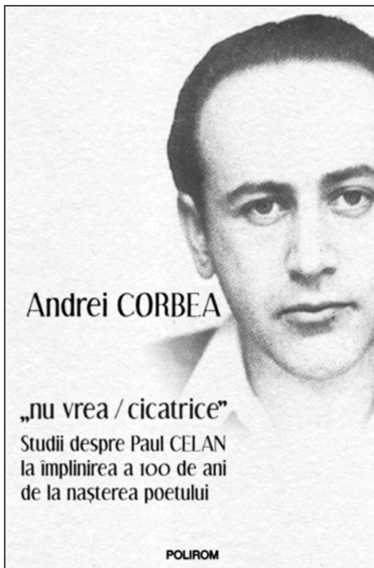
A Breathturn in Paul Celan's Scholarship

George State



Andrei Corbea, *"nu vrea/ cicatrice": Studii despre Paul Celan la împlinirea a 100 de ani de la naşterea poetului*, Iaşi: Polirom, 2020.

If I were to answer today, five decades after his death, the question of how Celan's heritage reflects here, I wouldn't be able, unfortunately, to name a Romanian poet of his stature—this is probably also due to the fact that the indigenous bards are not so much interested in history, looking instead for an ahistorical perspective, the eternity—and no name comes to my mind of one that has at least tried to start a dialogue with him. There are, of course, poets who "took something from him"—that is, they quoted Celan's verses in theirs, Mircea Ivănescu, for example, a *poeta doctus*, or Dan Sociu. But these borrowings, somehow on the surface of things, weigh mainly as bookish remnants. A more special case (because more experimental) is that of Emilian Galaicu-Păun, who explores and exploits Celan's figure. But perhaps this is not even necessary, as we find ourselves, *hic et nunc*, in the situation from the '80s anticipated by Mircea Cărtărescu: "even the tractor drivers know Paul

George State
Editor at the Center for Transylvanian Studies, Romanian Academy. Poet and translator, among others, of Paul Celan, **Opera poetică** (Collected poems) (2 vols., 2019).

Celan by heart"… Hence, the Celanian heritage—otherwise, a rich one—in Romanian culture is one of scholarship; to name but a few: Petre Solomon, *Paul Celan: Dimensiunea românească* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1987), George Guţu, *Die Lyrik Paul Celans und der geistige Raum Rumäniens* (Bucharest: Tipografia Universităţii din Bucureşti, 1990), Bianca Bican, professor at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, the author of a Ph.D. thesis entitled *Die Rezeption Paul Celans in Rumänien* (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), Laura Cheie from the West University of Timişoara, and Gabriel H. Decuble, Germanist at the University of Bucharest, signing pertinent articles and interventions on Celan, and (last but not least, on the contrary) Professor Andrei Corbea from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi.

In the centenary year of Celan's birth, the plurivalent Iaşi historian published three important books: the annotated edition of Immanuel Weißglas, *Gottes Mühlen in Berlin* (God's mills in Berlin) (Aachen: Rimbaud Verlag, 2020)—I will not insist on this restitution, as it has already enjoyed a competent reception in the local press: Alexandra Pătrău, "'Şi morile Domnului macină încet...'" ("And God's mills grind slowly…"), *Observator cultural* (Bucharest), no. 1026, 13–19 August 2020—, the revised translation of Celan's collected prose, *Meridianul şi alte proze* (The meridian and other prose writings) (Iaşi: Polirom, 2020)—again, those interested may find useful Ion Pop's review: "La 'meridianul' Celan" (At the Celanian "meridian"), *Apostrof* (Cluj), no. 8 (363), 2020—and *"nu vrea/ cicatrice": Studii despre Paul Celan la împlinirea a 100 de ani de la naşterea poetului* ("will not/ scar over": Studies on Paul Celan's oeuvre at the hundredth anniversary of his birth) (Iaşi: Polirom, 2020), a book that takes one step further the research collected in *Paul Celan şi "meridianul" său: Repere vechi şi noi pe un atlas central-european* (Paul Celan and his "meridian": New and old landmarks on a historical atlas of Central Europe) (Iaşi: Polirom, 1998), but most of all expands and deepens that from *Paul Celans "unbequemes Zuhause": Sein erstes Jahrzehnt in Paris* (Paul Celan's "uncomfortable home": His first decade in Paris) (Aachen: Rimbaud Verlag, 2017). Essentialized to the highest degree, Corbea's recent studies demonstrate how—following and in the midst of a (quasi)interpretative global overinflation, which in most cases and at best systematizes, resuming in different tones, things assessed by some few voices—you can still say today something truly relevant (i.e., original and innovative) about Celan.

