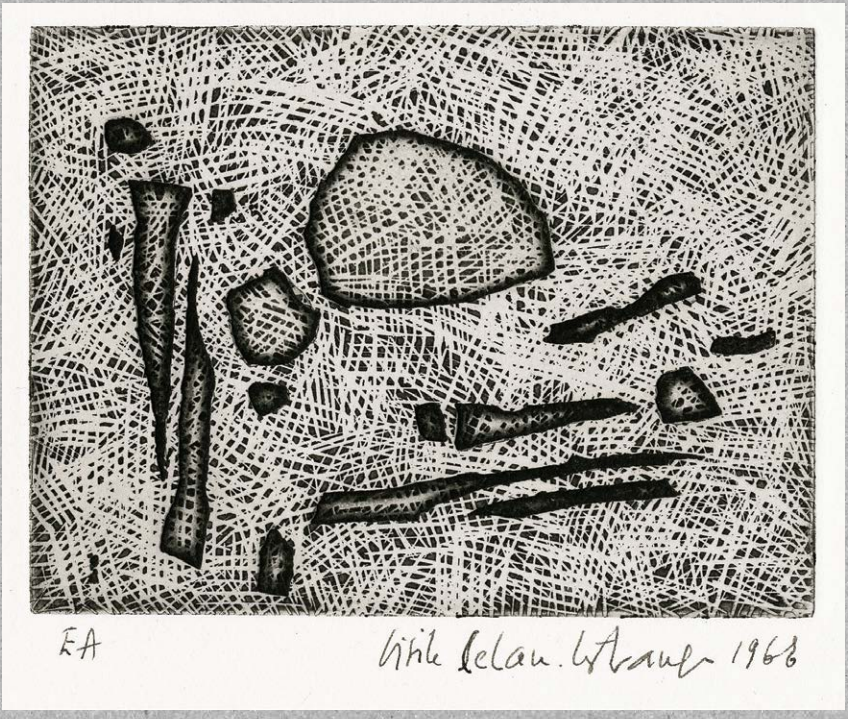
Paul Celan

Microliths

Posthumous Prose



Translated by Pierre Joris

Paul Celan

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Microliths They Are, Little Stones

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Posthumous Prose

Translated with a preface
by Pierre Joris

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Translation & preface
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0 Preface

MICROLITHS THEY ARE, LITTLE STONES

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Preface

Read this book from and through its title forwards and backwards. Celan's personal fate and his times' historical events intertwine and infiltrate — as rivulets and streams — the permeable and friable karstic (un)solidity of his century, carving a rhizome of pathways through it. Traces that leave behind fine crystal structures — the fully-realized and polished poems — and stones, small and not so small, scree and shards, witnessing the life and thought process of the poet in his time. In his notebooks Celan himself spoke of "microliths" — little stones — and this is the perfect title for this book.

But Celan was a writer *ab initio*, no matter what genre he would have chosen. Permit me to offer here a first translation of a letter a young Celan wrote in early November 1946 (he was still in Bucharest) to Max Rychner (1897–1965), the Swiss poet, critic, and editor of the magazine *Die Tat,* the man Hannah Arendt called "one of the most educated and subtle figures in the intellectual life of the era." The letter was a response to one by Rychner (now lost) to the Bukovinian poet Alfred Margul-Sperber (1998–1967), an early champion of Celan's work, in which the latter speaks to Celan's manuscript *Der Sand aus den Urnen* (*The Sand from the Urns*) (which Sperber had sent Rychner). Rychner would publish poems from that manuscript in *Die Tat.*

Dear Mr. Rychner,

How to thank you? How to explain what your letter to Mr. Alfred Sperber means to me? Maybe by telling you how nearly each one of my poems is accompanied by the feeling that now I have written my last poem, that one final favor has been

bestowed on me, or — and now, as it is coming back to me, I know it more clearly — how it was also often no longer this feeling, but only the whir of an alien (dark) wing and its dying away, that sounded and faded through me, the invisible angel's admonition, a nod I was barely able to impart.

Do I succeed in telling you how alone I was? Alone, not because I called and there was no one who could hear me. A few heard me call, but who were they? "You call, they said, but that's not how one calls. Did you believe you would confound us with your call? Call differently." I became afraid as I hadn't known that I had called *them*. So then I fell silent. Later I tried again, but I no longer called as loudly. Nor did I call into the same direction, in truth I no longer wanted to be heard, I was calling myself. And so I learned, slowly, to give answer to myself. Was it just this? No, because I also called out to the chestnuts, to the pink hawthorn and the grasses, to a woman, I called them all and I also spoke to them, until we became familiar with each other, and could just whisper. In the end we knew each other so well that it became a silent conversation. Thus arrived a period of speech-filled silence and I no longer wrote poems. I believe that back then already I knew that I was a poet.

Did I speak of calls? And was that all? Wasn't it rather, even as I called, a plea for entry, a desire for company when darkness sets in and the whispering begins? "I called," I began, to narrate the journey that now also leads to you — but it was no doubt the search for names and for me the difficulty resided in finding you, as you were kept secret. By whom? Do I know it today, as I know that only beyond words and between them those spaces open up which, shadowed by the words' branchwork and dipped into darkness, hide the small thickets from which fire leaps?

Did I penetrate all the way to this fire? You say so in your letter and this is where my loneliness ends. Certainly, I had

espied flames, but this could also have been an illusion. One and only one person had supported me in my undertakings: Alfred Sperber. He shielded me and interceded with those who bade me be silent. He won friends for me. I was no longer alone with my poems, but I believe I may say that now we both remained lonely, even if we were two. Now you too have joined in and surely you see that these lines are the way they are because I do not know how to thank you.

