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The Poem, the Place, the Jew: Emmanuel Levinas on Paul Celan

A reflection on Emmanuel Levinas's approach to Paul Celan requires an expansion of the field of vision as concerns the two protagonists. One such potential revision would be a constellation of the following names: Levinas, Blanchot, Hölderlin, Celan. These four figures conjoined paratactically form a chiasm with regard to the relationship between the poem, the place, and the Jew. Levinas and Celan meet at the outer poles of this figure of thought, at extremities whose relation is illuminated by the other two names, Blanchot and Hölderlin, which both unite and separate them. This chiasm is complicated by a division that distinguishes between the two thinkers and the two poets. At the centre of the chiasm is a name that is not expressed explicitly but which nevertheless constitutes the axis of this poetico-philosophical constellation: Martin Heidegger. This chiasm will, in what follows, be deployed in terms of a central motif: the question of place, more particularly the conceptual pairs of exile and *Heimat*, errancy and rootedness, homelessness and dwelling, all considered in respect to the poem, to poetry.

In his essay on Celan titled "Paul Celan. De l'être à l'autre" (Paul Celan: From Being to the Other), first published in *La Revue des Belles Letters* in 1972, shortly after the poet's suicide, Levinas implicitly retrieves the central idea of the famous passage in his earlier essay "La Trace de l'Autre" (The Trace of the Other), where he distinguishes between Greek philosophy and Jewish thought via the opposition between Ulysses's and Abraham's respective relations to place. In the earlier text, Levinas writes: "To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land" (Levinas 1986, 348).[1] Ulysses's journey is directed towards the eventual return to his fatherland, his *Heimat*; for Levinas, this is both a sign of turning in upon oneself and contrasts with Abraham's departure, which, rather than being directed towards return to the land of his birth, is oriented solely towards a foreign destination, a terrain that is, so far, nothing but

1 In the original: "Au mythe d'Ulysse retournant à Ithaque, nous voudrions opposer l'histoire d'Abraham quittant à jamais sa patrie pour une terre encore inconnue" (Levinas 1982, 192). The essay was first published in *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 25.3 (1963): 605–623.

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a promise. Between Ulysses and Abraham, as envisaged by Levinas, the fundamental difference between Greek and Jew is at stake, not just between the philosophical logos but also between Homer and the Hebrew Bible. The Greek route remains that of Ulysses, whose protracted, adventure-laden journey through the world is in fact nothing other than a return to himself, to his native island – "complying with the Same, misapprehending the Other" – in contrast to "the biblical movement of the Same towards the Other" (Levinas 1987, 43 (my translation)).[2] In contrast to the closure and totality re-established through the return as final destination in the Greek experience, the Jewish destiny corresponds to an incessant movement towards the other and to what Levinas terms, perhaps somewhat hyperbolically, in "Heidegger, Gagarin et nous" (Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us), an indifference to land and soil: "Judaism has always been free with regard to place" (Levinas 1990, 231).[3] In this, Levinas seems to support the idea of the Jew as the eternal wanderer and to affirm exile as both a mode of existence and a modality of thought opening towards a non-retrievable alterity.

The spirit of Levinas's statement would seem to accord with the writings of several thinkers in the second half of the twentieth century who, in a positive manner, associate Jewishness with exile, exodus, and errancy. In the post-World War II period, the old antisemitic motif of the rootless, parasitic Jew underwent a transformation and came to be invoked for its critical potential for undermining nationalisms of all colours. Understandably, in the years after National Socialism, the idea of the Jew as a homeless, eternal wanderer reactivated the notion of an intellectual rootedness imbedded within the law, the word, and the letter as an alternative to national or geographic rootedness. Many thinkers who, after 1945, allude to the centuries-old narrative of Jewish exile seek, on one hand, to reverse the inimical view of the homeless Jewish people and, on the other, to propagate a universally valid alternative, and even counterforce, to ideologies of "blood and soil" and, ultimately, to all nationalist identities. The simultaneity of these concerns raises fundamental questions: How can one present Jewish exile as positive, indeed as an exemplary condition of extraterritoriality, in light of the history of the Jewish plight, which includes a long and bloody history of suffering partly due to the lack of a "proper place?" And how does one prevent the consciousness of this negative aspect of exile from again becoming a desire for rootedness in the soil, which Levinas associates both with Greek paganism and with Nazi ideology, and which he calls,

2 In the original: "L'itinéraire de la philosophie reste celui d'Ulysse dont l'aventure dans le monde n'est qu'un retour à son île natale – une complaisance dans le Même, une méconnaissance de l'Autre" (Levinas 1987, 43).

3 In the original: "Le judaïsme a toujours été libre à l'égard des lieux" (Levinas 1983, 350).

in "Heidegger, Gagarin et nous," "the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers?" (Levinas 1990, 232)?[4] Moreover, how can one formulate a universal concept while referring to a particular, concrete, historical instance, without falling either into "Judeo-centrism" – the wandering Jew as exemplary and to be emulated by the whole of humankind – or into an annihilation of the concrete singularity of the Jew by means of metaphor, which would be the negation of Jewish history, of exile forced upon the Jews for centuries? And finally, above all in the context of poetry, how can one render justice to the Jewish attachment to the word and to the book – to having no other home than the letter – without idealizing this attribution to the point of forgetting the precarious state of this substitute for a domicile that would promise protection and security?

