

## Translator's Preface

This translation took the best part of seven years to complete—and in that sense is probably the most epic endeavor in this discipline I have undertaken to date. In contrast, my translation of the four volumes of Celan's poetry starting with *Breathturn* took only about half this long. The reasons will be obvious: the difficulties of trying to render minute differences between four or more parallel German versions or drafts, while staying true to and rendering the typographical layout of the original transcriptions. These scholarly transcriptions of all the extant textual variants of Celan's Meridian speech include a complex apparatus to reproduce deletions, inserts, additions, and a further range of minuscule changes (capital to lower case, vice versa, etc.) which I tried to maintain as closely as possible in the English. I did, at times, make the decision to omit such an indication when what was obvious in German would have required an over-long explicatory addition in English that would not have added anything substantial to our understanding of the texts (for example, occasions when Celan corrected the spelling of a word or added initial caps to nouns, a basic grammatical rule in German but not in English). But wherever the change was in any way meaningful or enriching for the text I endeavored to find a way to make this visible in the English.

I have of course maintained the original typographical labels and special characters as inherited from the German version. The only addition are backslashes, which I use to indicate that the German word has also been retained and is framed by these markers. This happens when the original term does not have a satisfying equivalent in English, either because of its domain of etymological origin, or because Celan took it from a specialized vocabulary and the available English word would lose that specificity. When I felt that the German word was more accurate or detailed than any available English equivalent I would also give the original term; backslashes are further used when an important aspect of the German term is untranslatable, as when, for example, Celan puns on meanings inherent in the image the German word presents and that are absent in the available English term. An example, among many others, would be the word `\Gänsefüßchen\` which refers to quotation marks, though the literal meaning is "little goosefeet," a meaning which Celan foregrounds and plays on at length on a number of occasions.

The only section of the book I have taken the liberty to shorten is the "Editorial Comments" section in the Appendix, leaving out material relevant and of interest only to a scholar doing research on Paul Celan in the Marbach archives—which presupposes a knowledge of the German language and thus no need for this English version of *The Meridian*.



I would like to thank, first and foremost, Werner Hamacher who approached me with the idea for translating the book, was able to convince me that it was possible, helped in innumerable ways over the years to create time and space for the project, and had enough confidence in my abilities to stand by me even when I was flailing about and ready to quit. I also want to thank my graduate students in the English department at the university at Albany, Sabine Seiler, whose “draft” translation of the preface of the German edition needed only the slightest revisions to become the final version, and Christopher Rizzo, who spent endless hours helping me straighten out the layout of the WordPerfect version. Helen Tartar, who was the Stanford editor at the start of the adventure, was and remains a friend and a prod—thanks are due to her too. During the fall of 2003 I was able to get a solid start on the translation, thanks to the Berlin Prize I was awarded by the American Academy in Berlin and which allowed me to work undisturbed and with all the needed German literary resources for three months in their beautiful residence on the Wannsee. Thanks are also due to Heino Schmull, the creator of the layout of the German edition, who provided me with the electronic version he had created and saved me much time. Last, but of course not least, I need to thank my family who put up with the long hours, the despondent, nay desperate monologues about the general impossibility of translation and the specific difficulties of this project—but who stood by, helped, and made finishing the job possible.

Of course, as they say, all remaining errors and mistakes are my own responsibility.

Pierre Joris  
Bay Ridge, Brooklyn  
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