

**Paul Celan**  
**- poems -**

# Afternoon Of Circus And Citadel

In Brest, before the Fire-Hoops burning,  
In the Tent, where Tigers sprang,  
there I heard you, Finite, singing,  
there I saw you, Mandelstam.

The Sky hung over the Roadstead,  
the Gull, hung over the Crane.  
The Finite sang there, the Constant –  
you, the Gunboat, Baobab.

I hailed the Tricolor  
with a Russian Word –  
the Lost was Un-Lost,  
the Heart Anchored there.

Paul Celan

# Alchemical

Silence, like Gold cooked in  
charred  
Hands.

Vast, grey,  
near as all that is Lost  
Sisterly-Shape:

All the Names, all the with-  
Burnt up  
Names. So much  
Ash to be blessed. So much  
Land gained  
above  
the light, so light  
Soul-  
Rings.

Vast. Grey. Clinker-  
less.

You, then.  
You with the pale  
bitten-out bud,  
You in the Wine-Flood.

(Did it not discharge  
us too, this Hour?  
Good,  
Good, that your Word died away here.)

Silence, like Gold cooked, in  
charred, charred  
Hands.  
Fingers, smoke-thin. Like Crowns, Air-Crowns  
around – –

Vast. Grey. Track-  
less.

Queen-  
like.

Paul Celan

# Aspen Tree

Aspen Tree, your leaves glance white into the dark.  
My mother's hair was never white.

Dandelion, so green is the Ukraine.  
My yellow-haired mother did not come home.

Rain cloud, above the well do you hover?  
My quiet mother weeps for everyone.

Round star, you wind the golden loop.  
My mother's heart was ripped by lead.

Oaken door, who lifted you off your hinges?  
My gentle mother cannot return.

Paul Celan

# Corona

Autumn eats its leaf out of my hand: we are friends.  
From the nuts we shell time and we teach it to walk:  
then time returns to the shell.

In the mirror it's Sunday,  
in dream there is room for sleeping,  
our mouths speak the truth.

My eye moves down to the sex of my loved one:  
we look at each other,  
we exchange dark words,  
we love each other like poppy and recollection,  
we sleep like wine in the conches,  
like the sea in the moon's blood ray.

We stand by the window embracing, and people look up from  
the street:  
it is time they knew!  
It is time the stone made an effort to flower,  
time unrest had a beating heart.  
It is time it were time.

It is time.

Translated by Michael Hamburger

Paul Celan

# Count The Almonds

Count the Almonds,  
count, what was bitter, watched for you,  
count me in:

I sought your Eye, as it opened and no one announced  
you,  
I spun that hidden Thread,  
on which the Dew, of your thought,  
slid down to the Pitchers,  
that a Speech, which no one's Heart found, guarded.

Only there did you enter wholly the Name, that is yours,  
stepping sure-footedly into yourself,  
the Hammers swung free in the Bell-Cradle of Silences,  
yours,  
the Listened-For reached you,  
the Dead put its arm round you too,  
and the three of you walked through the Evening.

Make me bitter.  
Count me among the Almonds.

Paul Celan

# Crystal

not on my lips look for your mouth,  
not in front of the gate for the stranger,  
not in the eye for the tear.

seven nights higher red makes for red,  
seven hearts deeper the hand knocks on the gate,  
seven roses later plashes the fountain.

Paul Celan



# Death Fugue

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at sundown  
we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night  
we drink it and drink it  
we dig a grave in the breezes there one lies unconfined  
A man lives in the house he plays with the serpents  
    he writes  
he writes when dusk falls to Germany your golden  
    hair Margarete  
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are  
    flashing he whistles his pack out  
he whistles his Jews out in earth has them dig for a  
    grave  
he commands us strike up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
we drink you in the morning at noon we drink you at  
    sundown  
we drink and we drink you  
A man lives in the house he plays with the serpents  
    he writes  
he writes when dusk falls to Germany your golden hair  
    Margarete  
your ashen hair Sulamith we dig a grave in the breezes  
    there one lies unconfined

