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Rhyme or Reason?: Successfully Translating the Poetry of Paul Celan

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"Wasteness," "crudeness," "dampness," "lostness"[1]: illustrative English words that resound aesthetically and—vocally, aurally, visually, contextually—hopelessly uncomfortable. It is this sense of discomfort that prevails throughout the poetry of Holocaust survivor Paul Celan, from his camp-experience "*Todesfuge*" to his post-war "*Todtnauberg*" almost 23 years later. Poem after poem, Celan wrote *his* Holocaust experience into collections of verse with "sub- or con-text of historical [Holocaust] reference" (Rowland 4)[2]. This ever-present yet rarely outwardly defined reference repeatedly brings to mind *struggle*: the struggle of language to "engage[e] with an event so resistant to artistic representation" (Rowland 11) and the struggle of experience to engage the accurate use of illustrative language used to represent it. Language in itself suggests the "impossible necessity of representing the Holocaust" (Rowland 12) through words, through grammar, through poetry.

Thus the poetic struggle unavoidably calls to mind the actual struggle of the Holocaust— of Celan's Holocaust--portrayed in "experienced" visual memory. Horrific images of previously viewed Holocaust depictions—photographs a reader may have viewed in a Holocaust museum, newspaper propaganda a reader may have studied in a high school world history class, reminders of war from a veteran relative or friend—proliferate readers' minds' stores, and Celan's verse recalls this projected memory-imagery. The images created by connotations, denotations, and elements that dive far more deeply than the visual or aural surfaces all contribute to the

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[1] "Wasteness," line 2 of John Felstiner's translation of Paul Celan's "*Fadensonnen*;" "crudeness," line 18 of Felstiner's translation of "*Todtnauberg*;" "dampness" line 25 of "*Todtnauberg*" in both Felstiner's and Michael Hamburger's translations; "lostness," line 1 of "*Bei Wein und Verlorenheit*" in Felstiner's and Hamburger's translations.

[2] Rowland quotes Berel Lang's essay "Holocaust Genres and the Turn to History," in *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable*.

discomfort inherent in Paul Celan's verse; his uneasy, awkward poetics "provide the reader with a self-reflexive position with which to engage" (Rowland 21) in the experience of ingesting Celan's Holocaust poetry. This self-reflection on the readers' part inspires a longing for justified empathy.

And this empathy is uncomfortable, uncomfort*ing*. Because of its inherency, how can such discomfort be recognized by translators when approaching Celan? How should it be worked in to their translated reproductions? Certainly, translations can and never will be exact representations: their English counterparts do not carry even a hint of the importance of the German language and its effect on those who suffered the Holocaust. However, Celan's poetics *have* reached out to other people with twelve published volumes of poetry, prose, and letters all translated into English. It is the task of the translators of these volumes to make sure that the words that reach *their* readers have much of the same effect Celan's words had on his.

Most successful translations, then, are not the translations that strictly follow the original grammatical structure, and are not the translations that formulaically replace words with their denotative target-language companions. Rather, the translations that relate the inherent discomfort of Celan's poetics, of the German language's "darknesses," and of the Holocaust itself are the translations that will truly reach those who desire to experience Paul Celan's poetry.

"*Bei [Worte] und Verlorenheit*": Lost(ness) in Translation

"The answer to the question, 'Can one translate a poem?' is of course no" (Bonnefoy 186). Again seeing the suggestion that "Celan poses as well the nearly impossible task of translation" (Wolosky 7), it sparks questions as to how and why translators came to tackle this

feat in the first place. If Celan-translation is impossible, then why have 13[3] authors—so far—attempted to render Celan's poetry into English?

John Felstiner, translator and biographer of Paul Celan, writes in a translated collection of Celan's poems that "men and women from every walk of life, anywhere from Hurricane, West Virginia, to Thunder Bay, Ontario, have written or telephoned or E-mailed me over the years to say that Paul Celan's writing touches them like no other: clears their vision, fires their hope, braces their pain."[4] Perhaps because Celan's poetry "points to his deepest impulse as a writer— the need to be heard, to reach another person" (Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 6), his words embody a necessary transcendence of the language barrier. However, the translator's job goes beyond Celan's own struggle to reach his readers. The translator must reach *into* the *Muttersprache* (the mother language) and pull out the substance that can reach non-German speakers as well. In doing so, the translator must also reach into the *English* language to find inherent qualities of English words that speak the same need to be heard, while still holding on to the implied "darknesses" of German and to the original words with double and inseparable meanings—do even the empty spaces need English words, too? Though many translators believe that—and there's that word again!—"in general it is *impossible* for one language to reproduce another with equal force and adequate expression" (Lednicki 304), it is evidently *not* impossible for Celan's words to satisfy his "need to be heard," to posthumously reach his English-speaking readers.

Fittingly, Celan has also reached *poets* "from every walk of life": note the various backgrounds of his translators. Dr. John Felstiner, poet, translator, and author of the Celan biography Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew, spent over fifteen years researching Paul Celan from

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[3] Individual efforts: Christopher Clark, Ian Fairley, John Felstiner, Michael Hamburger, Pierre Joris, Joachim Neugroschel, Rosmarie Waldrop; Collaborative efforts: Margret Guillemin and Katharine Washburn, Brian Lynch and Peter Jankowsky, Heather McHugh and Nikolai Popov.
[4] From the introduction to Felstiner's Celan translations in Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan. p. xxii

a Jewish-literary historical standpoint. His <u>Selected Poetry and Prose of Paul Celan</u>, winner of the PEN, MLA, and American Translators Association prizes, presents English and German poems side-by-side. Felstiner's translations tend to provide more denotatively accurate (detached?) perspectives, as Felstiner was born a Jew post-Holocaust in America. Poet and translator Michael Hamburger, German-born and a native German speaker, offers a different perspective. Because Hamburger had some Holocaust experience, his poetic translations tend to lean more liberal and at times more culturally aware. He, too, presents the English and German poems side-by-side. Then steering away from any visual-language influence, Heather McHugh and Nikolai Popov provide a collaborative insight into Celan's poetry, sans their German counterparts. McHugh's background in poetry writing and analysis combined with Popov's background in comparative literature and translation create an effort much more knowledgeable about the theory of poetic translation than about the poet or the history itself.

With similarities, differences, and original perceptions, the translations range from biographically intentioned to culturally poetic to freshly modern renditions. These three translators' works comparatively illuminate each other to determine themselves how successfully they recreate, re-gift Celan's poetry to English speakers. Beyond the "rhythm and rhyme, grammatical and syntactical subtleties, and lexical refinements and layers," a translator of Celan must remember to "substitut[e] only elements that do not violate the spirit of the complete work" (Weimar 87). Yet much of the spirit of German Holocaust poetry lies almost solely in the fact that the poems are written in German: describing the oppression with the language of the oppressor.

This language is vivid in Paul Celan's most famous poem, "*Todesfuge*." Begun in 1944 during Celan's imprisonment in the labor camps in Poland, it wasn't published until 1952 in

Celan's second poetry collection, *Mohn und Gedächtnis*. A solid foundation on which to base poetic analysis of Celan, "*Todesfuge*" is an "expression born of the poet's experience of the crisis of language, the imminence of silence, and the magic of the word" (Weimar 94). And just as Celan does, this magic prevails. Celan published *Die Niemandsrose* in 1963, with the "No-One's-Rose" of the title embedded in his poem "*Psalm*." Rich in historical and religious references, Celan's "*Psalm*" philosophically questions the meaning of human suffering without explicitly mentioning the Holocaust. Similar pain is felt in "*Bei Wein und Verlorenheit*," published in the same book, and is imminent in even the poem's dinner-time, memory-triggering conversation. In "*Fadensonnen*," a seven-line poem published in 1967 in *Atemwende* (and is used to title his 1968 collection *Fadensonnen*), Celan questions whether hope can exist in a world that exhibits constant, tangible reminders of such suffering. Finally, in "*Todtnauberg*," from his 1970 *Lichtzwang*, Celan brings the struggle between anguish and hope, between dark and light, to the tip of the "*Sternwürfel*" of Martin Heidegger's well: at this point in his life, Celan was forced to stand face to face with a philosopher-friend's Nazi past and move on in his own linguistic way. Together, these five poems span two decades of the consumption, reception, and critique of Celan's published life through language. Cycling from the concrete Holocaust experience to the philosophy of struggle to revisiting the Holocaust environment again, Celan's inherently uncomfortable poetics continue to grow and change and at the same time unrelentingly remain.

