

## The post-national Celan: The imperfect triangulation from (abandoned) Romanian poetry to world literature and back

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Paul Celan produced a scanty corpus of Romanian poetry: eight poems (one of which is fragmentary) and eight prose poems. Their literary quality is nevertheless so remarkable that one of the most influential anthologies of the Romanian literary avant-garde bears the subtitle “From Urmuz to Paul Celan” (Mincu 2006). According to Andrei Corbea, the foremost Romanian specialist in Celan’s work, none of the poet’s Bucharest writer friends between 1945–1947 “counted out” his “possible destiny [...] in Romanian literature” (2020, 73).<sup>1</sup> One of these friends, Petre Solomon, who published Celan’s early Romanian poems in 1987, states that “it is more than certain that there existed other Romanian poems besides the ones that I have preserved myself” (2008, 142). Corbea also plausibly argues that at least some of the poems published by Celan in his Bucharest years are self-translations from German originals (2020, 72–79), therefore enriching the Romanian section of his work. Both Corbea and Solomon think that Celan’s Romanian literary output, which Corbea calls his “Romanian horizon” (162), should include his remarkable translations from German (four parables by Kafka) and from Russian (Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time* and Chekhov’s *Peasants*) into Romanian.

Thus, Celan’s 16 still extant Romanian poems, as well as his translations of Kafka, Lermontov, and Chekhov, *do not* constitute a sufficient literary corpus to allow us to speak consistently of a “Romanian Celan”. But what they *do* constitute is sufficient proof that there has existed the *possibility* of an accomplished Romanian poet named Celan, and they subsequently legitimate the examination of Celan’s “Romanian traces”, as Corbea names them (157–176). However, this is not in the sense in which Mac Linscott Ricketts (1988) has written about the “Romanian roots” of Mircea Eliade. Both Eliade and Emil Cioran produced a few thousand pages in Romanian, which justify the claim for a “Romanian Eliade” or a “Romanian Cioran”, preceding their integration into world literature. From this point of view, Celan’s case is more similar to that of Tristan Tzara: their small number of poems and texts written in Romanian do not make a reasonable claim for a “Romanian Celan” or a “Romanian Tzara”, prior to their acceptance into world literature as German or French writers. But these “Ro-



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manian traces” do justify the examination of their relation with the culture in which, at some point in their lives, they thought that they might have a literary destiny. Topics such as the motivation(s) of their biographical and cultural beliefs, their elective affinities toward Romanian literary precursors or contemporaries, the nature and the poetics of the Romanian literature they left behind, the dialogue of this “small” literature with the “large” literatures they became part of, and their use of these elements in their new literatures, deserve examination and comparison with the writing they produced after their integration into world literature.

One strange and painful episode in the last decade of Celan’s life is his feud with his translator and friend Michael Hamburger (himself a remarkable poet), due to Celan’s completely erroneous belief that Hamburger was the author of an anonymous review in the *Times Literary Supplement* which discussed the “hermeticism” of Celan’s poetry. This misunderstanding, which involves Celan’s perception both of his poetry and of himself as a Romanian Jew writing in German, is useful for a better understanding not only of Celan’s perception of himself, but also of the manner in which his poetic treatment of his biographical background allowed him to integrate this experience in a semi-peripheral literature into a larger core literature. As David Damrosch asserts, in a context which will be discussed in more detail below (2003, 281), world literature is rather a mode of circulation than a set canon of texts. In this regard, Celan does not enter world literature when he starts writing in German and the circulation of his texts exceeds the framework of Romanian culture. This occurs when his German poetry starts traveling beyond its German context – either by translation (for example, in English by Michael Hamburger, or in French by André du Bouchet, Jean Daive, and Jean-Pierre Burgart) or through literary criticism in languages other than German (for example, in French by Jacques Derrida or in English by George Steiner). We shall see that Celan perfectly understood that and he used his own Eastern European biography as a catalyst of his poetry, intuiting that his traumatic and paradoxical relation with the German culture and language can fuel his writing in such a manner that his own biography may become suggestive for readers from cultures other than German or Romanian. His trauma was not his alone. It could become significant to other peoples and cultures, and it could help his literature enter a mode of circulation transcending its original context. In the same time, Celan did not want his poetry to be perceived as too openly biographical, fearing that the limits of his biography could be transformed into limitations of his poetry. It was the central paradox at the heart of his writing: on the one hand, as Celan repeatedly insisted, his poems have a biographical correlative, they always originate in “the breath of the mortal who crosses the poem” (2005a, 143) and always represent “a turn to breath” (2005b, 162), so that the poems are themselves biographical facts. This is why Celan, even though he disliked grandiloquence, feels entitled to utter the phrase, without fear of ridicule: “Je suis la poésie!” (Bollack 1993, 11). On the other hand, he refused any straightforward biographical identification in his poems, and – as we shall subsequently see – he refused to publish during his lifetime one of his most impressive poems, “Wolfsbohne”, precisely because he considered that the biographical cor-

