629-30).

A similar linguistic transition/translation is repeated in the four stanzas of Leyvik's poem: all stanzas, except for the last, begin with the Hebrew word "ממעמקים" ("Mima'amakim"), which is then substituted with the Yiddish "פונדערטיפעניש" ("Fromthedepths"). The first three stanzas thus open with the Hebrew word and conclude with its Yiddish counterpart—and this repetition, bringing Hebrew back into the poem once and again (questioning it, contemplating it, pondering it), seems to defy the translation's efficacy. Yet a change does take place in the course of the poem as a whole, as Hebrew is eventually banished from the poem: the first three stanzas start, as aforementioned, with the Hebrew word, but not so the last stanza, from which Hebrew disappears completely. A step towards this banishment has already taken place in the third stanza, where the Hebrew "ממעמקים" is transcribed in a Yiddishized, i.e. phonetic, spelling (lines 37-41: "מי / מאַ / אַ / מאַ / קים"; in the English translation, "Mi / ma / a / ma / kim"). The poem's last Hebrew word thus appears in Yiddish transliteration, assuming the spelling system of a language that customarily retains the original spelling of its Hebrew source-words.[30]

2. "Mima'amakim": A Call into the Depths

There is no place as appropriate for beginning the present discussion as the poem's own beginning. But where does this poem begin? And wherefrom?

1	*Mima'amakim*—		ממעמקים —	1
	What a word.		אַ װאָרט אַזאַ.	

It starts with the word "Mima'amakim," which amounts to saying that it starts with language. Not with the *parole*, not with "Mima'amakim" as an instance of language, but rather with the *langue*, with the very infrastructure of speech. The word "Mima'amakim" with which the poem marks its origin (both on the page and as a discourse) is paradigmatic of language and of the paradoxes of signification. For as a word, an uttered signifier (a mark of ink on a paper), "Mima'amakim" can never be the object it refers to: it can never become the realm of the "depths," with its sizeable volume and three-dimensional measures. The inscription of the word "Mima'amakim" confirms the rift between signifier and signified, the tension between presence and absence that is embodied in the linguistic sign. This statement holds true, of course, for every sign in language: a word can enter discourse only as a word, only as a split between symbol and its denoted meaning (a split of which it is both a vehicle and a remnant), dissimilar to itself but also identical to itself as a bare signifier. The word, then, comes into being as such for the very sake of entering discourse. Every word is therefore "just" a word and maintains, by necessity, the gap between the typographical mark of reference (typographical—in the case of the written text; auditory—in speech) and the object to which it refers (the referent). It maintains this gap as long as it prevails in the text, that is, forever. That "Mima'amakim" can enter the text only as a signifier—that pronouncing it already posits it as "merely" a word, a word relating to its signified only as to a desired, unapproachable horizon—thus seems to be self-evident. Writing always-already points to itself as an act of deferral, of repression, of renunciation: as an act taking place in the domain of the symbol, acknowledging its removal from the real. Writing is always "merely" writing.

But the word "Mima'amakim" is paradigmatic of speech and of the literary endeavor in a more fundamental sense. For whereas the poet's (or the speaker's)[31] insistence on inscribing the

word conjures it up as a sheer signifier, its inscription also renders it the marker of a reality beyond it, a symbol summoning and making present the reality that it defers. Maintaining the wordiness of "Mima'amakim" ("What a word," line 2), insisting on its identity to itself in the realm of the signifier (see lines 2-3) and on its referentiality allows "Mima'amakim" to be what it is: a word from the depths, a word in which morphology (the prefix "m-," meaning "from") is self-consummation. Precisely through its literality, "Mima'amakim" becomes the marker not only of a deep origin but also of this origin's echo, remnant, or trace; it becomes, we could say, *this* echo, *this* remnant, *this* trace. "Mima'amakim" emerges from the obscure realms of the depths and it emerges as a word—for words are the only medium through which a concrete or metaphysical world can emerge in writing. Put differently, the minute "Mima'amakim" enters the text we know that there are depths*, but that these depths are given to us only as a word*. If "Mima'amakim" is plainly what it is, then it attests both to the existence of the depths and to these depths' inaccessibility: to the inherent, irremediable rift separating the text and the world, the page and the psyche, the letter and the thing. As a mere word, "Mima'amakim" ("from-the-depths") is a surface.

What kind of surface is language? A reflecting one, through which the word "Mima'amakim" is returned in translation, i.e. transfigured, in the form of the Yiddish "Fundertifenish" ("Fromthedepths"). An invisible mirror separates lines 2 and 3 that constitutes lines 3-4 as a mirror image of the poem's first two lines:

1	*Mima'amakim*—	ממעמקים —	1
	What a word.	אַ וואָרט אַזאַ.	
	What a word:	אַ וואָרט אַזאַ:	
	Fromthedepths.	פונדערטיפעניש.	

And yet not exactly a mirror, for the Hebrew word "Mima'amakim" is returned as the Yiddish "Fundertifenish" ("Fromthedepths"). What comes out from the depths comes out *different*, and this difference, this discrepancy, itself hints at the existence of a mysterious bottom. As the turning of language upside-down coincides with the announcement of the depths, we realize that the mirror is the reflecting surface of a three-dimensional *pond* through which the poet pond-ers his word, ponders the depths through his word,[32] because only a word can be returned from the depths: Narcissus sees his reflection because a reflection alone can be seen.

The poem's narcissistic gaze does not constitute its mirror stage, then, as conceived by Lacan.[33] It does not provide the speaker with his integrated textual image, does not establish the written as a soothing (if illusory) escape from a state of inner disintegration. The poem is a symbolic pond (not an imaginary mirror): a self-reflection through language, through the water-like surface of language, that gives one to oneself as a split, as fragmented, as an already-punctured whole. This is the fate of the narcissistic gaze after the fall into language,[34] the destiny of the creative impulse: to bestow the subject with a superficial image, with the signifier, and at the same time to disclose its superficiality, the split that governs signification; to signpost both the depths and the impossibility to reach for them, both the symbol and the complete otherness not of language to the world but rather of the world to the text.

To write, then, means to remain on the surface of the page, on the page as a surface, and yet to know that there is a "beyond" and "beneath" that language can neither grasp nor communicate. What makes "Mima'amakim" paradigmatic of language (first of the signifier and then, inevitably, of language as a whole) is not that its signified cannot be incorporated in the text (this, we agreed, is characteristic of the linguistic sign as such), but rather that it points to the written word as that place from which the poet reflects on his expulsion from "the depths."

"Mima'amakim" is the prototype of writing not because it marks language's flatness but rather because it conjures up a topography that lays bare the meaning of this flatness, of this discursive surface-ness existing vis-à-vis an opposite, inaccessible realm. "Mima'amakim" points to itself as a signifier, and in this way confirms the existence of its signified *outside the realm of the text*.

But the Yiddish "Fundertifenish" ("Fromthedepths") is not a simple replication of a fissure already embedded and embodied in the Hebrew "Mima'amakim." Had this been the case, we could have only incorporated the second part of Ovid's story, in which Narcissus recognizes the reflection in the pool as his own:[35] "Fundertifenish" would have then confirmed an otherness already known to the speaker from the Hebrew (an otherness that can thus be regarded as sameness). But that Narcissus misrecognizes himself at first is an indispensible part of the story of self-reflection. What comes out from the depths, I have already noted, *comes out different*— and what comes out different is language: Yiddish instead of Hebrew, Yiddish translation instead of the Hebrew original, instead of Hebrew as a point of origination. Translation, we learn from the poem's first four lines, is an instrument of likeness; and yet it can establish this likeness only by registering a difference, by acknowledging a cleft within repetition. This becomes clearer when we re-cognize the poem's temporal order, that is, when we re-read lines 1-4 and measure the lapse of time between the first and the fourth lines against the background of the three-dimensional space that has come into being before our eyes. In this time-space gap—the gap between an original call and its resounding sound; a gap that does not exist, cannot exist, in the immediacy of visual impression—we find the female protagonist of the Narcissus legend, Echo. Like Echo, who can only repeat the words of others, but whose repetition introduces "not only deferral, but also difference" into the utterance (Berger 622), so does Yiddish repeat the poet's Hebrew word "Mima'amakim" but in doing it, it changes this word, compromising the word's

identity with a mirror image created through shared signification; compromising identity, that is, by introducing translation as a mechanism through which an original difference—and an origin—can manifest itself.

For what is translated here by the Yiddish "Fundertifenish" is not Hebrew, but rather the depths designated in it. The point of transition from Hebrew to Yiddish is the point where the poet's language touches the depths (the nature of which is yet to be found) and returns to the surface (of the page, of the pond) transformed by what it has encountered. Apparently, embracing translation as an exclusive instrument of resemblance, one that poses "Mima'amakim" and "Fundertifenish" ("Fromthedepths") as each other's exact mirror image (lines 1-4), would have reached a similar conclusion: both words, the Hebrew and the Yiddish, are to be read, very literally, as coming from-the-depths; both mark themselves as the echoes of another, primordial source residing *elsewhere*. Both words would thus become, in this foregrounding of their likeness, surface-signifiers (the signifier: an inhabitant of surfaces) for which translation is nothing but the exchange of places. In this respect, naming Hebrew as a source and Yiddish as its "mere" translation (its "inferior" derivative: farther from god's speech, lacking the truthfulness of the primal, devoid of the aura of sanctification), as the poem's discourse seems to imply, denies the equality established (indeed through a difference) between the two languages. What is interesting, however, in regarding translation as a vehicle of change, of an *altered* repetition, is that accepting or presuming Hebrew's primacy as an anteceding source and as the poem's primal, originating call ("Mima'amakim": coming from the sacred Hebrew text of Psalms, the word commencing the poem, the poet's first utterance) foregrounds a linguistic difference that can only become meaningful as the marker of a much more fundamental and significant difference. For language to emerge *different*, it has to undergo a

change, and this change can only be accounted for by Yiddish's transition through the depths. "The echo as altering repetition 'returns' to Narcissus as the possibility of his alteration" (Berger 629). The "depths," in other words, is a medium of transformation and a locus of foreignness. From there it emerges, this word "Fundertifenish" ("Fromthedepths"), impregnated with something to which it now becomes an echo: another source now manifests itself through it. Yiddish ceases to be the translation of Hebrew alone, becoming, rather, the translation (and the inscription) of a linguistic difference.

The poem's first four lines turn out to be, then, an endless labyrinth. If its consequences are yet unclear, at least its kernel can be identified: it is the doubleness created by a Hebrew source[36] (the Psalmic "Mima'amakim") marking itself also as a translation (an echo "from-the-depths") and by a Yiddish translation ("Fundertifenish") marking itself as having, in addition to the Hebrew word, a second source (the "depths"). Moreover: Yiddish, the poet's mother tongue that was called, as in the *Heder* years, to translate and explicate a Hebrew word—the mother tongue, through which the sacred text was to unfold and unravel—creates nothing less than *another enigma*. It creates "Fundertifenish" ("Fromthedepths"), a private neologism in which three separate words merge into one impenetrable verbal compound. What Yehoash,[37] in his translation of the Bible into Yiddish, renders in three separate words, "fun di tifenishn," "from the depths" (in the plural), becomes in Leyvik a singular, amalgamated, sealed name.[38] The Yiddish word is not only a translation with two sources; it is now itself in need of explication, and thus a "source" just like Hebrew, only perhaps even more unfathomable, for she, the poet's mother tongue, is supposedly the language of ultimate clarity whose meaning translation can only obscure. "Mima'amakim," a poem that seems to imitate the diglossic nature of traditional Jewish early education, based as it is on the translation of the *Torah* Hebrew words into Yiddish,

confounds "source" and "translation," "origin" and "derivative," "primary" and "secondary," collates the eye and the ear, the image and the echo, the two-dimensional page and the three-dimensional space. It poses translation as a task whose terms are unstable and whose prospects are unknown—and whose success or failure is bestowed with meaning much deeper than it might at first appear.

3. "Mima'amakim": A Call from and to the Depths

Fromthedepths: wherefrom is the call? And to whom is it addressed?

Chapter 130 of the book of Psalms is part of the "Song of Ascent"[39] and a lament coupling a personal complaint of suffering with a plea for divine help (Sarna 670). It is an appeal to God from the depths of the heart, of misery, distress, and destitution—an appeal, that is, to a transcendental, omnipotent God from the lowly position of the suffering human being (and of any believer, in any time).[40] Yet "Mima'amakim," in Leyvik's poem, is also a word, or even: "merely" a word (lines 2-3). The entity addressed in the second person is not only God, which is summoned here through the religious text and in what could be read as the customary way of appeal through the prayer ritual.[41] Rather, the word "Mima'amakim," and later its Yiddish counterpart "Fundertifenish," is itself the addressee. The poem thus collapses a call to God from the depths of misery with a call to the word "Fromthedepths" (either in Hebrew or in Yiddish) pronounced from the surface location of the text.

| 5 | What do you mean, Fromthedepths? | וואָס מיינסטו מיט זיך פונדערטיפעניש? | 5 |

There is room, in reading this poem, for probing the meaning of each of these appeals. But it is the conjunction of the religious cry and the mundane (literary) investigation, their

convergence, that seems to provide the richest ground for interpretation. Leyvik's allusion to Psalms summons the ancient Hebraic text and summons Hebrew as the language of a "serviceable poetic tradition"—one of few indigenous Jewish sources available for the Yiddish poet (Levinson 123-24).[42] Julian Levinson explains that, in contrast with Yiddish prose writers, who could draw on a substantial body of Yiddish literature created by previous generations in various genres, modern Yiddish poets, working in a tradition whose roots could not be traced back farther than the end of the nineteenth century, lacked Jewish literary forefathers (and see Harshav *The Other* 161, 64-68, 75). The book of Psalms, written in verse, emerges in Leyvik's poem as the birthplace of poetic inspiration: a "usable past" that can constitute, as it does, a point of origin for the poet's own "song." It is where the poem begins.[43] The strain implicated in the prayer's transformation into a poetic tool ("What a word"), into a point of inception for the artistic, non-religious, literary endeavor, stems, of course, from the twofold nature of Psalms as both a supplication and a song. But that addressing God becomes the addressing of a word (lines 5-6); that the text of prayer, this powerful, passionate religious plea, becomes a (mere) word and the object of intellectual investigation—this suggests that the depths designated by "Mima'amakim" in the Bible no longer exist for this poem's speaker; that he no longer finds within him the theological depths (i.e., the faith) that make possible the call to God; and that he seeks other depths in their stead.

The convergence of the two calls—to God, to the word—encapsulates, I am suggesting, the modern Yiddish poet's complex position vis-à-vis the Jewish tradition and its texts. The summoning of Psalms bespeaks an elemental continuity between the poet and his forefathers in ancient times. And yet the quick turning to "Mima'amakim" as a word insinuates a rejection of the religious text's spiritual meaning and the welcoming of the Hebrew word as a secularized

poetic vehicle, a means for the poet's reflection on the possibilities and impossibilities of his linguistic apparatus: a device in his artistic repertoire. The ancient Hebrew verse-text is confirmed to be part of the Yiddish poet's intellectual world and cultural heritage[44] at the same time that this very world (and its word) is disconnected, in a way, from its orthodox origins. The invocation of "Mima'amakim" as a word implies (and embodies) the poet's distance from this word's original context, a distance that allows the substitution of the discursive for the metaphysical, the analytical for the naively devout, the space of the text for the *Makom* ("the place," one of God's names in Hebrew)—and the assertion, so it seems, that an existential, emotional, and spiritual depth that was once found in religious belief is now contested and defied and perhaps sought in other venues (such as literature). The I-Thou relationship that had connected the Jew to God, this ultimate "other" that is nevertheless still a "thou," now extends between the poet and his language, which becomes a new source of meaning.[45]

It is the convergence of the two calls, then, that points to the desires and needs that underlie the poet's turn to the word. What drives this turn is not simply the search after old-new literary vehicles (the Biblical verse) or the enticement of linguistic playfulness, but rather the desire to fulfill a spiritual and intellectual need that religion, in its traditional textual apparel, has ceased to satisfy. The word "Mima'amakim" is investigated as a new object of devotion, one that can fill a void opened by the loss of religious faith engendered by the poet's exposure to secular Jewish culture and his immigration to the New World. Something akin to a *substitution* takes place, in which the word "Fromthedepths" becomes a new venerated object, a new meaningful and present entity, and the speaker's relation to it, a realm for seeking meaning, sense, and value.

In what follows I would like to develop an interpretation of Leyvik's poem that focuses on the meaning of the turn from the religious text to language as such. This turn is realized (both

embodied and manifested) in the process of translation taking place in the poem: "Mima'amakim" as the Hebrew word of the Bible and of Jewish tradition is substituted[46] with "Fundertifenish" as the word of a Yiddish secular, modern culture (Psalms as a "mere" word: necessarily, then, the word of secularization and the stamp of modernity). For the most part, this substitution is neither decisive nor final, as indicated at least by the recourse to Hebrew at the opening of stanzas 1-3. Neither is the abandoning of the Hebrew text free of conflict: it rather appears, particularly in stanzas 1-2, unsettled between the poles of attraction and rejection and thus ridden with conflict. Translation, in Leyvik's poem, signifies a position between continuity and change, turn and return, whose signification reaches beyond linguistics per-se. When Yiddish is eventually chosen, towards the end of the poem, as the language of the depths, it stands speechless facing the poet's demands. On that occasion, the discussion will come back to the poem's first four lines, where some final conclusions will turn out to have been foreseen and foretold.

3.1.　"Mima'amakim" the Hebraic Text of the Jewish Religious Tradition

How are we to read, more in detail, the poem's addressing of "Mima'amakim" as a word? "Mima'amakim," the word of Psalms, can be read as a metonymy of the Hebrew Bible: of the Bible as the quintessential Jewish sacred text but also as a generic name for the text in Judaism, the name of Judaism as (represented by, embodied in) a text. "Mima'amakim" thus stands for the specific text(s) that, particularly after the Babylonian exile, has come to connect Jewish communities across geographical but also temporal distances, providing them with moral, legal, and behavioral guidance, and thus a sense of community (a people, a nation) and continuity. But it also stands for the text as such, for Judaism as known through its texts, that is,

for Judaism as a textual presence (or entity, as opposed to habitus[47]) and authority, for Judaism as a text and thus as an authority (both authoritative or authoritarian).

What has initiated the speaker's inquiry of the word? What made him turn a critical eye towards the text of his own tradition? The answer hides in lines 5-8:

| 5 | What do you mean, Fromthedepths? What do you mean to me, Fromthedepths? | ווָאס מיינסטו מיט זיך פונדערטיפעניש? ווָאס בַאטיַיטסטו פַאר מיר פונדערטיפעניש? | 5 |

Meaning, we understand, has become personal: a text can be meaningful, can be deemed meaningful, only if it echoes the poet's inner world. That it had spoken to so many generations before him no longer bestows a text with meaning and value for the contemporary poet. Rather, the text is sought for its present meaning and meaning is constituted in the here and now.

To become meaningful, to be brought into relevancy, the text thus needs to be rendered in one's present-day language: in Yiddish, the poet's first language and the primary language of his writing. Translating "Mima'amakim" into "Fundertifenish" does not signify the simple abandonment of a text now considered irrelevant; it rather corresponds with the privatization of sense, becoming a means of approximation necessary for investigating what needs to be revealed anew. Leyvik here examines an old text's capability to transfer itself into a new world (America) and assume a new, contemporary and relevant meaning. In the United States, away from the battlefield of Yiddish and Hebrew nationalism and territorialism,[48] Yiddish could perhaps more easily become the language of the modern individual in a way that Hebrew, associated as it was, from the 1880s and on, with Zionism (associated, that is, both with particular territory and with a national, collective cause), could not become.[49] Yiddish was Leyvik's native tongue and the language in which he, the immigrant from Belarus, has come to know the New World and absorb

its modern sensibilities. Hebrew, precisely as the language of the sacred text—precisely as "the one [language] shared by Jews across historical, national, and geographic borders," the language of the laws that usher Jewish life on both intellectual and behavioral, private and communal, levels (Steiner *No Passion* 305), the language in which life in the diaspora was rejected—was loaded with historical, ideological, and, most important, emotional weight that the poet wishes he could escape:

9	Why are you chasing me,	פֿאַרוואָס יאָגסטו מיך,	9
10	Why are you racing after me	פֿאַרוואָס פֿאַרפֿאָלגסטו מיך	10
	From childhood,	פֿון קינדהייט אָן,	
	From *Heder*-school,	פֿון חדר אָן,	
	From white midnights—	פֿון וויַיסע חצות-נעכט אָן —	
	Fromthedepths?	פֿונדערטיפֿעניש?	

The word pursuing Leyvik and whose grasp he cannot escape is the word learned in the *Heder* and recited in long, sleepless nights of rigorous *Torah* study and prayer ("white nights").[50] He is chased by the sacred text: by the Hebrew, then, that was taught to him as a child, branded on his mind through endless repetition to become the signifier of the stringency and strict discipline to which he was subjected, the word of troubled memories. For this reason, too, Leyvik would have liked to turn "Mima'amakim" into a word, a mere word, as he attempts to do in the poem's first lines. By calling it a word, by calling to it *as* a word, Leyvik expresses the desire that this Hebrew word, "Mima'amakim," no longer symbolizes: that it becomes a hollow, trivial (innocuous and innocent) signifier, a neutral poetic vehicle devoid of a past. Such he would have liked to covet it (lines 18-15): in a completely unencumbered way. Translation here becomes (also) the mark of a resistance and a defense: the substitution of one signifier for another in order to distance its signified, to dissociate oneself from its sway.[51] It becomes a means of suspension. In this sense, too, the Hebrew verse of Psalms allows the poem to come

into being, this time not as an inspiring poetic tradition, but rather, somewhat paradoxically, as a text to be scrutinized and revolted against. Leyvik's investigation creates the distance that allows his poem to unfold.

But the Hebrew text, from which the poet seeks to flee, cannot be cast into oblivion, precisely because it is the text of his childhood. Disconnecting from the Hebrew word of the sacred text amounts to detaching himself from his own past. The language of the Bible and of early education, Hebrew is imbued with early memories that, even if distressing, are still part of his most intimate self. Or so we conclude from the poem's second stanza, in which the relationship between the speaker and his interlocutor, the "I" and the "you," appear as impregnated with intimacy and passion:

15	*Mima'amakim*—	ממעמקים —	15
	I am calling to you	איך רוף צו דיר	
	Fromthedepths;	פונדערטיפעניש;	
	I am praying to you,	איך בעט צו דיר,	
	I am stretching my hands to you	איך שטרעק מײַנע הענט צו דיר	
20	Fromthedepths;	פונדערטיפעניש;	20
	I want to be known to you.	איך וויל זײַן דערקאָנט צו דיר,	
	I want to be near to you,	איך וויל זײַן נאָענט צו דיר,	
	I want to touch you,	איך וויל דיך אָנרירן,	
	I want to reach you,	איך וויל דערגרייכן דיך,	
25	I want to raise myself up to you—	איך וויל זיך אויפהייבן צו דיר —	25
	Fromthedepths.	פונדערטיפעניש.	

The act of self-translation does not necessarily reflect, then, a deliberate rejection of the Hebrew word and a willful self-exclusion from the religious text. Rather, this translation and the mode of repetition through which it takes place appear (also) as a means for conducting a weariless investigation of, for the sake of gaining insight into, a word that, although enunciated in the intimate language of prayer, although a word of his memory, maintains a degree of unfathomability.[52] The transition into Yiddish, the same transition that allowed the poet, as a

child, to access the sealed text of the Hebrew Pentateuch, can be read as adhering to an old method, only now in a search for revelation, no longer for the sake of clarification *per se*. It can be read as an attempt to decipher and get closer to the meaning of "Mima'amakim," a word that the poet carries within him; a nostalgic and melancholic return to pastimes through a word encapsulating parts of his early childhood but remaining mysterious and foreign. "Mima'amakim" is a key to his childhood years, and yet a key that itself is locked in the face of the poet for whom the religious text ceased to be a close companion.

And thus the speaker tries all kinds of ways to approach the word: calling it, pleading with it, reaching for it, seeking its acknowledgement. He seeks intimacy both physical and emotional, and his actions, although aimed at a definite goal, do not form a complete, unified and ordered act. They appear, rather, as a series of discrete steps where different modes of connection are tried and re-tried (contact is sought in line 19 and then in line 23; proximity is sought in lines 22, 24, 25). Even the addressing of the word in the second person, as a "you" (a singular and familiar "you": *du* rather than the formal plural *'ir*), if not a sign for an existing familiarity, can be read as signifying the poet's attempt to render "Mima'amakim" a partner for an interpersonal encounter, especially given the rendition of the Hebrew plural word ("from the depths") as a singular in Yiddish ("from the depth"). Moreover: in this repetitive appeal to the word we can recognize, indeed, not only the old *Heder* method of explication through translation (and the Talmudic pattern of learning through questioning),[53] but also the very prayer form that the poem negates. Leyvik's recurrent calls to the word do not cease to be a prayer of a kind even when he locates his interlocutor within the mundane realm of secularized language. This framing of the poem as a devotional meditation appears as a compensation: a way, indeed, of carrying forward the Hebrew language into a secular world (which can thus perhaps never be entirely secular). It

constitutes a return to the tongue that was rejected, constitutes *art* as a return to what has been suppressed, refused, abandoned.

But what are these depths desired by the poet? Can "Fromthedepths," the word that incorporates its own inversion into a surface, be desired merely as a word? In what follows I would like to divert for a short while from the poem's explicit contents in order to bring into the frame of this discussion a cultural scene that I deem relevant for understanding this poem as a product of its time and that might as well be a source of influence on the way in which Leyvik's contemporaries had read "Mima'amakim." This cultural scene is that of modernism and of psychoanalysis as one of its expressions.

3.2. "Depth" as a Modern Trope

Leyvik's volume of poetry that includes "Mima'amakim" was published many years before American Modernism reached its maturity in the 1960s, but also many years after European Modernism crossed the Atlantic and made its full impact on American culture in the second decade of the twentieth century (see Bradbury 31; Singal 16, 21; Thorp 25).[54] Against this background I would like to read "Mima'amakim" as a poem engaged in a dialogue with modernist[55] hermeneutics—one that presupposes, in Fredric Jameson's words, "some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside" (11). What Jameson labels as Modernism's "depth model" is found in the psychoanalytic opposition between latent and manifest, in the philosophical dialectics of essence and appearance, in the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity, and in the semiotic differentiation between signified and signifier (Jameson 12; and see Hake 150).[56] Though these pairs can all be said to underlie the concept of expression, stipulated as it is on the "conception of the subject as a

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monadlike container, within which things felt are then expressed by projection outward" (Jameson 15), it is the pair inside/outside and its close association with the pair depth/surface that interest me most. The association of these two topographical oppositions owes much to Freudian psychoanalysis and its spatial metaphorization of the psyche. With its imagery of "surface" (conscious) and "depth" (unconscious), "top" (manifestation) and "bottom" (causation), Freud's archaeological metaphor (discussed below) constituted the psyche not merely as a site deserving of investigation, but as an entire universe of drives, forces, and desires in which the life of the modern individual *takes place*. By 1937, Freud had been long discovered by the Americans and his concepts absorbed into the nomenclature of various specialized disciplines and intellectual circles that found in psychoanalysis an expressive grammar for their inquiry of human subjectivity (Bradbury 31; Brenkman 172-73; Matthews 39; Thorp 1),[57] and Yiddish poets were no exception to this interest (Harshav *The Meaning* 162).[58]

A short exploration of Freud's archaeological metaphor is due here. Though Freud's introducing of what has come to be known as the "archaeological metaphor" of the psyche was informed by pragmatic thought that identified in this metaphor a potential gain for the nascent discipline of psychoanalysis, this metaphor had far-reaching ontological and epistemological implications. At the turn of the twentieth century, when the idea of the existence of an "inner world"—an interior space in which hidden desires lurk—had already been well-accepted, and the notion of the palimpsest, the stratified site in which depth of time and depth of deposit converge, already assimilated into archaeologists' working vocabulary (Thomas 27-28), Freud's analogy between psychoanalysis and excavation in his 1896 essay "The Aetiology of Hysteria" allowed him to convey an overall sense of the complexity of both his work and his object of research.[59] The idea of the psyche as "infinitely layered" and therefore consisting of "more than meets the

eye" suggested a complex dialectic of revelation and concealment in which the impressions of the individual's past are revealed through a careful deciphering of visible, if oblique, manifestations (Barker xi). This analogy, furthermore, allowed Freud to associate his innovative research with the emergence of archaeology, beginning at the mid 19th century, as the "embodiment of the recovery of hidden truths from below the earth and from the distant past" (Thomas 28). In a moment that followed a series of remarkable archaeological discoveries that resonated in the public memory,[60] Freud's association of psychoanalysis with the established science of archaeology delegated authority to the new theory and its methods, confirming its empirical foundation and infusing it with an aura of solidity, scholarly seriousness, and scientific innovation (Barker x).

But archaeology also constituted depth models as a primary epistemology (Thomas 28). The psyche as an archaeological deposit—as a stratified site in which "something meaningful […] is concealed behind or beneath an obscurant surface" and is brought to light (i.e., to consciousness) through delving into the subject's unconscious "depths" (Barker xii; Reinhard 57)—became a site of revelation and discovery, in which one can find the deep causes of the psychopathology of everyday life: of the normal and abnormal of human behavior. The new topography of surface and depth, through which psychoanalysis presented itself as a theory and practice focusing on hidden sources as opposed to superficial manifestations—on etiology as opposed to symptoms (O'Donoghue 655-56)—rendered the psyche a terrain in which associations, behaviors, and fragments of memory are traced back to their origin, to a repressed psychical event residing out of sight (i.e., out of consciousness), buried under the strata of time. Whatever was imagined to reside in the psyche was the fundamental causes of human behavior: a source of truth and knowledge, of meaning and insight, whose epistemological virtue was

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analogous to that of the knowledge produced by archaeology in its own recognized site of investigation.[61] The Freudian psyche was a *place*, a locus animated by events that conditioned human existence, and thus a site whose exploration (the journey from symptom to cause: from translation to source) was a condition for self-understanding. It became, to borrow Mary Jacobus's terms, one of the historically-specific spaces of modernity "where the modern citizen comes into being" (Jacobus 33).

Through imagining its space of operation, psychoanalysis transformed both the ontological and the epistemological status of its object of investigation. Animated by the activities of the psychoanalyst—by a drama of arrival, inspection, uncovering, and recovering— the spatialized psyche became a site of knowledge-generation and a stage for the individual's mental life that produced a new geography of the subject;[62] perhaps it produced the modern subject as such.[63] The spatial division between the inner ("subjective") world and the external ("objective") one established the psychical as a self-contained and powerful scene, one through which literature, and poetry in particular, could satisfy the demand of modern sensibility for new attitudes, new values, and new areas of exploration (see McFarlane 78). For psychoanalysis established the "associative logic found in poetry [as] intrinsic to the human mind" (Hough 317-18). The poet, not only the analyst, could now identify with the role of the archaeologist (the psychoanalyst), "who makes possible the return of what is forgotten or assumed to be dead," could now lead the journey into interior experience (Hake 151).[64] Leyvik's call for the depths in "Mima'amakim" is the expression of an ontological and epistemological demand for a new kind of knowledge of the self gained through new modes of exploration that were believed to lie within art's capacity and even more so within poetry's.[65] It is a summoning of the profounder levels of the psyche, of the "essential powers of language and the person" buried under the crust

of an overly cultivated mind and a conventional (and thus crippling) language (Sheppard 327-28)—the language of tradition, among the rest.[66]

What appeared earlier as the speaker's desire to render the Hebrew word a void signifier (denied of religious meaning) through its substitution with its Yiddish translation now appears as the poet's desire of "Mima'amakim" as a *pure signified*, a sign whose upper, signifying surface has been removed for the sake of reaching what rests beyond (beneath) the word, what precedes it in time: the primordial depths of the psyche, the content before the form. Leyvik articulates the poet's desire to know his psychic depths that are given to him as the sign: the desire to delve into the depths of memory and consciousness without the mediation of the signifier; to *circumvent language* (to transcend it, through a repetition of almost a mystical nature) and reach what lies beneath it.[67] It is the desire to dodge the surface of the Hebrew word, to dodge the Hebrew word as a surface, by substituting it with its Yiddish counterpart, with the mother tongue whose Imaginary cradle precedes the Symbolic order. Hebrew is this Symbolic: the father's tongue of the law and as the law, established as such already in the *Heder*, where the study of the Pentateuch customarily begins not with Genesis but rather with Leviticus, the book of priestly codes and regulations.[68] The Hebrew word "Mima'amakim" comes to be (as has been claimed earlier in this chapter) the paradigmatic sign of Symbolic existence, in the human being's submission to language: a flat, hollow mark in ink or sound that will never resemble its signified, will never become the depths it denotes, but will continue to point to these depths' existence. "Mima'amakim," the signifier of all signifiers, is the ultimate attestation to the poet's exile from the world of meaning (the signified), a world that words constantly defer.

What haunts the poet, then, is the word itself: the signifier that cannot dissolve to become its signified, that cannot transcend its two-dimensionality. He thus clings to the modes of inquiry

known to him from the *Heder*—clings to translation as a means for approaching the depths concealed by the Hebrew word. But memorization (the adherence to the signifier) thwarts recollection (the recall of the signified). The traditional way of knowledge, the act of recitation, blocks the path to the psyche because it inscribes the poet's consciousness with the signifier (that signifier which is the paradigm of all others). The adult's consciousness is irremediably inscribed by a past that continuously presents itself to him as written, as a text that prevents him from connecting *in a different way* with the primordial layers of his inner life.

How are we to understand, then, the string of discrete syllables, resembling a staircase, that seals the poem's third and fourth stanzas? Has the process of descent into the depths materialized in the mother tongue, that first and intimate of all languages? Has Yiddish achieved what Hebrew could not—could it circumvent language, circumvent itself as a language, to become the voice of the private depths?

3.3. Yiddish the Mother Tongue: Towards the Inner, Unnamed Source?

As mentioned earlier, the poem's gradual substitution of Yiddish for Hebrew coincides with a significant graphical change in the poem's last two stanzas. Rather than concluding with the word "Fundertifenish ("Fromthedepths"), these two stanzas dissolve into a sequence of diagonally dispersed syllables. A process of descending into the "depths" thus seems to take on a concrete form:

37	*Mi-*		— מי		37
	Ma-		מֹא —		
	a-		א —		
40	*ma-*		מֹא —		40
	kim—		קים —		

Leyvik's transition in the poem is not merely from one language to another. It depicts, rather, the modernist poet's turn away from institutionalized discourses and their conventionalized textual expressions (signified in Psalms) in the search for authority outside tradition, authority that will validate the tenor of new sensibilities and the aesthetic value of newly-configured psychological experiences.[69] This authority is found in the poet's own psyche. Leyvik rejects the text of the Hebraic/Judaic tradition and its status as a source of meaning and *in their place he constitutes a new kind of depths*, psychic depths, as the origin of insight and as the place where poetic experience is integrated and assumes meaning. He thus consummates the modern culture's shift (inspired by the psychologist William James) from "soul" to "psyche"[70] and from a reliance on external structures of belief to the powers of self-conduct and introspection. Within the poem, this shift corresponds with the transition from collective to a private, indeed a new kind of prayer that can be voiced only by dint of rejecting the social order.[71] The turn away from tradition and the elevation of the individual's subjectivity—the mandate for exercising "man's inherent powers guided only by his own personal understanding" (McFarlane 76)—are simultaneous characteristics of modernism and each other's corollary, in the poem as well.

