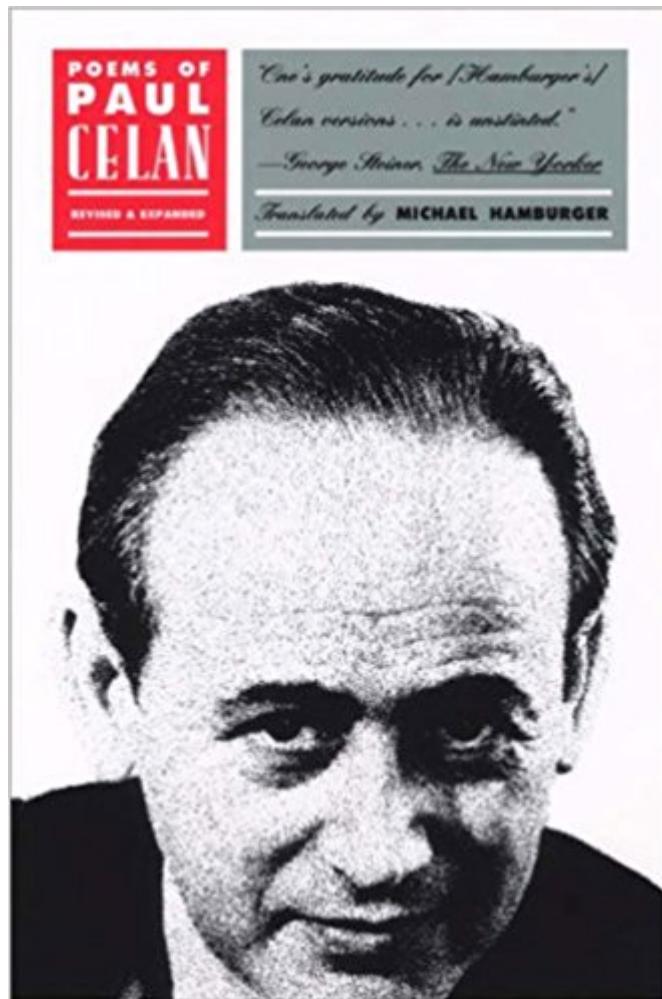


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# Poems Of Paul Celan: A Bilingual German/English Edition, Revised Edition



## Synopsis

The classic translation, Poems of Paul Celan is revised and expanded, featuring new poems and an essay by the translator. It is the foremost English-language edition of the great poet. The peerless translations of this haunted and haunting Holocaust poet, including ten new poems and an illuminating essay by the translator. Paul Celan is one the twentieth century's most essential poets, and twenty-two years after its publication, Poems of Paul Celan continues to be the single truest access for English-speakers to this poet's work. This new edition adds ten more poems and a significant essay, "On Translating Celan" by Michael Hamburger.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Poet and translator Michael Hamburger has done us an excellent service by giving us this book, which will certainly become the bilingual edition of choice for Paul Celan. A few words. On Celan: Probably the second most important German-language poet of the 20th century after Rilke, but very different in style and mindset! Whereas Rilke provides incredible lyricism, Celan's poetry is jerky, raw, cut-off, even tortured. Struggling with how to write poetry in the German language after the Holocaust (Celan was a Jew), he chose to focus on the basics of language - prepositions, pronouns - and place the language under such pressure and in such tension that poetry could again speak. To Adorno's claim that there could be "no poetry after Auschwitz", Celan proved there was a way, but it was a very difficult one. If you have not yet come across Celan, I can heartily recommend him as one of the greats of the 20th century. His most famous poem is "Todesfuge" or "Death Fugue", but his other poems are also excellent. But be forewarned - this is no light verse. You'll get some

heavy stuff, but you'll love it. On Hamburger: he is a good poet in his own right and a wonderful translator, having already provided the best edition of Hölderlin's poetry. Now that he has turned to Celan, we benefit very much from his efforts. Celan is incredibly difficult to translate, and the translator must make many choices and must try not to destroy the ambiguity in the German by reducing it simplistically into the English. Hamburger does a good job in this - in most cases a better job than Felstiner, who is the other main translator of Celan (and has a different collection). I would recommend Hamburger's translations over Felstiner. In most cases, he retains more, and there are fewer times when you will say "Eh?"

...have been for him to come across the words he found growing in himself in the tongue of the enemy: Schimmelgrün ist das Haus des Vergessens. Vor jedem der wehenden Tore blaut dein enthaupteter Spielmann. Er schlägt dir die Trommel aus Moos und bitterem Schamhaar; mit schwärzender Zehe malt er im Sand deine Braue. Länger zeichnet er sie als sie war, und das Rot deiner Lippe. Du füllst hier die Urnen und speisest dein Herz.----- Green as mould is the house of oblivion. Before each of the blowing gates your beheaded minstrel turns blue. For you he beats his drum made of moss and of harsh pubic hair; With a festering toe in the sand he traces your eyebrow. Longer he draws it than ever it was, and the red of your lip. You fill up the urns here and nourish your heart.----- I read these translations side-by-side with the originals, and find them to be about as ept as it gets -- German poetry is clunky enough put into English, but with Celan it gets completely out of hand -- his Deutsch reads like a patois of German and Martian -- twisting the sounds into shapes like a balloon-animal-maker before a birthday party of children, wringing meaning and context and consonance from consonantless animal cries, deep in the night, skinned on frost, in a crater of some prison moon, staring down at the earth very small and far away and jewellike from that distance...

Paul Celan stands as one of the most influential and visible poets of the second half of the 20th-century. The work he produced from World War II to his suicide by drowning in 1970 has been lauded by subsequent poets, taught in German history courses, and set to music by Berio, Birtwistle, and Rihm. The central theme of most of Celan's poetry is the slaughter of European Jewry in the Holocaust, as the poet was born in a German-speaking Jewish enclave in Bucovina and there lost his parents and his home, scars which even a successful new life in Paris could never erase. This volume of selected poems with English translations by Michael Hamburger is a fine introduction to his work. Celan's poem "Todesfuge" (Death Fugue) is one of his earliest mature

pieces and the most common introduction to his poetry. It's opening lines "Black milk of daybreak we drink it at sundown / we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night / we drink and we drink it / we dig a grave in the breezes there one lies unconfined" are a powerful depiction of the death camps and fully repudiate Adorno's claim that poetry after Auschwitz is impossible. Some critics have claimed that "Todesfuge" was Celan's only great poem and had it not been for that, then we would have never heard of him. That poem was certainly his break into the literary world, but other material in this volume is just as fine. "Einfuehrung" (The Straitening) is something of a rewriting of "Todesfuge" in considerably more desperate language and my favourite of Celan's poems. Here the motifs of the first poem are shattered into pieces ("Grass, written asunder. The stones, white / with the shadows of grass blades ... Ash. / Ash. ash. / Night. / Night-and-night.

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