PAUL CELAN: A Biography of His Youth. *By Israel Chalfen. Trans. by Maximilian Bleyleben. Persea. 214 pp. $24.95*
PAUL CELAN: Holograms of Darkness. *By Amy Colin. Indiana Univ. 211 pp. $35*

The horrors of the Holocaust are often termed unspeakable or indescribable, even though the endless stream of memoirs, fiction, academic studies, films, and TV documentaries about them belies such claims. Almost alone, the poet Paul Celan (1920–70) has registered the Holocaust *linguistically*, within language itself—in a stony fragmentary language that makes the work of other minimalists seem verbose. Celan abandoned speech and grammar as we know them, writing in a German without logic or syntax, often without connections or verbs, where the "meaning" must be eked out of individual words and sometimes even syllables. Nietzsche observed that if you want to kill God, you must also kill grammar. Perhaps because of his experiences in a labor camp, where God seemed absent, Celan has broken the old contract between the word and the world.

One might think a poet writing in difficult, enigmatic fragments would enjoy little popularity in his own language and be impossible to translate into others. Yet in Germany he is the most honored poet to have published after World War II; by 1989, in Europe and America, there were more than 3,000 books and articles about him. When the translated *Poems of Paul Celan* came out two years ago, the critic George Steiner declared in the *New Yorker* that they altered "my inward existence as only the greatest art [can] . . . . [L]et him enter your life. At risk. Knowing that he will change it."

Even taken out of context, some lines of Celan's early poetry make sense: "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[.]" Yet it is probably more accurate to suggest, as Steiner did, that to "get" Celan you must train your sensibility to a new register, in much the way that the early audiences of abstract painting and atonal music had to learn a different kind of appreciation.

Two new books can assist in that education. Chalfen, Celan's biographer, elucidates the connection between the life and the poems. He narrates the sad tale of a precocious Jewish youth in Bukovina (now in Romania) who was sent to one forced labor camp while his parents were dispatched to another, where they died. Celan settled in Paris after the war. There, Chalfen relates, the poet exercised his gift for languages, translating 23 major authors, including Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson, from and into a half-dozen languages. (In German, *Celanified* is now a word, meaning to translate and compress at the same time.) Colin, a Germanicist at the University of Pittsburgh, analyzes Celan's poems, even though she recognizes the irony of doing so: "The critic," she writes, "inevitably employs a language of which Celan's texts have already freed themselves."

Although sorrowful and difficult, Celan's poems are not without some "faith," struggling as they often do to shape a language of "still songs to be sung on the other side of mankind." In 1970, however, Celan became one of the camp survivors (the writers Primo Levi, Jerzy Kosinski, Jean Amiery, and Piotr Rawiez would be others) who chose to survive no longer. Their suicides make more poignant the lines by Celan that appear to refer to God's absence in the camps:

> No one
> bears witness for the
> witness.

But Celan, through his poetry, has created—and is still creating—his own witnesses.

THE SECRET RING: Freud's Inner Circle and the Politics of Psychoanalysis. *By Phyllis Grosskurth. Addison-Wesley. 245 pp. $22.95*
MOTHERS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS: Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein. *By Janet Sayers. Norton. 319 pp. $24.95*

Sigmund Freud used to hint that the key text of psychoanalysis, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), was his secret autobiography. Taking this clue, two new works attempt to understand psychoanalysis afresh by investigating the characters of its early practitioners.

For both Grosskurth and Sayers, psychoanalysis is a family romance. But for Grosskurth,