relation was too obvious. He even went to such lengths as almost entirely breaking off relations with his translator and friend Michael Hamburger when he considered that the biographical substratum of his poetry was misunderstood.

As Hamburger states, “‘Wolfsbohne’ is one of several poems excised by Paul Celan from his collection *Die Niemandrose* of 1963” (2013a, 395). Celan himself highly valued the poem; after writing its first version in 1959, he kept rewriting it and preserved these revisions in a separate file. Yet he decided not to publish it right before sending *Niemandrose* into print, and the poem was not published during his lifetime. Nevertheless, Celan did not destroy or abandon the poem. On the contrary, he was still working on it in 1965, when he took care to add some supplementary lines. When Hamburger came upon the poem after Celan’s death, he was immediately struck by its intensity and was granted the permission to translate it into English by Celan’s son, Eric, and by the German publisher Suhrkamp. Hamburger’s assumption (which I consider correct) is that Celan refused to publish the poem because its biographical origin was too explicit. As Hamburger writes, “‘Wolfsbohne’ must have proved unpublishable for and by Celan because, more starkly than any other poem of his maturity, it exposed the wound of his parents’ death in internment camps” (396). The tensest lines are those in which Celan is horrified by the idea that, after having arrived in Germany, he might have shaken the hand of his mother’s assassin: “Mutter, / Mutter, wessen / Hand hab ich gedrückt, / da ich mit deinen / Worten ging nach / Deutschland?” (In Hamburger’s translation: “Mother, / Mother, whose / hand did I clasp / when with your / words I went to / Germany?”).

Hamburger could not have known it, but this line is an exact reiteration of an emotional passage from a letter sent on 3 November 1946 from Bucharest by the 26-year-old Celan to the Swiss writer, critic, and editor Max Rychner (the publisher of Robert Walser and the pen friend of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Thomas Mann, Gottfried Benn, Ernst Robert Curtius, etc.):

I want to tell you how difficult it is to write poems in German as a Jew. When my poems appear, they will probably also come to Germany and – let me say the horrible thing – the hand that opens my book may have squeezed the hand of the one who murdered my mother. [...] And it could be even worse... But my destiny is this: to have to write German poems. And if poetry is my destiny – [...] – then I am happy. (2019a, 27)

The lines in “Wolfsbohne”, written in 1959, obviously rephrase the same fear expressed in this 1946 letter to Rychner, a convoluted psychic constellation which connects in one strong image his survivor’s guilt and his belief in his own poetic destiny. Tellingly enough, the place of the German language is not figured here in the mouth or in the brain, as it happens in everyday metaphorization, but in the hand which can both write poetry and commit murder. (A study on the hand as *locus* of the language in Celan’s poetry remains to be done.) Therefore poetry, which according to Celan is what remains after destruction, could be contaminated again by the destructive force.

