

Editors' Preface

By showing the layers of the genesis of Paul Celan's text, the *Tübinger Celan-Ausgabe* (TCA, Tübingen Celan edition) makes it possible to read them as poetic and historical documents and messages while also providing a vivid picture of the various stages of Celan's work on this text.

*The "Tübingen
Edition"*

This volume of Celan's notes to *The Meridian* can follow the editorial pattern of the poetry volumes only to a limited extent since the character of these texts is fundamentally different from that of the poetic works. The manuscripts and typescripts—most of them published here for the first time—can be considered working notes the author never intended for publication and never compiled systematically (or only partially). The material gathered here does not represent a strictly genetic corpus but is rather an extensive, heterogeneous collection of writings—Celan's attempts to write down his thoughts about his poetry—and shaped by the author's own needs. Celan had begun these attempts long before he received the news that the Büchner prize was to be presented to him, and then he completed the final version of the speech in a comparatively short time. Celan's notes trace the paths by which he arrived at the succinct formulations of his speech, formulations from which much has been omitted. The wealth of literary, philosophical, and political contexts and allusions in Celan's speech comes fully alive only against the background of these writings.

*About This
Book*

In organizing these papers for this edition, contradictory requirements had to be taken into account. On the one hand, presenting the texts as loosely ordered as they are in the file folders that make up the Celan collection of the German Literature Archive (Deutsches Literaturarchiv) in Marbach am Neckar, would have made this book unwieldy and difficult to read. On the other hand, systematizing them in any way destroys their original arrangement and the original context in which each text was placed.

We have tried to reach a compromise and balance these extremes—first, to make it possible for readers to become familiar with the situation in which the speech originated, and second, to make visible Celan's way of thinking. The writings gathered here do not reveal a linear progression; rather, there is a limited number of main themes Celan varied, interconnected, and developed. Our chosen method of presenting the material, especially in the largest section of the volume, the "Materials" for *The Meridian*, is designed to do justice to Celan's way of working on these notes. This will make possible a fruitful engagement with this wealth of complicated material.

*The Structure of
This Volume*

The material in this volume is arranged in reverse chronological order—that is, the most recent text comes first—so that the development of the speech can be traced back from the finished final version through the *preliminary versions* of the speech as a whole and through the *drafts* of individual passages all the way to the initial notes and to text passages from earlier works that were taken up again in *The Meridian*.

Accordingly, this volume begins with the running text of the *final version* of the Büchner-prize speech. Its sections and paragraphs have been numbered consecutively, with the numbers printed in the margins. These numbers serve as references to the final version throughout the book.

The final version of the speech is followed by selected *preliminary versions* of the speech as a whole; in analogy to the TCA poetry volumes, these versions are presented in chronological sequence in four columns across a double page. The boldface numbers within the texts correspond to the numbering of the final version. Reading through the various preliminary versions reveals how Celan structured the text of his speech by means of line spaces and line breaks and how he focused his work. A direct comparison shows the last deletions, additions, and transpositions Celan made before finishing the speech.

However, the remaining, much larger part of the existing text cannot be presented in a similar synoptic fashion because the texts in this volume—unlike poems—are not versions of a limited number of clearly delimited individual texts. Here *drafts* prefiguring the wording of the Büchner-prize speech, are distinguished from notelike *materials*.

Roughly a sixth of these writings are *drafts* and can be linked to the individual passages in the speech they prefigure. The paragraphs of these texts are also numbered and keyed to the corresponding sections of the final version. For the sake of greater clarity, the speech has been subdivided into three main parts, corresponding to the phases of Celan's work on *The Meridian*. Within each part the texts are arranged in reverse chronological order, insofar as a chronological sequence could be determined. In all, this volume thus reconstructs the evolution of the speech.

Following Celan's usual method, all the other *materials*—most of them only fragments—are grouped under a limited number of main themes, for example, under "darkness" or "encounter," so that texts related in content are placed near each other. Though the transitions from one theme to the next are fluid, the subdivision of the material allows a clearer view of different aspects of the concepts and their interconnection and interpenetration with other concepts in Celan's thinking. When texts belong equally to two categories, they are printed under both headings.

Every text in the draft and materials sections is numbered sequentially. A system of cross-references keyed to these numbers allows readers to reconstruct the material's customary arrangement at any time. In addition, a system of references to parallel passages points out further connections.