That the process of "descending" (down along the stairs made of syllables) coincides with the poem's transition from Hebrew to Yiddish posits the latter as the language in which new depths, other than the theologico-religious or spiritual ones that had lost their allure, are made accessible. Leyvik's positioning of the two languages as counter-points bestows Yiddish, the designated *mame-loshn,* mother tongue ("Mi / *ma* / *a* / *ma* / kim": we hear the word "mama"), with the qualities of informality, intimacy, flexibility, and warmth. The turn to Yiddish is the turn towards the language before language: to Yiddish as a primary milieu prior to the Symbolic.

For just before descent is consummated, another inter-text appears, in the form of a children's

song about the learning of the Hebrew alphabet in the *Heder*:

Oyfn Pripetchik	אויפֿן פּריפּעטשיק
In the little hearth flickers a little flame,	אויפֿן פּריפּעטשיק ברענט אַ פֿײַערל,
Warmth spreads through the house	און אין שטוב איז הייס,
And the Rabbi teaches little children	און דער רבי לערנט קלײנע קינדערלע
The Hebrew Aleph Bet.	דעם אַלף–בית.
Listen carefully, remember little ones	זעט זשע, קינדערלעך, געדענקט זשע, טײַערע,
What you are learning now	4. וואָס איר לערנט דאָ;
Repeat it once again, again and yet again	זאָגט זשע נאָך אַ מאָל, און טאַקע נאָך אַ מאָל:
The line under the Aleph is O.[72]	קמץ אלף – אָ!

"Oyfn Pripetchik" (also "Oyfn Pripetshik," and, less commonly, "Der Alef Beys" ["The

Alphabet"]) by Mark Warshavsky (1848-1907), perhaps the best-known and most popular

Yiddish children's song, depicts young children's learning of the alphabet and the vowel signs in

the *Heder*. The refrain's last two lines, spoken, apparently, in the voice of the *melamed* (a

teacher), are reproduced almost word for word in Leyvik's poem, and would be easily

recognized by any of its readers:

33	You're saying it once—	— זאָגסט עס איינמאָל	33
	Say it again,	זאָג עס נאָכאַמאָל,	
35	Sing it again,	זינג עס נאָכאַמאָל	35
	And then again:	און טאַקע נאָכאַמאָל:	

And later:

46	You're saying it once—	— זאָגסט עס איינמאָל	46
	Say it again,	זאָג עס נאָכאַמאָל,	
	And then again—	— און טאַקע נאָכאַמאָל	
	Out-	— פֿון	
50	of-	— דער	50
	the-	— טי	
	depths.	— פֿע	
		ניש.	

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The song's presence gives more than a nostalgic imprint. In addition to being heard "in its own right," the Yiddish song—the immigrant's cultural baggage and a depository of memories ("What traveled best [to the New World] was a specific repertory of Yiddish songs," Roskies 89)—enters the poem as a tonal quality, shaping the poem's "world of timbre."[73] Leyvik journeys into the depths of his (un)consciousness and to the forgotten events of his early childhood, via Yiddish as the sound before the word, the letter before the written text. Yiddish is thus constituted as what Julia Kristeva terms the semiotic—that linguistic modality, derived from the primary flow of bodily drives, that precedes and conditions language and through which the materiality of the sign, such as foregrounded in poetry, can be recognized (Kristeva). Yiddish, through the children's song, becomes the sound, the tone, and rhythm; it is positioned as primary and anterior to Hebrew and as the grounds of Hebrew literacy and textuality, including the poem's own, by that reversing the hierarchical relationship between the "source" language (Hebrew: the language of the sacred text) and its "derivative" (Yiddish: the language of translation: always secondary). Even the transliterated word "Mima'amakim" into Yiddish phonetics in the third stanza (lines 37-41) affirms this reversal, as it situates Hebrew as registered through the ear, i.e. as dependent on the speech that precedes writing, which is Yiddish speech. The latter may serve the acquisition of Hebrew, but it makes an earlier appearance in the child's life and forms the foundation of all Jewish literacy. This preeminence qualifies Yiddish for the task of self-search and poetic exploration, whereas Hebrew, identified with (or as) the Symbolic, is marked as incapable of this same task. Incorporating "Mima'amakim" in the Yiddish text means presenting it as a riddle: it means presenting the psyche as a foreign world to Hebrew *as a language*.

But can the mother tongue be summoned into the text as the non-language of non-verbal or pre-verbal psychic realms?[74] Can the depths be called into the text in a mother tongue that was exiled from the Symbolic? For precisely when it transforms, in the poem's last two stanzas, into the path of descent, Yiddish is decomposed to its syllabic molecules, becoming the alphabetical pre-text of Warshavsky's song; precisely when it seems to have fulfilled the task of ushering the poet into the desired depths, connecting him, through the tune, with his childhood and with the deeper layers of personality—precisely then Yiddish loses its ability to speak for the depths, turning out unable to bring the early psychic origins into the poem, unable to articulate these origins *within the space of the poem*. What poetic self-exploration can attain, can be rendered a poem only to the extent that it can be articulated in words. Whether the poet was able to surpass the signifier and reach the ancient strata of his psyche, we do not know: the poem ends there, on the bottom step.

49	Out-		פֿון —	49
50	of-		דער —	50
	the-		טי —	
	depths.		פֿע —	
			.ניש	

The attempt to constitute Yiddish, the mother tongue, as the language of psychic depths—a language of a *source*, no longer a "mere" translation of the Hebrew word "Mima'amakim" (a step that both bestows Yiddish with an equal status to Hebrew's, this language of the sacred source-text, and turns it into the source of Hebrew itself)—brings about its disintegration. For Yiddish to attain Hebrew's status as the language of origins it needs to renounce itself, while for remaining a language of writing it must equate itself with the Symbolic and accept the text as its ultimate arena of consummation. The mother tongue meets an inherent paradox that was, in a way, insinuated in its very first appearance in the poem, when the Hebrew

prefix "Mi" (in "Mima'amakim") was translated into the Yiddish "Fun" ("Fundertifenish"), which means both "of" and "from." Yiddish is a language rising FROM the depths—FUNdertifenish—but also the language OF the depths: a language in which psychological depths come to be within reach (the psyche's own idiom, rising from a fathomless interior) but at the same time a language like all others, fettered, like all others, to the capacity of the signifier.[75] Nothing reflects this duality better than the concluding lines of the poem, in which Yiddish goes up (*from* the depths: Fundertifenish) and down (into them) at the very same time.

Language becomes fragmented, then, when it passes through the prism of the self. This fragmentation results, we could say, from the pressure exerted by the poet's artistic and intellectual inquiry into the "traditional links between words and words, words and things" (Bradbury and McFarlane 48): from Modernism's subjection of the mind to a "wholly new kind of stress" and its submission of language to a wholly new range of demands, which made poetry "an intolerable wrestle with words and meanings" (McFarlane 72). In Leyvik's poem, it is the wrestle over the past before the signifier, before the screen of verbal memorialization. The poet's encounter with the Hebrew word "Mima'amakim" conveys to him his past *as a text that cannot be circumvented*, that cannot be redeemed through translation, not even through translation into the mother tongue (this gesture of alleged homecoming), or that can be redeemed only at the price of forsaking writing. If the turn to the mother tongue is not to become a turn away from language (to that *beyond* that spawns its dissolution), if one seeks Symbolic endurance that is nourished by subjective immediacy but is not consumed by it, then the enigma of a Yiddish word ("Fundertifenish": this strange, sealed amalgamation) needs to be tolerated. This, indeed, is another level of complication presented to us by this poem: Leyvik, I have noted at the beginning of this chapter, grapples *with Yiddish, too*—as is evident from his dialogue, a dialogue that

eventually, and at the bottom line, is conducted mostly vis-à-vis the Yiddish word "Fundertifenish." The strain of this poem is not only of translation as a force bringing to the surface of the page a symbolic knot that no linguistic transmutation can unwind (or circumscribe), but also of translation as turning the poet's intimate, first language itself into a riddle. Fundertifenish: so profound is this riddle that the conflicted relationship between the speaker and his interlocutor concludes in the poet's alienation from his own voice echoed from within. Leyvik the poet cannot recognize his voice in the call rising from the depths:

27	*Mima'amakim*—	ממעמקים —	27
	What sound are you?	וואָס פֿאַר אַ קלאַנג ביסטו?	
	What do you bring with you—	וואָס טראָגסטו מיט זיך —	
30	Fromthedepths?	פֿונדערטיפֿעניש?	30
	What do you possess in you—	וואָס פֿאַרמאָגסטו אין זיך —	
	Fromthedepths?	פֿונדערטיפֿעניש?	

And later:

42	Whose cry is it?	וועמענס געשרײַ איז דאָס?	42
	Who convulses in it?	ווער פֿאַרגייט זיך אַזוי?	
	Whose song is it	וועמענס געזאַנג אַזאַ	
45	Fromthedepths?	פֿונדערטיפֿעניש?	45

Pronounced "up there" on the surface level of the text, the word "Fundertifenish" ("Fromthedepths") is returned to the poet broken and estranged, as someone else's cry, song, and convulsion at the same time. Its dispersed syllables, whose diagonal arrangement suggested a path of descent, come suddenly to suggest the broken echo, coming from the depths, of a call made by him who, from the exteriority of language, from language as an exteriority, tries to articulate the labyrinths of his psyche; the ascending reverberation, then, of his repeated utterance from earlier parts of the poem, rising from the bottom "up" to the place from which he speaks.

Writing, then, remains on the surface. Leyvik cannot re-create the "time before the text"—the source before its translation—or, if he can, he cannot re-create this time (this source) *in* the text. His institution of the psyche as a poetic consciousness is driven by the same desire that has driven modernity at large: the desire to comprehend history without the mediation of the text, without the written word and its conventionalized, institutionalized discourses (Lucas 109).[76] "The idea of prehistory," writes Gavin Lucas when explaining modernity's fascination with material culture and its fossils (artifacts) as these were excavated by nineteenth-century archaeologists, "is in many ways the epitome of the modernist project: the creation of a past which has no connection to traditional history" (110). In the same way that "prehistory was not just a new past, [but] also a lost past—lost to traditional forms of memory, whether written or spoken"—so does the modernist poet's appeal to the depths reflect an attempt to reach a "before" which is not just temporal but also ontological: the pre-discursive, or the pre-history of conscious thought (see Lucas 116). Leyvik's, in words borrowed from Jacques Derrida, is the "desire to invent a *first language* that would be, rather, a *prior-to-the-first* language destined to translate [...] memory" (*Monolingualism* 61). But reaching for the depths, in the poem before us, is possible only at the cost of renouncing not language in general, but the mother tongue in particular. For writing's sake, this one can only endure as a guide ushering the poet into his interiority but remaining, for the very same reason, unavailing in its verbalization.

Can language constitute the poet's sole domain of habitation? Can it satisfy a writer's desire? This question goes back to the beginning of the poem, to the question of the constitutive power of the word vis-à-vis psychic life's anteriority to speech: can a word epitomize the depths of the psyche and at the same time be just ("just") a word (line 2 of the poem)? Can the unfathomable depths of the psyche be encapsulated in a word, can these depths be *what is*

encapsulated in a word, can these depths be *nothing but* a word? Which amounts to asking: can a word epitomize the depths of the psyche? Are there depths *although they are signified by "just" a word*, are there depths although they *can be signified only by a word*, are there depths although they *can only be signified, indeed by a word?* It is the question of whether the word can serve as a medium of introspection, i.e., whether it gives us access to the psyche, and at the same time it is the question of whether the psyche can be explored through language, whether the exploration of the psyche *can be conducted through the exploration of language*, as this poem seems to aspire to do. Finally, it is the question of bilingualism and the self: of whether the Hebrew "Mima'amakim" and the Yiddish "Fundertifenish" give access to *the very same psychic depth* and whether this depth can be known in the two languages *in the very same way*.

Leyvik's poem articulates an old text's journey to the New World and to the new (or no longer so new) poetics that this world embraces. The journey is successful to the extent that we read in "Mima'amakim" the survival (partial and full of doubts as it might be) of tradition in the modern poem: like many works by this "thoroughly Jewish" writer, "Mima'amakim" remains connected to religion in its core (see Pozy 385-86). The journey's success is nevertheless curbed by the recognition of the old text's becoming a token, the signifier of a topography drained of its original religious meaning: the name of a rift rather than of continuity. "Mima'amakim" depicts poetry's constitution for itself of an alternative past and an alternative (if fashionable) source of authority and value. The Jewish text (primarily Psalms, but also Warshavsky's children's or folk-song) gives a particular, "indigenous" flavor to what otherwise reads as the search for the universal "language" of the psyche (the "fundamentally human") in the "underneath" space of individual privacy. But the search, supposedly universal precisely because of its individuality, reveals the habitation of language to be incongruent with the writing enterprise. To write means

to gaze at a symbolic mirror (or pond) but in this way to discover within oneself the immanent gap (the split) between the signifier and the signified, the authorial "I" and some inner, essential and unyielding, kernel—a gap constituting the writing of the self as a constant translation. Sought as that site where the different levels of consciousness touch and nourish one another,[77] where words can belong both to the self and to the world, writing turns out to be a melancholic project, an endeavor always-already implicating the renouncement of the mother tongue as all-encompassing (thorough, ubiquitous, complete) and the discovery of its "othering" effect. Narcissus finds Echo, the "other," within him. But it is Echo's foreign voice that allows revelation and discovery to emerge where memorization and blind rehearsal have dominated— her voice that allows, then, the enunciation of a word whose examination, indeed from distance, summons what we call a poem.

Notes

[1] In Leyvik's collected poems, "Mima'amakim" appears as the closing poem of a 1937 cycle titled Lider *tsu der Baremhertsiker Shvester* (*Songs for a Merciful Sister*); see H. Leivick, *Ale Ṿerk fun H. Leyviḳ*, Yubiley Oysgabe ed., vol. 1: Lider un Po'emes, 1914-1940 (Nyu-Yorḳ: H. Leyviḳ yubiley-ḳomiṭeṭ, 1940) 550-51.I could not locate, however, a separate, independent publication of this group of poems.

[2] A more accurate (through perhaps less poetic) translation would be "A word as such," meaning: a word of such kind, such a kind of word. The connotation is of remote inspection/contemplation. I thank Anita Norich and Eugene Orenstein for helping me excavate the subtleties of the Yiddish text.

[3] The Yiddish "fundertifenish," translated here as "Fromthedepths," is an artificial compound (fun = from, der = the, tifenish = depth [singular]) created as an equal of the Hebrew word, which, grammatically accurate, is made of these word-parts (but in a plural form: "from the depths"). Noticeably, the English translation is in the plural (depths).

[4] The reflexive form creates a complex meaning: "what do you mean, being what you are?" or "what do you imply, being that thing that you are?" The reflexive form disappears in the next question: "What do you mean to me / Fromthedepths?" and its disappearance foregrounds the labyrinthine, tangled and entangling nature of the word.

[5] "chasing," or pursuing: the Yiddish verb suggests persecution. And see Psalms 139.7: "Where can I escape from thy spirit? Where can I flee from thy presence?" *New English Bible* (Cambridge: Oxford UP, Cambridge UP, 1970).

[6] "racing," or *hurrying, urging*

[7] The Yiddish word "fun" ("from") is treated here as a spatial indicator. The Yiddish text includes, however, also the word "on" (אָן), which is a time locator ("since … and on") emphasizing duration. The spatial and temporal are thus intertwined. Time made space and space made time will turn out to be important for the reading presented in this chapter.

[8] The Yiddish present tense can be translated into English as both continuous and simple present ("I call").

[9] "stretching," or *reaching for*. See Psalms 143.6: "To thee I lift my outspread hands," *New English Bible*. And in Yehoash's Yiddish translation: "Ikh hob oysgeshpreyt mayne hent tsu dir" *The Hebrew Bible*, trans. from Yiddish by Yehoash (S. Blumgarten), vol. 2 (New York: The Congress for Jewish Culture, 1985) 1081.

[10] "known," or *recognized, acknowledged*

[11] "raise," or *lift*

[12] "what sound," or *what kind of sound*

[13] "bring," or *carry*

[14] "cry," or *outcry* (from "shrayen," to scream); "it," or *this* (the latter stresses the call's foreign nature)

[15] "convulses," or *burst into, have a fit* (of crying, laughing, etc.); "in it," or *in this way*

[16] The Yiddish word "gesang" means both *singing* and *chant*; "is it," or *is this kind* ("Whose is this kind of song?")

[17] The translators here render "fun" as "out of," instead of the "from" that they used up to this point.

[18] The english translation is by Harshav and Harshav, eds., *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology* 742-45. It should be noted that the English transliteration of the Hebrew title-word, which appears without diacritics, follows the Sephardic (modern Israeli) pronunciation; the native Yiddish speaker would have pronounced "Mimo'o(m)kim" or "Mima'mokim." The Sephardic pronunciation accentuates every syllable of the Hebrew word (whereas the Yiddish prounciation might suppress this syllable or another), which may explain the translators' choice. The Hebrew word "Heder" (line 12), as well, appears in the English transliteration as if in the Sephardic pronunciation (the Yiddish would be *kheyder*). I thank Anita Norich for drawing my attention to this point.

[19] And see Psalms 118.5 for a somewhat different wording: "When in my distress I called to the Lord […]." *New English Bible*.

[20] In the poem's translation by Harshav and Harshav, English represents Yiddish, while Hebrew words embedded in the Yiddish original appear in English transliteration ("Mima'amakim," "Heder").

[21] On this subject see Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, trans. Shlomo Noble with the assistance of Joshua A. Fishman (Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 1980) 276.

[22] For a comprehensive description of the practice of code-switching among Jews, also in their interaction with the none-Jewish society ("external" bi-lingualism, as opposed to "internal bilingulism"), see Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990) 9, Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language & Culture* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2006) 92, Jeffrey Shandler, "Beyond the Mother Tongue: Learning the Meaning of Yiddish in America," *Jewish Social Studies* 6.3 (2000): 100.

[23] See Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language & Culture* 93. I draw on Shandler's text while trying to disentangle the original difference between the language and its vicissitudes (a difference between "Hebrew source" and "Yiddish translation" becoming a difference between "Hebrew as source" and "Yiddish as a translation").

[24] The Yiddish phrase "loshn-koydesh" encompasses Aramaic as well. Whereas the expression "sacred tongue" thus connotes an "impure" (mixed, hybrid) linguistic entity, Hebrew itself is still considered pure, "unadulterated" language.

[25] Except perhaps for Aramaic, which was itself the language of other highly-valued foundational texts, primarily the *Talmud*.

[26] The status of Yiddish as "servant" to the Hebrew was continuously challenged; it was publicly and openly defied in the 1908 Czernowitz Conference, in which Yiddish was declared a Jewish national language, a status that implied its cultural significance. See Benjamin Harshav, *The Other Culture: Yiddish and Jewish Discourse*, Selected Writings, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2006) 105.

[27] On the naming of Yiddish as "mame-loshn" (as opposed to the formal, scholarly, intimidating father tongue, Hebrew) see Harshav, *The Other Culture: Yiddish and Jewish Discourse* 27.

[28] How these two constitute each other cannot, however, be elaborated in the frame of this dissertation.

[29] Shmuel Rozshanski nicely depicts Leyvik's as standing "between literature and litera-Torah." Shmu'el Rozshanski, "H. Leyviḳ: Dos Geṿisn fun der Yidisher Liṭeraṭur," *H. Leivick - Oysgeklibene Shrifṭn*, ed. Shmu'el Rozshanski (Bu'enos Ayres: Yosf Lifshits Fand fun der Liṭeraṭur Gezelshafṭ baym YIVO in Argentine, 1963) 26.

[30] A notable exception is the Introspectivist poets (the "Inzikh" group), who applied Yiddish's phonetic spelling system to all Yiddish words, reagrdless of their origin, as a way to stress the language's uniformity and integral cohesion. See the group manifesto in Harshav and Harshav, eds., *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology* 780. A similar attempt was made in the Soviet Union with the intention of differentiating Yiddish, the language of the masses, from the religiouly-anchored, bourgeois, and Zionist-associated Hebrew. See Harshav, *The Other Culture: Yiddish and Jewish Discourse* 101-02.

[31] The poem's speaker assumes the persona of a poet, if we are to tell from his sensitivity to language. I thus use this terms interchangeably.

[32] The words differ, however, in their etymology. **Pond** (noun): Originally a variant of *Pound*: an enclosure maintained by authority for detaining stray or trespassing cattle, or for keeping distrained cattle or goods until redeemed; a pinfold. **Ponder** (verb): from the Middle French ponderer (*pondérer*): to assess mentally, to appraise, consider; for the classical Latin *ponderāre*, to weigh, to weigh up, to appraise. See: *Pond, n.*, March 2013. Oxford University Press, Available: http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/147571?rskey=lqHkKb&result=1&isAdvanced=false.
For "pound" see: http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/149024, 11 May 2013. *Ponder, v.*, March 2013. Oxford University Press, Available: http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/147578?rskey=JNL06g&result=3&isAdvanced=false, 11 May 2013.

[33] The "mirror stage," as conceived by Jacques Lacan, is a early developmental phase in which the subject-to-be becomes captivated by an ideal (unified, integrated) mirror image that he (she) mistakenly recognizes as himself (herself). The child's subjectivity thus originates in the assumption of an illusory gestalt. See Jacques

Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006) 75-81.

[34] Jacques Lacan conceives of the (infant's) initiation into language as a fall putting an end to the simbiotic mother-child relationship and instituting repression.

[35] See Ovid and Frank Justus Miller, *Ovid. Metamorphoses*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1951) Book III, lines 339-510.

[36] An allusion is itself, of course, an echo.

[37] Yehoash: Solomon Blumgarten (Bloomgarden), 1870-1927. Yehoash's translation: "A gezang fun di aroyfgangen. Fun di tifenishn ruf ikh dikh, got." *The Hebrew Bible* 1075.

[38] "Fundertifenish" is thus also the Freudian uncanny, in which familiar appears as foreign. See Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," *SE*, vol. XVII (1917-1919): An infantile neurosis and other works (1919).

[39] The "Song of Ascent" (*Shir Ha-Ma'alot*, in its Hebrew name) as a sub-group of the Psalter that includes chapters 120-134. The Mishnah understands maʿalot as steps (stairs) and associates them with the fifteen steps on which the levitical musicians used to stand during the ceremony of the "drawing of water" on Sukkot at the time of the Second Temple. According to another interpretation, the "Song of Ascent" has been sung by the pilgrims as they went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the three Pilgrim Festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. Only Psalm 122, however, would be appropriate to a "pilgrim psalm" of this kind. Some scholars assume a reference to some peculiar gradational style of musical execution. Finally, these psalms may also have derived their designation from their use in some festal procession. The above is based on "Shir Ha-Ma'alot," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), vol. 18, 673.

[40] The custom to build synagogues below street level, with stairs descending to the entrance, is commonly associated with this Psalm. The phenomenon, however, is also explained as a political necessity (to prevent synagogue buildings from reaching higher than the city's churches) and as the result of a changing urban georgraphy (the increase of street level due to infrastructure needs).

[41] Shmuel Niger reads "Mima'amakim" as a poem of deep religious longing reminiscent of the recitations of Rabbi Nakhman of Breslawu; see Shmu'el Niger, *H. LeyvIḳ, 1888-1948* (Ṭoronṭe: H. Leyviḳ Yoyvl-Ḳomiṭeṭ, 1951) 314-15. The mystical quality of Leyvik's poetry is acknowledged also by Arye Pozy, "'Iḳr Moṭivn 'in di Shafungen fun H. Leiviḳ (Central Motifs in the Work of H. Leyvik)," *Tsukunft* 78 (1972): 384, Melekh Raviṭsh, "Di Letsṭe 'Erdishe Yorn Un Ṭeg fun H. Leyviḳ," *Di Goldene Ḳeyṭ* 78 (1973): 88. One can assume these were two among many who shared this recognition.

[42] Levinson claims the opposite with regard to another poet, Mani Leib.

[43] We are also reminded that written Yiddish literature began with translations. "Most of the earliest works of Yiddish literature, especially those that appeared following the advent of printing, are translations. Prominent among these are Yiddish version of the Bible, legends, ethical guides, liturgy, and other texts originally written in *loshn-koydesh*. The earliest of these works […] began to appear in the mid-1500s"; Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language & Culture* 94.

[44] Yiddish and Hebrew were the two languages comprising the linguistic heritage of the majority of East European Jewish writers in America (and in other destinies of immigration) from the turn of the century up to the Second World War. See Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2006) 4.

[45] Interestingly enough, Leyvik's neologism "Fundertifenish" bears characteristics similar to God's own. Like God, the word "Fundertifenish" is radically one (also singular, grammatically speaking) and indivisible. In a sense, the poet's translation of the Hebrew "Mima'amakim" into Yiddish brings God back to the text (from which he was banished as the addressee of prayer) as that impenetrable entity.

[46] It is also replaced by the Yiddish word, but on this—later.

[47] Here in a sociological sense (habitus as sets of practices and norms shaping a social environment).

[48] See Hillel Halkin, "The Great Jewish Language War," *Commentary* 114.5 (2002). Benjamin Harshav notes that only few Hebrew writers worked outside the new literary center of Hebrew literature that emerged in *Eretz Yisrael* (Palestine) after the First World War; see *The Other Culture: Yiddish and Jewish Discourse* 170.

[49] Yiddish, even when advocated as proper for the Jewish nation, i.e. for national, collective life, remained a diasporic language with weak territorial affiliation and, in any case, unaffiliated with any specific territory. Nevertheless, even in the US it was the language of a cultural milieu "where a proletarian and certainly a religious collectivity had never dissolved"; Mark Bachman, "An 'Exotic' on East Broadway: Mikhl Likht and the Paradoxes of Yiddish Modernist Poetry," *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, eds. Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris, Modern and Contemporary Poetics (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2010) 90.

[50] A "white night" is a night when it is never properly dark—as was common in Leyvik's northern native land and in the landscape of his Siberian exile. In a borroed sense, this expression denotes a sleepless night. That it appears following the mention of the *Heder* suggests, to the writer of these lines, the particular meaning this phrase may assume in the Jewish context, where it is related to the custom to stay awake all night for studying the *Torah*, for example in the eve of *Shavuot*. Also notable is the custom to recite prayers (for the most part, a selection of psalms) at midnight in the memory of the destruction of the Temple ("Tikkun Ḥatsot," lit. "institution of midnight [prayer]"). See "Tikkun Ḥaẓot," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), vol. 19. My reading draws on these associations.

[51] Benjamin Harshav describes the process in which Hebrew words were incorporated in Yiddish, by that losing their religious connotations. See Harshav, *The Other Culture: Yiddish and Jewish Discourse* 110.

[52] Leyvik's rebellion, it seems, is not directed against Hebrew the language *per se*. The word "Mima'amakim" represents Hebrew only in as much as the latter is the language of the sacred, religious text; if it is resisted, it is resisted as such. Indeed, as a loshn-koydesh, the "sacred tongue," Hebrew has always been part of Yiddish. Not only are the two written with the same alphabet, but rather, Hebrew is a profound substratum of Yiddish, forming a part of the latter's vocabulary and having a profound influence on the coinage of words and phrases made in Yiddish of other "stock materials"; see Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* 52, Harshav, *The Other Culture: Yiddish and Jewish Discourse* 71. That the word "Mima'amakim" is translated within the poem marks it as external to Yiddish, rather than the representative of that layer of Hebrew already embedded in Yiddish. It foreignness, as manifested in its inaccessibility, signifies the foreignness or remoteness of the text for which it serves as a metonymy.

Julian Levinson notes that some Yiddish poets (mainly those associated with the *Yunge* group) incorporated Hebrew and Aramaic in their works as a way of imitating the Yiddish vernacular of Eastern Europe. Yiddish in which Hebrew and Aramaic were embedded was considered as more authentic than the heavily-Germanized Yiddish of these poets' predecessors; see Julian Levinson, *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture*, Jewish Literature and Culture (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008) 132. Not so, however, in this poem, where Hebrew functions as the token of a certain text rather than of daily speech.

[53] The *Talmud* is a multi-volume body of Jewish teaching consisting of the traditions and discussions of the text of the *Mishna* (a collection of rabbinic traditions redacted by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi at the beginning of the 3rd century). See Stephen G. Wald, "Mishnah," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), vol. 14, 319, Eliezer Berkovits and Stephen G. Wald, "Talmud," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), vol. 19, 469.

[54] The beginning of American Modernism is conveniently dated to 1912, to the appearance of Harriet Monroe's first (October) issue of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, or, alternatively, to the New York Armory Show of 1913. See Malcolm Bradbury, "The Nonhomemade World: European and American Modernism," *American Quarterly* 39.1, Special Issue: Modernist Culture in America (1987): 31, Daniel Joseph Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," *American Quarterly* 39.1, Special Issue: Modernist Culture in America (1987): 16, Willard Thorp, *American Writing in the Twentieth Century*, The Library of Congress Series in American Civilization, ed. Ralph Henry Gabriel (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960) 25.

[55] Here I adopt the distinction, made by Stephen Spender, between the modern and the Modernist: "The modern [is] a matter of period and historical phase; the Modernist, a matter of art and technique, a peculiar twist of vision." Qtd. in Graham Hough, "The Modernist Lyric," *Modernism, 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London and New York: Penguin, 1991) 314.

[56] About the signifier and the signified, see also Bradbury, "The Nonhomemade World: European and American Modernism," 32.

[57] According to F. H. Matthews, "the heyday of Freudian influence on the [American] lay intelligentsia came after the World War—probably in the 1920s—and the maximum penetration of specialized disciplines by Freudian concepts came after 1930" F. H. Matthews, "The Americanization of Sigmund Freud: Adaptations of Psychoanalysis before 1917," *Journal of American Studies* 1.1 (1967): 39.

[58] That psychoanalysis was of interest for Yiddish poetry in the fourth deacade of the twentieth century is seen more explicitly in works such as J. L. Teller's cycle of poems "Psikho'analiz" ("Psychoanalysis"), published in his 1940 volume *Lider fun der Tsayt* ("Poems of the age"). The poetry of the introspectivist poets is another expression of the fascination with the self, which Freudian psychoanalysis rendered a primary scene of modern life.

[59] Gentner and Grudin define the two purposes of the mental metaphor as "convey[ing] an overall sense of complexity or potential richness" and "allow[ing] the formulation of precise predictions in an unknown domain on the basis of known relationships in a familiar domain." Dedre Gentner and Jonathan Grudin, "The Evolution of Mental Metaphors in Psychology: A 90-Year Retrospective," *American Psychologist* 40.2 (1985): 189.

The analogy between the psychoanalyst and the excavator would continue to appear in Freud's work through the next four decades, culminating in his 1937 essay "Constructions in Analysis." Diane O'Donoghue argues that "[e]ach instance of Freud's turn to antiquity should be situated within the moment of its evocation, if we are to gain insight into the motivations and meanings that accompanied his use of archaeology." See Diane O'Donoghue, "Negotiations of Surface: Archaeology within the Early Strata of Psychoanalysis," *JAPA, The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 52 (2004): 654.

[60] These include the discovery of the Rosetta Stone (1799) and its deciphering by Jean-François Champollion (1822), the Troy excavations of Heinrich Schliemann (1870-1890), and the Austrian-led excavations at Ephesus (begun in 1895), in which the ruins of the legendary temple of Artemis were identified. See O'Donoghue, "Negotiations of Surface: Archaeology within the Early Strata of Psychoanalysis," 656-57, 60, 63-65. The Pompeii excavations of Guiseppe Fiorelli (1860's) and the German excavations in Olympia (mid-1870's) may as well have been sources of influence on Freud.

[61] "For Freud, a scientism of antiquity could offer a model for psychical investigation—and a recognized site for the production of empirical knowledge—distinct from the techniques of the physiology laboratory." O'Donoghue, "Negotiations of Surface: Archaeology within the Early Strata of Psychoanalysis," 667.

[62] This formulation is inspired by Elizabeth A. Gagen and Denis Linehan, "From Soul to Psyche: Historical Geographies of Psychology and Space," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24.6 (2006): 792.

[63] See, again, Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 15.

[64] "Three basic assumptions underlie Freud's use of the archaeological metaphor: his dependence on a model of stratification that obliges the analytical method to a strictly temporal-historical perspective; his emphasis on the continuing presence of the past, either in the form of repressed childhood memories or the legacies of antiquity; and his identification with the role of the archaeologist, who makes possible the return of what is forgotten or assumed to be dead." Sabine Hake, "Saxa Ioquuntur: Freud's Archaeology of the Text " *boundary 2* 20.1 (1993): 151.

[65] This view has made the myth of Orpheus paradigmatic for modernist poets (see Lane's article). Susan Sontag, in a different context, summarizes art's impluse in twentieth century as follows: "If within the last century art […] has come to be invested with an unprecedented stature […] it is because one of the tasks art has assumed is making forays into and taking up positions on the frontiers of consciousness (often very dangerous to the artist as a person) and reporting back what's there"; see "The Pornographic Imagination," *The Susan Sontag Reader* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1982) 212. Leyvik's poem can surely be read vis-à-vis the Orpheus legend; yet, as I will claim later, more than affirming the "imaginative power of interiorisation" for which the figure of the legendary bard was embraced (Lane 1), "Mima'amakim" eventually negates the idea of art's culmination in the artist's self-annihilation in his or her work. Leyvik's poem points,

rather, to writing's irreconcilability with the Orphic endeavour and heralds a post-modern understanding of the relationship between language and the psychic "depths."

[66] Richard Sheppard, writing on the modernist crisis of language, maintains that "Institutions inherited from the past (including the institution of language) [were] felt to be magnificent but hollowed-out shells that […] provide a beautiful surface for a repressive and pernicious reality." See Richard Sheppard, "The Crisis of Language," *Modernism, 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London and New York: Penguin, 1991) 327. On the modernist's relation to tradition see next.

[67] And see note no. 41 above.

[68] This custom, going back to the days of the First Temple, has prevailed among Ashkenazi Jewry in the Diaspora and is practiced to this day by Orthodox Jews. See Zeev Goldberg, "Where Should Little Children Begin Learning the Torah - from Leviticus or Genesis?," *Ma'of u-Ma'aseh (Vision and Practice)* 6 (2000): 227-28.

[69] "The core dilemma of modernity was how to understand the world without turning to tradition—how to find a new authority which resided outside of tradition—effectively, outside of time." Gavin Lucas, "Modern Disturbances: On the Ambiguities of Archaeology," *Modernism/Modernity* 11.1 (2004): 118.

[70] I am here adopting, with a slight change of meaning, William James's words: "[A]s psychologists, we need not be metaphysical at all. The phenomena are enough, the passing Thought itself is the only verifiable thinker, and its empirical connection with the brain-process is the ultimate known law"; "I therefore feel entirely free to discard the word Soul from the rest of this book." See William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, American Science Series, vol. 1, 2 vols. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890) 346, 50. This stance is not identical with, and does not directly lead to, the introspectivist mode of poetry of the Inzikh group, for which the self was a primary vehicle for processing the individual's impressions. This introspectivist poetry was not necessarily directed towards the subjective world; the self was its medium of experiencing whatever experienced had summoned. On this see the group manifesto and Harshav commentary on it.

[71] This idea has been famously developed by the psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott in his book *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971). From a different perspective, this rejection of the social order (the public, the collective, the shared) is also the acceptance of a different order, in which the division between the private and the public is a founding principle. According to Charles Lock, modernity was marked by changing reading habits and norms as reading aloud, a common practice until then, became "transgressive of the spatial and domestic contracts of privacy." Leyvik's turning of "Mima'amakim" into a word exchanged between one and oneself (as in a private prayer) can be understood as the product of a historical moment when the public, loud recitation of the prayer became "an abrogation not only of silence but of one's right to silence," in the words of Charles Lock, "Double Voicing, Sharing Words: Bakhtin's Dialogism and the History of the Theory of Free Indirect Discourse," *The Novelness of Bakhtin: Perspectives and Possibilities*, eds. Jørgen Bruhn and Jan Lundquist (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, U of Copenhagen, 2001) 75.