In the years when Celan was writing “Wolfsbohne”, an ongoing trial of the German language was taking place. The most famous line of argumentation was, of course, that of Adorno, who built probably the most influential and authoritative case against poetry (mainly, but not only German) in the postwar cultural industry. In contrast

to his famous dictum (written in 1949 and first published in 1951), “Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch” (It is barbaric to write a poem after Auschwitz; 1977, 30), his *Negative Dialektik* (1966; *Negative Dialectics*, 2001) reaches an acceptance of poetry’s moral right to exist: “Perennial suffering has as much right to express itself as the martyr has to scream; this is why it may have been wrong to say that poetry could not be written after Auschwitz” ([1970] 2001, 355). Adorno was of course not alone in his denunciation of the German language’s complicity with Nazism; other influential thinkers joined him during those years in his endeavor. George Steiner was an early admirer of Celan, whom he considered in *After Babel* “almost certainly the major European poet of the period after 1945” ([1975] 1992, 191). In his 1960 essay *The Hollow Miracle. Notes on the German Language*, Steiner denounced the German language as

not innocent of the horrors of Nazism. It is not merely that a Hitler, a Goebbels, and a Himmler happened to speak German. Nazism found in the language precisely what it needed to give voice to its savagery. Hitler heard inside his native tongue the latent hysteria, the confusion, the quality of hypnotic trance. (1960, 37)

Steiner further thinks that if one chooses to “use a language to conceive, organize, and justify Belsen; use it to make out specifications for gas ovens; use it to dehumanize man during twelve years of calculated bestiality”, then “something of the lies and sadism will settle in the marrow of the language” (38). The consequence of this infection of the German language is the fatal diminution of German literature: “Compare the best of current journalism with an average number of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of pre-Hitler days; it is at times difficult to believe that both are written in German” (41).

Radical as they may seem now, such ethical reactions as Adorno’s or Steiner’s were deemed necessary in the immediate postwar decades, and they dominated the public sphere in Germany. Celan was directly interested in this discussion, as was expected due to his production of poetry originating in the Holocaust trauma. We do not have any record of his reaction to the Steiner article, but we know he followed Adorno’s positions with increased attention and even took notes commenting on them when he prepared some of his own public positions (most famously in the *Meridian* speech at the reception of the Büchner prize, in which he quotes Adorno), as Marlies Janz has already carefully shown (1976) and as the *Tübinger Ausgabe* has also repeatedly documented in more recent years. Celan was interested in meeting Adorno in person, and in July 1959 Peter Szondi arranged a meeting in the Engadine. Although he made the trip to the Swiss Alps, Celan left a few days before Adorno’s arrival, and they only met in person for the first time in May 1960, in the Rhine-Main region (a detailed account of their failed meeting may be found in Felstiner 1995, 139–145). In the meantime, Celan sent Adorno a letter containing the “Gespräch im Gebirg”, a short story about a failed “encounter in the mountains”. The subliminal message of the story was clear enough: Celan took Adorno’s view about the ethical impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz quite personally. Even though they eventually developed an amiable mutual attitude, this remained a litigious point in Celan’s attitude towards Adorno.

“Wolfsbohne” was written in its first version in 1959, the year of Celan’s and Adorno’s failed first meeting. The double fear of contamination, that the poet’s hand may involuntarily touch the hand of his mother’s assassin, and that his poetry may fall into the hands of the murderers, is easier to understand when put into the context of the Adorno-Steiner discussion. What is more difficult to understand is Celan’s refusal to publish the poem (according to Hamburger, Celan must also have known that it was one of his masterpieces). Hamburger values in “Wolfsbohne” nothing less than

the exceptional importance for me of a poem that validates Celan’s insistence on whatever is the opposite of hermeticism. [...] More clearly than any other poem by Celan, earlier or later, “Wolfsbohne” renders the tug between life and death that was the price he had to pay for being a survivor. (2013a, 397)

He deeply regrets Celan’s decision to excise the poem from the final version of *Die Niemandsrose*, showing his conviction that its publication would have made obvious for everyone the true anti-hermetic nature of Celan’s poetry:

