


BETWEEN 'URBILD' AND 'ABBILD': THE CONCEPTION OF THE IMAGE IN CELAN'S POEMS 'BEI WEIN UND VERLORENHEIT', 'TENEBRAE', AND 'HALBZERFRESSENER'

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ABSTRACT

This article contends that the image is a central trope in Paul Celan's poetry. It suggests that Celan's rejection of metaphor and his opposition to readings of his poetry as mere imagery constitute only one side of his understanding of the image. On the other hand, Celan embraces the image when it goes beyond the merely figurative or imitative and approaches a form of 'Urbild'. This article traces Celan's understanding of the image as split between 'Urbild' and 'Abbild' in his mature poems 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', 'Tenebrae', and 'Halbzerfressener', through which we will also gain a fuller sense of how Celan conceives of language and poetic voice.

Dieser Beitrag argumentiert dafür, dass das Bild in Celans Dichtung ein zentraler Begriff ist. Celans abweisende Bemerkungen zur Metapher und sein Widerstand gegenüber Lesarten seiner Dichtung als bloße Bilder stellen nur eine Seite seiner Bildauffassung dar. Demgegenüber steht Celans positives Verständnis des Bildes, wenn es sich einer Art 'Urbild' annähert, das nicht figurativ und imitativ ist. Dieser Artikel untersucht Celans Bildbegriff in der Spannung zwischen 'Urbild' und 'Abbild' in seinen Gedichten 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', 'Tenebrae' und 'Halbzerfressener' aus seiner reifen Schaffungsphase, was uns auch weitere Aufschlüsse über Celans Verständnis von Sprache und lyrischem Ich gibt.

INTRODUCTION

Celan's relationship with the image is a fraught one. When his poetry was described by critic Oliver Storz as 'assoziativ[e] Reihung von Traumbildern', Celan could not accept such an interpretation of his poetry as mere 'bebildert[e] Sprach[e]'.¹ For Holocaust survivor Celan, the very real trauma of Nazi persecution he negotiates in his poetry was not to be mistaken for a mere play of language or metaphorical disfiguration.²

¹ The description of Celan's poetry as 'assoziativ[e] Reihung von Traumbildern' is from a review of Celan's poetry by Oliver Storz. Celan replied to this review in his poem 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', rejecting 'bebildert[e] Sprachen' and thus dissociating his poetry from being mere images, as Storz believed. Paul Celan, *Die Gedichte. Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann, Frankfurt a. M. 2005, pp. 126 and 674 (page numbers are respective to order of citation in the above text). Hereafter, this edition is cited parenthetically in the text as KG, followed by the page number.

² Regarding his poetry as a mere play of images and metaphors was common in the feuilletonistic reception of Celan's verse. For instance, Günter Blöcker's review of *Sprachgitter* claimed that 'Celan's Metaphernfülle ist durchweg weder der Wirklichkeit abgewonnen, noch dient sie ihr'; cited in Paul

Throughout his life he would insist that poems are not ‘de[r] Versuch, Bilder wirr durcheinanderzuwürfeln’.³ In numerous notes surrounding his ‘Meridian’ speech we find further rejections of metaphor,⁴ and in his poetry Celan would reiterate this negative view of the image and metaphor in the sarcastic ‘Metapherngestöber’ of his poem ‘Ein Dröhnen’ (KG, 206), or his denigration of the eye as a ‘Bilderknecht’ in ‘Wohin mir das Wort’ (KG, 155). Similarly, in his poem ‘Wortaufschüttung’ (KG, 180), a clearly negatively connotated ‘Abbild und Nachbild’ are opposed to the positive and fruitful encounter of the poetic voice with the ‘du’.⁵

In such a reading of the image in Celan, ‘Bild’ and metaphor are implicitly or explicitly treated as synonymous. A reading of this kind has some currency in Celan scholarship.⁶ While occasionally, as we have already seen above, Celan does use ‘Bild’ in the sense of metaphor, it is problematic to regard the two as interchangeable in Celan. More frequently than using ‘Bild’ and metaphor synonymously, Celan insists on differentiating the two, giving the image a positive and metaphor a negative connotation (see M, 69, 74, 87, 109, 128, 134, 145). Furthermore, Celan also uses the image in a perceptual sense (e.g. in ‘Wortaufschüttung’) as well as in reference to the ‘Bild’ of the visual arts (e.g. his ‘Unter ein Bild’ which alludes to Van Gogh’s

Celan and Ingeborg Bachmann, *Herzeit: Ingeborg Bachmann – Paul Celan. Der Briefwechsel*, ed. Bertrand Badiou *et al.*, tr. Barbara Wiedemann, Frankfurt a. M. 2008, p. 124. Particularly problematic for Celan were reviews by the unrepentant former Nazi Hans Egon Holthusen, who said about Celan’s *Mohn und Gedächtnis* that it consisted of a ‘wild blühende[s] Chaos der Metaphern’; cited in Joachim Seng, ‘Mohn und Gedächtnis’, in *Celan-Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, ed. Markus May, Peter Gossens, and Jürgen Lehmann, 2nd edn, Stuttgart 2012, pp. 54–63 (p. 62). For further reviews in this vein, see Jürgen Lehmann, ‘Niemandrose’, in May, Gossens, and Lehmann (eds), *Celan-Handbuch*, pp. 80–9 (pp. 87–8); and Wolfgang Emmerich, *Paul Celan*, 6th edn, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2014, pp. 94–5.

³ The above cited was Celan’s reply to a letter by a school class interpreting his poem ‘Vom Blau’; Paul Celan, ‘*Mikrolithen sind, Steinchen: die Prosa aus dem Nachlass*’, ed. Bertrand Badiou and Barbara Wiedemann, Frankfurt a. M. 2005, pp. 194.

⁴ See Paul Celan, *Der Meridian. Endfassung – Entwürfe – Materialien*, ed. Bernhard Böschstein and Heino Schmuil, Frankfurt a. M. 1999, pp. 69–70, 75, 87, 109, 128, 134, 138, 145, and 158–9. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as M, followed by the page number. I have discussed the image in Celan’s poetological writings, including his ‘Meridian’ notes, more extensively elsewhere; see Julian Johannes Immanuel Koch, ‘The Image in Celan’s Poetics’, *GLL*, 71/4 (2018), 434–51.

⁵ For further discussion of the image in ‘Wortaufschüttung’, see Julian Johannes Immanuel Koch, ‘The Allegorical Image and Presence in Paul Celan’s “Wortaufschüttung”’, *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 56/1 (2020), 22–36.

⁶ E.g. Gerhard Neumann, ‘Die “absolute” Metapher: Ein Abgrenzungsversuch am Beispiel Stéphane Mallarmés und Paul Celans’, *Poetica*, 3 (1970), 188–225 (210, 215, 217–19, and 223–4); Gerhard Buhr, *Celans Poetik*, Göttingen 1976, pp. 108, 118, and 123–4; Otto Pöggeler, ‘“Schwarzmaut”: Bildende Kunst in der Lyrik Paul Celans’, in *Die Frage nach der Kunst: von Hegel zu Heidegger*, ed. Otto Pöggeler, Freiburg im Breisgau 1984, p. 321; Christine Ivanović, ‘Eine Sprache der Bilder: Notizen zur immanenten Poetik der Lyrik Paul Celans’, *Études Germaniques*, 55/3 (2000), 541–59. For fruitful investigations of Celan’s use of metaphors independently of his own conception of the term, see Harald Weinrich, ‘Semantik der kühnen Metapher’, in *Sprache in Texten*, Stuttgart 1976, pp. 295–316; Winfried Menninghaus, *Paul Celan: Magie der Form*, Frankfurt a. M. 1980, pp. 130–72.

'Les champs de blés aux corbeaux', KG, 94).⁷ Both of these usages of 'Bild' are patently not coextensive with the image understood as metaphor.

