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*Reflections of Reading: On Paul Celan and Peter Szondi**

Christoph König

Verloren war Unverloren,
das Herz ein befestigter Ort.

[things lost were things not lost,
the heart was a place made fast.]

Paul Celan, "Afternoon with Circus and Citadel"¹

Without rhythm, but constantly

Rarely is the weight evenly balanced within a correspondence. Out of the difference between the partners, the stronger one takes charge. "Thou"—*Du*—becomes a means to develop one's own subjectivity. In the letters of poets since modernity, this general feature of correspondence came to acquire an artistic quality. The foundation of modernist aesthetics rested upon the conviction that only in art could one fashion a life by giving it sense and direction. Letters thus became one more means employed by artists to creatively shape language, and these artists not only grew stronger in their own domain but were also able to make new, specifically formal demands on their partners. Poets used this correspondence as an early stage of their works and of the subject they constructed therein. In

* Translated by Michael Thomas Taylor.

1. Paul Celan, *Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 205. The translation of the poem's title is from Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2000), p. 183. [Trans. note: In general, texts not originally published in English will be cited according to available English translations. Where no translation is cited, translations are my own in cooperation with Christoph König.]

the letters that Rainer Maria Rilke exchanged with women, for instance, the poet ecstatically expanded his linguistic powers and sheltered, in an intensely sacral tone that was echoed by his partners, the newness of his poetry.

By means of these letters, a new idiom thus originates that nevertheless takes on highly different functions in the history of modern lyric. Paul Celan decidedly opposed a poetic-theological speculation that, grounded in tradition, still shapes the reception of his work today—be it that one sees particularly poetic speech as the ontological opening to a higher form of language or that one considers the decisions of the lyrical subject to disappear within an all-present textuality that deconstructs the sense of the text. Celan instead trusted the basic principle of hermeneutics, namely that nothing can be understood that has not already been perceived. In the process of creation, he was still interpreting. The procedure toward which he strove is paradoxical. On the one hand, that which comes to the poet's mind should already have been given a poetic form, that is to say, have been "understood"—as is the case, for instance, in the letters. But on the other hand, the poet himself changes that which he thus understands in favor of a better, more radical understanding. The aesthetic critique that allowed Celan to visibly distance himself, in his language, from all preliminary insights thus becomes a part of understanding. He created his own unique idiom: Celan did everything he could to increase his influence over the written and spoken language that was his material. The letters themselves were not as important as the mastery of language in general, and of the German language in particular, in a non-poetic, prosaic realm. His letters are not the letters of a poet but testify more generally of a faculty for language.

All of his letters refer to specific situations. They are concrete because, among other things, they differ from one partner to another. Exercises in poetics were only secondary, though his addressees helped him practice. These addressees played a specific role that Celan practically created for them, depending on the particular balance of power in each relationship. Behind everything stood Celan's conviction of the uniqueness of his work: especially when he was personally attacked, he defended himself with the impersonal claim that he was the only one speaking the truth. Empathy, sympathy, and small talk are thus mostly lacking in his letters. The topic was his literature, whether he spoke objectively about the reception of his work or subjectively as an expression of his own poetic creativity. Perhaps

the women he loved were able to grasp his idiomatic poems more quickly than others and so gain a kind of closeness to them in the private language of their letters—for instance, his wife, Gisèle Celan-Lestrange,² or his late friend Ilana Shmueli³ (the letters he exchanged with Ingeborg Bachmann, which were essential, are sealed). Franz Wurm was a partner with whom Celan needed daily exchange.⁴ Such comradely immediacy was missing between Celan and Peter Szondi, who was neither a *Du* nor a stranger. Though Szondi, too, wanted things this way, the distance he shared with Celan was of a different nature—more a kind of defense. Szondi took up the cause of people in addition to that of written words and tradition.

In order to intervene in language, Celan distanced himself from it to assert—from without—a thought by means of it and often against it. On August 11, 1961, he wrote a letter to Szondi that establishes the center of their correspondence; he concentrated his thoughts in one sentence that the Jew “is nothing but one human figure [*Gestalt*], yet a *figure* all the same.”⁵ Celan’s point of departure was his Jewishness, which gains its figure in the memory of the murder of the Jews and, through this figure, can become a precondition of the “human.” But which “figure” did Celan mean? He himself takes a stand toward the word “figure” [*Gestalt*], even graphically emphasizing it. Keeping with a long German tradition, the word means an organism that is constantly *changing*—often something higher and more beautiful, such as Helena, the “figure of all figures.”⁶ In the Nazi period, the word was given a heroically Germanic inflection: the political leaders were such “figures.” Against this inhumanity, Celan held up the humanity

2. Cf. Paul Celan and Gisèle Celan-Lestrange, *Briefwechsel: mit einer Auswahl von Briefen Paul Celans an seinen Sohn Eric*, trans. Eugen Helmlé, ed. Bertrand Badiou with Eric Celan (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001).

3. Cf. Paul Celan and Ilana Shmueli, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Ilana Shmueli and Thomas Sparr (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004).

4. Paul Celan and Franz Wurm, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann with Franz Wurm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995).

5. Paul Celan and Peter Szondi, *Briefwechsel: mit Briefen von Gisèle Celan-Lestrange an Peter Szondi und Auszügen aus dem Briefwechsel zwischen Peter Szondi und Jean und Mayotte Bollack*, ed. Christoph König (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), Letter 52, p. 40. Individual letters from this collection will be cited as “Letter” along with their corresponding number.

6. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust: Texte*, ed. Albrecht Schöne, in *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, vol. 7, bk. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1984), V. 8907. Cf. Christoph König, “Wissensvorstellungen in Goethes Faust II,” *Euphorion* 93 (1999): 227–49.

of constancy, of that which does not change. This was the thought that he formed outside of language: in addition to practice and situation, irony became another sign of his mastery over language, acquiring a particular character from his Jewish non-belonging (German was foreign to both Celan and Szondi, but in different ways). This was where Celan wanted to bring Szondi.

Paul Celan (1920–70) and Peter Szondi (1929–71) exchanged over one hundred letters, postcards, telegrams, and dedications from 1959 until Celan's death. Still a leading figure of literary scholarship today, Szondi was born as the son of the psychiatrist Leopold Szondi, the founder of the phenomenological analysis of fate [*Schicksalsanalyse*]. The family barely escaped the National Socialist murder of the Hungarian Jews: they were rescued, first from Budapest and then out of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp into Switzerland, where Szondi studied in Zürich. His first book, *Theory of the Modern Drama* (1956), made him famous.⁷ He then turned to the topic of tragedy—his *Habilitationsschrift* (the second work required to teach at a German university) from the year 1961 is entitled *An Essay on the Tragic*⁸—and to the Romantic philosophy of art, above all to French poets, to Hölderlin and Celan. Szondi received an early call to a position at the Free University in Berlin, where he fought—in the spirit of 1968—for the institutional and political fundamentals of his philology. But the intellectual center of his engagement and his research lay elsewhere. This is already evident from his friendships with Celan and Jean Bollack, Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem. This was an “outside” that he himself chose and set up within himself—an outside that originated out of an ethical decision.

Although the exchange between Celan and Szondi does not exhibit any real continuity, individual phases can be clearly discerned, which, bound to places, gain their own topical meaning: the first meetings in Paris and Sils (1959); the Goll Affair and, orchestrated from Zürich, Szondi's struggle

7. Peter Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama: A Critical Edition*, ed. and trans. Michael Hays (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987). As with Celan, Szondi's texts will be quoted according to published English translations except where noted. The original German texts are collected in the two-volume *Schriften*, ed. Jean Bollack (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), as well as in the five-volume *Studienausgabe der Vorlesungen*, ed. Jean Bollack (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973–75).

8. Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002).

for Celan (1960–61, with a replay in the summer of 1961); two cancelled visits by Celan to Heidelberg and Lausanne; Celan's letters about his travels, written after an almost unbroken pause in the correspondence caused by both Celan's treatment in a psychiatric clinic and a lasting depression from which Szondi suffered until the beginning of 1964; then in 1965–66, Szondi's advice to Celan in the question of whether Celan should switch to the Suhrkamp publishing house; another long interruption, again caused by Celan's illness; and a last climax with Celan's visit to Berlin in 1967, which had been in planning for over a year. Celan occasionally reflected upon the sense of this topography in order to measure the distance to Germany that he shared with Szondi but also the difference between them, between the Jew from Czernowitz and the Jew from the more western city of Budapest. On December 7, 1961, when Celan wrote to Szondi, Szondi represented the professor of German in Heidelberg: "But Heidelberg—this seems, if all glorious student days do not deceive, to lie in the most restful way between, meaning that I could, between Hesse and Swabia, still chat away several leisurely eastern to central European hours with you. But I cannot name for you—and here things are becoming pronouncedly *east* European—the time (down to the last dot), I will call you [*Sie*] or, [inserted: "as it is said in Helvetic, *Ihnen*—"] from Frankfurt."⁹ The places from which they write are often themselves the idiomatic meaning of their letters.

The idiomatic usage of names, words, rhetorical expressions, and sentences took the place of news or tried to dominate it. The two men barely explored the things dear to both of them, such as Celan's poetry or Szondi's writings, Szondi's political struggles at the university, or both of their illnesses.¹⁰ Celan furthermore almost never wrote about his works. At the most, he shared himself only if necessary to combat a refusal of the other to understand him: for him, this resistance constituted a real situation with which he could engage. In this sense, this situation belonged to his creativity and was not meant to be disturbed by explication. (This changed later; he began to occasionally interpret his poems and accepted suggestions for changes, for example, in 1967 from Wurm for the poem "Think of it" ["*Denk dir*"]¹¹ or from Szondi).¹² Szondi visibly accommodated

9. Letter 55, p. 42.

10. For exceptions, see Letters 97 and 98.

11. Celan and Wurm, *Briefwechsel*, p. 77.

12. Cf. Letter 98.

himself to the silence: instead of communication, the letters thus often exhibit a dramatic scene, even a comedy, featuring a Celan who is decidedly aggressive without crossing a certain point in order to avoid injuring Szondi. The thought upon which Celan insisted took control of the letters and their language; poetry sought to violently assert itself in Szondi's life. The foundations of this thought were not so much a sheer desire for power as Celan's conviction that a transformed, "false" speech gained a sense of its own by reflecting the way in which traditional language is always already false. He signed one draft of a letter: "Paul Antschel, *false* Paul Celan."¹³

The idiomatic speech of this correspondence developed in the space of an agon. Celan and Szondi reacted sensitively and precisely to one another. When Szondi accidentally signed with his last name, Celan soon replied by expressly striking the name "Celan" and writing "Paul" next to it.¹⁴ Or they bandied expressions back and forth: when Celan wrote "the Jeune Parque is now taking revenge, my quill has refused its services since my return,"¹⁵ Szondi replied that he, the interpreter, had no fate watching him whom it might be risky to name: "My quill has also gone over to those refusing their duty, and I lack even the comfort of knowing who or what is thus taking revenge."¹⁶ They gave each other tasks and refused them: at the height of the Goll Affair, Szondi suggested that Celan should put together some notes for an article to be given to Gody Suter, the head of the arts section in the Swiss paper *Weltwoche*, which Celan rebuffed with the words: "I also have work to do."¹⁷ This, too, was thus a topic. They obstinately weighed their work against each other; in the final paragraph of many letters, for instance, Szondi almost rhetorically names his own lectures and books.¹⁸ Szondi saw in Celan the great poet, and at the same time he asserted himself. From Szondi's perspective, this duality was the condition for speaking clearly—as if to say: "I am at your service, because I admire you, but I am not your servant."

That is, until Celan decided the relative rank of their works by giving one word a new meaning: "Have my thanks, Peter, for your book. When I have returned to Paris (where a real reading-time will begin for me),

13. Letter 61, p. 48.

14. Cf. Letters 97 and 100.

15. Letter 6, p. 11.

16. Letter 7, p. 12.

17. Letter 42, p. 33.

18. For example, in Letters 29, 33, 43, and 74.

I shall read it carefully."¹⁹ Only after writing poetry was there time for books that would not be "read" in the way that books are usually "read."²⁰ The lecture that Szondi delivered upon taking up his professorship, "Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin,"²¹ was the only instance in which Celan voiced a dedication: "To Peter Szondi / after reading his inaugural lecture, / with moved [*ergriffenen*] thoughts and / sincere greetings / 11.10.61 / Paul Celan."²² Celan did not mean to express a feeling but rather joined two "names"—names in the sense of words that had been reinterpreted. His "thoughts" are bound to the historical event that he grasps [*greifen*, with writing hands]—having grasped [*gegriffen*] the destruction of the Jews. By the time Szondi received this dedication, he had already decided to take up Celan's cause. His lecture ended by remarking how deceptive Benjamin's hope proved to be—that is, Benjamin's hope that his collection of letters "German Men and Women" (1936) might still reach blinded Germans and Jews, and that his book—as an ark—might save them.²³ The ark, Szondi concluded, "sailed forth in the hope that it could reach even those who viewed as a fecund inundation what was in truth the Flood."²⁴

If Szondi at first showed himself to be up to Celan's level and capable of defending himself, he eventually lost the usual dialectic sharpness of his thinking and regularly invoked his own world: he, too, had his difficulties, published, led his own life. This change was rooted in Szondi's historical and psychological disposition, which also made him receptive to Celan's concise literary demands. That which maintained his own strength, his sharpness, weakened him against the poet. Celan recognized this. He saw in Szondi more a representative of the literary sphere than the academic world—in contrast to Beda Allemann, the protector of poetry (in the tradition of Heidegger²⁵) and the university professor whom Celan entrusted with the "institution" of the complete edition of his works. Not without reason was Szondi a friend of Ingeborg Bachmann, who developed an

19. Letter 52, p. 40.

20. On the semantics of "reading," see also Letters 61, 62, and 70.

21. Peter Szondi, "Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin," in *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 145–59.

22. Letter 53, p. 41.

23. Walter Benjamin, "German Men and Women: A Sequence of Letters," in *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), pp. 167–235.

24. Szondi, "Hope in the Past," p. 159.

25. Cf. Beda Allemann, *Hölderlin und Heidegger* (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1954).

appreciation of his *Habilitationsschrift*, "An Essay on the Tragic," in terms of her own poetics.²⁶

Szondi, too, attempted to organize his life, almost artistically, around a single point so as to fight off his melancholy and his own history.²⁷ His writings reconstruct in a rare way the (objective) sense of literary objects that particularly touched him, the interpreter, as a human being—from drama to the small, pithy line "La syntaxe est une faculté de l'âme." This sentence belonged to the aphorisms that Szondi chose and translated for the volume *Paul Valéry, Windstriche: Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen* [*Gusts of Wind: Notes and Aphorisms*]: "Syntax is a faculty of the soul."²⁸ Szondi chose this aphorism because the thought struck the core of his person; and in choosing what struck him, he underscored Valéry's thoughts. The idea that the soul could express itself poetically because the strictness of syntax is proper to it shows that the conditions created by syntax in its artificial "world" can prevail in the soul. In the style of his prose, Szondi possessed "syntax." Yet if he were able to sharpen his senses by beholding himself in the object, not every object could form him in such a controlled artistic, cathartic way. Only "objects" that had chosen strict procedure as their own law could function thus. He found such objects above all in literature and theater, especially favoring works from Racine to French Symbolism and Proust. He and Celan shared this kind of reading as their primary occupation.²⁹ Their friendship took place in the realm of literature.