If, on the other hand, he had been able to include the 1959 version in his book, every responsive and responsible critic would have to think twice before describing Celan as a “hermetic” poet – as Celan believed I had called him in an anonymous review of the book published in the *TLS*, despite my repeated assurances that I was not the author of that review. This misunderstanding troubled our relations, explicitly for a time, subliminally right up to the time of Celan’s death by suicide. Into my copy of *Die Niemandsrose* he wrote “ganz und gar nicht hermetisch” – “absolutely not hermetic”. (396–397)

We now know that Hamburger was indeed not the author of that anonymous *TLS* review which hurt Celan so deeply. Its real author, as Hamburger managed to find out and disclose only in 1997 (2013b, 405–22) was S.S. Praver, at that time lecturer at the University of Birmingham and regular contributor to the *TLS*. Unfortunately, Celan could not be convinced otherwise, and his bitterness against Hamburger “induced him to positively forbid [him] to translate his [Celan’s] poems in the last years of his life” (411). As Hamburger opines, “the vehemence of his response to this unattributed review was due to his being called a ‘hermetic poet’ [...] the term ‘hermetic’ was inadmissible only for those who knew Celan personally or had inferred from his text that its application to his work threatened his existential core” (411).

This is indeed the crux of the matter, explaining Celan’s constantly angry reaction against being labeled “hermetic”. No matter how well-intended the usage of the term may have been, he refused to be considered a hermetic poet in the lineage of Mallarmé and Valéry, because he was aware that, unlike that of the hermetic poets, his poetry did not aim at becoming a pure sonorous idea, isolated from the emotional human experience. Even though the complicated surface of his poem could sometimes give the impression of encrypted hermeticism, Celan insisted that each of his poems originates in “the breath of the mortal who crosses the poem”; or, as Jean Bollack says, “whatever he was speaking about, Celan also spoke about Auschwitz” (2000, 32). To call him “hermetic” meant to deny the trauma behind the poem; in a radical sense, it meant to destroy whatever human remnants still

survived within the poem. Unlike the hermetic poets, Celan understood poetry as individuation, as a construction of personal identity *via* poetry, as *Lebensschrift* and *bio-graphia*. Marko Pajević has convincingly shown this in a study reading Celan's poem as *Lebensschrift* (2000, 214–224). The poem must be acutely alive, there must be in it the acute feeling of day-to-day life, the *Akut des Heutigen* theorized by Celan in his *Meridian* speech. With its lack of interest in everyday life, with its rejection of the human emotionality and its cult of the de-humanized idea, hermetic poetry was the rigorous opposite of what Celan expected from poetry. Hence his acute and angry reaction against it.

To put it more directly: to label Celan as a hermetic poet meant for him to ignore his personal and historic trauma as a Jewish poet surviving the Holocaust and choosing to write his poems in German, the language both of his mother and of his mother's assassins. He always reacted towards that as to an insensitive unawareness of the traumatic biography in which his poetry originated. For him, as Andrei Corbea observes, "the smuggled goods of his biography prove unavoidable and, even more so, indispensable" (2020, 35). Even though this line of interpretation has become the dominant one since the 1970s, it is important to see that some of the most prestigious of Celan's contemporaries differed from it, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, who was decisively against the biographical interpretation, claiming that "all is there in the text" (1973, 138). It is also meaningful to see that Celan chose to assign the realization of the critical edition of his works to Beda Allemann, whose explicit option in his previous comments on Celan's poetry had been to ignore all the historical and contextual information referring to the Holocaust.