Separating the drafts from the other writings clearly distinguishes between documents representing goal-oriented steps in the development of a fixed, firmly established text and more open notes not prefiguring a sharply defined final formulation. This separation

also allows greater editorial latitude for the texts in the category materials as compared to the drafts and preliminary versions. As a result, readers can familiarize themselves with Celan's intellectual world by following the structure we suggest, and then, in a second step, with the help of the system of linked cross-references they can follow the notes in their customary arrangement. With the help of the signature markings, the introduction, and the appendix, readers can reconstruct the chronology, discover new connections and sources, and ultimately follow their own paths of interpretation.

Celan's speech on the occasion of receiving the Büchner prize is his most important document on poetics. The speech, entitled *The Meridian*, was first published in 1961 as a monograph by S. Fischer in Frankfurt; it also appeared in that same year in the *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung*. The present edition includes that published text, selected preliminary versions, and, more important, the numerous drafts and materials, never before published, that preceded Celan's work on the speech.

Text Version

Our text of the final version follows the first edition, which has been checked against Celan's corrections on the galley proofs (preliminary version "B"). The text of the preliminary versions, the drafts, and the materials is based on the unpublished papers relating to *The Meridian* in the Celan collection of the German Literature Archive in Marbach. These papers are kept in two simple file boxes (the binder with signatures "A" through "F" in one, and preliminary versions, galleys, etc. labeled "A" through "M" in the other).

Where necessary we have consulted additional writings: pages from other parts of the archive's Celan collection, such as his preliminary sketches for his radio-essay on Mandelstam with the initials "ÜR," Celan's notebooks and workbooks dating from 1960 as well as unpublished pages from the collection relating to *Niemand'srose* and the so-called "Dossiers—i."

This volume also includes Celan's radio-essay *The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam* (pp. 215ff.). This essay was first published in a collection edited by Ralph Dutli (*Ossip Mandelstam: Im Luftgrab. Ein Lesebuch*. With essays by Paul Celan, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Philippe Jaccottet, Joseph Brodsky, ed. Ralph Dutli. Zurich 1988, pp. 69-81) but was not included in any of the existing editions of Celan's works. The text in the present volume follows Celan's last fair copy, the typescript ÜR 6.10, located among the Celan papers relating to Mandelstam.

Finally, this volume also includes the thank-you letter Celan wrote to Hermann Kasack, the president of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung (German Academy for Language and Poetry), in response to a note informing him of the presentation of the Büchner prize (p. 222). Celan refers to this letter frequently in the speech and in his preparatory notes. The letter is located in the Kasack collected papers in the literary archive in Marbach.

*The Origin of
the Büchner-
Prize Speech*

The origin and evolution of *The Meridian* speech cannot be reconstructed with precision. If such a reconstruction is not to lapse into mere speculation, it must be based on dated writings. However, only very few of Celan's papers are dated, and therefore only a partial reconstruction is possible. Hypotheses about dates that are not noted on the papers themselves are out of the question—all the more so since Celan often wrote down the same texts more than once, sometimes with minor alterations, in different contexts and at different times.

The notes on *The Meridian*, which Gisèle Celan-Lestrange passed on to Bernhard Böschenstein, the editor, are combined into six binders and numbered consecutively. They are on loose-leaf sheets in simple file boxes and not uniform in character. Longer typescripts and single sheets with quick handwritten jottings are interspersed among sheets with various working notes that were written down with different writing implements and are separated from each other by a line or extra blank space. Typescripts and their carbon copies, fair copies and their preliminary versions, and other texts clearly belonging together are often spread over several binders (cf. the facsimiles, pp. 267ff.).

Of the six binders only three were compiled and given a title by Celan himself, namely, A: "On the Darkness of the Poetic," B: "Büchner" (that is, Büchner-prize speech), and F: "The Meridian." However, the pages in these three binders are not arranged in chronological sequence. Celan himself probably arranged them differently while working on them. The three remaining binders, C, D, and E, were compiled after Celan's death by Gisèle Celan-Lestrange and a friend of the poet. These untitled binders contain the scattered papers that had been found in various pieces of furniture and books.