However, understanding the image in Celan as a visual image or even more specifically as the 'Bild' of the visual arts is as problematic as conflating Celan's image with metaphor. Frequently and explicitly, Celan does not understand the image as a visual entity. In fact, when the image has positive connotations he typically stresses, as he does in his notes to his 1960 'Meridian' speech, that 'Bildhaftes, das ist keineswegs etwas Visuelles' and claims that 'Bild = Vision (nicht: Metapher)' (M, 107, 109; see also 101). Given these remarks, some iconoclastic tendencies in his poetic ekphrasis,⁸ and the fact that in many cases Celan's interest in the visual arts was driven by his personal interest in the artist, as seems to have been the case with Guéricault and Van Gogh⁹ as well as with his wife Gisèle Lestrangé,¹⁰ gleaming a systematic conception of the image from Celan's engagement with the visual arts faces significant difficulties.

I will suggest here that Celan's conception of the image is best understood not simply in terms of metaphor or of his engagement with images in the visual arts, but in terms of the Platonic and Neo-Platonic distinction between 'Urbild' and 'Abbild'. This distinction in turn informs Celan's thinking about metaphor and, at least in part, underpins Celan's approach to the visual arts. In what follows I will give a brief outline of this distinction and sketch how it underpins Celan's thinking about the image before turning my attention to three poems in which it is particularly pronounced: 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', 'Tenebrae', and 'Halbzerfressener'.

Celan's seemingly contradictory stance on the image – as 'Abbild und Nachbild' (KG, 180) and as 'nichts Visuelles, sondern etwas Geistiges' (M, 101) – is inherited from the conceptual ambivalence of the image in Western intellectual history that goes back to Plato. In Platonic and Neo-platonic philosophy, the image is split between what from the Middle Platonic Academy (266–241 BC) onward was often called 'archetypos' – translated by German Platonists and Neo-platonists with 'Urbild' – and the 'ektypos' or 'typos' – translated as 'Abbild'.¹¹ The 'Urbild' is the original

⁷ Werner Wögerbauer, 'Drei Skizzen zu Bildgedichten Paul Celans', *Celan-Jahrbuch*, 7 (1998), 165–77 (174–5).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁹ Frank Brüder, 'Kunst', in *Celan-Handbuch* (note 2), pp. 278–86 (pp. 279–80).

¹⁰ Barbara Wiedemann, "Und sie auf meine Art entziffern". Zur Entstehung der Edition Schwarzmaut von Gisèle Celan-Lestrangé und Paul Celan', in *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts*, Tübingen 2001, pp. 263–92. Wiedemann stresses the independence of Celan's and Lestrangé's *oeuvres* (p. 267).

¹¹ The Greek terms (sometimes also Latinised with the '-us' rather than the '-os' suffix) come from the art of coinage, where the 'archetypos' denotes the coin die or form that is pressed into the metal to mint a coin, the 'typos', see J. Hüllen, 'Archetypos', *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, 13 vols, Schwabe 2007, I, pp. 497–500. I will use 'archetypos' interchangeably with 'Urbild' and will predominantly use the adjectival form 'archetypal' to denote 'urbildlich'.

or model which the image represents. Thus, every time we hear ‘image’ we should hear an appended, silent ‘of’: the image is always an image *of* something, even as an abstract concept. This something which the image represents is external to the image. On the other hand, that which is represented, that is, the ‘Urbild’, does not present itself *in* the image, but is *re*-presented by the image or ‘typos.’ The image implies a one-directional dependence relation to the ‘Urbild’ it represents. In resembling the ‘Urbild’, the ‘Abbild’ necessarily differs from it, especially when we conceive of the ‘Urbild’ as a divine being – as (Neo-)Platonic Christians did – that necessarily escapes any attempt of being visually captured.¹² When we speak of an image or ‘Abbild’ in this (Neo-)Platonic framework, we talk of an entity or concept that is inherently lacking. Unlike the English image, which derives from the Latin ‘imitatio’ and is therefore only understood in the sense of ‘Abbild’,¹³ the faultline between ‘Urbild’ and ‘Abbild’ – that is, between that which is represented and that which represents – runs through the ‘Bild’¹⁴ in Celan’s German and thus explains his ambivalent, or indeed paradoxical, remarks about the image. Hence, when on the one hand, Celan rejects the image as ‘Abbild und Nachbild’ (KG, 180) and as mere metaphor, but on the other hand emphasises that the image is not visual but visionary (M, 107 and 109), he seems to echo the (Neo-)Platonic distinction between ‘typos’ or ‘ektypos’ and ‘archetypos’, respectively. Celan associates the mental or even spiritual image that is ‘nichts Visuelles, sondern etwas Geistiges’ (M, 101) with a ‘Wissen und Sehen von nacktester Evidenz’ (M, 128). Only true perception – ‘Sehen als Gewahren, Wahrnehmen, Wahrhaben, Wahrsein’ (M, 134; underlining in original) – can see this non-visual image.¹⁵ Traces of such an *archetypal* conception of the image and seeing in Celan are also found in his engagement with the visual arts, especially his translation of Bazaine’s *Notes sur la peinture d’aujourd’hui*, when Bazaine speaks of ‘die Verinnerlichung des Visuellen’ and a ‘Mehr-als-Sehen’.¹⁶ Unlike metaphor, for Celan, this

¹² Emmanuel Alloa, ‘Bildwissenschaft in Byzanz. Ein iconic turn avant la lettre?’, in *Philosophie des Bildes. Philosophie de l’image*, ed. Anton Hügli and Curzio Chiesa, Basel 2010, pp. 11–35 (pp. 25–6); Werner Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1985, p. 76.

¹³ Michael Syrotinski, ‘Image’, in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, Steven Rendall, and Emily Apter, Princeton 2014, p. 478.

¹⁴ Pascal David, ‘Bild’, in *ibid.*, pp. 107–10.

¹⁵ On Celan’s engagement with Plato and, in particular, ‘die Fähigkeit der geistigen Schau’ (S. 142), see Christine Ivanović and Max Reitermann, ‘Der Meridian und Die Niemandrose im Kontext der Goll-Affäre’, in *Lectures d’une oeuvre: Die Niemandrose, Paul Celan*, ed. Marie-Hélène Quéval, Nantes 2002, pp. 127–69.

¹⁶ Jean Bazaine, *Notizen zur Malerei der Gegenwart*, tr. Paul Celan, Frankfurt a. M. 1959, p. 35. The (Neo-)Platonic distinction between ‘Urbild’ and ‘Abbild’ itself had an enormous influence on the visual arts and its theorisation in artistic treatises; see Erwin Panofsky, *Idea. Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie*, Berlin 1924. For a discussion of this distinction in Celan’s engagement with notions of ‘vanitas’ in Baroque art, see Koch, ‘The Allegorical Image and Presence in Paul Celan’s “Wortaufschüttung”’ (note 5), pp. 28–31.

truthfully seen inner image does not feign to be what it is not: 'Wer im Gedicht nur die Metapher findet, der hat auch nichts anderes gesucht; er nimmt nichts *wahr*' (M, 138; my emphasis).

This is a cursory overview and below I will examine how the distinction plays out in Celan in more minute detail in his poems 'Tenebrae', 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', and 'Halbzerfressener' (KG, 97, 126, 195), written at the height of his career.