The new corpus opens with the updated version of an essay from 2001, a sharp analysis of the hermeneutic primacy of the message coming from the author (*Flaschenpost*) over the meanings discovered or invented by the untrained, novice reader. To be more precise, it deals with the question whether or not the Celanian work can be read—and at what cost—abstracting it from his biography

and the historical context it is intrinsically linked to. Undeniably (and even inevitably), Celan's poetry has been and continues to be perceived in this manner, the "historical context" being frequently dismissed as nothing more than a contiguous frame with the poem rising above it timelessly, ignoring—methodically and on principle—all that is external to the text, and inherently the informational baggage coming from the author and his intimates. In other words, the very meanings attributed and inscribed by the poet. This is the case of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, for whom the meaning precedes the work and is revealed, actualized there. As it was already noticed (J. M. Coetzee), this voluntary blinding doesn't lead far: if you don't know (and you don't admit there might be one) the key to deciphering a Celanian poem, you cannot be sure whether a certain extrinsic information is or not of secondary importance. More appropriate, the Romanian scholar compellingly argues, would be to champion the historical and biographical data and to welcome the Event and the events in the interpretation, as the philological hermeneutics did, starting with Peter Szondi's two fundamental texts from the beginning of the '70s and was continued, two decades later, by Jean Bollack. "Datum" and "event" are not to be taken metaphorically: Celan himself advocated (in his main poemological text, *Der Meridian*) that every poem has its own January 20th inscribed in it and the newness of contemporary poetry resides in the endeavor to remain mindful of such dates. This analysis of the "biographical" turn in the Celanian scholarship is summed up in a title that could not be more appropriate: "Marfă de contrabandă" (Smuggled goods).

Once the conceptual frame has been set, the investigations will go on following largely the chronology. "Diaspora literară cernăuţeană de limbă germană la ora 0" (The literary German-speaking Czernowitz diaspora at 0 o'clock) adds new elements to the documentary recreation of Celan's debut in the German-speaking cultural space, which owed a lot to Alfred Margul-Sperber epistolary push. In his letters to Otto Basil, the editor of the Viennese magazine *Plan* (which, in February 1948, published seventeen poems by, as Sperber named him, "the poet of our Western-Eastern landscape whom I've been waiting for a lifetime and who plentifully replenishes my faith in his appearance"), he advocated—sending to Basil, in October 1947, a collection of 106 poems by the young man born in Bukovina—their publication in a single volume: "the most important German poetry book of the last decades, the only lyric counterpart to Kafka's work" (p. 37). In the same context of "introducing" Celan into the German literature, Corbea also documents the correspondence with Ernst Schönweise, editor of *Das Silverboot* magazine from Salzburg, although, despite Sperber's perseverance, it will not materialize in the publication of his protégé; the collection of letters is completed by two letters to Schönweise (from June and July