The correspondence was not determined by an exchange between Celan and Szondi, nor by a rhythm of letters guided by an exchange, but rather by an intention bound neither to time nor to changing events. The letters gain a positivity and a trenchant tone of their own: it is *constancy* that unfolds in the obstinacy of idiomatic speech. The constancy that Szondi later praised in Celan's translation of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 105 found its form of life in faithfulness.³⁰ When Szondi declined to interpret

26. Cf. Christoph König with Andreas Isenschmidt, *Engführungen: Peter Szondi und die Literatur* (*Marbacher Magazin* 108), 2nd rev. ed. (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2005), pp. 46f.

27. Cf. König, *Engführungen*, pp. 4–13.

28. Peter Szondi, *Paul Valéry, Windstriche: Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen* (Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag, 1959).

29. "Lektüren und Lektionen" was the name of a collection of Szondi's scholarly essays that he planned and which was posthumously published in 1972.

30. Peter Szondi, "The Poetry of Constancy: Paul Celan's Translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 105," in *Celan Studies*, trans. Susan Bernofsky with Harvey Mendelsohn (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003), pp. 1–26.

a poem by Celan for Hilde Domin's book project *Double Interpretations*, she replied by speaking, in the words of Albert Camus, of the wrong that could be inflicted by the abused.³¹ It is better, Szondi replied, to be a victim than an executioner. He wrote on May 14, 1965: "We are all survivors, and each of us tries in his own way to deal with this humiliation. The faithfulness that you would have me abandon is perhaps one way. . . . It is precisely also because Celan is a victim that I stand by him—it mystifies me that you would use Camus's words against me."³²

Correspondence of three and four

A commentary usually reconstructs what was familiar to the partners in a correspondence, namely the world that is no longer known. Here, by contrast, a unique intention *not* to name certain things opposes the forgetting that a traditional commentary seeks to counteract. In this intention, a "figure" originates that—from a distance—creates the historically determinable sense of each passage. "Allow me to address these few lines to you today in a completely sober matter," Szondi wrote in order to mark the difference in register.³³ Just before this line, Szondi had written: "Dear Mr. Celan, you are still present in our discussions and our thoughts."³⁴ Yet this line is wholly different. This "presence" itself was meant to guarantee to Celan that the discussions were discussions in support of his position—something that Celan decidedly doubted.

Part of the life that anarchically unfolds in the commentary against the text of the letters, as if it gave the text its correct meaning, is Szondi's correspondence with a third person: namely, the scholar of ancient Greek Jean Bollack (born 1923), occasionally also with his wife, the Latinist Mayotte Bollack (born 1928), or with both of them together. Between 1959 and Szondi's death in 1972, he exchanged more than three hundred letters with the Bollacks, more than with anyone else.³⁵ Time and time again they returned to the topic of their common friend, Paul Celan. During the long interruptions in the correspondence between Szondi and Celan, their conversation continued via the Bollacks with news that was meant to be passed along or with explanations of things that Celan only indirectly

31. Hilde Domin, *Doppelinterpretationen: Das zeitgenössische deutsche Gedicht zwischen Autor und Leser* (Frankfurt am Main and Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1966).

32. Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach, A: Domin.

33. Letter 23, p. 18.

34. Letter 21, p. 18.

35. The originals are in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach.

hinted at. In this regard, these letters are also a part of the correspondence between Szondi and Celan.³⁶

This triangle existed from the very first letter onward, in which one reads: "I am staying with Jean Bollack"; and already during the first visit between all three, Celan wanted to exert his influence over it.³⁷ On the recommendation of Bernhard Böschstein, Szondi came to Paris in early 1959 from Zürich, where he met Jean Bollack and, later, Mayotte. Szondi visited Celan for the first time on April 8, 1959, in Celan's apartment in the Rue de Longchamp; he soon planned a second visit together with Jean Bollack, and on Sunday, April 26, 1959, they both visited Celan. At the time, Celan was finishing the manuscript for the volume *Osip Mandelstam: Poems*, which he "rendered [*übertragen*] from the Russian." The book was published that year by S. Fischer.³⁸ Celan reflected upon the situation of the three of them together and left his mark by reading one of these poems aloud to the classical philologist and the literary scholar: "Insomnia. Homer," from Mandelstam's first volume of poetry, *Stone*.³⁹ Celan placed the understanding of literary works at the center of the triangle with Szondi and Bollack and chose, with translation, its most radical form.

This was Celan's thought: for one poet to translate another, he must hear what counted for the other. But what counted usually lies hidden. In order, nevertheless, to speak "in the matter of another," the reading should in fact fail, thus becoming aware of the difference between what was said and the transformation that the literary translator has brought about.⁴⁰ In this new interpretation, so Celan argues, the poems acquire their particularity: they develop a defense against themselves, that is to say, against

36. Passages dedicated to Celan have been chronologically interpolated into the commentary of Celan and Szondi, *Briefwechsel*, as additional letters (cited hereafter as "Additional Letters" along with their corresponding number).

37. Letter 1, p. 9.

38. Osip Mandelstam, *Gedichte, aus dem Russischen übertragen von Paul Celan* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1959).

39. Osip Mandelstam, *Kamen*, 2nd ed. (1916); cf. *Osip Mandelstam's Stone*, trans. and intr. by Robert Tracy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980); see also Christoph König, "Schlaflosigkeit. Homer: Celan, die Philologen und Mandelstamm," in *Antike in Sicht: Strandgut aus dem Deutschen Literaturarchiv (Marbacher Magazin 107)*, ed. Jochen Meyer (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2004), pp. 48–51.

40. Paul Celan, *Der Meridian: Endfassung, Entwürfe, Materialien*, ed. Bernhard Böschstein and Heino Schmull, with Michael Schwarzkopf and Christiane Wittkop (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1999), 31b.

the hollow chattering [*Gerede*] into which their language degrades if it remains uncontrolled and unmastered—compulsively so when the poems do not shrink back from their own abyss. When reading comes to a stop, it is on the right path. It is in this sense that Celan translated Mandelstam's poem—obstinately in the sense of the author and his Jewishness.

Already on June 2, 1960, Szondi wrote Celan, mindful of the double doctrine of ethics and critique: "The deep impression that the poem 'Insomnia. Homer . . .' left on me on that Sunday afternoon last year, when you read it to me and Jean Bollack, makes itself felt again and again while I read your book—as does the memory of our last discussions, which of course also intensely occupies me."⁴¹ These discussions were about Jewishness and probably also about the Goll Affair. In the correspondence between the three of them (in addition to the few letters between Celan and Bollack, one must also include many telephone conversations, walks in Paris and in the Alps, as well as visits that Bollack partly recorded), the beginnings of a Celan-philology already manifest themselves that pose the question of the hour: how can the poet's solidarity—for example, with Mandelstam—be renewed?

Not until long after Celan's death did Bollack take up Szondi's experimental *Celan Studies*, which are situated between the history of philosophy, textuality in the sense of deconstruction, and hermeneutics—that is, within the field of a *literary* hermeneutics that responds to the historical decisions of the author as they are preserved in the language that he used. In the idiom of Celan's poems, Bollack discovered the poet's means of taking a stand toward language, and he analyzed the system at the foundation of this idiom, namely, the possibility for the lyric subject to constitute itself in a thou, a *Du*.⁴² The motivation that drove Celan to send traditional language through the "chasm" and thereby "resemanticize" it thus became crucial. Szondi had already recognized this motivation—in spite of his own initial theses. Celan wanted to respond to the destruction of the Jews,

41. Letter 18, p. 16.

42. Cf. Jean Bollack, *Paul Celan: Poetik der Fremdheit*, trans. Werner Wögerbauer (Vienna: Zsolnay Verlag, 2000); and *Dichtung wider Dichtung: Paul Celan und die Literatur*, trans. Werner Wögerbauer, with Barbara Heber-Schärer, Christoph König, and Tim Trzaskalik, ed. Werner Wögerbauer (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006). On Bollack, see Pierre Judet de La Combe, "Interprétation et poésie critique," *Critique* 672 (2003): 317–31; Christoph König, "Kritische Philologie heute," in Jörg Schönert, ed., *Literaturwissenschaft und Wissenschaftsforschung* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler Verlag, 2000), pp. 317–35; Denis Thouard, "L'enjeu de la philologie," *Critique* 672 (2003): 346–59.

which he interpreted culturally (rather than economically or politically), since the German poets had also played their particular part in this cultural history.