I am very conscious of the fact that this letter only gives insufficient information concerning those things that have moved me and whose confidant I prefer to remain, those wings whose whir came from behind, went through me, and there fell silent — for that my joy is too great. But there is something I have to add, with an uneasy heart, and in this moment I no doubt speak from that darkness that also knew how to claw me in with predator talons: I will tell you how difficult it is as a Jew to write poems in German. When my poems are published they will no doubt also reach Germany and — let me say the horror — the hand that will open my book has perhaps shaken the hand of the one who murdered my mother… And it could even get more horrible…

But this is my fate: to have to write German poems. And if poetry is my fate — and here I thank you for affirming this — then I am pleased to be the occasion for your beautiful parable of the burst spell, and to be able to say to myself that this other Germany perdures, that at least the story of the "deux Allemagnes" has not lost its (sad) meaning.

Forgive me, dear Mr. Rychner, this darkening toward the end of a letter that should only have been allowed to express the joy to have found the approval I had dreamed of when, surrounded by spears, I saw a leaf fall and knew that it was a message — be once more deeply thanked by your

Paul Celan

If I have reproduced the above letter in full it is because I see it as a fascinating document showing how a young Celan, aware that he is a poet, speaks to this fact and its difficulties in a prose of an intensity, rhetoric-, and image-richness nearly equivalent to that of his poetry. I will go so far as to suggest that had he been able to work more in prose, he would have become an equal to and successor of Franz Kafka — one of the prose writers he loved the most. The letter to Rychner also points indirectly to why Celan, consciously or unconsciously, was aware that no matter how gifted he was, and how wide-ranging his ambitions were, he would and could never be a novelist or narrative prose writer. Poetry — even while causing problems at a certain level, as he details in the letter — was the only way in which he could envision his witnessing, due, essentially, to the difficulties brought about by his decision to write in German.

We know from his work as a poet in, and prose-translator into, Rumanian that he could have written in that language. He lived in France from 1948 until his death in 1970 and his letters in French to his wife and other correspondents show that he would also have been a superb prose writer in French — had he so decided. But there doesn't seem to have been any moment in which Celan seriously thought of using any of those languages for his life's work. It is the personal fate and the historical facts mentioned in the opening lines that made these choices impossible: he had to write in German because it was his mother('s)-tongue, the language in which she had shared her love for classic German literature with her only child. Memorializing her is a red thread that runs through the oeuvre from first poems to the end, a thread red as the blood Friederike Antschel shed on the snows of Transnistria, executed by Nazis — whose language was also German. These circumstances made the exigency to write in German abso-

lute, but it also demanded of Celan, writing after the Khurbn, that he cleanse his mother's high-German of all the poison injected into it by her murderers' ideology. Such an action can only be undertaken in a poetry which allows — even requires — focused attention to each & every syllable and word, in its current usages as well as in its etymologico-historical depths, something impossible to do in prose. One could suggest that Ezra Pound's use of Basil Bunting's find, namely that the German noun for poetry, "Dichtung," and the verb "dichten," in its meaning of "to condense," is germane here. The highly condensed, tightly-packed matter of poetry allows for the focused attention that allows pin-point surgical intervention for needed scalpel-sharp excisions and/or the creation of new words, combinatory neologisms that, it so happens, German is very adept at. These latter word-creations, are, in fact, a hallmark of Celan's mature work. (I speak to these matters in more detail in the various introductions to the books of my translations of Celan's poetry.) It is that verticality of poetry as against the horizontality of prose that would be Celan's preferred instrument for creating a viable post-Holocaust world.

And yet, Celan never stopped writing prose and actually harbored plans for more extensive non-verse writings: in 1954 he wrote to Alfred Andersch: "After the publication of my next volume of poetry, I will try to write prose — what I have produced so far in that area is not worth being printed —, and if something worthwhile comes of this, I'd love to see it published in the series you edit."[1] Two years later, already a widely recognized poet and on the path to becoming the major German-language poet of the second half of the 20th C, he suggested in a draft of a letter to his publisher that he had

1. Paul Celan, *Briefe 1934–1970*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann (Suhrkamp, 2019) p. 177.

a mind for writing that "would be a bit more sober and more spacious" than his poems.[2] Nothing came of this occasion, and in his life-time, Celan published very little of such "more spacious" work — i.e. prose — except for two essays that were public award-acceptance speeches, a short (6 or 7 pages-long) now well-known narrative, "Gespräch im Gebirg" (Conversation in the Mountains), and a few occasional bits and pieces often published, or better, hidden away in obscure places. It is only with this volume, edited by Barbara Wiedemann and Bertrand Badiou, and first published in 2005, that Celan's multifaceted achievements as a prose writer can be discovered — and confirmed. This English version of *Microliths* follows the first German edition as far as Celan's texts are concerned. The final section, the commentaries, is a shortened version of Wiedemann and Badiou's original commentary section, with additional material by the translator.

The book at hand should thus not be seen as a "Collected" or "Complete" prose of Paul Celan, as it does not include the above-named essays or the conversation. For other obvious reasons — how do you translate a translation, or of what use, outside of analytical textual critical essays, would be a translation of a translation, especially of prose? — this gathering excludes a range of Celan's prose translations, done in his Bucharest days in the 40s from Russian into Rumanian of books by Mikhail Lermontov and Anton Chekov (in fact, Celan's very first published works!), and those done in the 50s into German as primarily a way of making ends meet, such as Jean Cayrol's 1954 novel *L'Espace d'une nuit*, translated as *Im Bereich der Nacht,* Henri Thomas's novel *Le promontoire*

2. Cf. Paul Celan, *Mikrolithen sinds, Steinchen,* ed. by Barbara Wiedemann and Bertrand Badiou (Suhrkamp 2005) p. 221.

(unpublished), or two Georges Simenon *Commissaire Maigret* novels. More important from a literary point of view is his 1953 translation of E.M. Cioran's *Précis de décomposition* (*A Short History of Decay*) as *Lehre vom Zerfall*, which is still in print today. Worth mentioning here too is the fact that in the 50s Celan, and probably again mainly for financial reasons, translated a range of essays for the German magazine *Perspektiven*, essays that include — from English — work by James Baldwin, Saul Bellow, and Irwin Howe. Also excluded are Celan's German versions of a range of translations Wiedemann situates "in the border domain between aphorism and prose poem" from the works of René Char and Henri Michaux, which are gathered in the 2 volumes of Celan translations in the *Complete Works* editions.