This ambivalent reaction towards his own biography is most specific to Celan: he does not allow having his poetry detached from it (neither in its conception, nor in its interpretation), but he also does not allow having it too openly discussed. He writes "Wolfsbohne", rephrasing the obsessive image of the murderer's hand touching the poet's hand, but he cannot publish the poem exactly because of that image. He writes his poetry insisting that it is filled with the breath of the mortal who creates it, but he assigns the task of the critical edition to the very person who chose to ignore that breath. It is, as he knows (and as he states in the 1946 Rychner letter), the paradox of a Jew writing poetry in German, the language both of his beloved mother and of her assassins. Celan identified profoundly with Heinrich Heine, in whom he saw a fellow Jewish poet sharing a similar experience, and, as Nelly Sachs recounts, in moments when he felt humiliated by some of his contemporaries, he went to visit Heine's tomb in the Montmartre cemetery in a sort of purification ritual. He also read attentively Adorno's 1956 text about Heine, "Die Wunde Heine", and made numerous annotations on his private copy. Among others, he underlined a passage where Adorno notices Heine's "lack of resistance to the fluency of the usual [German] language". Celan's solution was obviously quite the opposite. His German shows an amazing capacity of opposition to the fluency of usual German. His poetry seems to resist its own language and it does so with the same paradoxical intensity with which it camouflages the biographical event, without which it cannot exist.



Celan's innermost experience of the German language is marked by the traumatic experience of a Romanian Jew surviving the Holocaust. He has to write poetry in his mother's language (at the same time the language of his mother's assassins), but in his few Romanian writings from his early years, he was not confronted with this tragic paradox. Even though his mother could speak Romanian, those who have planned and ordered her execution did not (although we should not overlook that a significant number of the guards in Nazi camps were themselves Eastern Europeans). The executioner (or at least the chief executioner) and the victim do not inhabit the same linguistic space of the poem. He had to completely abandon his writing in Romanian (scanty as it was) in order to build this paradox, without which his major poetry could not exist and which was also the cause of its (and his) destruction. Celan's biography could be transformed into major poetry only when written in this language which was simultaneously the language of the victim and of the assassin. This decisive change happened not because he has abandoned a "small" culture for a "large" one; after all, Romanian language has managed to produce major poets both before and after Celan. But it was only in German that this tragic paradox mentioned before was possible.

As David Damrosch observes, when "traveling abroad, though, a text does indeed change, both in its frame of reference and usually in language as well" (2003, 292). The "travel abroad" mentioned here is obviously the translation of the text. As we know from Petre Solomon's own testimony, the Romanian version of "Todestango" (as "Todesfuge" was first titled), published on 2 May 1947 in *Contemporanul*, was translated by Solomon and Celan together under the title "Tangoul morții" (2008, 63). Corbea thinks it was a self-translation by Celan, with a possible revision made by Solomon (2020, 76). It is interesting to compare this early Romanian version with the final German one, which is definitely more intense and more powerful, and to see that it is indeed "writing that gains in translation", as Damrosch famously defines world literature (2003, 281). Applied to Celan's particular case, Damrosch was right to say that "in an excellent translation, the result is not the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a *heightening* of the naturally creative interaction of reader and text. In this respect a poem or novel can be seen to achieve its lasting effect precisely by virtue of its adaptability to our private experience" (292). In the final German version, Celan's private experience of the Holocaust reached a heightened intensity and "achieved its lasting effect" because "the natural interaction of reader and text" had a new context: the poem is a witness of the destroyed uttered in the language of their destroyers. It was a radical change of the frame of reference as well as the most radical translation imaginable. The poem (and Celan's poetry) has found its only language where its tragic paradox was possible.

From this moment on (May 1947, half a year after the letter to Rychner), Celan's poetry started to become world literature precisely because it was "writing that gains in translation". There are other poems from the same period written by Celan both in German and in Romanian, such as for example "Trei poeme" (Three poems), brought to the literary magazine *Agora* by Lia Fingerhut, also considered by Ion Caraion to be self-translations (2020, 75). Celan's negotiation with trauma (both per-