1947) discovered in the Literary Archive of the Austrian National Library and published in Romanian translation (pp. 40–43). Not least, as the twelve studies that make up *"nu vrea/ cicatrice"* try to outline, kaleidoscopically, a psychological and ethical profile of Celan, it is also worth mentioning here the pages dedicated to the relationship between the two former high school colleagues, lyric pals and rivals Paul Antschel and Immanuel Weissglas. Whereas Leo and Fritzi Antschel were deported in June 1942 to Transnistria, and subsequently assassinated there (their son had been mobilized, one year earlier, near Buzău, in the compulsory work squads for young Jewish men), the Weissglas family, the parents and the two boys, survived; this "driven" experience becoming the caesura that set the two young poets apart—leading to their final estrangement. The homecoming of the Weissglas brothers together with their parents constituted for Paul Celan a further motive to blame to himself for not accompanying and protecting his parents, although later, and probably as a defense mechanism, he would write quite cynically to a common friend, Gustav Chomed—and this would not be the only unfair judgement of Weissglas (see p. 62)—that "not much" would have happened anyway to the latter and "his folks" in Transnistria (p. 64). Fleeing after the war to Bucharest, the two friends adopted different strategies: Weissglas, who was also pursuing an "international" literary career, was very determined to be acknowledged abroad as an established writer: therefore in 1947 he managed to publish at Cartea Românească Publishing House the booklet *Kariera am Bug* (Quarry on the Bug) (*Gottes Mühlen in Berlin* was scheduled for the end of the same year, but it would only get to be published in 2020, at Aachen, in the abovementioned critical edition of the Iaşi philologist). Celan, more mobile, and also more skilled, doesn't seem to have made serious efforts in Romania to establish himself as a German-language poet, frequenting instead more diverse and visible circles. An argument for this would be the publication of the poem "Tangoul morţii" (Deathtango) (a first Romanian version signed by Petre Solomon of what will later become famous as the "Todesfuge") on the first page of the weekly journal *Contemporanul*, in May 1947; an event that also determined Weissglas to eliminate a poem from his book ready to be published (and which "suddenly, is no more," as Sperber put it): dated 1944 in the 1970 edition, in *Neue Literatur* magazine, "Er" bears many similarities, and not only from an atmospheric point of view, to "Deathfugue." On the controversy, started after Celan's death, concerning the "borrowings," the author of "Er" replied to the Germanist Gerhart Baumann in a letter dated May 1975: "An exclusive ownership of mine is out of the question" (p. 65). Finally, according to the recollections of a Czernowitz sweetheart, Edith Horowitz (married Silbermann), who had also ended up in Bucharest, another act of betrayal supposedly took place in December 1947: when Celan left Romania for good, Weissglas, with his

"backpack ready" was waiting for him, "but Paul found a way to cross the border without him, which he took; escaping is easier without company" (p. 60).

Continuing two older studies collected in the 1998 *Paul Celan şi "meridianul" său*—"Celan 'înainte de Celan'" (Celan "before Celan") and "Paul Celan şi limba română: Un bilanţ" (Paul Celan and the Romanian language: A record)—the article "'Trei poeme' de Paul Celan" ("Three poems" by Paul Celan) sheds light on an issue interesting at least from a documentary point of view: next to the sixteen poems and prose poems written in Romanian during the time he spent in Bucharest between 1945 and 1947, three undiscovered Romanian versions of poems well-known in German were found in the archive of Petre Solomon, a devoted friend to "our" poet. Grouped together under the title: *Trei poeme de Paul Celan: Ospăţul, Taina ferigelor, Singura lumină* (Three poems by Paul Celan: The banquet, The secret of the ferns, The sole light), they were recently published (also in facsimile) in Paul Celan, *Opera poetică (II)* (Collected poems, vol. 2) (Iaşi: Polirom, 2019), pp. 500–505. Beyond the thorough recreation of the hypothetical route these texts have taken, it is worth mentioning here some legitimate observations from the end of the account: that Celan's actual Romanian poetry, which Solomon gradually released after his death, "Tangoul morţii" published in 1947 in *Contemporanul*, and the three (self)translations recently uncovered are consistent in letter and spirit alike (p. 75); that the network and its metaphorical imagery recipe are following the line of Rainer Maria Rilke (Neo-romanticism)–Georg Trakl (Expressionism), and not that of Surrealism with which some scholars stubbornly try to associate him (p. 78); that it would be worth initiating a debate on the affinity of the young Celan for the French poetry of Benjamin Fondane and Ilarie Voronca, and for that of the former contributors to the modernist magazine *Albatros*, with which—unlike the Surrealist Bucharest circles from the end of the '40s—he had been in contact (p. 79).

Resorting both to a series of documents that have neither been examined at all, nor exploited at their full potential, and to recounted testimonies, recorded by the author in 1999, of some of the poet's intimates from his Paris period (Yves Bonnefoy, Isac Chiva, Guy Flandre, and Serge Moscovici), the study "Cum a devenit 'apatridul' Paul Antschel cetăţean al Republicii Franceze" (How the "stateless" Paul Antschel became a citizen of the French Republic) painstakingly recreates Celan's tribulations (and those of his naturalization application filed in January 1951 at the police station at the Sorbonne) until he was granted the French nationality. The bureaucratic process was long and tormenting for the applicant. Although the petitioner didn't say a word, in order not to compromise his application, about his previous occupations in Bucharest (as a Russian