These omissions not withstanding, *Microliths* is the complete gathering of all extent posthumous texts and prose fragments, and brings to light an essential aspect of Celan's achievement that the previously available translated work — the essays, essentially — was not able to show. The book opens with the early language games of surrealist inspiration, goes on to a range of biting, bitter, yet deeply insightful aphorisms, "counterlights" (as he calls them) thrown on those concrete dates from and toward which his poems are written. Among the most surprising and appealing of these prose writings are the (mostly broken-off or abandoned) narratives — including brief theatrical scenes —, "stories" and dialogues with the background of his Jewish fate. We further enter the wider area of Celan's poetological reflections, often framed as critiques of the prejudices with which the volumes of his poetry were received and (mis)read. On the matter of the Goll-affair — the calumnious and defamatory accusations of plagiarism the widow of the poet Ivan Goll made public in Germany, and which marred the final decade of Celan's life by

triggering several severe psychic breakdowns — Celan never spoke up publicly, preferring his friends in the literary world to do so for him. Included here are several shorter pieces and, majorly, a long never-sent and until now unpublished draft of a letter to the writer and publisher Alfred Andersch giving us Celan's most complete, complex, yet terse take on this truly criminal matter.

It is fitting that this book should come out here in the US in 2020 — the year that marks Paul Celan's 100th birth- and 50th death-year. It is also the year that marks this translator's half century-long trajectory ferrying — Celan called translation "Fergendienst," ferryman's labor — this work over into English. What strikes me most at this moment, a moment that is also momentous (and year-long) in this country, culturally, politically (and those two are intricately connected), is the absolute foresight and insight Celan's work offers. His urgent sense, dismissed by his contemporaries of the left or the right as no more than paranoid ravings, that the forces of evil (be it in Germany or elsewhere in Europe, or even in America), anti-Semitism, and fascist ideology represented had only gone to earth at the end of World War II, and were well and alive & ready to pounce at the slightest incitation, turns out to be an accurate diagnosis. I would like to propose that reading Celan closely is an excellent way of learning the truth about our human or inhuman condition, and may be the best homeopathy for heart and brain we have. A poem, Celan said, is a handshake — so are his prose microliths.

Pierre Joris
Brooklyn
February 2020

Aphorisms, Counterlights, and Aphoristic Fragments

Microliths they are, little stones, barely perceptible, tiny xenocrysts inside the thick tuff of your existence — and now you try, word-poor and perhaps already irrevocably condemned to silence, to read them together into crystals? You seem to wait for reinforcements — say, where should these come from?

Paul Celan

PAUL CELAN'S LITTLE EVENING BOOK

III. 11. 47. 1.1
Paul confirms that he will make self-love with Ciuci.

Comment on Barbu Lăzăreanu. 1.2
Why should words not have their graveyards too?

The great peacock Păun (A+) 1.3

——— 1.4
III. 15.
— I have sleep.
— Sleep or sturgeon?

20. 1.5
— Good morning
— Wasn't necessary.

22 1.6
In spring we make a few excursions that will never become part of the history of the mountains.

24. 1.7
Tell me something in another idea-disorder, Margareta.

— She is start but smerile (Nina) 1.8

———
I would even eat a piece of Viorica! 1.9

1.10 Dedication in a volume of poetry:
You were the coffin from which I descended to coffide this.

1.11 If someone keeps his mouth shut, his words become proverbs
(Jünger)

1.12 Who rides a tiger, can't dismount anymore

1.13 _____
Paul Celan: persona gratinata

1.14 On Sașa Pană vis-à-vis Tzara:
The shadow that has finally found its man.

1.15 _____
— What are you thinking about (in silence)
— Multiplication tables

1.16 A thought for Margareta:
It's good when you feel the wind, but the wind should feel you too.

1.17 In poetry one doesn't wait for the dial tone — when making a phone call.

1.18 Aragon: a Great Poet
Éluard: a great Great Poet

1.19 _____
April
She — In what quality should I come to the mountains?
He — As a sister of charity.
Or as the charity of a sister of quality.

1.20 Mister Alafon to the Telederca

Manivocal equifesto 1.21

We cent a rar 1.22

Gargarete Dorian 1.23

Antechamber music: 1.24
Solo for Petronome with Paolocello accompaniment.

There you go, splitting woods 1.25

From the program for the Hölderlin-memorial at the Lovinescu- 1.26
circle of friends:
Hölderlin & Lovinescu will meet in the Ether and sing a methylic hymn.

V. i. 47 1.27
And a journey will come from which we will day away.

——— 1.28
Neither in evening tuck nor in morning nip

Variation on: 1.29
And a time will come when we'll die of hunger.
↓
And a hunger will come when we'll die of time.

———————————————————— 1.30
— What function does that have?
— Sinus.