[72] The full text, translated from Yiddish by Feigl Rosenberg, can be found in Sinai Leichter, ed., *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs*, vol. 6: The Mark Warshavsky Volume (Jerusalem: The Hebrew U of Jerusalem, Magnes P, 2002) 28.

[73] I borrow this formulation from John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1981) 108.

[74] Here Leyvik's endeavor diverges from the typical modernist poet's, who seeks "to liberate the repressed expressive energies of language"; Sheppard, "The Crisis of Language," 329. Leyvik is indeed engaged in the project of "revivifying language" (see Sheppard 324) when he use the poetic to disturb an automatization caused by the repetition and allows the conventionalized text to become the source of a private, subjective voice. In this respect, his work aligns itself with the modernist inquiry into the poetic potentialities of words' "secondary potential" (their "connotative properties, rhythmic and aural possibilities, similarities with other words, forgotten meanings"; Sheppard 329). Yet Leyvik's trajectory seems to be driven by a desire for the "depths" in which language, in a more limited way, is primarily a vehicle. His frustration has less to do with the words' "com[ing] to lie like a thick crust over his imagination" (Sheppard 328) and more with the fundamental qualities of language as a signifying system.

[75] In my reading I take the word FROM the depths to be the psyche's own word rising from the bottom and the word OF the depths to be the language used to speaking about the depths. An alternative reading would take the word FROM the depths to mark the external, verbal, legible manifestation of the psyche (its translation into ordinary language) and the word OF the depths to mark the language (a non-language) spoken by these depths (the psyche's own language).

[76] "The core dilemma of modernity was how to understand the world without turning to tradition—how to find authority which resided outside of tradition—effectively, outside of time." See Lucas, "Modern Disturbances: On the Ambiguities of Archaeology," 118.

[77] See Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 111, 13.

CHAPTER TWO

Poetry and the Praise of Distance:

Paul Celan's "Tübingen, Jänner" ("Tübingen, January")

1.   Poetry and Testimony

I would like to open this chapter with what I consider to be the prime challenge in

reading and interpreting Paul Celan's literary work. In his book *Remnants of Song: Trauma and*

the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan,[1] Ulrich Baer positions

Baudelaire and Celan as the two chronological extremities of the period of time customarily

called Modernity (*Remnants* 1). This period's literary production Baer characterizes, following

Walter Benjamin, as preoccupied with "the increasing fragmentation of experience under the

impact of [the] shock" brought by modernity, with the "unremembered and unassimilated

experiences" that are constitutive of modern existence (*Remnants* 2). Of the poetry written

during this period, Celan marks a point of culmination; his work, though engaged in its own

independent search for authentic literary idiom, shares the modernist doubt about the reliability

of human perception and participates in the struggle to represent experiences that reside beyond

the individual's cognition, acknowledgement, and understanding, but that nevertheless deeply

influence the individual's emotional life (Baer "Fractured" 3). Both Celan and Baudelaire "bear

witness to the difficulty of fully grasping and giving voice to our increasingly fragmented

existence," seeking to incorporate this existential condition in their poetry (*Remnants* 1). This

last attribute is definitive, in Baer's eyes, of what came to be known as the "modern" in literature.

Baer acknowledges, right away, the gap separating Celan and Baudelaire within the modern tradition, a gap stemming from the different scope of the event they seek to articulate: the Holocaust, in Celan's case, and the "small shocks of urban existence" afflicted by the metropolis, in Baudelaire's (*Remnants* 7). But even when he discusses the two poets' common denominator and their shared poetic heritage, Baer's discourse points to the disparity between them, one that not only extends beyond the disparity that he himself explicitly acknowledges, but is also of a different kind. Celan's work, Baer contends, is a "literary testimony to the tremendous suffering, unresolved mental anguish, and vast intellectual and cultural crises prompted by the catastrophe of the Holocaust." It "bears testimony to the catastrophic events that seem to mark the modern tradition's end," seeks "to testify to a horrendous reality" (*Remnants* 5, 1, 5). These terms are not atypical: for John Felstiner, Celan's reticence regarding his private trauma "gives his poetry a testimonial charge" (*Paul Celan* 22), and Shoshana Felman asserts that "the poetry of Paul Celan gives testimony […] [to a] cultural and historical breakdown, to the […] massive trauma of a catastrophic loss" ("Education" 25).[2] These words touch, but do not linger on, the fundamental challenge facing both Celan and his post-Holocaust readers, a challenge having to do with the relationship between poetry and testimony in the poet's work. One of Celan's tasks (or at least, one of his sought or fulfilled accomplishments), the above critics seem to concur, is to bear witness. We might agree that the search for literary (aesthetic) means for expressing what lies beyond the *cogito* is, specifically, modernity's heritage;[3] we might agree, even further, that this search has become a primary, fundamental concern of "post-Holocaust literature," a literature whose skepticism "about its adequacy vis-à-vis the subject

matter" was inevitable (Baer "Fractured" 13). Yet if Celan's work cannot be separated from the task of bearing witness—if readers and critics insist that it plays or needs to play a role outside the realm of belles-lettres—then its attempt to pave a way from an ungraspable, unfathomable reality into the text should be examined (so I would like to suggest) side by side with its attempt to keep open the opposite path, from the text to reality. The poet's task, in this view, extends beyond the desire to find "proper words" for the indescribable to the recognition of the social, cultural, and historical role he or she serves. Celan's poetry struggles to present, not just to represent; to remain close to its referent, not just to transform it aesthetically: to absorb reality's signs, we can say, rather than simply invert them to create another.[4] From within poetry's domain it seeks to render itself a decipherable access-path into a certain reality, and these ambitions pose competing and often contradictory demands to writing.

This claim needs explication. To bear witness, says Felman, is "to speak, implicitly, from within the legal pledge and the juridical imperative of the witness's oath […]. To testify is […] to *take responsibility*—in speech—for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal" ("The Return" 204). One needs not retreat to formal definitions of testimony in order to realize the challenge posed to the literary text by even the obligation to just record the past. Keeping records of the past, Saul Friedlander contends— keeping records, particularly, of the Holocaust, an event where "perpetrators invested considerable effort […] in effacement of all traces of their deeds"—demands precision, adequacy, and faithfulness to the truth[5] and thus sets limits to representation that *"should not be* […] *transgressed"* ("Introduction" 3). The problem posed to and by aesthetic experimentation, as well as to and by conventional historical accounts of the Holocaust, arises, Friedlander continues, from the tension between the need for truth and the opaqueness inherent to an event of

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the nature and dimensions of the Holocaust's. The difficulty here stems, it is implied (and here Friedlander's view concurs with Baer's), from the lack of a clear, graspable reality to orient the artistic endeavor. The separate problem of the *medium*, "the opaqueness of language as such" ("Introduction" 4), troubles, however, the literary text in particular. Here the commitment to "truth," the accuracy and fidelity implicated in the act of witnessing, contrasts with the ambiguity, malleability, and indeterminacy characteristic of the literary idiom. An argument could be made, Friedlander contends, that such aesthetic characteristics are justifiably and appropriately (and even: inevitably) called upon "in the face of events which seem to escape usual categories of representation," events that lie, in Baer's aforementioned words, beyond the individual's perception, recognition, and grasp. Such has indeed been, very often, the rationale of postmodernist aesthetic experimentation. But a reconciliation of this kind, I would like to suggest, cannot be accepted as an outlet for a literary endeavor seeking to *bear witness*. The significance of the Holocaust and the desire to "keep enough direct references to the 'real' events" (in Friedlander's words, "Introduction" 17) render the evasive nature of "truth" an extra pressure on poetic language rather than a safe refuge, and this pressure endures as long as survivors and witnesses insist on their works' testimonial character, as long as readers refer to their works in these terms, and as long as historical relativism is not taken to an extreme to regard all accounts of the past as equal. Testimony, even in the form of poetry, never renounces the truth of the historical event.

Understanding why representation (as above) cannot be the sole challenge of Celan's poetry and how representing the Holocaust differs from bearing witness to it accentuates the inadequacy, for the present discussion, of terms commonly used in the scholarly debate of the place and role of the arts (verbal ones included) vis-à-vis the Holocaust. I would like to use this

differentiation between "representing" and "bearing witness" for shifting the critical focus away from the question of the limits and possibilities of representation to the related question of poetry's modes of relation and access to the real, which I intend to pursue in this chapter through a close reading of Paul Celan's poem "Tübingen, Jänner" ("Tübingen, January"). "Representation" as understood here designates the substitution of one thing with another that stands for it symbolically;[6] it implicates an exchange in which an aesthetic or discursive product takes the place of a represented, which from now on presents itself only under disguise, only through this newly-formed, substituting object. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the possibility of "representing the Holocaust" in literature is discussed mostly in relation to narrative prose (see, for instance, Friedlander's edited book, *Probing*).[7] The act of substitution is stipulated on the representing entity's ability (or purport) to not simply form an access to the original, but rather constitute its autonomous replacement; to serve not as a mere link to the represented entity, but rather as a synthesized, meaningful construct standing on its own in the realm of discourse or art. Narrative, as a structure of meaning and a teleological construct, complies with this demand for independence and self-containedness (which is why the question of the Holocaust's graspability and intelligibility has become entangled, as I hinted above, with the question of narrativity, but not of "poeticity").[8] As such, representation differs both from testimony, which, in its modern conception, is based on an epistemic model that maintains a direct connection to the related event (without necessarily striving for cohesion),[9] and, more significantly, from poetry, which does not operate through meaning-making structures and does not make epistemological claims equal to the narrative's.[10] "Representation" implies the renunciation of an experiential "source," of an originary experience, in favor of its intermediary creative substitute, and this renunciation defies the testimony's immediate, unmediated relation to the event. The goal of bestowing history with

an autonomous aesthetic existence in the text can never be the ultimate goal of the writer-witness.[11]

Yet the task of bearing witness, and the challenges faced by poetry when assuming this task as its own, have to do with the same gap that the act of "representing" attempts to cross: the gap between experience, knowledge, and expression. What I would like to suggest as a focus for discussion is a reversal of the point of view from which this gap of expression is commonly regarded, a reversal in which poetry's central concern exceeds the extracting of discourse from an unfathomable real to center on the poem's access to, and upholding of, the originary experience that seeks verbalization. The main difficulty faced by the poet witness (the witness poet; the two are one in Celan's case) is of maintaining an enduring and permanent contact with the reality seeking re-presentation (rather than "representation").[12] The testimonial poem is never the walking away from the source experience in and through the untroubled path of aesthetic production; rather, it constantly seeks the path back to this source, ceaselessly grappling with, and watching with fright, its own "getting away" into art's domain. Aesthetic transformation, I want to say, becomes a cause of disturbance for this poetry rather than a purpose and desired goal alone. The question implied in Baer, of how to translate into words events that fail to gain full recognition (such as a trauma)—the question, that is, of testimony's meaning in the lack of a fully-known originary experience—remains yet unanswered. Yet from a question about expression and expressibility, about searching and finding "proper words" (if this, indeed, is the modern poet's concern), it turns into a question about poetry's tortured relation to its own means, about poetry as a torture through its own, verbal means. How poetry bears witness, what it bears witness to, how it incorporates the real without leaving art's domain, and what happens to the real in the verbal act, in verbal art (does it become, as contended by Berl Lang (139),

"increasingly attenuated as the text is more fully realized poetically"?)—are questions this chapter seeks to explore. Moreover: that Celan's poetry is considered testimonial despite its opacity underscores the complexity of art's political, historical, and ethical engagements and adds to the critic's consideration the question of reading, of the reader's inclination to relate to Celan in terms such as Baer's,[13] which might be the other side of the poet's grappling with the very same complexity. What it means to read poetry as testimony, what kind of "evidence" (of "unmediated knowledge") is made accessible to the reader of "testimonial literature," and whether Celan's poetry can be read outside the frame of testimony are questions to be pondered seriously but to which this chapter may only be able to suggest partial answers.

2.   "Tübingen, Jänner": Analysis of the Poem

TÜBINGEN, JÄNNER	TÜBINGEN, JANUARY

1   *Zur Blindheit über-*
     redete Augen.
     Ihre—"ein
     Rätsel ist Rein-
5   *entsprungenes"—, ihre*
     Erinnerung an
     schwimmende Hölderlintürme, möwen-
     umschwirrt.
	1 Eyes talked into
	     blindness.
	     Their—"an enigma is
	     the purely
	5 originated"—, their
	     memory of
	     Hölderlin towers afloat, circled
	     by whirring gulls.

     Besuche ertrunkener Schreiner bei
10   *diesen*
      tauchenden Worten:
	
	     Visits of drowned joiners to
	10 These
	      submerging words:

     Käme,
     käme ein Mensch,
     käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute, mit
15   *dem Lichtbart der*
      Patriarchen: er dürfte,
      spräch er von dieser
      Zeit, er
      dürfte
20   *nur lallen und lallen,*
	
	     Should
	     should a man,
	     should a man come into the world, today, with
	15 the shining beard of the
	      patriarchs: he could,
	      if he spoke of this
	      time, he
	      could
	20 only babble and babble

immer-, immer-	over, over,
zuzu.	againagain.
("Pallaksch. Pallaksch.")	("Pallaksh. Pallaksh.")[14]

"Tübingen, Jänner" (from the volume *Die Niemandsrose,* "The No-One's Rose," 1963) commemorates Celan's 1961 visit to Tübingen, the town of Friedrich Hölderlin, the great poet of German Romanticism and lyricism and the "quintessential mad philosopher poet" (Weineck 263) who, after descending into mental illness, spent his last thirty-six years (half of his life) in a tower on the bank of the Neckar River, cared for by a carpenter who had taken him under his custody. Silke-Maria Weineck (268-69) explains the event commemorated in the poem and recounted in its first two stanzas: standing at the railing of the tower, looking down at the river, seeing the tower's and the seagulls' reflections in the water, Celan imagines an inverted world where past events are re-staged: the carpenter's visit to Hölderlin tower, turning in the water into a drowned carpenter's visit; a visit to what becomes "towers afloat" and to Hölderlin's words, now submerging. These submerging words, the colon at the end of the second stanza indicates, are the words of the third stanza and the line following it. They are Hölderlin's words and at the same time his non-words of madness, a stammering ("over, over, / againagain") that culminates in the senseless word "Pallaksch," which the German poet is said to have repeated during his years of mental illness, "meaning sometimes yes, sometimes no."[15] Visiting the legendary poet thus becomes encountering him as a linguistic product, a fragmented and disintegrated one.

Hölderlin is one of many "pristinely German" cultural icons evoked in Celan's poetry from its early stages in the attempt to assert the poet's "standpoint within a compromised tradition" (Felstiner *Paul Celan* 24). Hölderlin, the great poet of the Romantic tradition, is a source of poetic inspiration for Celan,[16] his figure standing here at the heart of the recollected

image conjured by eyes that were "talked into blindness," or blinded by speech (lines 1-2). Even before he is introduced into the poem by his name, Hölderlin is made present in "Tübingen, Jänner" through a line of his poetry: "Ein Rätsel ist Reinentsprungenes" (lines 3-5) is the first line of the fourth stanza of Hölderlin's hymn "Der Rhein" ("The Rhine"). By evoking, furthermore, some concrete details of Hölderlin's surrounding such as the castle, the tower, and the river, themselves frequent motifs of Romantic poetry[17]—by evoking the natural scenery that was absorbed into Hölderlin's poetry and inspired its idealism, loftiness, and sentiment (see Goebel 36, 37)—Celan, the German-speaking Czernowitz-born poet living outside the boundaries of the German-speaking cultural world, summons into his text the iconic signs of a literary tradition with which he shows himself to be in dialogue.

But occasions of intertextuality never mark a simple, uncomplicated relation to literary sources of inspiration in Celan, for whom the status of the source, precisely, is a central preoccupation. Acknowledged and unacknowledged quotations are prevalent in his work and are often related to the question of the ownership of speech, the disappropriation of language, and the redemptive wish to shelter words from the "aggressive" hermeneutic attempt, characteristic of traditional German literary criticism, to trace a text's bits and pieces to their sources in order to consolidate its one and only meaning (Müller-Sievers 141-43). It is thus unsurprising to find in "Tübingen, Jänner" additional intertexts, except for "Der Rhein": scholars have indeed identified in this poem tenuous allusions to Georg Büchner's play *Woyzeck*, to the book of Isaiah, and to other poems by Hölderlin, some of which, interestingly enough, articulate the Romantic poet's casting of "doubt[s] upon the power of poetry" (Wright 193).[18] "Tübingen, Jänner," writes Joan Wright (192), "is constructed from a myriad of fragmentary echoes, implicit and explicit, both of Hölderlin's poetic works and of his life-story." Of all these echoes, the direct quotation from

Hölderlin in lines 3-5 is of particular interest for the present discussion by dint of its subversive realization of "quoting"—a subversion that undermines, indeed, what could otherwise stand as an announcement of Celan's affinity with this preeminent poetic "source." For lines 3-5, we realize if we turn to Hölderlin's original text, are a distorted recasting of the line from "Der Rhein." *Ein Rätsel is Reinentsprungenes* turns in Celan's hands into *ein / Rätsel ist Rein- / entsprungenes*—a wrenching of the literary source taking place in a sentence concerned, precisely, with the mystery of origination—which itself is accented through the surprising enjambment at the end of line 4:

3	*Ihre—"ein*		3	Their—"an enigma is
	Rätsel ist Rein-			the purely
5	*entsprungenes"— ...*		5	originated"— …

A jump, "Sprung" in German, is tacitly implicated in "Reinentsprungenes" and is expressed graphically in the word's bouncing into the next line (Weineck 271). Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe explains this transition: poetry, he asserts, "springs forth" or "breaks out" (*Sprung*, *entspringen*) from blindness and bedazzlement, from "the memory of bedazzlement, which is also the pure dizziness of memory—[which] is precisely that which did not take place" (18). In the attempt to say its own coming into being, to mark the incident of its origination, the poem tries to "open up […] its own source" and in this way "reach the general source of all poetry." And yet all it can point to, writes Lacoue-Labarthe, all it can indicate and show, is its springing forth from memory as blindness and enigma, from memory as a sealed *non*-event; not from a "lived" experience, not from an experience that can be lived, but rather from the dizziness which is memory itself. *An enigma is the purely originated*, says Hölderlin, and adds: "Auch / Der Gesang kaum darf es enthüllen […]," "Even / the song may hardly reveal it." Lacoue-Labarthe summarizes: "if the poem says or tries to say the source in this manner, it says it as inaccessible,

or in any case unrevealed 'even [by] the song,' because in place of the source […] there is dizziness, the instant of blindness or bedazzlement before the sparkling waters of the Neckar" (Lacoue-Labarthe 19). In Anne Carson's words: "Origin as riddle. Riddle as origin. Like the source of the Rhine, pure origin is hard to specify (131-32). Celan's line-breaks and word-division emphasize parts of the word "Reinentsprungenes," allowing the "purely originated" to sound like "Rhine-originated" and even to suggest the non-source as "*Der Rhein*-originated" (Carson 132).

"Tübingen, Jänner" begins, then, in a reflection on the poem's "source," in a (water) reflection *as* the poem's source, in a contemplation of the (in)ability to specify the "source" in one's field of vision. But then and there, at this (doubly-marked) point of incipience, Celan immediately marks a temporal gap between experience and writing, observation and verbal articulation, image and the "springing forth" that is the poem—a temporal gap that leaves the poem uprooted. The text devoid of a recognized origin becomes a monument, a memorial, an epitaph for (time as) past-times and for the loss inscribed in the turn to the letter. But this turn implies the loss of the "source" not merely as writing's outcome, but also as its condition. The "springing forth" that is the poem *renders* the source an enigma in the very same way that symbolization in general induces the amnesia of repression. "Entspringen," taken by itself, means not only "rise" or "having an origin in," but also "escape." The transition into the poem amounts to renouncing an originary experience, renouncing it as accessible through language and renouncing language as a path back to a primordial "occurrence." Writing commands the signified's sliding under the signifier, reality's disappearance behind the word that comes to stand for it, and condemns the subject to be expelled from himself (herself).[19] Verbalization, always a shift from the individual to the (potentially) communal and from the privately-

remembered to the historically-shared, imposes a caesura, a rift, and constitutes the text as a memory site, a site in which "remembering" is anything but the re-membering of a disintegrating source: an affirmation of the latter's fading into oblivion.[20]

Hölderlin's intricate admission into "Tübingen, Jänner"—as an origin but also as its contortion, a ripped and dissected birthplace—points to the theme of continuity and contiguity as one of the poem's main concerns. The signifiers (better say, qualifiers) of tradition and the *quote* as their most emblematic token are systematically subverted, undermined, "misquoted." This subversion inscribes itself even on the scene of contemplation that bestows the poem with its narrative frame. Celan's gazing at the water from the river bank clearly harkens back to the genre of reflection poetry characteristic of the Romantic tradition—the same one of which Hölderlin is so prominent a symbol—a genre where "an external phenomenon that seems to replicate the mind's own act of mirroring nature" (very often an image reflected on the surface of the water) induces a poetic meditation on sensual experience, subjective perception, and mental speculation (Burwick 23). But if Romantic poetry's attempt to articulate the image's fragility and instability often "seems to render [it] more tenable," if the assertion of perception's perversions and follies "are nevertheless described in detail" and made sound and persistent (Burwick 23-24), language, in Celan's poem, does not escape the tormenting vicissitudes of fragmentation. As the waters become a metonymy of Hölderlin ("Visits of drowned joiners to / these / submerging words") and thus of lyric poetry, as they become "the Hölderlinian river itself" (the rivers of which the German poet sings in numerous hymns), the poem says its drowning: it "says 'drowning' in Hölderlin's verse," by stuttering, as its infinitely-paradoxical possibility (Lacoue-Labarthe 21-22). By no means is the shattered water reflection revealed to the poet's eyes (lines 12 and on) an originary "incipience" that summons for him an opportunity to reflect on the "capacities of the

mind" (see Burwick 29) or the poised reflection induced by Romantic contemplation (even that contemplation of the non-poised, broken image). The fragmentation he ponders is, rather, poetry's language displaying the consequences of the recognition of its incapacity. It is the collapse of the utterance:

12	*Käme,*	12	Should
	käme ein Mensch,		should a man,
	käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute, mit		should a man come into the world, today, with
15	*dem Lichtbart der*	15	the shining beard of the
	Patriarchen: er dürfte,		patriarchs: he could,
	…		…
20	*nur lallen und lallen,*	20	only babble and babble
	immer-, immer-		over, over,
	zuzu.		againagain.

The disintegration in which the poet's words find their destiny—the break of continuity, we could say, between the world outside the water and the world inside it (i.e., poetry), between the landscape and its singing—must be said as its own performance, must be born on the poem's flesh. Language's sinking into babbling ("submerging words"), its dispersion as fragments in the water to become the "anti-language" of stutter (and madness), exhibits the breach between history and what a man "com[ing] into the world, today" could say. The poem's drowning seems to be commanded by language's very nature: the eyes "talked into / blindness" (lines 1-2) were also exposed to "too much talk" (*über-redete,* "über" as the "over" that signifies excess) (Hillard 399), which, for Lacoue-Labarthe (21-22) is the "flood of eloquence" of Hölderlin's poetry. Eloquence breaks: the Hölderlinian streaming of words, its rhythmical swing—this poetry that has been celebrated as "spring[ing] from vividness of imagery, rhythmic energy in phrasing, and directedness of language" (Rannit 117, 18)—meets its counterpoint as it assumes Celan's feeble, shivering diction, changes its tonal and compositional feel. Hölderlin's powerful, expansive, elevated style (a style "lofty and sublime," "rhapsodic [and] decentralized; Rannit 118, 13)

collapses into a form of verse that brings to mind, above all, the expanding ripples produced by a stone hitting the water:

12	*Käme,*	12	Should
	käme ein Mensch,		should a man,
	käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute, mit		should a man come into the world, today, with

"Tübingen, Jänner" tells the story of destruction by its own collapse, manifesting a breach as its only way of articulating it. The opposite technique—an excess of words, "too much talk"—would fail to express (i.e., exhibit) this crisis. "What poetry sinks into, what drowns poetry, is an eloquence," says Lacoue-Labarthe (24): not abundance, but rather the transgression of an interdict, which leads the poem's "telling" to its collapse. In this sense, "Tübingen, Jänner" is poetry's speaking "beyond its means," in Shoshana Felman's words: a testifying

> to the impact of an accident whose origin cannot precisely be located but whose repercussions […] continue to evolve even in the very process of the testimony. The accident is therefore 'known,' paradoxically enough […], only through its aftermath, through its effects. ("Education" 21-22)

Poetry is discontinuous with history. Its dynamics of origination, "Tübingen, Jänner" seems to suggest, is reminiscent of a trauma's: like the event of trauma, whose incident of origination can only be grasped as unknown (Caruth "Unclaimed" 187), so does poetry "spring forth" from an experience whose force "appear[s] to arise precisely […] in the collapse of its understanding" (Caruth "Introduction" 7). But this does not mean that the poem loses its means to testify to its source ("this time": historical experience). The poem of testimony, the poem as testimony, carries the scars of history, the weight of unbearable events, as a disruption to language (Bernard-Donals 146). It carries history's oblique signs, carries them obliquely. Its "testimony" assumes—form; it assumes "form" as a means of telling, bears "language" as itself

speaking, not merely spoken through. "Tübingen, Jänner" conjures up a punctured scene of speech—a scene of babbling—that defies the standing of direct, unmediated reference as the sole and absolute provenance of moral authority through which verbal expression, including the figurative one, can win its status as testimony. It renounces, indeed, in accordance with its enigmatic inception, the (circumstantial) markers that could (easily) bestow the poem with a witness's legitimacy in the face of an (imaginary) earthbound court.[21] And yet the poem's plea, if not to an imaginary court then at least to an interlocutor, should not be dismissed as impossible, unviable, or hopeless. The word "zuzu" (line 22) that brings "Tübingen, Jänner" to its conclusion (almost) and that can be read as the repeated address "to" marks this poem's hope to be heard from within the depths of its incomprehensible, drowned words.[22] A "going towards another," even through the fragments of speech, even through the fading echo, seems to be implicated in this poem even where it apparently sinks into intelligibility. That the reader's role is to acknowledge the ethical aspect of poetic form, to acknowledge that structure can become "an assertion or idea, an element of [a poem's] subject" (Lang 120), is an important aspect of the venture to understand poetry's relation to testimony that I shall address later.

The drowned poem cannot tell; or, better said, it "tells" not, marking metonymy's loss of its poetic force. "Tübingen, Jänner" is a contemplation of discourse and its tropes (of what a man coming into the world today could say about "this / time") in which the breakdown of a readable "origination"—and with it the breakdown of the idea of pure, transparent, comprehensible transmutation of the real in the poetic (the idea, then, of writing as a linear, continuous emanation from an experiential source)—serves to articulate a temporal consciousness founded on contiguity at most (i.e., not continuity). Neither history nor subjective experience, neither the external nor the internal, can be the bedrock of poetic speech, the bedrock spoken by poetry. Or

rather, neither of these experiences could expect its smooth and unruffled continuation in poetry, expect the continuity and sequentiality, within poetry, of ordinary, straightforward speech. Succession is broken almost in every line of "Tübingen, Jänner" through enjambments severing articles from nouns (*ein / Rätsel* [3-4]*, diesen / tauchenden Worten* [10-11]*, dieser / Zeit* [17-18]), prepositions from indirect objects (*Erinnerung **an** / ...* [6-7]*, Besuche ertrunkener Schreiner **bei** / ...* [9-10], ***mit** / dem Lichtbart* [14-15]), verbs from subjects (*er / dürfte* [18-19]), possessives from possessed (***ihre** / Erinnerung* [5-6], *dem Lichtbart **der** / Patriarchen* [15-16]), and even some words' different compounds from each other (*über- / redete* [1-2], *Rein- / entsprungenes* [4-5], *möwen- / umschwirrt* [7-8])—as if exposing not the fragility of communication but rather poetry as a place where language reclaims its true fragmentary nature, where it can "babble and babble / over, over, / againagain."

What, then, instead of metonymy, instead of continuity and succession? It is first through its graphical arrangement that "Tübingen, Jänner" gives, without explicitly giving, its rule of reading. The colon at the end of the second stanza, referring to the third stanza as to an explanation or clarification, suggests that the poem contains "its own translation" (Lacoue-Labarthe 18); it contains a translation of what it says as a poem, but also "translation" as what it says as a "poem." This inner translation, the third stanza, appears discontinuous with what precedes it, marking (graphically, on the page) a gap in verbal transmission: a suspension and a halt, but also a repose, a breathing space. A similar gap is found at the end of this stanza: the word "Pallaksch," placed within parenthesis and quotation marks, presents itself as a conclusive hindsight remark: a one-word summary of the poem, a capsule-like realization of its receding from meaning. Accepting this rift between the "source" and its translation, accepting the *gap* as a form of mediation between an origin(al) and its rendition, is the only way to bring to the poem

the unity it lacks. Celan gives up metonymy when he interrupts the poem's sequentiality, dividing it into stanzas (and sentences, and phrases, and words) that keep seeking their succession in the lines to come; and yet he points to metaphor, discourse's other tenet,[23] as poetry's preferred mode of speech when he mandates (and forces) the crossing-over of the gaps between the stanzas (and the lines). These stanzas are the fragments of verbalization: the discontinuous objects of thought joined through a poet's reflection, against the odds of miscomprehension. Metaphor, from the ancient Greek μεταφορά, literally "carrying over,"[24] is the mark of progression through leap, the institution of the leap as a new principle of continuity and a vehicle for carrying-over through which the poem can be read as one. Poetry's sinking into babbling in "Tübingen, Jänner" defies the power and the validity of metonymic articulation, of poetry's continuity with the world (reality's continuation "through other means"), but it offers the metaphoric passage, the vault over the gap of silence, as a path for the poem's "springing forth": an enigma, Celan says in Hölderlin's voice, the enigma of a poem, is what springs forth from the purity of bedazzlement.

"Tübingen, Jänner" positions vis-à-vis each other two modes of speech through which a poem can relate to its "origins"—be it the poet's experience as alluded to in the poem (the visit to Hölderlin's hometown) or that which remains unsaid and unfathomable (the trauma, for Celan, of the loss of his parents and his own detention in a force labor camp) or, more abstractly, the German cultural and literary tradition to which he was introduced early in his life by his mother and which remained a fountainhead for his poetry (Felstiner *Paul Celan* 4 and elsewhere). Of the two avenues of progress in speech, metonymy and metaphor, the latter is found most appropriate for poetry. And yet concluding that poetry, like the (available) signifier of a (repressed, inaccessible) trauma, must be accepted as a speech removed from the source is true only if we

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fail to read the poem to its very end. For there, in "Pallaksch," in Hölderlin's non-word of madness, the poem finds its root.

14	*käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute, mit*	14	should a man come into the world, today, with
	...		…
18	*er*	18	he
	dürfte		could
20	*nur lallen und lallen,*	20	only babble and babble
	immer-, immer-		over, over,
	zuzu.		againagain.
	("Pallaksch. Pallaksch.")		("Pallaksh. Pallaksh.")[25]

Celan must have identified with Hölderlin, the tragic poet for whom "like the song of a nightingale in the dark, the world's song of life will ring out triumphantly only in deep sorrow" (in Hölderlin's own words, qtd. in Goebel 34), the poet who is said to have felt as keenly as no other poet "the painful contrast between the wretched political conditions in Germany and its highly developed culture" (Goebel 37). Celan, tells Joan Wright (190), "sees in Hölderlin's predicament not only a metaphor for his own personal dilemma as a poet but also for the existential condition of all poets, which the twentieth century has only intensified." By incorporating "Pallaksch" in his poem and bracketing it—by including it as separated not from the poem as such but rather from Hölderlin's poetry as signified (metaphorically) in the third stanza ("These / submerging words")—Celan turns "Pallaksch" into his own word, translating himself into the figure of the deranged Hölderlin to become the protagonist of the drowned plot. The unintelligible babble where symbolization ceases—the ultimate refusal of logos; a word whose madness is "real and final" (Weineck 268)—is the only possible (non-) word for the survivor who faces the eclipse of Heaven.

And yet precisely here, where the poem concludes with the nonsensical "Pallaksch," Celan quotes Hölderlin not only directly but also with precision: a faithful quotation, then, of the

mad word meaning "yes" and "no."[26] Like the line from Hölderlin's "Der Rhein" quoted earlier in the poem, "Pallaksch" becomes a coordinate in the cultural and intellectual milieu to which "Tübingen, Jänner" relates itself. But as a "source," "Pallaksch" is a text of an entirely different kind. Its introduction into the poem amounts, indeed, to the admission of madness into poetry: it can be read as affirming the place of the absolutely singular in poetry, of poetry as the place of the idiosyncratic and thus an exit from language: a suspension from art, from communication, from "eloquence" (see Lacoue-Labarthe 48). "Pallaksch" is the affirmation, quite simply, of poetry's mandate to stammer in the face of history's predicaments and of the insane word as paradigmatic for the language of "this time": the "wholly negative" signifier turns, in Celan's hands, into an affirmation "that his [Celan's] own poetry with its broken lines and stammering rhythms […] may be a viable poetic articulation of the exigencies of *his* own time" (Wright 193).

But the implications of "Pallaksch" for understanding poetry's relation to its "birthplace" are far more interesting here. For in "Pallaksch" madness becomes part of the source that nourishes poetry and that finds its afterlife in it. It becomes part of language: of German, Celan's beloved mother tongue[27] and (as is often mentioned by his readers) the language of his parents' murderers. Through the quote, Celan re-situates the incidence of "origination" in madness, presenting this madness as internal to language, part of Hölderlin's speech: part of the words, then, of a poet who had become something of a "poetic patriarch" and who composed the *Vaterländische Gesänge*, patriotic songs; the poet who has been considered by many a national treasure and was popular among the National Socialists (Weineck 266). The madness of German—the void underneath it, the darkness lying at its foundations—was for Celan the deep truth of this language, which he sought to express; and what could be a better pronouncement than the assertion of madness's insidious place within the "pristinely" German? "Pallaksch" as

the signifier of Hölderlin and his poetry, and thus perhaps of poetic speech in the broadest sense, marks and exposes the shadows haunting the Romantic tradition both as the cradle of the "Volk" and as an idealized poetic landscape of worldly and heavenly harmony and quiet, peaceful contemplation (see Goebel 37; Rannit 110).