THE LACK OF A DIVINE 'URBILD' IN 'TENEBRAE'

'Tenebrae' is among Celan's most explicit engagements with the traditional conception of the relation between 'Urbild' and 'Abbild' and the poem also re-evaluates the traditional conception of *imago Dei* (as we will see below). 'Tenebrae' consists of nine stanzas and was written in 1957 and published as part of the poetry volume *Sprachgitter* in 1959. The title of the poem alludes to a Christian Easter mass which takes place in church after dark in the last three days of Holy Week. During the ceremony candles are extinguished, symbolising the dying of Christ at the Cross, while religious chants are sung (see Wiedemann's notes: KG, 649). As the title suggests, we encounter allusions to the Eucharist and the crucifixion of Christ in the poem. Formally the poem most closely resembles a religious song or plaint to God, although the traditional direction of address, from man to God, is inverted, as we will see.¹⁷

The poem stands in a long tradition of lamentations to God but exceeds the plaintive impetus of most ritual lamentations in its climactic eighth stanza where God becomes a mere 'Abbild' in a trough of blood he has shed. While most critics note the Eucharistic motif and point to similarities of the Divine image in the trough with the image of Christ on the Cross,¹⁸ and some compare the lamenting poetic voice of the poem with Christ's moment of doubt on the Cross (see Matthew 27:46),¹⁹ to which moment the titular 'tenebrae' also refers (Matthew 27:45),²⁰ here I would particularly like to focus on the theological and philosophical implications of Celan's divine image in stanza eight:

¹⁷ It is a 'Kirchenlied contrefait', according to Wögerbauer; see *Sur quatre poèmes de Paul Celan: une lecture à plusieurs: analyses et présentation des débats*, ed. Jean Bollack, Jean-Marie Winkler, and Werner Wögerbauer, Villeneuve d'Ascq 1991, p. 129.

¹⁸ Ruth Lorbe, 'Paul Celan, "Tenebrae"', in *Über Paul Celan*, ed. Dietlind Meinecke, Frankfurt a. M. 1970, pp. 139–51 (pp. 148–9); Irène Elisabeth Kummer, *Unlesbarkeit dieser Welt: Spannungsfelder moderner Lyrik und ihr Ausdruck im Werk von Paul Celan*, Frankfurt a. M. 1987, p. 129; Beate Sowa-Bettecken, *Sprache der Hinterlassenschaft: jüdisch-christliche Überlieferung in der Lyrik von Nelly Sachs und Paul Celan*, Frankfurt a. M. 1992, p. 191.

¹⁹ Joachim Seng, *Auf den Kreis-Wegen der Dichtung: Zyklische Komposition bei Paul Celan am Beispiel der Gedichtbände bis 'Sprachgitter'*, Heidelberg 1998, p. 212.

²⁰ Sowa-Bettecken, *Sprache der Hinterlassenschaft* (note 18), p. 175.

TENEBRAE

Nah sind wir, Herr,
nahe und greifbar.

Gegriffen schon, Herr,
ineinander verkrallt, als wär
der Leib eines jeden von uns
dein Leib, Herr.

Bete, Herr,
bete zu uns,
wir sind nah.

Windschief gingen wir hin,
gingen wir hin, uns zu bücken
nach Mulde und Maar.

Zur Tränke gingen wir, Herr.

Es war Blut, es war,
was du vergossen, Herr.

Es glänzte.

Es warf uns dein Bild in die Augen, Herr,
Augen und Mund stehn so offen und leer, Herr.
Wir haben getrunken, Herr.
Das Blut und das Bild, das im Blut war, Herr.

Bete, Herr.
Wir sind nah. (KG, 97)

After the first stanzas, in which Celan seems to evoke scenes from concentration camps with bodies clawing into each other, the first-person plural poetic voice bows before a trough ('Tränke') filled with blood in which God is transformed into a mere image (an allusion to and reversal of Eucharistic transubstantiation in which wine is supposedly transformed into blood).²¹ As the image of God materialises in the trough, we realise that the suggestively obeisant gesture of bowing to the frequently invoked divine Lordship is controverted, since we do not gaze up to look for signs of God but bend over ('zu bücken') to behold the image of God. This implies an inversion of above and below in and through the formation of the divine image in the trough at our feet.²² The spatial deposition of God entails an

²¹ Lönker notes that three different texts documenting the Holocaust seem to underlie Celan's poem: the motif of the trough may have been inspired by a report by the Hungarian doctor Miklos Nyiszli; dead bodies clawing into each other resembles a passage in Gerald Reitlinger's *Endlösung. Hitlers Versuch der Ausrottung der Juden Europas 1939–1945*. Finally, the open eyes and mouth in the poem probably stem from Jean Cayrol's documentary *Nuit et brouillard*, whose French script Celan translated; see Fred Lönker, 'Tenebrae', in *Kommentar zu Paul Celans 'Die Niemandsrose'*, ed. Christine Ivanović and Jürgen Lehmann, Heidelberg 1997, pp. 187–96.

²² Celan alludes to and inverts Psalm 145:14 here; see Wögerbauer: 'Une fois de plus, le poème inverse ce que dit le psaume: Yahvé retient tous ceux qui tombent, redresse tous ceux qui sont courbés (Ps. 145, 14). Dans le poème de Celan, ceux qui ploient sous le joug ne sont pas redressés,

entire complex of value changes that occur within the traditional Christian framework of meanings which governs perceptions of the below. An all too speculative interpretation could elaborate on connotations of hell and underworld here; these endeavours, however, would rely on thin evidence in the text itself. That which is below the poetic voice is not an otherworldly realm, an absolute below. Rather, what lies below the poetic voice is relative to its position as beholder – to its position as plaintiff, reader, and victim. The fact that the poetic voice sees God in a trough below nonetheless carries connotations of God's abjectness and inferiority of power. God's image in the trough beneath the poetic voice is a display on the surface of the blood and therefore lacks profundity and depth.

The words of Psalm 23 echoed in the poem, according to which God leads the Psalmist to the water and restores his soul,²³ now get a cynical twist as we find out that the trough is filled with 'Blut, [...] was du vergossen, Herr'. Depending on whether we read the verb 'vergossen' as transitive or ditransitive, the shed blood can be interpreted as either coming from God, evoking Christ's blood on the Cross, or as that of the poetic voice (and by implication the victims of the Holocaust), accusing God of the crimes of the Holocaust. Many critics follow both readings and believe that Celan underlines a similarity between Christ's sacrifice and the massacred Jews.²⁴ Wögerbauer is appreciably careful in asserting that '[l]e poème dit qu'il y a une relation entre les deux sangs' ('the poem says that there is a relation between the two types of blood'; my translation),²⁵ rather than prematurely affirming, like Seng, that this relation consists of an 'Annäherung an Christus'.²⁶ Given our reading up to this point, this caution is well justified, because in what would this approaching consist? In light of Christ's divine provenance and the resurrection after his crucifixion, in light of the theological and teleological purposiveness of his sacrifice, none of which applies to the senseless murder of the Jews during the Holocaust, such attestations seem imprudent.²⁷ The sarcastic tone of the opening lines that had evoked a proximity to God due to the impending death of the poetic voice ('Nah sind wir, Herr') has not changed by the time the poetic voice gazes into the trough filled with blood. Let us take a closer look at the nature of the relation between the two bloods and between poetic voice

bien au contraire : ils se courbent et se baissent davantage encore (uns zu bücken / nach Mulde und Maar)'; Bollack, Winkler, and Wögerbauer (eds), *Sur quatre poèmes de Paul Celan* (note 17), p. 129.

²³ See Wögerbauer, *ibid.*; Lönker, 'Tenebrae' (note 21), p. 191.

²⁴ Sowa-Bettecken, *Sprache der Hinterlassenschaft* (note 18), pp. 187–8; Kummer, *Unlesbarkeit dieser Welt* (note 18), p. 130; Seng, *Auf den Kreis-Wegen der Dichtung* (note 19), p. 211.

²⁵ Bollack, Winkler, and Wögerbauer (eds), *Sur quatre poèmes de Paul Celan* (note 17), p. 130.

²⁶ Seng, *Auf den Kreis-Wegen der Dichtung* (note 19), p. 211.