Mister Philippide will hold force on Tolstoi. 1.31

A soul sub-engineer 1.32

1.33 Decembrie
John Step advanced two steps back

1.34 A perry by Sartre and a straight line May wine

1.35 _____
in strangling HAR HAIRA
will transpare
millennial kerchief for getting-out-of and into-the hair
Infringer-in-chief: Bosaru

1.36 Constantin Paranoia

1.37 Petre Solomon
V. 1. 47 / who stops in Batiște Street /
A love-murmur:
Advance in cambric!

1.38 IV. 24.
Nina's account
From critic to critic or raven to raven he scratches out the eyes.
(Moni against Cornea)

———

1.39 — What do you do in summer?
— Warm.
———
To Jani:
— And what shall I do with that?

1.40 The refuge in case of Moni's death:
his sister will come with a jaw in heaven and a brother under the earth.
———

Moni's chronicle on the communion-wafer-mustached poets: that's a talmuddy. 1.41

The tears I shed in front of you: the narrow strip of water that feeds our stone-seas. 2

×

3

Nothing is blacker than the luminous morning of memory. 3.1

+

Knock on the door of your loneliness and ask for the master: when the door is opened for you, you will not have spoken in vain to humans. 3.2

+

Among the angels' host only every tenth carries weapons, though he does not know how to use them 3.3

+

Give your heart to the one who asks for it; take it back from the one who asks why. 3.4

+

Bend when faced with overwhelming might, but as a prisoner speak a language that cannot be understood. 3.5

Learn from autumn how to drive away birds 3.6

Teach the fish the language of fishing hooks. 3.7

She claimed to be a scale whose plates were her hands; but she made these into fists every time you wanted to put a weight on them that did not come from the emptiness of her heart. 3.8

4 Counterlight

+

A sudden gust of wind tore the face away and revealed the veil.

+

5 They fought.

And while they fought, the sand of the desert in which they stood piled up at the edge of their feet, and slowly, sand grain by sand grain, rose along them. They continued to fight. The sand covered their feet, their legs, their knees, their thighs. They didn't stop. The sand, the sand of the desert nonetheless continued its labor. Already it covered their hips, their breasts, already it drew the (sand) shirt over their shoulders.

And a second and a third and a thousandth shirt. . . . . .

And started anew: sand shoe, sand sock, sand shirt

. .
. .
. .
. .
. .
.

Only their blades remained blank and hurt each other so much that the hearts of their seconds stood still.

+

6 Counterlight

He denied himself this too: the joy of joylessness.

+

Counterlight 7

While he put the poem under the magnifying glass of his mind,
I contemplated it from the other side through the telescope of
fantasy. And I saw more.

8

Proper canonical dream for rifle bullets: I am a human skull 8.1
and transpierce a canon's eye.

+

To search for one's conscience in the unconscious. 8.2

+

Counterlight 9

Only then may one count the vultures among the birds of prey 9.1
when it can be ascertained that they took on the voice of humans.

+

The columns of wisdom were torn down to erect the temple of 9.2
reason.

+

He put no leaf in front of his mouth because he was afraid to 9.3
uncover his sex.

+

Someone who stepped into the dream of a rifle bullet and 9.4
overcame it.

+

He peeled the apple before plunging the knife into his heart. 9.5

+

Weeping you tear open your veins; weeping you close them 9.6
up again.

+

9.7 Discipliné, il attendait le mot de désordre.

10

+

10.1 Stones too are flowers, only their scent is stronger.

+

10.2 As lost as a pine needle in a seamster's apprentice's hand. — As lost?

+

10.3 A strange story, the history of our world: not completely that of the world, not completely ours, not completely story; not really all that strange.

+

10.4 "You speak so incomprehensibly," the dead one said to the dying one, "you just stammer, you stammer like a newborn. Speak more clearly, speak more deadly!"

+

10.5 "This here is the map of silence," the wise man said, pinning a large black leaf to the wall. "Now calculate the scale!"
One of the pupils did so.

+

10.6 Reaching the bottom of the sea, the man who was drowning voluntarily got frightened: his feet hit swampland, into which he sunk, always sinking deeper, it was an endless sinking, "I am heaven," he heard the swamp say. "To die isn't worth it."

+

10.7 Wait patiently on the shore. The drowned one will save you.

+

10.8 "We shall be friends," he said, while taking hold of my hand. — I took hold of his words and entered loneliness.

+

COUNTERLIGHT 11

When praying died down on earth, a startled God woke up. 11.1

+

Overnight the days turn white. 11.2

+

A heavy word that wants to be breathed lightly. 11.3

+

A word: so old, so grey, that silence apprenticed itself to it. 11.4

+

The rock face, — punctured by the roar of the ocean; the ocean, ploughed through by the storms of infinity; infinity, furled by the whisperings of the forlorn. 11.5

+

×

The one door answers to the other, and the one — the fool — who stands in front of the first door, stops! he claims to have made out a sign meant for him and believes — what, in fact — does he believe? He believes that he has to knock anew. 12

13

To go into the desert, to be able to reach its most torrid middle, so as to bury there the plan of the city of a thousand fountains. 13.1

Paris, May 13, 1951.

/

My friends: they wired me congratulations for the approaching day of my death. 13.2

/

14

14.1 And even the trace of his blood had the color of his spirit. No other.

+

14.2 A language, as incomprehensible as two identical words that hover on two ready-to-kiss pairs of lips.

+

15 *Hermann Lenz* Paul Celan

The Sayings of Li-Tu-pu

First saying

Now as before
the umbrella speaks for itself.

It floats out of every salon
like a prince of Zion.