translator for the official communist paper *Scânteia* and for the magazine of the Soviet-Romanian Friendship Association *Veac Nou*, the association with Cartea Rusă Publishing House, which played a key role in the propaganda apparatus of the Romanian Communist Party, or Russian press reviewer), and two years later he updated the information regarding the changes that had occurred in his life in the meantime (marriage, family of the wife, studies, income), it seems that the favorable official response, received in June 1955, was strongly influenced by the intervention of professor René Dujarric de la Rivière, famous bacteriologist and deputy director of the Pasteur Institute, father of a very good friend of his wife. Still, as it has remained recorded in an internal note of the Subdepartment of naturalizations, "in the process of turning it into French, it was not possible to change his family name to Celan, his pen name" (p. 100). The issue of getting French citizenship was of particular importance for the poet: as Corbea-Hoisie underscores in *Paul Celans "unbequemes Zuhause,"* his "bourgeois" existence in Paris, for the consolidation of which he had struggled since the moment he set foot there, somehow offered a solution to the tension between his desire to be accepted and acknowledged as a German writer and that of remaining loyal to his Jewishness, bearing as a distinctive mark the suffering induced and even augmented by the "murderous" language.

The essay "Rîsul poeţilor" (The laugh of the poets) departs, in the footsteps of Helmut Böttiger, from an episode largely ignored, a radio interview from June 1954 that preceded the reading of some of his poems, and takes us further into the underground of Celan's mental life. Subjecting himself voluntary to the post-Romantic canon of the enchanting visionary, the newcomer to the West-German letters, who venerated Rilke and Trakl since his adolescence, and by that time was already reading Martin Heidegger sympathetically, was trying—at least, in the fifth decade—to fully embody the image of a *poeta vates*, in order to fit more easily in a cultural environment that was still praising the ancient sacerdotal cult of the one who, by means of the Word, initiates his peers, revealing the signs, in the supreme mysteries of the Being. Naturally this "en-rolement" (also in the public space) triggered sarcastic reactions: Günter Grass, for example, described their first encounter as "embarrassing," as the poet of *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952) seemed to "officiate at a religious service even when he was washing his hands" (p. 315, n. 11). And Gershom Schocken, in a letter dated January 1970, rebuked him for having entered the German literature "wie ein Halb-Verdeckter" (half-camouflaged), copying the obsolete Hölderlinian model (p. 106). In the abovementioned radio show, before reading "Der Reisekamerad" (The travel companion) (a poem haunted by his mother's murder), the author brought up Andersen's fairy tale that had inspired its name, adding: "The poem departs

from here and follows its own paths" (p. 102). When the host made the comment that "Reality" makes its presence felt in the "fairy-tale" world, the armor of official solemnity crumbled: Celan started to giggle. Accurately, Corbea explains the mechanisms of this outburst:

> *the voluntary compliance with a prevailing lyric model, in other words, not only was he aware of its legitimizing effect in the Germanic literary field, where he aspired to be "acknowledged" as a poet, but also because he had been 'educated' in it as an intellectual and a poet, equated, therefore, with the inability to speak freely about the first-hand resources, in the atrocious reality he had personally experienced, that of his own "lyric"! Hence that nervous laugh, probably not in the least liberating.* (pp. 102–103)

As some distinguished scholars like Jean Bollack have underlined, in many of the texts written in the '60s—staging a struggle with himself, recognizing his abdications, and embracing self-criticism—Celan sublimated the prototype of the poet possessed by inspiration, in an ongoing confrontation that took the form of a dialogue between a historical I (*Ich*) and a poetic You (*Du*), one in which, on the other hand, and this was not a singular event, the poem unfolded exclusively in his mind, without reaching the reader anymore.

Coming back to this essay, the plural form in the title of the text includes Ingeborg Bachmann. I will not talk about their correspondence published in 2008—in English: Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, *Correspondence*, eds. Bertrand Badiou, Hans Höller, Andrea Stoll, and Barbara Wiedemann, transl. Wieland Hoban (London–New York–Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010)—, nor will I speak of the "poetic correspondences" (hints, mutual quotations, and references in their writings), I will only mention that Bachmann, after "the miracle of the six weeks spent together in 1948" (p. 108), discovered her role: "that of the successful woman of letters, admired and envied, with a tempestuous social presence" (p. 110). As an antidote for the deadlock following their separation, which she retrospectively evaluated as "devastating," and the asymmetry that appeared between the two lovers—"for some unknown and demonic reasons, we steal each other the air," she will later confess to Hans Weigel (p. 111)—, the score of that who had been emotionally and morally wounded would become the expression, as biographer Ina Hartwig notices, of a femininity manifesting itself at opposite poles from the archetype of the "German housewife" and who would stand out (in her career, but also in her emotional life) on account of her hardly gained autonomy, and therefore "irritating" for many of her contemporaries. In 1964, after the break-up with Max Frisch and the emotional cataclysm that followed, Bachmann met Adolf Opel (a journalist from Austria,