Especially for a German reader (and perhaps even for a reader of Felstiner's and Hamburger's side-by-side German and English versions) there is no escaping the "*Deutsche*" of these five German-language texts. Such reality imposes a harsh discomfort, as Celan identifies his poems as having to "pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech" (Celan,

Gesammelte Werke, 186)[5]. This, however, should not give the German *cultural* elements the same darknesses, as "today people associate speaking German with being German" which is "a profound misconception" (Del Caro 113). With much difficulty, a German reader should strive to disconnect the language from the illustrated experience, recognizing that both connotations and denotations created by the Holocaust are best understood through language rather than through stereotypes, assumptions, or epitomes.

This disassociation is even more important when a reader keeps in mind that Celan himself never even lived in Germany, yet through his entire life he identified German as his *Muttersprache*. Instead of questioning Celan's use of the German language for his poetry, a reader can acknowledge that Celan's Jewish, Romanian and French backgrounds did not provide substance to accurately describe the terrors through which he went. Celan himself claimed that "only in the mother tongue can one speak his own truth… in a foreign tongue the poet lies" (Chalfen 184)[6]. Celan's German, rather, provides a clear and deliberate path into describing and integrating the experiences of the Holocaust. "Paul Celan teaches us to appreciate German in its history… despite the absolutely sordid, criminal, and genocidal applications of the German language as they erupted" (Del Caro 113) during the Third Reich.

Though it is apparent that the German language and the German culture *should* be detached, this separation is no—mentally—easy one. Images of the Holocaust seep in with words like "smoke," "star," and "strikes;"[7] who hasn't, at some point, been educated on or viewed images of the incinerators' smokestacks, the yellow Jewish star badge, and the crowded

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[5] "Die Sprache… mußte hindurchgehen… durch die tausend Finsternisse todbringender Rede; …aber sie ging durch dieses Geschehen."
[6] Quoted from a conversation with Ruth Lackner, 1947.
[7] "smoke" (Rauch) in both translations of "*Todesfuge*," line 25; "star" (Stern) in both translations of "*Todesfuge*" and of "*Todtnauberg*," lines 7 and 3, respectively; "strikes" (Spielt auf, trifft) in Hamburger's translation of "*Todesfuge*," lines 9 & 32, (grieft) in Felstiner's translation of "*Fadensonnen*," line 5.

bodies tired and torn? Holocaust and post-Holocaust photojournalism and graphic design "show the ruins in every imaginable context" (Rolleston 2). And in the photos one sees German-language signs or banners; in the graphics one sees German-language headlines or text art. With the foreknowledge that Celan's poetry is classified as Holocaust literature, this imagery is inevitably juxtaposed onto his texts.

When mere words invoke such striking illustration, vivid enough that "readers may feel compelled to close their eyes in holy dread" (Morse 716), the success of the translation of those words lies in the translation's depiction of this same graphic discomfort. Putting aside the fact that English translations can never truly *be* the German ones, and that English is *not* German nor the language of both the oppression or the experience of the Holocaust, a translator must strive to adequately convey the discomfort present in the original German, where words of the *Kommandant* are the same words of his victims, Celan's translators must exhibit a keen and clever awareness of the discomfort written, felt, in the essence of his poetic language. Such discomfort is related when translators utilize three individual yet intricately connected methods: an appropriate identification and deliverance of connotation, a culturally educated understanding of denotations, and a presentation of cultural, historical, and literary reference or allusion in English and/or German culture.

I. "*Bebilderten Sprachen*": The Evocative Complexity of Connotation

"In Celan, words are not simply use as designators of things; they often appear as autonomously self-asserting qualities" (Meyerhofer 73). Would it not be appropriate, then, to contemplate these qualities when developing a poignant translation? The preservation of individuality in translated words is accomplished in a careful analysis of what the German word

would convey to a German reader. The consideration of connotation becomes a central element to the translator's task: the discomfort felt in inherently uncomfortable German words must somehow be conveyed *ohne* German.

In Celan's "*Todesfuge*," Celan presents his readers in his opening two lines with four different times of the day: "*Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie* abends*, / wir trinken sie* mittags *und* morgens *wir trinken sie* nachts." A reader understands that this "black milk" is forcefully constant yet darkly discomforting, and its repetition scores the image of black milk into nearly every stanza. With the start and the finish of these dreadfully recurring days, Felstiner and Hamburger treat "*morgens*" and "*nachts*" with the same translations: morning and night, their concrete meanings. However, "*abends*" and "*mittags*" are translated differently by the two throughout the poem. With the majority of their appearances in the same context and sequence, repetition of "*abends*" and "*mittags*" by Celan directly correlates to the repetition of the two different translations.

Felstiner identifies "*abend*" as "evening," the most prominent dictionary definition, and "*mittag*" as "midday," quite literally, "mid" ("*mit*" meaning within) and "day" ("*tag*" meaning day). Hamburger translates "*abend*" into "sundown," a meaning not given by the dictionary, and "*mittag*" into "noon," a meaning derived by cultural usage in words and phrases like "*Mittagessen*" (lunch, or literally, mid-day meal) and "12 *Uhr Mittags*" (used at 1200 hours to describe the first time denoted by the afternoon). Perhaps to correspond with the previously used "daybreak," or perhaps to suggest an actual "*ab-end*" ("ab" meaning exit; "end" meaning the last or final scene) with the sun's exit from the sky, Hamburger translates here with a more poetic interpretation.

Though they might come across as merely subtle differences, the translations of these pairs—"evening" and "midday;" "sundown" and "noon;"—structure the time and place around which the poem centers. Felstiner's translations suggest general times. Evening and midday blend ranges of hours together, without specificity. Oppositely, Hamburger's translations are more definite. His "sundown" and "noon" provide exact times in the day in which "we" drink the black milk, almost like clockwork. Rather than the hours that pass through the evening, Hamburger's "we" drinks the black milk at precisely sundown; rather than the hours surrounding midday, Hamburger's "we" drinks the black milk at precisely noon. The rigidity, the exactness, of Hamburger's word choices hint at the structure present in the camp system—the wake up call, the evening roll call, and the slim rationings of food at specific times during the day—and therefore offer the reader a more uncomfortable, somewhat tangible sense of the activities of the camp and of the Jewish experiences there.

Further in "*Todesfuge*," at the end of the fourth line, Celan writes "*da liegt* man *nicht eng*," and here the two different translations concern "man," an indefinite singular pronoun equivalent to "one" in English. However, "man" can also be translated a bit more informally as "you," suggesting address or discourse. Hamburger uses the former translation, while Felstiner uses the latter; these differences in translation change the recipient of the actions of "we" and of "he" and of the meanings of these actions entirely.

Hamburger's translation of the end of line four reads "there one lies unconfined," where he recognizes "man" as the pronoun rather than the informal address. This separates "man" from "*dich*," "*dein*," and "*ihr*" which occur later in the poem correctly translated as "you," "your," and "you" in second person singular and plural form. By avoiding another "you" translation, Hamburger avoids the questions that arise from it, claiming that there is only one indefinite

object which can lie unconfined: anyone. This is not a direct address; this does not single out any individual person or persons that might be taken aback by being summoned as "you": this is a realization for any speaker, any subject, any reader, that he or she could be this "one."

Felstiner chooses to translate "man" as an informal "you." By using this translation, Felstiner does not differentiate in English the "*dich*," "*dein*," and "*ihr*" of the German second person. The fourth inclusion of "you" with the "*man*" to "you" translation only occurs twice in the poem, but adds in English another second-person dialogue between the "we" and the "he." Without reference back to the original poem with some knowledge of the German language— and assuming the average English reader would not have both sets of this information—the "you" in "where *you* won't lie too cramped" could as much represent an informal group as it could be a direct address to a second-person presence.