²⁷ We should also remember that Celan had criticised Nelly Sachs for her attempts at a 'deutsch-jüdische Symbiose' as 'Versöhnungsversuche im Geiste christlicher Liebe und eines ungebrochenen Gottesglaubens'; cited in Tobias Tunkel, 'Das verlorene Selbe'. *Paul Celans Poetik des Anderen und Goethes lyrische Subjektivität*, Freiburg 2001, p. 37.

and God, which culminates in the image that forms in the trough in stanza eight.

In this image Celan not only contradicts the hierarchy of vision in the Christian (and also, in part, the Jewish) tradition by the inversion of the direction of the gaze (below, into the trough, instead of above into the heavens) and of the direction of prayer ('Bete, Herr, / bete zu uns'), but also by a perverted form of transubstantiation of God as an image in the trough. The senselessness of the crimes of the Holocaust is embodied and symbolised by the image that forms in the trough. The violence, of course, is already signified by the image's material constitution: it is an image reflected in blood. But the senselessness is also more subtly intimated by the structure of the image. Images in bodies of water are mirror-images, they are copies of an original, i.e. 'Abbilder' of an 'Urbild'. However, the mirror-image to which we bow down does not seem to have an 'Urbild'; in fact, God's substance seems to transform into a mere, substance-less image which is (re)producing itself in what is either the fluid of his own disembodiment or the blood of his victims.²⁸ In either case the theological underpinning of the Christian conception of the image is dissolved from within in Celan's evocation of the divine image here; and with it, all corollaries of the divine 'Urbild' – its theological, teleological transcendency and, since God is implied to be complicit in the crimes, its ultimate status as moral paragon – are abandoned. The collapsing of the 'Urbild' into the 'Abbild' not only renders God visible in explicit contradiction of the Second Commandment, but such a complete trespass of the divine into the visual realm inscribes upon His image the discrepancy from the 'Urbild' that inheres in the conception of the 'Abbild'. The copy that is the mirror-image in the trough is a copy discrepant to itself, a reproduction without an original.²⁹ Such a copy's copy is, of course, entirely vacant³⁰ and, indeed,

²⁸ Sowa-Bettecken also interprets the image as a mirror-image and believes that God's image being reflected, rather than that of the poetic voice, is a further sign of their closeness, suggesting that 'im Spiegelbild der Sprechenden das Bild des Herrn aufsteigt'. These readings of unification or approximation between Christ and the poetic voice, however, gloss over the violence with which this image enters into the eyes of the poetic voice. Sowa-Bettecken rephrases the violent intrusion of 'warf uns dein Bild in die Augen' in religious terms as an entering or merging into (eintreten); Sowa-Bettecken, *Sprache der Hinterlassenschaft* (note 18), p. 189.

²⁹ This may echo Benjamin's conception of the artwork in the age of reproduction, but the implications here are quite different. Benjamin sees positive political and aesthetic revolutionary potential in artworks (such as photographs) that are copies without an original. The copy-image in Celan's 'Tenebrae' on the other hand is not positive and is, as I suggest in my interpretation, vacant and without essence when deprived of its *archetypal* original. Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols, Frankfurt a. M. 1974, I/1, pp. 431–509.

³⁰ The vacancy of God's image here is not related to the pregnant use of 'Nichts' in the poem 'Mandorla', by which Celan evokes mystical connotations of God as a substance that can only be apophatically described (from our human perspective) as nothing (cf. KG, 142). On the vacancy of the image here in relation to 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', see also Wögerbauer: 'Le sang, et l'emblème qu'il contient, trouvent leur adéquation dans le vide. Cet accueil engloutit également

the divine image cast into our eyes – an almost violent act of intrusion into our retina³¹ – elicits their emptiness of expression: 'Es warf uns dein Bild in die Augen, Herr, / Augen und Mund stehn so offen und leer, Herr.'

If, in the Christian tradition to which Celan alludes here, we understand ourselves as human beings and as self-conscious subjects through our being *imago Dei*, the image is fundamental to the poetic subject's constitution as poetic voice. Thus, the image as 'Abbild' in 'Tenebrae' undermines the voice's ability to assert itself. The seeming diminution of God's power as 'Abbild' does not concomitantly augment our own powers of self-determination similar to Goethe's Prometheus who formed 'Menschen / Nach [s]einem Bilde'.³² It is not only the conception of the divine image which Celan controverts in 'Tenebrae'. In making a (liquid) mirror the mediator between God and our (self-)perception, Celan also takes up another foundational metaphor of Christian philosophy in the tradition of Augustine. Celan undermines the traditional role of this reflecting interface in the conception of the *imago Dei*, and in turn, undermines how humankind can comprehend God as well as itself as *mens humana* through the contemplation of God.³³

In his *De trinitate* in particular, Augustine had used the metaphor of the mirror as a core element in his exposition of how humankind comes to reach understanding of God and recognise itself as image of God. According to Augustine, as man is looking at his image in the (metaphorical, intellectual) mirror, he recognises himself as image and as bearing likeness to God.³⁴ Since this form of mirror-reflection is an intellectual act, looking and recognition are not mere passive display on a mirror as on a projection screen, but an activity of constituting that which elevates humankind above other beings and distinguishes it from other creatures: its *mens*.³⁵ Looking or contemplating and recognition are part of the same activity in which the mind becomes a mirror *through which* (*per*

l'image, dénoçant ainsi les langues imagées, inauthentiques et mensongères', in Bollack, Winkler, and Wögerbauer (eds), *Sur quatre poèmes de Paul Celan* (note 17), p. 131.

³¹ That violence occurs in the image being cast into the eyes of the poetic voice is very clear from the great similarities this passage bears to Jean Cayrol's description of dead Jews in *Nuit et brouillard*; see Lönker, 'Tenebrae' (note 21), pp. 192–5.

³² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Prometheus', in *Berliner Ausgabe. Poetische Werke*, ed. Siegfried Seidel, 22 vols, Berlin 1960, I, pp. 327–9 (p. 328).

³³ Johann Kreuzer, 'Was heißt es, sich als Bild zu verstehen? Von Augustinus zu Eckhart', in *Denken mit dem Bild. Philosophische Einsätze des Bildbegriffs von Platon bis Hegel*, ed. Johannes Grave and Arno Schubach, Munich 2010, pp. 75–99 (p. 82).

³⁴ 'Indem sie sich als Bild erkennt, realisiert die *mens humana*, wovon sie sich als Bild denkt – zumindest wird diese Erkenntnis zu ihrem Anspruch'; Kreuzer, 'Von Augustinus bis Eckhart' (note 33), p. 82.

³⁵ Aspects of this thought can already be found in Philo of Alexandria and from then on in the entire Eastern Christian theology, e.g. in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite; see Gerhart Ladner, 'The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1953, VII, pp. 1–34 (pp. 11 and 13).

speculum) man realises his being a finite image of God.³⁶ From Augustine on, this conception of the intellectual act of mirroring and image formation becomes immensely productive in Christian philosophical thought, and is foundational to, for instance, Eckhart's conception of 'Bildung'³⁷ and to the mirror-motif as perpetuated by Cusanus in his conception of the *imago Dei*.³⁸ Such self-acting image production on the intellectual mirror has a strong tendency towards the iconoclastic in that the (*typos*-)image disposes of its visual tabernacle and is entirely elevated into the spiritual realm in approximating the 'Urbild'.³⁹

Yet, the bloody mirror of Celan's poem that casts the divine image into our eyes is not an active production of our contemplating intellect, as in the Augustinian tradition. We have already discussed how the mirror reflects the divine image without an original, collapsing the 'Urbild' into the 'Abbild', whereby the 'Abbild's' difference from itself is totalised, effectively uncreating the entire image. But the mirror metaphor in Celan goes further. Instead of situating the mirror in our *mens humana* as the Patristic tradition had done, the mirror is located in and constituted by the blood. In this line of reading, the 'Urbild' become 'Abbild' implies the physical disembodiment of the poetic voice by exsanguination as well as the lack of an 'Urbild' through which it could recognise itself as subject, as *imago Dei*. The image in the blood is therefore doubly outside its proper domain. The reflected image is a reflection outside our mental faculties, for which our body serves as tabernacle according to the Augustinian tradition, depriving us of the possibility of recognising ourselves as human subjects (in recognising ourselves as *imago Dei*). Further, even this tabernacle is deprived of its life-giving essence by its bleeding out. Hence, in a crassly sarcastic contortion of Augustine's metaphor, in 'Tenebrae' the mirror does form *in* us, or rather in a *part* of us: our blood that has been shed. Consequently, the emptiness of expression of the divine image cast into our eyes is not just a nonentity in and of our perception, but affects our very self-perception and constitution, at least by the way the mirror and the image are conceived in the Christian tradition in our recognition and knowledge of ourselves.