whose memoirs of their trips to Prague, Greece, and Egypt, published in 1996, will be dismissed by the "official" critics for puritanical reasons); she would recount to him that decisive moment when, in the desert, with "the silent triumph of sex over the old hypocrisies of words," when "obsolete moral is engulfed in a stream of sincerity," one can hear "the gale of laughter in the night" (p. 114).

From Celan's industrious erotic activity, more and more extensively documented lately, the "Femei" (Women) article picks two very contrasting entries: one by the Czernowitz lover Edith Horowitz-Silbermann, that gathers together (posthumously) not only her recollections of him and their correspondence following the Silbermanns' emigration to Germany in 1963, but also 22 handwritten poems, given by the young Paul Antschel and piously kept "over the years and spaces" (p. 119); the other by Brigitta Eisenreich who, upon finding out that the Celan archive preserved in Marbach contains a folder with her letters and poems from the respective period (they met in 1952 and broke up at the beginning of 1963, after his first psychiatric hospitalization), decided to recall in a book their long secret love relationship. The difference between the two (writings and persons) is acutely captured: whereas

> *Edith Silbermann has fought for decades for the recognition of the 'slice' of Paul Celan's personal and poetic destiny she was entitled to . . . the unselfish devotion of Brigitta Eisenreich (who, married, would make a life and career independently from Celan) went so far . . . as to include Gisèle's [Celan-Lestrange] notes full of bitterness and despair from the time when she found out about the two in her own book.* (p. 124)

The study "'es/ harzt, will nicht/ vernarben'" ("it/ resins, will not/ scar over") examines Heinrich Heine's presence in the Celanian oeuvre. Researcher and translator of some important works by Theodor W. Adorno, the Iaşi professor starts his investigation mentioning the poet's reply—"simplifying in its irritation": "Prof. Adorno, . . . of which I thought he was a Jew" (p. 126)—after reading the 1956 essay "Die Wunde Heine," reaction that placed the philosopher among the detractors of the "good Heine" (how he called him in a letter dated September 1962 addressed to Sperber), with whom Celan began to identify more and more in the period between 1959, when he got hold of *Noten zur Literatur* (Notes to literature) by Adorno, which included the text on "Heine the wound," and 1961–1962, when he was working on the poem "Eine Gauner- und Ganovenweise," with the well-known motto from Heine. Of Adorno's allegations, one is likely to have particularly unnerved the poet: "Only someone who is not actually inside language can manipulate it like an instrument," as he might have connected it to that of Günter Blöcker, from a much-debated review of *Sprachgitter*

(1959): "Celan has greater freedom vis-à-vis the German language than most of his fellow poets. That may be owed to his origins" (p. 130). I will not insist on the fact that "Blöcker . . . actually advocates the opposite of Adorno's claim" (p. 131). The allegations of the two made Celan return to Karl Kraus (about whom, in a letter addressed to his wife in January 1965, he came to the following conclusion: "un homme douteux, une œuvre douteuse"), the author of a pamphlet against Heine, in which this Jew recently converted to Catholicism wrote that the poet of *Buch der Lieder*—and the anti-Semitic innuendo was crystal clear in the era—"had adopted a poetic expression (and actually a language) foreign to him and his 'nature,' more appropriate for 'commerce'" (p. 130). Beyond such harsh stands, Heine's example underscored the problem "ever more painful of assimilating the Jew in the German culture, pertaining to all sorts of concessions and dependencies" (p. 134). In short, considering Heine "through to the end," as Corbea put it paraphrasing a questioning on Mallarmé from the *Meridian* speech, "Celan the wound," one that does not want to scab over, exposes, as it embraces its "Jewish stigmata of the periphery" (p. 135), the idea that only a *Mauscheln* of a Jew—as opposed to the unspoiled language endorsed "kontemporarily and legally," under threat of the gallows, by an On High—, only a rogue's and gonif's ditty ("gesungen von Pawel Lwowitsch Tselan, Russkij poët in partibus nemetskich infidelium"), who, as a tree, "stands against/*the Plague*," the counterword, in other words, antagonizing the traditional "word-trinket, word-hatchet" and consequently abhorring lyricism, "speaks true."