16 He who transforms himself wants, being the same, to become someone else

Shape = semblance

17 There is no such thing as the Ibolithic, you say! Well, where would we wind up if we agreed with that? For then the Lithic wouldn't exist either, the basic Lithic, this idiom worked up with such great pains. And Paleo, Mezzo and Neo, so excellent, they too would then be as if extinguished — and — do I dare

ask — where in this case would we be at? We, so proud to have managed to put the ice age behind us… Why, I heard it asked — and I hear resentment roiling in that question, yes indeed, resentment! —, Why? Was that necessary? We stand pretty now, we, those of today… Gone, our past, gone… And our future? Our future-bearing future? I'm asking, I'm not answering. Let the others, the anti-iboliths, answer. But, isn't it so, Rumpelstiltskin, we two, you and I, we want into the Open once again, into the forest, and crossing the swath that leads to the nuclear reactor, and where the honeysuckle, so beguiling, rambles, we, despite the danger of falling into discredit, even here, we want to sing

Verbier, VI. 25. 57. 18

× 18.1

We were one flesh with the night.

× 18.2

In the look you throw at it, the gazed at awakens.

×

X. 26. 57. 19

Poems are passageways: A toi de passer, Vie!

A paradise was indeed promised us, but to no one among us, not even to the fiercest believers, a vehicle with tail flukes, so as not to remain unnoticed on the roads up there, when the driver chauffeurs us to the confectioner's. 20

For so much anguish, so much symbolism! 21

22 Hermeticism —

Certain "citizens" and the poem: They buy the surprise bag; one knows vaguely what's in it, it won't be much, but then it doesn't cost much either, and if one happens to visit the fair and one has enjoyed the lady without lower — but with upper body, one's amusement also demands this. And when what's in it turns out — but here too the buyer's superior humor can prove itself — to be even cheaper than cheap, there still remains the fun that all of that was "too."

23 9. 9. 59.

… and sounded off against his God.

24

24.1 –i– He who really learns how to see, closes in on the invisible.

24.2 –i–
/ It is always a matter of a beginning and an end; in-between there is only the moment. /

25 As long as you, with consummate giddy-up and giddy-down, ride what's written today and yesterday further into the cul-de-sac —

26

26.1 One can, why not, envy one's own thoughts —

———

26.2 You (we?) have shot our conscience up to the moon.

27

"And everything that he blew upon was lost." 27.1

Sometimes one would like everything that has been written 27.2
to go to the devil: God rages on — so what can words do?

Some shoot their conscience into outer space — the others 27.3
(hear! hear!) discover that two-legged creatures and centipedes saw the light (…) of this world… in the very same week of creation…

There exist down here, here, on earth, and a bit, a middling hu- 28
man height above it, invisible channels and fluxes; and along that pathway things come at one.

1. 22. 60.

–i– To infuriate one brain- and heart-wise! 29

30

There are eyes that go to the bottom of things. They catch sight 30.1
of a bottom. And there are those that go into the depths of things. These do not catch sight of any bottom. But they see more deeply.

Frankfurt, 5. 13. 60.

× 30.2

Only the misunderstood understands the others.

It is not a sign of reversal when one praises things and men 31
that one damned yesterday with the same, with other words, though in the same tone as yesterday. —

32 Where the little ſpark (Fünklein.) is missing, that's where broadcaſt-poetry (Funkdichtung) comes into being —

33

33.1 –i– The eyebrows: deſperate from birth already, written above eyes either horrified or loſt in the faraway. —

33.2 –i– Inability to note directly; taking shape through forgetting

33.3 –i–
Riddles can't be figured out; if they could, they wouldn't be riddles.

33.4 –i–
We live five centimeters above the ground our feet seem to touch. —

———

33.5 –i–
"Split personality": one only "ſplits" into what one truly is.

———

×

34 Love of mankind is something other than philanthropy

×

35

35.1 × × There are (cosmo)nauts. And there are skyfalls.

×

35.2 There is (in small & ſmalleſt coinage) a koiné of the lyric; and then there is the one ſingular language of poetry.

Comfortably at home in stylistically correct smart aleck'ry, one will write obituaries for the great deceased &, while in selected company availing oneself of the memorial sites, one will not forget to take an elegant sideswipe at one's young neighbor on the occasion of the wreath laying; evenings one will pray briefly but substantially to the God one came to via several (up-to-date and high-profile) conversions, and the next morning one will, while commenting on the latest news with Bible-, Goethe-, and self-citations, drink one's black coffee, with a mouthful of toast and commiseration. 36

The "friends," those who, while the enemies tighten their hands around one's neck, just can't lend one enough of a hand… 37

+

He who under the — sanctimonious — pretense that one has to let the dead rest in peace watches the murder of the living, murders too. And thus mocks all the dead. 38

———

The Eternal Jew 39

———

———

something is against us, something that does not want to acknowledge us: the decisions fall — crash down on us, coming from the Beyond-human; if I believed in a God, I would now say: he has emigrated, has driven ahead of our eye and its addiction to earth-brown, he waits for us — on another planet — under another shape.

40 Where are we — as knowers too? About this too we already know a fair amount, but a last sillily-human hope also obstructs this knowledge's sight. So that's where we are.

41 1. 4. 1961.

41.1 I read various things in a new language that differentiates itself sharply from my mother tongue: aggregated German. To be read and to be spoken at will from left to right and from right to left.

41.2 Definition of a politically committed writer: someone who writes his photogenic conscience off his body (& paunch).

41.3 The paycheck-paved road from Berlin-Alexander-Platz to Ascona.

41.4 The radio [Funk]: the place where the little spark [Fünklein] dies out.

42 Instructions for use

Take:

one still alive Jew of middle (Jewish-)age, middle (Jewish-) size, unmarried, if possible childless, circumcised.

If it turns out to be an only half-dressed exemplar, do accouter it. In such cases one also should provide for upper wear; let the one to be used provide for footwear and accessories. (With pocket money and the like one should deal parsimoniously, possibly replace it with weekly feeding.) There is no fundamental objection to the occasional administration of aphrodisiacs, should such reveal themselves as unavoidable. Not to be forgotten in case of need: black lacy panties with potassium

cyanide-like scent. If ſpeechlessness of the one returning from horizontal or other positions is incomplete, the mention, especially if an imperious need to ſpeak arises, of one or several in Poland or elsewhere missing cousins of the second to fourth degree is recommended. For a liſt of names, commas should be highlighted by telling blinks. Breathe evenly.