So, the "we" continues to "shovel a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped," and the "we" addresses the "you" with a variety of meaning. Perhaps the "we" shovels the grave for a group of prisoners not unlike themselves, perhaps for their captor, perhaps for the black milk itself, or perhaps to another "you" altogether: the reader. This possibility reads that the Jewish captives who serve as the speakers of "Deathfugue" would like to invite the reader to share in their experience, ultimately comparing the reader with the "you" used later in the poem to describe the same act of digging graves: "he," the camp führer, shouts "*dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng*" ("you'll then have a grave in the clouds where you won't lie too cramped," trans. Felstiner). Though the Jews are struggling to survive, and paradoxically surviving by shoveling their own graves, Felstiner's translation makes sure that this grave will ultimately belong to them—a culturally shared reward, a freedom from their chains and their cramped conditions—when they die. But, as questioned in connotative context

by the Kommandant and his vipers/serpents, are the imprisoned Jews the only ones suffering in this war, the only ones deserving of their own grave in the clouds?

Hamburger's translation of "*man*" into "one" provides an uncomfortable answer to this question. By differentiating the "one" from the "you" early in the poem, Hamburger makes it even more clear in the latter parts of the poem that there is a distinction between what *could* happen to anyone versus what *is* happening to the we, the speakers, the labor camp prisoners. "Then a grave you will have in the clouds," Hamburger translates, the "you" spoken to the Jews by the camp guard, "there one lies unconfined." A crucial placement of "one," Hamburger creates a distance between the grave that "you" are digging and the instruction that anyone can lie in it, unconfined. This leaves room in the sky not only for the Jewish prisoners who are digging the grave—their grave—but for the guard, for his serpents, for Margarete, for Shulamith, for Celan, for his readers. Because the grave has been dug by the Jews, with day after day of forced labor, then it should belong to the Jews, and they should find the comfort of lying there no longer chained, imprisoned, or confined. However, the discomfort rooted so deeply in this "one" little word is that Hamburger suggests they might inevitably share this grave, this death, with those experiencing the Holocaust opposing them, whether through action or through written word. Uncomfortably, unconventionally, Hamburger lets "*der Mann*" lie beside "*seine Juden*" even in the afterlife.

The choices between translating with a more denotative connotations or connotations with a cultural edge, Celan uses a word in his "*Psalm*" that ultimately varies with translations. In "*Niemand knetet uns wieder aus Erde und Lehm,*" Felstiner and Hamburger translate the word "*knetet*" differently. Felstiner sticks to the more denotative definition of "*kneten*": to knead or to pound. He translates that "No one *kneads* us again out of earth and clay," where "kneads"

suggests that "no one" shows no sign of concern or affinity for the subject "us." Kneading is an act of haphazard physical force, with no careful measures taken to truly appreciate the earth and clay from which the "us" takes form.

Hamburger, however, translates "*knetet*" as "moulds" and writes "No one *moulds* us again out of earth and clay." Though "moulds" and "kneads" don't seem to differ greatly in meaning on the surface, Hamburger's "moulds" lends familiarity and suggests a personal connection to, paradoxically, "no one." Much as a potter would dedicate himself to molding a unique piece of clay, a sense of creation and production is implied with "moulds," and the care taken in the process of molding undoubtedly inspires pride and ownership. Continuing beyond the first line of the poem, this translation instills a feeling of failed recreation or rebirth from the very beginning.

If success comes with discomfort, then the discomfort lies in Hamburger's "moulds" and the contradictory familiarity created in the opening line and the overwhelming apathy created later. It makes too much sense that the "No One" would give little concern to kneading a dusty piece of clay in Felstiner's translation. Hamburger uses the act of molding to connect "no one" to "us" only to widen a gap of desperate acceptance between them later in the poem.

Continuing with "*Psalm*," Celan ends his second stanza with the word "entgegen." German dictionaries define "*entgegen*" as both "towards" and "against," but the translation of "*entgegen*" as "towards" is the meaning most commonly used in everyday German situations. Felstiner goes "against" this grain, translating "Dir / entgegn" as "In thy / spite," accurate in both denotation and grammatical structure. In spite of, going against, the will of "No One" to rise beaten from the dust, Celan's "we" continues to struggle for recognition despite "No One's" lack of effort to recognize. This seems clear: there is a feeling that "we" will remain "Nothing" to

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"No One," a logical deduction from understanding the hardships of the Holocaust survivors and their re-admittance into a war-torn world. The "Second World War had divested [Celan] of home, family, and community" (Wolosky, 200); what, then, would Celan have had left A Jewish faith that once held those three things together? Celan's experience was not unlike many other survivors, and it follows that "the wreckage of his faith he thus seems to discard. Instead of giving everything into the hand of God, he gives it into the hand of no one" (Wolosky 201).

Hamburger chooses the opposite translation with the word more commonly used: "For your sake / we shall flower. / Towards / you." Though Felstiner's thought-provoking translation does provide an incredible sense of discomfort—speaking as a "we" that will still bloom, prosper, despite a lack of effort on the part of "No One"—Hamburger's translation strikes a different chord. For Hamburger, this same "No one" is one for whose approval and appreciation the "we" continuously strives for, and using "Towards" submits "we" to a sad sense of desperation. Certainly, the struggle of recreation is still present with Hamburger's "Towards," but the struggle is transformed from an inter-personal vendetta *against* "no one" to a struggle for acceptance *by* no one.

Having to rely on "No One" for a chance at survival is inherently discomforting, especially in relation to the survival of an entire race/culture following the Holocaust. Celan identifies a struggle with the deity of these survivors, sharing a poetic realization that "'Nothing' is the force / That renovates the world."[8] Though it might seem more natural, as in Felstiner's translation, to turn "against" this force—it is "No One" to them, after all—Hamburger's choice

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[8] From poem #1563, "*By homely gifts and hindered words*" by Emily Dickinson:
    By homely gifts and hindered words
    The human heart is told
    Of Nothing—
    "Nothing" is the force
    That renovates the world.

of "towards" provides a deeper sense of discomfort because it further strengthens a seemingly non-existent bond between a people and the "no one" in whom they futilely continue to place their faith, their trust, and their hope for a future together.

More conflict in translation is presented "*Bei Wein und Verlorenheit*," with the first word of the poem, "*Bei*." "*Bei Wein und Verlorenheit*," Celan begins the poem, "*bei / beider Neige*:" the German preposition "*bei*" has various meanings when used in different grammatical or conversational contexts. One translation of "*bei*" into English is "with," carrying a suggested tone of "in conjunction with." Both Felstiner and McHugh/Popov choose this candid definition to begin their translations "With wine," making the speaker seem to have this wine and this "lostness" physically *with* him. Hamburger, however, chooses a translation of "*bei*" *not* suggested by the dictionary: he translates "*bei*" into "over." Consequently, the reader finds the speaker situated "Over wine and lostness"—rather than giving the speaker possession of the wine and the lostness, Hamburger delivers a more casual tone, like a conversation over dinner. The connotations of "with" and "over" offer two different views of the backdrop to "*Bei Wein*."

Later in the poem, the reader discovers that wine and lostness are not the only things *over* which the speaker must endure. As well as physically hurdling himself *over* an obstacle, the word "over" also suggests that the speaker feels the act is finished, done. He is *over* wine and lostness: he is exasperatedly done with them. The speaker seems to have finally reached the end of an endeavor, and he is both literally and figuratively *over* it. Though not the conventional translation, the use of "over" by Hamburger makes the poem more cohesive and more internally interconnected than the use of "with" by Felstiner and McHugh/Popov.

Though Hamburger's translation of "*bei*" immediately creates a variation in tone, it is clear soon after that McHugh/Popov's interpretation of the poem in its entirety is strikingly

different. McHugh and Popov produce a more liberal translation than Hamburger and Felstiner have done in any of their translations thus far, and this is readily apparent in the numerous (rather than few) discrepancies between word choice, word order, line formation, and grammatical structure. Certainly, there are areas in all three translations that can't diverge much from the concrete meanings behind the German words: "*beider*" can only be translated as "both;" "*Schnee*" can only be translated as "snow;" "*es war unser lezter Ritt*" can only be translated as "it was our last ride." Yet McHugh/Popov work around these concrete meanings to ultimately make the poem as much theirs as it is Celan's.

McHugh and Popov took full liberty with an interpretative translation of "*Bei Wein*." Though many of their choices might seem questionable in regards to the original German, straying from the conventional to the innovative when making individual word translations proves to be the most successful in conveying the discomfort of Celan's German. If the goal is to instill a sense in an English reader that would be similar to one felt by a German reader undoubtedly closer—in language, history, proximity—to the Holocaust, then McHugh and Popov reach that goal by saturating their translation with heavy English connotations and inferences.