Looking back, Bollack explains a delay, a kind of hysteresis: "At the time I was not capable of understanding what Celan gave me to read. It was necessary for a certain amount of time to pass. What happened was a delay, something belated. I myself felt it as an obligation to make up for what had not happened."⁴³ The tone Bollack assumed toward Celan was, from the beginning, different: more direct, simple, sincere. Even if he only turned to the poems belatedly, the effect was the same as with the method that determined his engagement with the best of Greek literature and philosophy: Bollack did not so much seek a literary relationship to his objects nor make a claim for a privileged, intensified relationship that could hermeneutically mediate between himself and poetry. Instead, he reconstructed the (inner) logic of the works.

At first, Bollack's analysis concerned only Celan's *person* and its "coherence." He and his wife often received Celan as a visitor in the Rue de Bourgogne, and as Celan was hospitalized again and again, they eventually cared for him in close consultation with Gisèle Celan-Lestrange. Bollack's report to Szondi from January 7, 1961, is a model of the "pure reason" that Bollack held up against Celan's complaints.⁴⁴ Like all of the letters between the Bollacks and Szondi, it was written in French:

As I returned last Saturday from the telephone booth, I found a response from Jens that corresponded perfectly to what one might expect, very kind if not more than kind. He said he told the editor of "Die Zeit" right away on the phone to refrain from publishing these despicable and silly things. Paul also wrote him, by the way. / All this is fine. What is not so fine is the insatiable suspicion that animates Paul's steps. He writes to Jens above all to confirm that he has been the victim of a miraculously well-consolidated mafia (I myself believe rather in a collusion of aversions), despite the fact that Jens has acted so spontaneously not only to testify of his admiration and his sympathy, but also to show and tell him that a group of outstanding intellectuals has come together to help his spirits, a good side. / I promised Paul to never listen to the gossip about him that explains his "case" as a mental disorder [*défaillance*] referred

43. Jean Bollack, *Sinn wider Sinn: Wie liest man? Gespräche mit Patrick Llored*, trans. Renate Schlesier (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003), p. 177.

44. Additional Letters 9 and 17, pp. 170ff. and 195.

to by different names. / It is however no less true that he expects from his friends that they act on his behalf and testify for him, he expects almost nothing else. The very judgments that he makes about the works can be explained precisely because of this attitude. . . . Mayotte told me yesterday that little Eric, in the classroom, refrains from attacking his little comrades, whom he considers to be his enemies, preferring instead to remain cloistered in his "prudence" (as he says and as one makes him say), but he expects his fellow pupils to take charge of the attack. / No, I would never say of Paul that he is "mad," even if I had been forced to think so, but rather [that he is] hunted, to be sure, and that he jealously guards his persecution, drawing from his state of being under siege—which is in truth carefully guarded and deliberately bounded—the rights of a judicial majesty.⁴⁵

This is an analysis in several steps. Celan responds to Walter Jens's real defense with suspicion, but Bollack refuses to speak of a "défaillance" (a mental disorder)—only to nevertheless "recover" it again in order to give it a place in his argument, namely, that it nourishes Celan's suspicion. Celan jealously guards his persecution, and as he sees it, this persecution finally results in the only attitude that his friends (and interpreters) can assume toward him: "that they act in his behalf and testify for him." Szondi was always immediately informed of the stages of Celan's illness through such analytical reports—decades before details from more recent editions, most importantly in the correspondence between Celan and his wife, established biographical information as a new center of explanation in the place of the poems themselves.⁴⁶

Despite everything, Bollack lived in a different world: during the 1960s, he worked on a large edition and commentary of Empedocles, of which the first volume was published in 1965 and the last three in 1969.⁴⁷ He thereby sought to fathom the philosophical system determining Empedocles' use of literary tradition, and he further developed a "science of the work" that critically rejected what had accumulated in the history of interpretation. Together with Pierre Bourdieu, his colleague at the Uni-

45. Additional Letter 9, pp. 170f.

46. Cf. Celan and Celan-Lestrangé, *Briefwechsel*, p. 7, as well as Christoph König, "'Give the word': Zur Kritik der Briefe Paul Celans in seinen Gedichten," *Euphorion* 97 (2003): 473–97.

47. Jean Bollack, *Empédocle*, vol. 1, *Introduction à l'ancienne physique*; vols. 2–4, *Les Origines: Edition, traduction et commentaire des fragments* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969; 2nd ed. Gallimard, 1992).

versity of Lille, he sought to understand the deficits of this tradition of scholarship in sociological terms. Only when Szondi asked Bollack to read and comment upon his scholarly essays on Celan did Bollack employ his philology to approach Celan's poems.⁴⁸ A first step was his participation in the Celan Seminar of the Paris Goethe Institute in 1972.⁴⁹

Decisions for Jewishness

Inconspicuous sentences written on August 4, 1959: "Adorno has not yet received 'Speech-Grille' [*Sprachgitter*] and would naturally be quite happy if you would send it to him. You know how sorry he is to have missed you here."⁵⁰ Through Szondi's mediation, Celan and Adorno were supposed to have met in Sils Maria in July 1959. But Celan left early, undoubtedly not without careful consideration, and composed the work of prose "Conversation in the Mountains" [*Gespräch im Gebirge*] from the distance of Paris.⁵¹ Szondi stood between Celan and Adorno, to whom Szondi felt bound in a very different way than to Emil Staiger, with whom he had studied literature in Zürich: Adorno announced an independent interest in literature that grew out of his social theory. Szondi referred to the theories of Benjamin, Georg Lukács, and of course Adorno in creating a unique form for his book *Theory of the Modern Drama*. He interpreted how social conflicts, namely, the dialogicity of the modern human, precipitated into various dramatic forms.

At the same time, however, Adorno's dictum of 1949 that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, and this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today" did away with the possibility of eluding a form of reason that had become practical, pragmatic, and instrumental.⁵² Szondi wrote to Celan: "I immediately forwarded your packet of books and did not acknowledge its receipt only because Adorno told me that he himself would write to you soon. Apparently his work and society (in the most concrete sense) has hindered him until now

48. Cf. Additional Letters 53ff.

49. Cf. Additional Letter 60.

50. Letter 5, p. 10.

51. Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*, vol. 3, *Gedichte, Prosa, Reden*, ed. Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert, with Rudolf Bücher (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983). Cf. Paul Celan, "Conversation in the Mountains," trans. John Felstiner, in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 397–400.

52. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT UP, 1981), p. 34.

from doing so. But he was very happy.”⁵³ The subject seemed to find itself delivered up to the powers of reason, with the help of which it liberated itself. Dialectical reason could not secure the happiness of being free, which was waiting in a completely different place—perhaps in the utopia of a pure language into which the poet could suddenly transport himself. It was in this sense that Adorno, even late in his career, interpreted the works of Stefan George and Rudolf Borchardt. But this was not the place from which Celan’s poems could be understood. Adorno’s criticism presupposed another place, in poetry. His mysticism denied Celan’s poems their justification (he later addressed all the objections to the sentence that he had once uttered), yet Celan defended himself, and the leap he had made, in his own way: the “Conversation in the Mountains” took the place of the conversation that did not occur. In the place of Adorno, it substitutes another figure with whom one can haggle and who is actually a great Jew or is great as a Jew.⁵⁴ Szondi felt the tension and wrote to Celan as if wanting to say: “You don’t know at all how much you have hurt him, and now twice.”⁵⁵

The insistence on the proper name (which Adorno had given up along with the name of his father, “Wiesengrund”) is one of the mottoes or even slogans of the letters that Celan wrote to Szondi (alias Sonnenschein: Szondi’s father Leopold had Hungarianized the name) in order to win Szondi over to his side. Szondi could have become another Adorno, who maintained or reclaimed his proper name in the sense of a certain tradition. (Celan sarcastically noted in the draft of a letter to Reinhard Federmann from March 15, 1962: “Heidelberg on the Neckar is where my ‘defender’ Peter (Sonnenschein-) Szondi, a Kastner Jew, lectures.”)⁵⁶ The “name” belongs to the language that Celan renewed for his poems and in which he wanted to train Szondi. In 1960, Celan sent Szondi the “Conversation in the Mountains,” which had just been published, with the dedication: “For Peter Szondi, / heartfelt and with a crooked nose, with a crooked

53. Szondi to Celan, Letter 7, p. 12.

54. Cf. König, “‘Give the word’.”

55. Szondi writes on August 4, 1959 (Letter 5): “Adorno did not in fact receive *Sprachgitter* and would naturally be very happy if you would send it to him. You know how sorry he is to have missed you here.” Szondi thus refers to both injuries that Celan inflicted upon Adorno.

56. Barbara Wiedemann, ed., *Paul Celan, Die Goll-Affäre: Dokumente zu einer ‘Infamie’*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), p. 506.

nose and /heartfelt/ Paul Celan/ in September 1960.”⁵⁷ These words have a sense of their own, as does the date, which Celan corrected by hand from October to September—the month of plenty and of shadows, in which the roses blossom a second time; the autumn month in which poetry may arise because one says things a second and a third time: “When/when will blossom, when/when will blossom the, sosometheblös/sösömthebleu, yes those, the September-/roses?”⁵⁸ The dedication, a chiasmus with the form a-b-b-a, describes two paths—from heartfelt [*herzlich*] to the crooked nose [*krummnasig*] and from the crooked nose to heartfelt—and privileges the second with a line break. The difference rests in the freestanding “and,” which should be understood causally, meaning that one element syntactically determines the sense of the other. If one has a crooked nose because of a superficial politeness, a *Herzlichkeit*, it remains uncertain whether one will ever unequivocally make a decision for a Jewishness that is nevertheless not about religion. But if the order is reversed, one begins with this decision [*krummnasig*] and is heartfelt [*herzlich*] in the sense of remembrance, as the German word “Denken” contains for Celan the remembrance with which *Denken* and *Herz* are bound up in his idiom. Szondi understood the repeated admonition.

Szondi defended Celan and, in the Goll Affair, did so publicly. This was something his institution, the university, did not expect; it firmly held to the fiction of a division between methodological science, cultural values, and its own structural interests. Szondi took a large risk for his career in almost symbolically taking up at the same time both Celan’s cause and the hurdles of his *Habilitation*.⁵⁹ At first, however, he argued strictly within the boundaries of his philological métier by carefully attending to the chronology of the material before him. At the center of the Goll Affair was Claire Goll’s accusation that Celan had copied poems in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952) from Yvan Goll’s volume *Traumkraut* (1951), which was an anthology of Goll’s last German poems—or at least that Celan’s work had been based upon his knowledge of Goll’s poems from *Chansons malaises* (1934), *Elégie d’Ihpétonga* (1947), and *Les Géorgiques Parisiennes* (1951), which Celan translated into German. Yet Claire Goll’s

57. Letter 22, p. 18.

58. From the poem “Huhediblu,” in Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 275. The original lines read: “Wann/wann blühen wann,/wann blühen die, huhendibluh, huhediblu, ja sie, die September-/rosen?”

59. Cf. Letters 40, 43, and 46.

accusations referred to poems that had already appeared in the volume *Der Sand aus den Urnen* (1948), of which she had no knowledge. Celan's defenders thus demonstrated that those poems that had made their way from *Der Sand aus Urnen* into *Mohn und Gedächtnis* had already been written before Celan had met Goll and become familiar with the poems of the *Traumkraut* group. Celan's first visit with the Golls did not take place until the end of 1949.

On November 11, 1960, Szondi's article "Borrowing or Slander?" appeared in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*.⁶⁰ A letter to the editor appeared in *Christ und Welt* a bit later, on December 1, 1960,⁶¹ followed by a "Short Chronology" in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* on January 24, 1961.⁶² In addition, Szondi coordinated Celan's defense.⁶³ He did all of this out of a conviction for his métier: "The only philological response" consisted in "giving the chronology and the authentic wording in each individual case, to prove the impossibility that Celan's verses depended upon Goll's, and—in light of the contradictions and with a view toward the possibility of a reverse influence—to question when the individual poems from Goll's papers were written."⁶⁴ Szondi did not consider the possibility that, with a knowledge of Celan's first volume of poetry, Claire Goll might have manipulated poems or translations of poems by Yvan Goll written after the publication of Celan's *Der Sand aus den Urnen*—poems that he had left behind in his papers but that had not yet been published.⁶⁵ Celan regularly insisted—and rightly so—that this was the case. The polite salutation in the middle of one letter was his idiomatically rhetorical way of saying that Szondi was not quite on top of things: "Dear Peter, please allow me to return to this issue: I believe that the authenticity of [Goll's] papers... must be questioned."⁶⁶ Accompanying this accusation was another that concerned Szondi's method: as long as one only compared the wording of passages (in order to determine chronology), one would miss the words' uniquely proper sense [*Worteigensinn*]. It would thus become easy to prove Celan

60. "Anleihe oder Verleumdung?" reprinted as Document 5 in Celan and Szondi, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 87ff. The text is almost identically reproduced in *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, January 1961.

61. Cf. Document 3, in Celan and Szondi, *Briefwechsel*.

62. Cf. Document 12, in *ibid.*

63. Cf., for instance, Documents 33 and 40, in *ibid.*

64. Letter 41, p. 33. On Szondi's lists, see Document 9, in *ibid.*

65. Cf. Letter 30/2.

66. Letter 37, p. 29; cf. Letters 35 and 42.

guilty of further literary historical dependency and thus of lacking originality. Inasmuch as this argument was also used antisemitically during the Goll Affair, which was a point that Szondi did not address, Celan did not consider Szondi's thinking to be up to the task. Relying upon notions such as the concept of "wandering images,"⁶⁷ Fritz Martini and Reinhard Döhl made reference to Szondi when they presented such a "philological" proof in an intervention before the Germany Academy for Language and Poetry.⁶⁸

(Methodological) Domination

In 1961, coinciding with the completion of his *Habilitation*, a phase of Szondi's life came to an end. Celan, however, did not engage with the depression that manifested itself in Szondi's letters. Quite the contrary: he wrote Szondi on August 11, 1961, and took control of their correspondence. At the time, Celan was in Trébabu, the furthestmost western tip of Brittany, writing almost the entire third cycle of his volume of poetry *Die Niemandrose*.⁶⁹ The constancy exemplified in the lines "things lost were not lost, / the heart was a place made fast" [*Verloren war Unverloren, / das Herz ein befestigter Ort*]⁷⁰ from the poem "Afternoon with Circus and Citadel" [*Nachmittag mit Zirkus und Zitadelle*], written at this time, marks the distinctiveness of these poems.⁷¹ Their triumphal, confident, optimistic character further determined Celan's letter to Szondi, a replay of the events a year before. Celan transposed the personal aggression of an earlier draft⁷² into the frame of a "spiritual [*geistigen*] world"⁷³ that would bind both partners, thus setting the rules for their correspondence:

Dear Peter, I am not at all mad at you, my old feelings are still there, but they have been joined by the painful realization that it was possible to use your name for the purposes of this dark Döhl—Martini—Kasack con-

67. Cf. Letter 50/2.

68. Cf. *ibid.*

69. Paul Celan, "Die Niemandrose," in *Werke: Tübinger Ausgabe*, ed. Jürgen Wertheimer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996). For English translations, see the volumes cited in note 1.