He calls out jab deeper into the earth you lot you  
    others sing now and play  
he grabs at the iron in his belt he waves it his  
    eyes are blue  
jab deper you lot with your spades you others play  
    on for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
we drink you at at noon in the morning we drink you  
    at sundown  
we drink and we drink you  
a man lives in the house your golden hair Margarete  
your ashen hair Sulamith he plays with the serpents  
He calls out more sweetly play death death is a master

from Germany  
he calls out more darkly now stroke your strings then  
as smoke you will rise into air  
then a grave you will have in the clouds there one  
lies unconfined

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
we drink you at noon death is a master from Germany  
we drink you at sundown and in the morning we drink  
and we drink you  
death is a master from Germany his eyes are blue  
he strikes you with leaden bullets his aim is true  
a man lives in the house your golden hair Margarete  
he sets his pack on to us he grants us a grave in  
the air  
He plays with the serpents and daydreams death is  
a master from Germany

your golden hair Margarete  
your ashen hair Shulamith

Translated by Michael Hamburger

Paul Celan

# Flower

The stone.

The stone in the air, which I followed.

Your eye, as blind as the stone.

We were

hands,

we baled the darkness empty, we found

the word that ascended summer:

flower.

Flower - a blind man's word.

Your eye and mine:

they see

to water.

Growth.

Heart wall upon heart wall

adds petals to it.

One more word like this word, and the hammers  
will swing over open ground.

Paul Celan

# Fugue Of Death

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at nightfall  
we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night  
we drink it and drink it  
we are digging a grave in the sky it is ample to lie there  
A man in the house he plays with the serpents he writes  
he writes when the night falls to Germany your golden  
hair Margarete  
he writes it and walks from the house the stars glitter he  
whistles his dogs up  
he whistles his Jews out and orders a grave to be dug in  
the earth  
he commands us strike up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
we drink you in the morning at noon we drink you at  
nightfall  
drink you and drink you  
A man in the house he plays with the serpents he writes  
he writes when the night falls to Germany your golden  
hair Margarete  
Your ashen hair Shulamith we are digging a grave in the  
sky it is  
ample to lie there

He shouts stab deeper in earth you there and you others  
you sing and you play  
he grabs at the iron in his belt and swings it and blue are  
his eyes  
stab deeper your spades you there and you others play on  
for the dancing

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at nightfall  
we drink you at noon in the mornings we drink you at  
nightfall  
drink you and drink you  
a man in the house your golden hair Margarete  
your ashen hair Shulamith he plays with the serpents

He shouts play sweeter death's music death comes as a

Master from Germany  
he shouts stroke darker the strings and as smoke you  
shall climb to the sky  
then you'll have a grave in the clouds it is ample to lie  
there

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
we drink you at noon death comes as a master from  
Germany  
we drink you at nightfall and morning we drink you and  
drink you  
a master from Germany death comes with eyes that are  
blue  
with a bullet of lead he will hit in the mark he will hit  
you  
a man in the house your golden hair Margarete  
he hunts us down with his dogs in the sky he gives us a  
grave  
he plays with the serpents and dreams death comes as a  
master from Germany

your golden hair Margarete  
your ashen hair Shulamith.□

Paul Celan

# Homecoming

Snowfall, denser and denser,  
dove-coloured as yesterday,  
snowfall, as if even now you were sleeping.

White, stacked into distance.  
Above it, endless,  
the sleigh track of the lost.

Below, hidden,  
presses up  
what so hurts the eyes,  
hill upon hill,  
invisible.

On each,  
fetched home into its today,  
an I slipped away into dumbness:  
wooden, a post.

There: a feeling,  
blown across by the ice wind  
attaching its dove- its snow-  
coloured cloth as a flag.

Paul Celan

# I Can Still See You

I can still see you: an Echo,  
to be touched with Feeler-  
Words, on the Parting-  
Ridge.

