

ÉTICA E FILOSOFIA POLÍTICA

On the Lyrical Presentation of History: Hegel and the Modern Poem

*Sobre a apresentação lírica da história:
Hegel e o poema moderno*

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Abstract: The article recasts the pre-history of philosophy as it is understood by G. W. F. Hegel, so as to examine what a “Lyrical Presentation of History” might have been. The essay argues that Hegel’s treatment of history at the end of his *Lectures on Aesthetics* suffers from an inattention to the specific philosophical content of modern lyrical poetry, which can be located in his claim that lyrical poetry is primarily concerned with the subject. In contrast, the author argues that Hegel’s account ought to have led him to hold that lyrical poetry is primarily concerned with subjective, alienated worlds, which he calls “counterworlds”. The essay ends with a brief treatment of three poems by Paul Celan to show how this shift in the meaning of lyrical poetry would have led Hegel to give greater weight to lyrical poetry in his theory of history.

Keywords: Celan. Hegel. History. Lyrical poetry. Modernity.

Resumo: O artigo reformula a pré-história da filosofia como é entendida por G. W. F. Hegel, a fim de examinar o que uma “Apresentação Lírica da História” poderia ter sido. O Autor argumenta que o tratamento da história por Hegel no final de suas palestras sobre estética sofre de uma falta de atenção ao conteúdo filosófico específico da poesia lírica moderna, que pode ser localizada em sua afirmação de que a poesia lírica está principalmente preocupada com o sujeito. Em contraste, o Autor argumenta que o relato de Hegel deveria tê-lo levado a considerar que a poesia lírica está principalmente preocupada com mundos alienados subjetivos, que ele chama de “contramundos.” O ensaio termina com uma breve análise de três poemas de Paul Celan para mostrar como essa mudança no sentido da poesia lírica teria levado Hegel a dar maior peso à poesia lírica em sua teoria da história.

Palavras-chave: Celan. Hegel. História. Poesia lírica. Modernidade.

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Imagine for a moment a world where poetry mattered.

Now that we have cleared this fiction out of the way, we can turn to the matter that concerns us here, to philosophy and to the birth pangs of Spirit. I am interested in looking more closely at these birth pangs, at the pre-history of philosophy as it is understood by G. W. F. Hegel. To be more specific, I examine what a “Lyrical Presentation of History” might have looked like for Hegel, had he developed such a notion. Hegel’s treatment of history at the end of his *Lectures on Aesthetics*¹ suffers from an inattention to the specific philosophical content of modern lyrical poetry. I locate the cause of this inattention in Hegel’s claim that lyrical poetry is primarily concerned with the subject. In contrast, I argue that Hegel’s account ought to have led him to hold that lyrical poetry is primarily concerned with subjective, alienated worlds, which I call “counterworlds.” I end with a brief treatment of three poems by Paul Celan to show how this shift in the meaning of lyrical poetry would have led Hegel to give greater weight to lyrical poetry in his theory of history.

History from *The Phenomenology* to the *Aesthetics*

I begin by situating Hegel’s understanding of the importance of art, particularly poetry, within the understanding of temporality and historicity that he advances at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.² Although there are slight differences in the accounts of the history of art in the *Phenomenology* and the *Aesthetics*, if we examine either account on its own, we will come to the same conclusion: it is somewhat odd to believe that lyricism, that most poetic form of poetry, has anything interesting to say at all about history. History is necessarily relational, and the great romantic dogma of poetry, indeed of art in general, is that the poem is self-enclosed and cannot, of itself, relate to anything. This is one fiction that romanticism shares with a good deal of modernist and post-modernist thought, insofar as these traditions all emphasize the fragmentary in literature.³ And whatever else Hegel may have found detestable, or at least contestable, in the romantic project, he certainly did not forego the claim that art did not, in-itself, have access to that highest alchemy of relationality or reflection that we call mediation.

¹ HEGEL, G. W. F. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (two volumes), trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; hereafter cited in body of the text as A.

² HEGEL, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; hereafter cited in the body of the text as PS.

³ On the maintenance of certain romantic themes in modernism as it is relevant in this context, see particularly LACOUÉ-LABARTHE, P. and NANCY, J.-L. *L’Absolu littéraire: théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand*. Paris: Seuil, 1978.

He allowed art this privilege only when it was cast in the mold of the philosophical concept. This is roughly what he meant when he said that “Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our *ideas*, instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place” (A, 11).

And yet there is a crucial sense in which art must be understood as being inherently historical. Art, like religion, becomes relevant to Spirit at precisely the moment when the temporality of the concept undergoes its most radical transformation. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, religion is taken up when the logic of the temporal moment breaks down. An event which happens but which is not fully understood in-itself must then be understood from the vantage point of absolute knowing as “being-for-itself,” for Spirit itself. There is, however, a certain mis-representation of the nature of time in the temporal succession of individual moments as it is conceived prior to the treatment of religion and art. What we have learned by the time we have gotten to religion is that the “being-in-itself” and the “being-for-itself” are not actually fundamentally different. Their conversion is by no means an alchemical transmutation or transubstantiation; recollection is certainly not a foreign catalyst (see PS, ¶¶677-680).