70. Celan, "Die Niemandrose," p. 93.

71. Cf. Werner Wögerbauer, *Invarianz und Indifferenz: Zum 'bretonischen' Zyklus in Paul Celans 'Die Niemandrose'*, unpublished manuscript, 2003.

72. Cf. Letter 50, p. 38: "Now—and not only now—you have an opportunity to prove this."

73. Letter 61, p. 48.

coction.—but what isn't done today..../Do you remember I once wrote you that this matter is *bottomless*? It is, Peter./You are, as I am, a Jew, and thus I can pass over certain things here and, in *this* context, express a thought which, God knows, doesn't appear to me to be made up out of thin air: even the very "best" people are all too happy to suspend the Jew as a subject—and this is of course nothing but one human figure, yet a *figure* all the same—and pervert him into an object or a "Sujet." In many cases this might be an unconscious compulsion—although that which is externally imposed, even by "Jews," naturally plays a role. What is fatal is that some people believe in all seriousness and perhaps in all simplicity that the "claw" can replace the hand.⁷⁴

This letter takes precise aim at the field of interpreters surrounding Szondi. Celan knew what he was talking about: he constructed the scholarly and critical position that he wanted Szondi to take. Szondi should free himself from Germanists like Fritz Martini, from the poets and critics like Ingeborg Bachmann and Werner Weber (whom Celan might have meant by "the best of them"), and from Adorno, the Jew who is a Jew but does not understand himself as such (he is set apart by quotation marks) and thereby, with his negative dialectic, offers Szondi the wrong help. Jewishness—a *form* that turns against the wavering "figure" of the Jew and in which the humanity that develops out of "being human" can articulate itself—requires a writing "hand" instead of a bestial "claw." Celan wanted his interpreter to have this hand.

Celan's letter continued:

If I may skip over a few things here—: this whole metaphor-trend* also comes from this direction; one translates in order...to carry off and away, one puts things into images that one cannot perceive, doesn't want to perceive; *Time* and *Place* are talked to shreds. Now, of course Auschwitz was both a commonplace and a thousandplace.../Give my greetings to Sils and to Chasté!/Sincerely yours/Paul// *I wrote Walter Jens that "Aschenkraut" was the *name* of the Cineraria. In his essay he calls this *word* a "translation"...("because nothing can be that may not be"...)⁷⁵

Celan's claim to dominate the correspondence had methodological consequences. Szondi reacted in his tractatus "On the Problem of Knowledge

74. Letter 52, pp. 39f.

75. Letter 52, p. 41. [Trans. note: *Aschenkraut* translates literally into English as "ashweed."]

[*Erkenntnis*] in Literary Scholarship” by differentiating passages of text according to their function in the text: his argument was directed above all at the notion of “parallel” passages within a work or in the comparison of different works.⁷⁶ Although Szondi does not mention the Goll Affair, this argument would prevent such abuse. Yet if Szondi also determined the place of a citation within the whole, he did not yet determine its idiomatic sense in the poems. Celan’s admonition that names were at stake in which lexical meaning becomes individual did not yet make itself felt. All the same, Szondi received a hint of the instance that these names can create: in contrast to Jens, he should note that the “hand” of the poet is capable of writing “names” that gain their sense from a standpoint vis-à-vis language. Hence “ashes” remembered the Jewish catastrophe in a different way than the (German) “kraut,” the meaning of which was therefore transformed in being compounded. This was the reason for the critique of metaphors that runs through the entire correspondence. Instead of leaving it to language to produce a new meaning in metaphor, poetry should gain its particularity from a standpoint outside of language—a standpoint marked by Jewishness. As the precise analysis of the “topos” Auschwitz as chatter shows, its historical reality (a place for thousands) originates in the negation of the use of metaphors. In this sense, Celan called himself a “dealer in old metaphors.”⁷⁷ Interrupting Szondi, who had invoked Mallarmé,⁷⁸ Celan noted in his “Meridian” speech: “Gedichte, n’en déplaise à Mallarmé, werden nicht aus Worten . . . gemacht” [“In this, one must contradict Mallarmé: poems are not made of words”].⁷⁹ Though Celan defended Mallarmé against those theologically minded Germanists who despised him for being all too playful, he was not so much interested in aesthetic speculation as in historical truth—when poems are no longer mere words.

Literary, philological hermeneutics

Because of the rigor of his reading, Szondi learned to differentiate and thus protect individuality. In literature, he found the proper object for the inner rigor of language, leading him to the domain of hermeneutics, to

76. Peter Szondi, “Zur Erkenntnisproblematik in der Literaturwissenschaft,” in Szondi, *Schriften*, 1:263–86.

77. Paul Celan, Hanne and Hermann Lenz, *Briefwechsel: mit drei Briefen von Gisèle Celan-Lestrange*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann with Hanne Lenz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001).

78. Szondi, *Schriften*, 1:283f.

79. Celan, “Meridian,” in *Werke: Tübinger Ausgabe*, p. 74.

the doctrine for understanding linguistic articulations, which he further developed into a doctrine for understanding *individual* linguistic articulations. He called this a literary hermeneutics that is material because it should be concrete. Understanding the individual, concrete work becomes an act of solidarity. The fact that Szondi occupies an exceptional place in the literary scholarship of his day precisely because of his contributions to hermeneutic reflection is almost paradoxical, for hermeneutics had hardly touched the history of the philological disciplines, including Germanistik. They were two histories without any contact.

Yet while the hermeneutic philological tradition with all of its competing models had been forgotten, a philosophical hermeneutics made its appearance with Martin Heidegger (for whom Szondi's teacher in Zürich, Emil Staiger, sought to be a mouthpiece) and later with Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose book *Truth and Method* appeared in 1960. This new kind of hermeneutics made demands on the discipline of Germanistik and developed principles for its analysis of literary and cultural tradition. Szondi rejected this offer of a philosophical foundation for hermeneutics, as influential as it was in the 1950s and 60s. A "deep hermeneutics" motivated by the idea that a power, be it language or tradition, sovereignly asserts itself in the work of art was neither for Szondi nor for his hermeneutics, as he was concerned with differentiating individuality.⁸⁰ To put it another way: Szondi counteracted traditional models of literary studies by invoking the method of hermeneutics in a way that completely rejected its contemporaneous, widely accepted renaissance. He had already found his position "outside"—in poetry, the reflexive potential of which he took seriously.

Two kinds of reflection meet here, however, both of which demand their rights: aesthetic rationality and an interpretation guided by theory. Solidarity succeeds only when it takes into account a paradoxical relationship: the researcher would like to understand an object that he would destroy if he had to make it up himself. The problem goes to the heart of hermeneutics: the interpreter's reflection presupposes a literary work that reflects upon itself (otherwise this understanding would not be possible)—but in a productive way, through production. How can the inner logic of works be laid bare without being caught in the mental effort of

80. Peter Szondi, "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics Today," in *On Textual Understanding*, pp. 95–114; Peter Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Martha Woodmansee (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1995).

external (aesthetic) norms? If understanding is grounded in the reflexivity of works, then the practice of reading corresponds—before theory—to this reflexivity. A reflection upon this practice of reading is thus the appropriate literary theory.