Exitus lætalis to be induced after multi-year use.

2. 14. 61.

×

43

Yeſterday's reeves are today's adminiſtrators. You recognize them by their incessant talk about the adminiſtered — the co-adminiſtered —: this, ſo as to avoid any self-queſtioning. 43.1

×

On its own ruins the poem ſtands and hopes. 43.2

×

Proſe — — — 44

Procreatiσ

With some of his poems, things went for him as they had gone with some of his women: he had barely left them alone for a moment, when his "friends" would deſcend on them, the little males and the little females, ſpermatic, ovary-rich, androgyne. And then came the midwifes, the maieutic explainers, the angel-makers and the editors, the ſtatiſticians and the reviewers. There was progeny, there was immortality.

+

III. 11. 61.

45

45.1 Counterlights
(To counter the lice)

45.2 The left- and the right-intellectuals? The Hü- and the Hot(t)-intellectuals.

×

45.3 The League of the Homeland-Evicted. The League of the World-Evicted remains to be called into existence.

×

45.4 Emmdebäh-poetry.

Speech-sadism in poetry: the do-it-yourself poem. "Poesy" as syllable-mix with footnote studded with foreign language terms and photogenic blabber. In the publications: lettristic revolutionariness; shortened polyglottism at reception clerk's niveau. Besides, the MdB-style, exposing them and their mentality: "I assume, *may* I, that you have excellent Yiddish." Emmdebäh-poetry.

×

45.5 Contemporaries.
In the streets: the semi-tough. In literature: the one-and-a-half-time tough.

×

45.6 The innocuous. After the recipe: if you beat a living Jew to death, use, as far as possible, a dead Jew to do so. (Pereat Judæus, vivat Germania Judaica. Or: Whup the red-beard, but don't forget to praise the grey-beard.)

×

45.7 "Conversion" as the upending of the clichés. Instead of the hook-nosed garlic-smelling ones, the almond-eyed orientals that you cavalierly save from the pogrom, resp. save from the claws of the "others" after withdrawal of bank account.

46

The meridian: the secret rime, alivened toward the invisible. 46.1

×

The poem, where it truly carries over (and in no way transposes): not metaphor, but metabasis (εἰς ἄλλο γένος) — into the Other… as into the Same. 46.2

×

To him who yells at "words," language will refuse itself. He who yields to language, him… words will find. 46.3

×

"My" and "my" and "my" poem. — The "Zeit" and its mepoems. — Assaisonnons… 46.4

×

Counterlights —: To counter the lice. 46.5

×

The experienced — thus the Jewishness experienced by the Jew —, that lets itself be grasped pneumatically in the interval (breath-units, yes, they do exist!), — this they don't put up with, they don't brook. And thus, not all too rarely with the eager participation of "Jews," they push it back, behind the *vicariously* experienced, which they accordingly raise—: up on the pedestal of their mendacity, their lowliness and cowardice, or — this too happens — compel up. 46.6

×

Even the "best" don't want to perceive the Jew (who is nothing but a form of the human, but is at least that, a form) as person, as subject: that is why they pervert him into a — this or that way manipulable — object, into a "sujet." He who doesn't have a hand, shows how well he can manage with his "claw." 46.7

×

The word, remaining true despite having been several times misaddressed by me: Pereat Judæus, vivat "Germania Judaica"! In German: Zum Teufel mit dem Menschen, hoch die Anführungsstriche! 46.8

×

46.9 The — lucratively usual — "conversion" of so many: nothing but the upending of the cliché. Instead of the distorted, the beautified; instead of the hook-nosed, the almond-eyed. "Hebraica"…

×

46.10 The human chance today: Return to the Future!

×

46.11 Space rockets, earth satellites, cosmodromes. Long ago conscience flew ahead, stumbled ahead. The launchpad heart.

×

46.12 Lies have… long legs.

×

46.13 Some who in the 30s (& until 1945), thus in their operational time, weren't… man enough, want now, old-frankish-modern, i.e. with recliner and teapoy, … to be fathers. What does it matter that they could only show protheses — Goll — for self-validation purposes… The literary one-and-a-half toughs grab their asses, with vociferous Döhle-holler. German Youth, foot soldiers, footnote soldiers. Come lil' hyena, lend me your lil' incisa.

×

46.14 The poem about the outrage is not the outrage. The poem is the outrage.

×

46.15 Much photogenic anger. Alors qu'ils te font perdre le nord et ton ombre, ils ne perdent pas… le sud et leur ligne.

While they make you lose your true north (your sense of direction) and your shadow, they do not lose… the south and their line.

×

46.16 The League of the Homeland-Evicted. — The League of the World-Evicted still remains… to be called into existence.

×

Habent nostra fata libelli. 46.17

×

You can occasionally recognize pharisees by their tendency to run off at the mouth about their anti-pharisee-ism. The attack that pays off. — The stance of being-attacked, of being-affected, of the one who stands against. — 46.18

×

Overloud, shrill posterization of truth as a means to get rid of it. Growing world of facades. Behind which: the castles of soul-detritus, soul-rot. 46.19

×

Those who should frame their words with a dozen quotation marks, decree arrest warrants against the few still trying to speak both directly and from themselves. 46.20

With prefabricated (speech-)components they close in on language.