To put this into the technical terminology of the *Aesthetics*, the recollective character of religion (and art) provides the basis upon which externality can pass into internality through the identity of both in the concept. In this respect, recollection performs the role that the *sensus communis* plays in Kant's aesthetics. To explain the concept's identity, recollection hits on the problem of Spirit's representation of itself to itself, the time of which is not merely a function of a reflective consciousness holding together abstract moments. But that *something* must hold it together is why there seems to be a need for something material, sensuous and concrete in which recollection takes place. This is why philosophy must pass through religion and through art.

Despite the different ways in which this passage is effected in the *Phenomenology* and the *Aesthetics*, there is a shared assumption that this figure of recollection is representative, particularly in the sense of pictorial representation. Pictorial representation is a necessarily recollective operation which involves referring a spatial assemblage constructed out of potentially diverse temporal moments to an operation of formalizing identity. The formalizing movement of representation from architecture through sculpture to painting coincides with the interiorization of the divine. Even music, which abandons pictorial representation, continues to concentrate Spirit in a represented figure, albeit the figure of the point in time.

However, when we turn to poetry, the recollective property of art must be reconsidered. As Hegel recognizes, there is a sense in which poetry already does the work of philosophy insofar as it further interiorizes this recollective movement and spiritualizes it, by putting it into the medium of words (even though the sensuous character of these words must still be overcome prior to becoming conceptual knowledge). Before the emergence of philosophy, poetry already passes beyond the sensuous into an interior sensibility. Before philosophy, poetry already realizes that language, although not strictly material, can be the “something” in which the individual moments of time are held together. And poetry does all this in a way that is much more ideal than the pictorial form proper to all religious thought (see *A*, 972-976).

Thus the treatment of poetry at the end of the *Aesthetics* does not really continue the historical development of paradigmatic arts through symbolic, classical and romantic art as the treatments of architecture, sculpture, painting and music had done. Poetry, because it is at least partially ideal, does not merely represent the succession of time. Religion also does not merely represent the succession of time, but represents time as a totality. But the realization that religion gives us to think a totality of moments is a realization that itself lies outside of religion. Poetry already grasps itself as a totality, albeit in a non-conceptual way. To be sure, Hegel attempts to downplay the importance of poetry by insisting that poetry has not entirely shaken off the shackles of sensuous thought. While this is true, this element of poetry does not exhaust the possibility for poetry to think about life purely immanently. Poetry brings the exterior world into the interiority of the inner sense in many ways. And while Hegel suggests more than one way in which poetry accomplishes the gathering and reconciling work of mediation, in his attempt to explain how poetry must give way to conceptual knowledge, he is forced to disown his own accomplishment.

On the Epical Presentation of History

That Hegel must disown his own accomplishment can be seen by comparing Hegel's treatment of lyrical poetry with his much more substantive treatment of epical poetry. By treating the epic poem as the pre-prosaic predecessor to both philosophy and historiography, Hegel gives it an important place in the development of the state, the nation and what Marx will call ideology. The treatment of the epic in fact ends up having many of the same features that Plato imputes to art but actually incorporates into his own philosophy. Similarly, by sensuously presenting the idea of an organic totality, the epical features of art play

a crucial role in preparing the way for the form of knowledge specific to philosophy.

For Hegel, the epic poem articulates and asserts the truth of a mythological origin to the ethical substance of a nation or people. Hegel takes very seriously Herodotus' claim that "Homer and Hesiod gave the Greeks their gods:"⁴ Homer and Hesiod synthesize an array of heterogeneous stories, influences and customs into an organic totality through a mythology which uses the form of the gods to reveal a people's identity to itself. "Epics must belong to an early period in a people's history and yet have not to describe its earliest period. Almost every people in its earliest beginning has under its eyes a more or less foreign culture, a religious worship from abroad, and it lets these impose themselves on it" (A, 1048). It is only when these foreign elements are domesticated by synthesis into an organic totality that its artistic culture comes into its own. "What is accomplished in the genuinely epical event is not a single casual deed, ... consequently it is not a purely accidental happening, which is related, but an action ramified into the whole of its age and national circumstances so that it can be brought before us only within an outspread world and demands the portrayal of this world in its entirety" (A, 1051). This world is essentially the world in which the epic poet feels herself at home, but projected back into a mythical past. The poet and her contemporaries passionately identify with this past. Even though it is less factually true than their actual origin in the confluence of foreign influences, it becomes true in a way that history cannot grasp. In this way, for Hegel, the epic constitutes a people's prehistory and also opens them up to the prosaic development of its actual history and cultural knowledge. The heroic age is bounded by the recollection of its (fictional) beginning in the mythology of the epic poet and the formulation of this recollection in the writing of the epic poet at the end of the heroic age.