In a speech on the occasion of receiving the literature prize of the city of Bremen in 1958 Celan talks about the dark wellspring of history from which the German language has to re-emerge:[28]

> Reachable, near and not lost, there remained in the midst of the losses this one thing: language.
>
> It, the language, remained, not lost, yes in spite of everything. But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, 'enriched' by all this.
>
> In this language I have sought, during those years and the years since then, to write poems […]. (*Selected* 395-96)

Poetic speech is made possible when it acknowledges the madness of the source, acknowledges madness as part of the source, renounces the "source" as a source of *meaning*. Language gives back "no words for that which happened," Celan propounds, by that announcing poetry's exile from the discourse of direct, immediate reference. And yet what allows and saves poetry is that it accepts its origination in a maddened or missing source, in a "frightful muting" and in the "thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech," and directs its intentionality elsewhere, assuming a different kind of "meaningfulness" or a different understanding of what "the poem's meaning" means. "Pallaksch" is not only Celan's holding onto what remains (even if only as a ruin) or an expression of his resistance to the creation of a new language, which "could suggest that the damage done to language could be forgotten" (Baer *Remnants* 5).[29] It is,

rather, an assertion that while verbalization "still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible," literary expression, in Geoffrey Hartman's words, is not necessarily "a movement from darkness to light" (Hartman 259, 63). Poetry survives by renouncing the attempt to constitute itself as continuous with a (mute, traumatic, traumatized) origin and by consenting to the enigma of origination and to engaging in the "subversion" of the real, a subversion through which a telling *of some kind* becomes possible. Aesthetical transformation, not enlightenment, owns the power of disclosure. "[T]he truth," in Felman's words, "does not kill the possibility of art—on the contrary, it requires it for its transmission" ("The Return" 206).

"Tübingen, Jänner" thus brings to the fore the relationship between poetry and testimony, posing the question not just of whether the former amounts to the latter, but also of whether in order to become a testimony (i.e., a first-hand attestation to an experience) poetry needs to reach for the source, cling to it, or rather draw itself away from it and release its hold. Paradoxically, drawing away is the poem's path—perhaps the only possible one—to the telling of the "inside" of an experience that cannot be fully articulated. "Pallaksch" is neither simply the bare sign of language's disintegration in the face of historical calamity nor the "paradigm" of the Holocaust survivor's "non-language." It signifies neither the poem's (and poetry's) ultimate collapse into madness nor the opposite, namely, Celan's striving for the incorporation of madness in the poem as a way of saying it, his attempt to create a space for madness "apart from its critique" in order to re-assert the power of poetry over madness (as suggested by Weineck 262-63). Similarly to other quotations in Celan's work, "Pallaksch" rather brings to the fore the question of originality, that is, "[the text's] reference to an origin either in a consciousness, in a literary epoch, on in a genre" (Müller-Sievers 143), a list to which "experience" can be added. But "Pallaksch," despite

its apparent senselessness, also constitutes these quotations' very paradigm. If unacknowledged quote thwarts the attempt to trace a fragment of speech back to its source,[30] then "Pallaksch" is the archetypal (or prototypical) non-source from which poetic discourse emanates. It is a paradox-ridden archetype, marking an absence through its presence and vice versa. But this very paradox of a quote that signifies the impossibility (or "meaninglessness") of quoting allows Celan, precisely, to articulate the literary work's disconnection from the "missing" point of its inception while presenting this disconnection as the poem's only possible relation to the place wherefrom it "springs forth": "Pallaksch" is an origin precisely as a hole.

Through "Pallaksch," then, Celan delineates the capacities of the text vis-à-vis the world outside it, questioning poetry's relation to (and knowledge of) its genesis as a condition for its ability to speak meaningfully. Poetry, he seems to be implying, cannot respond "properly" to history's call and cannot do justice to its exigencies, if doing justice means direct reference and explication (Bernard-Donals 158), first of all because the close affinity with the real such as implicated in the faithful quotation ("Pallaksch") does not guarantee intelligibility (communication, shared signification). Poetry does not turn its back to history: "Tübingen, Jänner" revisits a past experience, even if only as a recollected vision; it pays homage to the great Hölderlin and to his words, orderly and disorderly; it dates itself to a certain time (January) and marks its place (Tübingen)—though these contextualizing circumstantial markers are indeed rather subtle and vague. Yet poetry cannot assume the epistemic position from which testimony, as commonly understood, speaks. As an authoritative expression by the poet-patriarch, as a trusted signifier, "Pallaksch" is a space outside language, one that, we have already seen, gives rise to the poem through the leap (*"Rein- / entsprungenes"*) of metaphor over a gap that denies the poet's utterance the possibility of *vraisemblance* but precisely in this way assures its

endurance. Metaphor: not the renouncement of the source, not its substitution, but an oblique carrying of it over and through, in order to enable expression; a lateral speech, emerging not directly from the absence, but from a place right next to this absence, from the periphery of the discourse of reference. Like the signifier of the trauma (the manifest signifier of the latent, unknown, traumatic event), testimonial poetry is a talk from elsewhere. It bears witness but differently, and to something else.

12	*Käme,*		12	Should
	käme ein Mensch,			should a man,
	käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute, mit			should a man come into the world, today, with
	...			…
16	*er dürfte,*		16	he could,
	spräch er von dieser			if he spoke of this
	Zeit, er			time, he
	dürfte			could
20	*nur lallen und lallen,*		20	only babble and babble

Though it takes witnessing—the possibility of speaking about "this / time"—as its explicit object, "Tübingen, Jänner" does not attempt to constitute itself, then, as a medium for testimony in the juridical sense. Neither does its speaker identify himself as a victim or a witness nor is the background situation an imitation of the venue or speech mode of witnessing. In the same way that a speaking "I" is absent from the poem (even the eyes whose memory inaugurates it are not identified as the speaker's, and even the recollection is the eyes' rather than the person's), so is an addressee, another essential party of the setting of witnessing, missing from this text. Speech, moreover, is staged here in a tentative style, being introduced in the subjunctive form of the verb (*käme, dürfte, spräch*), which not only shifts the scene of telling onto the future (whereas the language of testimony entails the past tense) but also looms with skepticism and uncertainty.[31] Its approaching of the real is measured and full of doubts: "*Käme*" in line 12 gains its subject only in the next line ("*käme ein Mensch,*" line 13), and its site of

action, only in the one after ("*käme ein Mensch zur Welt*," line 14). With this gradual creation of a safe milieu of operation, every step forward is also a step backwards (or, in the least, the halt of further progress), as the continuous replication of previous lines allows the witness to gain presence only through repeated attempts: "Should / should a man, / should a man come." Whoever this human being or patriarch is, his arrival in the world is suspended: we hear Celan's hesitation as he orchestrates the moment of reality-encounter. The verb repetition here increases neither the sense of agency, nor the sense of urgency, nor the sense of resolution that such restatement of an act could suggest; it does not promulgate or assure the witness's arrival, but rather casts the summoned speech-act into further obscurity, into the realm of the wishful and the unrealistic, offering nothing but the flimsy firmness of the tentative mode: "he could, / if he spoke of this / time." Everything that could be said in this poem is conditioned upon this "if"; speech is always divided between the desirable and the feasible, which itself can only be uttered "over, over, / againagain"—without redemption.

The poem's scene of speech defers, then, the circumstantial markers of "narrated events, witnessed at the time and communicated afterward with a view to maximum reliability, hence objectivity" (Yacobi 242), as well as the testimony's epistemic model of speech unambiguously based on first-hand experiential knowledge (see Frisch 36). Understanding it as a testimony, understanding how Celan's poetry, or poetry in general, bears witness to the Holocaust (to the extent that this particular poem seeks, and succeeds, to touch upon poetry more broadly) requires the reader's acknowledgement and acceptance of the poem's distinctive means of saying. Straighforward historical refrentiality is the first to be dismissed as a definite qualifier of testimony; following it, is the tendency "to view prose rather than poetry as the natural medium of testimony, which itself springs from the […] tendency to equate the testimonial with the

factual and the documentary" (Yacobi 224). Compared to other genres, poetry is seldom acknowledged as an appropriate medium for testimony[32]—and unsurprisingly so: the stammering voice of "Tübingen, Jänner" reminds us that poetry, and particularly poetry scarred by history's extremities, can never be (unlike the narrative form) the forthright, plain totality standing for an experience as its token in the realm of discourse. Yet apt here, perhaps, is Giorgio Agamben's remark[33] about the testimony that "founds the possibility of the poem" (36), which poses the testimony as a certain content for which verse is a possible vessel. Though Agamben rejects the idea that poetry's devices can attest to what lies "beyond words" (beyond denotation), his remark validates and legitimizes it as a proper—proper in principle—vehicle for telling. To the extent that narrative, as a structure of meaning, is more prone to detach itself from its referent, poetry's disjointed composition (not an oxymoron) might even suggest an answer to the blight of prose: the transition into narration easily turns a re-presentation into representation, creating something akin to what Pierre Nora (Nora 15) names a "memory site": a site that commemorates the past and bestows it with habitation and at the same time promotes forgetfulness by means of de-sensitization. Poetry, as has already been argued here, does not speak directly for or from the experience in which its origination is to be "found." Yet to the extent that "Tübingen, Jänner" can be seen (for a moment) as its paradigm, poetry desires and craves the roots of its commnecemnt and constantly aspires to get in touch with them: the source is kept on its horizon as a subject of contemplation, meditation, and self-critique. The conventional tropes of representation—mirroring, doubling, substitution—"Tübingen, Jänner" indeed replaces with the image of the broken water reflection (stanza 3), in this suggesting the significance of poetic subversion ("distortion") in making the journey from history into communication. But this, nonetheless, is far from being the poem's safe haven. By staging this subversion, by making its

rootlessness (sourcelessness) explicit, the poem seems to keep torturing itself over its distance from its place of origination, whose absence and meaninglessness—whose absence as meaningful, and whose meaninglessness as presence—it does not try to hide.

What we see in "Tübingen, Jänner" is the staging, then, of the loss of meaning rather than its real loss in the course of the poem: a staged collapse of "sense" rather than the fall from poetry into gibberish. For these two, the event and the staged performance, must be distinguished from each other for the sake of the poem's survival as a work of art. Celan's "Pallaksch" may appear as literature's partaking, by means of its "cryptic forms," of the "historical impossibility of writing a historical narration of the Holocaust" (Felman "The Betrayal" 201). "Tübingen, Jänner," I stated earlier, manifests a breach in language as its only way of articulating this breach, appearing to fulfill Giorgio Agamben's imperative that language "give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness" to the victims' lost, unrecoverable, dismembered speech (39). Through a crisis os symbolization, through its own ruin, the poem of descent bears witness: almost despite itself. And yet, as Shira Wolosky rightfully argues, "Celan does negate a 'signified' but *not* as a collapse of meaning or as a loss of reference." Rather, the poem's aesthetical composition is enacted in terms of the possibilities of "time, materiality, and history, which language represents not only referentially but also figurally" (Wolosky "The Lyric" 665). Language, then (eventually), not only re-represents itself: it also represents itself. The meaning of the utterance is the figuration of its ways to mean; its negation (its deflected quotes, its stammer) is history's figuration in the poem's composition, in the poem as a configuration of possibilities marked by experience, temporality, and material conditions.

"There exists no real choice between considering Celan's project as the search for an idiom that could master a changed historical reality, and recognizing that this reality shatters the possibility of finding such an idiom," Baer argues ("Fractured" 20). That it is impossible to decide "when a certain style is an inevitable response to a history that imposes itself and when it is merely aesthetic device" ("Fractured" 33) should be ascribed to the simultaneous operation of the two forces shaping the poem's (any poem's) verbal surface: a deliberate creation, guided by the author's will and reflecting his or her aesthetic choices,[34] and the external conditions that register themselves in the text independently of this will and sometimes even against or despite it. "Regardless of 'subject matter,'" Carolyn Forché claims (30), "these poems [of witness] bear the trace of extremity within them, and they are, as such, evidence of what occurred." The disintegrative language of "Tübingen, Jänner" can certainly and convincingly be read as an attempt to master a certain experience by clinging to "what is left" for the poet facing the unfathomable. By dint of this possibility—the possibility to read aesthetic fragmentation, a poem's wrenched textual fabric, as a discourse riven by speechlessness (by the silence to which the witness to the Holocaust is condemned)—the question of the relation between the language of poetry and the act of witnessing, which Celan's poetry brings to the fore (Baer *Remnants* 189-90), becomes a question of reading: the question of reading the text's very act of signification, reading "for the wound as well as the power of signification that contains or composes it" (Hartman 259). But while acknowledging that the words of the literary text "bear the wound or are scarred by it"—a possibility corresponding to Baer's questioning ("Fractured" 32) of the historical "value" of the trauma signs, or of their ability to testify through (precisely) their resistance of coherence and verbalization—Geoffrey Hartman, for one, admits that literature

retains a darkness of its own (260, 63). The gloom of "Tübingen, Jänner" is not history's alone; it is, I am suggesting here, art's as well.

The discussion of the "witnessing of language" (of language as an agent of "witnessing") is critically related to the meaning of "Pallaksch," the enigmatic heart of "Tübingen, Jänner." Earlier in this chapter I presented a reading of "Pallaksch" as a sign of madness, which has cast into question its ability to bear witness other than through its performance (or better: occurrence). As a language outside meaning, a word whose madness is "real and final" (Weineck 268), "Pallaksch" has become the poem's uncontrolled testimony through the collapse of speech. Yet reading "Pallaksch" as a real, authentic loss of the poem's (ability to make) sense bears not only on the question of poetry's capacity to witness, but also on the status of "Tübingen, Jänner" as a work of verbal art. Is "Pallaksch" poetry at all? As history's taking control over writing, "Pallaksch" is a threat not only to straightforward referentiality, but also for the "cryptically poetic." That is to say: if it bears witness to "this / time" only through its failure, it becomes excluded from the poem's regime of speech, from the poem as such, as art—in the same way that if, on the contrary, it is conceived of as residing within the domain of the poem as deliberately shaped discourse, its "failure" (its "madness") must be thought of as a staged performance (rather than an on-going event). The poem's aesthetic valence and artistic kudos, it is my claim here, is stipulated on a conception in which it testifies *from within its boundaries*: on a conception where "Pallaksch," too, is part of the poem's crafted perspective on the real; a sign, perhaps, of the fortunes of sober speech confronted by "the world, today" and of the (im)possibility and improbability of "knowledge construed as synthesis."[35] The collapse of the poem as testimony, in other words, is its collapse as a poem as well.

Wolosky's insight into Celan's work, which I would like to reiterate here, does not completely resolve the tension between the writer's agency and history's power to inscribe itself on the text.[36] Suggesting that poetry does not testify from the place wherefrom it "testifies" and granting language the power of figuration, Wolosky reads as implying the poem's bearing witness despite itself after all. Her argument, however, allows poetry to testify from within its boundaries, neutralizing the tension implicated in Baer, for whom the poem's testimonial valence rests on its communication "in a language that reaches for another's understanding while maintaining its own radical individuation" (*Remnants* 12)." The challenge to verbalize experience without sacrificing the poem's "poeticity" (its sensibility and voice) becomes a non-challenge in Celan, whose work, rather than attempting to transcend or transgress the "aesthetic" or the artifact, weaves its "saying" from the very materials of direct and indirect, explicit and implicit reference. Through its quoting practices, through its allusions and re-writings and adaptations, "Tübingen, Jänner" re-presents the ruins of direct testimony but in this way represents them, "retheoriz[ing] language's status and role in the construction of meaning within and in terms of concrete and temporal experience" (Wolosky "The Lyric" 665). Wolosky's words are more than apt here: in pointing to itself, she writes—and we can add: in pointing to itself *as a ruin*—"the language of the text points to the conditions under which we live in the world and […] to the role of language in that effort" ("The Lyric" 666). "Pallaksch" is language marked by history and thus a vehicle for reflection on the conditions of speech as determined by "[h]istory as circumstance, contingency, mutability, accident, desire, and disaster." Eventually, it is for the reader to choose how to read "Pallaksch" as a signifier—whether as the manifestation and registration of a crisis or as a testimony mediated through art, art subjected to testimony and in this way subjecting it and using it for its own needs and purposes.

Regardless of the question of capacity, Celan's poetry seems to never aspire to the eloquence to which Adorno, according to George Steiner, has alluded in his famous dictum from 1949. Steiner takes the renowned claim that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric"[37] to mean that "Eloquence after Auschwitz would be a kind of obscenity." His interpretation puts the weight of Adorno's words on the question of language's refusal, for the sake of aesthetic pleasure, to carry "the embers that continue to crackle," the marks of a horrifying history (Steiner "The Long" 156). Steiner's invocation of "eloquence" seems due here: there can be no "barbarity" inherent to the writing of survivors who find outlet in literature. But Celan's poems anyway do not attempt to escape history's predicament, and they never produce an unblemished verbal surface in order to fill for a void that always-already precludes any kind of fluent, mellow rhetoric. Though it knowingly defies the reader's ability to make his or her way "back" from the poem into history (without, however, ceasing to mark both its historicity and its break with the past), "Tübingen, Jänner" offers itself as an artistic formation/formulation of its time's conditions of speech, and this pronounced artistic outwear hints at this time's very nature. The poem testifies, then, to a certain way of telling: to its own paths of "telling," to the competence of the word, to the inability of the existent, the common, and the ordinary (i.e., not only of the poetic) to speak meaningfully about "this / time" and at the same time to the terrifying isolation of any invented idiom ("Pallaksch") through which poetry might seek to fill the gaps of speech. To this it bears witness; as such it needs to be accepted.

"Events remain historical […] if we understand that they exert a pressure upon […] discursive form," writes Michael Bernard-Donals (164). In this respect, every poem written under the impression of a catastrophe potentially participates in the task of bearing witness to it, though its testimonial valence is often stipulated upon the reader's recognition. An ethical

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response to literary works produced by survivors commands the acceptance of their words as a testimony—even, indeed, if only to words' helplessness.[38] Or rather, such ethical response commands at least the reader's sensitivity "to the gesture of the poem as a whole," in Michael Hamburger's words (xxvi). It is for the reader to pick up the "message in a bottle" that a poem is, according to Celan (*Selected* 396), a poet whose poems "rest on an extraordinary trust in his readers' capacity to respond to the dominant gesture of a poem without access to the circumstantial data" (Hamburger xxxiv). The reader is the representative of a community whose listening and reception from "outside" are necessary for the testimony not less than its own origination "inside" the experience.[39] And yet the question of whether, given a catastrophe's historical weight, poetry *should* be read as testimony (assuming, for a moment, that the two discourses can indeed be clearly distinguished from each other) cannot be answered in a definitive way, as is the question of the status of poetic speech as both the receptive slate on which history inscribes itself through its effects on language and a measured, planned artifact projecting reality's portrayal according to its creator's will. The poetry of witness demands that the reader acknowledges not only the reality in which it had originated (objective reality and, as suggested here, a discursive one, the reality of signification) and the chasm that forces speech into artistic circumference, but also the artistic deed: acknowledge art's survival, its refusal to succumb to the concrete, its right to exist as reality's sublimation.[40] The reader's responsibility, in other words, is not just to history, but to art as well. Reading Celan's project of re-situating language vis-à-vis the Holocaust risks a falling into barbarity if it neglects to include poetry's right to be guarded against its merging into history, into the discourse allowed by the need to make history known. In the face of an unfathomable event stamping his writing with the permanent sign of gravity, Celan's writing becomes a struggle to allow poetic knowledge to

develop into a broader epistemology: to allow the *poetic* to become *knowledge*. "[T]he truth does not kill the possibility of art—on the contrary, it requires it for its transmission," says Felman ("The Return" 206) in a sentence already quoted here. Art, we could add, does not kill the possibility of truth, though it may leave the path to it lacking clear, intelligible signs.

Notes

[1] And in his doctoral dissertation, on which his book is based.

[2] Notable, in this context, is Primo Levi's response to Celan's poetry. Levi, as noted by Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, although seeing himself as the reader whom Celan is seeking, states that Celan's poetry "is not a communication […], not a language" and adds: "he who is not understood by anyone does not transmit anything." See Primo Levi, "On Obscure Writing," trans. Raymond Rosenthal, *Other People's Trades* (New York: Summit, 1989) 173, 71, and see discussion in Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, "'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry," *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1992) 264.

[3] And see James Rolleston, *Narratives of Ecstasy: Romantic Temporality in Modern German Poetry* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987) 134. That modernist poets acknowledged the existence of a realm of experience inaccessible to human cognizance and sought ways to incorporate this ungraspable reality into their work does not, however, amount to saying that they recognized the inherent limitations of the verbal medium.

[4] See Saul Fiedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. from the French by Thomas Weyr (New York: Harper & Row, 1984) 19. Fiedländer's discussion of the vicissitudes of artistic representation (the relationship between Nazism and its reflections in literature and art) emphasizes the challenges posed by the Holocaust to the writer who wishes to remain within the realm of the event.

[5] Friedlander discusses the demands posed to representation by postmodernism's claim for existence of countless narratives; he therefore encloses the word "truths" within quotation marks. The present discussion focuses, in a more limited way, on the problems encountered by the writer attempting to articulate personal experience; I thus considered it appropriate to omit the quotation marks.

[6] Representation: "Something which stands for or denotes another symbolically; an image, a symbol, a sign […]; The action or fact of expressing or denoting symbolically." See "Representation, n.," *OED Online*, March 2011 ed. (Oxford University Press), vol. Also see note no. 4 above and its referral in the text.

[7] For a general discussion of representation and narrative form see, e.g., Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987). The problem of narration as construction (and thus as substitution, if not aesthetization) is not identical to the problem posed to Holocaust representation by postmodernism, in which the multiplicity of narratives thwarts the creation of an integrated discourse, disappointing the desire for "stable narration" and for a master-narrative of the Nazi era and the final solution. The latter is Friedlander's main concern. See Saul Friedlander, "Introduction," *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambrdige and London: Harvard UP, 1992) 5, following Jean-François Lyotard.

[8] On narrative as a structure of meaning see, e.g., Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1992).

[9] **To testify**: "*To provide evidence as a witness, subject to an oath or affirmation, in order to establish a particular fact or set of facts* […]. A witness may testify as to facts directly observed […]; facts learned indirectly […]; or, in the case of an expert, an opinion the expert has formed based on facts […]." **Witnesses**: "*Individuals who provide evidence in legal proceedings before a tribunal. Persons who give testimony under oath in court, concerning what they have seen, heard, or otherwise observed*. See "Testify," *Gale Encyclopedia of American Law*, ed. Donna Batten, 3rd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2010), vol. 10, 13; "Witnesses," vol. 10, 437. About testimony's modern epistemic conception see Andrea Frisch, "The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective," *Discourse* 25.1-2 (2003): 36, 38.

[10] "[N]arrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning. […] [T]he absence of narrative capacity or the refusal of narrative indicates an absence or refusal of meaning itself." See White, *Tropics of Discourse: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* 1-2.

[11] That "representation" is not at stake in the present discussion renders impertinent the question of the aesthetical and ethical limits of Holocaust renditions that are often brought to the fore in similar discussions.

[12] And in Felstiner I find this sentence: "where representation has its limits, presentation with such terrifying resonances does not." John Felstiner, "Translating Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge': Rhythm and Repetition as Metaphor," *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1992).

[13] Baer occasionally uses the term "bear witness" when discussing Baudelaire, too. Celan's poetry, however, is being continually referred to in these words in his work. Notable as well is the semantic difference between "bear[ing] witness to the difficulty of fully grasping and giving voice to [… a] fragmented existence" (Celan and Baudelaire) and "bear[ing] witness to the catastrophic events" (Celan).

[14] Paul Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. with an introduction and postscript by Michael Hamburger, Revised and Expanded ed. (New York: Persea, 2002) 154-55.

[15] This, according to Christoph Schwab, Hölderlin's first biographer: "Ein Lieblingsausdruck war das Wort pallaksch!, man konnte es das einmal für Ja, das andermal für Nein nehmen." The excerpt from Schwab ["Schilderung des kranken Hölderlin in seiner Biographie 1846"] appears in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, eds. Norbert von Hellingrath, Friedrich Seebass and Ludwig von Pigenot (München und Leipzig: G. Müller, 1913-23) vol. 6, 442-54. The quote is from page 444.

[16] See Felstiner's numerous accounts in his biography of the poet, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*.

[17] See Frederick Burwick, "Reflection as Mimetic Trope," *Romantic Poetry*, ed. Angela Esterhammer (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John. Benjamins, 2002) 27 and elsewhere.

[18] And see Silke-Maria Weineck, "Logos and Pallaksch. The Loss of Madness and the Survival of Poetry in Paul Celan *'Tübingen, Jänner'*," *Orbis Litterarum* 54.4 (1999): 264, 66, 70, and the works cited in the notes.

[19] See Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* 419.

[20] The term "memory site" was coined by Pierre Nora, who, recounting the formation of collective memory, relates the erection of "memory sites" ("Lieux de Mémoire") to a social transition from memory (an unconscious performance) to history (conscious articulation). This transition, paradigmatic also in psychoanalysis, denies access to the past and encourages forgetfulness by means of de-sensitization. See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 15.

[21] Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's discussion of "Images […] so decontextualized as to be considered illegitimate" suggests that poetry's moral authority is related to its connection to a "source" through "circumstantial markers that locate [the poem] historically." See "'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry," 261, 73. The same is implied by Tamar Yacobi in her reading of Dan Pagis, whose staging of testimony "invalidate[s] all earthbound legalisms, procedures, specifics, viewpoints." See "Fiction and Silence as Testimony: The Rhetoric of Holocaust in Dan Pagis," *Poetics Today* 26.2 (2005): 235; also 24, 26-27.

[22] "Zu," however, means not only "towards" but also "shut" (i.e., closure), which bestows the end of the poem with "simultaneity of opening and closing." See Weineck, "Logos and Pallaksch. The Loss of Madness and the Survival of Poetry in Paul Celan *'Tübingen, Jänner'*," 264.

[23] The metonymical and metaphorical as the poem's two avenues of progress is borrowed, of course, from Roman Jakobson's articulation of the discursive principles of combination (metonymy) and substitution (metaphor). See "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971) 1113.

[24] The word "metaphor" is made of the wrods $\mu\varepsilon\tau\alpha$-, "meta" (meaning over/across) and $\phi o\rho\acute{\alpha}$, carrying (from $\phi\acute{\varepsilon}\rho\varepsilon\iota\nu$—to bear, carry). See "Metaphor," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2011), vol.

[25] Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan* 154-55.

[26] See note no. 15 above.

[27] See note no. 9 on page 27.

[28] In his 1948 essay "Edgar Jené and the Dream of the Dream," a foreword to a brochure of the artist Edgar Jené's works, Celan proposes to "never leave the depths and keep holding dialogue with the dark wellspring." I borrowed the phrase from there. See Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 52.

[29] Recognition of the crisis faced by the German language after the Second World War and of the need for its reform, transformation, or refashioning can be found, for instance, in Eugen Hartmuth Mueller, "The

German Language of Today," *The German Quarterly* 25.1 (1952). Mueller can be assumed to represent a broader trend. The nature of the desired change is likely to have been defined differently by different critics and in any case needs to be clearly distinguished from the language construction sought by the National Socialists (who sought, among the rest, to "purify" German from any "foreign," i.e. non-German, elements and were engaged in an attempt to re-invent a language to serve the process of extermination).

[30] Practice that, for Helmut Müller-Sievers, aims at "disorient[ing] permanently the desire to identify meaning and intention" and has "an undeniably redemptive dimension": "poetry today is the shelter of words that have been severed from their organic reference […]. A second cutting, a second citation brings them into the space of poetry […] where they are safe at once from instrumentalization and hermeneutic aggression." Helmut Müller-Sievers, "On the Way to Quotation: Paul Celan's Meridian Speech," *New German Critique* 91, Special Issue on Paul Celan (2004): 138, 42, 43.

[31] Writing about "poetic witnessing" in the works of Dan Pagis, Susan Gubar mentions verb tense as one of several vehicles through which the gap between authentic testimonial utterance and constructed poetic formulation is brought to the reader's attention. Testimony, she notes, is always given in the past tense; the employment of the present (or future) tense is clearly a divergence from the language of testimony. See Susan Gubar, "The Long and the Short of Holocaust Verse," *New Literary History* 35 (2004): 449-50.

[32] See, for example, the opening sentence of Froma Zeitlin's article "The Vicarious Witness": "Whatever form Holocaust testimonies may assume—diaries, memoirs, oral reports, photographs, chronicles or histories—all of them inhabit a haunted terrain of traumatized memory." Froma I. Zeitlin, "The Vicarious Witness: Belated Memory and Authorial Presence in Recent Holocaust Literature," *History and Memory* 10.2 (1998): 5. Poetry is disregarded right away.

[33] In his critique of Shoshana Felman's analysis of Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*.

[34] Even here, as artistically-determined, the poetry of witness (Forché's designation) is entrapped by another complication, simultaneously aiming towards reality and moving away from it, undecidedly swaying between the wish to commemorate and the desire to forget events whose endurance in memory jeopardizes psychical integration. See Ulrich Baer, "Fractured Experience, Absolute Event: The Poetry of Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan," PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1995, 148, following Lawrence L. Langer, *The Ruins of Memory: Holocaust Testimonies* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991).

[35] In her commentary on Felman, Frisch (49) notes: "it becomes clear that the impossibility [of bearing witness] [Felman] means to evoke here […] is the impossibility of knowledge construed as *synthesis*."

[36] Wolosky keeps using metonymies that ascribe agency to Celan's work, language, aesthetics, radicalism, project, writing etc. This figurative language is at the very stake of the present discussion; its abundance, however, complicates the theoretical question I am trying to answer.

[37] Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. from German by Samuel and Shierry Weber, 1st MIT Press paperback ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983) 34. For the German original ("Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch") see Theodor W. Adorno, "Prismen (1951)," *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann unter Mitwirkung von Gretel Adorn, vol. 10.1: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977) 30.

[38] I recognize that such formulation does not entirely solve the problem of poetry's testimonial value if the latter is measured by referencing to events and situations in the material world, outside the realm of discourse.

[39] And see Baer: "The survivor's apparent difficulties of speaking about the event are directly linked to the implicit fear that there is no addressee for their [*sic*] stories, and that language itself has lost the capacity to establish a human bond prior and beyond the interviewer's openly avowed commitment or obligation to listen." *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000) 201. For Tamar Yacobi, readers are those who "supply the missing background and causal links to project a coherent tale of Holocaust." See her "Fiction and Silence as Testimony: The Rhetoric of Holocaust in Dan Pagis," 239. This view, however, brings up the question of the testimony's own narrative form, which cannot be discussed here.

[40] I use "sublimation" here as the general name for the transfiguration of content into a socially-accepted or culturally-valued object or form (sublimation, then, as the human's turn towards reality and not away from it).

CHAPTER THREE

The Holy, the Mundane, and the Sacred:

Language and the Divine in Paul Celan

When he was asked how he could go on writing in German—the mother tongue that had

become the tongue of his mother's murderers—Paul Celan replied that "Only in the mother

tongue can one speak his own truth. In a foreign tongue the poet lies."[1] Indeed, his entire work is

riven by the paradox of a beloved language permeated by the "thousand darknesses of

deathbringing speech" of the Third Reich (*Selected* 395). Though fluent in Romanian since

childhood and in French later in his life, these languages were never options for his poetry, as

Celan's biographer John Felstiner argues based on the mature works of the poet, who "did not

believe in bilingualism in poetry."[2] Celan, nonetheless, did incorporate words and phrases in

languages other than German in his poems. Several instances of Hebrew, in particular, are

central to this chapter. As Felstiner stresses, Hebrew words, derived mostly from liturgy or from

the Scriptures and occasionally denoting proper names of people and places, always resound

with purpose in Celan. They form a part of the "Hebraic presence" that Felstiner identifies in

Celan's work "from beginning to end," and which he detects also in more subtle forms (such as

puns or plays on Hebrew, phrases that require translation into Hebrew in order to reveal certain

textual affinities, and Hebraicized spelling; Felstiner "Mother" 151, and see the examples there).

This presence has been regarded by various critics as performing an act of commemoration for

which German can only be inadequate, as embodying Celan's complex dialogue with the Jewish

and Hebraic tradition (Felstiner, in his biography, dwells on instances of this dialogue), as a means to implant a thread of foreignness in the flesh of the German poem (see Eshel 104-06), and even as marking a "dialogue or dialectic between Diaspora and Zion" that summons a reflection on the themes of exile and uprootedness in Celan and on language as both a form of habituation and a source of estrangement.[3] The present chapter seeks to add one more reading to these by turning to three poems from the volume *Die Niemandsrose* ("The No-One's Rose," 1963), a collection that "abounds in Jewish terms, images, themes," yet one in which Celan's oscillation "between prayer and revolt" becomes most evident (Felstiner "Paul Celan: The Strain" 45). The occasions of Hebrew in these poems, when read in conjunction, reveal an attempt by the poet to redefine the relationship between language and the deity or between the divine and humans' creative acts. Recognizing God's withdrawal, Celan uproots the Holy Tongue from its place in the domain of the sacred, embedding it, instead, in the realm of the profane to render it a new domain of sanctification—and one that commits God to the human bond.

1.   "Mandorla": On the Space Between the Human and the Divine

A site of act and counter-act, speech and counter-speech, where Celan re-defines the relationship between language and religious belief, "Mandorla" might serve as a proper outset for exploring Celan's relationship both with God and with the ideas of divinity and sacredness, which stands at the center of the present chapter.

MANDORLA	MANDORLA
1 *In der Mandel—was steht in der Mandel?*	In the almond—what dwells in the almond?
Das Nichts.	Nothing.
Es steht das Nichts in der Mandel.	What dwells in the almond is Nothing.
Da steht es und steht.	There it dwells and dwells.

<table>
<tr><td>5</td><td>*Im Nichts—wer steht da? Der König.*</td><td>In Nothing—what dwells there? The King.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>*Da steht der König, der König.*</td><td>There the King dwells, the King.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>*Da steht er und steht.*</td><td>There he dwells and dwells.</td></tr>
</table>

Judenlocke, wirst nicht grau. — Jew's curl, you'll not turn grey.

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>*Und dein Aug—wohin steht dein Auge?*</td><td>And your eye—on what does your eye dwell?</td></tr>
<tr><td>10</td><td>*Dein Aug steht der Mandel entgegen.*</td><td>On the almond your eye dwells.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>*Dein Aug, dem Nichts stehts entgegen.*</td><td>Your eye, on Nothing it dwells.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>*Ed steht zum König.*</td><td>Dwells on the King, to him remains loyal, true.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>*Es steht und steht.*</td><td>So it dwells and dwells.</td></tr>
</table>

Menschenlocke, wirst nicht grau. — Human curl, you'll not turn grey.

15 *Leere Mandel, königsblau.* — Empty almond, royal-blue.[4]

"Mandorla" (Italian for "almond") is organized as a series of questions and answers adhering to a fixed, straightforward pattern: each of the three main stanzas names an object and formulates a question regarding this object's contents or orientation; a laconic answer is then provided, which is then elaborated into full sentences. This structure, John Felstiner notes (*Paul Celan* 180), evokes the Christian tradition of written catechism while hearkening back, as Beth Hawkins adds ("The Washing" 62), to Judaic study practices through questioning. But whereas religious catechism provides authoritative (or pseudo-authoritative) instruction in the faith, Celan's catechism suggests not only the pervasiveness of negation, but also the "insufficiency of the answer," Hawkins notes. Each stanza opens to the next in a chain-like query: in the almond—what dwells in the almond? Nothing (literally: The Nothing); and in the Nothing, what dwells there? The King. The poem's ontological premises, served by its deictic markers ("**the** almond" etc.), does not assume the shape of a familiar world, and the process of questioning, carried deeper and farther, revolves, through what appears as mere redundancy, into stasis—a stasis, then, that opposes the forward movement of language itself. The almond is pervaded by the Nothing, by a void that dwells in it and exerts from it its nullifying power: preceded by a definite

article (**Das** Nichts), capturing a whole line (obliterating everything in its vicinity), posing itself as an answer to the preceding question and at the same time assuming the shape of an absolute (followed by a period), this Nothing is a present absence, an absent presence. Any assertion of its existence unavoidably (un-a-void-ably) foregrounds its emptiness, any compliance with its negativity essentially attests to its (non)being. Even the assertion of relationship—"What dwells in the almond is Nothing" (line 3)—brings no revelation. The poem follows, rather, a trajectory of reiteration: of repetition, as if in a game of linguistic combinations, of the already-known ("There it dwells and dwells," line 4). With the gathering of the lines on the page, almost no new words are admitted into the text, no new patterns are formed, no substantial development can be inspected: the Nothing stands still, and still stands. This relentless standing, announced by the 14 instances of the verb "stehen," marks the strain of language in this poem. "Mandorla" becomes a poem of contemplation, from different angles, of a static condition that words cannot permeate, only surround. Language, it seems, fails to set the Nothing into motion, encountering a reality that disavows speech and refuses to be recreated in the poet's hands.