×

"Speak so that I may see you" —: that sentence too is valid only anymore as an exception. — Be silent so that I may not go blind completely. Mute yourself so that you may catch sight of yourself. 46.21

×

They do not forgive you the comma —: they know that here your breath comes to a stop — they know that they choke off your airway. They throttle. — You helper, gill! 46.22

×

The poem <u>about</u> the outrage is not the outrage. The poem <u>is</u> the outrage. 46.23

×

Poems are mono-tone. And recognizable <u>by</u> that. 46.24

×

The <u>gaze</u> gives the words the direction — the meaning. From each of your words your eye looks out. Lidless, lashless, ever-awake poem. 46.25

×

46.26 God needs the heretics… and for this he punishes them.

×

46.27 You can tell your false friends also by the fact that they come to your "defense" when it is already too late. If there was a scintilla of sincerity in them, they would put themselves on trial and let you know.

Meanwhile they have long been sitting at the table of your destroyers, and relish the many mistakes you have made, so as not to let their advice, as the advice of friends, go unheeded.

×

46.28 The many wrongly addressed letters. Then the unsent ones. Followed by the unwritten ones. And at last — again — the poem: the breathed breve… a few syllables too long. — (Wave shorts. Wave troughs. No crests at all.)

×

46.29 The poem unfolding itself for the sake of your involution. Self-encounter, self-discovery. This circle- and crab-walk is what is given, lent, offered, supplied to you. There where it raises itself, it raises you — whereto? — And thus I injured myself raising myself.

×

46.30 Anger of the non-Jew when you, as Jew, use the word "Yid": that too they consider as their privilege. And privileges — those only they want to be able to confer. En tant qu'affranchi par eux, tu auras le droit de t'appeler libre. [As someone set free by them, you will have the right to call yourself free.] "Emancipated" & "progressive" Jews pay this — shameful — price.

Rights [Vorrechte] are not the forecourts [Vorhöfe] of Justice; they are the walls before it.

It is not the fate of the beautiful diary-writing Jewish girl that makes the horror of what happened clear. The hunchbacked, stammering, lame Jew who was gassed — he is the victim. He, the Jew, is your brother — acknowledge him & turn

back — to you, you hunchbacked, stammering, lame — you kingly creature!

×

S. had a sharp tongue. As sharp as the ironed crease in his fashionably tight pants. 46.31

×

When they read Pound they even understand Chinese. With that pound they like to practice usury — not least also because they want to keep Shylock alive as a cliché 46.32

×

Where yesterday one read "Spirit and Power," one reads today "Spirit and Origin." Because the spirit may not blow where it wants to. 46.33

×

Each Eichmann finds his Servatius. And those Eichmann victims accused of survival at best… only that too. The Kastner-Jews are then quite ready to pay the trial costs. There are also philosemites among the Jews. 46.34

×

You ask why so many let themselves be murdered without resisting. You do not ask why there were so many murderers and "uninvolved" spectators. For how many must the gaze of the bystanders have been more terrible than the hand that struck. 46.35

×

God the Just would let go of all hope for justice if one accorded him "objectivity." Love demands truth & resolve. "Objectivity" is the cover for presumptuousness. We are all subjects — submitted to the truth in love. Veni Creator, subiice me! — 46.36

×

"Many few make a many." 46.37

The desperate waiting for the disintegration of the compressed evil into its parts and particles.

×

46.38 Repairman, repairman-ship, and -chicanery.

×

46.39 The Pereat Judæus today: the marble slab with the golden inscription: "Hic jacet Judaeus."

Monument-conservation…

×

46.40 Not something like "made fun of" or even "dragged through the mire." — Highly praised. Higher than high. With gold in the pockets, to accelerate the fall.

×

46.41 They claim to act, in the name of mankind, against the coming Deluge — for that reason they drown man as pre-diluvian in their spittle and slobber.

×

46.42 "Timeless" poem: what's always present for untimeliness. The time-ripened sensed as untimely in the present. Timeless = open to time.

×

46.43 The overloud voice of the lonesome solitary: the voice, louder because of the interlocutor through so much distance, and whose silence it accepts. Double voice that has in this manner taken upon itself that no answer comes. The one who doesn't answer gives no thanks for that either. He prefers word-richness this side of the sound- and you-frontier. With that he, a shaper of space, builds his distance — no, distance itself.

×

46.44 This, our feuilletonistic time of the poem: the leafing over and across man.

By writing their life for you, they write your life dead.

×

46.45 Curriculum vitæ: My education was not unjewish, my growing up was not unjewish. I did not do anything "inhuman." But I had the "humanists" too against me.

×

Banalement. 46.46

J'aurai beaucoup aimé la France, moi. Avec tout mon amour.

×

In the "Meridian" I defined poetry as a "hors texte." — Eh bien, me voici, et il le fallait bien, hors texte. 46.47

8. 27. 1961 (Kermorvan)

×

Gone awry from pain, gone mad from pain, the errant, the And-yet-harmonies. And yet: the harmonies. 46.48

×

12.13.61. 47

La poésie et ses Possédés 47.1

Poetry and its Possessed

"My" & "my" & "my" poem. Time and its me-poems, its noems.

Faire mouche 47.2

When a non-Jew meets a blow-fly, the blow-fly will get insulted, and that until it drops dead. Then it is most carefully speared and widely and visibly catalogued as blow- and Jew-fly.

If a Jew is lucky enough to meet a blow-fly, he'll be known henceforth as "the blow-fly Jew." Concerning the fly, there is much to be admired in its emerald wings.

(Cum grano,) sine grano 47.3

One rainy day Eisig [Glacial] happened to stand under the colorful awning of a house with projecting sidewalk café-terrace — where Eisele [Glaciel] too had found refuge; they started up a conversation.