Epic poetry also makes possible the rise of prose, including philosophy, and in doing so makes itself impossible. History, or historical writing, therefore finds its moment immediately after the articulation of the epic. In this way, epic poetry will always be seen as a foreclosed possibility within a culture. It precedes culture, makes culture possible, but makes itself impossible. This is why Hegel values "primitive epics" over "those composed artificially in later times" (A, 1073). Hegel insists that in Virgil, as opposed to Homer, "instead of [the gods] being alive themselves and generating a belief in their existence, they are evidently *mere* inventions and external means, not capable of being taken very seriously by the

⁴ Qtd. at *Aesthetics*, 1047.

poet or his hearers, although they are given a show of being taken very seriously indeed" (A, 1073). Thus, the *Aeneid* fulfills the explicitly ideological function of justifying Augustus's *imperium*. The bad-faith epic of Virgil is not the birth of philosophy but of ideology. Ideology is the fiction that knowledge matters more than power. The most important philosophical precursor for the ideologically motivated epic style of the *Aeneid* is Plato's noble lie in the *Republic*.⁵ What is interesting is that this story is a lie when it is projected onto a fictional past, as a story of origins, but it in fact yields a true depiction of the life of the soul, as is seen in the central parts of Books VI and VII of the *Republic*. The fiction of the epic, when spiritualized, becomes the truth of philosophy. This does not mean it has shaken the fiction of ideology.

The epic's poetical presentation of the totality of a world in a particular, objective and exteriorized form is the most complete realization of the felt identity of the particular with the individual and of nature with spirit. This realization is the accomplishment of art as such. In contrast, the proper time of the genres of lyrical and dramatic poetry is after the development of a prosaic world view, after the hardening of the mythological imagination into religious dogmatism and after the separation of the mythological imagination from critical reason, after the passage of art into philosophy. Why, then, are these latter genres relevant to the pedigree of spirit? Philosophy indeed views the classical, epical moment of poetry as the final moment of art (just as it also views the classical form of art as the most truly artistic form of art, rather than the later, romantic form of art). This is seen most clearly at the moment that Hegel finds it necessary to turn to the romantic form of art. "Classical art became a conceptually adequate representation of the Ideal, the consummation of the realm of beauty. Nothing can be or become more beautiful" (A, 517). The external presentation of the Ideal is the chief hallmark of art's spiritual progress; this is as far as art, considered on its own terms, need progress. "Yet there is something higher than the beautiful appearance of spirit in its immediate sensuous shape, even if this shape be created by spirit as adequate to itself" (A, 517). Romantic art struggles to present negativity, death and difference, but it only fully succeeds in doing so artistically, i.e. sensuously and in external form, in dramatic poetry, which is not properly romantic at all.

What remains for lyrical poetry and dramatic poetry to accomplish is the differentiation of philosophy from other forms of prose. Philosophy, like poetry, art and religion, and unlike prosaic history, has the character

⁵ PLATO, *Republic*, 414c-415d.

of being a totality (this is analogous to Aristotle's claim that poetry and philosophy are alike in that both are universal, whereas history is particular.)⁶ That totality can only be grasped in its philosophical form once philosophy learns something from the manner of thinking proper to tragic poetry, via a detour through lyric poetry.

Hegel's Failure: On the Lyrical Presentation of History

This epical heritage of philosophy, then, ought to make lyrical poetry philosophically important, since Hegel takes lyric poetry to be the genre of the subject that exists alongside prose, philosophy and the state. But instead, Hegel explicitly treats lyrical poetry only in its difference from epical poetry as a way of preparing his understanding of dramatic poetry.⁷ What such an account misses is the important way in which lyrical poetry ought to provide a critique of the ideologically formed national subject as a product of both art and philosophy. Where Hegel shows the epic to treat such a subject as real, true, natural and mythologized, lyrical poetry already ought to have revealed the fictional and artificial status of such a mythology, had Hegel followed his own logic through. This insight is of crucial importance in understanding Hegel's interpretation of the general situation of art throughout his lectures on *Aesthetics*, but resonates with the treatment of art in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* also.

Hegel explicitly admits he is only interested in lyrical poetry insofar as it allows him to differentiate epic and dramatic poetry. Indeed, he thinks that this restriction allows him to side-step the inherently pluralistic character of lyrical poetry. "Little can be said, by way of generalization, about the lyric poem as a work of art, because here there is a fortuitous wealth of variety in the mode of treatment and the forms of the subject-

⁶ ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*, 51b.