"Bivolii 'româneşti' ai lui Celan" (Celan's "Romanian" buffaloes) epitomizes a masterful analysis of the multiple sources out of which an enigmatic text clots, "Coagula," included (together with his correspondent "Solve") in the 1967 *Atemwende* (Breathturn) book. Like many of his creations, it's a baffling poem, for it doesn't let itself to be unequivocally interpreted: on top of the sacred halo of the compound "das Hörnerlicht" ("horns' light")—"the symbolic power of David's biblical horn of Salvation and, at the same time, Amalthea's cornucopia from Greek mythology" (p. 139)—profane innuendos sneak in: Rosa (alchemica) camouflages the name of Mary, mother of Jesus, who—like Rosa, the raped handmaiden from a Kafkian story—"could be the harbinger . . . the hope of the coming of a Son destined to save the world" (ibid.), unveiling equally the name of Rosa Luxemburg, as the "rumänische Büffel" refers to an incident seen out of the prison's window and recounted by the leader of the Spartacists in a letter from her cell to Sophia Liebknecht in December 1917, about some buffaloes brought from Romania as war trophies and mercilessly whipped by the guards: "Oh, my poor buffalo, my poor, beloved brother! We both stand here so powerless and mute, and are as one in our pain, impotence, and yearning" (p. 140). All this conglomerate has been laconically described by Celan in a letter to Solomon

dated November 1967: “les bisons roumains aperçus par Rosa Luxembourg à travers les barreaux de sa prison convergent avec les trois mots du *Médecin de campagne* de Kafka—et avec ce nom: Rosa. Je coagule, j’essaie de faire coaguler” (p. 138). The genetic reading conducted by Corbea, a specialist on the topic of Bukovina, adds to the philological work on Celanian texts an unconsidered “reminiscence from Czernowitz.” The first “alchemical” sketches started to coagulate in 1962 around the project of a Valais/Paris elegy (initiating a dialogue with Rilke’s Duino elegies), and there we come across a proper noun, *Fallik*:

> *David Fallik . . . the young Jewish candidate for a bachelor’s degree in 1926, who led the Czernowitz rebellion against the jury of the examination commission . . . who had programmatically rejected the non-Romanian candidates . . . in the first day of the trial filed by the authorities against him, . . . was shot and killed by a legionnaire, who was later acquitted, despite the obviousness of the assassination, as it took place in public . . . The young Jews from Czernowitz saw in David Fallik not only a victim, but also a symbol of a righteous resistance . . . Hence, the invocation of David Fallik’s name means to Celan a “meridian” return to his roots.* (pp. 144–147)

Even if it is symptomatic of the “Carpathian fixation” evoked in the correspondence of those years, Fallik’s figure did not survive in the printed version of the poem, but solely, as anamnesis, the image of the young communist woman, born in Poland, whose wound (“Also your/ wound, Rosa”), perceived as one of his own, is “the open wound of confrontation with a (German) ‘culture’ of intolerance, which couldn’t stand the integrity of the otherness and ended by discarding it with unrelenting cruelty” (p. 148).

The article “Semnele şi vocile cărţilor” (The signs and the voices of the books) deals with the Romanian “traces” in Celan’s library. Comprising more than 6,000 titles, “from philosophy to botany, and from linguistic theory to French, German, and English poetry” (p. 157), from the very beginning it has drawn the attention of the scholars, as the highlights and the annotations offered solutions both for the interpretation of texts and for determining their origin. The 41 titles amassed in the category “Romanian literature” are an indication of the “ever growing precariousness that, following his ‘illegal’ emigration first to Vienna and then to Paris, characterized Celan’s contact with Romanian culture and the Romanian world in general” (p. 159). With thoroughness, Corbea presents and explains the route of the Romanian appearances—real (encounters and correspondence) or only written (dedications from some authors on their own books)—in the poet’s life, suggesting, after examining the annotations, that three of them “testify that the poet never gave up the older idea of translating

Romanian poetry into German" (p. 173): *7 poeme* (7 poems) by Leonid Dimov, published in 1968, "didn't leave him at all indifferent," and "the booklet *Oul şi sfera* (The egg and the sphere) (1967) by Nichita Stănescu consolidated the incentive effect . . . emerged upon the reading of some young Romanian poets," as we can find there the scribbles of some "first German correspondences for words and verses" (p. 174). "Celan's intention to translate Romanian poetry was taken a step further in the case of the volume *Disciplina harfei* (The discipline of the harp) by this old friend Nina Cassian" (ibid.), who gave him the book personally in September 1965, when she first came to Paris, and from which he rendered, in a quasi-definite form, four poems. The conclusion speaks for itself: "All we can hope for is that a future edition of the collected Celanian translations will include the four poems by Nina Cassian among his scarce conversions from Romanian" (p. 176).