In my reading of Levinas's text on Celan and of several verses by Celan, I wish to show that it is through the use of poetic language that both the philosopher and the poet devise suggestions that indicate the direction of such a possibility: to think, or rather to write, exile as the ethical refusal to anchor oneself in the soil, without, at the same time, negating the vulnerability of such a state; to conceive the exemplary association of Jewishness and exile while maintaining both its particular and its general dimension, its concrete history and its meaning as a universal predicament; and finally, to convey the vitality of the idea of Jewish dwelling in the word and the letter, but in such a way that the vulnerability of this substitution as well as a hope born from the contesting force of the poetic act remain perceptible.

1 Levinas Reading Heidegger

Given his distrust of poetry,[5] expressed among other places in his early text "La réalité et son ombre" (Reality and Its Shadow),[6] why does Levinas rethink the question of place in the context of poetry, particularly that of Paul Celan? A preliminary response to this question presents itself in one of the key expressions Heidegger borrows from the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin: "Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch auf Erden" (Poetically Man Dwells on Earth).[7] For Heidegger, the poet is the one who provides man with a dwelling in the

4 In the original: "la scission même de l'humanité en autochtones et en étrangers" (Levinas 1983, 350).

5 See, for example, Leslie Hill, "Distrust of Poetry: Levinas, Blanchot, Celan" (2005).

6 See Levinas, "La réalité et son ombre" (1994).

7 See Heidegger, "Poetically Man Dwells . . ." (1975).

"house of being" (Heidegger 2002, 232).[8] Levinas's "Paul Celan. De l'être à l'autre" can be read as a radical contestation of Heidegger's claims, most pertinently those maintained by the later Heidegger of *Holzwege* in 1950. The task of the poet is to provide man with a place, to root the human being in the earth, thus finding again, in and through this dwelling, the ancient splendor of the pagan gods. This task is the response to the question presented in the title of a central text in this collection of Heidegger's articles. The title of the article, "Und wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?" (Why Poets in Times of Distress?), derives from another celebrated verse of Hölderlin. This question, with which Heidegger begins his reflection on the task of the poet in modernity, cites Hölderlin's elegy "Brot und Wein" (Bread and Wine). Heidegger evaluates in Hölderlin's poetry the notion that, after the death of Herakles, Dionysus, and Christ, the world has lost the meaning of its history and of "man's stay within it." Heidegger continues, "in the absence of God notice is given of something even worse. [. . .] The time has already become so desolate that it is no longer able to see the absence of God as a lack" (Heidegger 2002, 200).[9] The world has lost its ground, and, with the abyss that has thus opened, it has lost the possibility of all rootedness, the possibility of inhabiting the earth. It is not possible to reverse this condition unless man places his dwelling in his own being, and it is the task of the poet to lead him there. The conditions of this reversal are linked to a time, a place, a language, and a relation to nature, which all together provide mortals with a dwelling on this earth. If "[i]n the age of the world's night [*Weltnacht*], the abyss of the world must be experienced and must be endured" (Heidegger 2002, 201), it is the task of the poet to experience and endure this abyss.[10] For Heidegger, this *Weltnacht* extends from Socrates to the present. It is the mission of the poet to recall the gods and their absence; it is his task to advance fearlessly toward the abyss, to confront it directly. The poet's calling consists in listening and submitting to the *language that speaks*

8 In the original: "Haus des Seins" (Heidegger 1999, 310).

9 In the original: "Der Fehl Gottes bedeutet, daß kein Gott mehr sichtbar und eindeutig die Menschen und die Dinge auf sich versammelt und aus solcher Versammlung die Weltgeschichte und den menschlichen Aufenthalt in ihr fügt. Im Fehl Gottes kündigt sich aber noch Ärgeres an. Nicht nur die Götter und der Gott sind entflohen, sondern der Glanz der Gottheit ist in der Weltgeschichte erloschen. Die Zeit der Weltnacht ist die dürftige Zeit, weil sie immer dürftiger wird. Sie ist bereits so dürftig geworden, daß sie nicht mehr vermag, den Fehl Gottes als Fehl zu merken" (Heidegger 1999, 269).

10 In the original: "Im Weltalter der Weltnacht muß der Abgrund der Welt erfahren und ausgestanden werden. Dazu ist aber nötig, daß solche sind, die in den Abgrund reichen" (Heidegger 1999, 270).

Being in the impersonal neuter, to sing the "god of the vine," who "preserves in it and in its fruit the essential mutuality of earth and sky as the site of the nuptials of men and gods" (Heidegger 2002, 202)[11] and thus to provide human being with its dwelling on this earth.