⁷ Whereas I am treating Hegel's discussion in the section on poetry primarily generically, it is also possible to treat it historically. History and genre are related in Hegel, but their developments don't exactly parallel one another. For a discussion of lyrical poetry in the context of modernism, see ELDRIDGE, R. "Hegel as a Modern Philosopher of Art," in *Proceedings of the European Society of Aesthetics*, vol 2. 2010, 113-124. See especially 120-122. Where Eldridge adheres closely to a reading of the *Aesthetics* and therefore locates the philosophical significance of his aesthetics for modernism very much within a romantic conception of art, C.A. Tsakaridou attempts to extend the argument of the *Aesthetics* beyond Romanticism into modernist painting and cinema. See TSAKARIDOU, C.A. "Art's Self-Disclosure: Hegelian Insights into Cinematic and Modernist Space." in *Evental Aesthetics* 2, no. 1 (2013): 44-72. The discussion of space there is germane to my discussion of counterworlds, but where Tsakaridou still emphasizes a subjective understanding of modernist space, I am interested in dissociating Hegel's latent modernism from a subjective understanding of the role of art.

matter which is just as incalculably varied itself ... Therefore, for our purpose, we are concerned only with the question how the type of lyrical works of art differs from that of the epic" (A, 1132).

Epic poetry is the most straightforwardly pre-philosophical of the three genres, because its conception of the world literally gives rise to the concept of history. Dramatic poetry continues this pre-philosophical pre-figuration of the concept of history and further realizes the disruptive, conflicted shape of history as such. This peculiarity of poetry's education of philosophy, its continued relevance beyond its natural life in the prehistory of a people, accounts for the peculiar fact that the fate of epic poetry is not itself epic, but tragic. But while lyrical poetry will supply dramatic poetry with its disruptive character through its style of diction (see A, 1007-1011) it does not, for Hegel, add anything important to an understanding of history. Lyrical poetry does not present a total historical or national moment. Rather, it merely presents the subjective life of the individual in revolt against these moments. Hegel admits that this affords lyrical poetry an enormously wide scope, wider, he admits in a moment of uncharacteristic modesty, than he is capable of dealing with (A, 1112-1113). This inability on Hegel's part does not, however, touch the logic of the *Aesthetics*. This is because Hegel holds lyrical poetry, with its subjective inwardness, to be inherently inartistic. Lyrical poetry is not a happening as such. It presents the protest of the individual against totality, and thus spurs both dramatic poetry and philosophy onto more highly differentiated forms of totality, but it is not itself a totality. Or rather, although it must remain a totality of sorts to qualify as art, Hegel thinks that he is on good grounds in downplaying its significance as a totality.

It is, however, possible on Hegel's own account to describe lyrical poetry in terms of a positive and distinctive sort of totality. If epical poetry is, for Hegel, necessarily classical or pre-classical, lyrical poetry proves to be distinctively modern insofar as it contests the modern subject and reveals its fictional status. And, just as Hegel's interpretation of epic poetry occupies a central place in his relegation of art to the past, a Hegelian theory of lyrical poetry could demonstrate the continued relevance of the experience of art to philosophical life.

Hegel takes lyrical poetry as the genre of subjectivity par excellence. But lyrical poetry is also the resistance of poetry to a prosaic world. And here there is a paradox, because the pre-prosaic world that lyrical poetry wants to preserve is also pre-subjective. In this way, we might wonder whether Hegel would be more true to his architectonic logic if he said: the lyrical subject is the pre-subjective subject. Just as the epic poem or the tragic poem (when treated epically) treats the fictional

formation of the national subject, so does the lyrical poem treat the formation of the subject alienated from her nationality. What is crucial to realize, however, is that it does not follow that this formation does not entail a certain kind of worldhood. In fact on Hegel's account it must entail such a worldhood, given the total character of all art, and even more of all poetry. It is simply not the worldhood of a nationalized, domesticated, or ideological subject. On the contrary, it is the worldhood of the world – or rather (because, as Hegel admits, there are many diverse kinds of lyrical poems, as many as there are subjects) it is the worldhood of *worlds* that are necessarily alienated from this nationalized subject. For reasons which go beyond the scope of this paper, but which depend upon what I owe to Celan, I will call these worlds “counterworlds.”

What alienates these counterworlds is not the nationalized subject's rejection of interiority, as Hegel suggests, but the ideological rejection of materiality. Whatever we may say of lyrical poets qua subjects, we might still suspect that there is a logic to lyrical poetry which is irreducible to subjectivity and interiority. Consequently, we might suspect that whatever this logic is like, its philosophical lessons remained to be learned. The logic of the lyrical poem, if there were such a thing, would interrogate what in the idealized, ideologized world that we share resists going up in philosophical smoke, resists passing out of art into philosophy. Thus, my attempt to develop a lyrical theory of poetry necessitates a reconsideration of the pre-philosophical position that Hegel assigns to art generally.