Line 4 ("There it dwells and dwells"), sealing the poem's first stanza, is thus the result of a continuous process of diminution and reduction; the natural result of the natural process of diminution and reduction that emanates from the Nothing and continues into line 5: "In Nothing—what dwells there?" This time, the answer ("The King") is provided immediately (in the same line), as if to mark the poem's growing inclination towards the rhetorical and the already known. Like the Nothing in which he dwells, the King, too, stands still, annulling the words that struggle to approach him ("**There** the King dwells" [emphasis added]: beyond reach), undecipherable in nature (resisting any further characterization)—and taking no notice of the gaze directed at him. For opposite the almond, dwelling on an already-announced

emptiness, stands "your eye" (line 9): the eye of an anonymous interlocutor; an *Ayin* (Hebrew for "eye"), in which another *Ayin* (Hebrew for "nothing") is reflected;[5] "your" eye, then, facing the oval shaped "eye" of the almond, which contains the *Ayin* of Nothing in which the King, like a pupil, dwells. Watching from a distance, loyal and true to the King, this eye's search for the Other is met with the dumb gaze of the empty mandorla, an emptiness with which the possibility of reciprocity, of a mutual visual gesture, fades away. And yet "your eye" dwells—"So steht es und steht"— anticipating and expecting a response. It is in the repeated verb "stehen," in this continuous pronouncement of the word of immobility, that a simple repetition (line 3) turns into an incomplete action (line 4, and later lines 7 and 13) through which a sense of constant waiting and a lack of closure permeates the poem (Olschner 179).

The empty almond-eye: in traditional iconography, the mandorla is an oval-shaped radiant aureole surrounding the entire figure of a holy person. In Christian art[6] it usually surrounds the figure of Christ, especially in paintings depicting the Transfiguration (where Christ is revealed to his Apostles as in his celestial form) and the Ascension (where the resurrected Christ ascends to heaven) ("Mandorla"). Made of two circles partially overlapping one another to form an almond shape in the middle, it symbolizes the union or the encounter between opposing realms such as heaven and earth, divine and human, spirit and matter, self and other (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 16; Hawkins *Reluctant* 124-25). Why the mandorla is the realm of the "Son of God" is clear: Christ is the corporeal touched by transcendence, the figure of divinity embodied in human flesh, the absolute union of the human and the celestial. Because of this very union, the mandorla has thus come to express the standpoint of the mystic as a realm of dwelling (rather than of void) where dualism is transcended and union and harmony with the divine are experienced.

Pervaded by Nothingness, Celan's mandorla (reminiscent as it is also of a human being's dead, blind eye) marks the absence and failure of divine watchfulness, vigilance, and approval: the almond is God's[7] omnipresent, watchful, all-seeing eye (through a Hebrew pun between "almond," SHAKED, and "vigilant," SHOKED)[8] whose idleness denies the human Providence and redemption. It is a declaration of God's withdrawal rather than a denial or negation of God's existence: not only does the eye sustain its devotion to the (still existing) King—to the Jewish God, the "King of glory" (Psalms 24:7), but also to Christ, "King of the Jews" (INRI)—and to the mandorla as a source of promised revelation (lines 11-12). Rather, the mandorla as the marker of divinity reduced to an empty husk regains its symbolic meaning as it renders a precious shell closing up its go(o)ds.[9] Here the language of (Western) symbolism provides a cipher for the reader. As Christ's true, divine nature lies, in Christian doctrine, beyond the surface of his corporeal being, so does the almond symbolize, because of its husk, a hidden spiritual truth (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 15-16)—and perhaps even spiritual truth *as* hidden: it symbolizes God as unknowable (Felstiner *Paul Celan* 181). The moment of reduction, in which Celan asserts the mandorla's emptiness, is thus also a moment of reaffirmation and of the constitution of a negative theology (apophasis) of a God defined and known by its absence.[10] The seed of divinity in the human turns out to be an empty shell at the same time as it renders an impenetrable treasure, creating the paradox of a Godly presence conceptualized as Nothingness, which is indistinguishable and inseparable from it (Dan 359-63).

Read in the light of other works by Celan, the almond as a Jewish symbol encapsulates these strains in another interesting way, which may be worth a note here. According to Felstiner (*Paul Celan* 64), the almond, "[b]looming earliest in Israel, yielding sweet nuts and bitter, oval like the Levantine eye," betokens Jewishness for Celan; that it reverberates with the name of

Osip Mandelstam, the Jewish Russian poet admired by Celan and in whose name he heard the German word for root or tribe ("Stamm"), furthered this association (Felstiner "Paul Celan: The Strain" 50). The almond has become, as has already been mentioned above, a symbol of watchfulness, vigilance, and divine approval, and its early blooming rendered it a herald of spring, a sign of nature's rebirth, and a symbol of hope and resurrection (De Vries 12). And yet the same qualities—especially its early bloom, susceptible to late frost—have turned the almond into a symbol of transience and ephemerality: "the almond blossoms before it is covered with leaves. Thus it symbolizes (Jer. 1:11–12) the speedy fulfillment of the prophecy of doom. It may also signify old age and the imminence of death. It is used, allegorically, in this sense in Ecclesiastes (12:5) to describe the short cycle of human life" (Feliks 683). The almond tree's pale blossom is often compared to a hoary head (which has to do with the sidelocks mentioned later in the poem), introducing a shadow of death into the image of revival (De Vries 12; Chevalier and Gheerbrant 17). The almond, then, symbolizes God's enduring wakefulness but also the ephemerality of the human (see Rashi's commentary on Ecclesiastes 12:5), the redemption to come but also God's prophesy of rage (Jeremiah 31:27), fruitfulness (Aaron's rod blossomed and yielded almonds, Numbers 17:8) and barrenness, Providence and God's fury.

This multiplicity of meanings, all of which Celan was in all likelihood aware of (Felstiner is quite determined in this point), suggests that more than pointing to one or several particular meanings, the almond in "Mandorla" embodies the paradox of a symbol whose (interpretive) promise is drained by an all-determined and determining context. The almond is a hope and its collapse, prospects and their decline, an affliction without redemption. It is the originally multifaceted symbol whose meaning could have proliferated in a different context as an icon of hope, fertility, and blossom, but whose final meaning is preordained by the poem's

circumstances, that is, by the irrevocable absence of the divine. The affliction suffered by Jews—their vulnerability, their despair, their premature and ruthless death—becomes the mandorla's ultimate signified in Celan's poem due to the context's submitting the symbol to its control, and this submission can be regarded as standing for a broader, more crucial predestination (a doomed fate) to which God's obliviousness is responsible. What could possibly be regarded as illustrative of the tensions between two realms of signification, two realms of being (a hopeful one and a desperate one), succumbs to the Nothingness pervading the poem and collapses as the token of a promise-fulfilled.

The empty mandorla thus symbolizes a failed reconciliation: the human failure to approach (summon, invoke, access) the deity due to the latter's withdrawal from the domain in which an encounter between the holy and the mundane could have taken place. In the conceptual language of Jewish mysticism, which Celan had been studying at the time of writing "Mandorla" (see Felstiner *Paul Celan* 180-81), and whose traces can be found in many of his poems, the mandorla's emptiness signals the contraction of the divine, its self-removal from the worldly: not merely a split between God and the *Shekhina* (God's indwelling presence in the world, identified with the people of Israel (Scholem *On the Kabbalah* 105-06),[11] between Jews' physical and spiritual existence—a split considered, in the Kabbalah, the source of all worldly evil. The Shekhina itself, rather, has vanished, leaving behind a world of demonic powers, *kelippoth* (shells) (*On the Kabbalah* 114). In "Mandorla," it is the eclipse of God that leaves "your eye"—humankind's—forever wandering in vain in the search for a divine sign and that drains the Shekhina, conceptualized in the Kabbalah as a nut (*On the Kabbalah* 58), of its symbolic contents. The King's standing, the state of stagnancy in which God ceases to nourish the world with its reviving inspiration, is the indication and at the same time the result of a rupture in

God's relations with people, a rupture whose source is in the former's *Hester Panim*, "hiding of the face," which is God's self-removal from the company of Israel and his receding into transcendence—and here God's contraction into an eye is implicated very literally.

But here we should turn to the poem's three indented lines (8, 14, 15), in which a voice of a different tonality—resolute, resolved, pointing towards the future—paves its way into the poem with the ghastly declaration, "Jew's curl, you'll not turn grey" (line 8). This sober voice does not suggest a plain affirmation of God's passivity. Through its separation from the poem's main body, through positioning itself (literally, graphically) vis-à-vis the three stanzas, through speech addressed at the human (to the extent that the sidelocks are read as a synecdoche for a human being) it implies the poet's own withdrawal from the realm of expectation. Gaining prominence as the poem proceeds (capturing one line and then two), this newly-emerging voice gradually substitutes for the realm of questioning and patient anticipation and its message becomes universal (a supposedly Jewish addressee in line 8, marked by what reads as an allusion to the sidelocks of Jewish orthodox men, becomes a general human being in line 14). It thus asserts the existential aloneness first of Jews, then of humankind as a whole, revoking divine salvation through prophesying a near demise: the hair that would not turn gray is the hair of the victim of untimely death (Olschner 178, 80-81).[12] The poem's last line, "Empty almond, royal-blue," in which the realm of the holy is recognized (and constituted) as a mere wave of color (blue: an empty sky?), likewise participates in this generalization of the Jews' condition. But are not these indented lines also the marker of the poet's own withdrawal, in response to God's "hiding of the face"? Does not speech here become, through graphical means but also through differences of tonality and intentionality, a realm of resistance, of separation, of the human's (and humanity's) own desertion of God? "Mandorla," I would like to suggest, not only joins other poems by Celan

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in articulating a negative theology (the famous "Psalm" is an iconic example for a poem in which God is affirmed by negation, acknowledged by denial), but also generates in speech a deliberate movement of retreat from the encounter with the divine, and eventually, a defiance of the sacred. For the mandorla's middle zone can also be regarded as the domain of the sacred[13]—that earthly milieu devoted by humans to worship, divinity approached and conceived of in human terms. The desolation of this in-between zone marks the end of the alliance through which humankind partakes in the divine through prayer and ritual, for it is the sacred that is God's territory on earth, God's infinite being revealed to the human eye, in human terms.

What, then, is the status of religious language in Celan, and particularly of Hebrew words denoting Jewish prayers and rituals? Is religious language primarily a poetic means, purposeless except as a poetic vehicle (Olschner 178)? Can the notion of negative theology account for the presence of Hebrew and religious terms in the poems or are we to look in them for a different intentionality and a different kind of address? Hebrew as the language of addressing the Hebraic God but also the primal tongue in which this God's own speech was realized and in which the Torah and the prophecy were given; Hebrew as the language of creation, in which God's infinite being is revealed: what does it mean for Celan? Can Hebrew be spoken, can it be spoken about? And here a note about translation is due; for significantly, the name *Leshon Hakodesh,* as Hebrew is commonly referred to by its Jewish speakers and non-speakers, translates literally as "the language of the sacred." This "sacred" might be standing for "the sacred books": Hebrew is the language of the Torah and the Bible. But "sacred" could also read as a generalized name for the institutional realm of sanctity to which Hebrew pertains. *Kodesh,* the Hebrew word for "sacred," is derived from the same root of the verb *Lehakdish*, "to devote" or "to dedicate." Hebrew is not the "holy language" but rather a language reserved to that which gains sanctity by

and through its isolation from everyday life practices, by and through its dedication to worship. Differentiation, in other words, precedes (and produces) sanctification: Hebrew is the Jew's tongue devoted to the realm of the holy, and it is from the latter that it gains, in its turn, the power to sanctify.

To speak Hebrew means, then, to devote to God the very act of speech. Uttering the Hebrew word amounts to addressing God, an act of *Kiddush* (sanctification) by *hakdahsa* (dedication), and thus by itself an act of praise and a reassurance of belief. But in the absence of God—to whom will language be devoted? When holiness is pierced by nothingness, what will the fortunes of the holy language be—the fortunes of Hebrew, a language cherished by Jews in all generations, the language in which Jews prayed, hoped, and found, through the Bible, the source of their shared identity, in Diaspora? That language, encapsulating Jewish tradition and history, communal and familial rituals—can it survive the disappearance of its primal addressee? It is from here that Celan's protest against the absent God evolves. Facing empty skies sealed to human prayer, recognizing the futility of his speech, Celan responds to God's retreat from the world by his own, equal retreat from God and by a redefinition of Hebrew's status as a sacred language. Refusing to consecrate God through language any longer, Celan embeds Hebrew in the profane and devotes it anew, not to the abandoning God but rather to the Jews who perished under Nazism. A God aloof and withdrawn, indifferent to human agony, can no longer consecrate a territory for itself in the human; in Celan, this God becomes submitted to a new covenantal relationship, to the Hebrew language as the realm of abiding.

2.   "Havdalah": From the Sacred to the Mundane

It is through the Havdalah, the Jewish ritual separating the Sabbath from workday, that Celan solves the problem of Hebrew as God's language. Possibly known to the poet from his early childhood, "Havdalah" becomes a keyword in Celan's redefinition of the relationship between language and the deity, in which Hebrew is re-consecrated: no longer as God's language of sanctification, as God-sanctifying tongue, but rather as the property of the Jewish people, of Jews' ordinary life and practices. The passage from the sacred back into the mundane in the Havdalah (signified and articulated in Hebrew) becomes the marker of a process of withdrawal from God, in which the holy language devotes itself anew.

HAWDALAH	HAVDALAH
1 *An dem einen, dem*	On the one, the
einzigen	only
Faden, an ihm	thread, on that
spinnst du — von ihm	you spin — by that
5 *Umsponnener, ins*	spun round into
Freie, dahin,	Freeness, out
ins Gebundne.	into Boundness.
Gross	The spindles stand
Stehn die Spindeln	huge
10 *ins Unland, die Bäume: es ist,*	into untilled land, the trees: from
von unten her, ein	underneath a
Licht geknüpft in die Luft-	light is braided into the airy
matte, auf der du den Tisch deckst, den leeren	matting where you set your table for the empty
Stühlen und ihrem	chairs and their
15 *Sabbatglanz zu — —*	Sabbath radiance in — —
zu Ehren.	in honor.[14]

Like many poems in the volume *Die Niemandrose*, "Hawdalah" articulates some of the tensions surrounding the Jewish religion, its rituals, and its language (Lehmann 232). The main theme is the tension between connection and disconnection, attachment and detachment, as it is

expressed, before everything else, by the poem's title. *Havdalah,* Hebrew for "distinction" or "differentiation," is a blessing recited at the end of Sabbaths and festivals to mark the separation of the sacred from the mundane, i.e. the separation of the departing Sabbath or festival from the ordinary weekdays that are now to follow (Ta-Shma 466-67) (in this, it is the opposite of the *Kiddush,* the ritual marking the transition into the holy at the eve of the Sabbath). And indeed, already in the poem's first two lines a step towards separation takes place: for while the "one" (einen) is first preceded by a preposition (An), implying and foreshadowing a form of relationship, it is promptly isolated (line 2). Moreover, what reverberates with the words of the first Commandment, in which God's oneness and singularity are announced—what reads, thanks to the Ten Commandments' ubiquitous formulation, almost as an outright assertion of God's singular existence—is quickly undermined: the one, the only one, is merely a thread (line 3). A thread, then, *LEHAVDIL* ("to tell apart") from the omnipresent, omnipotent object of supplication: through the poem's title, a first step towards *HAVDALAH* has already taken place.

The thread, perhaps one of which the wick of the Havdalah ceremony braided candle is spun, becomes the core and the basis of a creative act: "on that / you spin" (lines 3-4). It is reminiscent of the metaphoric thread of life, a symbol of continuity and of life's fragility appearing in Sefer Yezira[15] as well as in the Greek Mythology through the figures of the three Fates, the three Moirai, who weave (Clotho: the spinner), dispense (Lachesis: the allotter), and cut (Atropos: the inflexible) the thread of human life ("Fate"). The act of spinning, of drawing out and twisting fibers into yarns and into fabric, of which the interlocutor ("du," you) is both a subject (spinning) and an object (spun), thus evokes both the myth of the world's cosmic creation and the theme of life and death, both pertaining to realms beyond the human. And yet, positioned in the midst of the homey ritual that marks the sacred's becoming mundane, this creative act

appears nevertheless to take place within the realm of the human. As Godly creation comes to an end on the week's seventh day, a second, human creation begins that extracts from the religious ceremony a new kind of connectedness. The paradoxical nature of this connectedness is expressed first when the poem's interlocutor is announced as both the subject and the object of spinning, a creator and a created at the same time (lines 4-5), then when the spinning takes direction *into freeness* and *out into boundness* (lines 6-7). Weaving becomes a liberating act at the same time that it invokes a new kind of commitment: Freeness is gained through the bond whereas the recognition of Boundness (to the Jewish people? To its traditions? To its memory?) is concomitant with self-liberation.

This double movement takes place within the poem's language as well. A vocalized reading emphasizes, perhaps better than a quiet one, the peculiar rhythm created by the enjambments that draw the poem's lines, especially in the first stanza, to close (but not to closure). These enjambments serve a purpose. Separating prepositions from the objects to which they relate, linking every word to another that is summoned only in the line that follows, the enjambments allow the poem to dwindle between bond and freedom, affinity and detachment, continuity and break (and also, possibly, faith and heresy: we do not forget the poem's title and the religious ritual it poses as a backdrop); they allow the poem's language to imitate and embody the struggle between the two poles. The resulting rhythm is of a cut, a mend, a cut, a mend: each line opens into the unknown, is cut in its midst, but is then mended through a line that itself emulates a cut, a fragmentation, which only heals in the next line, and so on and so forth. Some readers might even hear, in this disrupted flow, the spindle's turning this way and that or the rhythmic alternating (into and out-to) movements of the loom or the spinner's hands twisting fibers into yarns. Creation in language—the poet's work: this second creation starting

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when God recedes into heavenly rest on Sabbath and the mundane seizes control—does not amount to "freedom" perhaps because in language as well, in poetry (this domain of human activity), in the poem (this inscription revolving around the thread of an idea, an image, a want), freedom is consummated in every linguistic choice and yet every chosen word poses constraints on the following ones. Most importantly, this kind of creation, too, is subjected to the activity of whimsical Fates: the poem's own continuity is continuously jeopardized; the thread of language, of language such as Celan's, is finer than we think.

Celan does not let these tensions subside in the second stanza, maintaining and upsetting the oppositions between sacredness and profanity, continuity and break, life and death, in more and more intricate ways. The image conjured by this stanza perhaps needs explication: the thread (from the first stanza) turns out to be a light emanating from the soil, spun around huge tree-spindles (or spindle-trees) and braided into an airy matting, like warp and woof, to create a table cloth for the Havdalah ceremony. But understanding this image requires that we read it closely. "The spindles stand / huge / into untilled land," lines 8-10 read. The composite "stand into" is an attempt, by the translator, to fuse together the two opposing meanings created in German, where the spindles are marked as rooted in their place ("stehn") but also as moving towards future rootedness ("ins," in the Akkusativ [accusative] case, marks movement into or onto a place). The movement of spinning (that started in the first stanza) comes to a halt as the spindles' rootedness in the soil is affirmed in line 9 (line 8 in the English translation), but at the same time is continued, as the trees keep "settling" into their embeddedness (line 10). The intermixture of motion and stillness becomes even more complex when we notice that the verb "stehn" (the English "stand") relates to both the spindles and the trees (as noted by Lehmann 234). The spindles likened to trees are, in their immobility, prevented from sustaining creation (human or

divine); if their spinning motion generates the thread of life, their halt evokes demise, as do the trees, which (Lehmann notes), shaped like spindles, are reminiscent of cypresses, a common symbol of death. Finally, as Lehman notes, Celan here dismantles the name of "Spindelbaum" (Spindle Tree; *Evonymus* in Latin), a type of tree found in East Europe and from which spindles were commonly made. "die Spindeln / … die Bäume": The reader can almost hear, in this interval, the break of the tree trunk and the cessation of its life.

But what makes this picture particularly interesting is the emanation of light from the ground: from / underneath a / light is braided into the airy / matting" (lines 10-13). A reader such as the writer of these lines, prone to looking for Celan's "cryptic use of Hebrew" (Hawkins "The Washing" 61) in a poem articulating the neglecting of the sacred, is inclined to find here the *Khol*, Hebrew for both "sand" (or soil) and "profane" (or secular). Celan's spindles bring the poem to ground level, finding the source of divine light in the sandy, untilled (waste) land. One can elaborate this image with the help of the Kabbalistic notions of the ten *Sefirot*, the ten aspects of God, symbolically represented by a tree (Scholem *Elements* 176-78): Celan, indeed, was drawing elements from Jewish mysticism into many of the poems he wrote at that time ("Mandorla" is among these poems) (Felstiner *Paul Celan* 180). The *Sefirot* are the emanations of divine light, a light which, in peaceful times, nourishes the *Sefirot* from top to bottom. But for Celan, in "Hawdalah," the soil, the *Khol* (could he be thinking about the ashes of the dead, too?), becomes the origin of light and thus of holiness, of a new kind of holiness, one that positions the earthly and the human at its center. Sacredness resides in the commonplace and the mundane, in the ordinary setting of Jewish life and its family home rituals.

But the next lines, while summoning the Havdalah ritual in many ways, also communicate the ritual's immateriality and emptiness. On the airy matting interweaved with the

thread of light, preparations are made for the departure of the Sabbath. The setting of this partly worldly, partly celestial scene is reminiscent of Jewish tradition and folklore in more and less explicit ways: the Havdalah dinner table, (der) *Tisch,* reminds us of the custom, among East European Hasidim, to gather during holidays for a ceremonial meal combining food and drink with the teaching of the Torah, a gathering called "Tish"; the set table instantaneously calls to mind the *Shulḥan Arukh* ("the prepared table"), the main authoritative source of the *Halakha* (Jewish law);[16] the empty chair could signify the custom to leave an empty seat for Elijah the Prophet at the Passover Seder table (a chair that has thus come to be connected with redemption) or for the *Ushpizin* (Aramaic for "guests"), the spirits of seven of Judaism's founding fathers and leaders who are invited to dwell in the *Sukkah* (tabernacle) during the Sukkot holiday and bring their blessing and spiritual grace to it. But the table in Celan's poem consists of air and both the table and chairs (in the plural) are empty;[17] the participants as well as the articles necessary for performing the ritual (a braided candle, a cup of wine, fragrant spices) are absent from the scene.

Of all absences, perhaps the empty chairs carry the heaviest symbolic weight. A piece of domestic furniture, a trace of human existence, and an intimate object bearing personal traces, the empty chair is a powerful symbol, but also a token of loss, grief, and the condition of mourning. Representing human absence, the empty chairs make this absence present and palpable, unforgettable and undeniable; through their number (chairs: in the plural) they stand for private but also for collective loss, for personal solitude but also for a more general human condition of abandonment by God and for an existential condition of rootlessness and expulsion.[18] The empty chair near the family table is the site of private memory; the gathering of many empty chairs becomes the site of collective mourning. Finally, the empty chair represents both a palpable absence and the sense of inner void experienced in mourning, the emptiness

permeating the life of those left behind, and surely, of the Holocaust survivors among them. Celan's are the desolate chairs of the mourned, but also of the mourners, who—as is customary in Judaism—abandon their chairs to sit on the ground or on low stools during the *Shivah*, the seven days of bereavement after the death of a loved one. The chair is a scar: it is materiality stripped of the human, a sign of *this world* devoid of its subjects, and thus a defiant assertion, in God's face, of the impossibility of forgetting and forgiving. If the empty table, the empty *Tish*, conjures a Hassidic milieu that has been obliterated in the Holocaust, the empty chair might read as signaling the absence precisely of this Jew whose life embodies faith fused with *this world* orientation, religious belief and human integrity; the Jew whom Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810, the founder of Hassidism), in a fable attributed to him, addresses when saying: "When one sits on the chair, one is *mensch*!"[19] The *menschen* who populated Bukovina and its surroundings, Celan's childhood landscapes—the *Ostjuden* of Galicia and Eastern Europe whom he famously evokes in his Bremen speech,[20] but also all their spiritual sisters and brothers regardless of their place of origin, who should have gathered around the table to conduct the *Havdalah* ritual—their life and their ashes are, for Celan, the source of divine light, of a new kind of holiness.

It is for this reason that Celan's Hebrew utters *Havdalah,* separation, rather than its sacral opposite, *Kiddush* (consecration): the passage from the holy to the mundane becomes Hebrew's passage to a new *Hakdasha,* a new dedication of itself: no longer as the language of the sanctification of God's name (*Kiddush HaShem*), but rather as the language of the sanctification of the many. Notwithstanding his hesitation (as the dashes in line 15 might indicate),[21] Celan, as Lehman (235) notes, rhymes *leeren* (line 13) with *Ehren* (line 16), the empty chairs with the honor (in the sense of glory) elicited by the awesome service and of the Sabbath radiance: he

poses human life and fortunes as deserving of the gesture of devotion. The poet's act of creation is consummated in this gesture: in spinning verse for creating new meaning (*leeren-Ehren*), in harnessing language for weaving new associations, in braiding the word of a holy ritual into the ordinary and materializing it against itself. The *Havdalah*: is not this Celan's revolt against the eclipse of heaven, his counter-speech growing from below as in "Mandorla"?

The gesture of *Havdalah*, of separation or differentiation, does not amount, then, to a simple transition from the holy to the mundane: it articulates no plain rejection of the "religious" for the sake of the "profane" wherein the former connotes boundness and the latter freedom. Celan, rather, moves "into / Freeness, out / into Boundness": into a *new kind* of commitment and bond. This bond itself is not disconnected from the idea of holiness: the poem, after all, does name itself after a ritual having to do with the seams between the earthly/human and the divine/Godly. The existence of both realms is thus acknowledged. Yet the opposition human/divine does not overlap with the opposition profane/holy. The immaterial, celestial, airy ritual that take place at the end of the poem should be regarded not as a rejection or dismissal of the religious act, but rather as its subversion, and one that concludes, moreover, in the creating of a new covenant. The poet's act of creation reverses the Godly original one: the week's seventh day, in which God finished separating light, air, earth, see, flora and fauna from the chaos (Lehmann 235), becomes an occasion for tying heavens and earth together anew ("from / underneath a / light is braided into the airy / matting," lines 10-13). The poem settles on the passage-way from the divine to the worldly, rendering itself the vehicle of stitching them together, in order to bring holiness to the mundane but also the mundane (back) to the holy. "Hawdalah," this poem about separation and division—this poem in whose background we hear the echoes of Celan's famous "Deathfugue" ("Todesfuge") with its graves in the air: the ashes'

looking for a proper resting place to be redeemed from God's sin towards its people—eventually

becomes a poem about mending a breach, about sealing a rupture. The inverted Sabbath service

becomes a means to re-introduce *this world* into God's domain: a means to "[open] the realm of

divinity to direct incursion by historical trauma" (Wolosky *Language* 206). For Celan would not

allow God to separate the Godself from the human (the earthly, the mundane, the mortal) at the

end of the Sabbath.

3.　　"The Lock Gate": On the Subject of Commemoration

DIE SCHLEUSE		THE LOCK GATE	
1	*Über aller dieser deiner* *Trauer: kein* *zweiter Himmel.*	Above all this mourning of yours: no second heaven.	1
	· · · · · · · · · · ·	· · · · · · · · · · ·	
5	*An einen Mund,* *dem es ein Tausendwort war,* *verlor—* *verlor ich ein Wort,* *das mir verblieben war:*	To a mouth, for which it was one of a thousand I lost – I lost a word that had remained with me:	5
10	Schwester.	sister.	10
	An *die Vielgötterei* *verlor ich ein Wort, das mich suchte:* *Kaddisch.*	To the worship of many gods I lost a word that was looking for me: *Kaddish.*	
15	*Durch* *die Schleuse mußt ich,* *das Wort in die Salzflut zurück-* *und hinaus- und hinüberzuretten:* *Jiskor.*	Through the lock gate I had to go to save the word back to the salt waters and out and across: *Yiskor.*[22]	15 20

　　　"Die Schleuse" ("The Lock Gate") begins in the eclipse of God. Its first line seems to

hint at the existence of transcendence: of a realm "above all," in which the promise of revelation,

even of redemption, clearly resounds. Where "all this" is "yours" from the very beginning (as it is in the German original; the English translation necessarily differs here), a fortune and abundance, even spiritual lavishness, are suggested. And yet the poem is quick to cast the shadow of disillusionment on the reader's imagination, evoking an overwhelming grief such as leaves language itself reticent (line 4). Something is given in the German original; "all this" is given, but is immediately taken back. The negation word "kein" does not refute the fact of grief ("Trauer") although the two are juxtaposed (line 2); it rather defies the existence of a "second heaven"—of a God to account for human suffering, of a final end or cause, and of the world to come;[23] it might read, indeed, as a negation of transcendence as such. "Über aller dieser deiner," reads line 1, and we hear: *Deutschland über alles ...* Above all "this" hovers the language of the Third Reich, casting upon the poem the shadow, indeed, of a negation of a different kind. Not life alone is here negated, but also the purity of language, whereby ordinary words—words such as "Über aller"—are penetrated (indeed, to the ear of the writer of these lines) by a "deathbringing speech." The incursion of speech by the language of National Socialism almost seems to have become possible *due* to the absence of a Godly Word: the eclipse of a "second heaven" has left forsaken a realm now taken by another form of domination. Already in the first stanza, Celan marks language as the poem's main concern—language and its realms of viability and influence.

Under the abysmal heaven the poem opens up a perforated line (which occurs elsewhere in *Die Niemandrose*) that, as Anja Lemke notes (4), can be read as the graphic representation of the passage motif to which the title alludes but also as this motif's opposite: as a verbal lock gate (or sluice, as it is translated by Felstiner, *Selected* 151), a hindrance to both writing and reading. It can also be read as embodying the void to which lines 1-3 refer, that is, as the "second heaven"

whose existence is defied and is thus represented by this mark of emptiness above the text's "body." In this reading, the perforated line represents the separation between the divine and the human worlds, which has already emerged both in "Mandorla" and in "Hawdalah": the lock gate of heaven, accessible perhaps only through a tiny breach such as exists between two dots. That the bulk of the poem appears beneath it is thus unsurprising: the poet's speech, a human's, inhabits the lower, earthly domain. The line suggests, indeed, God's paradoxical being and nothingness, as well as the fragile path that human supplication must follow: the sluice of God's muteness. In the light of Celan's "Hawdalah," this perforated line becomes the seam connecting (and dividing) the two realms: a graphical mark of the fragile stitch with which the poet seeks to commit God to its people (rather than vice versa). Finally, this perforated line, a kind of speechless gap within the poem, transferring silence into its interior (Lemke 4) in the same way exerted by the dashes in "Hawdalah," is the poet's own subsiding into reticence in response to God's descent or speech's being silenced by the recognition of the absence of addressee.

The reticence of language in the face of the empty skies is made clearer in the following lines, where God's withdrawal into Godself is answered by the poet's gradual counter-withdrawal. The next lines stress primarily the theme of loss, a loss that, iterated twice, becomes the predominant fact of the stanza: "To a mouth / for which it was one of a thousand / I lost – / I lost a word (…): / sister" (lines 5-10). It is, though, a loss whose appropriate recognition becomes a subject for language's own contemplation. Celan's "Tausendwort," which John Felstiner, in his translation, renders as the more neutral "thousandword," forms a *compound* where meaning points to a *shattering*: it is a word that, as if in spite of the poet's binding efforts, is nevertheless shattered, becoming one of many (Wolosky *Language* 209). Lines 6-8 thus seem to inquire into the question of how grief is to be expressed, as they position the repeated word of

loss ("verlor – / verlor ich") vis-à-vis the single indication of the pure collapse. Language is undoubtedly in conflict with itself as it examines how denotation operates in conjunction with occurrence (i.e., the instances of the word). Is pain better expressed, better communicated and voiced, through repetition or rather through the expression of magnitude? Is loss an event in language, too? Can language signify loss and still preserve its integrity, its figure, its gist?

Why the word "sister" has been lost should perhaps be answered first with the help of some biographical details. Previous versions of "Die Schleuse," Peter Horst Neumann reminds us, reveal its participation in Celan's poetic dialogue with the Jewish poet Nelly Sachs. Its original title is "Stockholm, Linnégatan tolv" (Stockholm, 12 Linné St.) and it is dated to the days following Celan's visit with Sachs, then hospitalized for a mental breakdown, in the Swedish capital city.[24] This visit remains implicated in the poem's eventual title: at the center of the city of Stockholm one finds the huge "Slussen," a floodgate separating the Baltic Sea's salt waters from the sweet waters of the inland Mälaren lake and a busy traffic node named after it (Neumann 100).[25] These biographical details, nevertheless, do not establish Sachs or any other particular person as the poem's addressee, as Neumann himself notes. The poem, rather, is easily read as revolving around a broader theme, of the possibility of personal address. The word "sister," standing for Celan's soul-sister Sachs (in their letters they call each other "sister" and "brother")[26] but also for the sister Celan never had, is of special significance in Celan's poetry (Neumann 101)—as is the word "thousand," which often has negative connotation for Celan, possibly because of the epithet of the "thousand-year Reich" (Felstiner *Paul Celan* 162). Losing the word "sister" to a mouth "for which it was one of a thousand" implies negativity, banality, and mistrust: a loss to a careless, anonymous mouth for which the poet's precious word has become negligible. This we can conclude also from the line's formulation in one of the poem's

early versions: "Mund, dem es nicht galt," freely translated as "a mouth to be mistrusted" (Celan

Die Niemandsrose: Vorstufen 28). The loss of "sister" to this mouth thus amounts to the loss of

one's ability (but also of God's) to denote the singular (Lemke 4), a motif that reappears later in

lines 11-14, where another word of singularity, "Kaddish," is lost to a multiplicity.

It is, though, as Neumann notes (101), a strange loss: the uncommon binding of noun and

preposition ("An einen Mund") can be read as a purposeful, deliberate loss. Neumann does not

linger on this strangeness, yet the point is significant. The mouth, God's solely manifest aspect

(in Numbers 12:8 God says of Moses: "with him do I speak mouth to mouth"), is the same

mouth that heedlessly created the world in excessive speech (in "thousand words") such that

annihilates particularity. The image brings to mind an inverted, estranged scene of sacrifice in

which the precious word of distinctiveness, offered on God's altar in a gesture of faith and

faithfulness, is brutally expropriated by a God who instead of uttering a redemptive word,

dispossesses the poet of his word, of his prayer of commemoration.[27] The perforated line thus

becomes ellipses:[28] a straightforward mark of words that were lost either to God's voracious

mouth that swallowed them or for the poet whose language was quenched and appropriated by a

force stronger than he. "Sister": lost is the generic, general name of a loved one, but also the

singular, the one sister cherished by the one person to which she is *a* sister, *the* sister. She is the

one-in-many, the one both many and one; the word of all commemorations but also of the one

prayer made for her sake. It is, finally, the word of human bonding, solidarity, and warmth,

which cannot permeate a sealed, deserted sky; the word of family belonging and of the

unprotected fragile *she* whose loss is so paramount and overwhelming as to overshadow the self-

recognition of the mourning "I" ("verlor – / verlor ich," lines 7-8; in the English translation, the

personal pronoun does appear twice).