Perhaps the most poignant of these differences is McHugh/Popov's treatment of Celan's "*Menschen-Hürden*." Both Felstiner and Hamburger render this quite literally as "human hurdles," the most direct translation. The "human hurdles" suggest standing obstacles literally made of humans: perhaps these were the persecutors, the guards, the "they" in the remainder of the poem, that the "I" speaker had to hurdle *over*, to *over*come (Hamburger's "*bei*" interpretation begins to make even more sense here). Having to hurl himself, with help only from God and the

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"our" that puts him in a group with a common goal, over these obstacles, the speaker of the poem strains to leap over the heads of the human hurdles.

However, McHugh and Popov create "hurdled humans" from "*Menschen-Hürden*," painting a drastically different picture. Suddenly the humans in question are no longer ominous obstacles standing tall in the way of freedom or flight; rather, they have already become toppled, thrown down. The "human hurdles" are an intimidating threat; the "hurdled humans" are a broken-down barricade. Needless to say, this takes the grandeur out of the "last ride" over these humans. Not only does it show that the human obstacles have already been weakened—also evident with translating Celan's "*duckten*" as "cowered" rather than "ducked"—it lessens the strength and courage necessary for the speaker to clear such a hurdle. From the speaker's perspective, the hurdled humans don't pose too much of a threat, and along with the use of "cowered," these humans might be more afraid of the hurdler than the speaker is of the hurdle. Could the fight for freedom from oppression possibly have been less of a battle than had been previously evoked? A decrease in the impact of this "last" struggle on the future of the speaker and his "us" increases conventional discomfort, and brings to mind an image or insinuation with which perhaps very few people can agree.

The third stanza of the poem then presents the image of the speaker actually hurdling over his obstacle, be it taller and rigid or smaller and crushed. Felstiner and Hamburger's humans indifferently and safely "duck" as the speaker leaps over head, while McHugh and Popov's hurdled humans "cower" in fear and anxiety.

Upon further inspection, denotatively defining these words in "*Bei Wein*," all four translators of this poem are subject to secondary definitions of Celan's "*Hürden*." While the German word "*Hürden*" ties its origins more closely to the idea of a natural wattle or barrier, an

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etymological exploration of the English word "hurdle" reveals a definition given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a kind of frame or sledge on which traitors used to be drawn through the streets to execution." This definition offers an interesting depth to the English translations: not only are the hurdles physical and mental obstacles which the Jews must overcome, they are actual tools of execution. "Hurdles" in their English form suddenly become more intensely uncomfortable, and the different translations of "*Menschen-Hürden*" take on an even higher importance. For Hamburger and Felstiner, the "human hurdles" become tangible tools for the final human punishment. But for McHugh and Popov, the "hurdled humans" become human beings facing imminent death—providing a more pertinently pressing sense of discomfort. Keeping this definition in mind, McHugh and Popov present their readers with an incredibly uncomfortable new thought: are the "hurdled humans" the cowardly camp guards, or are they fellow Jews that those riding over must leave behind?

In Celan's "*Fadensonnen*," Hamburger and Felstiner offer different translations for "*Ödnis*" in the poem's second line. "*Ödnis*" is the landscape Celan provides in the second line as the setting of the poem as a whole, yet Hamburger's "wilderness" and Felstiner's "wasteness" describe Celan's "*Ödnis*" with entirely different connotations. A "wilderness" immediately implies impenetrability, and readers can understand this setting to be a busy and confused one. A "wasteness," however, presents a vast, unusable landscape that places the reader in an empty and barren environment.

Hamburger's word "wilderness" conjures tangled, uncharted, and (naturally) wild imagery: forests, tall trees, jungles inhabited by interactions between native species, untouched or unconquered by human hands. Though human presence isn't prolific in the wilderness, a sense of dense and foreign crowdedness is. Hamburger's vision of "*Ödnis*" as "wilderness" affects the

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rest of the poem with the "tree- / high thought" and the "light's pitch," which do seem to be characteristic of a forested wilderness. A thought that tops the trees can be illuminated by rays of light that float through the cracks in the canopy, can be accompanied by nature's sound. In this "wilderness," perhaps the "songs" on the "other side / of mankind" are songs that resonate from deep within the forest. Though it may be "grey-black," the light from within Hamburger's wilderness seems to offer a slight glimmer of hope.

Converting the hopeful to the hopeless, Felstiner's vision for the "*grauschwarzen Ödnis*" is dramatically different. Rather than make this landscape a dense, dark forest, Fesltiner makes it a "wasteness," a nothingness. No trees stretch or vines wrap around multitudes of green here; instead, this "wasteness" suggests brown, dry, and deserted. Felstiner's backdrop is a vast and fruitless plain unfit for any growth or cultivation. How, then, can any "tree- / high thought" ever blossom here? How can a "light-tone" have any effect on the mind, if all the mind sees or hears is a colorless void? Felstiner's "*Ödnis*" presents a much more uncomfortable image of an ominous "beyond" that reaches "humankind" by the end of the poem. The thoughts, the sights, and the songs become hypothetical when situated in a lifeless wasteland—they, too, are still a waste.

As the different interpretations of "*Ödnis*" set the tone of "*Fadensonnen*," more word conflicts appear. For Felstiner, the "tree- / high thought" aggressively "strikes the light-tone;" for Hamburger, the same thought timidly "tunes in to light's pitch." These two translations exemplify the difference between action and reaction. Felstiner's "strikes" is a vivid verb, and because of its action, Celan's "thought" creates its own music by physically striking out the melodies of the "songs to sing." Hamburger's "tunes in" takes a more passive stance, where Celan's "thought" blends with light's already-established pitch. So which plays the most

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discomforting music? As Felstiner's thought takes action and "strikes" its own tone, Celan

potrays the struggle to create his own song to sing, for others to hear and sing along. But when

Hamburger's thought "tunes in" to a pitch previously resonating, the thought's reaction is to join

in. Rather than displaying an individual struggle, Hamburger's more passive interpretation

conveys the almost inescapable recognition of "light's pitch," resembling an unavoidable falling

in line with the cadences of the concentration camps. From the shuffle of footsteps to the quiet

murmurings of the imprisoned, participating in the sounds of the community became an

inevitable score for many victims. It only seems predestined, then, that Celan himself would

"tune in" to the voices of this same collective pitch when seeking hope for emotional Holocaust

survival. Here, Hamburger certainly invokes more imagery and more cadence than Felstiner,

achieving a level of discomfort on numerous sensory levels—touch, sight, sound, imagination.

II. "*Wir trinken und trinken*": Repetition, Rendition, and Grammatical Rigidity

As much as the complexity of connotations bears weight on English reception, accurate

denotative interpretation and grammatical conversion are also a part of the translator's duty to

the original author. The "technical" elements of the poem must be recognized—especially true

for Celan—as Celan frequently uses words with double-meanings and intentional contradictions,

as well as poetically amends grammatical structure and convention.

Important to any language's grammatical system, noun declension explicitly determines

person and number, and therefore must be accurately translated. Unlike modern English, modern

German still distinguishes the formal "You" ("*Sie*," the nominative second person formal

pronoun) from the informal "you" ("*du*," the nominative second person "conversational"

pronoun) when addressing an elder, an official or a supervisor, and is used in other socially appropriate situations. Celan's "*duzen*," (using the informal "*du*" pronoun and its forms) of "*Niemand*," then, dampens the importance of this figure. Perhaps because Celan makes God "no one," or perhaps because Celan's speakers somehow feel comfortable enough to speak informally with God, the presence of "du" instead of "*Sie*" in relation to God seems to knock God down a few notches. With God's significance minimized, Celan creates a contradiction to the praise offered by the speakers in "*Psalm*" versus the value they place on the god to whom they offer it.

In his translation of "Psalm," Felstiner chooses to "*Siezt*" his English translation. Instead of translating "du" as the informal "you," Felstiner turns "*du*" into "thou" and "*dir*" (the Dative "*du*" form) into "thy." Referring back to traditional German grammar which capitalizes all nouns, he leaves "*Niemand*" capitalized as "No One," consequently designating "*Niemand*" as a proper noun. By doing so, Felstiner transforms Celan's "*du*" forms into Felstiner's own "*Sie*" forms; however, this decision clarifies to an English reader the proper noun—"No One"—read as "God." Though Felstiner's "*Siezen*" is easier to read in English as "God," it ultimately takes away from Celan's intentional depreciation. Rather than demoting God, Felstiner's language elevates God, and the corresponding "thy"s and "thou" imply a tone of higher English, something a contemporary English reader might associate with a "Ye olde English" language reference.