Indeed, Celan undermines the conception of God through the image and concomitantly of the plural poetic voice so completely (death already

³⁶ Kreuzer, 'Von Augustinus bis Eckhart' (note 33), p. 84.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁸ 'Indem der Mensch – als selbstaktiver Spiegel der Bildhaftigkeit der Wirklichkeit – eben diese Bildhaftigkeit auch tatsächlich einsieht und denkt, realisiert er erst sein Bild-Sein'; Thomas Leinkauf, 'Der Bild-Begriff bei Cusanus', in Grave and Schubach (eds), *Denken mit dem Bild* (note 33), pp. 99–129 (pp. 106–7).

³⁹ Kreuzer points to, for example, John Scotus Eriugena for his 'ikonophoben Aufhebung der Bilder in einer rein geistigen Schöpfung zu der die "sinnliche Kreatur verwandelt wird.'" Meister Eckhart speaks of 'entbilden' in much the same spirit. See Kreuzer, 'Von Augustinus bis Eckhart' (note 33), pp. 84–8.

having loomed in the subtext of the second stanza) that the entire fabric of the poem is threatened. And this fabric is, of course, poetic speech. Consequently, the empty expression is not only in our eyes, once the image strikes our retina, but the mouth, too, is 'offen und leer'. Similar to the divine de-substantiation in the 'Abbild' which is constituted in perennial difference to itself, destituting the 'Urbild', verbal expression seems consumed by the emptiness and senselessness of the deeds committed against us as victims and readers of violence. This resonates phonetically in the echo of 'Herr' in 'leer' which represents sonically what is inherent in the structure of the divine image in the trough. The echo of 'Herr' in 'leer' has expressly nothing as its origin: *Leere*.⁴⁰ The negative, empty visuality of the image now seems to have encroached upon our possibility to speak.

The poem could end here. But it does not. The eyes seem to be permanently blinded, incapable of further perception – indeed, this is already programmatically projected by the title 'Tenebrae', which means obscurity. The mouth, however, almost silently returns in the subsequent stanza: 'Wir haben getrunken, Herr. / Das Blut und das Bild, das im Blut war, Herr.'

Poetic speech seems to somehow go on through the act of drinking, which Wögerbauer believes 'devient constitutif d'un nouveau langage' ('becomes constitutive of a new language'; my translation), that is, however, a 'contre-langue' ('counter-language') to the language of Christianity and belief.⁴¹ The act of swallowing, especially in the perfective tense of '[w]ir haben getrunken' suggests the passivity and powerlessness of victims of violence, and in his commentary on the poem Lönker even goes so far as to suggest that the swallowing and the last lines of the poem confirm the death of the poetic voice.⁴² Once again Celan inverts the supposed spiritual replenishment of the Eucharist. Unlike Matthew 26:28, the act of drinking the blood does not imply 'remission of sins' and, unlike John 6:58, the blood does not appear to be a source of life. Indeed, the consumption of the blood by the poetic voice seems to be the climax of Celan's inversion of Christian tropes and motifs. The poetic voice consumes itself by consuming the blood – possibly its own – and the image, insofar as it consumes God as image and therefore consumes itself as *imago Dei*.⁴³

⁴⁰ Sowa-Bettecken, *Sprache der Hinterlassenschaft* (note 18), p. 190; John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, New Haven 2001, p. 145.

⁴¹ Bollack, Winkler, and Wögerbauer (eds), *Sur quatre poèmes de Paul Celan* (note 17), p. 131. Sowa-Bettecken and Kummer seem to share this belief that the suffering of Jews has now replaced that of Christ; see Sowa-Bettecken, *Sprache der Hinterlassenschaft* (note 18), p. 191; Kummer, *Unlesbarkeit dieser Welt* (note 18), p. 131. Gadamer is alone in proclaiming that the closing lines of the poem reaffirm the Christian doctrine of incarnation and the position of God as 'Herr'; Hans G. Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Ästhetik und Poetik II*, 10 vols, Heidelberg 1993, IX, p. 458.

⁴² Lönker, 'Tenebrae' (note 21), p. 192. The swallowing in 'Tenebrae' reminds us of the prominence of swallowing in Celan's 'Todesfüge', which also evokes the Holocaust and where swallowing is likewise associated with death.

⁴³ Georg-Michael Schulz very appositely reads the act of swallowing as 'auto-consommation': 'il s'agirait donc (car je pense, à l'évocation de l'image, à l'homme fait à l'image de Dieu, qui – sous la

At the same time, despite the implications of self-consumption and self-abnegation in the act of drinking, the poetic voice seems to defiantly persevere by having drunk the blood and, in the last lines of the poem, calls on God to pray. The poetic voice is still not entirely the arbiter of its own fate. It does not assertively tell God to pray *to* it anymore, as it did in the third stanza. It is also still not an agentive subject of verbs in the present tense, which would indicate that it is in control of its acts. However, the imperative appeal to God to pray attests to the continuation of poetic speech beyond the presumed death of the speaker and beyond a God become 'Abbild'. Poetic speech survives as plaint.

In Celan's 'Tenebrae' the image plays an entirely negative role. The would-be and should-be 'Urbild' that is God is nothing but an 'Abbild' and threatens poetic speech. In the next poem I want to examine – 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' – we witness a similar loss of an 'Urbild', yet here Celan maintains a more positive outlook for poetry's ability to give testimony of the 'Urbild'. While in 'Tenebrae' we have seen that Celan's image as 'etwas Geistiges' (M, 101) is wholly negative when it becomes mere material 'Abbild', a closer look at 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' will show us how Celan connects his notion of the image, informed by the philosophical tradition of thinking the image, with the Judæo-Christian mythology of the confusion of tongues. Language(s) after Babel are merely metaphorical, 'bebildert', and 'umgelogen' as Celan says in his poem, whereas for Celan, poetry is 'Unübertragbar' and 'anti-metaphorisch' (M, 145).

SPEAKING AFTER BABEL IN 'BEI WEIN UND VERLORENHEIT'

In his 1959 poem 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', published as part of the poetry volume *Die Niemandsrose* (1963), Celan associates the confusion of tongues with a form of 'Abbild' that is clearly negatively connoted, sparked in part by persistent reviews of his works as metaphorical and consisting of mere imagery (see introduction). In the poem, the irremediable separation between an originary, lost form of speaking (a loss already evident in the titular 'Verlorenheit') and the languages of mankind is already formally expressed in the stanzaic divisions:⁴⁴ the Pegasus-like God's singing of the

forme de l'image de Dieu – se reflète dans le sang) d'une sorte d'auto-consommation'. See Bollack, Winkler, and Wögerbauer (eds), *Sur quatre poèmes de Paul Celan* (note 17), p. 140.