The oldest text of Paul Celan that already points to *The Meridian* is probably his "Address on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Literary Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen," which Celan gave on 26 January 1958. There we read: "Poems are also on the way in this manner: they are headed for something. For what? Toward something still open, still to be occupied, perhaps toward a responsive You" (GW 3,186). Toward the end of *The Meridian* speech we find a similar formulation in which the poet looks back on several "breathturns" in the speech; "Twice ... the breathturn seemed to happen. Perhaps also when I tried to set course toward that inhabitable distance which finally becomes visible only in the figure of Lucile" (43).

The notes to *The Meridian* compiled here include several passages that correspond to this or similar Versions of this phrase in Celan's Bremen speech, for instance, that of being "on the way," of trying to "find a direction, get a bearing."

In August 1959 Celan wrote the *Gespräch im Gebirg*. (*Conversation in the Mountains*), and he mentioned its connection to Büchner's *Lenz* in his letter to Hermann Kasack dated 16 May 1960, the letter in which he responds to the notification of the Büchner-prize presentation.

In August 1959—that is, nine months before he received the letter notifying him of the prize award—Celan also wrote the earliest of the notes, namely, the bulk of binder A,

which he entitled "On the Darkness of the Poetic." On 13 June 1960 Celan was still planning to develop these notes into an essay. Among his notes of that day is the following: "Essays: 1. Büchner-speech, 2. Darkness, 3. Mandelstam, 4. Translation of J. Parque into German" (Workbook II, 21, inserted sheet; sheet B 49, which is not reproduced here, has notes to Valéry's *Jeune Parque*, among them one that reads: "6/12/1960: All this to be developed in an essay on the translation of Jeune Parque!"). The notes to *The Meridian* include jottings on all four of these projects.

Binder A was added later, probably by Celan himself, to binders B and F. On one of the two dated sheets in binder A Celan already wrote about the "constitutive, congenital darkness" of poetry (No. 64/102). His wording of this idea in the final version of the speech is: "This is, I believe, if not the congenital darkness, then the darkness attributed to poetry [...] from a [...] distance or strangeness" (27).

This core theme shows that the earliest binder of the poetological notes compiled here served as a draft for a text Celan later used in *The Meridian*. Probably the thirty-three sheets collected in this binder originally came from a single writing pad; thus, it is likely that not only the two dated sheets but also most of the others in this binder originated in August 1959. In addition, the notation "B-R" (Büchner-speech) does not appear on any of these sheets.

Several other sheets dating from August 1959, however, have been included in binder F, which Celan entitled "The Meridian." Of these, F14, F18, F 20, and F21 are dated; the related pages F 5-13, F 1547, F 19, and F 22 are not dated. Some of these texts reappear as undated copies near the end of binder F (F117-119). As a result, binder F—according to Gisèle Celan-Lestrange, compiled by Celan himself—seems to be chronologically and thematically a very varied collection, particularly since it also includes dated sheets from a later period, namely, the time between 28 September and 10 October 1960.

Celan's concentration on Mandelstam, specifically the translations from *Der Stein* (*The Stone*), *Tristia*, *Gedichte* (*Poems*) (in spring and summer 1958 and in early 1959) and Celan's composition of the note at the end of the first edition of these translations (9 May 1959), was significant for his Büchner-speech. While working on these themes, Celan probably also read Mandelstam's important prose works, and echoes of their main ideas appear in the preparatory notes and papers for *The Meridian*,

Mandelstam's prose works were found in Celan's library with underlining in his hand, among them, *Die Reise nach Arrnenien* (*The Journey to Armenia*), *Das Wort und die Kultur* (*The Word and Culture*), *Über die Natur des Wortes* (*On the Nature of the Word*). His reading of Mandelstam's poetry and prose served Celan as his foundation in preparing his radio-essay, *Die Dichtung Osip Mandelstam's* (*The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam*), broadcast on 19 March 1960. Two sections of that essay (numbered 33 and 36) have been included in *The Meridian*. It is likely that these passages, especially section 36, were transferred into the text of *The Meridian* only fairly late in the process, when Celan already felt pressed for time.

The letter from Hermann Kasack, the president of the academy, that announced the upcoming presentation of the Büchner prize to Celan is dated 11 May 1960. The draft

of Celan's reply, which is included in the collection of his papers in the literary archive, was composed four days later. The final version of the letter was written one day after that, on 16 May 1960. The rough draft of the letter already contains an early version of a sentence from the speech: "Poems: the infinite speaking of mortality and pointlessness that is aware of its finiteness." Here, too, the connection between *Gespräch im Gebirg*. (*Conversation in the Mountains*) and Büchner's *Lenz* is mentioned. Moreover, Celan reported in this letter that he had recently discussed Büchner with his students. Celan also participated in a seminar on Büchner's aesthetic views conducted by Hans Mayer, then a guest lecturer in Paris. Among others, the Büchner passages Celan later placed at the beginning of his speech were the subject of discussion and interpretation at that seminar.