The chapter titled "Benjamin, Adorno, Heidegger" brings together exactly what the subtitle announces: conspectuses for a *Forschungsbericht*. The first section, a larger one, is dedicated to affinity—a concept that "corresponds better to the typological frame in which a comparison . . . could be undertaken" (p. 180)—between Paul Celan and Walter Benjamin. Without going into the details of such an erudite presentation (following in the footsteps of some important scholars like Christine Ivanović or Winfried Menninghaus), I will only mention a few general issues. The writings of the thinker invoked in *Der Meridian*, but also in a poem from 1968 (kept among the manuscripts until 1997, when the posthumous poems were edited: *Gedichte aus dem Nachlaß*) attracted Celan's interest "well before the Benjamin vogue reached Germany in the '60s" (p. 179). The poet "seems inclined to appropriate only what fitted his immediate priorities, therefore the reception . . . took place only partially and fragmentary" (p. 185), favoring the "philosopher 'touched by the Jewish mysticism,' not the one practicing 'dialectical materialism'" (p. 184). In any case, a series of poems from July 1968, written immediately after reading some Benjaminian essays, started "a 'dialogue' unique in its amplitude and almost in 'plain sight' with the author of the *Illuminations*: Benjamin's texts serve as a depository from where he takes the elements 'heterogenous' to his lyric, which he appropriates merging them with his own poetical discourse" (p. 186). The second conspectus starts from the observation that the complex relationship between Adorno and the one he called (in a letter from March 1965 addressed to Jacob Taubes) "the most powerful lyrical force in today's German language's sphere" (p. 189) was only superficially investigated. A paper from 2014 by Kim Teubner has sought to fix this shortage, but "the unequivocal belief in the impossibility between a 'meeting' between Celan and Adorno . . . makes the argumentation of the author slip into dogmatism" (p. 190). The last part is a review of a book by

Hadrien France-Lanord, *Paul Celan et Martin Heidegger: Le sens d'un dialogue* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), which subscribes to a "scholarly current that seems not to have exhausted yet the resources of deciphering both Celan's poetry and poetics through a Heideggerian lens" (p. 191). I also consider France-Lanord's account unreliable, and I recommend instead the more balanced investigation conducted by James K. Lyon, *Paul Celan & Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation 1951–1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), which underscores the poet's ambivalent attitude towards the oeuvre and figure of the "One from the mountain" (Bollack). At any rate, in this case Corbea proved his mastery more than two decades ago in the final essay of *Paul Celan* şi *"meridianul" său*, "Celan în coliba lui Heidegger" (Celan in Heidegger's cottage).

"În aşteptarea 'favorului limbii'" (Waiting for the "blessing of the language") is an essay on the topic of translation, fundamental for all those entangled in the difficult mission of transposing Celan; to be more exact, of trans-posing in a different idiom his message simultaneously poetical and political, existential and—due to the dense and far-stretching fabric of its intertextual references—scholarly. Professor Corbea departs from a pulverizing review from 1971 by Henri Meschonnic, with a telling title: "On appele cela traduire Celan," occasioned by the publication, in the same year, of the volume *Strette*, a first anthology in French of Celanian works (verses and prose), who scolded the three translators (André du Bouchet, Jean Daive, and Jean-Pierre Burgart) for the inability "of sensing the profound dimension of the place held by Celan's poetical voice in a historically definable mode of living the language—'son vivre le langage'" (p. 198). The ahistorical character derived from mistaking the ahistorical condition for a metaphysical one, following an incorrect reading, "still prevalent in the France of the '70s, which completely ignored the 'Judaic' side of his poetical credo," consequently lead to "replacing poetry with 'poetry-fication' unbearable to Celan" (ibid.). But the embracement of this *exigence d'exactitude* can equally, as Corbea rightfully noticed, have as a result a "disturbance opposite to the relationship with the original": "Isn't it that this widely hailed 'duty to the word in its literal sense and to the nimbus of the original verb,' especially when texts pertaining to the 'high' poetical canon are at stake, ends by producing mere 'documentary' translations or simple decals?" (p. 199). A possible answer to this dilemma would be the interpretation of the rendering as a legitimate creation, equivalent to the original. In Meschonnic's own words: "The more involved the translator gets, as a subject, in the translation, the more so the act of translation can, paradoxically, take further the text it starts from" (p. 200). This is what the translator Celan did, whose poetical *impetus* "knows no essential difference between the 'production' of an 'original' poem and the translation of a 'foreign' text" (p. 201). Klaus Voswinkel radically advances an antithetical perspective,