Your face softly shies away,  
when all at once there is  
lamp-like brightness  
in me, at the Point,  
where most painfully one says Never.

Paul Celan

# I Hear

I hear, the Axe has flowered,  
I hear, the Place is un-nameable,

I hear, the Bread, that looks on him,  
heals the Hanged-Man,  
the Bread, his Wife baked for him,

I hear, they name Life  
our sole Refuge.

Paul Celan



# Ice, Eden

There is a Land that's Lost,  
Moon waxes in its Reeds,  
and all that's turned to frost  
with us, burns there and sees.

It sees, for it has Eyes,  
Earths they are, and bright.  
Night, Night, Alkalis.  
It sees, this Child of Sight.

It sees, it sees, we see,  
I see you, you too see.  
Ice will rise again before  
This Hour shall cease to be.

Paul Celan

# Illegibility

Illegibility of this  
World. All twice-over.

Robust Clocks  
agree the Cracked-Hour,  
hoarsely.

You, clamped in your Depths,  
climb out of yourself  
for ever.

Paul Celan

# In Front Of A Candle

I formed the holder of gold,  
as you told me to mother,  
gold, out of which She comes,  
a shade, to me, in the middle  
of fracturing hours,  
your  
being-dead's daughter.

Slender in shape,  
a thin, almond-eyed shadow,  
her mouth and her sex  
danced round by creatures from sleep,  
out of the cave of the gold,  
she rises up,  
to the summit of Now.

With night-dark-shrouded  
lips,  
I speak the Prayer:

In the name of the Three  
who fight with each other, until  
heaven reaches down into the graveyard of feeling,  
in the name of the Three, whose rings  
gleam on my finger, whenever  
I loose the hair of the trees into the abyss,  
so that the richer floods rush down through the deeps-

in the name of the first of the Three  
who shrieked,  
when he was called on to live,  
where his word went before him,  
in the name of the second, who watched it and wept,  
in the name of the third, who piles  
white stones in the middle –  
I say you are free  
of the amen that overpowers us,

of the ice-filled light at its rim,  
there, where tower-high it enters the sea,  
there, where the grey one, the dove  
picks at the names  
this side and that side of dying:  
You still, you still, you still,  
a dead woman's child,  
sealed to the No of my yearning,  
wedded to a cleft in time  
to which the mother-word led me,  
so that a single spasm  
would pass through the hand  
that now, and now, grasps at my heart!

Paul Celan

# Landscape

tall poplars -- human beings of this earth!  
black pounds of happiness -- you mirror them to death!

I saw you, sister, stand in that effulgence.

Paul Celan

# Little Night

Little Night: when you  
take me within, within,  
up there,  
three Pain-Inches above  
the Floor:

all the Shroud-Coats of Sand,  
all the Help-Nots,  
all, that still  
laughs  
with the Tongue -

Paul Celan

# Mandorla

In the Almond – what dwells in the Almond?  
Nothing.  
Nothing dwells in the Almond.  
There it dwells and dwells.

In Nothing – what dwells there? The King.  
There dwells the King, the King.  
There he dwells and dwells.

Jews'-Hair, you'll not grow grey.

And your Eye – where does your Eye dwell?  
Your Eye dwells on the Almond.  
Your Eye, on Nothing it dwells.  
It dwells on the King.  
So it dwells and dwells.

Human-Hair, you'll not grow grey.  
Empty Almond, regally-blue.

Paul Celan

# Night Ray

Most brightly of all burned the hair of my evening loved one:  
to her I send the coffin of lightest wood.

Waves billow round it as round the bed of our dream in Rome;  
it wears a white wig as I do and speaks hoarsely:

it talks as I do when I grant admittance to hearts.

It knows a French song about love, I sang it in autumn  
when I stopped as a tourist in Lateland and wrote my letters  
to morning.

A fine boat is that coffin carved in the coppice of feelings.