Only one day after writing the above-mentioned letter, that is, on 17 May 1960, Celan jotted down important interconnections on sheet B 27 (nos. 135-138): the Pascal quotation about the "darkness we acknowledge," which he was to use in *The Meridian*, the Baudelaire quotation about the "sharp point of the infinite," which Celan's *Niemandsrose* was to echo (by way of Hofmannsthal who used the quotation several times, especially in his notes and drafts), the situation of St. Alexius "under the servants' stairs," which served Hofmannsthal to define the position of the poet in his speech *The Poet and Our Time* in analogy to Lenz, who wants to "walk on his head." This first passage from Büchner's work Celan wrote down was to remain the most important to him to the end of his life; his relationship to Büchner was primarily founded on this passage. Connecting the context of the Pascal quotation in Leo Schestow's essay, *La nuit de Gethsémani: Essai sur la philosophie de Pascal* (where Pascal's concept of the abyss is discussed) with Lenz's notion of walking on his head reveals that the idea of poetry as bottomless was on Celan's mind already as early as 17 May 1960. Celan links this bottomlessness—by way of 20 January, the date of the so-called Wannsee Conference, the 1942 conference about the implementation and coordination of the "final solution of the Jewish question"—to the move of poetry toward the dead of Auschwitz. Thus, a major part of *The Meridian*'s central idea and concept was already in place when Celan received the news of the Darmstadt academy's decision. As a conclusion to his speech Celan intended to use the quotation from Benjamin's essay on Kafka, which he in fact retained in the final version of the speech: "Attention is the natural prayer of the soul" (no. 51).

Celan's notes dating from the end of May 1960 deal with the significance of breath in poetry (nos. 262, 269, 579). This theme figures prominently in the materials for *The Meridian* but much less so in the final version of the speech (5b, 18c). Similarly, the theme "involution" (cf. nos. 375ff.), conceived of as the opposite of the maxim "Elargissez l'Art" —which M. N. Rosanov, quoted by Celan in reference to Lenz, attributes to Mercier —though frequent in the notes, is not even mentioned as a word in the final version of the speech. Instead, it appears there as the turning "into your innermost narrows" (42).

There are no dated sheets from the middle of June to the middle of August 1960 and none from the first two weeks of September. This may be because Celan traveled frequently during that time, meeting with Nelly Sachs both in Zurich and in Paris, going to Brittany and to Vienna to see Klaus Demus, and then taking a trip to Stockholm. The stress and

strain Celan experienced as a result of Claire Goll's defamatory article in the Munich literary review *Baubudenpoet* (issue 5, March/April 1960) cast a shadow over the whole time in which he composed *The Meridian* ever since he read the article on 3 May 1960. Though not directly expressed in his work, Celan's anguish and concern are reflected in the strongly polarized juxtaposition of "poetry" and "art." While the notes contain numerous critical comments on this time, Celan left them out of the final text of the speech because they had been absorbed into Büchner's critique of art in the passages quoted at the beginning of *The Meridian*. It is by means of these quotations that the speech retains its political character; here Celan turns Büchner's hostility toward art—which he admits in his notes he shares—against those of his critics who brand him as a "second-hand metaphor dealer" (as Celan later ironically calls himself in a letter) and thus misunderstand the basis and direction of his poetry. For Celan, the critics denouncing his genitive metaphors were no different than those who sided with Claire Goll against him. In fact, at one time Celan even considered refusing the Büchner prize, as is clear from unpublished documents. This is important in the present context insofar as it illumines the connection between Celan's critical analysis of contemporary issues, hostility toward art, and the Goll affair. Even Celan's deletion of many personal and more direct formulations must be understood in this context. Büchner thus represented an opportunity for Celan to express very personal conflicts.