Felstiner continues his "*Siezen*" process in the third stanza of "*Psalm*" with "Nothing" and "No-One's-Rose." However, this "*Siezen*" is different in that it gives a proper address to the speakers, too. "A Nothing / *we* were," "the Nothing - the / No-One's-Rose," Felstiner translates, and in this way he depicts the speakers as being on the same level with "No One," with God.

This somewhat mimics Celan's "*duzen*" by leveling the conversational field, but it is achieved only with inconsistency. Though the German companions to "the Nothing" and "the No-One's-Rose"—Celan's "*die Nichts*" and "*die Niemandsrose*"—are capitalized, the German capitalization does not signal a proper noun. Felstiner doesn't capitalize "pistil" or "corona"—"*de[r]* Griffel," and "*de[r]* Staubfaden," are also both preceded by articles and therefore not noted as proper—so why does he take the liberty to make proper "the Nothing" and "the No-One's-Rose"? In elevating the speakers to God's level rather than bringing God down to theirs, Felstiner omits a crucial sense of discomfort that Celan conveys in his demotion of God to "*Niemand.*"

Hamburger, on the other hand, sticks to Celan's "*duzen*" of the relationship between God and "us." He also refrains from any additional capitalization, and keeps "no one" on the same level as "us." Yet the reference to God is still suggested in Hamburger's translation: "Praised be your name" in line 4 is a phrase commonly associated with the praise of God, to which Hamburger adds the lowercase "no one." Farther into the poem, God and the speakers remain on the "you" level, where "A nothing / we were," "the nothing-, the / no one's rose" describes the speakers as they equate themselves with an absence, a "no one." Hamburger, therefore, is able to relate the discomfort inherent in Celan that downgrades the deific presence while bringing it into dialogue with the speakers. The subsequent equality in this god-to-man relationship is further justified by Martin Heidigger in his *Unterwegs zur Sprache* when he acknowledges that "it is precisely the lonesome of something in common which persists as the most binding bond *with* it" (Lacoue-Labarthe 99, quoting Heidigger). Hamburger's contradiction, therefore, between the elevated praise and the de-elevated tone represents a bigger Holocaust picture: the actions of God

versus the presence of God certainly can provoke the response that God, to the speakers, is surely "no one."

Verb placement and conjugation also prove important. German grammar rules state that when using a finite auxiliary or modal verb, the active verb partnered with the auxiliary is placed in the infinitive form at the end of the sentence. This same rule is used in the formation of the present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect tenses, most commonly accompanied by the finite forms of *sein* (to be), *haben* (to have), and *werden* (to become). The joke is a common one: "You can't interrupt a German because you don't know what he's saying until he gets to the verb at the end of the sentence!" While this rule may seem exasperating to some—in all other tense cases the verb is found strictly in the second position—the perfect and passive structures often create an inevitable suspense, and Paul Celan uses this suspense to craft a number of poetic possibilities.

Word order is treated differently by the translators in "*Todtnauberg*"—and Felstiner's adherence to the accurate grammatical structure of the original German; acknowledgement of Celan's particular word placement in line breaks and stanza structure—differs greatly from Hamburger's presentation of it. These syntactic differences begin in the third stanza when Felstiner stays true to the German structure while Hamburger adapts some new arrangements. "*die in das Buch*," reads the first line of Celan's third stanza, which, taken singly, reads "It (in German, a gendered article) in the book." Felstiner's translation follows this basic structure— "into the book"—with "into" coming from clues farther down the poem. Hamburger, however, bumps "*das Buch*" all the way down to the end of the next line, so that the translation of Celan's sixth line reads, merely, "the line."

Consequently, this decision proves critical in the English reading and understanding of the third stanza of "*Todtnauberg*." Felstiner's initial adherence to the German grammatical structure allows Felstiner to more accurately translate the style into the rest of the stanza. In lines 7-8, he is able to use the pronoun "it" when describing the book mentioned in the first line, which is more similar to the absence of a pronoun altogether in Celan's two lines. Felstiner is also able to introduce "the line"—the subject of the third stanza—with much of the same lengthened suspense that the German grammar naturally provides. The importance is not fully realized until "the line" is stumbled upon, and then expanded upon as "a hope," "a thinker's / (un- / delayed coming) / word / in the heart" (lines 11-15).

Hamburger's choice, on the other hand, gives an almost singular importance to the actual, physical *line*. Not only is "the line" crucial enough to have its own, well, line, "the line" stands out by itself in contradiction to the lines readers soon discover were "registered," "inscribed" before Celan's. Hamburger emphasizes "the line" immediately as the subject, and then repeats "the line" again directly after the em-dash interjection. This repetition adds sophisticated rhetorical element and implies poetic weight, but it foregoes the opportunity for grammatical suspense.

Though each construction bears its own poetic device, Felstiner's inclusion of grammatical suspense provides a greater uncomfortable tension. Considering Celan's *actual* line in this non-fictional book of which he writes[9], the assumption can be made that the anxiety of Celan's visit with Heidegger was by far the most pressing issue at the forefront of Celan's composition—the anxiety of writing the ideal, the "coming" word from Celan's heart. Only by experiencing a similar anxiety can an English reader begin to understand Celan's visit to the

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[9] "Into the hut-book, looking at the well-star with a hope for a coming word in the heart. On 25 July 1967 Paul Celan" (Felstiner 244, quoting Celan's writing).

Schwarzwald, his confrontation of his and Heidegger's contradicting Holocaust pasts, and the impact it had on the relationship between the two.[10]

Veering away from word groups and syntax, sometimes even the slightest hint of discomfort can be found in the single grammatical element of an individual noun, verb, adjective, adverb, or preposition, and a translator must accurately reciprocate these parts of speech. Such task is present in Felstiner's and Hamburger's translations of "*Todesfuge.*" In the sixth stanza Celan writes "*er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau.*" Felstiner translates "*trifft,*" the third-person conjugation of "*treffen*" (in this case, "to strike" or "to hit, as in a target") as its original verb: "he *shoots* you with shot made of lead *shoots* you level and true." Hamburger, however, chooses to only reciprocate the first active verb "*trifft*" in "he *strikes* you with leaden bullets his aim is true." The second "*trifft,*" is replaced with a passive verb, and instead Hamburger transforms "*treffen*" into the substantive "aim" of the shooter. This variance in translation comes at a crucial point in "*Todesfuge.*" First, a reader can note that one of only two rhyming couplets in this poem is found in this line and the previous, with "blue" and "true" ("*blau*" and "*genau*"). The contrast between the shooter and truth—a Nazi and a moral value—is given heightened importance in this rhyme, and it seems fitting that such an uncomfortable comparison should stand out. Though Hamburger's verb-to-noun transformation is interesting in its (literal) perspective, it does not function with as much poetic sophistication as Felstiner's translation. Hamburger couples a twelve-syllable line ("true") with a thirteen-syllable line ("blue"), whose beats don't pair off or create the fugue-like rhythm present in Celan's couplet. Felstiner, on the other hand, cleanly matches two fourteen-syllable lines with each other while

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[10] For Celan, "an encounter with Heidegger had to be fraught" with conflicted feelings—Heidegger was an active supporter of the Nazi party during WWII, and had resorted to complete silence about his participation immediately following the party's defeat. Celan's one line in Heidegger's guestbook, then, would serve as a spring-board to a poem that "challenge[d] Heidegger" (Felstiner 245-246) and his philosophies.

keeping accurate denotative translations. The beat almost identically matches Celan's, allowing for these two lines to stand out in rhyme and in rhythm. When the "blue" eyes are paired with the word "true" successfully, the reader is presented with a pair of contradictory elements—certainly the actions of the Kommandant, in Jewish eyes, had nothing to do with "true."

The comparative reader can notice that parts of speech are again juggled in "*Bei Wein*," with words in Celan's fourth line, "*in die Ferne—die Nähe*." Hamburger and Felstiner both render "*Ferne*" and "*Nähe*" as nouns, replicating their German parts of speech as suggested by their preceding articles—Hamburger with "farness" and "nearness" and Felstiner with "distance" and "nearness." Mc Hugh and Popov, however, omit the German presence of the "die" article, translating "*Ferne*" and "*Nähe*" as "far" and "near." Though changing Celan's part of speech from nouns to adverbs, further inspection of these words' placements show their location inside prepositional phrases used to describe the movement of the subject. Transforming these prepositional phrases to adverbs, McHugh and Popov's translations remain accurate. Yet "far" and "near" seem clipped, lacking depth: riding God merely far or near is short of the strength it takes to do so; riding God *into* a distance invokes a tunneling sense of struggle, as one would ride into battle or ride into a storm.