Paul Celan on the Lyrical Presentation of History

How would this reconsideration of the philosophical position of lyrical poetry in terms of the presentation of counterworlds proceed? I will indicate how to elucidate this notion of the counterworld in one of Celan's longest poems, “*Engführung*” (“*Stretto*”):⁸

⁸ CELAN, P. *Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983; hereafter *GW*, 1:197-204. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

STRETTO

Abandoned in the
terrain
with the unmistakable track:

Grass, written against itself. The stones, white,
with the shadows of grass blades:
Read no more – Look!
Look no more– Go!

Go, your hour
has no sisters you are
are at home. A wheel, slowly,
rolls out from itself, the spokes
clamber
clamber up the blackened field, the night
has no need of stars, there is nowhere
asking for you.

*

There is nowhere
asking for 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,
discoursed on
words. Nothing
awakened,
sleep
came upon them.

*

Came, came. There is
Nowhere asking –

It's I, I,
I lay between you, I was
open, could
be heard, I clicked you together, your breath
hearkened, I
am as always it, you
sleep yes.

*

Am as always it –

Years.
Years, years, a finger
probes downwards and upwards, probes
about:
Suture marks, palpable, here

ENGFÜHRUNG

Verbracht ins
Gelände
mit der untrüglichen Spur:

Gras, auseinandergeschrieben. Die Steine, weiß,
mit den Schatten der Halme:
Lies nicht mehr - schau!
Schau nicht mehr - geh!

Geh, deine Stunde
hat keine Schwestern, du bist -
bist zuhause. Ein Rad, langsam,
rollt aus sich selber, die Speichen
klettern,
klettern auf schwärzlichem Feld, die Nacht
braucht keine Sterne, nirgends
fragt es nach dir.

*

Nirgends
fragt es nach dir

Der Ort, wo sie lagen, er hat
einen Namen - er hat
keinen. Sie lagen nicht dort. Etwas
lag zwischen ihnen. Sie
sah nicht hindurch.

Sah nicht, nein,
redeten von
Worten. Keines
erwachte, der
Schlaf
kam über sie.

*

Kam, kam. Nirgends
fragt es -

Ich bins, ich,
ich lag zwischen euch, ich war
offen, war
hörbar, ich tickte euch zu, euer Atem
gehörte, ich
bin es noch immer, ihr
schläft ja.

*

Bin es noch immer -

Jahre.
Jahre, Jahre, ein Finger
tastet hinab und hinan, tastet
umher:
Nahtstellen, fühlbar, hier

it gapes wide open, here
it grew back together, who
covered it up?

*

Covered it
up – Who?

Came, came.
Came a word, came,
came through the night,
Wanted to shed light, wanted to shed light.

Ashes.
Ashes, ashes.
Night.
Night-upon-night. – To
the eye go, to the wet eye.

*

To
the eye go,
to the wet eye–

Hurricanes,
hurricanes, from ever,
particle storms, the other,
you
must know, we read it in the book, was
meaning.

Was, was
meaning. How could
we have grasped
one another – and with
these
hands?

There was also that written.
Where? We
make a silence on that,
poison-sated, huge,
a
green
silence, a sepal, it
clung to a thought of the plantlike.
Green, yes
clung, yes
beneath sneering
skies.

To, yes,
the plantlike.

Yes.

klafft es weit auseinander, hier
wuchs es wieder zusammen - wer
deckte es zu?

*

Deckte es
zu - wer ?

Kam, kam.
Kam ein Wort, kam,
kam durch die Nacht,
wollt leuchten, wollt leuchten.

Asche.
Asche. Asche.
Nacht.
Nacht-und-Nacht. - Zum
Aug geh, zum feuchten.

*

Zum
Aug geh,
zum feuchten -

Orkane.
Orkane, von je,
Partikelgestöber, das andre,
du
weißt ja, wir lasens im Buche, war
Meinung.

War, war
Meinung. Wie
faßten wir uns
an - an mit
diesen
Händen?

Es stand auch geschrieben, daß.
Wo? Wir
taten ein Schweigen darüber,
giftgestillt, groß,
ein
grünes
Schweigen, ein Kelchblatt, es
hing ein Gedanke an Pflanzliches dran -
grün, ja,
hing, ja,
unter hämischem
Himmel.

An, ja,
Pflanzliches.

Ja.

Hurricanes, particle storms, there remained time, remained, to experiment with the stone – it was hospitable, it did not interrupt. How good we had it:

Grainy, grainy and fibrous. Stalky, dense; grapish and radiant; clustered flattish and lumpy; Loose, den-drite -: the stone, it did not interrupt, it spoke, was glad to speak to dried eyes, ere it shut them.

Spoke, spoke.
Was, was,

We did not let it loose, stood in between, a lattice of pores, and it came.

Came towards us, came right through, stitched unseen, stitched to the last membrane, and the world, a thousandcrystal, shot forth, short forth.

*

Short forth, Short Forth.
Then–

Nights, abstracted. Circles, green or blue, red quadrangles: the world puts its innards into play with the new hours. – Circles, red or black, bright quadrangles, no flying silhouette, no plane-table, no smokesoul rises and plays along.