considering the Celanian poems as renditions: "they translate the language of others into his own, even into his own estrangement" (ibid.), as for Leonard Olschner Celan's created and translated poetry are "closely, even inseparably related" (p. 202).

The second part of the research consists of three "practical applications": a presentation of Celan's translation technique, abstracted from the annotations and corrections to some of his poems translated into French, in the '50s, by Denise Naville and Jean Pierre Wilhelm (kept in the German Literature Archive in Marbach, the two bundles have been revised and prepared for printing by the poet himself); a few preliminary notes, of refined subtlety, to his translation form *Gespräch im Gebirge* (Conversation in the mountains), the only "narrative" prose published by Celan; and finally, a postscript in which, turning his attention to my version of "Einmal" (Once), the closing poem from the 1967 book *Atemwende*, and agreeing on the pertinence of the concept of semantic primacy in translating Celan, he nevertheless notices that, although consistent, I went frequently, in the rendering of his later texts, "for a solution unable to catch the entire essence–form of the Celanian expression" (p. 220). The scholar is undoubtedly right: the translation not only preserves an affective and reflective content, but—despite any presumed solidarity and identification with the rendered author—modifies and destroys. By appropriating the precept of the poet and translator Martine Broda ("celaniser le français"), my intention was to "celanize" the Romanian language. Naturally, I am not the one to assess the effects of these (real or imaginary) mutations.

The final chapter, "'Poezia: . . . o schimbare de suflu'" ("Poetry: . . . a breathturn"), brings together—in an easy flowing and expressive prose, free from any constraints of the critical apparatus—all the threads thoroughly unraveled so far. Due to their pertinence to the point, they are among the best pages on Celan I have read in the entire scholarship I have consulted. It's hard to sum up this true masterclass, in itself the abstract of more than 30 years of Celanian readings and reflections, and for that reason I will set to underscore some of the key ideas: that Celan's work escapes any categorization in an unequivocal genre concept, the distinction between poetry and prose being impossible to precisely define; that the motif of inversion is characteristic for the Celanian language, tortuous and tormented—"Ingeborg Bachmann suggested at some point that Celan's apprehension for paradox could be the consequence of a post-traumatic disorder" (p. 229); that in the lyric of his last decade of life, the poet "displays manifestly (a program summarized in the phrase from *L'Éphémère*: 'La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose') a process homologous with 'the negation of negation,' when it comes both to poetry and the being that identifies with it" (p. 230)—"Je suis la poésie," he confessed to some friends in August 1964; that "the obscurity of

his language coincides, therefore, with the obscurity of the history that he had happened to live in, and the 'confinement' of his work in such an obscurity protects it from the guilty traps of common language and also from the grotesque of 'turning it into poetry' and embellishing it" (p. 233), as "from a certain moment on, the poet felt ever strongly a constitutional reticence to 'name' the crime on the same syntactic and semantic axes along which the orders of and the instructions of committing it were formulated" (p. 237)—as Peter Szondi famously put it: "Celan's language does not speak *about* something, but 'speaks' itself" (p. 263), that he "understood his commitment to Jewishness not 'thematically,' but 'pneumatically'" (p. 255); that "after Auschwitz, Celan was one of the few poets that . . . have inspired the resistance and defiance as substantial resources of the New" (p. 267).

In conclusion, the Romanian reader has now access, via Polirom Publishing House, not only to the quintessential Celanian works (*Opera poetică*, 2 vols., 2019; *Meridianul şi alte proze*, 2020), but also—with Andrei Corbea's *"nu vrea/ cicatrice"*—to the instructions manual.

(Translated by BERTHA SAVU*)*