In "Paul Celan. De l'être à l'autre," Levinas takes up these Heideggerian terms and refutes them one by one: against the *Weltnacht* and its continuity from the pre-Socratic Greeks to our times, Levinas names the "time of distress" the "passion of Israel under Nazism" (Levinas 1978, 16).[12] Against Heidegger's suggestion of continuity, Levinas views Auschwitz as "the interruption of history," that which, precisely, underlies the ruptured harmony in Celan's verses. Against the Heideggerian abyss, Levinas speaks of the "leap across the abyss open in Being" (Levinas 1978, 18).[13] Against the language that speaks in the neuter, Levinas, evoking Celan, describes a "mumbling infancy of discourse," an "awkward entry into the [Heideggerian]'speaking of language,' the celebrated '*die Sprache spricht*'" (Levinas 1978, 16).[14]Against the impersonality of this language, Levinas cites Celan, who describes the genesis of the poem through the "inclination" (*Neigungswinkel*) of the poet's existence. Against the splendour of nature – the pagan idolatry of "the shining forth of pre-Socratic 'physis'" (Levinas 1978, 16)[15] sung by the poet, according to Heidegger – Levinas invokes the dialogue of the two Jews in *Gespräch im Gebirg*, one of Celan's rare prose texts, in which the poet formulates the Jewish negation of paganism in the most simple and direct terms: "for the Jew and nature, they are two" (my translation).[16]

Heidegger's primary metaphor of the *Weltnacht* itself designates a place: the reversal of the night occurs where the mortals inhabit the "site" of Being, where they "come into their own essence," where Being dwells. It is this site that Levinas calls upon us to leave behind as he sets forth on the path of the poem which, in Celan's words cited by Levinas (Levinas 1978, 17), "goes toward the other."[17] On this path, the poem shows the direction to be taken.

11 In the original: "[. . .] der Gott der Rebe verwahrt in dieser und in deren Frucht zugleich das wesenhafte Zueinander von Erde und Himmel als der Stätte des Brautfestes für Menschen und Götter" (Heidegger 1999, 271).

12 In the original: "la passion d'Israël sous Hitler" (Levinas 1976, 54).

13 In the original: "saut par-dessus l'abîme ouvert dans l'être" (Levinas 1976, 52).

14 In the original: "Communication élémentaire et sans révélation, balbutiante enfance du discours, bien maladroite insertion dans la fameuse langue qui parle, dans le fameux *die Sprache spricht* [. . .]" (Levinas 1976, 50).

15 In the original: "l'éclat de la *physis* des présocratiques" (Levinas 1976, 50).

16 In the original: "Denn der Jud und die Natur, das ist zweierlei" (Celan 1983, 169–170).

17 In the original: "Le poème va vers l'autre" (Levinas 1976, 51).

A brief excursus will illuminate the extent to which, in Levinas's text on Celan, the critical attitude shown towards Heidegger's paean to the pre-Socratic mythology of *physis* is prefigured in Celan's "Why Poets?," a poem that the Jewish-Romanian poet wrote in his youth. According to Heidegger:

> These, for the poet, are the tracks of the fugitive gods. This track, in Hölderlin's experience, is what Dionysus, the wine-god, brings down for the God-less during the darkness of their world's night. For the god of the vine preserves [. . .] the essential mutuality of earth and sky as the site of the nuptials of men and gods. [. . .] Poets are the mortals who gravely sing the wine-god and sense the track of the fugitive gods; they stay on the gods' track, and so they blaze a path for their mortal relations, a path toward the turning point.
> (Heidegger 2002, 202)[18]

In 1942, Celan wrote the poem "Nähe der Gräber" (Nearness of Graves) after learning of his mother's death. This poem of five stanzas points to the indifference of nature in the face of violence and the suffering of victims. Having called upon the water of the river near the internment camp where his mother was killed, and upon the wheat field, the trees, the quaking aspen ([*Zitter-*]*Espe*), the weeping willow ([*Trauer-*]*Weide*), he invokes, in almost naïve fashion, the god Dionysus:

> Und steigt nicht der Gott mit dem knospenden Stab
> den Hügel hinan und den Hügel hinab? (Celan 2003, 17)

> And does not the god with the bourgeoning stick
> Go uphill and downhill, from summit to valley?[19]

Indifferent to the plight of the victims, Dionysus continues on his path up and down the mountain according to the rhythm of the seasons. And the poem continues:

> Und duldest du, Mutter, wie einst, ach, daheim,
> den leisen, den deutschen, den schmerzlichen Reim? (Celan 2003, 17)

> And, mother, can you bear as once ago, ah, *daheim*
> The gentle, the German, the painful *Reim*.

18 In the original: "Das sind für den Dichter die Spuren der entflohenen Götter. Diese Spur bringt nach Hölderlins Erfahrung Dionysos, der Weingott, den Gott-losen unter das Finstere ihrer Weltnacht hinab. Denn der Gott der Rebe verwahrt in dieser und in deren Frucht zugleich das wesenhafte Zueinander von Erde und Himmel als der Stätte des Brautfestes für Menschen und Götter. Nur im Bereich dieser Stätte können noch, wenn irgendwo, Spuren der entflohen Götter für die gott-losen Menschen zurückbleiben" (Heidegger 1999, 267).

19 The translations from this poem are my own.

The harmonious poetry of the German lyrical tradition has become unbearable, particularly the poetry which Heidegger, in his text written some years later (though perhaps already conceived when Celan composed the poem), envisages as offering a dwelling and a *Heimat* to man in the *Weltnacht*, the night of the world. Celan and Heidegger clearly envisage different nights and different worlds. Celan's poem, written in the darkest night of the Shoah, prefigures Levinas's injunction to tear out the pagan roots – both physically in the earth and metaphorically in myth – of the Greek *physis* and the German residues of its chant.