When Israel Chalfen asked, in 1961, for an interpretation of a poem, Celan replied: “Read! Just keep on reading. Understanding will come by itself.”⁸¹ In these words, practice comes forward and turns against a prejudiced interpretation existing then—as Celan knew—in the two forms named earlier in this essay: a philosophical-hermeneutic form and a scientific form, in Emil Staiger’s art of interpretation (inspired by Heidegger) and in the linguistics (influenced by structuralism) coming out of America, France, and Russia.⁸² If practice (“Read!”) thus takes the place of philosophy and theory, one wants to know more precisely what is being read when one simply reads. And the question arises how the activity of reading can in this case live up to objective, scholarly demands. Hermeneutics as theory must be tested in reflection on a practice of reading that would be a theory of philological practice. Philological knowledge would thus be understood procedurally. It would consist in objectifying the procedure—in this case, reading—and bringing out its inherent clarity.

To ask what is being read when one simply reads is to pose the question of this clarity. If one cannot understand or perceive anything that has not already been understood or perceived, then the interpreter reads what the author has already read, namely, the reflection that grows out of his or her own observation during the writing—a *secondary* reflection. One reads Celan’s self-interpretations and critically tests their scope. But a *primary* reflection forms the touchstone, for writing is already a considered act, the rationality of which shows itself in its progression, that is to say, in the reasons that lead from one word (understood in the broadest sense) to the next. Reading and writing are the same; the difference produced by this work of meaning is rational.⁸³ If one reads what has already been read, then philological knowledge consists in the hermeneutic reconstruction [*Nachvollzug*] of a process of reading. To quote Theophil Spoerri, a

81. Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979), p. 7.

82. Cf. Christoph König and Ulrike Haß, *Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik von 1960 bis heute* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003).

83. Regarding Mallarmé, see Jean Bollack: “Enigmatization itself brings clarity; in the process of decoding reflection makes itself known as reflection”; from “Die Dichtung und die Religion: Zu Mallarmés ‘Toast funèbre,’” *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 51 (2006): 104. This means: enigmatization is decoding by reading.

Romanist and teacher of Szondi: "The interpreter has no other means of knowing a work than creating it anew [*ré-création*]." This emphasizes an idea of hermeneutics that feels obliged to the model of repetition.⁸⁴ The ascetic process of reading continues ("just keep on reading") because the reader constantly returns to what he or she has come to know and expands its boundaries.

So what is the difference between the ways that poets and interpreters read, between Celan and Szondi? And what scholarly claims does the philologist make? Celan made translation his model of reading—translation in the sense of a counter-reading that helps the poet being translated to better reach the aim that he had in mind, and which thus corrects the poet. This cannot be the model of philological-hermeneutic "*récréation*." It is not the process that should be translated; interpretation should not be *performative*, for this would only replace the object to be interpreted with another obscure object—thereby changing it. Instead, the sense of this counter-reading must be historically reconstructed in the process of its creation and its own self-reflection.

The correspondence between Celan and Szondi shows that Celan forced his philological friend to take up, under the sign of their common Jewishness, a certain idiomatic kind of reading that orients itself toward the "name," toward the *individual figure*. In the letters, one encounters a course in reading. Without Celan, there would be no *Celan Studies*.

At the beginnings of philology around 1800, however, hermeneutics already counted as a genuine theory of philological practice. August Wilhelm Boeckh gave a textbook summary of this tradition in his *Encyclopedia and Methodology of Philological Science* (his lectures, posthumously published in 1877), which already stood at the end of a tradition that originated in the world of Goethe, Friedrich August Wolf, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Schiller. Seen from this tradition, philology originally concerned itself with texts from all possible areas of cultural history. It did not aim to intervene into the business of the natural scientist, the politician, or the philosopher, whose writings it read. But it did aim to understand them:

The acting and producing that occupies politics and the theory of art does not concern the philologist, but the knowing of that which each theory

84. Klaus Weimar, "Hermeneutik," entry in Weimar, ed., *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Neubearbeitung der deutschen Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 2000), pp. 25–29.

produces [does concern him]. The proper task of philology therefore appears to be the knowing of that which has been produced by human spirit, that is to say, that which has been perceived.⁸⁵

Thus does language come into play:

Since philology therefore everywhere presupposes a given knowing, it cannot exist without communication [*Mittheilung*]. The human spirit communicates itself in all kinds of signs and symbols, but the most adequate expression of knowledge is language. To investigate the spoken or written word is, as the name Philology itself says, the original philological drive.⁸⁶

Understanding linguistic articulations, Boeckh further explains, is a practice—but a practice containing an implicit theory. Made explicit, this theory would transform philology into an artistic faculty of its own:

Even famous philologists often have little understanding for understanding; even the best often make mistakes. If there is really art involved here, then it must have a theory. This theory must include a scientific development of the *laws* of understanding and not—as is the case, of course, in most treatments of hermeneutic and critique—merely practical rules.... Thus only through theory does philology become art, although many philologists already consider a mere empirical skill in explication and critique to be art.⁸⁷

“Art” here hardly means art in an aesthetic sense but rather the carefully considered mastery and control over philological practice. Boeckh’s formulation is intricate. As mere theory, so one reads, this practice would not be art; and as a naïve practice it would go astray and find itself far from its object, which is art. The solution lies in combining both possibilities: theory brings philological practice closer to aesthetic practice. Its “art” consists in understanding art without being art. Both have in common a reflexivity guided by theory; understanding builds upon a mental relationship of the author (both the artist and the philologist) to his creativity.

The theory that Boeckh empirically gleaned from the activity of the philologist is of course hermeneutics, the principles of which he sketched

85. August Wilhelm Boeckh, *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften*, ed. Ernst Bratuschek (Leipzig: B. G. Tuebner Verlag, 1877), p. 10.

86. Ibid. p. 11.

87. Ibid. p. 76.

in close adherence to Schleiermacher. At the center of this enterprise is the connection between, on the one hand, grammatic interpretation concerned with language *in general*, that is to say, with vocabulary and grammar, and, on the other hand, *individual* interpretation dedicated to the subjective use of language in speech.

Of course, it was not a philologically grounded hermeneutics that established itself at the German University during the nineteenth century but rather, in the wake of Karl Lachmann, an abbreviated, technical treatment of works. This was a *restricted* philology that took the standpoint of being concerned only with knowledge, meaning with the knowledge of tradition and of language, as well as *realia*—the material context to which the noble name of “antiquities” was given. An interest in the object as the construction of an individual appropriation counted as something private, elite, and reprehensible. *Activity* was emphasized apart from reflection upon its preconditions, including the individuality of poetic works.

Experiments in the Celan Studies

With his *Celan Studies*, Szondi kept a promise that he had made to Celan to write about him.⁸⁸ Although these works evince the poet’s influence, Szondi’s objective aims led him to subordinate his literary object to strict methodological principles, namely, the necessity of an argumentation that, led by theory, finds its concrete model in the “logic of its produced-reality” [*Logik des Produziertseins*] (Adorno), as well as in the demand to be concrete by grounding interpretation in the matter of language. This model was aimed against Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. And Szondi’s ethics of seeing a universal humanistic norm in the struggle for the individual finally emerged as a philological claim: to recognize the individuality of poetry—its “figure” in Celan’s sense. Szondi regained the rigorous focus, the distance that had been lost in the letters. His text “Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutics Today,” which is dedicated “to the memory of Paul Celan,” takes up the conditions of recognizing individuality.⁸⁹ Outside the tradition of a poetic scholarship, against which Szondi’s claims positioned his work, it was entirely unusual to dedicate a methodological treatise to a poet.