In "*Todtnauberg*," Felstiner and Hamburger again present the possibility of interpreting different parts of speech. The first instance comes in the fourth stanza, line 17, where Celan's "*einzeln*" is translated by Hamburger as "single," an adjective, and by Felstiner as "singly," an adverb; later, Hamburger's line-18 adjective "clear" corresponds to Celan's line-19 adverb "*deutlich*," translated by Felstiner in his line 19 as "clearly." Though both translations in both instances are denotatively correct, they focus on different aspects of the modified subject.

As would come with an adjective, Hamburger's "single" is a physical description of the actual "orchid and orchid" preceding it; as would come with an adverb, Felstiner's "singly" is an interpretation of an active ("verbed"?) state of "Orchis and Orchis." Hamburger's adjective physically separates the "orchid and orchid," a deliberate inconsistency, for how can two be a "single" one? Hamburger emphasizes the importance of the individual flower: though there are two, each is its own single entity. Singled out, suddenly, the only thing the "orchid and orchid" have in common is that they share the same name on the same line.

Felstiner's adverb functions to describe the state of the "Orchis and Orchis" rather than the flowers themselves, ultimately implying that they stand singly together. Though not as poignant a paradox as Hamburger's isolation, Felstiner's "singly" makes the flowers capable of action, even if it is in a rooted stance. As a result, Felstiner identifies the possibility of further action, and makes it possible for the cultural allusions (discussed later) behind "Orchis" to engage in action as well.

"*Deutlich*," the adjective/adverb discrepancy continues to be a concern with "clear" and "clearly." Hamburger adjusts the word order to put the adjective a line above its original placement in Celan, allowing "clear" to modify only one recipient—"coarse stuff" from the beginning of the line. Felstiner leaves the word order as found in the original, placing "clearly" alone on its own line (18) and retaining both commas Celan uses preceding and following it. Keeping this grammatical structure also keeps the possibility of "clearly" modifying the action in either the line above or below it. The adverb can describe the previous action "while driving, / *clearly*," or can serve as a statement of observation: "*clearly*, the one driving us."

The third instance in this poem is not as drastic. It comes in the last two lines of the seventh stanza with Celan's "*Knüppel- / pfade*," which Felstiner translates as "log- / paths" and

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Hamburger as "fascine / walks." With Hamburger's omittance of the hyphen at the end of the line—the hyphen that Celan and Felstiner use to create a compound adjective—readers have the choice to understand Hamburger's "walks" as a noun or a verb. With this choice, Hamburger is now the translator that successfully relates the most discomfort. His choice is still denotatively accurate—"*pfade*" translates to "paths" or "trails"—yet it allows for literary-critical deliberation and decision. Is Celan treading over walks constructed of wood? Or are the woods themselves actually "walking"—flowing, branching out—over the "high moors"? Such questions generate confusion, of which even the slightest bit can be discomforting: is Celan the subject with the action, or are his surroundings? The idea that the reader can diffuse action on the narrator *or* the setting confirms that the "fully determined genocidal environment of the Holocaust severely tested for its participants the limits of self-conceptualization and self-representation" and depicts Celan as "attempting to reconcile the enormous ambivalence generated by [such] environment" (McC. Lewin, 296, 311). By helping to relay some potential feelings of the Holocaust experience, Hamburger has provided the most uncomfortable translation with his noun/verb "walks." Hamburger offers a glimpse into Celan's manipulation of language and evokes Celan's ability to grammatically "build into his speech a dramatic questioning of language and poetry" (Felstiner, *Mother* Tongue, 113).

III. "*Der Mensch, der's mit anhört*": Collective Cultural Allusion

After analyzing the connotative and denotative decisions a translator must make, a critical reader should then naturally wonder, "What about the *heart* of the poem?" Arguably, the "uniqueness of [Celan's] poems is not in the words, not in the phrases, not in the sentences." Yet "where else can it be? In the structure of the poem, the peculiar way in which the phrases are

combined, on the level of the text rather than the level of semantics and syntax?" (Horn 18)

Undoubtedly, Celan's poetry is full of depth "on the level of text," from intertextual references to cultural context to literary and historical allusion. The translator must remember, recognize, or discover Celan's profound command of his *other* knowledges—of history, of literature, of culture, of tradition—and successfully relay those elements to a reader that might not be as familiar with their German backgrounds. This includes the translator's option to most accurately convey the German by simply leaving some words *in German,* allowing their own cultural saturation to seep into the poem.

Of the selected five poems, the most prominent example of this non-translation lies in Felstiner's reproduction of "*Todesfuge.*" Felstiner translates by leaving some German words untranslated, and achieves success because of the repetition of select words and phrases in Celan's original—he recognizes the appropriate instances in which to leave the German as it is. Felstiner calls it "reversing the process of translation" in order to "recover [a] loss" (Felstiner, Mother Tongue, 115); his remittance of the original language allows the words to "identify and even incarnate what no other can" (Felstiner, *Ziv,* 627). So with this technique, Felstiner includes non-translations whose implications would be nearly impossible to recognize by only providing the English words. First, he identifies "*Deutschland*" as the setting of the poem (rather than Hamburger translating it to "Germany"), thus forcing an English reader to understand cultural elements of the place on terms of the *Muttersprache,* and making any process of disassociation of the country from its primary language increasingly difficult. Perhaps some English readers connect "*Deutschland*" with the former first verse of the "*Deutschlandlied,*"—"*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles*" [11]—and garner a sense of dominating German presence.

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[11] As the first line of the German national anthem, the phrase "*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles*" was "originally intended in 1848 as a call to place the concept of a unified nation above regional differences—with

Felstiner goes on to utilize Celan's poetic repetition. Its fugue-like echoes[12] create phrase frequency and similar stanza placements, and Felstiner carefully utilizes the canonic presence to introduce and include the German. This gradual and somewhat methodical non-translation is fugue-like in itself, and its presence not only increases the tension between the visual/physical differences in the languages, it piece by piece adds more of the discomfort of the unfamiliar. Ultimately, Felstiner forces the reader to succumb to an inevitable German presence. An English reader can never feel comfortable enough to forget the German background of the poem, as the German sneaks in with "*Deutschland*" in the beginning but doesn't stop there. Felstiner then adds the non-translation of "*goldenes*," "*aschenes*," and "*Haar*"—close enough English cognates to almost go unnoticed, yet in close enough proximity to the previous English words—"golden," "ashen," and "hair"—to be understood. And by the last three stanzas, the German words have almost conquered the poem. The "Death" that is "a master from *Deutschland*" (my italics) becomes "a master *aus Deutschland*" and then "*ein Meister aus Deutschland*" until Felstiner relies solely on the original German words to convey the poem's poignancy: "*der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland.*" By not translating a line that has been "echoed ever since in German anthology titles, chapter headings, [and] epigraphs" (Felstiner, Mother Tongue, 115), Felstiner allows the English reader to experience this line's power as well.

Two final lines rendered completely in German—"*dein goldenes Haar Margareta / dein aschenes Haar Shulamith*"—end Felstiner's translation. Not only must this English reading end with words that are not English's own, the English reader must let a foreign entity resonate. German successfully invades this poem, allowing discomfort in the idea that even and English

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geographic borders marking the extent to which culturally German settlers had spread." However, this sense of unity "became reinterpreted as a justification for German expansionism and misinterpreted by some as a claim to German world hegemony" (Encyclopædia Britannica).

[12] As defined by the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a fugue is a "compositional procedure characterized by the systematic imitation of a principal theme in simultaneously sounding melodic lines."

translation has been overtaken by German identity. Readers are one step closer to imagining how it must have felt for the Jews, and Felstiner is one step closer to most accurately conveying Celan's poetics.