The question "Why poets in times of distress?" undoubtedly applies to Celan, the poet of the Shoah, but also the poet who is considered to have both sustained and closed the tradition of German lyric poetry that began with Hölderlin. Celan's belonging to this tradition is no doubt due to the philosophical character of his poetry, and to the fact that he, as few others, embraced Hölderlin's major themes: the lament of absence, memory, the task of the poet, the dwelling of man on earth. These are precisely the poetic topoi that Celan reconfigures in the face of the catastrophe. Celan's complex relation to Hölderlin, and particularly to Hölderlin as the late Heidegger conceives him, underlies Levinas's text. This would indeed be the point of departure for Levinas's text on Celan: it is, above all, with and against the understanding of poetry as rooted – and rooting – in the soil, as Heidegger's text describes it, that Levinas addresses Celan. He does so in his own text in the form of an Abrahamic departure without return, which he opposes to the "site of Being." Levinas's entire text is conceived as an invitation to depart from this site and, with it, from Heidegger's world. The departure from this world, which Levinas also calls the Hellenic space of the "truth of being," is effectuated not only by means of a reflection *on* poetry but by a poetic path.

As the subtitle "De l'être à l'autre" – a strange and attractive alliteration in the French – indicates, Levinas's text bears within itself the traits of poetic language: it is an invitation to a transformative passage, in which the Heideggerian vocabulary is invoked, transfigured, and undermined. The epigraph at the beginning of Levinas's text consists of verses by Celan that refer to Heidegger and which dismantle his world:

> alles ist weniger, als
> es ist,
> alles ist mehr. (Levinas 1976, 49)

everything is less than
it is,
everything is more.[20]

In these verses, Celan proceeds to a negation of Being in its impersonal and neutral form of the *es ist*, which is derived from *sein*. The verb "to be" in the form "is" is also contained in the preceding and following verses, preceded by "everything." These Celanian verses negate Heidegger's thought of Being as a totalizing ontology without anything outside it, and which encompasses both heaven and earth, gods and humans. In Levinas's epitaph, the verse "it is" separates what is less and what is more than being, and at the same time joins them. The poem thereby dismantles the closed totality of being just as much by what "is less," that which is lacking, as by what "is more," that which exceeds the totality, that which is before and that which goes beyond and outside of being.

Levinas's "Paul Celan. De l'être à l'autre" projects the departure from the world of Being into three parts, respectively entitled *Vers l'autre* (Towards the Other), *La transcendence* (Transcendence), and *Dans la clarté de l'utopie . . .* (In the Clarity of Utopia . . .). In "Towards the Other," the text embarks on its path; with "Transcendence," it goes *beyond*, breaching the limits of what is enclosed; and, having left the closed space, arrives without arriving "In the Clarity of Utopia . . ." The ellipsis in this last subtitle indicates the opening to which the text moves: towards the non-place of u-topia.

As announced in Celan's verses, Levinas's text begins with an enactment of the "less" than Being; the first pages move from a suggestion of totality to the description of something deficient, lacking: "Here then is the poem – perfected language." This traditional idea of the poem as complete, absolute, and closed in itself is, in Levinas's description of Celan's poetics, reduced to a series of attributions in a minor key (see Levinas 1978, 16).[21] Referring to Celan's understanding of his own poetry, Levinas describes the poem as a mere "interjection" (interjection), a "handshake" (poignée de main), a "wink" (clin d'œil), a "sign of nothing" (signe de rien); he speaks of "dispossession," of a "gift without revelation" (donation [. . .] sans

20 My translation. Interestingly, Melville's translation ("Being and the Other: On Paul Celan," Levinas 1978), cited throughout this article, omits both this epigraph and the essay's dedication to Paul Ricœur. These elements are retained in the version included in Michael B. Smith's translation of *Proper Names* (Levinas 1996, 40).

21 In the original: "Voilà le poème, langage achevé, ramené au niveau d'une interjection" (Levinas 1976, 49).

revelation), of stammering language, a "babbling childhood of speech" (balbutiante enfance de discours), a "clumsy gesture" (maladroite insertion), the "beggar's door" to the "*dwelling of Being*" (entrée de mendiant dans la *demeure de l'être* (italic in original)). To totality, grandeur, pathos, Levinas opposes the "less than being," human language in its imperfection.

After the "transcendence" of the second part, describing the "more than Being," we arrive at the infinite opening, at utopia. "De l'être à l'autre" thus suggests traversing a place that is closed and dark, traversing Being towards a *clearing* (*Lichtung*), an eminently Heideggerian term designating the revelation of Being. This very term, however, is, in Levinas's text, submitted to the transformation towards which the text moves. Here, Levinas implicitly addresses Heidegger, who writes, in "Why Poets?":

> The poet thinks into the place that is determined from that clearing of being which has been stamped as the realm in which Western metaphysics is fulfilled. Hölderlin's thinking poetry has also stamped this realm of the poetic thinking. His poetry dwells in this place more intimately than any other poetry of his time. The place into which Hölderlin came is one where being is manifest, a manifestness which itself belongs in the destiny of being; out of this destiny, the manifestness is intended for the poet. (Heidegger 2002, 203)[22]