88. Cf. Additional Letter 56.

89. Published in 1976; originally published in 1970 as “L’herméneutique de Schleiermacher,” *Poétique* 2 (1970): 141–55, with Szondi’s dedication “To Paul Celan” glued into the galley proofs. For Szondi’s request, cf. Letter 109. Bollack returned a telegram on March 3, 1970: “Paul accepts, being very touched” (Additional Letter 49).

Yet how can a text gain its individuality out of itself? In his first Celan study, "Poetry of Constancy—Poetik der Beständigkeit," which he wrote in December 1970, Szondi gave an answer that loosely divides the works of both Celan and Shakespeare according to their respective epochs.⁹⁰ That which Shakespeare glorifies in his Sonnet 105, namely constancy, becomes in Celan's modernity the act of the poem itself, as can be seen in the repetition of words. Celan's "intention toward language" (Walter Benjamin),⁹¹ which changes according to the measure of its epoch, thereby manifests itself as distrustful of language's own expressive potential. Szondi writes: "Celan does not have the poet insist that his verse leaves out difference. Rather, he lets the poet speak in a language in which differences have been left out."⁹² The viewpoint of one epoch, however, misses the differences between the individual poems.

In the second of his Celan studies, Szondi went beyond this epochal intention with a desire to trust in "textuality." Thinking "syntactically" in relationships created by the text, he goes beyond "representation," meaning the potential of a word to mean something. He thus encounters the elusive movement within the text by means of which he considered it possible to recognize the *functional* uniqueness of individual passages. His text "Reading 'Engführung'" strictly follows the course of the strophes in the poem (from "Speech-Grille" [*Sprachgitter*] 1959).⁹³ Although the poem had occupied him since 1961, he did not write the essay until January 1971.⁹⁴ Szondi turned his back upon both Germanistik and the German public: writing in French, he published the text, together with Jean Bollack's revisions,⁹⁵ in the journal *Critique*,⁹⁶ which was published by Jacques Derrida, a man with whom Szondi was on friendly terms and to whose style of "deconstruction" he was attracted.⁹⁷ Szondi's closeness to Derrida's method predated its later triumphs, and deconstruction's consequences for interpretation had not yet become evident. Szondi was

90. Szondi, "The Poetry of Constancy," pp. 1–26.

91. Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux parisiens: deutsche Übertragung mit einem Vorwort über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, bk. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981), p. 16.

92. Szondi, *Schriften*, 2:344. Cf. Szondi, "The Poetry of Constancy," pp. 25ff.

93. Peter Szondi, "Reading 'Engführung,'" in *Celan Studies*, pp. 27–82.

94. Cf. Letters 51, 90, and 97.

95. Cf. Additional Letters 53ff.

96. Peter Szondi, "Lecture de Strette: Essai sur la poésie de Paul Celan," *Critique* 288 (1971): 387–420.

97. Cf. Additional Letter 54.

attracted by deconstruction's focus on the text and by the high level of reflexivity manifested in its analyses, but he was not yet concretely aware of what was at stake: if made into a doctrine, the polysemy that Szondi also held to be one possibility of expression contradicted his hermeneutics by principally destroying the meaning of a text. In Szondi's interpretation of "Engführung," however, meaning nevertheless took priority over the textuality that had attracted Szondi's attention, for Szondi partly read the text as an expression of the Jewish catastrophe—an example of which is in the transition between strophes VIII/2 and VIII/3. The line "visible, once/more: the/grooves, the" (VIII/2) is followed by "choirs at that time, the/psalms. Ho, ho-/sanna" (VIII/3).⁹⁸ Szondi comments: "It is known that the deported Jews often would begin to pray and sing psalms when faced with execution."⁹⁹ He concludes:

"Engführung" is in a quite precise sense a refutation of Theodor W. Adorno's now all-too-famous thesis: "After Auschwitz, one can no longer write poetry." Adorno, who for years had wanted to write a long essay on Celan, whom he considered the most important post-war writer besides Beckett, understood perfectly well that his thesis was open to misunderstanding, and perhaps even false. After Auschwitz, one can no longer write poetry, except with respect to Auschwitz. Nowhere did Celan demonstrate more clearly or convincingly than in "Engführung" how well-founded the secret credo of his work was, its essentially non-confessional, impersonal character.¹⁰⁰

In the *Celan Studies*, Szondi undertook two experiments. Until this point, he had tried to get by with mere *textuality*, without parallel passages or references to reality. But this thought could not be maintained: in Szondi's critique of Celan's translation of Shakespeare, the entire poem became an example. Finally, in "Engführung," the black reality of the Holocaust proved to determine the textual relations. Szondi did not yet consider the idea that individual words could change their meaning, and he therefore left Celan's vocabulary untouched. He saw certain, predetermined meanings of words realized according to the measure of the syntax in the poem. The second experiment thus concerned an assumption that he

98. Paul Celan, "The Straitening [*Engführung*]," in *Selected Poems*, p. 151; cf. Celan, "Stretto," in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 129.

99. Szondi, "Reading 'Engführung,'" p. 73.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

had, from the beginning, presented as methodologically absurd, namely, to base interpretation in reality. But he discovered that he could not simply return to textuality from the real world, indeed, that the notion of textual autonomy proved to be too dogmatic.

In the end, Szondi contributed to the image of a Celan who takes a position toward social and historical questions in his poems. By means of biography, which in the end became the same as politics, Szondi sought to close the gap between his own aesthetic interest for modes of poetry, as in his analyses of Hölderlin and Schlegel, and the relationship that genres bear to the historical world. As a dedication, Celan copied the poem "You lie" [*Du liegst*] into the volume "Breath-Turn" [*Atemwende*] (1967),¹⁰¹ which he gave to his host and friend as a reminder of a shared drive through a wintry Berlin in December 1967, where he had given a reading of his poetry on the invitation of Walter Höllerer and Szondi.¹⁰² The experience with these two experiments left a deep mark upon Szondi's last, unfinished essay, which he wrote between April and September 1971 and which took up this poem.¹⁰³ Celan drove through Berlin with others, too; and after asking both Walter Georgi and Marlies Janz for more information, Szondi produced an interpretation that connected the poem's various stations with these drives. The attempt to nevertheless maintain the autonomy of the poem failed, and in the middle of the interpretation Szondi deleted a long paragraph that was meant to prepare an analysis of this autonomy. He wrote there, against reality: "One takes recourse to reality only to test whether the analysis does not in fact draw its material from it as a kind of smuggled goods."¹⁰⁴ He deleted the passage because he realized that Celan's perception had already made a selection among things, before writing, and had furthermore narrowed [*enggeführt*] the meanings of words into individual *names*. The word "Eden" (for Paradise), which Celan identified with the hotel in which Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht spent their last hours before being murdered, became just such a name: the poem later bears this name as its title, the "bitter word-pit of the poem," as Szondi noted.¹⁰⁵ Szondi, however, had helped Celan arrive at this idiom. Biography joined itself with poetry, the interpreter anticipated

101. Letter 102, pp. 71f.

102. Cf. Additional Letter 37/1.

103. Peter Szondi, "Eden," in *Celan Studies*, pp. 83–92.

104. Cf. König, *Engführungen*, p. 70.

105. Cf. *ibid.*

in life the poem's interpretation: Szondi had given Celan a book to read into which the path of Rosa Luxemburg's murder and the removal of her body had been marked.¹⁰⁶ After years of friendship, Szondi knew which route to seek for Celan.

Szondi's reading determined his methodological premises. From one kind of reading, based on the text, he arrived at another, based on biography, that nevertheless came to an abrupt end. This process is dialogical and can be systematized. The dialogue requires many participants; the history of knowledge opens a wide space of discourse in which it becomes systematically possible to develop a theory of practice that takes into account the individuality of the work.

106. Elisabeth Hannover-Drück and Heinrich Hannover, eds., *Der Mord an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht: Dokumentation eines politischen Verbrechens* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), p. 38.