⁴⁴ A closer investigation of Celan's poem and Hölderlin's 'Brod und Wein' is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth noting that the motif of 'Wein', the presence of 'Dionysian' sounds and intoxication, as well as the loss of communication between man and God in Celan's poem clearly allude to Hölderlin's famous elegy. See Hölderlin's lines: 'Aber Freund! wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben die Götter, / Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt'; Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Brod und Wein', in *Sämtliche Werke*, 8 vols, ed. Friedrich Beissner, Stuttgart 1951, II/1, pp. 90–5 (p. 93). On the Dionysian in Celan's poem, see especially Arno Schmidt, "'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit [...]'. Bemerkungen zu einem Dithyrambos von Paul Celan aus der Sammlung *Die Niemandsrose*', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete*, 57/2 (2011), 345–55.

second stanza is juxtaposed with mankind's mistranslation of God's song, amounting to nothing but images and lies in the third.⁴⁵ In my analysis here, I will predominantly focus on the notion of the image expressed in the 'bebilderten Sprachen' of the third stanza:

Bei Wein und Verlorenheit, bei
beider Neige:

ich ritt durch den Schnee, hörst du,
ich ritt Gott in die Ferne — die Nähe, er sang,
es war
unser letzter Ritt über
die Menschen-Hürden.

Sie duckten sich, wenn
sie uns über sich hörten, sie
schrieben, sie
logen unser Gewieher
um in eine
ihrer bebilderten Sprachen. (KG, 126)

The derivative character of the image in question here is already apparent in its prefix 'be-', indicating its status as a mere 'Abbild'. The 'Abbild'-character of these languages is intricately linked to their being written – 'sie / schrieben' – and thus contrasting with the unwritten divine incantation.⁴⁶ Indeed, the derivative written character of man's languages is addressed not only semantically, but visually. The deficient and subordinate ('sie duckten sich') character of man's languages of images is emblematised by the positioning of stanza three below God's *archetypal* song in stanza two, whose visual placement above stanza three, in turn, relates to the upward movement that is described semantically ('Ritt *über* / die Menschen-Hürden'; my emphasis).

Mankind's inability to understand God's song is also apparent in the fragmented character of the third stanza which is particularly marked in 'sie / schrieben, sie / logen', where the line breaks separating subject and verb echo the divide between man's languages and God's song. In another, further sense, the Divine Word is betrayed here. By means of the symmetry between '[s]ie duckten sich', 'sie schrieben', 'sie logen', Celan uses syntactical parallelism to turn the Bible's most important poetic device against the Divine Word (or song), suggesting a duplicitousness that is also already conveyed in mankind's act of lying.⁴⁷ The derivative and deviating

⁴⁵ Jürgen Lehmann, 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', in Ivanović and Lehmann (eds), *Kommentar zu Paul Celans 'Die Niemandsrose'* (note 21), pp. 61–4.

⁴⁶ On Celan's preference for the audible, living, breathing spoken word as opposed to the written word, see Koch, 'The Allegorical Image and Presence in Paul Celan's "Wortaufschüttung"' (note 5), pp. 24–5.

⁴⁷ Stephen Geller, 'Hebrew Prosody and Poetics. Biblical', in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. T. V. F. Brogan, Princeton 1993, pp. 509–11.

character of these 'Abbilder' that are man's languages thus inheres in the grammatical structure of these languages themselves.⁴⁸ This derivative character is also conveyed in their plurality, embodying their difference to the univocity of God's *archetypal* song – a differential character that governs these languages internally, even down to their broken-up structure.

It is worth dwelling a bit more on this plurality of mankind's languages which alludes to the Biblical confusion of tongues and which Celan sees as a linguistic Fall of Man.⁴⁹ For Celan the event that brings about the confusion of tongues is not of an unhistorical, mythological nature but is re-imagined as the historical trauma that is the Holocaust. According to Winfried Menninghaus: 'die Erfahrung des Faschismus [ist...] der historische Grund der Aktualisierung der Sündenfallgeschichte' in Celan's conception of language.⁵⁰ Linguistic expression is encumbered by the historical 'Asche ausgebrannter Sinnggebung', as Celan would state in his 1948 poetological essay 'Edgar Jené und der Traum vom Traume',⁵¹ and an *archetypal* linguistic state in which word and thing are one is lost.⁵² Yet, the hope for a more *archetypal* form of communication remains, whether he declares in his 1948 essay that he wants to restore 'jene Ursprünglichkeit' in which 'Anfang und Ende zusammen[fielen]' (GW III, 156 and 157, respectively)⁵³ or lets the poetic voice listen to God's song eleven years later in his 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit'.⁵⁴

However, in the light of the plurality of languages confounding mankind's communication in the last line of the poem, we have to read the poem anew. The impossibility of truthful expression in language after Babel is most densely encapsulated in the polyglot pun of 'Neige' in the second line of the poem. 'Neige' is not only the German word for decline – which

⁴⁸ On the 'Abbild' as embodiment of its difference to the 'Urbild', see Alloa, 'Eine Sprache der Bilder' (note 12), pp. 25–6.

⁴⁹ As Menninghaus has shown, Celan, like Walter Benjamin, effectively conflates the confusion of tongues and the Fall of Man; Menninghaus, *Paul Celan. Magie der Form* (note 6), pp. 54–5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55; Menninghaus's interpretation of the multiplicity of languages in Celan differs from that of Derrida, who seems to see (multilingual) difference as integral to Celan's poetry when he states that '[c]haque poème a sa propre langue' and speaks of the 'valeur différentielle' as a 'condition [...] du poème'. See Jacques Derrida, *Shibboleth. Pour Paul Celan*, Paris 1986, p. 56.

⁵¹ Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden. Gedichte III. Prosa. Reden*, ed. Beda Allemann, Stefan Reichert, and Rudolf Bücher, Frankfurt a. M. 1983, p. 157. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as GW III, followed by the page number.

⁵² In Hebrew, word and thing carry the same name: 'dabar'; see Klaus Reichert, 'Hebräische Züge in der Sprache Paul Celans', in *Paul Celan*, ed. Werner Hamacher und Winfried Menninghaus, Frankfurt a. M. 1988, pp. 156–69 (p. 164).

⁵³ On the motif of the Fall of Man in relation to the image in Celan, see Koch, 'The Image in Celan's Poetics' (note 4), pp. 443–5.

⁵⁴ Celan also takes up the Babel motif three years later in his poem 'Hinausgekrönt' (written in 1962, published in 1963 as part of *Die Niemandsrose*, KG, 702–3). Here, Babel as the mythological *locus* of the confusion of tongues is situated in an unspecified below, negatively inverting the tower motif, and is opposed to the fertility of life and a truer form of language. See also Menninghaus, *Paul Celan. Magie der Form* (note 6), p. 55; Petra Leutner, *Wege durch die Zeichen-Zone: Stéphane Mallarmé und Paul Celan*, Stuttgart 1994, pp. 181–2.

in the context of the poem's title seems to have connotations of loss – but also the French word for snow, echoed in its German equivalent 'Schnee' here. Additionally, it bears resemblance to the 'Nähe' in the poem and the English word 'neigh', which in turn is picked up semantically when mankind merely hears 'Gewieher' where the poetic voice hears God's song.⁵⁵ We realise that the heterology of languages even encroaches upon the first-person voice. Celan, too, writes after Babel. The sense of loss conveyed by 'Neige' is also enacted by its relation to Nähe/neige/neigh, evoking the heterology of languages and their distance from *archetypal* speaking. The 'Nähe' into which the poetic voice rides the God-horse, passing through 'Schnee' or neige, becomes linked to the sensation of loss and linguistic confusion via the polyglot 'Neige'.