Hamburger's extent of non-translation encompasses only one element: "Margarete." Though Felstiners "Margareta" differs by only one letter—and, transcribed, would read phonetically closer to the German pronunciation if "Margarete" was treated with a silent "e"— "Margarete" provides a direct reference to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*. Goethe—one of Germany's most influential writers of the romantic period—crafted *Faust* as a drama of the doctor who made a pact with the devil, and Faust's infatuation with Margarete is central to his contract. Margarete's character is described by Goethe as being "fair" with "red lips" and "bright cheeks"[13]— as she is often illustrated as such, Margarete resembles the extremely stereotypical German woman[14] (though I suppose I must be careful with that one, considering this discussion of the Holocaust itself). In this context, she is paired antithetically with Shulamith, the dark-skinned princess in the Old Testament *Song of Solomon* who represents Jewish women. Such contrast begs the reader to notice the difference in treatment by the Kommandant in the various stanzas.

As Celan's writings turn from experience to philosophy, allusions infuse Celan's "*Die Niemandsrose*," and, appropriately, "*Psalm*." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a Biblical psalm as "any song or poem of a sacred or serious nature," and the Psalms of the Old Testament

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[13] From Goethe's *Faust*, lines 2609-2614:
"Beim Himmel, dieses Kind ist schön!
So etwas hab ich nie gesehn.
Sie ist so sitt- und tugendreich,
Und etwas schnippisch doch zugleich.
Der Lippe Rot, der Wange Licht,
Die Tage der Welt vergeß ich's nicht!"

[14] In her essay "The Problem of Gretchen," Furst quotes Peter Heller in describing Margarete (Gretchen) as the "emblem of the pure German maiden," and notes that Margarete is "endow[ed] with the attributes most highly cherished in a woman at that time" (Furst, 48).

are comprised of elements of praise or lamentation. Celan's "*Psalm*" cleverly combines the two. The "we" in the poem is praising God, yet at the same time lamenting God's abandonment. Celan uses the sense of sight in his vivid visual descriptions to suggest that God has closed his eyes to his people; he uses the sense of touch in physical recreation, re-blooming; he uses the sense of hearing in the song of the speaker-flower. Celan synesthetically implies God's proverbial "deaf ear" that God has turned towards those singing out to God. Much as the subject matter of the poem suggests a "deaf ear," Celan's title, "*Psalm,*" incants a specific Psalm of the Old Testament, Psalm 116[15]. Psalm 116 lies in the middle of the *Hallel*, a Jewish prayer tradition, which consists of a variety of verbatim recitation of Psalms 113-118 used for praise and thanksgiving on certain Jewish holidays[16]. In this Psalm, the singer offers praises to God for saving him from mortal dangers and despairs, and vows to offer himself as a sacrifice if it will repay God for the good God has given him.

It is fitting, then, that the "song of praise" is blatantly present in this Psalm, as the first two verses declare "I love the Lord, because [the Lord] hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because [the Lord] hath inclined [the Lord's] ear unto me, therefore will I call upon [the Lord] as long as I live" (Psalm 116:1-2). David's[17] praise then turns to actually summoning the Lord in David's times of need, as he writes ,"The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul" (Psalms 116:3-4). What *isn't* present here is the "song of lamentation," which Celan creates to coexist with the praise in his poem. In

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[15] Confirmed by Jerry Glenn in his chapter on "Psalm." Glenn also suggests that the last two verses of Psalm 115 tie Celan's poem closer to Psalm 116 (Glenn 121-122). Psalm 115:17-18: "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore" incorporates Celan's inclusion of the dead/recreated as praisers of God.
[16] *Encyclopædie Britannica Online*
[17] Traditional Judaism recognizes David as the individual author of the 150 Psalms in the Old Testament. Modern religious teachings, however, suggest that the Psalms were works of numerous authors and compiled by David.

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"*Psalm*," the praise coming from "us" is offered to "*Niemand*"—to No One. The speaker(s) of "*Psalm*" are quite aware that their praises are being sent up in vain, a vast contrast to David in Psalm 116, who is confident that his praises will be answered with salvation. Though beseeched, this "No One" cannot return the praises of the people in the "Psalm," well, because "No One" simply doesn't exist.

With this praise/lamentation context in mind, a translator surely realizes the inevitable presence of conflict between fact and faith. Such struggle is further culturally relayed where, in line 18, Celan's personified "*Niemandsrose*" is painted with the color "*Purpur*." Hamburger translates this color as crimson, while Felstiner makes it purple. Not only do these differences in color conjure two separate physical compositions, they also carry with them different symbolism in their cultural meanings and uses. Using this color to describe the words singing out from "*die Niemandsrose*," Celan illustrates a blooming *Passiflora*, or passion flower, which is most commonly purple. So named because of its "Passion of the Christ" composition, it fits that Celan uses a flower with a New Testament reference to contrast the Psalm from the Old Testament. Suggesting an inseparable but independent bond between the Jewish tradition and the Old Testament and the Christian (here, German) tradition and the New Testament, Celan once again creates an uncomfortable relationship between the speakers who personify the flower and the object associated with religion and deific presence.

Thus in describing this flower, the choice to translate "*Purpur*" in two different ways presents two different contexts in which to illustrate it. Hamburger's "crimson," a color commonly used to describe the color of blood, can invoke bravery, martyrdom, and courage in the face of death. Yet imagery of bloodshed no doubt brings negative and fearful reaction, and is saturated with a viscous, uncomfortable reality of violence. This summons certainly rings a true

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note as a description of the Holocaust, and provides its own sense of discomfort. If the words

sung from the petals of the passion flower are blood-soaked with undertones of sadness and

hatred, their tune seems hopeless.

Felstiner's approach to *Purpur* conveys a different meaning entirely. His use of "purple"

seems the most denotatively accurate, and it brings with it hints and images of royalty and

richness. Part of both English and German historic culture, the color purple has been associated

with aristocracy. Purple is also present in the church during the Christian practices of Lent and

Advent, signaling the death and birth of Christ the King; appropriately, this same color is used in

a poem about rebirth, where "No one kneads us *again* out of earth and clay." Felstiner's purple

also seems only natural to complete the passion flower imagery—the purple that covers the

passion flower is the same purple that covers Christ[18].

However, above this all, we must not forget to take into account the actual German word

"*Purpurwort.*" In 1810, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe published *Zür Farbenlehre* (On the

Theory of Color) discussing his ideas on the physiological and physical properties of color and

light. Goethe "proposed that color is an active and dynamic process of the 'tension' between

light and dark—a 'coming into being' out of light and dark" (Whitelegg 315), and thus used a

color wheel to describe the interconnectedness of individual colors and their interactions with

and creations of each other[19]. Goethe took into consideration both the physical and psychological

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[18] John 19: 2-3: And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and arrayed him in a purple garment and they came unto him, and said, Hail, King of the Jews!

[19]

Goethe's color wheel published in *Zür Farbenlehre*.

elements of color relationships, and built his color wheel around these properties. Goethe placed *Purpur* (as crimson) at the top of his wheel, substituting purple for red because of the way he thought light creates it. At the intersection of *Phantasie* and *Vernunft* (fantasy and rationality), Goethe uses his wheel to describe *Purpur* as *Schön* (beautiful). Goethe's insights offer a visual description to purple as a royal color; his *Purpur*, then, invites the same implications garnered from the common purple: situated over the other colors, at a polar intersection between imagination and reason, *Purpur* seems to reign richly, beautifully. It also, however, tops Celan's use of "*Purpurwort*" in "Psalm." The physical description of the flower in the last stanza calls first to mind the passion flower, as previously discussed. However, keeping in mind Goethe's color wheel, perhaps the "purple word we sang / over, O over / the thorn" is a *physical* situation *over* the center, "dem Dorn" (which can be translated as both "the thorn" and "the point"). In this case, the beauty of the crimson and its place between fantasy and reality gives Hamburger's "crimson" its own (if Goethean) power.

Is the description of the speakers as the "*Purpur*" passion flower more poignant—does it portray more discomfort—as the common purple or as Goethe's purple-red-crimson?[20] If crimson invokes blood, then blood running through the words of this *Niemandsroses* song is heavy with Holocaust emotion, and is Goethe's ideal of the color with the most power. If purple is a symbol of beauty, then this perfect passion flower should not be a *Niemandsrose*; rather, a *Jemandsrose* that should be admired and cherished. Herein lies exceptional evidence of the impossibility of translation: both purple and crimson describe this flower, these speakers, with

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Rudolf Magnus, in his book *Goethe as Scientist*, notes that "In Goethe's view [the color wheel] contained three primary colors: blue, yellow and purple (red); and three blended colors: green, orange and violet…A primary color is always opposed to a blend" (149).