I too drift in it downbloodstream, younger still than your eye.

Now you are young as a bird dropped dead in March snow,

now it comes to you, sings you its love song from France.

You are light: you will sleep through my spring till it's over.

I am lighter:

in front of strangers I sing.

Paul Celan



# O Little Root Of A Dream

O little root of a dream  
you hold me here  
undermined by blood,  
no longer visible to anyone,  
property of death.

Curve a face  
that there may be speech, of earth,  
of ardor, of  
things with eyes, even  
here, where you read me blind,

even  
here,  
where you  
refute me,  
to the letter.

translated by Heather McHugh and Nikolai Popov

Paul Celan

# On My Right

On my Right – who? The Death-Woman.  
And you, on my Left, you?

The Wandering-Sickles in extra-  
heavenly Place  
mime themselves grey-white  
Moon-Swallows, together,  
Star-Swifts,

I plunge there  
and pour an Urnful  
down onto you,  
in you.

Paul Celan

# Only When

Only when  
as a Shade I touch you,  
will you believe my  
Mouth,

that climbs with Late-  
Minded things up there  
around the  
Time-Courts,

you come to the Host  
of the Twice-Using among  
the Angels,

Silence-Enraged  
Stars.

Paul Celan

# Psalm

No-man kneads us again out of Earth and Loam,  
no-man spirits our Dust.  
No-man.

Praise to you, No-man.  
For love of you  
we will flower.  
Moving  
towards you.

A Nothing  
we were, we are, we shall  
be still, flowering:  
the Nothing-, the  
No-man's-rose.

With  
our Pistil soul-bright,  
our Stamen heaven-torn,  
our Corolla red  
with the Violet-Word that we sang  
over, O over  
the thorn.

Paul Celan

# Stuttered-Over-Again World

Stuttered-over-again World,  
where I shall have been  
a Guest, a Name,  
sweated down from the Wall,  
that a Wound licks up.

Paul Celan

# Tallow Lamp

The monks with hairy fingers opened the book: September.  
Now Jason pelts with snow the newly sprouting grain.  
The forest gave you a necklace of hands. So dead you walk the rope.  
To your hair a darker blue is imparted; I speak of love.  
Shells I speak and light clouds, and a boat buds in the rain.  
A little stallion gallops across the leafing fingers--  
Black the gate leaps open, I sing:  
How did we live here?

(from Mohn und Gedachtnis by Paul Celan, trans. by Michael Hamburger)

Paul Celan

# Tenebrae

We are near, Lord,  
near and at hand.

Handled already, Lord,  
clawed and clawing as though  
the body of each of us were  
your body, Lord.

Pray, Lord,  
pray to us,  
we are near.

Wind-awry we went there,  
went there to bend  
over hollow and ditch.

To be watered we went there, Lord.

It was blood, it was  
what you shed, Lord.

It gleamed.

It cast your image into our eyes, Lord.  
Our eyes and our mouths are open and empty, Lord.

We have drunk, Lord.  
The blood and the image that was in the blood, Lord.

Pray, Lord.  
We are near.

Paul Celan

# The Poles

The Poles  
are within us,  
insurmountable  
while Awake,  
we sleep across, to the Gate  
of Mercy,

I lose you to you, that  
is my Snow-Comfort,

say, that Jerusalem is,

say, as if I were this  
your Whiteness,  
as if you were  
mine,

as if without us we could be we,

I open your leaves, forever,

you bless, you bed  
us free.

Paul Celan



# The Straitening

\*

Driven into the  
terrain  
with the unmistakable track:

grass, written asunder. The stones, white,  
with the shadows of grassblades:  
Do not read any more - look!  
Do not look any more - go!

Go, your hour  
has no sisters, you are -  
are at home. A wheel, slow,  
rolls out of itself, the spokes  
climb,  
climb on a blackish field, the night  
needs no stars, nowhere  
does anyone ask after you.