sonal and historic) had already begun. He was obviously melding various sources in his successive versions of “Todestango”, as proven by its similarities to his Czernowitz friend Immanuel Weissglas’s “Er” (1944), where Death also appears as a German master. As Weissglas writes, “Spielt sanft vom Tod, er ist ein deutscher Meister” [“He sings sweetly about death, he is a German master”], “Wir heben Gräber in die Luft” [“We raise graves in the air”], and “Er spielt im Haus mit Schlangen, dräut und dichtet, / In Deutschland dämmert es wie Gretchens Haar” [“He plays in the house with the snakes, he drafts and composes, / In Germany there grows a twilight like Gretchen’s hair”]. Whether or not Celan knew Weissglas’s poem, it is not possible to verify if it was written before or after Celan’s inexplicably similar one (Stiehler 1972, 11–40), but striking details have been identified by John Felstiner. Firstly, in the Janowska concentration camp near Lvov, the Jews selected for extermination were compelled to listen an Argentinian death tango before their execution; and secondly, in 1944 the Soviet writer Konstantin Simonov (whose play *The Russian Question* Celan was to translate in 1947) published a brochure about the concentration camp in Majdanek (which Celan may have therefore known), describing in detail how the prisoners were marching to their execution while tens of loudspeakers were playing foxtrot and tango (Felstiner 1985, 44–55). We see in this negotiation with both the personal and the collective trauma a symptom of Celan’s initiated individuation as a German poet, entering the “large” context of German culture and of his traumatic guilt-ridden past with the effect of radical intensification of his writing, which thus “gains in translation”.

Returning to David Damrosch’s criteria for the definition of world literature, we must observe that there are three – but not with a cumulative logic. Each of them describes a fundamental trait, which also means that any literary work satisfying any of the three characteristics is a piece of world literature: “1. *World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.* / 2. *World literature is writing that gains in translation.* / 3. *World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagements with worlds beyond our own place and time*” (2003, 281; italics in the original). We have seen before that Celan’s early poetry published in Bucharest satisfies the second criterion, as his movement from the German original to the Romanian self-translation and then to the final German version functions as a radical translation which intensifies the text. We can verify now that it also satisfies the first: it is “an elliptical refraction” between German literature and Romanian literature, with Celan’s biography elliptically stretching between them, a refraction which “can help to clarify the vital, yet also indirect, relation between the two” (282). Any German poem of Celan, simultaneously fueled and burdened by fragments of a Romanian Jew’s biography, becomes a permanent “locus of negotiation” between the Romanian source culture and the German receiving one. As Damrosch shows,

[e]ven a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures. The receiving culture can use the foreign material in all sorts of ways: as a positive model for the future development of its own tradition; as a negative case of a primitive, or decadent, strand that must be avoided or rooted out at home; or, more neutrally,



as an image of radical otherness against which the home tradition can be defined more clearly. World literature is thus always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture; hence it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone. (2003, 283)

Damrosch distinguishes therefore three possibilities of a text's integration into the receiving culture: positive (a "model for future development"), negative (illustrating a "primitive, or decadent, strand which has to be avoided or rooted out at home"), and neutral (a "radical otherness" which allows the receiving culture a better self-definition). Among other qualities, Celan's case has the merit of proving that these possibilities are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, the tragic paradox at the core of Celan's poetry generates a strange situation in which it illustrates simultaneously all of the three possibilities. As the contemporary state of German poetry has proven, Celan's poetry was indeed a "model for [its] future development"; at the same time, as it catalyzed a dialogue of German memory with its Nazi past, it illustrated a "primitive, or decadent, strand which has to be avoided or rooted out at home"; and it also constituted a "radical otherness" which allowed German culture a better self-definition. Far from proving Damrosch's distinction wrong, the complicated situation of Celan's poetry in relation with the receiving German culture proves in fact that Damrosch is absolutely right when asserting that "world literature is thus always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture". German culture, profoundly troubled by its recent Nazi past, with a language contaminated by the totalitarian virus (as shown in Adorno and Steiner's critiques), was painfully striving towards its own restoration. Celan's poetry has the remarkable merit of simultaneously suiting all these types of possibilities, be they "positive", "negative", or "neutral". In other words, "connected to both cultures", German and Romanian, "and circumscribed by neither alone" (as Damrosch states in the previous quotation), Celan's literature is indeed a "locus of negotiation" between them, transmitting information from one to the other, modifying both the source culture and the receiving one to the point where they become indistinct from each other: Celan is just as much a Romanian Jewish (aspiring) poet integrated in a German culture, which he consistently changes, as he is a German poet with Jewish origins returning into a formerly abandoned Romanian culture, which he consistently enriches and modifies. The reception of George State's excellent first complete translation of Celan's poetry into Romanian (2015, 2019b), as well as Andrei Corbea's remarkable translations and critical studies of Celan, are among the best testimonies of this catalytic return.