In borrowing Celan's words from his meta-poetical text "Der Meridian" (The Meridian), this clearing is no longer a place, as in Heidegger, but rather the clarity of a utopia, in the light of which the human appears, the other human.[23] "Utopia" designates literally u-topos, non-place. And it is thus that Levinas describes the path that his argument pursues: "The movement thus described – going from place towards non-place, from *here* to u-topia" (Levinas 1978, 18).[24] It is in this last part of his text that Levinas addresses most explicitly the question of place and of non-place. These pages lead us to questions we asked at the beginning: does Levinas, in his distancing from Heidegger, refuse the

22 In the original: "Der Dichter denkt in die Ortschaft, die sich aus derjenigen Lichtung des Seins bestimmt, die als der Bereich der sich vollendenden Metaphysik in ihr Gepräge gelangt ist. Hölderlins denkende Dichtung hat diesen Bereich des dichtenden Denkens mitgeprägt. Sein Dichten wohnt in dieser Ortschaft so vertraut wie kein anderes Dichtertum zu seiner Zeit. Die Ortschaft, in die Hölderlin gekommen, ist eine Offenbarkeit des Seins, die selbst in das Geschick des Seins gehört und aus diesem her dem Dichter zugedacht wird" (Heidegger 1999, 273).

23 "Nothing is stranger or more alien than the other man, and it is in the light of utopia that one touches man outside of all rootedness and domestication" (Levinas 1978, 19). In the original: "Rien n'est plus étrange ni plus étranger que l'autre homme et c'est dans la clarté de l'utopie que se montre l'homme" (Levinas 1976, 54).

24 In the original: "Le mouvement ainsi décrit va du lieu vers le non-lieu d'ici vers l'utopie" (Levinas 1976, 52).

implanting in a place, the dwelling of Greek being provided by the poet, to the extent of celebrating unconditionally the modality of exilic existence considered as the Jewish modality par excellence?

Before considering these few pages in the last part of *De l'être à l'autre*, it is instructive to turn to another text by Levinas, entitled "Le regard du poète" (The Poet's Gaze), in which he addresses this question more explicitly. The text is the first piece in the collection *Sur Blanchot* (On Blanchot). In this piece, from 1956, written fifteen years before "De l'être à l'autre," Levinas recognizes the importance of Heidegger's thought for Blanchot's work, stating: "One feels the proximity of the German philosopher in myriad ways, right up to [. . .] the texts by Rilke and Hölderlin that he comments upon."[25] It is thus a question, as Levinas states explicitly, of the later Heidegger, precisely of the one who will be the object of his polemic in the text on Celan. And just as fifteen years later Levinas finds in Celan, particularly in Celan's Büchner Prize address, "Der Meridian," an invitation to leave the Heideggerian world, in the vision of art espoused by Blanchot he reads an opposition to "the Hellenic truth of Being." Levinas writes of Blanchot: "Does [he] not attribute to art the function of uprooting the Heideggerian universe?" (Levinas 1996, 139).[26] He undoubtedly discerns correctly when he distances his friend from Heidegger's pagan temptation, above all where he affirms Blanchot's insistence on nomadism as the human essence. However, the association of the "authenticity of exile" (one of the subtitles of his text) found in Blanchot, with the condition of human being "as a being, as this man here, exposed to hunger, to thirst, to the cold" is in fact that of Levinas rather than of Blanchot, who, Levinas admits, did not place ethics at the centre of his considerations. And what would Levinas have said of a text by Blanchot bearing the title "Traduire" (Translate), first published in 1961, in which Blanchot, in dialogue with Walter Benjamin and his celebrated text on the task of the translator, sings praise of Hölderlin, specifically for having magisterially unified in a "pure language" nothing less than the Greek and the German in his translations of Sophocles, his last works before sinking into madness?[27]

One would also have to turn here to Blanchot's pages on Paul Celan entitled *Le dernier à parler* (The Last to Speak), published in the same issue of the

25 My translation. In the original: "le voisinage du philosophe allemand de mille façons et jusque dans . . . les textes de Rilke et de Hölderlin qu'il commente" (Levinas 1975, 24).

26 In the original: "Blanchot ne prête-t-il pas à l'art la fonction de déraciner l'univers heideggerien?" (Levinas 1975, 25).

27 See Vivian Liska, "A Same Other, Another Same: Walter Benjamin and Maurice Blanchot on Translation" (2014, 242).

Revue des Belles Lettres as Levinas's text on Celan, to see where Blanchot's reading situates the Jewish poet with respect to Hölderlin – particularly the later Hölderlin, to whom he refers at various junctures – and implicitly with regard to Heidegger. It will perhaps suffice, however, to suggest that in contrast to Levinas, who brings about a "departure from the Heideggarian world," Blanchot indicates with his title (citing a verse by Celan) that this poet in fact closes the tradition of Hölderlin, but *without leaving it*: for Blanchot, Celan is, rather, "the last to speak," to speak Hölderlin's language, that of Heidegger's Hölderlin. Blanchot indeed leads Celan to the edge of the Heideggerian abyss but without Levinas's injunction to "leap beyond"[28] and above all without setting himself on the way towards the other. The path on which Celan embarks in Blanchot is indeed one directed towards an exterior (*un dehors*), "never already given,"[29] "movement or following a route, a relation without attachments or roots [. . .] indicating the Open, what is empty, free,"[30] it is rather "white at the ground of what is without a ground."[31] Blanchot designates an abyss that is indeed different from that of Heidegger's – the latter being an apocalyptic one, indicating the absence of the gods, but also the possible place of a turn – while in Blanchot's the void remains essentially empty, a different abyss but an abyss just the same. It is an excess, a murmur, the rustling of the outside. But another human face is not to be seen.