The rain — what a ſpectacle next to this house! — came down ever harder and more ſteeply, the voices and themes became ever ſteeper and more dramatic. When they got to the very top, they noticed that they came together, coincided. "Yes, you are right," Eisele's mouth agreed passionately, "one can jewify." Upon which, not without having perceived their nearly perfectly co-in-sounding names as a favorable omen, they hurried out into the evermore tightly falling rain: given that, as the poet's line would have it, their hearts were a house of rays.

For Eisele this meeting remained unforgettable: he wrote a play about jewifying.

Eisig learned about it from the newſpaper, where an unbroken-undivided for-a-long-time-no-longer-antisemite lauded it over the length of many columns above the (at that time reddishly flowering) green clover. Not one, not even a single grain of Anti could be found in it.

Eisig searched and searched — no, indeed not one grain, not one grainlet could be found there, and the reader hurried outside, into the open air.

It was hailing.

48

48.1 Counterlights: To counter the lice.

×

Signature

48.2 Pawel Lwowitsch Tselan, Russkij poët in partibus nemetskich infidelium.

Paul, son of Leo, Celan, Russian poet in the lands of the German unbelievers.

/ Montana XII. 21. 1961 /

×

48.3 The letters, the letters: With the word-lantern in search of mankind.

«Любовная лодка разбилась о быт» (Mayakovsky)
The love-boat has to shipwreck against existence
II. 3. 62

×

"You human brethren, who live after us"… Always (only?) after us… 48.4
2. 6. 62.

×

An old maximalist: he demanded a minimum of the obvious, the natural. 48.5
2. 18

×

"Workshop discussions" with the literary eminence: in the bel étage — on the upholstered lathe, with dialogical understatement-ho&humming, timely radio-lather. In the basement: the little spark's final resting place. 48.6
3. 10. 62

×

Spirit of anarchy: actualized in the greatest, lonesome, for all. Royal "Communism of the spirits." La Cité des Citoyens. 48.7
The City of the Citizens.
3.10.62

×

CHECKMATE TO POETRY! 49

It was a simultaneous display. All variations were played — White was set upon everywhere, the boards consisted of only black fields.

But White could not know this — White trusted in what's assumed in such games, namely also in the whiteness of the fields.

The weakest among the opponents had the job to keep this faith alive for White

50

50.1 About a younger lady that should have pulled the black net-stockings she had on her legs, over her tongue.

×

50.2 A woman spectator at Frank V.:

Ophelia as record holder in swimming.

×

51

51.1 The Germans were unable to bring the world to heel — now they are causing it to rot through and through.

×

51.2 Miracles are long suppressed, bonding- and finally bonded-truths.

×

51.3 Infamy's game also includes the decency-variation. It is played during the breaks.

×

51.4 With the help of the clichés of a (pre- and counter-)past projected into the future one misconstructs the present — the actual fundament.

×

51.5 The sweet child — it wanted to become uncle sourpuss. And climbed into the bed of an auntie.

×

51.6 Le poisson du Christ, lui, fait toujours maigre.

Christ's fish is always fasting.

×

51.7 La langue c'est un royaume; elle se moque des empires.

Language is a kingdom; it scoffs at empires.

×

52

Counterlights / To counter the lice / 52.1

The new moor-washing (à la Böll-Diesel, à la Leonhardt-Baumann): in view of the Reich's foundation, the Nazis are not whitewashed, only whitishly-washed. 52.2

×

Bread-and-Soil (*The Spiegel* on Böll). 52.3

×

53

Counterlights 53.1

/ TO COUNTER THE LICE /

Je n'aime pas les bougeoirs montés en lampes: je suis la bougie; nous sommes les bougies. 53.2

I do not like candle-holders made into lamps:
I am the candle; we are the candles.

Léguer, c'est aussi: déléguer. 53.3

To bequeath also means: to delegate.

3. 24. 1962

«Я последний поэт деревни» —: Ce vers de Essenine, qui, textuellement, veut dire »Je suis le dernier poe`te du village«, et que j'ai traduit, »librement«, c'est-à-dire en obéissant à toutes mes lois – qui sont aussi celles de mon époque et celle du temps vécu – par »Kein Lied nach meinem mehr, vom Dorf zu singen«… Ce »Dorf«, ce Village, n'est-il pas, chez moi, le Village du »Château« de Kafka? Vases Communicants – communiquant à travers la vie, grâce à la vie. 53.4

3. 27. 62.

"Parturiunt montes, nascitur ridiculus mus" [When mountains give birth, a ludicrous mouse comes forth]… But when the lowlands give birth… what do they deliver? Giant rats, giant rats… 53.5

3. 27. 62.

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In the mid-fifties Paul Celan suggested that he had a mind for writing that "would be a bit more sober & more spacious" than his poems. And yet, in his life-time Celan published very little of such "more spacious" work — i.e. prose — except for two essays that were public award-acceptance speeches, and a few occasional bits and pieces often published, or better, hidden away in obscure places. It is only with this volume, edited by Barbara Wiedemann and Bertrand Badiou, that Celan's multifaceted achievements as a prose writer can be discovered.

For example, in the early language games of surrealist inspiration. In the biting, bitter aphorisms, "counterlights" thrown on those concrete dates from and toward which his poems are written — since the early sixties we are dealing with texts that explicitly exhibit their contemporaneity. Or in the poetological critique of the prejudices with which the volumes of his poetry were read. Among the most surprising & appealing of these prose writings are the narratives, the "stories" and dialogues with the background of his Jewish fate.

This English version of *Microliths* follows the first German edition of 2005. The sole difference is in the final section, the commentaries, which is a shortened version of Wiedemann & Badiou's original commentary, with some additional material by Pierre Joris. The translator, who this year concludes a 52-year involvement with bringing Celan's œuvre into English, and the publisher are honored to release this book — the only major collection of Paul Celan's prose — in 2020, his 100th birth- & 50th death-year.

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