Moreover, we realise that the poetic voice which so seemingly confidently steers the divine horse does not itself actually communicate divine song to us. Rather, the poetic voice has to evoke a 'du' as witness to divine song – 'hörst du' – and only through this address to the testifying 'you' do we know of divine song. Hence, we only know, along with and through the 'you', that there is singing, not what is sung. Indeed, we must realise that the poetic voice expresses itself only as text – indeed, testimony of divine singing is only borne by the written words of the poem. The text as (visual) text (rather than spoken word) draws itself into question via Neige/Nähe/neige/neigh, since as Yoko Tawada perspicaciously discerns '[d]as englische Wort 'neigh' (Gewieher) weicht zwar von dem deutschen Wort 'Neige' orthografisch etwas ab, aber dennoch geht es hier eher um eine grafische Ähnlichkeit als um eine phonetische'.⁵⁶

Thus, unlike Arno Schmidt, who envisions a form of *unio mystica* between poetic voice and God,⁵⁷ and Jean Bollack, for whom the 'Schnee', somewhat inexplicably, is 'etwas Abbildloses, Unbebildertes' and thus *archetypal*,⁵⁸ my interpretation sees the heteroglossia of 'Schnee' as 'neige' and its similarity to 'neigh' precisely as a mark of linguistic separation between the poetic voice and God. The plurality of tongues suggests an unbridgeable gap between the (absent) *archetypal* song and its indirect, textual representation in the poem. Indeed, the only time that the poetic voice and God-horse are described as speaking in unison, they are ironically characterised – from the perspective of mankind – as neighing ('Gewieher'). This neighing in turn embodies the confusion of languages in its similarity to Neige/Nähe/neige.

⁵⁵ For *paronomasia* in Celan's poetry, including this poem, see Elizabeth Petuchowski, 'Bilingual and Multilingual "Wortspiele" in the Poetry of Paul Celan', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 52/4 (1978), 635–51 (645). See also Lehmann, 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' (note 45), p. 62.

⁵⁶ Cited in Wiebke Amthor, *Schneegespräche an gastlichen Tischen: wechselseitiges Übersetzen bei Paul Celan und Andre du Bouchet*, Heidelberg 2006, p. 311.

⁵⁷ Schmidt, 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' (note 44), 350.

⁵⁸ Jean Bollack, 'Chanson à boire. Über das Gedicht "Bei Wein und Verlorenheit"', in *Celan-Jahrbuch*, ed. Hans-Michael Speier, Heidelberg 1989, 23–35 (35).

Thus, the seeming unity between poetic voice and God-horse already suggests an inherent gap between poetic voice and the divine 'Urbild'.

Certainly, even if the poetic voice cannot join the God-horse in its song, the repeated use of the first-person plural pronoun ('unser', 'uns', 'unser'; see lines 6, 9, 11) in opposition to the third person plural of mankind ('sie') also implies their fundamental difference. Whereas mankind ducks down ('[s]ie duckten sich'), the poetic voice and 'du' listen to divine song. Thus, even if poetic voice and 'du' (and the reader of the poem) do not partake in *archetypal* speaking, they are also not speaking in the false 'gebilderten Sprachen' of mankind. In his 1960 'Meridian' speech, Celan would be more positive and envision a possibility for poetic language to approach the *archetypal*. Celan hopes that in speaking 'in eines Anderen Sache', that is, an intimate, dialogical other akin to the 'du' we encounter in 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', the poem could also speak 'in eines ganz Anderen Sache' (M, 8; italics in original). This 'ganz Andere' is nothing other than a 'Hilfswort' for God.⁵⁹ Thus, even if poetic speech remains 'terrestrisc[h]' (M, 12) and does not undo the linguistic Fall of Man, it approximates *archetypal* speech and is precisely not merely 'übertragen' (M, 145), metaphorical, and a linguistic 'Abbild' thereof.

SUBJECTIVITY AND THE IMAGE IN 'HALBZERFRESSENER'

In 'Tenebrae', the loss of an 'Urbild' as the ontological basis of the 'Abbild' almost completely undermines the possibility of communication. Similarly, in 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', Celan associates the confused languages that speak in mere metaphors with a negatively conceived 'Bebilderung' of a form of linguistic 'Urbild'.

The 'gebilderten Sprachen' of mankind in 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' and Celan's inversion of the traditional discourse on the *imago Dei* in 'Tenebrae' find their positive counterpart in his 1964 poem 'Halbzerfressener', published as part of the volume *Atemwende* published in 1967. In the poem, the image as a form of 'Urbild' is constitutive of the poetic voice, rather than threatening its existence as 'Abbild'. This different role of the image in 'Halbzerfressener' goes hand in hand with a different relationship between language and image:

Halbzerfressener, masken-
gesichtiger Kragstein,
tief
in der Augenschlitz-Krypta:

⁵⁹ For a more complete discussion of this passage in Celan's speech, see David Brierley, 'Der Meridian': ein Versuch zur Poetik und Dichtung Paul Celans, Frankfurt a. M. 1984, pp. 188–90; Florence Pennone, *Paul Celans Übersetzungspoetik: Entwicklungslinien in seinen Übertragungen französischer Lyrik*, Tübingen 2007, pp. 53–7. For historical contexts of 'das ganz Andere' and use of this expression in Heidegger and Buber, see Buhr, *Celans Poetik* (note 6), pp. 193–4.

Hinein, hinauf
 ins Schädelinnre,
 wo du den Himmel umbrichst, wieder und wieder,
 in Furche und Windung
 pflanzt er sein Bild,
 das sich entwächst, entwächst. (KG, 195)

I would like to particularly focus on the dialogical relation between the I and you – which were also present in the previous two poems, but which I did not explicitly discuss. The dialogue is a form of dualism very different from the dualism of 'Urbild' and 'Abbild'. In 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit', the 'du' appealed to by the poetic voice is not part of the 'Menschen-Hürden' of the third stanza who create 'Abbilder', and although 'Tenebrae' ends more ambivalently, the poetic address to the second person singular, namely God, seems to let the first-person poetic voice continue speaking. A poetic interchange based on listening and speaking, a dialogue in which the speakers engage with each other in an attempt to bridge possible differences, seems to be Celan's ideal for communicating and translating in language. Framed in the words of Walter Benjamin's famous translation essay, rather than copying the original ('abbilden'), Celan seeks a fitting together ('anbilden') of languages and fragments of speech which, 'anstatt dem Sinn des Originals sich ähnlich zu machen', are recognisable as parts of 'einer größeren Sprache'.⁶⁰

This dialogical conception of language in relation to the image is perhaps most expressly found in Celan's 'Halbzerfressener'. Divided across the poem's two stanzas, we move from a visual outside to an inside that withdraws from the perceptual grasp of our sense of vision. The partially eroded corbel that opens the poem is a representation whose representationality is patently visible: 'masken- / gesichtig'. The visual mask is emphasised further by the mid-word enjambement after 'masken-'. This enjambement, which so ostentatiously foregrounds the pretence of the mask's display, calls to mind the prominent enjambements in 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' where 'sie / schrieben, sie / logen' so emphatically condemned the visuality as 'Abbild' of mankind's picturised languages. We should not necessarily think of the mask as concealing the corbel's face, but rather the mask is the face of the corbel, since the word mask as technical term in the arts is synonymous with 'Kragstein'.⁶¹ The mask-character and the associations of deceitfulness which go along with this word thus pertain not to an assumed visual display or wilful deceit by the corbel but concern the very nature of the corbel as such, as artifice. This is important because it entails that the opposition in the poem is not between a false and a true

⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften. Kleine Prosa. Baudelaire-Übertragungen*, ed. Tillman Rexroth, Rolf Tiedemann, und Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols, Frankfurt a. M. 1972, IV/1, p. 18.

⁶¹ See entry 7 for 'Maske', in *Wörterbuchnetz – Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GM02008#XGM02008 (accessed 10 April 2020).