\*

Nowhere  
does anyone ask after you -

The place where they lay, it has  
a name - it has  
none. They did not lie there. Something  
lay between them. They  
did not see through it.

Did not see, no,  
spoke of  
words. None  
awoke,  
sleep  
came over them.

\*

Came, came. Nowhere

anyone asks -

It is I, I,  
I lay between you, I was  
open, was  
audible, ticked at you, your breathing  
obeyed, it is  
I still, but then  
you are asleep.

\*

It is I still -

years,  
years, years, a finger  
feels down and up, feels  
around:  
seams, palpable, here  
it is split wide open, here  
it grew together again - who  
covered it up?

\*

Covered it  
up - who?

Came, came.  
Came a word, came,  
came through the night,  
wanted to shine, wanted to shine.

Ash.  
Ash, ash.  
Night.  
Night-and-night. - Go  
to the eye, the moist one.

\*

Go  
to the eye,  
the moist one -

Gales.

Gales, from the beginning of time,  
whirl of particles, the other,  
you  
know it, though, we  
read it in the book, was  
opinion.

Was, was  
opinion. How  
did we touch  
each other - each other with  
these  
hands?

There was written too, that.  
Where? We  
put a silence over it,  
stilled with poison, great,  
a  
green  
silence, a sepal, an  
idea of vegetation attached to it -  
green, yes,  
attached, yes,  
under a crafty  
sky.

Of, yes,  
vegetation.

Yes.

Gales, whirl of part-  
icles, there was  
time left, time  
to try it out with the stone - it  
was hospitable, it  
did not cut in. How  
lucky we were:

Grainy,  
grainy and stringy. Stalky,

dense:  
grapy and radiant; kidneyish,  
flattish and  
lumpy; loose, tang-  
led -; he, it  
did not cut in, it  
spoke,  
willingly spoke to dry eyes, before closing them.

Spoke, spoke.  
Was, was.

We  
would not let go, stood  
in the midst, a  
porous edifice, and  
it came.

Came at us, came  
through us, patched  
invisibly, patched  
away at the last membrane  
and  
the world, a millicrystal,  
shot up, shot up.

\*

Shot up, shot up.  
Then -

Nights, demixed. Circles,  
green or blue, scarlet  
squares: the  
world puts its inmost reserves  
into the game with the new  
hours. - Circles,  
red or black, bright  
squares, no  
flight shadow,  
no  
measuring table, no  
smoke soul ascends or joins in.

\*

Ascends and  
joins in -

At owl's flight, near  
the petrified scabs,  
near  
our fled hands, in  
the latest rejection,  
above  
the rifle-range near  
the buried wall:

visible, once  
more: the  
grooves, the

choirs, at that time, the  
psalms. Ho, ho-  
sannah.

So  
there are temples yet. A  
star  
probably still has light.  
Nothing,  
nothing is lost.

Ho-  
sannah.

At owl's flight, here,  
the conversations, day-grey,  
of the water-level traces.

\*

(--day-grey,  
of  
the water-level traces -

Driven into the  
terrain

with  
the unmistakable  
track:

Grass,  
grass,  
written asunder.)

Paul Celan

# The Trumpet-Part

The Trumpet-Part  
deep in the glowing  
Text-Void  
at Torch-Height,  
in the Time-Hole:

listen in  
with your Mouth.

Paul Celan

# There Was Earth

There was Earth in them, and  
they dug.

They dug and they dug, and so  
their Day went by, and their Night. And they did not praise God,  
who, so they heard, wanted all this,  
who, so they heard, knew of all this.

They dug and they heard nothing more;  
did not grow wise, invented no Song,  
thought up for themselves no Language.  
They dug.

There came a Silence, there came a Storm,  
There came every Ocean.  
I dig, you dig, and it digs, the Worm,  
and the Singing, there, says: They dig.

O someone, o none, o no one, o you:  
Where did it lead to, that nowhere-leading?  
O you dig and I dig, and I dig towards you,  
and on our finger awakens the Ring.