To these interpretations one more needs to be added, for the loss of "sister" is followed by two other accounts of loss, each taking place in another foreign tongue. Unlike these other two, the loss of the singular human takes place in German, the mother tongue: "Schwester." This loss—the loss of that innocent place in German where it, the language, has remained pure, has retained its ability to signify purity—Celan might have experienced as especially acute when composing the poem on 13 September 1960, following a meeting with Martin Buber in Paris. Celan, who since his youth "had read and revered Martin Buber—for the recovery of Hasidism, the spiritual constitution of dialogue, and his translation of the Bible" (Felstiner *Paul Celan* 161)—seems to have hoped to find in the philosopher's soul "a tension in relation to German comparable to his own" (Friedman 47). That German, the beloved mother tongue, was now torturously tainted needed another person's acknowledgement; perhaps it needed the acknowledgement precisely of this man, Buber, who, representing Jewish spirituality and the now-lost milieu of the pious East European Jews, symbolized the survival of Jewish roots and the possibility of reaching for them through the German language. And yet Celan's was a tension that Buber, who had never wrestled with the German language and had written in it for many years before the rise of Nazi power, had not experienced even after the Holocaust (Friedman 47). Taking a pardoning stance toward Germany and claiming that it was natural to publish his work there, Buber failed to echo the poet's plight (Felstiner *Paul Celan* 161), leaving Celan—a Romanian poet living in Paris and writing in German—"forever in exile, as Martin Buber was not" (Friedman 59).

The loss of the word "sister" in the mother tongue, bearing the echoes of Buber's compromised solidarity, is followed by a second loss: "To / the worship of many gods / I lost a word that was looking for me: *Kaddish*" (lines 11-14). The parallel structure of this stanza and

the previous one supports the supposition that the aforementioned mouth is God's indeed. Like "sister," the word "Kaddish" was lost to a multiplicity, this time the multiplicity of God (or, as appropriate here: god) itself.[29] Whereas the latter may suggest the evangelical triangle (which we can safely assume, after reading "Mandorla," is part of Celan's conception of the deity), it may also allude to the Hebraic God, known by many names and at the same time nameless through his unpronounceable designation (except for heretics) as *Yehova* (YHVH, the Hebrew letters of being). The God to which Celan refers elsewhere as "No One"[30] is, by a logical extension, a poly-god, a God that is many. The incorporation, too, of the names of two Jewish prayers, *Kaddish* and *Yiskor* (Yizkor), forthrightly identifies this God (be it one, or none, or many) as the Jewish people's and supports this assumption. Possibly, this God is an addressee turned multiple by the multiplicity of appeals; alternatively, this addressed divine presence is itself of multiple, irreconcilable faces (a praised savior, a neglecting guardian) and thus an impenetrable, confusing abundance. Lost is what has not found an addressee: the prayer that could not be directed to any particular ear.

But why has *Kaddish* been lost, whereas *Yizkor* (in the next stanza) has been salvaged? *Kaddish* (Aramaic for "holy") is a doxology, mostly in Aramaic, recited at the close of individual sections of the public service and at the conclusion of the service (Avenary and Millen 695). The *Mourner's Kaddish* follows these lines:

Mourners and those observing *Yahrzeit* (the anniversary of a person's death):

Hallowed and enhanced may He be throughout the world of His own creation. May He cause His sovereignty soon to be accepted, during our life and the life of all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

Congregation and mourner:

> May He be praised throughout all time.

Mourner:

> Glorified and celebrated, lauded and praised, acclaimed and honored, extolled and exalted may the Holy One be, praised beyond all song and psalm, beyond all tributes which mortals can utter. And let us say: Amen.
>
> Let there be abundant peace from Heaven, with life's goodness for us and for all the people of Israel. And let us say: Amen.
>
> He who brings peace to His universe will bring peace to us all and to all the people of Israel. And let us say: Amen.

> (Harlow 198; translation on page 95)

The *Kaddish*, replete with praise and glorification of God and expressing the hope for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth (the first words of the *Kaddish* are taken from Ezekiel 38:23, where he prophesizes the affirmation of God's glory and ultimate victory in the war of Gog and Magog), "is not properly 'a prayer for the soul of the departed,' but an expression of the *ẓidduk ha-din* ('justification of judgment') by the bereaved" (Avenary and Millen 696). Different, however, is the *Yizkor* prayer. "Yizkor," Hebrew for "May he remember" or "He shall remember," is the opening word of a memorial prayer and of the entire commemoration service to which it serves as an opening. The prayer expresses the hope that God may remember the souls of the deceased and that the departed souls will enjoy eternal life in God's presence ("Yizkor" 379; Ydit 496). Its opening sentences, in English translation, are as follows:

> May God remember the souls of our brethren, martyrs of our people, who gave their lives for the sanctification of His name. […]
>
> May their souls be bound up in the bond of life. And may they rest eternally in dignity and peace. Amen.

> (Harlow 521)[31]

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It has been argued that Celan was skeptical about transcendence and about the possibility and desirability of (aesthetic) transcendence through poetry.[32] For Emmanuel Levinas, "That there is, in Celan's essay on the poem ["Der Meridian"], an attempt to think transcendence, is obvious," and yet he conceives of Celan's impulse towards transcendence as a "going out toward the other man," since "Nothing is more strange or foreign than the other man" (Levinas 42, 44). Yet Celan's use of religious terms (often subsumed in his negative theology, that is, in his conceiving of God through negation [*Apophasis*]) justifies an inquiry into his struggle with the realm of the divine, rather than the human, Other. Embedding the names of prayers itself points to Celan's attempt, in Levinas's words, to think transcendence within poetry. But that transcendence is thought through prayer in particular, that Celan thinks transcendence in its relation to the human language (in the same way that he thinks the divine in relation to the human gaze in "Mandorla" and in relation to the human ritual in "Hawdalah"), marks his search for the absolute not as an appeal to the other human being, not as a restitution of a lost belief, not as the beseeching of spiritual fulfillment or elevation, but rather as an insistence on language of prayer and ritual as a space extending between God and man (rather than an open-ended, merely formal appeal), part of the in-between space of the mandorla, where everything sacred resides. A realm of dialogue and encounter, it is thus also a space of resistance and struggle, and where Celan positions his poetry as an act of re-consecration, re-sanctification. Assuming the form of a plea, Celan's summoning of the prayer is meant to claim the in-between space through which an addressee is held accountable, as is made clear from his condemning each of the two prayers to a different "fate."

Why the *Kaddish* has been lost to Celan whereas the *Yizkor* has been salvaged has to do with the different ways in which each prayer commemorates the dead. For Anja Lemke (4), the

loss of the *Kaddish*, a prayer prayed in common, marks the loss of the possibility of collective mourning and commemoration, whereas the rescued *Yizkor* marks the survival of silent prayer, the prayer chanted silently by each mourner, and the protection of memory "from becoming a part of repetitive, ordinary language." Yet one more difference between the prayers must have played a role in Celan's distinguishing between the two forms of supplication. The *Kaddish* is the avowal of God's omnipotence and includes no reference to the fact of death, leaving it, in a key sense, unrecognized. In its entirety, it is a recital of the greatness of God who watches carefully and persistently over a world that abounds with splendor and glory. The *Yizkor*, in contrast, expresses the silent wish that "May he [God] remember." Traditionally accompanied by verses expressing an awareness of human fragility and mortality, it is a human imperative compelling God to forever bear the memory of the dead and grant them a "proper resting place" (see: "Yizkor"). In a world from which God has retreated, the loss of the *Kaddish* symbolizes the loss of the ability to praise God while mourning, a refusal to affirm God's glory and assert one's belief from the depths of sorrow. That adversity can be a test of one's belief (which needs re-affirmation) and that humans can find comfort in meriting God must have been unthinkable for Celan.

The *Kaddish* that was looking for the speaker is a prayer in search of a subject, of a worshipper (but it is also, possibly, death itself). It is the word of praise given to God without a demand for reciprocity in whatever form: guardianship, Providence, redemption. But Celan, refusing to join that recital of God's glory in the *Kaddish*, avoids the encounter with the word that seeks him (lines 13-14). Sought by the sign of the unusual death of his parents (the sign of his own incidental survival), Celan, rather, devotes his poem to the task of salvaging the *Yizkor*—the prayer that casts upon God the task of remembrance. "Yizkor"—"may he

remember"—is the only word in the language of consecration that Celan is willing to devote to God: a word not of praise, but rather of indictment; not of glorification, but rather of admonition. Forfeiting the hope for commemorating individual names and sisters, maintaining the imperative that he, the nameless polygod, remember, "The Lock Gate" commits itself to the task of binding the deity to the remembrance of the life and death of those who perished without a proper ceremony.[33] "Yizkor": this Hebrew word alone is worth the risk the poet takes upon himself, the risk of going through the lock gate, "back / to the salt waters and / out and across (lines 17-18 in the German original, 17-19 in the English translation) to bring a proper resting place to souls of the lost ones.

The struggle to rescue the Hebrew word takes a movement akin to the spinning thread in "Hawdalah": back and forth, into and out-to, in a dangerous, challenging fluctuation through a sluice whose graphic representation, a string of dots, embodies both a hurdle and a pathway. The salt waters—so many tears and the tears of so many, pooling in a river of infinite sadness (we read this in the light of the poem's opening lines)—form the word's destination and place of refuge ("in die Salzflut […] hinaus- und hinüberzuretten": "to save the word […] out and across") but also its place of origin ("in die Salzflut zurück[zuretten]": "to save the word *back* / *to* the salt waters*,*" italics added) (Neumann 102). The speaker's path thus begins and concludes in the cry. But on his painful journey, a journey within the province of sorrow, he draws, through and for the sake of salvaging *Jiskor*, a connection and a link between the two sides separated by the lock gate: between the word's human origin and its divine destination. This is the poet's journey, the poem's trajectory: from the mundane into the heavenly and back, in order to bring the *dead* (the Holocaust victims) into Hebrew (into God's language and recognition), *Hebrew* back to the dead.

If Hebrew is the language of consecration, of devotion through dedication; if praying means devoting to God the act of speech—then the poet's only possible word can be the counter-word (*Havdalah*, but never the *Kiddush*, never the word of consecration), his only possible act to refrain from uttering the holy in the holy language. If "holy" is to appear in his poem, let it be in Aramaic ("Kaddish"), the second language of Judaism's religious canon, rather than in Hebrew; if Hebrew is to appear, let it be a word of indictment ("Yizkor") rather than of praise; if praise is to appear, let it become lost to the poet (and thus to God). Only the word of indictment is left to be uttered in the language of the sacred: the single verb command, a word as clear as a crystal, lucid and simple and not to be misunderstood. Celan leaves for God the one Hebrew word he deserves, but at the same time he brings it back to the human, to being humans'. *Yizkor* is the prayer summoning God (back) into prayer, since it summons God into remembrance, into the human bond. It is the "holy language" brought back into domain of the sacred: into the domain of divinity's sharing with the human (living and dead), of prayer as speech-dwelling-in-the-sacred. Hebrew's becoming a prayer while also becoming the province of God's memory of humanity is Hebrew's becoming a mandorla. "Yizkor" is the mandorla.

"The Lock Gate," then, is more than a poetological poem about the threatened existence of language and about its recovery through the rescue of one word (as presented, for instance, by Neumann 99), though it certainly deals with language as inflected and afflicted by history: with words as fragments of a lost past and with the attempt to salvage them in order to "reassert the world to which they belonged" (Wolosky *Language* 208). The same can be said of "Hawdalah," where Hebrew becomes a manifestation of remembrance and a declaration of commitment to maintaining alive what is left of an obliterated culture: an act of love, in the face of loss. But "The Lock Gate" is also, very specifically, about speech as an address and about prayer as part

not of the holy but rather of the sacred, of the human-divine shared realm. Prayer as a summoning and as an imperative ("May He remember," "He shall remember")—the clearest one, indeed: imperative through one word only—becomes a means to bind God to the in-between zone of the mandorla where divinity exists only in as much as it cooperates with, participates in the human. For this reason, the juxtaposition of the names of prayers and the poem's denial of a "second heaven" does not result in a plain contradiction and should not be read as emptying the prayers of their contents (see, again, Neumann 103). As the course of the three poems here discussed suggests, Celan's grappling with the question (or problem) of God's existence, with an absence that forced believers "either to abandon their faith that God exists or to face the likelihood that He is malevolent" (Ossar 175), achieves resolution of a kind through the figure of the mandorla. It is as if the poet is willing to accept God's absence, but not its unresponsiveness, willing to accept God's death but not its withdrawal from the human bond. This resolution is akin to Celan's use of negative theology in the sense that it allows the summoning of God and its denial in the same breath; it differs from negative theology in that it takes place in the space between a God and a people (rather that between God and the poet) and in that it challenges not God's existence but rather a specific aspect of it, the relational aspect. Celan, I am suggesting here, forces God to continue to exist in relation to humans even if it needs to die in every other way (as an immanence and transcendence), and this intent is precisely what the "Yizkor" reflects. If it is read as more than an expression of sheer humility, the prayer's summoning of the distanced, third-person "He" can be read as denying God's existence as an addressable entity (even if only by avoiding the "you" whose poetic articulation could amount to a straightforward recognition[34]). At the same time, the indirect address implicated in "Yizkor"

binds God, this non-presence, to a relationship through the imperative to remember. At stake is God's own commitment (rather than its existence *per-se*).

For this reason, Celan's "Jiskor" does not seem to be an invocation of the Greek Mnemosyne, the Goddess of memory, and an affirmation of remembrance as the task and power of poetry in the same way it was, for example, for Friedrich Hölderlin[35] (see in Neumann 103). "The Lock Gate" is more than a poem about poetry as a memory site or about the functioning of language in a world from which the divine has been so clearly removed (see, again, the perforated line and the negation of a "second heaven"), a world in which religious terms have come to signify secular, mundane practices. Celan refrains from translating "Jiskor" into the German verb for "remember" that his German-speaking readers would understand, and which would still be acceptable as a prayer (on the unequivocal permission to pray in a language that one understands see Petuchowski 43-55). "Jiskor" is rather a remnant of another discourse, of another community and another cultural milieu, a trace of the Jewish tradition that Celan struggles to keep meaningful. For Celan, Shira Wolosky aptly argues (*Language* 208), "turning back and toward his heritage is an act of linguistic return." Hebrew will never be an intertext of a neutral valence to be understood principally through the language of formal and meta-poetic discourse. But even as a marker of a certain history, the Hebrew word does more than invoke a certain Jewish milieu and mark the stance of rootedness and rootlessness, of origins, authenticity, or their loss.[36] Its operation exceeds the dialogue Celan's poetry conducts with its interlocutors, in which the presence of Hebrew calls Judaism and Jews to the reader's mind, or, alternatively, interrupts this reader's peace (especially if this reader is German) by blurring the boundaries between familiar and foreign, self and other (Celan transliterates the Aramaic and Hebrew words in Roman letters, making his text both recognizable and alien, even alienating).[37] Hebrew, in the

poem discussed here, is first and foremost the language in which God's covenant with the Israelites has been given. Of this ancient covenant, Celan here reminds God: he gives back to God God's own language as a reminder.

And so the perforated line, this sluice that separates the human from the divine, the poem from the possibility of transcendence through art, the poet's words from a higher, prevailing national and ideological language, becomes also the open gateway that Celan leaves for God's own return into the world. A "gap in space and [a] pause in signification," this sluice or lock gate "make[s] it possible for the pure phonic essence of voice to be heard" (Budick and Iser xviii), makes it possible for the poet's word of prayer—a word pronounced from the zone in-between religious and poetic language—to fill the space with its resonance and reach God's ear. What happens to poetry when it incorporates the religious imperative, when it aligns itself with the language of devotion, cannot be answered here: is the literary form, with its indeterminacies, the mirror of one's ultimate inability to ascertain God's existence and determine the appropriate ways to tackle it in discourse? Celan's poetry remains on the border between genres[38] in the same way that it remains, disconcerted and disconcerting, between the languages in which the poet carried his life and memories. But this speech, this at least we can tell, derives its strength not, like prayer, from the belief in Providence, but rather from the poet's recognition of the importance of his mission, which is both an obligation and an inevitability: "Durch / die Schleuse *mußt ich*" ("Through / the lock gate I *had to* go"; lines 15-16, emphasis added). A sense of urgency might be what allows Celan to resume speech after the eclipse of heaven, after the gate to a God-trusting faith has been locked and a different sense of commitment had to emerge in order to justify the endurance of "Jiskor," even if only within a poem. We read

Celan's "Die Schleuse" as an attempt, if not to make the call, then at least to give voice to the myriad of calls for a God that returned, from afar, as empty echoes.

Notes

[1] As it has already been mentioned; see note no. 9 on page 27.

[2] "I do not believe in bilingualness in poetry," Celan is said to have claimed. See Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in Fünf Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983) vol. 3, 175, qtd. in Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 170.

[3] See, for example, Felstiner: "To translate Celan's German into English would mean to displace the orphan and exile yet again from his mother tongue and native tongue." "The Mother Tongue of Paul Celan: Translation into Biography," 168.

[4] Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan* 167. Celan's poem in German appears facing the translation, which appears on page 166. I have chosen to use Michael Hamburger's translations of Celan wherever possible, as they tend to be more accurate (even if sometimes less "poetic") than John Felstiner's as appearing in Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, trans. John Felstiner (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2001). In "Mandorla" I preferred Hamburger's "dwell" over Felstiner's "stand" for the German "steht," as it better captures the poem's spiritual air. In addition, Felstiner's translation of line 8, "Jewish curls, no gray for you" (and then again in line 14: "Human curls, no gray for you") endows the line with a colloquial shade which I deem inappropriate; see Felstiner's translation, 173. For "Hawdalah," later in the chapter, I present Felstiner's translation as I could not locate one by Hamburger. Finally, for "The Lock Gate" again I chose Hamburger's translation. Though Felstiner's title "The Sluice" (151) is closer to the original "Die Schleuse," Hamburger's lock gate evokes the *Ne'ilah*, a worship service that concludes the Jewish Day of Atonement service in the synagogue. The full name of the service is *Ne'ilat She'arim*, "Closing of the Gates." Referring originally to the daily closing of the Temple gates, it became associated with the symbolic closing of the heavenly gates for prayer at sunset. The service also includes the recitation of the Kaddish, which relates it even more intimately to Celan's poem. The expression *She'arei Shamayim,* Gates of Heaven, has become common in Jewish sources. Where I found Felstiner's translation of specific words or phrases helpful for the literary analysis, the thing is indicated and discussed in the chapter.

[5] This pun is noted by Felstiner and others and is made apparent in Celan's Hebrew translation by Shimon Sandbank: "Ha-aiyn omedet 'el mul ha-ayin" ("Your eye, on Nothing it dwells," line 11). See Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 181, Paul Celan, *Soreg Safah: Selected Poems and Prose by Paul Celan*, trans. Shimon Sandbank (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1994) 58.

[6] The mandorla is also found in the art of Buddhism. See "Mandorla," *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*, Web ed. (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2011), vol.

[7] Hamburger's translation preserves the capitalization of "King" to create a parallel to the German "König" (and of "Nothing" to create a parallel for "Nichts"). This capitalization, necessitated by the German grammar, intensifies the tension between acknowledgement and negation of God. When relating to the poem I therefore follow Hamburger's rule.

[8] The source is Jeremiah 1.11. See Ad De Vries, "Almond," *Elsevier's dictionary of symbols and imagery*, 2nd, enlarged ed. (2004), vol., 12. The interpretation reappears in Leonard M. Olschner, "Mandorla," *Kommentar Zu Paul Celans "Die Niemandsrose"*, ed. Jürgen Lehmann, unter Mitarbeit von Christine Ivanović, Beiträge Zur Neueren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1997) 181.

[9] I am borrowing Hans Biederman's formulation. See Hans Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, trans. James Hulbert, Knaurs Lexicon der Symbole (New York and Oxford: Facts on File, 1992) 215.

[10] Clive Wilmer writes about "Psalm": "[D]ivinity, though logically implicit in the poem's thought, is not actually referred to in it. It is as if Jehovah, having been created by an act of human speech, has been uncreated by another." See: "Paul Celan: Between Silences," *PN Review 23* 8.3 (1982): 27.

[11] Significantly, the *Shekhina* is identified also as the lowest of the ten Sefirot (emanations), which is named *Malkhuth*, kingship. See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1996) 138.

[12] A repeating motif in Celan's poetry. Several instances are mentioned in Olschner, "Mandorla," 180.

[13] Sacred: (1) Of the Eucharistic elements: Consecrated; (2) (Followed by to) (a) Consecrated to; esteemed especially dear or acceptable to a deity. (b) Dedicated, set apart, exclusively appropriated to some person or some special purpose. (c) Of things, places, of persons and their offices, etc.: Set apart for or dedicated to some religious purpose, and hence entitled to veneration or religious respect; made holy by association with a god or other object of worship; consecrated, hallowed. See "Sacred, *Adj*.," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989; online version December 2011), vol.

[14] Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose* 181.

[15] Sefer Yetzira (Hebrew: "Book of Creation"), the "oldest known Hebrew text on white magic and cosmology; it contends that the cosmos derived from the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and from the 10 divine numbers (sefirot)." See "Sefer Yetzira," *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition* (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. <http://www.britannica.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/EBchecked/topic/532602/Sefer-Yetzira>), vol.

[16] The *Shulḥan Arukh*, by Joseph Caro, is the standard code of Jewish law. See: Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Shulḥan Arukh," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 18 (2007), <http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2587518424&v=2.1&u=umuser&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w>.

[17] As Lehman notes, the adjective "empty" is positioned so as to relate to either the table or the chairs. See Jürgen Lehmann, "Hawdalah," *Kommentar Zu Paul Celans "Die Niemandsrose"*, ed. Jürgen Lehmann, unter Mitarbeit von Christine Ivanović, Beiträge Zur Neueren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1997) 235.

[18] In proposing these I was inspired by Avraham Levitt, "Israeli Art on Its Way to Somewhere Else: The Rise and Fall of Zionist Art," *Azure: Ideas for the Jewish Nation* 3 (1998), 3 Oct. 2012 <http://tchelet.org.il/article.php?id=49&page=all>.

[19] I was unable to verify the source of this fable, which appears in a collection of aphorisms attributed to the Besht. Nachman Ben Simhah, of Breslov, *The Empty Chair: Finding Hope and Joy. Timeless Wisdom from a Hasidic Master*, Adapted by Moshe Mykoff and the Breslov Research Institute (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994) 9.

[20] "The landscape from which […] I come to you […] is the landscpae that was home to a not inconsiderable portion of those Hasidic tales that Martin Buber has retold for us all in German. It was […] a region in which human beings and books used to live." See: Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose* 395.

[21] See Lehmann, "Hawdalah," 235.

[22] Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan* 147.

[23] Peter-Horst Neumann notes the seven skies counted in the Talmud, tractat Chagiga 12b. Such differentiation between different heavenly realms appears in the Koran, too, and is related to "otherly worlds" and thus to transendence. See: Peter-Horst Neumann, "Die Schleuse," *Kommentar Zu Paul Celans "Die Niemandsrose"*, ed. Jürgen Lehmann, unter Mitarbeit von Christine Ivanović, Beiträge Zur Neueren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1997) 101. In this reading, a chaotic world emerges in the poem, in which nature's entities have not yet formed.

[24] On this abortive visit see Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 160-61.

[25] That in an early version Celan wrote "Schleusen" in the plural supports the biographic conjecture. See Paul Celan, *Die Niemandsrose: Vorstufen, Textgenese, Endfassung*, Werke / Paul Celan; Tübinger Ausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996) 28.

[26] Naumann (102) notes, though, that "sister," *Schwester*, can also hint at the Krankenschwester, a nurse. Sachs, as aforementioned, was hospitalized in a nerve clinic at that time.

[27] Prayer is a surrogate Temple cult, considered by rabbinic Judaism as a symbolic (verbal) substitute for blood sacrifice. See Richard S. Sarason, "Religion and Worship: The Case of Judaism," *Take Judaism, for Example: Studies toward the Comparison of Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 1983) esp. 55-58.

[28] I borrow this idea from Jonathan Skolnik, "Kaddish for Spinoza: Memory and Modernity in Celan and Heine," *New German Critique* 77 (1999): 178. Skolnik, however, does not elaborate.

[29] Like many German words ending with "rei," the neologism "Vielgötterei" is an abstract noun in the singular; it also a compound. From a grammatical point of view, Felstiner's "polygoddedness" is thus a better translation than Hamburger's "many gods." In addition, "Vielgötterei" reverberates with the language of the Reich (rei-reich) that hovers "above all this." See Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose* 151.

[30] See in his poem "Psalm" (not discussed here).

[31] The ellipsis in the quotation stands for the *Hazkarat Neshamot* part of the prayer, which mentions charitable offerings for the repose of the departed souls and promises for donations; see in Meir Ydit, "Hazkarat Neshamot," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), vol. 8, 497. The quoted lines were, in all likelihood, on Celan's mind while writing "Die Schleuse."

Harlow presents the prayer with its variations for commemorating a father, a mother, a spouse, a child, one's relatives and friends, and martyrs. See Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom : A Prayerbook for Shabbat, Festivals, and Weekdays* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly: United Synagogue of America, 1985) 518-21. After the Holocaust, a special "Yizkor" prayer was created for the victims, which exists in several versions. All are similar to this example: "May the Lord remember the souls of the holy and pure ones who were killed, murdered, slaughtered, burned, drowned, and strangled for the sanctification of the Name, because, without making a vow, I shall give to charity on their behalf. As reward for this, may their souls be bound in the Bond of Life, together with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah; and together with the other righteous men and women in the Garden of Eden. Now let us respond: Amen." See *The Yizkor Prayer for Martyrs*, Available: http://www.ou.org/yerushalayim/yizkor/martyrs.htm, August 8, 2012.

[32] Leslie Hill, for example, considers Celan's response to a 1958 questionnaire from the Parisian bookshop "Librairie Flinker" a sign for his skepticism towards traditional views of aesthetic transcendence: "It [the language of poetry] does not transfigure, does not 'poeticise,' but names and posits, and endeavours to measure out the domain of what is given and what is possible." Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in Fünf Bänden* vol. 3, 168, qtd. in Leslie Hill's translation in her article "'Distrust of Poetry': Levinas, Blanchot, Celan," *MLN* 120.5 (2005): 1004, footnote 27.

[33] Anne Carson claims similarly: "*Yizkor* […] insists that God do remembering alongside us." See: Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 37.

[34] For James Lyon, Celan's poetry is dialogical in its basis, creating a "Thou" by the addressing it. In this Celan shows close affinity with Buber's ideas. James K. Lyon, "Paul Celan and Martin Buber: Poetry as Dialogue," *PMLA* 86.1 (1971): 110-11, 17.

Though the three poems discussed here do not and cannot represent Celan's whole ouvre, I do suggest that his basic impulse is not just towards dialogue, and that God, rather than being sought as a partner for dialogue, is rather called back impersonally into a forgotten covenant. I thus disagree with Lyon's (119) appraisal of Celan's religious motifs as "apparent anachronism of a religious impulse in a technical, secularized age."

[35] The Romantic Hölderlin concludes his hymn "Andenken," "Remembrance," with the line "Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter," translated by Michael Hamburger as "But what is lasting the poets provide." See: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Selected Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger, English and German ed. (London: Penguin, 1994) 253.

[36] Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi notes that Hebrew in Celan recovers its status as the uncorrupted "language of origins, the primordial language […], maintaining the status of a document, a relic, a ritual." See: DeKoven Ezrahi, "'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry," 269. Felstiner, while discussing the possibility of translating Celan into Hebrew, relates to the latter as "the Biblical, the reclaimed, the refugees', the redemptive tongue"; Felstiner, Celan's biographer, relates this status of the Hebrew to the Jewish strains in Celan's work and his words seem to reflect, at least partially, Celan's own stand with regard to Hebrew. See John Felstiner, "Mother Tongue / Holy Tongue: Celan into Hebrew," *Tel Aviv Review* 3 (1991): 149.

[37] See the full argument as presented by Amir Eshel, "Von Kafka bis Celan: Deutsch-Jüdische Schriftsteller und ihr Verhältnis zum Hebräischen und Jiddischen," *Jüdische Sprachen in deutscher Umwelt: Hebräisch und*

Jiddisch von der Aufklärung bis ins 20 Jahrhundert, ed. Michael Brenner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 105-06.

[38] Poetry and prayer in this chapter, poetry and testimony in chapter 2.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Ever-Escaping Word:

Sargon Boulus's "Ṣandūq, 'Arūs, fī al-Fajr, Ilá Mīnā'"

("A Trousseau, a Bride, to a Seaport, at Dawn")

صندوقٌ، عروسٌ، فى الفجر، الى ميناء
سركون بولص

1   عروسُكَ المهجورة تجلسُ القرفصاء
في مهرجان اللغة الصاخب، تلك الحانة الوحيدةُ في البلد
حيث يشرب الشعراءُ بالدَيْن، فودكا رديئةً
مع الليمون والملح والمرارة.

5   كلماتك اليوميّة التي تبتلعُ سيوفها
كحاوٍ حزين أمامَ الغوغاء، مومسٌ نساومها
في زقاقٍ ضيّق آخرَ الليل بعُمْلة الحزن
والندم والخسارة؛ وللإنارة، أحشاؤها، أحشاؤها التي
تلتفّ حول ملويّةٍ من عظام الملوك
10   أسهرُ تحتها مهلوساً أبياتي حتى الصباح
حتى يطرق الجنودُ بأعقاب بنادقهم على بابي.

النبيّ يهذي في حرّائه لأنبل العناكب
في سلطانها الهشّ على التراب، وتحت رأس الضحيّة
الذي ينوصُ كمصباح المؤرّخ
في برج بابل رأسي, مدينةٌ لم أرها

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15 تظهرُ أحياناً سرابيّة الزوايا

فيها بيتٌ مهدّمٌ على بابه امرأةٌ تبكي.

هذه الكلمةُ، هي تلكَ التي

تلك التي لم تكن أبداً هذِه: غداً, أو اليوم.

والكلمةُ أيضاً

20 نبعٌ سحيقٌ في مثانة الشيطان

صندوقُ عروسٍ تهربُ في الفجر الى ميناء.

صندوقٌ، عروسٌ، في الفجر، الى ميناء

والغبيّ الذي لا يفهم أنها العاصفة يخرجُ واثقاً ليرفع

مرساةَ يقيني.

A Trousseau, a Bride, to a Seaport, at Dawn[1]

by Sargon Boulus

1   Your abandoned bride kneels crouching
      in the bustling language fair, that single bar in town
      where poets drink for credit cheap[2] vodka
      with lemon, salt, and bitterness.

5   Your everyday words, whose swords you swallow
      like a sad conjurer in front of the rabble, are a hooker we haggle with
      in a narrow alley, in the third night-watch, over the currency of sorrow,
      regret, and loss; and for illumination—her entrails, her entrails that
      curl around a crooked bone of kings
10   under which I sit awake all night, driveling my verse until daybreak
      until soldiers bang on my door with their rifle butts.

      The prophet is raving in his Hira Cave to the noblest of spiders
      about her fragile regime of dust underneath the victim's head,[3]
                         which glimmers like a historian's lantern
      in my head, a Tower of Babel, a city I have not seen before
15   flashes from the dark,[4] its corners are a phantom
      a ruined house is in this city and at its doorstep, a woman is crying.

This word is the one
the one that was never this: tomorrow, or today.

And the word is also
20   an ancient spring in the devil's bladder
the trousseau of a bride running away to a seaport at dawn.

A trousseau, a bride, to a seaport, at dawn
and the trusting fool who fails to see that she is the storm will spring to pull
the anchor of my certainty.

Two main riddles emerge in the face of Sargon Boulus's poem and both demand to be

solved. The first and more discernible riddle has to do with the poem's apparent incoherence,

particularly from the second stanza and on, where the logical succession becomes so disturbed

and the images so eerie and perplexing as to threaten the poem's unity. The second riddle is met

already in the poem's title, yet it does not present itself so much as an object for questioning at

first sight. But a riddle it is: for how often does one encounter a title in which four discrete

nouns, familiar enough to join into one narrative frame, are followed by one another in this

composed manner? Four nouns conjuring up a world inhabited by animate and inanimate objects

(a bride, a bridal trousseau) and affixed by time and space coordinates to the plots of the

common imagination; four nouns insinuating a dramatic, both riveting and unsettling story that,

disrupted by three commas and neglecting to include a verb, is never fully staged. An abandoned

bride is making her way to a seaport with her precious belongings, leaving behind a neglectful,

possibly unfaithful, would-be husband: a version of this ubiquitous if obsolete scenario, I dare

say, is what we are likely to expect. Had we gathered, however, the four words in one

uninterrupted sequence according to their order of appearance, we would have quickly realized

our mistake: for the bride, the title's human subject, would only capture the second position of a

formula centering, rather, on the trousseau as its true core "figure" ("A trousseau is carried by a bride to …"; "The Trousseau of a Bride …" etc.).

Is a disassembled sentence still a sentence? Of course not. But it is exactly as such—dismantled, taken to pieces—that the title gives us, encapsulated, the poem's "whole story." There is a story behind the poem, one that has to do with the poem's coming into being precisely as a whole, with the tension between parts and wholes, the poem's "organs" and "body." The creative act, the strivings and prospects of writing, is thus brought to the center of the reader's critical investigation. And yet attending to the "story" behind the poem amounts to more than merely probing the actual relationship between the four nouns that, presented to us at the outset, we come to regard as the main constituents, the main actors and setting features, of this poem's "plot." To find a "whole story" behind the poem brings to the fore the question of what a poem *is*, how it relates to and differs from other modes of discourse, and how we read poetry in and through these other discursive forms. Is poetry the forefront of prose, its high-toned contraction (into four emblematic nouns)? Is it the collapse of the narrative form, the parts' assuming a life of their own independent of the set-up ensemble? Where does the poetic lie—in ordinary words whose deeper meaning poetry excavates and exposes, or rather in the stated and imagined relationships between words, in a newly-conceived way to move between the building blocks of the prosaic? Where and how, in short, does poetry come into being?

By bringing these questions to the fore, the title of Boulus's poem becomes a key for understanding its episodic structure. But we only grasp the issues at stake when we notice another strange occasion, the re-appearance of the title within the poem's body towards the end (line 22). This is not a completely unprecedented event: by the time we get to line 22, the bride has already made herself present; as the poem's first word (which is not apparent in my English

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translation, E.B.), she is the point of outset for the tale of unconsummated marriage. The narrative of this tale is typical, pattern like, similar to what we have imagined: a bride arrives from a distance, her sole possessions being her dowry box, to marry a local man who, unable to keep his promise and perhaps fearing the commitment, goes to the local bar to get drunk with his fellow poets; oblivious, forgetful of the woman awaiting for him, he then visits a prostitute, engaging in detached, emotionless sexual relations and paying with sorrow and pain the price of a miserable night. But there and then, in the middle of line 8, this rather coherent storyline collapses into a series of hallucinatory images—which happens to be the very moment when the prostitute's body, too, disintegrates and the relationship between "text" and "body" assumes a new manifestation and depth. None other of the poem's four staple nouns, we notice this as well, makes a second appearance until line 21.