*

Orkane, Partikelgestöber, es blieb Zeit, blieb, es beim Stein zu versuchen - er war gastlich, er fiel nicht ins Wort. Wie gut wir es hatten:

Körnig, körnig und faserig. Stengelig, dicht; traubig und strahlig; nierig, plattig und klumpig; locker, verästelt -: er, es fiel nicht ins Wort, es sprach, sprach gerne zu tockenen Augen, eh es sie schloß.

Sprach, sprach,
War, war.

Wir ließen nicht locker, standen inmitten, ein Porenbau, und es kam.

Kam auf uns zu, kam hindurch, flichte unsichtbar, flichte an der letzten Membran, und die Welt, ein Tausendkristall, schoß an, schoß an.

*

Schoß an, schoß an.
Dann -

Nächte, entmischt. Kreise, grün oder blau, rote Quadrate: die Welt setzt ihr Innerstes ein im Spiel mit den neuen Stunden. - Kreise, rot oder schwarz, helle Quadrate, kein Flugschatten, kein Meßtisch, keine Rauchseele steigt und spielt mit.

*

Rises and
plays along –

In the owl's flight, by
petrified leprosy,
by
our hands taken flight, in
the youngest of downcasts,
above the
bullet-catch on
the sunken wall:

visible, just
now: the
grooves, the

choirs, earlier, the
psalms. Ho, Ho-
sanna.

So then
there are still temples standing. One
star
perhaps still has light.
Nothing,
Nothing has been lost.

Ho-
sanna.

In the owl's flight, here,
The dialogues, daygray,
of tracks of groundwater.

*

(-- daygray,
of
tracks of groundwater.

Abandoned
in the terrain
with
the unmistakable
track:

Grass,
grass,
written against itself.)

Steigt und
spielt mit -

In der Eulenflucht, beim
versteinerten Aussatz,
bei
unsern geflohenen Händen, in
der jüngsten Verwerfung,
übern
Kugelfang an
der verschütteten Mauer:

sichtbar, aufs
neue: die
Rillen, die

Chöre, damals, die
Psalmen. Ho, ho-
sianna.

Also
stehen noch Tempel. Ein
Stern
hat wohl noch Licht.
Nichts,
nichts ist verloren.

Ho-
sianna.

In der Eulenflucht, hier,
die Gespräche, taggrau,
der Grundwasserspuren.

*

(-- taggrau,
der
Grundwasserspuren -

Verbracht
ins Gelände
mit
der untrüglichen
Spur:

Gras.
Gras,
auseinandergeschrieben.)

A brief response to this elucidation will conclude the paper. Prior to this, however, it is necessary to take a detour through Celan's most famous poem "*Todesfuge*" ("Death's Fugue")⁹ in order to develop a

⁹ *GW*, 1:41-42.

conception of poetic activity which discloses a multiplicity of historically constituted worlds alongside one another. It is in this multiplicity that I find the presentation of a modernity at odds with the present: such a presentation constitutes a task distinctive to lyrical poetry but necessary for Hegel's intellectual and cultural project.

DEATH'S FUGUE

Start the day with black milk we drink it at evening
 We drink it at midday and morning we drink
 it at night
 We drink it and drink it.
 We dig up a grave in the free air, where none shall
 lack space.
 A man lives at home who plays with the
 serpents who writes
 who writes when it darkens Germany
 your hair with its gold Margarete
 He writes it and steps from the house and out front
 stars are flashing he calls his wolfpack to his side
 He calls his Jews up to the front, has dug up a
 grave in the deep earth,
 He commands us to play for the dance.

Start the day with black milk we drink you at night
 We drink you at morning and midday we drink
 you at evening
 We drink you and drink you.
 A man lives at home who plays with the
 serpents who writes
 Who writes when it darkens the homeland
 your hair with its gold Margarete
 Your hair with its ash Shulamith we dig up a
 grave in the free air, where none shall lack space.

You there dig down to the earth's depths he calls
 and you others should sing and play
 He grabs the metal from his belt he swings
 and his eyes they are blue
 Sink deeper your shovels you ones there you others
 should keep to the dancing.

Start the day with black milk we drink you at night
 We drink you at midday and morning we drink
 you at evening
 We drink you and drink you.
 A man lives at home your hair with its gold
 Margarete
 Your hair with its ash Shulamith he plays with the
 serpents
 He calls play sweetly the death and death is a master
 from back home
 He calls pluck your strings more darkly then you'll
 climb as smoke in the air
 Then you'll have a grave in the clouds and then none
 shall lack space.