[20] Goethe's interchanging of purple and red seem definitive of the German word "Purpurrot" (literally, purple-red) differing from "Purpurwort" by a mere two letters. "Purpurrot" is the German word for "crimson," Hamburger's interpretation.

equally upsetting tensions. The possibility that the speakers' song is thick with a crimson substance and a Goethean power gives these speakers' words a prevailing voice in German culture; however, the chances that an English reader would read into the Goethe allusion are slim. For this reason—perhaps for this reason only—Felstiner's "purple" proves the more successful translation, simply because English readers can better understand or read in to purple's cultural significance. The ideal image of the purple *Passiflora* is contradicted by the speakers' feelings of inadequacy, and it is with this image that Felstiner conveys the uneasy outlook on a future life, a rebirth.

Continuing to recognize Biblical allusions in Celan's "*Die Niemandsrose*," Celan invokes Biblical images in "*Bei Wein und Verlorenheit*." Considering the phonetically similar "*Wein*" and the verb "weinen" meaning "to cry," Celan points his readers the Old Testament book of Joel. In German, the word of God as told by Joel says, "Wachet auf, ihr Trunkenen, und weinet, und heulet, alle Weinsäufer, um den süssen Wein; denn er ist euch vor eurem Munde weggenommen." (Joel 1:5, *Die Heilige Schrift*). Both "Wein" and "weinen" are present in this passage, which is the command of God to "Wake up, drunkards, and weep, and wail all you drinkers of wine, for it has been snatched from your lips" (Joel 1:5, King James). Though Celan's first line does *not* read "Bei Wein und *weinen*," his "Verlorenheit" can be felt with tears, especially when Celan notes "bei / beider Neige." The wine is running out, and its loss rings similar to the loss felt by those in Joel who have suffered from God's deliberate draught and plague.

Additionally, more images of God's harsh punishments are discussed "Bei Wein": in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, God says to Jeremiah, "Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be

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moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. … For, lo, I begin to

bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall

not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth" (Jeremiah

25:15-16, 29). Jeremiah shows God unpleased with the people of God's city, and their

intoxication induces their lostness. The wine creates the obstacles placed in front of the Jewish

people and invites down the sword of God, yet the people have no choice but to drink it—much

like "they" in "*Bei Wein*" have no choice but to ride through the snow and hurdle over their own

obstacles.

A successful translation conveys these Biblical allusions, and captures the presence of

God before God's literarily-physical presence in line 4. Going back to the first translation of

"*Bei*," Hamburger's "over" and the area "over" encompasses between preposition and

convention shows the conversational element between God and God's people about the "Wein"

and the "weinen." Just as God was in dialogue with Joel and Jeremiah in the Old Testament

books, God comes into dialogue here with Celan and the "I" speaker of "Bei Wein." God's

presence as a voice undoubtedly conjures guilt about the actions done in by the Jewish people in

the Old Testament that warranted God's plagues and punishments.

From the experience in "Todesfuge" to the philosophy of "Die Niemandsrose," Celan

turns towards experience again with "*Todtnauberg*." To relay this experience, the translators

once again utilize the method of non-translation. In line 17, Celan himself leaves "*Orchis*"

untranslated, and Felstiner follows suit. "*Orchis*" in its origin is a Greek word meaning

"testicle," but as an allusion or reference it is the name of a Greek mythological character[21] as

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[21] In Greek mythology, *Orchis* was the "son of the satyr Patellanus and the nymph Acolasia who presided at the feasts celebrated in honour of Priapus. The headstrong Orchis being present at the celebration of the feast of Bacchus laid violent hands on one of the priestesses of that god and this sacrilegious conduct so incensed the Bacchanals against the youth that they forthwith set upon him and in their fury literally tore him in pieces. His father

well as the name of a classification of a genus of the orchid family[22]. By leaving "*Orchis*"

untranslated, Felstiner leaves the cultural, historical, and even scientific meanings present in his

English version. Readers are able to not only feel the Greek influence that must have been

present in the original German (because why would and English reader assume that Felstiner

chose to translate the German *into* Greek?) but also to feel the depth of any of their own

foreknowledge. Readers who have Greek mythological background can associate Orchis with his

ghastly actions and gruesome fate[23], where the discomfort speaks for itself; readers who have

botanical background can understand the colors and the characteristics of the plethorea of orchid

species situated under the genus "*Orchis*," where this multitude inevitably contradicts their

presence "singly" one word later. And, conveniently, for readers that have no background in

either of the aforementioned categories, the word "*Orchis*" is itself a close enough cognate to the

English "orchid" that one might at least be able to picture this finicky flower as part of an

important cultural allusion.

  So it almost becomes a question why Hamburger *did* choose to translate "*Orchis*" into

"orchid." By doing so, Hamburger completely omits any sort of cultural or historical association

that might be garnered from the original Greek noun. Without the original—at least in context—

readers feel no discomfort from the mythology and see no connection to the host of scientific

possibilities that challenge the "single" presence of the "orchid and orchid" in the "woodland"

setting. Felstiner's lack of translation keeps the discomfort of "*Orchis*" that is present not only in

the English allusions but even hints at the discomfort in the original German as well.

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adjured the gods but the only remedy he could obtain was that his son's mangled corpse should be transformed into a flower which should ever after bear the name of Orchis as a blot upon his memory." Folkard, *Plant Lore*, 478-479.
[22] Information from *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, which defines "orchis" as a specific "genus of orchids, family Orchidaceae, containing as many as 100 species native to Eurasia and North America
[23] Folkard, *Plant Lore*, 478-479.

Though considerably obvious, it should not go unstated that the most successful translations invoke Celan's cultural references and the discomfort in the stories behind them. What might be innate in German culture *must* also be evident to the educated English reader. It is also fair to say, then, that any understandable inclusion of original German text, where appropriate, provides a level of discomfort that cannot be felt by English words alone. These translators' practices of non-translation, of allusive inclusion, offer backgrounds and characteristics with which a reader can feel more attune to the German cultural context and thus more uncomfortable with its content.

"*Es sind noch Lieder zu singen*": Nothing is Impossible

During my first readings of the poems, I found myself favoring Felstiner's translations. Even making my initial red-pen markings all over my copies of the poems, I was drawn more closely to his translations than to Hamburger's or McHugh and Popov's. So it *almost* came as a surprise to me when my conclusions began to support Hamburger more and more… In a purely quantitative contest, Hamburger receives the connotative award with 6 "wins" for the most discomforting elements; Felstiner tops the list at 5 and 3 "wins" for denotative recognition and cultural context respectively. It wasn't until questioning my own conclusions that I realized that perhaps I initially favored Felstiner because his translations *didn't* overwhelmingly instill that sense of discomfort.

However, each translator and set of translations offer indispensable elements towards conveying the discomfort in Celan. Felstiner's careful thus successful practice of non-translation contributes to the indefinably thick tension between the Jewish and the German Holocaust experiences, as Celan's German words ultimately conquer and replace Felstiner's English ones.

This non-translation contributes to Felstiner's grammatical organization and poetic tempo, creating translations that are easily readable and understandable yet still delve into the depths of discomfort present in Celan's poetics.

McHugh and Popov translate with liberal and modern flair, and their tendency towards relating the inner elements of poesy rather than rigid adherence to the original form or structure proves invaluable in "*Bei Wein*" in instilling both connotative and denotative discomfort. Their more modern vernacular brings to mind images fresher in the reader's mind, as well as offers the opportunity for research behind their choices.

And Hamburger takes the connotative cake, perhaps because of his German background and his more native understanding of word's contextual meanings. Readers are able to draw the right implications from Hamburger's word choices that the Holocaust was, somehow, poetic. An idea uncomfortable on its own, many critics have asked, "Can poetry be written after the Holocaust?" Hamburger's response seems to be that the more beautifully this poetry is written, the more it can provide the most discomforting account.

So in order to experience the poetics of Paul Celan as rendered in English, one must understand that no one translation will ever be adequate enough. Though each translator successfully identifies elements of Celan's discomfort, no single one fully encompasses all three. A reader wishing to fully intake Celan's words in English must become a comparative reader, a critical reader, and most importantly a reader who understands that perhaps one of Celan's most discomforting elements is that he didn't always wish to be understood.

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