And so it happens that when we get to line 21, where the bridal trousseau, the bride, the seaport, and the dawn are all combined in a sentence-like formulation—complemented by the possessive form (which in Arabic only requires a change of the two nouns' case) and by a verb ("running away") and eliminating the dividing commas—we realize that only now have these become part of the plot conjured up by our elaborative imagination. One may rightfully claim that the title, from which we had taken many of our cues, is the poem's first line *de facto*, being part of the reader's field of vision from the moment of its utterance (as some versions of reader-response criticism would have it).[5] But even so, we must recognize that the story of loss and abandonment that starts to unfold in the first stanza has been *suspended*, *put off* up until this point, which means, until (almost) the end of the poem. Moreover, it now resumes its "non-poem" form. In line 22 the poem returns to its origins as it recedes back into the fragmented, disintegrated formula prescribed by its title and from which it has been extricated momentarily,

in line 21, only to orchestrate the slipping away of she whom we conceived of as our major heroine: the slipping away, indeed, of "poetry" itself.

Is Boulus's a poem about the impossibility of bridging the gaps between discrete acts of signification? Is poetry the limit of common discourse, of communication? Is it the horizon of madness of narrative prose, its abject? A trousseau, a bride, to a seaport, at dawn: is what we see a poem or rather its failure? Noticeably, the text before us marks its location on the boundary, marks the boundary as its (paradigmatic) location: between light and dark ("at dawn"), between land and sea ("to a seaport"), even between two personal life stages (the bride is no longer single, but not yet married). The in-between, we think, may be the only possible place for the poet himself, a US émigré from Iraq situated between old and new geographies, landscapes, and attachments, measuring loss and gain. Is not the port, the site of arrival and departure, a focal point on the mental map of the immigrant writer? Is not the bride about to go to the sea the figure of the exile swaying between fear and hope? Yes. But the question of boundaries is for Boulus more crucial than that. For one more effect of the title's reappearance in the poem (within its "body": this will turn out to be significant) is of drawing our attention to the liminal notions of "beginning" and "end," "inside" and "outside"—this after having already foregrounded, as its first effect, the strains of the pair "together" and "apart." If the poem's title announces what we have in front of us (what the poem is "about"), if it posits an equal sign between the four initial words and the text that follows them, then it points to the poem as the expansion of this itemized list, the title: its extension, elaboration, fleshing out. By the same token it also points to the title as the poem's essential core: its condensation, parsimonious representation, digest. And yet no "digestion" takes place, if we are to judge from line 22. The "swallowed" title words, incorporated with the intention that they become part of the poem's flesh, remain unprocessed at

the end. But unprocessed they also become, once again, the text's raw material. The end of the poem is the point from which it will have to be re-written: for writing is this attempt to marry isolated words into a literary "whole." The poem's point of inception is now in its midst, "inside" its body, and its body a point of inception. Boulus's poem consumes itself, its boundaries, its textual and generic designation; it is contents without edge, leading the reader from beginning to end and back to the beginning in a circular, self-perpetuating, movement, annulling the locus of its origination and conceiving itself anew time and again. The poem doomed to failure, writing's vanity, thus comes to guarantee poetry's continuity, against all odds.

There is one object, however, whose elusiveness leaves a secret looming over the poem: the bride's trousseau. Among the four title constituents, which we come to regard as the pillars of the poem's storyline (or plot, or scenario), the hope chest, or trousseau, is the most intriguing. Whereas "dawn" and "seaport" need no further explication—we easily read their acts of signification—the sealed chest keeps its contents hidden; and whereas the poem is replete with still additional markers of time and place, the dowry chest stands out as unique in its singularity. Even the bride is only one of three female figures mentioned in the poem (see lines 6, 16). Not so the trousseau, which resembles (in essence and function) no other object in the poem. The bridal trousseau—which is also marked as a word (lines 19-21)—is a signifier we only meet from without, and in this sense it is indeed paradigmatic of language, this chain of words whose very existence casts the world of objects into exile: given and immediately taken, it is named for us but at the same time kept protected from our peering gaze and eventually is carried away. It is also a signifier of a secret, a signifier pointing to the signified as itself hidden and hiding. The signified is here a mystery; the chest we can read as the ungraspable aspect of the "thing itself,"

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that which remains unfathomable even when viewed from within the world of objects that precedes language. Or perhaps the chest as "the word" is what escapes or resists symbolization, language's own enigma: a fantasized, longed-for object constituted and experienced as lost because it cannot be found or cannot be found *again*; a thing lost forever, a thing always-already lost in the very process of the subject's coming into being in language; a thing that, remaining unknown and ungraspable, signification can never contain (Fink 94).[6] The bridal trousseau is meaning screened behind more than one veil. It is also the word on the boundary of wordiness, the seam between "word" and "thing" and the mark of the tension inscribed in their possession, in the material's concrete yet vulnerable tangibility, in the immaterial's mobile but elusive intangibility (and in this respect, the trousseau joins the other title words as the marker of a border). The word-trousseau is the chest of belongings that cannot entirely belong (to), the improper property of the wanderer, the traveler, a bride.

The English translation dissolves some of the mystery when it turns *ṣandūq*,[7] literally a chest (of valuables) or a trunk, into a trousseau. This particular slant on the *ṣandūq* is implied in more than one way: of all trunks and boxes, the dowry box is the most closely associated with the bride awaiting her fiancée. Moreover: the bride and the chest enter the reader's field of vision at the same moment, by that becoming each other's metonymy, and in line 21 the chest is explicitly marked as the bride's. Finally, the poem as a whole revolves around the secret of the chest, which remains undecipherable to the speaker but seems to constitute part of the woman's knowledge. But even as a bridal trousseau it still keeps its secret: the intimate one of white embroidered linen and a young woman's undergarments; a symbol of virginity, femininity, and Eros, of the bride's body and its promise of fertility, fecundity, procreation. It is her womb that she is bringing,[8] and with it the mystery of reproduction and creation. If the trousseau is an

object echoing a primordial, irrevocable experience, it might be echoing the union with the mother's womb. In the primary scene of the consummated marriage we, readers, are unwelcome guests: only to her husband's eyes will the bride expose her innermost.

But she is refused, rejected, left to her own: "Your abandoned bride kneels crouching," reads line 1 to recount a withdrawal that followed an earlier disavowal. What slips away at the end of the poem was "his" (the man's) at the beginning: *Your* bride. This "you," the poem's interlocutor, I here read as a self-address articulated in the second person for the sake of sharing a tale all-too-familiar (that the speaker turns to the first person beginning in line 10, and that the poem concludes telling of the bride as the speaker's anchor of certainty, support this reading). What follows is the note of her being abandoned, after which she herself (only then) adopts the crouching position and "abandons" her surrounding, abandons herself to her surrounding. The lost, in other words, must have been first possessed, and so was she: the man's by commitment, by promise, by vow. What does she do, then, in that crowded, tumultuous language fair (line 2), a place where words are a merchandise, where verbal signs are traded, not before they are rolled in the mouths of potential buyers, uttered aloud to be tried, tested on one's tongue for their quality? A goods and a commodity they are, to be bought, sold, and consumed (on the cheap? In large quantities?) in this *mahrajān*, in which the bride sits *mahjūrah*. She is abandoned, we learn by listening to this alliteration, to the vulgarity and indecency of the carnivalesque exhibition. But is not she, too, a word presented for sale? Is not hers the slave's squatting position in the market, and could not she be covering her face for shame rather than fear, disappointment, or vain anticipation of her lover? The poem would neither deny nor state this clearly. And yet the abandoned bride, the *'arūs mahjūrah*, reverberates for the Arabic reader with the sound of the *kalimah mahjūrah*, an idiom translated as "abandoned word" and denoting a word no longer in

use. The bride *is* the word; she is *the* word, the promised, longed-for one that should have been sought by the poet interlocutor. Her arrival should have redeemed the poem, tightened its feeble texture, fill in its landscape of lack and absence. Her slipping away at the end of the poem coincides by necessity with the poem's disintegration.

In the busy, noisy fair she is forsaken, then—in that fair, which is also "that single bar in town / where poets drink for credit cheap vodka / with lemon, salt, and bitterness" (lines 2-4). The language fair is thus also a place of mindless consumption and indulgence, also of non-intimate social gathering; a men's territory (if we are to judge from the first-person plural implied in line 6: "a hooker we haggle with"), but also, being a space of momentary pleasure and short-lived companionship, a mark of homelessness and dispossession; the place of intentional and unintentional obliviousness of one's hardships but also of anticipating brides. Everything in this scene stands in contrast to what is symbolized by the bride: the momentary sense of brotherhood offered by the (many) men vs. the long-lasting intimacy offered by the (one) woman; the hopeless, degenerate atmosphere of the bar (with its rancid drinks) versus the stability and comfort of the family nest (the hope chest, after all, is also a symbol of good housekeeping, its contents proving the young bride's ability to order and decorate the household, to reproduce and sustain a *home*); the melancholy of intoxication versus the optimism of future and continuity. This sharp contrast establishes in the poem two existential realms immanently different and irrevocably differentiated from one another; two milieux the choice between which closes the door on the road not taken. Renouncing the bride amounts to renouncing everything she stands for and to one's sinking into a metaphysically-doomed world having only a feeble façade of propriety.

Boulus's is a poem about poets, then, and about their relationship to language, to words, and to "their" poetry, to what they desire but are unable, are able but refuse, to possess. The image of the penniless poet entertaining the masses for a few coins, "like a sad conjurer in front of the rabble" (line 6), evokes a sense of both desolation and scorn, both pity and disdain for this neglecting man. But how much sympathy we have, at the same time, for his preferring the momentary pleasure of heedless consumption to the formidable demands of "real" life. Of the four basic flavors of existence, he is left with the sour, the salty, and the bitter, condemning himself to an everlasting lack. This lack, we shall see (we have in fact already started seeing), costs him his poetry. But how understandable his choice becomes when we recall that the desired sweetness, the coveted taste of poeticity, is inscribed with the figure of enduring, life-long commitment: a poet's life-long commitment to the *Word*, *the* word. This word-bride will never feel itself comfortable in the ordinary and the quotidian: she who "was never this: tomorrow, or today" (line 18) was never of the here and now and could never become accustomed to simplicity, could never assimilate into the vocabulary of everyday life out of which poetry is so commonly made (line 5).

What is there, instead, for a poet? "Everyday words" (line 5), ordinary, common ones, which, seeking the audience attention and wishing to entertain and excite, he "swallows" like a conjurer in the fair. Behind the appearance of the conjurer's heroic encounter with the danger there hides an exercise in mannerism: exhibitionist, courageous to some degree, but based on self-conditioning; a skill developed through training and practice rather than an exercise of creativity and innovation. Important here is the double meaning of line 5, which suggests (in the Arabic) that the swords of everyday words are swallowed by the poet-conjurer, but also that the words swallow their own swords: Your everyday words *that swallow their swords* / … . Words

lose their sting and bite in the poet's hands, induced into silence or even themselves refusing to participate in the continuous effort to *please*: swallowing their own swords, they cast themselves into silence. Boulus disparages a readership (his own) for its shallowness and fancy, but more than that, he denounces himself and his fellow poets for blunting language's honed edges. Language as they want it, he seems to be blaming, is this non-demanding prostitute offering herself to everybody, giving pleasure without asking for commitment, willing to comply with the man's fantasies: a hooker costing no more than the price of sorrow, regret, and loss, and from whom one can walk away, oblivious. That the conjurer and the prostitute are placed side by side in line 6 suggests their own, respective likeness.

But here, in the middle of line 8, the more-or-less clear story about a group of poets and their relationship with words dissolves into incoherence, as the recognizable street scene staging a sex-for-money exchange is invaded by the spectacle of the prostitute's entrails. The image is disorienting, perplexing: a result, perhaps, of an intoxicated man's dulled senses, which, from this point on, will constantly unsettle the text. And yet for the reader, too, it is a moment of "illumination," of insight, a point of inversion that reveals the poem's desire, not entirely outside the range of what was revealed to us through the figure of the neglected bride. The woman's body is the repository of a secret to which men have no access (or have access in the price of giving up the floating, unattached bachelor life and its tempestuous pleasures). Unlike the bride's sealed trousseau, the prostitute's body's "inner space" offhandedly exposes its "treasures" (the prostitute's body: the body undemanding passion and devotion); and this divestment of secrets makes her attractive. The display of the prostitute's entrails is the turning inside-out of her body, like a piece of clothing, for the sake of externalizing what is perceived as tucked away beyond the man's reach. It is the externalization of the "feminine inside" (a violent externalization, the

exact opposite of the gentle, timely unpacking of a dowry chest) in order to inhabit it and at the same time the making of the outside world, the men's world and words (this poem before us), into an interior, part of *her* body, of *her* secret.

Yet the search after the mysterious productive feminine space "inside" is carried according to the grammar of male physiology and thus doomed to result in misunderstanding. The secret of the chest—of the womb: the secret of engendering and sustaining life, of creation in the broad sense, translated here into the word's giving birth (to poetry?)—is to be found, it is well understood, in the woman's "belly." And yet her "insidedness," the sign of inner vitality (of an "internal experience that has been kept alive and flourishing," as opposed to inner deadness),[9] is misinterpreted as, misplaced for, wrongly conceived to be, her entrails. True, in the *aḥshā'*, entrails, of the *mūmis*, prostitute, an echo can be heard of "*aḥshā' al-mūmis*," an idiom that might designate her sexual organs, and this reading could suggest a not completely-diverted gaze, a not-total misconception of the "origin." Yet the rich symbol of the trousseau cannot be reduced to being the sign of the female reproductive organs, and in this respect, the men's aiming at the *aḥshā'* as the totality of the "inner" does suggest a misinterpretation of the feminine. One could also rightly claim that the word *aḥshā'* is used in some Arabic renditions of the Bible, where, in Psalms 71.6, the Hebrew words *mi-beten mi-m'ey 'imi* (literally: from my mother's belly, from her bowels) are translated as *min al-baṭni* and *min aḥshā'i 'ummī*.[10] The word *Aḥshā'*, then, for the (Christian) reader of Arabic, may read as synonymous with "womb."[11] And yet the image of the curling *aḥshā'* (line 9) corresponds to the shape and anatomy of the intestines (rather than of the female genitalia) and thus coincides with a certain bodily operation that starts in the scene of drinking (line 3), continues in the image of the (s)word-swallower (line 5), and concludes in the remark about the devil's bladder (line 20). Pro-creation is confounded

with digestion; the womb is confounded with the entrails; the bridal trousseau is confounded with the prostitute's seductive but non-reproductive body. Like the child researching into the enigma of childbirth only to arrive at the theory of bowel-birth (Freud "On the Sexual" 219), so does the poem's speaker imagine creativity to emerge through the one pathway known and available to him: through the interiors of his own familiar body. His anatomy informs his epistemology.

He is not the only male figure looking for "illumination" in the wrong place. The historian (lines 13-14), whom the Arabic original indicates to be a man, conducts his presumed search under the light emanating from a victim's glimmering head (whose victim, we cannot tell). The dim emanation already suggests the futility of summoning yet another illuminating bodily organ into the poem, of harnessing this second source of "light," whose faint luminosity by no means resembles the radiance of the prostitute's inner parts. Like the entrails, the head, too, ushers the man's search in the wrong direction to the extent that it symbolizes reason and rationality, thus failing to expose the longed-for hidden object of desire. Furthermore, in the same way that the image of the exposed entrails implies an act of violence, the figure of the historian points to the man's relation to the world through violence, through dream and delirium, but also through studious yet barren quest. The man's affinity is always with the past; his engagement is with dead objects; his touch reveals death to him.

And so when the prostitute's entrails become the source of streetlight (line 8) they also render a tangible, material object for investigation, branded with the man's desire to know words' secret reproductive mechanism: how is poetry produced in language's viscera?—and this transformation helps us recognize the opposition inside-outside as the poem's main topographical axis, the pivot that governs the transitions between its disordered images and

episodes. It is the poem's Ariadne thread: wherever a legible image or sequence breaks down, a movement from an inside space to an outside one (or vice versa), or their transformation into each other, takes place. Thus, the open space of the fair turns into the closed space of the bar (line 2); the inner body parts of the prostitute are externalized to become the source of streetlight but also a closed space of refuge for the poet threatened from outside (lines 10-11); the prophet hides inside the cave, raving about the spider's outer regime of dust (13); the poet's head, a tower of Babel, contains a city, in which there is a ruined house—a house, then, whose own "entrails" are exposed and permeated by the outside (lines 14-16); the word is a deep spring inside the devil's bladder, but also a trousseau carried outside to the open sea (lines 20-21). The places or sites into which the poem strays are realistic and mundane at times (the seaport, the fair, the bar, the town, the alley) and at other times imaginary (the city, lines 14-15, is just a phantom), drawn from the folklore (the Ḥirāʾ cave north-east of Mecca, where the prophet Muḥammad is said to have been spending a month each year engaged in religious devotion;[12] also the cave where he is said to have found a refuge from persecutors thanks to the spider web),[13] or having a symbolic significance (Babel, the devil's bladder). Regardless of their nature, they all participate in the movement of internalization and externalization, in the transitions across a boundary whose exact place cannot be determined with certainty but is meant to constitute a "body" and a "self" by locating a subjective reality vis-à-vis an objective one. The figure of the poet swallowing (s)words (line 5) attests to the perils involved in the movement in and out, at the end of which words nevertheless remain foreign to the poet's flesh. But even better a testimony to the inability to find one's place vis-à-vis that which remains fundamentally unknown and unknowable is the re-incorporation of the poem's title in its "body" of text towards the end. Like the *corpus* of the text, which "swallows" the title words in order to re-create them

as a totality (unattained, after all), so does the poet attempt to get hold of something that, much like the bride and her trousseau, can never be captured and held onto. Never can one, even a poet, be sure of one's possession of this word that is always a prostitute and a bride: exposed and withdrawn, submissive and evasive, flawed and pristine, yielding and out of the poet's control (she is the storm, we read in line 23: untamed, whimsical, dangerous).

The movement in and out, through which the secret of the word (the woman's secret: the word's) is to be unveiled, aims at more than just incorporation; or rather, the incorporation of words aims at more than just gaining possession. Writing as an act of origination depends on the locus of the origin, on its possession. The figure of the poet swallowing (s)words for the audience's pleasure couples the scene of display and exhibition not with the expression of the inner, not with the externalization of what has already been established as one's possession, but rather with the desire to take in and possess something that has never been one's own. Writing begins before the writing *act*: not in the expelling of words onto the page but rather in the attempt to appropriate (swallow) them and in the resulting recognition that the poem's prospects can never be guaranteed. Poetry is an order that never constitutes itself completely from within the subject; it exists outside the regime of power and control, indifferent to one's will and determination. This shall turn out to be significant.

Images related to the exertion of power allow Boulus's poem to speak for the reality beyond its boundaries. The soldiers banging on the door, the prophet's escape, the victim, the woman crying at the doorstep of a demolished house—these implications of violence call to the reader's mind contemporary images of political oppression, all "knocking" on the poet's door, demanding recognition and threatening poetry's seclusion. Such hints of the real should not be discarded as irrelevant, given Boulus's life as a member of the Assyrian minority in Iraq, a

victim of and a witness to war, persecution, and refugee life.[14] But power in this poem has to do with the larger theme of authority *within* the realm of literature. That is, power is related to the ephemeral (a crooked bone is the only trace of a dynastic kingship, line 9; the spider's only reign is a "fragile regime of dust ," line 13) and, surely enough, to violence (the soldiers banging on the door, line 11); and the desire to control is associated with demise (the prostitute's entrails are touched by death as they become exposed, line 9) and destruction (the Tower of Babel, the archetype of hubris, is linked with the ruined house, lines 14-16). But at the same time, the image of the speaker driveling his verse (literally, his stanzas; line 10) under the prostitute's curling entrails suggests that poetry is stipulated on a *loss* of control, on *renouncing* the poet's forceful grip on language, rather than on submitting it to his will: the verse that flows naturally out of the speaker's mouth is an autonomous and automatic speech not entirely, not exactly, his "own." This latter conclusion applies to all the poem's male figures, none of which appears to have control over speech: neither the sad conjurer, drawing in words from without and anyway subjected to the audience's command, nor the prophet raving in his cave. Here a small typographical mark becomes meaningful: the name of the Ḥirā' cave (the prophet's hiding place) appears in the Arabic text with an accented ("doubled") 'r', in this way incorporating the root ḥ-r-r, related to fever and feverishness. This may be a typographical error, but it may also be Boulus's way to strip the prophet (standing also for the poet himself, through their juxtaposition in Romantic imagery) of even the remotest sign of sovereignty over his talk.

We might be hearing Boulus's own authorial voice here, if only because the poem before us imitates this kind of verse drivel. Obviously, the uncanniness of even the most schizophrenic literary text needs to be treated as an intentional poetic effect: "The force of the poem," says John Wilkinson (365) about a poem by John Wieners in words that I find apt, "arises from the

tension between the exercise of an insistent control and the working of its productive genera; what makes the poem could also unmake it as a poem." And he continues: "what does it mean to describe language as 'an autonomous source of control over speech or understanding' when what is being considered is a poem rather than speech? Is it not true that to make a poem and to see it into print is to assert control over language?" (Wilkinson 367). As for Boulus, in a reported interview with Margaret Obank, the editor of *Banipal* magazine of modern Arab literature, he says about the volume in which the poem appears:

> The book I am working on right now is called *If You Were Asleep in Noah's Ark* which is taken from two lines of poetry by Ruhmi, the great Persian mystic poet. He says: 'If you were sleeping in Noah's Ark, drunk, / what do you care if the flood has come?' […] In these violent poems [written] in America I felt I was controlled by language, instead of me controlling the language. So I had to create this flowing rhythm, this mad flowing rhythm of language and then everything is being dragged by this fantastic current.[15]

The question of the boundary between language's autonomous gesticulation and the poem as an "exercise of an insistent control" is unapproachable from within the written text, which presents us already with the artistic resolution of the writer's (preceding) struggles. At stake here, rather, is the textual representation of the borderline between the poem and the poet. The analogy between the poem's body and the poet's through their parallel "swallowing" act brings to the discussion's fore the relationship between body and text (their identity and disparity, their transmutation in one another) and the attempt to turn life into art and art (the lifeless?) into life. The tension between the desire to become one with the word and the need to reserve the distance from which form and structure can be introduced into the text is incarnated in the contrasting figures of the bride and the prostitute: if the bride stands for the collapse of all dividing lines in the love act, the prostitute marks a union in which a measure of emotional

distance is always cautiously kept. Complete self-annihilation in the one exalted, rare and majestic word, or a casual, pedestrian romance with the ordinary one that gives itself with ease (but implicates death: the space of her exposed entrails suggests a *grave*): these are the two poles of the poet's deliberation.

And yet this occasion of "swallowing" words for the sake of turning them into a poem seems to concern more than just the artist's union with the work, the poet's union with the text, their possession of one another in a fusion act. The overlapping of the two "bodies," the poet's and the poem's, suggests an attempt *to turn the regularity and constancy of bodily processes into poetry's driving force*: an attempt, that is, to establish an order whose inner, sustainable operation will redeem the fragmentation of language, words' disengagement from one another, such as we see in the title;[16] a self-perpetuating order, independent of the poet's ability to gain access into the secret of poetry, of origination, and safeguarding the poem's (and the poet's) autonomy and endurance. And what could be a better path than the autonomous, spontaneous working of the body? A mouth (lines 3, 5), entrails (line 8), and a bladder: the poem before us *is* a body, a corporeality. Boulus's conjurer is a realization of the not-uncommon metaphor of literary consumption as eating (Strachey 324) at the same time that his whole text is "an anagram of the body" (Barthes *Pleasure* 17)[17]—and both are the imprint of a writer's anxiety. The bride's fleeing with her trousseau, both from the poet and from the poem—the poet's failure to assert control over the *word*—provokes helplessness, aggression, and a fierce desire to possess what has been unwilling to submit itself to the poet's will. But what cannot be owned can at least be held onto. Swallowing is envy replaced by oral greed.[18] It is this incorporation of words in defiance of their externality, this internalization of what has left the poet's body unchanged by

his inner creative processes—processes whose operation and vitality can be recognized only through their production of a whole out of separate elements.

The poet's hate, or anger, or fear, are nevertheless simultaneous with love, frustration simultaneous with desire: "it must not be forgotten that the relation is all the time a two-sided one, and that [the poet] is simultaneously loving the words, rolling them round in his mouth and eventually making them a part of himself" (Strachey 327). The hope to be Ezekiel, for whom the swallowed words of woe turned honey in his mouth,[19] wrestles with the dread of a Cronus swallowing his children for the fear of being overthrown by one of them. Perhaps for this reason the poem's words are re-consumed after being expelled. But they are also discharged, released through the textual body's lower part. What, asks James Strachey (327), are the written words, "from the point of view of the unconscious?" What do they symbolize? And he answers by quoting from Ernest Jones: "printed matter [is] a curious symbol of fæces." Strachey then ties literary "consumption" and "production," taking in and taking out, with a single metaphoric thread: "I will even go further and suggest that a coprophagic tendency lies at the root of all reading. The author excretes his thoughts and embodies them in the printed book; the reader takes them, and, after chewing them over, incorporates them into himself" (329). The association of writing with oral activity is most explicit in Boulus. But the proximity of the poem's title, the (devil's) bladder, and the poem's end allows us also to recognize (to think, to conjure) a coprophagic fantasy realized. It thus allows us to understand the poem's cyclical course, in which a lost object, perhaps even the loss of the object, is devoured, consumed once again to become the productive title of a poem: to be re-submitted to the poet's will. In its second appearance, the title is these unprocessed, unimpressed, resistant words; a kind of corporeal waste. The poet's words: a useless surplus, the defiled creation of the corporeal, the poisonous

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product of life's degeneration (we remember the rancid drinks from the bar, line 3). It is language exiting the poem's body as it entered it, leaving behind what is possibly a poem, possibly its failure: the failure to weave signifiers into meaningful webs, into a narrative that would bring to conclusion a tale that was abandoned prematurely. It is also the point in which we understand how the poem's striving for unity (its attempt to become a story in order to become a poem) is related to its circular course: how "together" and "apart" are related to "beginning" and "end," "inside" and "outside." But is the loss of meaning, of meaning produced through narration, also the loss of poetry? We might have been able to answer had we known what a poem *is*: had we known, in other words, the secret of the woman's trousseau. But all we have before us is a poem in the making, struggling to assemble itself. Is poetry more than "poetry in the making"?

Yet as long as poetry is "poetry in the making," Boulus's poem has secured its survival. The substitution of digestion for procreation—of automaticity for incapacity: for the female's secret of creativity[20]—turns the poem into a self-perpetuating enunciation that does not belong to, but is also independent of, the realm of meaning and communication, and more importantly, an enunciation independent of the unreachable origin of "poetry" and of anything outside the text. The cycle of devouring, digestion, and discharge constitutes the poem as its own guarantor and securing-chain: as an unabated mechanism in which material for writing is constantly produced and processed, as if in a muscular reflex. Perhaps this explains the sense of familiarity, the feeling that everything in the poem's tale of unfaithfulness and disavowal, betrayal and regret, is expected and known: when the poem begins, the bride has already been abandoned; the fair has already begun; the poet-speaker has frequented the bar (enough times to be characterized as drinking "for credit"); the words have been used all-too-often ("everyday words": words used

daily or words suited for the ordinary and quotidian); the scene of haggling with the hooker has already recurred (as suggested by the verb tense).[21] The poem consumes words, processes them (or not) inside its body, and releases them ("defaecation is the model of the act of birth," writes Freud; "New" 100) only to re-consume them, out of denial of their resistance to the poet's attempted appropriation, and so on and so forth. A futile repetition replaces the instance of inception, of origination, of (pro)creativity; a repetition not productive, yet one that enforces productivity and struggles to constitutes a prolific "interiority" through the very dialectic of introjection and projection, incorporation and expulsion, writing, reading, and re-writing.[22] Boulus asserts poetry's disengagement from mastery and control, and yet his is not a poem uncontrolled: it rather puts language's natural inclination towards disintegration, and the orderliness of bodily operations, into creative use.[23]

As a critical gesture (I am using Barbara Spackman's words in a different context; see Spackman 1), conjuring up the poem's systemic digestion and the coprophagic fantasy that sustains it "reduces the work of the intellect to the twitches of a body jolted by nerve spasms," to the rhythmic pulsations of gobbling up, processing, and releasing. The involuntary, the inbred, the physically autonomous can be better counted on for enduring literary productivity, even if a productivity divorced from creativity. This retreat to the body and its natural rhythms renders the writer's physical being a participant in the poetic experience; in a way, this retreat allows him to bridge an irreparable, unbearable split between life and art and turn the body into art, into the producer of art (eating: a Christian channeling of the material into the spiritual?): to bring the body-before-language into the text. The body, then: not the mind, the unconscious, or the imagination; not a muse or inspiration; not even the "poetic." But also: not the outside world, not nature, not the world of concrete objects. Boulus defies the view of poetry as stemming from

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within (from introspection, the unconscious, etc.), but also as derived from without, as an immediate, simple, spontaneous response to the outside world (the Romantic idea); it defies the view of poetry as resulting from revelatory inspiration but also as fashioned in hard work; finally, it defies the view of poetry as the beautified articulation of the real but also as a purely linguistic product pertaining to the realm of abstracts. Poetry is no longer the composed expression of the soberly-reflecting subject, but neither is it a language "talking its talk" arbitrarily, inhumanely, an utterance devoid of an uttering subject. The body's internal operations may remain undecipherable, but its corporeal existence and its cadence ensure that the death of the author as consciousness and a desire (Barthes "The Death") is not the death of poetry.

The myth of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11.1-9) has become the ultimate figurative name of linguistic confounding. It explains the existing multiplicity of languages, and at the same time evokes an original state of primordial Oneness. This evocation itself renders Babel an imaginary fulfillment of the yearning for restoration, for the return to a primordial state that might have never existed but, enunciated through the myth, is nevertheless experienced as lost: an imaginary fulfillment, then, of the desire to know that an ancient, one and only language (virtuous, pure, unmitigated) is buried somewhere (Amati-Mehler, Argentieri and Canestri 16). And so it is, we can imagine, for the multi-lingual poet or for his representative in the text, whose own head is the site of a Babelian chaos akin to the language fair (line 14) and of destruction (line 16). Whatever appears in the speaker's field of vision turns out, under the spell of this verbal chaos, to be an illusion (or, more accurately, one illusion upon another: "a city I haven't seen before / flashes from the dark, its corners are a phantom"; lines 14-15) out of which

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only demolition and loss, embodied by the woman crying at the doorstep of a ruined house (line 16), emerges sound and clear. The abundance of languages gradually undermines the sense of reality until it undermines reality as well.

Is this why, as the poem's speaker asserts,

<div dir="rtl">

هذه الكلمةُ، هي تلكَ التي

تلك التي لم تكنْ أبداً هذِه: غداً, أو اليوم.
</div>

This word is the one
the one that was never this: tomorrow, or today. (17-18)

Under the spell of verbal chaos, the word becomes unequal to itself. With every word being uttered in the poet's mind in more than one language, the signifier is always double, the signified split between signifiers, dissimilar to itself in its different garbs. The Babel myth as the name of the degeneration of unity speaks for the bilingual poet's desire for a single mother tongue in which meaning can be translated confidently, unequivocally, into verbal signs; a language of open chests where "this word" (this meaning, this signified) is never trapped in the "either/or" ("tomorrow, or today"). How, indeed, can poetry be written when the already-convoluted "this" of the poet's mind (a literal translation of lines 17-18 would read: "this word is that one that / that one that was never this [one]") yields nothing but an unresolved "or"?

"Tomorrow" and "today," however, are also markers of time and temporality, and lines 17-18 form a separate stanza that can also be read independently of the previous ones. The undesignated word ("This word") that was never either "tomorrow" or "today" was never (so we are allowed to think) about the future or the present; instead of marking regeneration, reproduction, redemption, it is (presumably) the mark of finality, irreversibility, termination. It can be carried into the future only as a monument for, a reminder of, what once *was* but no longer *is*: an abandoned bride that was "your bride" (language: you leave it and then it leaves

you). And yet it is also a word that cannot be pronounced; a nameless word; meaning resisting explicit designation, resisting designation as explicit name-giving, and which can thus be referred to only through the non-specific "this": *this word*. The occasion of an unspeakable past might not be coincidental. If the crying woman (line 16) is a mother figure, if the ruined house is the loss of the maternal (of which the house is a metonymy)—another Babelian fall, from a mother-child pre-verbal Oneness into the separation of the symbolic order, or the fall of a real separation from a mother, a home, and a land that were left behind—then the word of the past might be of times that have become unavailable for thought and verbalization, too painful for containment. The nameless past, the loss of which becomes palpable in writing, is approachable only through its surrogate or proxy: through a "tomorrow" or a "today" that needs to be negated for the nameless word of yesterday to reveal its shadow. Like water falling on a roof, symbolization cannot hold onto its desired site, leading astray the poet's index finger, and his pen away from the wound of the past.

The tower of Babel is not an unambiguous sign here, though. Does desolation coincide with the tower's fall or rather with its survival? The poem makes room for a reading in which the unity stipulating the tower's existence, rather than the multiplicity of languages that came with its ruination, is the source of the poet's tragedy. The oneness of the one language, then, may as well be experienced as an adversity: the need to renounce multilingualism for the sake of a single language of writing, communication, and textual engagement. "This word" that will never be itself is the word whose imprint on the page will never reflect the profusion filling the multilingual poet's head: even a simple word like "tomorrow," even the clearer, more concretely present "today," amounts to more than its ink mark on the paper. Paraphrasing Roland Barthes's question in *The Pleasure of the Text*, "How can a text, which consists of language, be outside

languages?" (*Pleasure* 30), we may ask: how can a text, which consists of languages, be outside [the one] language [of writing]? Barthes addresses the text's ability to liberate itself from the *doxa*; taken out of its context and paraphrased here, it comes to articulate the deliberation of a poet whose Babel of consciousness murmurs under his pen: how to voice the world in one tongue without silencing the echoes of the many?[24]

Still there is one more level of significance to Babel. For the exile poet from the town of al-Habbaniyah, is not Babel also reminiscent of *Bābili*, Babylonia[25]—and perhaps of Iraq in general, this Iraq of which Boulus says, "when it comes to religions and ethnicities, Iraq is a veritable Tower of Babel" (al-Shawaf 35)? Babel as an acoustic path to *Bābili* is a path to a real place and to a lived past whose lingering in memory as a tangible image is threatened by oblivion not less than by a reality of war and conflict. The city that has not been seen before (line 14) may be a hometown made unfamiliar by the passage of time, the notion of one's "place" made unthinkable. This city's brief appearances, blurred and fuzzy (line 15), may mark memory's struggle over the faint images left to the poet from his homeland, images whose construction as clear visions must rely on the power of imagination (to give them corners and borders, shape and distinct form); the ruined house may mark memory's failure to accomplish this task, after all. The tower, the city, the house, and finally the door: the poet's gaze gradually focuses on that one door, substituting a close-up look for the long-shot view of the city. But this zooming in, which reaches a point of clarity only when resting on the one house that may have been the poet's, reveals nothing other than devastation and suffering. The crying woman: is she, too, a *word*—is she the word "that was never this," part of memory's vocabulary (the mute vocabulary of the trauma of destruction and separation?) that could never form the building

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blocks of future speech, of the poem of the present? Does she, too, signify poetry's inability to go back to its origins in the poet's early years—there, in that house, on that doorstep?