Moreover, according to Damrosch's most recent book on world literature:

The one-to-one identification of nation and language was almost always a fiction, and it is becoming more and more tenuous today, even in the case of many small countries with a national language rarely spoken beyond their borders. A full view of contemporary Israeli literature should include writing in Arabic, Russian, and Yiddish as well as Hebrew, and Romanian literature includes the work of the Nobel Prize winners Eugène Ionesco in French and Herta Müller in German as well as Andrei Codrescu and Norman Manea in America, writing in English and Romanian, respectively. (2020, 175–176)

Damrosch here unintentionally grants Ionesco a Nobel Prize, which the French-Romanian writer never received. But the Harvard critic is perfectly right in his assertion: the cases of the bilingual/multilingual writers he lists, to which Celan could and should be added, clearly show that world literature as a mode of circulation between languages makes superfluous the strict division of national literatures within the borders of single languages. Celan is a post-national poet, with all the simultaneous pluralities postulated by Damrosch's conjecture. Thus, he is simultaneously the Celan of a "small" culture writing poems in two languages during his Bucharest period, examining the possibility of becoming a Romanian writer before leaving for France, the Celan of the "large" German culture who identified in the German language the ideal "locus of negotiation" of his personal trauma, and the Celan who returns by means of translations and of critical studies into Romanian culture. The post-national Celan is not a single poet but rather a network comprising all his possibilities of development in any language, intersecting possible (but abandoned) and accomplished versions of himself, writing in two languages (even though in highly imbalanced proportions), absorbing and distributing information (biographical and cultural) from and to each of them.

Finally, the case of the post-national Celan helps us clarify the insufficiency of Damrosch's definition of world literature from 2003, according to which "[w]orld literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures" which needs a "host culture" and a "source culture" (2003, 281–283). If by these two cultures (source and host) he understands two national literatures, his definition is proven perfectible by such cases as Celan's or Tzara's – generally speaking, by this category of writers who have at one point switched to writing in another language and entered world literature without having elaborated a consistent body of work in the national literature of the "source culture". In such cases, the "host culture" (German for Celan, French for Tzara) functions as a secondary "source culture" for their future translations in other languages and their insertion into another national cultures and literatures. While the primary "source culture", containing their amputated literary destiny in what could have been their first national literature, displays something similar with the phantom limb syndrome: even though their destiny has been severed at an early point due to their personal decision, its unrealized possibility continues to generate a sort of anxiety of influence on their realized body of work.

In the cases of all exiled or displaced writers who have chosen to change their literary language and subsequently entered world literature *via* another literary tradition, there is not only a "source culture" and a "host culture", as David Damrosch posits, but there exists a triangulation of cultures, involving a triadic relation between the primary source culture, the secondary source culture, and the other national literatures wherein their work enters by translation. While studying Romanian travelogues to China under communism, Andrei Terian has reached a similar conclusion: in comparative cultural studies and in world literature studies, binarisms are still dominant in studies of world literature. Their most successful theoretical tools, Terian convincingly shows (2019, 16), have a binary mechanism: David Damrosch's "elliptical reading" (2003), Pascale Casanova's "pacified" and "combative

literatures” (2011), Franco Moretti’s oppositional “core” and “peripheries” (2013). Terian sees in this binarism a proof that the respective theories “continue to firmly rely on the colonizer–colonized dichotomy”. In comparative cultural studies and in world literature studies, he deems more useful a cognitive model functioning as a triadic mechanism, which he labels as “cultural triangulation”, defining it as follows:

cultural triangulation postulates that all (inter)cultural processes are ideologically filtered and imply the existence of an intermediary C between A and B, which takes various roles, mainly of camouflaging / altering / compensating / overturning certain power relations that are by no means perceptible or inescapable. (2019, 19)