The parts of "Paul Celan. From Being to the Other" where Levinas addresses most closely the question of place are found at the beginning of the third and final part, bearing the title "In the clarity of utopia . . ." It is here that Levinas invokes and at the same time goes beyond the non-place, Blanchot's neutral outside, without, however, arriving at another destination. Yet the direction of this destination is nonetheless inscribed there, and in Levinas's language where this is at its most poetic. At the beginning of this third part, Levinas writes, "This exceptional 'outside' is not an other landscape. [. . .] the poem takes a further step" (Levinas 1978, 19).[32] And one might add that in Levinas it perhaps takes a step further than Celan himself. Levinas writes: "the

28 In the original: "transcendance – saut par-dessus l'abîme ouvert dans l'être" (Levinas 1976, 52); "transcendence [. . .] a leap across the abyss open in Being" (Levinas 1978, 18).

29 My translation. In the original: "jamais déjà donné" (Blanchot 2002, 83).

30 My translation. In the original: "essai d'un mouvement ou d'un cheminement, rapport sans attaches et sans racines" (Blanchot 2002, 83).

31 My translation. In the original: "blanc qui est au fond de ce qui est sans fond" (Blanchot 2002, 85).

32 In the original: "Ce dehors insolite n'est pas un autre paysage. Au-delà du simplement étrange de l'art et de l'ouverture sur l'être de l'étant – le poème fait un pas de plus [. . .]" (Levinas 1976, 53).

strange is the stranger" (Levinas 1978, 19).[33] It is indeed Levinas himself, and not Celan, who adds that "nothing is stranger or more foreign that the other *human being*" (Levinas 1978, 19).[34] In effect, Celan remains more vague and more abstract in the original German when he writes that the poem goes towards "a foreigner, an other, a totally other" (my translation) without specifying that this is in fact a question of the human other – or, in language that is almost already Biblical, of the neighbour. In any case, it is at this moment that Levinas expostulates: "Outside of all rootedness and all domestication; authenticity as being without a fatherland!"[35] The next paragraph ends with the sentence: "But the dwelling justified by the movement towards the other is essentially Jewish."[36] In this formulation, at the latest, one could gain the certainty that Levinas takes the position of the wandering Jew as an ultimate philosophical theme, as the guarantee of a modality of the ethical being. Yet it is also at this moment that Levinas adopts a language of detours, of zigzags, of propositions and counter-propositions that destabilise his own proposition: "Outside of all rootedness and all domestication; authenticity as being without a fatherland!" It is in "this adventure" – this path towards the other designated by Celan's "Der Meridian" – that "the I dedicates itself to the poem so as to meet the other in the non-place, it is the return that is surprising – a return based not on the response of the summoned relation, but on the circularity of the meridian [. . .]" (Levinas 1978, 19).[37] This is indeed a surprising proposition, for the circularity of the movement leading towards the other described by "Der Meridian" is, Levinas continues, "As if in going toward the other, I were reunited with myself and implanted myself in a soil that would, henceforth, be native; as if the distancing of the I drew me closer to myself, discharged of the full weight of my identity – a movement of which poetry would be the

33 Melville's translation (Levinas 1978) cited here omits the final three words of the sentence, which should read: "the strange is the stranger or the neighbor." In the original: "[. . .] l'étrange, c'est l'étranger ou le prochain" (Levinas 1976, 54).

34 In the original: "Rien n'est plus étrange ni plus étranger que l'autre homme [. . .]" (Levinas 1976, 54).

35 Melville's English rendering of this sentence (Levinas 1978) is inaccurate. The version above has been offered by the translator of this article. In the original: "Hors de tout enracinement et de toute domiciliation; apatridie comme authenticité!" (Levinas 1976, 54).

36 My translation. This sentence is missing in Melville's translation of the text (Levinas 1978). In the original: "Mais l'habitation justifiée par le mouvement vers l'autre est d'essence juive" (Levinas 1976, 54).

37 In the original: "Hors de tout enracinement et de toute domiciliation; apatridie comme authenticité! [. . .] Mais le surprise de cette aventure où le moi se dédie à l'autre dans le non-lieu, c'est le retour" (Levinas 1976, 54).