For there is another side to the loss implied in lines 14-16, which becomes apparent when we realize that *houses* have already inhabited the poem as *lines of verse*, literally houses or homes (*bayt* in Arabic means both "house" and "stanza"), driveled by the speaker in line 10.[26] The ruined house is the ruined house of poetry, a decomposed stanza: the verbal chaos of Babel brings about not only the loss of a place, but also of poetry, of poetry as a place of dwelling.[27] Like the other two female figures in the poem, the unidentified woman in line 16 is linked with refuge and comfort (the bride symbolizes matrimony, the prostitute's body is an asylum, the third woman is identified with the homestead) but also with loss (the bride flees with her trousseau, the prostitute's charge is the currency of "sorrow, regret, and loss," and the unidentified woman stands, crying, in front of a ruined house); and like them, she, too, is linked with the question of the poet's relation to writing, of his ability (and desire) to "inhabit" poetry. If they are "inside" at all, men in this poem are always on the run. Indeed, against the recognizable sites in which the poem takes place—a local bar, a busy fair, a midnight alley, a hidden cave, the Tower of Babel, a phantom city, a ruined house, an open seaport—not even one inside space appears to be unencumbered by pain, violence, and persecution, not even one door or opening leading into peacefulness, and the door into the house of poetry, into the *bayt*, is no different. Words cannot be kept "inside" the speaker (we know they evade his poem) but he, too, cannot dwell in his writing because he is unable to build a proper "house" for the word-bride, settle down, and fulfill his husband duties. Myriad languages (the Babel of his head) are not enough to build, to write, even one well-constructed, well-structured stanza for the figure of poetry that will stand the blows of the outside world. Possessing language, possessing languages in the plural, has nothing

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to do with the ability to engage with the single word, with the word as single. The polyphony of Babel leaves no room for the discrete, for a speech fragment so small as to be able to unlock a sealed trousseau.

How are the question of habitation, the multiplicity of languages, and the poem's cyclical movement interrelated? In the opening sequence of the frame story of *The Arabian Nights*, the famous *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah*,[28] two brother kings whose wives had been unfaithful leave their estates to roam the world in search of one whose misfortune is greater than theirs. Sitting in a meadow to rest from their journey, they suddenly hear a great cry coming from the middle of the sea. From their hiding place in the foliage of a tree they watch with terror a giant demon carrying on his head a large glass chest: a *ṣandūq*, in the original Arabic text (*Kitāb Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* 63). Out of the chest, which the demon lays on the ground and unlocks of its four steel locks, there emerges a beautiful young woman. She is, it turns out, his bride, whom he carried away on her wedding night and now keeps imprisoned in the chest in the middle of the sea to guard her purity and chastity. And yet he fails: ninety-eight men, a hundred when joined by the two kings, had known the bride, for "nothing can prevent or alter what is predestined" (*Kitāb Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* 63-65; *The Arabian Nights* 8-10).

The poem's summoning of its title words in its midst, we understand through this intertext, marks in its cyclical structure not only the desire to constitute the poem as its own inception point to make it independent of an inaccessible origin (as it has been discussed thus far), but also the attempt to go back to this origin in order to appropriate it: to capture the bride, the anchor of the poet's certainty (line 24), in the place where she is still within reach, namely, is the title, before writing had given her the chance to slip away from the poet's grip (the language-bride: the promise of a future, a reminder/remainder of the past). Boulus allows the art of writing

to perform what the reality beyond the boundaries of the text usually does not allow: the gesture of return, of going back to the beginning. It is the poem's return (line 22) to its constituent words as a still-to-be-realized potentiality, as the four building blocks out of which he can try to re-build the house of poetry for his language-bride. But writing (or re-writing), erecting a *Bayt,* also renders the poem a form of incarceration. Precisely as a place of dwelling, as the inhabitance of poetry, the poem becomes a kind of chest, a *ṣandūq*, in which the poet gathers words whose purity and chastity he is determined to guard. And yet "nothing can prevent or alter what is predestined." The bride cannot be domesticated; the symbol of dwelling cannot be confined in the poem because writing sets her free, sets language free. The written text is language's space of betrayal, where she turns the poet himself into a cuckold, giving herself, like the prostitute in the midnight alley (are they the one and the same woman?), to his fellow poets.[29]

Language loses its innocence in writing; only outside the text, before writing begins— only in the title, before being put to use—can she be saved pure and chaste, untouched and unchanged. Writing is language's becoming many (Babel), her becoming inhabitance of many, her fulfilling foreign desires and succumbing to her own ("nothing can prevent or alter what is predestined and […] when a woman desires something, no one can stop her," *The Arabian Nights* 9-10). She cannot be possessed; the poet's longing is at odds with her free spirit. Unadulterated she can be kept only if the poem is never to materialize in the actual text. Paradoxically, this nature of hers sustains the motion of writing: her freedom keeps the whirlwind of poetry, of poetry as a chase, on the move. It is her flight that the poem's title cannot capture, missing a verb in conjunction with a subject, an object, a time expression, and a locative. Her independent movement in the written bestows the poem with a driving force, one

that emerges only at the moment of its fulfillment, after the poet gives in, gives up, and resumes his desiring.

The search for a home in language—for dwelling in one's mother tongue, here turned a desire to have language itself dwell in poetry (in the *Bayt,* in the trousseau)—is both the rescue of writing and its predicament. Yet every act of writing becomes, in Boulus, precisely this search (and this rescue, and this predicament), as long as it takes place in the language the poet covets most, the language whose body he wants to exclusively possess. An anchor it thus cannot be; instead, it becomes a sign of the poet's dispossession of his only "capital," of this capital as "his." And chaste, as well, she cannot remain: for the poet himself, by his very writing, inevitably participates in her exposure. Writing is a place where a word deemed chaste turns out to be a streetwalker, where a poet deemed respectful turns out to be her visitor. Upon appearance, she is always-already dissimilar to herself, unfaithful to her image in the poet's mind (lines 17-18); her intimacy is deceiving, but her deception is exposed only upon inscription, for there is where intimacy is consummated.

Thus far this chapter has presented two separate perspectives on the poem's "plot." One (a "first reading") was a story about envy: about a neglectful poet who, unable to commit himself to matrimony and thus abandoned by his bride, constitutes his body as a productive interiority equal to the woman's. The other story[30] (a "second reading") was about jealousy: about a poet who attempts to incarcerate a word-bride who refuses (now she) to have him as her single lover. The first reading allows the poem's structure (or rather, some structural elements) to tell a tale that is echoed in the poem's thematic level; the second reading gives priority to the themes and interprets the poem's structure in their light. In both cases the poet vainly chases the bride or

what she represents (the secret of origins, origination, and originality), but each reading locates unfaithfulness in a different figure.

Yet none of these interpretations weaves a story comprehensive enough to capture the poem's twists and turns in their entirety. The first fails to account for the man's flight and hiding (lines 11-12) (which the second reading can still accommodate through the plot of *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah*, see endnote 29 on page 182); the second reading fails to account for the bride's carrying the chest with her to the sea (a detail that only makes sense in the first reading): if the *ṣandūq* is her prison, why does not she leave it behind, once she was able to release herself from her incarceration? That neither of the interpretations presented thus far is comprehensive enough to comfortably accommodate all these details in one eventful sequence might indicate that there is still one more aspect of this poem that has not been explored, and which has to do, I would like to suggest, with the bride's own mission and with the way in which her own story (a "third reading") is interweaved into the poet's. Why this is important will become clear shortly.

To reconcile the poet's own hiding with the bride's keeping the chest in her possession we might need, indeed, to read the figure of the bride as the demon and the poet as the sought-for lover whom she would like to seduce and imprison. A woman-demon from the sea arrives in a small town seeking the poet whom she was promised but who abandoned her. She thus goes to the language fair (lines 1-2), lurking in that tumultuous place where, she knows, poets often meet for a drink and for sharing their melancholy (lines 2-4). Or: a woman-demon offers herself for sale in the language fair, hoping that a poet would take her as his wife and build her a home. But the poet foresees his failure to build her a house (lines 14-16), recognizes her alienation from simple, everyday life (lines 17-18), acknowledges her devilish, demonic and daemonic, nature (lines 19-20)[31]; for her sake, he knows, for the sake of matrimony, his countless lovers and

beloveds from amongst the words of everyday (line 5) whose voices resound in his head (line 14) will have to be muted. He does not seek the grand and the glorious: bad vodka suits his ragged life (lines 3-4) of night wanderings and occasional sex (lines 6-8), his eyes see nobility even in the most dejected (lines 8-9), and this dejected is often the source of his inspiration (line 10). He therefore runs away, taking a refuge in a faraway cave, where a spider's web hides him from the soldiers that were sent after him (lines 11-12) and where he can recede into delusion: into the non-poetic, non-committed, non-beautified speech (line 12) for which one man's life—one poet's life?—has already been taken (line 13). This victim is history incarnated: he faces the poet like a warning sign (line 14). That somewhere this bride would continue to exist, that her majesty can endure in this world, is an anchor for the poet (line 24): she is, we know, the word of poetry. And yet tying his life to hers will make the poet her eternal prisoner. Let her go back to the sea, her place; let her leave empty-handed; let these poets wait for her next storm of rage, her next hunt. She makes her way into an indefinite port (*a* seaport, see lines 21, 22, and the title), which we might read as indicating that this small town was merely one stop on her way to other towns, to other poets. That her *ṣandūq*, mentioned in the poem's title, re-appears only towards the end is no longer the sign for the poet's dispossession, for the bride's elusiveness: in the present reading, it becomes a sign for the poet's fortunate escape.

This reading does not exclude any of the former ones, but is rather intended to suggest the interweaving of two disparate plots—one in which the poet chases the word (first and second readings), another in which the word chases the poet (third reading)—as this poem's way to contemplate the relationship between language, dwelling, and desire. Even without considering the two basic plots in their entirety, the coexistence of a poet chasing and being chased, of the word-bride being chased and herself chasing the poet, this coexistence, evident from the

transitions from the title into the body of the poem, from one stanza to another, from one line to the next, points to a constant exchange of the position of desiring between the poet and his language. *Language desires*. This we know from her portrayal as both a young bride arriving with a *ṣandūq* and this *ṣandūq* itself—a doubleness that has been acknowledged earlier in this chapter, but only now can be fully understood. Standing in opposition to the prostituting "everyday words," the bride herself becomes a word standing for everything far apart: she is home, stability, and (pro)creation; she is one of a kind, special, and rare (she reigns her lines in the poem and resists incidental qualifications: "the word," she is named in line 19; an *arūs mahjūrah* she is, an embodied *kalimah mahjūrah*: the word no longer in use[32]); she is the word of poetry without which a *Bayt* collapses. But against this personalization, the poem also states the word's identity with the chest (line 21), rendering her both a desiring entity and the carrier of other people's longing. The portrayal of the word as twofold thus poses at the poem's midst the question of *who desires*. Is it the poet, desiring a word or a language[33] that evades him, or is it the word, desiring for itself (herself) the house of poetry, which only a poet could build? The answer is: both. There are (at least) two sources of desire that keep this poem in motion, two that overlap without being reconciled. The poet's desire becomes language's and vice versa; desire circulates in the poem, lost and appropriated, lost again and re-appropriated; and this circulation shoves the poem into its self-perpetuating cycles. The written poem, the one inscribed on the page, might designate the end of this circulation; Boulus, however, allows it to continue, not only because he knows language (this storm) will not renounce its desire ("In these violent poems [...] I was controlled by language, instead of me controlling the language," Obank 14), but also because the poet wants to be desired by it, wants to find hunger and thirst in language, needs to know that it wants to be written, that words' resistance is temporary, that his poem can surprise

him with the forces of its inner life. Poetry is never an act of full mastery, poetry must be in motion, poetry is the intertwining of passions.

But why should the word be a chest (a trousseau), too? The question of desire could have been articulated even with the word's being a bride and nothing more. But that it is made into a *ṣandūq* not only allows us to better discern the cycle of its (her) exchange with the poet—as a chest, I have noted above, the word, very clearly, is the bearer of someone else's fancies—but also impels us to think about the end of this pursuit called writing. If the word is a chest, we have an idea about her contents: the chest, I have argued at the beginning of this chapter, is the signifier masking its signified, the paradigm of the linguistic sign. The chest is words as we know them, as we know the structure of their secret to be. But if the word is a fleeing bride possessing a sealed, nameless chest, then language has a secret to which we might not gain access even if we unveil, unfold, get to know it (the signifier: our limit). Language keeps a secret to itself that will never be explicated, a secret doubly veiled, doubly remote from the poet: its desires are foreign. Lying in-between this familiarity and foreignness, the poem remains undecided—or, we could say, polyphonic.

And thus when we seek to address the question of inhabiting, of dwelling in a chest, in a house, or in language, we find this poem's answer at least double. The poet's desire for dwelling becomes, we have seen, a desire to have language itself dwell: to have it fixed into the poem (into a certain meaning and moment), have it immaculate, unsullied by others (other writers and readers). As for language, "she" has conditions of her own if she is to renounce her lovers: her demand, with which the poet will never be able to comply, is for total, absolute devotion. It is now his turn to refuse: refuse to remain the author of this one poem, to commit himself to the majesty of Poetry, capitalized: the spaces of temporariness—a bar, a street, a cave—where

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everyday words can continue nourishing his work, better suit his path in writing. And since saying "yes" only comes after hearing "no" (yes, he would build her the house of poetry, if only she renounced her lovers; yes, she would settle into the housewife role, if only he promised never to see other women)—since, in other words, the poet and the language only comply with each other's *ultimata* in a scenario other than their own: the scenario of the "whole" poem (the harmonized unified plot), upon which the text never converges (clinging, instead, to the divergence of irreconcilable ambitions)—neither the poet nor "his" language (a language that will never be his) can rest of their pursuit. Boulus's poem is never to become a place of wish fulfillment, where a writer comes to be the demon resting his head on poetry's chest (*Kitāb Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* 63).[34] The disjointed title words, we understand, were pure potentiality where the collision of desires was yet to occur.

Notes

[1] The Arabic text is from Sargon Boulus, *Idha Kunta Nā'iman Fī Markab Nūḥ ("If You Were Asleep in Noah's Ark")* (Köln: al-Jamal, 1998) 11-12. Translation is mine, E.B.. I thank Anton Shammas for his helpful comments. All mistakes in the translation are mine only.

[2] Literally: sub-standard; rancid, foul, spoiled. Since Vodka does not get spoiled in the usual sense, I chose "cheap" to mark its low quality.

[3] Literally: "About her fragile rule over/above the earth/soil and underneath/below the victim's head." The sentence offers the opposition above/below, which is not made explicit in the translation. The regime of dust, however, is supposed to suggest the opposition's first part.

[4] Literally: "appearing/emerging now and then," "is visible for moments." "Flickering" would be an alternative translation. The dark background ("from the dark") is my addition, extending the meaning of "appearing."

[5] Stanley Fish, for example, sees meaning as the reader's developing response to the utterance. Every word is an occurrence changing the reader's horizon of expectations. The work's title, as well, becomes an occurrence conditioning the reader's interpretation of what follows. See Stanley E. Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins, 1980).

[6] What Lacan calls the *object (a)*. See Fink.

[7] Except for words in common usage, Arabic Romanization follows the Library of Congress rules as appearing in *ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts*, Randall K. Barry editor and compiler (Washington, DC: Library of Congress).

[8] In Freudian symbolism, "Boxes, cases, chests, cupboards and ovens represent the uterus, and also hollow objects, ships, and vessels of all kinds." See Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams (1900-1901)," *SE*, vol. V (1900-1901): *The Interpretation of Dreams (Second Part) and On Dreams* 354.

[9] I am here borrowing from psychoanalyst Melanie Klein. Klein spoke specifically about fertility as that sign of inner vitality (and about infertility as arousing the fear of "inner deadness"); see Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1995) 99. I permitted myself to apply her insight more generally: my reading suggests the male speaker's resistance to recognizing the mechanisms of birth or his insistence on substituting it with the operation of another "inside" bodily system.

[10] See, for example, *The Smith & Van Dyke Arabic Version of the Bible of the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 11 May 2013 <http://www.copticchurch.net/cgibin/bible/>.

[11] In English translations of the Bible one can find both "womb" and "bowles." The *New English Bible*, for instance, translates Psalms 71.6 as "From birth I have leaned upon thee, my protector since I left my mother's womb," whereas *King James Bible* translates this Psalm as "By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels; my praise shall be continually of thee."

[12] His visit there by an angel is sometimes identified with the beginning of revelation. See: T.H. Weir and W. Montgomery Watt, "Ḥirāʾ," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs, Second ed.

[13] According to Muslim tradition, a spider once saved Muḥammad from a great danger when it camouflaged, with its web, the entrance to a cave in which Muḥammad and Abū Bakr had sought refuge at the year of the *Hijrah* (622 A.D.). Seeing the spider web, the Koreish people who pursued the two gave up the search, believing that no one could have entered the cave a short time previously. See J. Ruska, "Ankabūt," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs, Second ed. A similar story is told about King David in the Hebraic *Midrash Aleph-bet de-Ben Sira*.

[14] See Rayyan al-Shawaf, "An Interview with Sargon Boulus," *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 29.1-2 (2006): 32-33, 35-36, 39, 41, also see: Margaret Obank, "'It Just Grabbed Me, This Magic of Words, of Music': Iraqi Poet Sargon Boulus Talks to Banipal's Editor," *Banipal: Magazine of Modern Arab Literature* 1998.

[15] Obank, "'It Just Grabbed Me, This Magic of Words, of Music': Iraqi Poet Sargon Boulus Talks to Banipal's Editor," 14. The image bears strange similarity to the one conjured up in the poem: the drunkard in Noah's ark as the writer swamped by the flood of language echoes the figure of the poem's intoxicated speaker, the poet's loss of control over language, and language itself as a raging sea (a storm). Being engulfed by the "mad flowing rhythm of language" that drags everything it encounters on its way is nothing but writing itself, poetry's swallowing the poet, who, in the poem before us, tries to gain control over language by himself swallowing poetry (see next). The tension between mastery/control and losing/loosening one's grip on language is central to Boulus's conception of the creative process. I thank Artemis Leontis for drawing my attention to the similarities between the poem's and the quotation's figurative languages.

[16] This formulation was inspired by F. Garber, "The Structure of Romantic Decadence," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 1 (1973): 85.

[17] In *The Pleasure of the Text* asks Roland Barthes: "Does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of our erotic body."

[18] My formulation is influenced by Melanie Klein's view of "oral greed" (the desire "to possess and control") and envious aggression (a fantasized destruction) as two opposite responses to the infant's helplessness at the breast, a source of goodness "so powerful and important, able to make such an enormous difference in his experience, yet outside his control." See Mitchell and Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* 99-100.

[19] "Then I saw a hand stretched out to me, holding a scroll. He unrolled it before me, and it was written all over on both sides with dirges and laments and words of woe. Then he said to me, 'Man, eat what is in front of you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the Israelites.' So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said, 'Man, swallow this scroll I give you, and fill yourself full.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey." Ezekiel 2.9-10 – 3.1-3, *New English Bible*.

[20] "Certain regions of the body," writes Freud, "such as the mucous membrane of the mouth and anus, seem, as it were, to be claiming that they should themselves be regarded and treated as genitals" Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905)," *SE*, vol. VII (1901-1905): *A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works* 152-53. Suggested in this is "the possibility of the anus to be symbolically like the vagina in its ability to usher in new life, in its ability to be creative"; Alexandra Hoffman, A Fan of the Fanny: The Golden Bow(E)L as a Treatise for Men's Penetrability, Unpublished Manuscript, University of Michigan, Department of Comparative Literature, 14.

[21] The English Simple Present ("a hooker we haggle with") is my translation of the Arabic future tense, which suggests repetition and habit.

[22] For psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and her disciples, the dialectic of introjection and projection "provides the very basis for the distinction between inside and outside." See Mary Jacobus, *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading*, Clarendon Lectures in English Literature (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 23.

[23] While my ideas were developed independently, my formulations were enriched by reading Garber, "The Structure of Romantic Decadence."

[24] In the reality outside the poem, this may have not been a true dilemma for Boulus, for whom the purity of Arabic, in which he writes, is an imaginary construct: "Arab history, Assyrian history, Armenian history, all the peoples, all their languages poured into the Arabic language. The Arabic language is probably 70 per cent Syriac, Aramaic, even Sanskrit, and other languages, so there is no pure language in this sense. […] So, when I write my poetry in Arabic […], sometimes I feel that I am really writing in all these languages" Obank, "'It Just Grabbed Me, This Magic of Words, of Music': Iraqi Poet Sargon Boulus Talks to Banipal's Editor," 10. The multiplicity encapsulated in Babel may thus be, for Boulus, less a cause of desolation and more an anchor in the reality of his life in Iraq before he had left it.

[25] *Bābili* is Babylonia's Assyrian name; see, in numerous appearances, *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination*, Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society, vol. 12 (Berkeley: U of California P).

[26] The play on the meaning of "bayt" is only possible thanks to the use, in line 16, of the singular form. "Bayt" is the singular both of the plural "buyūt", houses, and "abyāt," verse (stanzas).

[27] "I've never stopped thinking of my country or longing to see it. America for me is a place to live, a home, but not a homeland […]. And at the same time, as Thomas Wolfe knew, you can't go home again. The Arabic language, which is the umbilical cord that ties me to my people and my history, is the only true home I have." al-Shawaf, "An Interview with Sargon Boulus," 54.

[28] I thank Anton Shammas for bringing this allusion to my view.

[29] One of these fellow-poets may be the poem's very speaker, confessing to her cheating. That he finds himself running away and under threat can be read in the light of the story's earlier and later events: upon returning to his palace, one of the king brothers orders the death of all slave men who had sinned with his own wife and caused him his misfortune.

[30] Told more briefly, as some of the relevant images/details have already been discussed in length.

[31] Boulus might as well be alluding (especially through the word "ancient") to the belief, deeply ingrained among the early Arabs, that "every great poet had a *shayṭān* [Satan] of whom he [is] merely the mouthpiece" and that "poetic inspiration [is] demonic in origin"—a piece of folklore that captures the sense of poetry's mysterious origination, untamable nature, and frightening effects. The word is thus associated with the poet's inner world of demons, the world of autonomous (unconscious?) forces that operate in the text even against the author's will. *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P).

Another association is of course to the Pandora Box, where the bride might be hiding her Luciferian powers. It should be noted, however, that the Arabic word for "box" as in the compound "Pandora Box" is likely to be *'ulbah* rather than *ṣandūq* (though the latter might appear as well). For this reason, this interpretive trajectory is not developed further. Also worth of a note here is Freud's essay on the Theme of the Three Caskets. The third casket, sometimes replaced by a third woman (out of three women who are also associated with the Moerae, the three Fates of the Greek mythology), becomes identified with death through her dumbness. See Sigmund Freud, "The Aetiology of Hysteria," *SE*.

[32] For either obsoleteness or negligence—reasons both relevant here.

[33] If the Tower of Babel signifies, as it was presented in my third reading, the voices of former female lovers, then the female is also a language and not merely a word.

[34] In the story, the demon rests his head on the woman's lap; her cheatings take place during his sleep and thus he remains unaware of them. In my allusion here, I use this episode for the image of the demon's peaceful sleep disregarding the original context.

AFTERWORD

This dissertation sought to provide an in-depth look into the attempt, made by three 20th-century displaced poets, to establish in writing a thread of continuity to a "place of origin" through which the viability and meaningfulness of the literary enterprise could be reassured. This longed-for place of origin emerged, in the literary analyses, to be incompatible with poetry's verbal means: a mute target of desire to be imagined and approximated but eventually renounced as that which both impedes writing and is impeded by it. The written poem becomes a mark of a language wanted for what it is, for being (simply?) the realm in which a poem comes to exist: language is that which substitutes for the unreachable but that can be desired as such, as what relies within reach. The text, we come to realize, participates in a metaphysics of absence, accepted not as the consummation of an original desire (in every sense) but rather, and perhaps only retrospectively, as its mundane replacement. This is Leyvik's, Celan's, and Boulus's struggle: not to inhabit language or domesticate it, but rather to want nothing more than it gives. This struggle involves the recognition that whatever resides beyond the signifier cannot be thought of as the poem's immediate source. A center of gravity, yes; a fountainhead of inspiration, possibly. But *as writing*, poetry comes from elsewhere.

The multiplicity of "origins" that are sought for in the poems—psychic origins (chapter 1), experiential origins (chapter 2), divine and historical-cultural origins (chapter 3), and linguistic/poetic ones (chapter 4)—supports the postulation that the experience of displacement, shared by Leyvik, Celan, and Boulus (notwithstanding each poet's particular circumstances),[1] is

central to determining the poems' concentration on the question of rootedness in the broad sense and to shaping their internal textual dynamics. The limited number of the poems studied here—poems that were written, furthermore, many years after their authors' displacement[2] (which, because of the complicated circumstances, cannot be traced to a single moment in time)—does not allow this postulation to become a generalization, leaving open many of the questions that initiated this research—questions, indeed, about the ways in which linguistic practices mediate the construction of selfhood and belonging, about the vicissitudes of language outside of "its" place, and about the exchange of signifiers as the displaced poet's capital. Still, the study foregrounds phenomena that might deserve further contemplation and research.

The chapters' arrangement according to the chronological order of the poems' publication dates foregrounds a certain change that can be aligned with broader trends in Western literature of the twentieth century. In this I mean primarily the transition from modernism to post-modernism as reflected in the transition from a depth model of origination (chapter 1) to a surface model (chapter 4) and from the psyche to the plain text. If "Mima'amakim," in chapter 1, represents a poetry incumbent upon the presence of a speaking subject and the striving for extracting "authentic," intimate poetry from this subject's psychic labyrinths, then "Ṣandūq, ʿArūs, fī al-Fajr, Ilá Mīnāʾ," in chapter 4, represents an "automatic" textual reproduction where the self, no longer the authoritative source of speech, is substituted with the autonomous mechanisms of the body-text. Introspection and self-reflection, which in Leyvik give the poem its suggestive kinetic scheme of descent and ascent, give way, in Boulus, to a "mindless" game of assembling, disassembling, and reassembling by means of which the poem's very existence comes to be questioned, even before any poetic "insight" is gained.

That both Leyvik and Boulus "return to language," that both accept language as this surface on which they operate, should not blur the important differences between them. Language has always been a "flat" medium and the modernist is a "master in deciphering" it, in reading the surface layer in which the signifier is embedded. And yet his goal is to interpret, to derive the latent (the "deep") from the manifest (Ophir 158). The postmodernist, in contrast, sees the signified as existing only on the surface, as part and parcel of the signifier, the latter both representing and constituting it (Ophir). Leyvik takes a step towards a *post*modernist awareness to the extent that he (in words I borrow from Frederic Jameson) deconstructs his own aesthetic of expression by underscoring the immanent, irreparable gap between his epistemology and his medium (the designated depths versus the two-dimensionality of the paper) (Jameson 14). Still, "Mima'amakim" is articulated in terms of a topography of surface and depth, "top" and "bottom"—a topography of the search for revelation and disclosure, we could say—whereas "Ṣandūq" operates in a geography of "here" and "there," "part" and "whole" which are all on the surface of the text. Boulus's poem is made of "islands" of text differing from each other in their length and shape and separated by gaps in logic; it renounces the closure of thematic cohesion, allowing the semi-automated processes of the body-text to become the poem's "place" of origination and its unifying force, but unity (and "origin") is always transitional. This poem lacks, I want to say, the kind of homogeneity and synthesis that Leyvik's poem achieves through its clustering around the word "Mima'amakim," around the voicing of this inner refrain,[3] and through its continuous mode of questioning. Boulus does not allow the subject position to settle down onto certain signifieds: a woman is a word is a trousseau; desire is not merely the poet's but language's as well. Surely enough, a readerly interpretation is itself the creation of a depth

structure (unless it rejects all kinds of symbolism). But in Boulus, interpretation can only attest to the impossibility of achieving closure.

Between Leyvik and Boulus, Celan captures something akin to a middle position. As Ulrich Baer writes: "Celan's poems […] are marked by the realization that introspection itself is curtailed by the disappearance of stable conceptual horizons under which our experiences could once be organized" ("Fractured" 6). As I claimed in chapter 2, to the extent that modernism is defined as a "crisis in representation" (in articulating of what lies beyond the *cogito*), Celan's work, with its testimonial impetus, diverts from the modernist project. Yet his poems do cluster around particular images (some occurring frequently in his poetry) and his mistrust of language's expressive capacity is manifested still within a symbolic language that seems to call for the right key.

But there is another source of difficulty in positioning Celan on the same historical curve that connects Leyvik and Boulus and which has to do with the place of the Holocaust as a crisis that hastens a transition from faith in language's expressive capacity to deep suspicion of it. For some, the Holocaust's place within this historical succession—was it the consummation of modernity (a project of "distinctively modern touch," in Zygmunt Bauman's words)[4] or a deviation from it?—is yet unsettled, though many agree that its effects on language were profound and radical in nature.[5] Whether one locates the Holocaust in the midst of the twentieth century's narrative of cultural history or outside it, whether one considers it a singular event by which the narrative of modernity as progress collapsed or one of several events through which certain cultural conditions were replaced by others that elicited new artistic and literary responses, the question remains open of the extent to which poems written following the Holocaust and in response to it should be read entirely within the frame of literary criticism. Art,

even Celan's, should be allowed to survive as art; but should it be contemplated through the *same* critical lenses and analyzed in the *same* critical terms prevalent in more mundane discourses (such as those about "modernism" and "postmodernism")? What, indeed, if Western modernity and its vicissitudes are exchanged for a different kind of periodization, a more particular national-ethnic one (such as the history of European Jews from the Enlightenment and on)? Different historical lenses would produce different understandings of continuity and break, and the frame suggested here is only one of several possible frames among which there may be more satisfactory ones.

Celan's poems discussed in chapter 3 stand out in another respect that I would like to acknowledge here. Language, in the three poems discussed in conjunction in that chapter, emerges not merely as humans' mundane possession but rather as a domain through which humans participate, by prayer and ritual, in the divine. The language of prayer belongs to God to the same extent that it belongs to its subjects; and by dint of this shared possession, precisely, Celan need not compromise his relation to the divine origin when stepping into poetry. Whereas Leyvik and Boulus and Celan's own "Tübingen, Jänner" grapple with non-verbal or mute or silent "sources" that writing cannot incorporate, Celan's project in "Mandorla," "Hawdalah," and "Die Schleuse" is stipulated on language's *connection* and *proximity* to the godly origins of the sacred tongue, this tongue of which God, in prayer, is also a target. The Hebrew word of prayer is God's self-adoration. But when Celan returns to god the word of prayer, he returns it re-consecrated. The emanation of light that symbolizes divine abundance, God's nourishing of the human world, comes to find its new origin in that world (the mundane: a new source of sacredness) at the same time that Hebrew is returned to its Godly origin as a word of condemnation.

What can be said about the choice to adhere to the mother tongue? Does this choice, made by three poets separated by time, place, language, and cultural roots, suggest the fundamental appeal of the project of root-making in both modern and postmodern times (I use these terms here as a shorthand for marking the disparate cultural conditions of the early-mid and late twentieth century)? Does this choice, and the desire that it both represents and fosters, imply that the concept of the subject (yes, even in Boulus's poem) is eventually indispensible for poetry and for its study? Or is the subject an effect of displacement, or of writing? Surely, writing "is produced by *someone* as opposed to no one (in Caren Kaplan words, 114, following Edward Said). But is the desire to reach a point of beginning, a moment of existential and epistemological certainty that would guarantee authentic and meaningful literary creation—is it an entirely human desire, spurred by objective conditions (such as displacement), or is it, rather, a hidden desire propelling any work of verbal art by dint of the lack instilled in us by our symbolic existence? Is the search for an "origin," in other words, an effect of language (or of a displaced language)? Jacques Derrida, in his *Monolingualism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin*, says something of this sort when inquiring into human beings' sense of "alienation" from language. The sense of dispossession, of being unable to own language ("I speak this language but it is not mine"), is phantasmatic in nature, claims Derrida (25), for there is no alienable self that precedes writing; rather, by allowing us to hear ourselves articulating our thoughts, language constructs an "I" whose felt alienation is nothing more than the after- effect of the utterance. Expression, in other words, precedes the birth of *ipseity*: the "I am" follows the "I can" (14, 29). Can the "origin" that has come to play such a key role in this study be, like "identity" for Derrida, a thing forming itself "at the site of a *situation* that cannot be found, a site always referring elsewhere, to something other" (29)? Might there have been no "beginning" before the

beginning of writing and other than the one presenting itself as that which speech needs to stem from? Which is to ask: to what extent is writing the transmitter of something that precedes it (an intention, a desire) and to what extent is it a place of creation the products of which are then projected onto the past?[6] Can we talk, indeed, about the "poetics of the mother tongue" as steered by the individual poet—or is the quest for "origins" the expression of the already-alienated subject position? To answer these questions might require more than a literary study can offer.

As for this particular study, it finds its origins in the metaphor of the text, or writing, as a home—a recurrent trope in essayistic works by displaced authors. The various articulations of this metaphor differ subtly but significantly: *writing* can be a dwelling place thanks to the need for self-engagement and its oblivious or reassuring or soothing effect. The *text* or the *book* can be one's fatherland by dint of its enduring spiritual presence and inspiration. *Language* can be one's "home" because language is our *Umwelt*, the world that surrounds us and in which we are enmeshed, a world that language has come to encompass, allowing words and their sounds to conjure up for us a local, shared, familiar milieu. Inhabiting poetry, or living in it, or dwelling in it, differs from all these. The *poem* can be a home by forming this tangible object to which one can go back, since returning is itself "part of the ritual of remembering" (in André Aciman's words, "Shadow Cities" 27). Its aesthetic garb creates the distance by dint of which we both recognize ourselves and come to assume an attenuated version of our tribulations (a Lacanian mirror effect). But writing, or the text, or language, or poetry can be a place of dwelling because dwelling is possible, eventually, only within the realms of the known. For a long time now I have been preoccupied with the metaphor of language as a habitat (in its different variations) until I recently came to realize that the metaphor's act of pointing out is more important than the thing pointed at. The center of the metaphor resides not in its missing sign, "poetry" (this sign we can

only articulate through a metaphoric circumvention), but rather in the act of signifying, in an attribution made *in certain terms*. It is the home, I want to say, that we should read and re-read here. To talk about language as a home or as a place of dwelling means that one finds in it familiarity and intimacy (not necessarily devoid of conflict). We might continue not knowing exactly what poetry is: the metaphor, by its nature, translates the unknown into the terms of the known, asserting similarity but not identity. But what needs emphasis here is the act of pointing to language (or to poetry, or to the text) as to something familiar. We come back to poetry from its "beyond" as to an old acquaintance, with the recognition both of the force of circumstances and of the need for acceptance.

Notes

[1] Leyvik, as already mentioned, emigrated to the United States after escaping, within Europe, from the exile to which he was sentenced by the oppressive Czarist regime; Celan left his hometown of Czernowitz, which, after WWII, he could no longer endure, settling in Paris after a period of self-search in Bucharest and in Vienna; Boulus was banished from Lebanon, a country to which he entered illegally, and from which he was able quite incidentally to leave for the United States.

[2] This time gap poses, of course, further constraints on the claim for displacement's influence on the poems.

[3] In many of Leyvik's poems, repeated single words, expressions, and even particular sounds form an inner refrain that accentuates key aspects of the literary work and allows it to express fine subtleties of emotion. See Niger, *H. Leyyiḳ* 139-41.

[4] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011) 219.

[5] Berl Lang's essay "Language and Genocide" is only the most paramount example. See Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* 81-102.

[6] On writing as a place of origination see Niva Arav's study of Derrida's work: Niva Arav, *Margins of Desire: The Foundations of Derrida's Social Ethics* (Boca Raton, FL: Dissertation.Com, 2010). A detour through Deconstruction is beyond my scope here.

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