Paul Celan



## This Evening Also

more fully,  
since snow fell even on this  
sun-drifted, sun-drenched sea,  
blossoms the ice in those baskets  
you carry into town.

sand  
you demand in return,  
for the last  
rose back at home  
this evening also wants to be fed  
out of the trickling hour.

Paul Celan

# To Stand In The Shadow

To stand in the Shadow  
of the Wound's-Mark in the Air.

For no-one and nothing to Stand.  
Unknown,  
for you  
alone.

With all, that within finds Room,  
even without  
Speech.

Paul Celan

# Twelve Years

The line  
that remained, that  
became true: . . . your  
house in Paris -- become  
the alterpiece of your hands.

Breathed through thrice,  
shone through thrice.

.....

It's turning dumb, turning deaf  
behind our eyes.  
I see the poison flower  
in all manner of words and shapes.

Go. Come.  
Love blots out its name: to  
you it ascribes itself.

translated by Michael Hamburger

Paul Celan

# Vinegrowers

Vinegrowers dig up dig  
under the darkhoured watch,  
depth for depth,

you read,  
the invisible  
one commands the wind  
to stay in bounds,

you read,

the Open Ones carry  
the stone behind the eye,  
it recognizes you,  
on a Sabbath.

TRANSLATED BY PIERRE JORIS

Paul Celan

# When You Lie

When you lie  
in the Bed of lost Flag-Cloth,  
with blue-black Syllables, in Snow-Eyelash-Shadow,  
the Crane through Thought-  
showers,  
comes gliding, steely-  
you open for him.

His beak ticks the Hour for you  
at every Mouth – at every  
bell-stroke, with red-hot Rope, a Silent-  
Millennium,  
Un-Pulse and Pulse  
mint each other to death,  
the Dollars, the Cents,  
rain hard through your Pores,  
in  
Second-Shapes  
you fly there and bar  
the Doors Yesterday and Tomorrow – phosphorescent,  
Forever-Teeth,  
buds the one, and buds the  
other breast,  
towards the Grasping, under  
the Thrusts –: so thick,  
so deeply  
strewn  
the starry  
Crane-  
Seed.

Paul Celan

# Whorish Other-When

Whorish other-when. And Eternity  
blood-black en-babelled.

Mud-drowned  
with your loamy Locks  
my Faith.

Two Fingers, hand-far,  
row towards a swampy  
Vow.

Paul Celan

# With Every Thought

With every Thought I went  
out of the World: there you were,  
you my Gentle One, you my Open One, and –  
you received us.

Who  
says that for us everything died,  
that for us there the Eye broke?  
Everything woke, all things began.

Vast, a Sun came swimming by, bright  
a Soul and a Soul engaged, clear,  
masterfully made a silence for it  
a path ahead.

Lightly  
you opened your Lap, quiet  
rose a Breath in the Aether,  
and what became cloud, was it not,  
was it not Form, and for us then,  
was it not  
as good as a Name?

Paul Celan

# With The Voice

With the voice of the Field-mouse  
You squeak up,

a sharp  
Clamp,  
you bite through my Shirt into the Skin,

a Cloth,  
you slither over my Mouth,  
in the midst of my,  
to you, Shadow, burdensome,  
Speech.

Paul Celan



# Your Hand

Your hand full of hours, you came to me – and I said:  
'Your hair is not brown.'

You lifted it, lightly,  
on to the balance of grief,  
it was heavier than I.

They come to you on their ships, and make it their load,  
then put it on sale in the markets of lust.

You smile at me from the deep.

I weep at you from the scale that's still light.

I weep: Your hair is not brown.

They offer salt-waves of the sea,  
and you give them spume.

You whisper: 'They're filling the world with me now,  
and for you I'm still a hollow way in the heart!

You say: 'Lay the leaf-work of years by you, it's time,  
that you came here and kissed me.

The leaf-work of years is brown, your hair is not brown.

Paul Celan