This triad involves “three ‘peaks’ corresponding to just as many members from different ‘national’ cultures”; these “peaks” are a *Scope* (“standing for the ‘lookout’ culture and its perspective”), a *Scope* (“the culture open to contemplating and reading by the Other, which functions as a basis for comparison with culture A”), and a *Scale* (“or the ‘Hidden Third’, the culture operating as an implicit yardstick for the evaluation of both A and B”). Terian applies this ternary mechanism in the analysis of three postwar Romanian travelogues to China. His results are so remarkable that his proposition seems to be one of the main theoretical openings in recent comparative cultural and literary studies. “Cultural triangulation” as a cognitive model and its derived analytical vocabulary have an inner dynamic which replicates more accurately the inner relational dynamic within the network(s) of world literature – be it only for the reason that the relational sophistication of a network can be better topologically reflected by the inner sophistication of the triangle than by the too simplistic figure of a line drawn between two foci.

Such as Terian describes it and makes use of it, “cultural triangulation” is designed as a mechanism of comparison (between three or more “national” cultures). However, its functionality is extendable to much more than comparison – in such cases as Celan’s, for example, the triangulation helps to explain literary processes having to do not with cultural comparison, but with text production as well as with its distribution. When used for comparison, triangulation is a psychological process. It is no less psychological when applied to the production of literature – in this case, cultural triangulation takes Harold Bloom’s mechanisms of “anxiety of influence” one step further, adding (at least) one more actor to their previous binary description. If used for describing a mechanism of distribution of literary objects within and throughout the world literature network, triangulation stops being psychological. It turns into a technical ternary mechanism examining literature’s modes of circulation in a way which explains better than Damrosch’s binary theory itself how world literature is “a literature that gains in translation”. Natural space limitations of such an article do not allow for further elaboration in these respects. For now, Celan’s case study alone has proven that cultural triangulation can function not only as a mechanism of comparison, as Terian has designed it, but also as an analytical mechanism for matters regarding production and distribution. Terian may have underestimated the functional extension of the theoretical ternary mechanism he has proposed.

What is peculiarly interesting in cases such as Celan's or Tzara's is that the triangulation may happen even when the primary source culture is underdeveloped or even abandoned: it functions as an imperfect triangulation with two present foci and an absent (abandoned, amputated) one. In the case of the post-national Celan, this imperfect triangulation is a troubling *mise en abyme* of his tragic biographical amputation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the present author.

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## The post-national Celan: The imperfect triangulation from (abandoned) Romanian poetry to world literature and back

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World literature. Post-national literatures. Paul Celan. David Damrosch. Bifocal perspective. Elliptical refraction. Cultural triangulation.

This article focuses on the (dis)continuities between the German-language work of Paul Celan (integrated into a "large" literature where he becomes "Europe's foremost poet after World War II", in George Steiner's opinion) and the scanty corpus of Romanian literature written by Celan in his Bucharest period, read in the post-national perspective. In his book *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age* (2020), David Damrosch states that a unified Romanian literature should integrate literature written in several languages, disregarding the obsolete criterion of the national language. While agreeing with this proposition, the article remarks that Damrosch's other theoretical proposition, that of the bifocal viewpoint, with the two foci represented by the literature of origin and that of insertion, proves ineffective in Celan's case. The author proposes the use of "cultural triangulation", Andrei Terian's concept, for a better understanding of Celan as a post-national poet. In this model, Celan proves to be not a single poet but rather a network comprising all his possibilities of development in any language, intersecting possible (but abandoned) and accomplished versions of himself, writing in two languages (even not proportionately so), and absorbing and distributing biographical and cultural information from and to each of them.

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