TODESFUGE

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
 wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken
 sie nachts
 wir trinken und trinken
 wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man
 nicht eng
 Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den
 Schlangen der schreibt
 der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland
 dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 er schreibt es und tritt vor das Haus und es blitzen
 die Sterne er pfeift seine Rücken herbei
 er pfeift seine Juden hervor läßt schaufeln ein
 Grab in der Erde
 er befiehlt uns spielt nun zum Tanz

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
 wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken
 dich abends
 wir trinken und trinken
 Ein Mann wohnt im Haus und spielt mit den
 Schlangen der schreibt
 der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland
 dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith wir schaufeln ein
 Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng

Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen
 ihr anderen singet und spielt
 er greift nach dem Eisen im Gurt er schwingts
 seine Augen sind blau
 stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andern spielt
 weiter zum Tanz auf

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
 wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken
 dich abends
 wir trinken und trinken
 ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar
 Margarete
 dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den
 Schlangen
 Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister
 aus Deutschland
 er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als
 Rauch in die Luft
 dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man
 nicht eng

Start the day with black milk we drink you at night
We drink you at midday and death is a master from
back home
We drink you at evening and morning we drink
you and drink you
And death is a German-bred master and his eye
is blue
He greets you with bullets made of lead he comes
right for you
A man lives at home your hair with its gold
Margarete
He looses his wolf pack on us he grants us a
grave in the air
He plays with the serpents and he dreams how death
is a master from back home.

Your hair with its gold Margarete.
Your hair with its ash Shulamith.

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus
Deutschland
wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken
und trinken
der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge
ist blau
er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich
genau
ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar
Margarete
er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenkt uns ein
Grab in der Luft
er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet der Tod
ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

My reasons for making this detour into “Todesfuge” are dictated by the poem “Engführung” itself. The title “Engführung” contains at least two references back to “Todesfuge.”

The first of these is found in the fact that Engführung refers to the musical device in a fugue of layering all the voices in close succession. A fugue is a piece of music where each voice enters one at a time on the same theme or on some iteration of that same theme before proceeding to its own developmental section, which is then contrapuntally related to the theme as it is being played in the other voices. A “stretto” or “engführung” denotes those points in the music where a particular theme or phrase is taken up by each voice successively before the previous voice has been able to complete it. A stretto, then, is not a complete fugue but represents the most fugal moment of the fugue, as it were.

The other reference is found in the word “eng,” narrow or tight. Engführung could literally be translated as “Leading into narrows” which is roughly what stretto means in Italian. And the word “eng” shows up in the “theme” of “Todesfuge:” “Wir schaufeln ein grab in den Luften da liegt man nicht eng:” We’re dig up a grave in the air there no one lies in straits, or to get at the same idea in a slightly looser translation: “where none shall lack space.”

Who are these “we,” and how do they dig a grave in the air?

It seems to me that the answer to these two questions indicates a Celanian understanding of lyricism that points to the sort of counterworld making activity which Hegel’s theory of lyricism ought to have developed, but fell short of. Celan is describing the activity of the poet in an untenable world, and it is an activity that produces the sort of poetics I am urging onto Hegel: a poetics of a lyrical counterworld, rather than the lyrical individual.

There is actually also a third reference to “Todesfuge” in “Engführung,” but it is not one that shows up in the title or indeed in anything contained in the text of either poem. It has to do with the context of the poems and with why Celan thought it was important to write “Engführung” in the first place.

It has to do with the lyricism of “Todesfuge.” Although he did not necessarily have “Todesfuge” in mind when he said it, it was understood as one of the primary targets of Theodor Adorno’s famous claim: “To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric.”¹⁰ After all, it was one of the most celebrated post-war poems written in German. And it describes a sadistic, but cultured, concentration camp commandant, one who commands “his Jews” to play him a song.

And the song is beautiful: musical and lyrical. It even follows the format of a fugue as closely as can be expected of a poem, which does not have simultaneous multiple voices. What else would you expect from such a cultured commandant? We should notice the evocation of domesticity. This man lives in a house. It is his home away from home. He is no doubt in some god-forsaken place, but he writes at night to Germany, his homeland, and his letters evoke Goethe and Bach.

For all the talk of domesticity and culture, what could be more barbaric than this?

Only the song being sung is not precisely his song. It is the one he bids “his Jews” to play.

The central “story” begins with him establishing a division of labor. He has some people dig graves in the earth, while others sing and dance. It is this singing and dancing which digs the grave in the air. It is at his command, and he even dictates some of the terms of the song.

But the counterpoint is crucial here. The commandant says “your hair with its gold Margarete,” and “we” sing that and it is beautiful but then “we” respond “your hair with its ash Shulamith.” The commandant says that in the grave in the air “none shall lack space.” And we say, “None shall lack space.” The commandant thinks that he is being ironic, but, ironically, he is not being ironic, or not merely ironic. The song that he bids the prisoners to sing is in fact a song, their song, and it serves as a grave in the heavens.

This is an example of lyrical rebellion. It rejects the world that is, the world of the commandant, and sets up, in its place, a different world: one that sounds very similar, but one in which poetry still matters.