possibility itself, and a native land which owes nothing to rootedness, nothing to 'prior occupation': a native land that has no need to be a birthplace. Native land or promised land?" (Levinas 1978, 20).[38] And it is Levinas who asks himself the final question, using a biblical image: "Does it spew forth its inhabitants when they forget the course of one who goes off in search of the other" (Levinas 1978, 20).[39] Would the surprise of the return be that it is necessary to go towards the other in order to end at home with oneself in the Heideggerian "when mortals come into their own essence" (Heidegger 2002, 202)?[40] This is by no means the case if one reads these lines as an act of poetic language: in such a reading, the return does not go back to the same but transforms the same on its path. In these lines, the exclamation that authenticity is to be bereft of a fatherland no longer appears in light of a philosophical or moral affirmation of exile; instead, it leads to the conception of Biblical dwelling that does not allow for forgetting that the relation to the land is neither possession nor rootedness. The land always remains a *promise*, it does not offer a dwelling but rather a *refuge* in order to "pass the night" (Levinas 1978, 20),[41] in order (as Levinas earlier stated, in his text on Blanchot) for shelter from the cold, from hunger, from destitution. A temporary shelter, where, in the words of a severe piece of poetry, there persists both the "[i]nsomnia in the bed of Being" (Levinas 1978, 20)[42] and the "impossibility of curling up to shut one's eyes" (Levinas 1978, 20).[43] As far as concerns the Jewish essence, which could be interpreted as chauvinist particularism: it is defined, in the paragraph that follows, according to Jewish history under Nazism, and as the extreme possibility and impossibility of humanity as such, leading to a vision of human being in its most vulnerable nudity. It is later in this passage that the state of "being without a fatherland"

38 In the original: "Non pas à partir de la réponse de l'interpellé, mais de par la circularité de ce mouvement sans retour, de cette trajéctoire parfaite, de ce méridie que, dans la finalité sans fin, décrit le poème. Comme si en allant vers l'autre, je me réjoignais et m'implantais dans une une terre, désormais natale, déchargée de tout le poids de mon identité. Terre natale qui ne doit rien à l'enracinement, rien à la première occupation; terre natale qui ne doit rien à la naissance. Terre natale ou terre promise" (Levinas 1976, 54).

39 In the original: "Vomit-elle ses habitants quand ils oublient le parcours circulaire qui leur a rendu familière cette terre, et leur errance qui n'était pas pour le dépaysement, qui était dépaganisation?" (Levinas 1976, 54).

40 In the original: "Mit den Sterblichen wendet es sich aber, wenn sie in ihr eigenes Wesen finden" (Heidegger 1999, 271).

41 In the original: "pour passer la nuit" (Levinas 1976, 54).

42 In the original: "Insomnie dans le lit de l'être" (Levinas 1976, 54).

43 In the original: "impossibilité de se peletonner pour s'oublier" (Levinas 1976, 54).

loses its aspect of a superior moral position to be imitated and becomes the signum of this idea of the fragile human being, exposed to evil and to destitution, which for Levinas is absent from the Heideggerian world. Levinas's passage ends with a return to Paul Celan and his poetry: against the silence of nature confronted with frail and denuded human being, Levinas writes, "a true word" (*une vraie parole*) is necessary, against the language of the poetry that Heidegger derives from Hölderlin's hymns. It is the word of poetry that expresses and maintains the remembrance of "this particular human being." This is the framework in which the role of the poetic word in Levinas can be linked to his evocation of the relation between the Saying and the Said in *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence). The language that I earlier called poetic language calls sclerotic concepts into question, submits the Said of "place" or "exile" to the movement of the Saying in which the wounds of Jewish experience are exposed. Such a vulnerability, expressed in the poetic word, exposed and as such shared with the other, cannot possess a place, cannot consolidate itself as the supremacy of possession, be it of the land, be it of the content of a concept, of an "essence."

In a remarkable text that appeared in a major collection edited by Danielle Cohen-Levinas, *Le souci de l'art chez Emmanuel Levinas* (The Care of Art in Emmanuel Levinas), Stéphane Habib and Raphaël Zagury-Orly analyse a fragment of this passage and, after a lucid and nuanced deconstructive course of argument, arrive at the convincing conclusion that Levinas's thought cannot be reduced either to a return to the same or to an affirmation of wandering as a position, as a positive modality. They rightly call on the reader to listen to the complication to which Levinas invites him/her, that is, the necessity to think at the same time dwelling and the movement towards the Other. They write that Levinas "is not a philosopher of dwelling, of being at home. But Levinas is also not a philosopher of the wandering of exile."[44] Their conclusion, however, particularly in light of the present context, elicits doubt. Commenting on Levinas's deviating the Jewish essence towards a complex validity – possible and impossible – for all humanity, they write: "Everything takes place as if, in a message towards a universality of insane necessity, Levinas were responding to Saint Paul's famous 'neither Jew nor Greek' by saying 'both Jew and Greek,' one in

44 My translation. In the original: "n'est pas un philosophe de l'habitation, du chez soi. Mais Lévinas n'est pas non plus un philosophe de la poésie de l'errance de l'exil" (Habib and Zagury-Orly 2011, 178).

the other, alteration."[45] Perhaps in their deconstructive gesture, which attempts at all costs to avoid hierarchy and the primacy of tradition, of one form of thought in relation to another, and above all to avoid any such synthesis into a third, Habib and Zagury-Orly miss what is brought about essentially by the alteration of the thought of place that Levinas allows us to think. It seems to me that Levinas has indeed passed from being to the other; he has not effectuated a symmetrical deconstruction of two equal, opposed positions but has rather instigated a radical modification of the notion of place. Exile, displacement, and the loss of fatherland are indeed authenticity for him, yet this does not ignore the need for refuge claimed for oneself and granted to the other. The circular trajectory towards the other – the path of Celan's meridian, according to Levinas – thus does not end in a return to the same, but this same, like this place, has itself become transformed: it has become refuge and shelter for the naked human being.