In the second half of August 1960 (August 19 and 22) Celan wrote in his workbooks mostly very short notes, only a few of which are related to the completed version of the Büchner-speech. Instead, most of these notes deal with Celan's view of poetry in a more general sense. A collection of notes on this topic Celan had jotted down earlier can be found in a series of typescripts dated 28 September 1960 (pp. 199ff.). These are the clearest reflection of the extreme tension between the smear campaign and Celan's understanding of his own poetry as directed toward the dead, as testifying to a unique individuation and hostile to any conscious artistry. Only four days later, on 21 May, Celan was already composing the beginning of the speech based on the *Lenz*; quotation in combination with the walk through the "mountains" on "January 20."

The last dated sheets, from 4 through 10 October and perhaps including the one from 14 October—in other words, the sheets written only a few days before the award ceremony—show that at that time there were still many options open to Celan, most of them differing from the final version of the speech. All in all, most of the texts that can be classified as drafts are in binder C, which includes mostly typescripts and only one dated sheet, the date being 9 October. The majority of these texts clearly dates from the days just prior to the completion of the final version.

From the fact that the parts of the speech not found in the handwritten notes in binders A, B, and F appear only on the typewritten sheets in binder C we can deduce that these sections probably were not formulated until just before completion of *The Meridian*. In particular, this is true for the Büchner passages quoted at the beginning, the central paragraph 36 about poetry as a dialog—which was taken from the radio-essay on Mandelstam—and most of the passage concluding *The Meridian*. Thus, the motif of the "meridian" was added only very late in the process. (The term appears for the first time in a letter from Nelly Sachs to Paul Celan, dated 28 October 1959. "Between Paris

and Stockholm runs the meridian of pain and comfort," in *Paul Celan/Nelly Sachs: Correspondence*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann, translated by Christopher Clark, 1995, p. 14.)

According to contemporary witnesses, Celan completed the text of the speech only just shortly before the presentation of the prize, and the process of composition was accompanied by very intense inner struggles. Gisèle Celan-Lestrange described how Celan woke her up one night just a few days before the award ceremony to read her the final version of *The Meridian*. Celan also read it to Jean Bollack, asking him again and again, "Is it all right to say it like that?"

*Presentation
and
Transcription*

The first requirement of this transcription is to present the often very complex handwritten and typewritten material as legibly as possible while retaining its character as preliminary notes and drafts. At the same time, the writings' internal history, reflected in the many parts Celan crossed out, in numerous insertions and additions, should remain transparent. The present transcription is designed to strike a balance between these contradictory requirements.

Attempting to present the material as far as possible in its completeness would not have served our purpose. Limitation and selection were unavoidable, and consequently we more or less completely dispensed with a detailed breakdown of various layers of corrections and with a chronological presentation of internal variations. Peculiarities of the material used (such as different writing instruments, types of paper, etc.) are mentioned in the appendix only if the material was important in dating particular notes or establishing their context in the corpus as a whole.

When unambiguous, the numerous spelling errors have been silently corrected throughout. Punctuation marks have been reproduced as they were in the original. Missing punctuation marks were not supplied because punctuation often serves to accentuate meaning or clearly signals the inconclusive, open-ended nature of many of Celan's notes.

In this critical reproduction of the existing texts insertions and deletions are indicated; the text of the final version appears in the regular type size while deleted and corrected text is set in a smaller size. The distinction between a primary and a secondary textual layer (the latter set in a lighter typeface) has been maintained throughout. The secondary layer includes Celan's subsequent additions, comments, and elaborations. When shifts in the typescripts indicate a significant break in Celan's thinking, a notation in the text (<new start>) signals the new start. Markings by Celan, such as arrows, borders around words, carets, etc., are reproduced here to the extent possible. The same applies to the lines and crosses Celan often used to separate individual notes from each other. Even when these were inserted in the original just above the next note, here they are always placed directly below the preceding one since their function is to separate a note from what follows. The function of these markings becomes clear if one reads the text preceding and following the passage in question in the traditional arrangement of the material.

Typescript texts are labeled as such; however, further typographical differentiation—as in the TCA's poetry volumes—was not practicable because most of the material presented

here consists of handwritten notes and drafts. Philological notes in the appendix supplement the transcriptions.

This edition would not exist without Gisèle Ceian-Lestrange (†) passionately working toward making it possible. Particularly in the early phases of the project, she tirelessly gave her help and accompanied the work with interest. We remember her with profound gratitude.

We sincerely thank Eric Celan for kindly granting us the rights to publish this complex, collection of his father's papers for the first time. Bertrand Badiou has earned our gratitude by providing additional material from other collections of Celan's papers.

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