¹⁰ ADORNO, T. *Prisms*, trans. Sheirry Weber Nichol森 and Samuel Weber. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983; p. 34.

Lest this sound like a paltry thing, consider one of the main paradoxes that troubles Celan, one which Jacques Derrida has pointed out in *Cinders* and in “Poetics and the Politics of Witnessing.”¹¹ Celan is constantly troubled by the impossibility of testament. In fact, this impossibility haunts the invocation and constitution of the “we” of the poetic voice. This trouble is gathered in the image of dispersion: dispersed, incinerated bodies that, in the free air, lack any space to call their own. The grave is not the site of death. Even the mass grave is not only the site of death. It is also a site of memory. A grave contains this experience. A grave in the free air, however, is an absurd image. Without constraint, with room for all, there can be no site for this memory, this singularity. Except, ironically that there is, in the airiness of the clouds.

It is this airiness, the materiality of clouds and of ash, that is taken up in the elemental play of “Engführung” when, again echoing “Todesfuge” Celan speaks of the fact that “no smoke soul rises and plays with” the new hours of the new world. What is being considered here is the world of the lyrical poem as it persists beyond the subjectivity of the lyrical poet.

Consider for example, an even later poem, “Mit Allen Gedanken” (“With all that is thought”):¹²

WITH ALL THAT IS THOUGHT

I went
Far out from the world: There you were,
You my soft one, you my open one, and –
You received us.

Who
says, that it all went dead,
when our eyes failed?
All awakened, all taken up.

Giant, a sun came swimming, bright
stood soul opposite soul, clear,
domineering they silenced it
upon its path.

With ease
your womb opened up, silently
a breath rose up in the aether,
and what formed a cloud, was it not,
was it not figure and of our own stuff,
was it not
as good as a name?

MIT ALLEN GEDANKEN

ging ich
hinaus aus der Welt: das warst du,
du meine Leise, du meine Offne, und -
du empfangst uns.

Wer
sagt, daß uns alles erstarb,
da uns das Auge brach?
Alles erwachte, alles hob an.

Groß kam eine Sonne geschwommen, hell
standen ihre Seele und Seele entgegen, klar,
gebieterisch schwiegen sie ihr
ihre Bahn vor.

Leicht
tat sich dein Schoß auf, still
stieg ein Hauch in den Äther,
und was sich wölkte, wars nicht,
wars nicht Gestalt und von uns her,
wars nicht
so gut wie ein Name?

¹¹ DERRIDA, J. *Cinders*, trans. Ned Lukacher, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. See also, DERRIDA, J., “Poetics and the Politics of Witnessing,” in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, trans. Thomas Duitot. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 65-96.

¹² *GW*, 1: 221.

This is a poem about the materiality and temporality of thought. This is also a poem about mothers, about the materiality of the mater, about mothering persisting even in death (“Deines Todseins Tochter” “Your Beingdead’s Daughter” Celan says elsewhere).¹³ After all, who says everything died? Far out from this world (in another atmosphere, and another world then): there, your womb opened with ease. But this sounds so wrapped in the sentimentality of maternity. The “I” is not the child. I went out to you, my open one my soft one so that you would receive me. And you did.

Your easy womb opened up, as I was saying. I am not the child: I went for the womb. What came out of it, that is something else. That is a cloud: “What formed a cloud, wasn’t that a figure and made of our stuff? Wasn’t it as good as a name?”

In this description of atmospherics we encounter again the notion of the birth of the world, which is implicit ironically in “Todesfuge” but which becomes the main theme of “Engführung,” through the central image of “Die Welt, ein Tausendkristall.” The world a thousand crystal shot forth shot forth.” “When?” When “We did not let it loose stood in-between a lattice of pores.” This voice contains the only “we” in “Engführung,” and if anything in that poem recalls the singers of “Todesfuge,” it is this “we.” This subjectivity, not just the subjectivity of the individual but the subjectivity of individuals together, is the lattice work for the world, for the poem. Up to this point, we inhabit a terrain without stars, an almost indiscernible terrain: a terrain of ashes and night, with just traces of something else. An unmistakable trace, my own audibility, the palpability of scar-tissue: these hints and little else. Still, it is all that we had to hold on to. It was enough to make some kind of world, an imaginary, fictional one at least.

A world in which poetry mattered, a world fashioned of poetic material. This is the stuff of lyrical poetry. Hegel is right to call it an act of assertion against the world of the Volk. But it is not a matter of self-assertion. It is a matter of asserting other, counter-worlds, worlds that elucidate this world, that criticize this world, that reject this world.

We must be reminded even while reading “Engführung” of what we learned in “Todesfuge.” These worlds have an alien beauty of their own. They sing. A Hegelian reading of Engführung, one which paid attention to its import as a lyrical poem, could thus be stated as briefly and economically as possible:

Something happened.

¹³ *GW*, 1:110.

What's the matter?
It is here, in your hands. It's right in front of you.
It's called a poem.

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