It is, therefore, not a question of simply opposing the Greek and the Jew, nor of embedding one into the other so as to have one who is "both Jew and Greek"; rather, it is an invitation, as a travelling companion of Levinas, to follow his Abrahamic path by introducing the Greek into the infinite movement of a departure without return. This movement would, in the course of its journey towards the other, and without supporting a call to re-implant itself, transform the native place of the other just as much as the absence of this place is itself marked as an absence. It is through the angle of this transformation that the poetical word enacts what it conveys and constitutes a place of engagement with the other. This place remains, and must remain, both a promise and, as Levinas puts it, in his text on Blanchot, in reference to the Exodus from Egypt and the feast of Tabernacles, a "hut in the desert" – in order to transform, to translate a Jewish experience into a Greek signifier in the name of *return*. This, while following the path of the same not as a destination but rather as the transformation of being with the Other in view. It is not a case of "both Jew and Greek": it is a Jewish path inviting all those who feel called by this vision to take their place in his hut without, however, stopping their passage towards the Other and towards the promise of a time and of a place, of a truth of Being that signifies justice.

Celan's poetry reveals, in a form condensed to the extreme, that which one finds in Levinas almost in filigree in the passages conceived poetically, or

45 My translation. In the original: "Tout se passe comme si, en un envoi vers une universalité d'une exigence folle, Levinas était en train de répondre au fameux 'ni juif ni grec' de saint Paul par un et Juif et Grec, l'un dans l'autre: altération" (Habib and Zagury-Orly 2011, 195).

which at least opens up a reading attentive to the mode of signifying, subverting propositions that could pose problems when conceived purely conceptually (such as the idealisation of being without a fatherland or the proposal of a Jewish essence).

2 Paul Celan's "With Us"

In a poem entitled "Mit uns" (With Us), written on 9 April 1966 and which concludes the cycle "Eingedunkelt" (Darkening Light) (first published in 1968), Celan envisions Jewish exile in similar terms to those of the other authors who wished to reverse the negative associations of the rootless, homeless Jew. As did other thinkers who regarded the Jew as the embodiment of displacement, Celan associates both rootedness and belonging to a place with Heidegger and, beyond that, with the "blood and soil" ideology of National Socialism. Celan, too, links the alternative to this rootedness in the earth with the text and letter. However, he simultaneously blocks the paths to appropriation and self-affirming embellishment of the condition of involuntary displacement, and, above all, enacts an irrefutable resistance to the forgetting of suffering, in particular, the suffering from exile.

MIT UNS, den	
Umhergeworfenen, dennoch	With us, those
Fahrenden:	thrown about, nevertheless
	traveling:
Der eine	
unversehrte,	The sole
nicht usurpierbare,	unscathed,
aufständische	non-appropriable,
Gram. (Celan 2003, 268)	defiant
	grief.[46]

In a short, two-part sentence lacking any verbs, Celan speaks as "we" (or "us") and says what or how it is "with us." The intertextual reference to Heidegger's "Being-with" (*Mitsein*) becomes more explicit in the second line, where he defines the collectivity to which he refers: the we/us are the "thrown about, nevertheless." "We" are, and also are not, the Heideggerian thrown, those thrown into the world as being. "We" are, more precisely, "thrown about" – thrown from one place to the next, displaced, hunted, and expelled. "We" are, above all, those

46 My translation.

who *nevertheless*, despite the trauma of persecution and expulsion, eschew searching for a homeland and resist the yearning for a dwelling that would ward off the existential condition of thrownness. "We" are those who "nevertheless" defy that consolation, who turn the passivity of having been thrown by fate and history into a self-determined action: "We" become the "travellers" (*die Fahrenden*), who as such could be Rilke's unplaced, melancholy yet of their own free choice, nomadic wanderers. Celan's "travellers," however, derive their significance from the resistance evoked in the "nevertheless"; they are the expelled and hunted who nevertheless withstand the temptation of remaining in place, who resolutely travel *as resistance* against emplacement. This resistance rests on the only unrelenting, undiminished certainty that remains: "The sole / unscathed, / non-appropriable, / defiant / grief."

The insurmountable, defiant grief uniting anger and mourning binds these travellers and accompanies them. It does not stand for them metaphorically nor does it define an identity; rather, it is *with* them. It is neither to be used nor to be appropriated (as a metaphoric undoing of particularity would have it); it stands upright amidst all movement. As in the poem "Niemals, stehender Gram" (At No Time, Lasting Grief) (Celan 2003, 526), written two years later, it defies the "mimeticists," who, "no matter how lettered," never wrote a word "that rebels" (my translation). The sorrow evoked in "With us" is as defiant as the letter of this poem in which grief (*Gram*) and *Grammaton,* the Greek word for letter, come together in the concrete and singular reality of the poem that is open to all fellow travellers who are touched by it. The sorrow that "With us" evokes is as recalcitrant and rebellious as the letter of these poems, of the poem in which *Gram* and *Grammaton* coalesce in the singular reality of the poem, a reality open to all the fellow travellers who are "with us." Like Levinas in his thought, Celan translates here Jewish experience as well as its rebellious letter, its poetry, into Greek.

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