

PAUL CELAN: A Biography of His Youth. By Israel Chalfen. Trans. by Maximilian Bleyleben. *Persée*. 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 con-

nection 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 Rawicz 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.

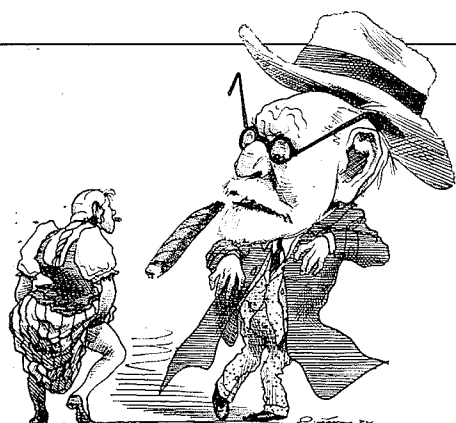
But Celan, through his poetry, has created—and is still creating—his own witnesses.

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,



professor of psychoanalytic thought at the University of Toronto, the family is predominantly male. She hones in on the Secret Committee in Vienna, which operated as a palace guard to protect Freud and to defend his theories. Not surprisingly, these theories often implied the superiority of men over women. (Possession of that magical instrument, the penis, was considered proof.) Freud's adopted "sons"—Karl Abraham, Max Eitingon, Sandor Ferenczi, Ernest Jones, Otto Rank, and Hanns Sachs—are here pictured bickering with each other while serving their idealized father, Freud. The Freud who emerges in Grosskurth's account hardly deserves all the attention. He is a cold, manipulative narcissist. What made him so unpleasant? Grosskurth offers an answer: Freud received so little tenderness from his mother that "his ability to empathize was frozen."

The figure conspicuously absent from Freud's male family thus becomes the key to his personality. Grosskurth's suggestion is certainly in line with current trends in psychoanalysis, which have shifted from a patriarchal and phallogocentric orientation to mother-centered theories. The vocabulary of analysts and therapists reflects this change. While formerly they spoke of resistance, repression, and castration, today they talk of identification, introjection, and deprivation. For this change, argues Sayers, the chair of the Women's Section of the British Psychological Society, we have four women to thank—Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud, and Melanie Klein. Sayers shows how they drew on their own experiences as mothers (or, in Anna Freud's case, on her wartime work in orphanages) to challenge the centrality of male-oriented theories, such as the castration complex. The irony is that none of these therapists (according to their children)

was a good mother, and their approach—which is called "object-relations theory" and concentrates on the child's earliest relations with his mother—appears to emphasize the mother mainly in order to blame her.

Grosskurth and Sayers both intend to challenge the original "operating principles" of psychoanalysis, but in most ways they remain exponents of them. Neither author questions the familial model on which both the old father-centered and the new mother-centered psychoanalysis are based. They never consider whether our views of early infantile experience are shaped by our *cultural* stereotypes of maternal and paternal roles—that is, by culture itself. As long as "mother" and "father" remain the idealized and blamed sources for human psychology, we will be served by simplistic explanations for our behavior in a complex and increasingly violent society.

History

LABOR WILL RULE: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor. *By Steven Fraser. Free Press. 688 pp. \$29.95*

This is at once a history of industrial America and a personal success story to outrival anything in Horatio Alger. During the 1930s, Sidney Hillman (1887–1946) was Franklin Roosevelt's adviser on labor policy, memorialized in FDR's quip, "Clear it with Sidney." For a man who had been a revolutionary agitator in Russia during his teens, Hillman had come some distance.

Hillman's rise from an immigrant cutter working in Chicago's garment trade to a national leader of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was exceptional. Labeled a conservative within the labor movement, Hillman tended to avoid direct confrontation; yet his pragmatism won him the rank-and-file's confidence. (CIO members even went along when he recommended wage cuts in the early years of the Depression.)

Fraser, executive editor of Basic Books, is less concerned with Hillman's personal story than with his role in defining the character of modern American liberalism. Along with reformers such as Hull House founder Jane Ad-