(outside) appearance, but rather between outward appearance and inner being or self. Thus, when we go under or beyond the corbel's mask, we do not arrive at the face of the corbel, but we go inside the 'Schädelinnre' of the corbel. We hence move from the outwardly directed mask exposed to someone's gaze, to an inwardly oriented gaze that seems to be the corbel's own. The word 'gesichtig', so critically separated from the visual pretence of the mask, can mean both: visible to an external onlooker and inwardly looking.⁶² '[M]asken- / gesichtig' thus expresses the two poles that create the tension operative in the poem: a visibility, which, indiscernible to itself, services someone else's gaze, and a self-active introspection.

In the next few lines our gaze shifts from the displayed face of the corbel to the crypt in or of its eyes. Our gaze now penetrates the depth of the 'Augenschlitz-Krypta' and, obviously, the gaze is a metaphorical, mental one now.⁶³ This becomes most clear when we consider that the old Greek *κρυπτός* means 'concealed'.⁶⁴ Perception, ultimately, has turned inward and on itself. It is in this turn or rather in the act of turning, as we will see, that perception and image become defined and, indeed, coincide.

Inside the skull, which we have entered through the eye-slit, a dialogical 'du' becomes active and we encounter motifs of fecundity. The image is pivotal for this productivity: the image is what is cultivated by the you and the corbel (which is masculine in German, hence 'er' in the poem). It is in this act of reflection in the 'Schädelinnre', in this inward-turn of the corbel's gaze, that he encounters the you. The you is thus a part of the corbel's introspection. This you, *through* its cultivating ('in Furche und Windung'), forms and becomes the corbel's image. In passing through his other that is the 'du', the perceiving subject (the corbel) and its act of perception almost coincide with the perceived object (the 'du' or 'er'), and they coincide in the image: the difference between 'Urbild' and 'Abbild' seems almost overcome.⁶⁵ Yet, this act of cultivation, the act of ploughing, 'wieder und wieder', is not a finite act – we never achieve a state of final unification of you and corbel in the image. The image, planted in the celestial soil ('Himmel'), continuously outgrows its own perceptual grasp ('sich entwächst, entwächst').

What is imaged or imagined here? This mental self-reflection through the image reminds us of the Augustinian *mens* contemplating its likeness

⁶² See 'Gesichtig', in *Wörterbuchnetz – Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GM02008#XGM02008 (accessed 10 April 2020). For a discussion of the eye in Celan, see Sieghild Bogumil, 'Geschichte, Sprache und Erkenntnis in der Dichtung Paul Celans', in *Der Glühende Leertext: Annäherungen an Paul Celans Dichtung*, ed. Christoph Jamme and Otto Pöggeler, Munich 1993, pp. 127–42 (p. 133).

⁶³ This movement into an eye, i.e. into that which the eye itself cannot see, is a very frequent motif in Celan's poetry. See also the poems 'Zuversicht' and 'Ein Auge, offen' (KG, 93 and 109).

⁶⁴ 'Κρυπτός', *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, ed. Robert Beekes, Leiden and Boston 2010, p. 786.

⁶⁵ In spirit, this is not unlike the conception of the image in Meister Eckhart's philosophy; see Kreuzer, 'Von Augustinus zu Eckhart' (note 33), p. 89.

to the divine 'Urbild' in its own image as *imago Dei*, which we discussed in 'Tenebrae'. Whereas in 'Tenebrae' Augustine's notion of the *imago Dei* was only negatively present in its absence, as it were, in 'Halbzerfressener' we encounter what appears to almost be a positive counterpart to the lacking *imago Dei* in 'Tenebrae'. Further corroborating our suspicion that the idea of the *imago Dei* informs this poem, the inside of the corbel's skull in 'Halbzerfressener' is also the heaven ('Himmel'), that is the traditional *locus* of the divine 'Urbild' as image in which the Augustinian *mens* would recognise itself. Yet we should be more cautious in our interpretation. 'Himmel' can mean both a divine heaven as well as a terrestrial sky; furthermore, the rather sober and anatomical description of the *mens* as 'Schädelinnere' and possibly the brain as 'Windung'⁶⁶ secularises Augustine's solemnly spiritual concept and quite literally grounds it, considering the agrarian vocabulary. The 'Urbild' of which an image is formed hence is not divine but rather that of the corbel contemplating itself as (mental) image.⁶⁷

Yet, there is potentially more to this corbel, and the 'Windung' and 'umbrechen' of the second stanza provide a clue: they are German variants of the Latin 'versus'. Eventually, the self-contemplating act takes place in and *through* poetry, and consequently the contemplator or corbel is none other than the poet himself who (re)constitutes himself – continuously – in the act of writing.

Celan had said in his *Meridian* speech that '[d]as Gedicht will zu einem Anderen. [...] Erst im Raum dieses Gesprächs konstituiert sich das Angesprochene, versammelt es sich um das ansprechende und nennende Ich' (M, 9). The contemplating poet thus becomes a 'wahrnehmende[s] Du' in his self-reflection, which is nothing other than 'ein Sichvoraus schicken zu sich selbst, auf der Suche nach sich selbst' (M, 11). This self-recreation as reflected 'Bild' via the contemplating you, perhaps, for the briefest of moments, turns and returns to recognise and meet himself as self-defining, secular 'Urbild': 'Ich bin [...] mir selbst begegnet' (M, 11). In this encounter between the first-person poetic voice and the other, the intra-linguistic divide between *archetypal* speaking and a language of 'Abbilder' seems to have been bridged by the momentary self-recognition of the first-person poetic voice in the image of the other.

⁶⁶ I cannot subscribe to the main line of Taibon's interpretation, which holds that 'Innenraum' and 'Außenraum' are united in the poem whereas I perceive that the poem follows a clear line from inside to outside; see Markus Taibon, "Ein Wort nach dem Bild des Schweigens". Zur Sprachmetaphorik im Werk Paul Celans', *Sprachkunst*, 24/2 (1993), 233–53 (242).

⁶⁷ Burger goes further and states: 'Der Dichter – das Du kann sich nur auf seine Person beziehen – bricht den "Himmel" um, damit das Bild Früchte tragen kann [...]. [D]as Bild [wird] durchtränkt [...] vom Göttlichen, das im Dichter waltet. Dieser Umbruch führt aber auch dazu, daß das Bild sich "entwächst"; Hermann Burger, *Paul Celan: auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sprache*, Zürich 1974, p. 20. The identification of 'du' with the poet and with the 'Bild', in turn, also implies that Burger identifies the you with the corbel whose 'Bild' is planted. I do not fully agree that the image is imbued by the divine here, which should be clear from the explanation above.

CONCLUSION

For Celan, poetry can only testify to a form of 'Urbild' by engaging in a dialogue with a 'du', as we saw particularly in 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' and 'Halbzerfressener' but also in the persistence of the poetic voice's address to God in 'Tenebrae'. And yet, instead of his poetry speaking in 'bebilderten Sprachen', languages of 'Abbilder' and metaphors, Celan insists that the image his poetry tends towards is 'geistig' and 'unübertragbar'. The two poles of the image in Celan (and the German philosophical tradition) – the negative potential of the image as 'Abbild' in 'Tenebrae' and also 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' as opposed to the positive more 'Urbild'-like image in 'Halbzerfressener' as well as his 'Meridian'-notes – lets us understand how Celan could understand images pejoratively (as 'Abbild und Nachbild', KG, 180; the eye as 'Bilderknecht', KG, 155; poetry as not a mere attempt 'Bilder wirr durcheinanderzuwüfeln') and positively as something non-visual and spiritual.⁶⁸

I have focused here on three poems from Celan's mature writings spanning *Sprachgitter*, *Die Niemandrose*, and *Atemwende*, as well as notes to his 'Meridian' speech. Yet, the notion of the image, between 'Abbild' and 'Urbild', I believe, is not limited to this period of Celan's writing. I have shown elsewhere that it plays an important role in Celan's early poetological essay 'Der Traum vom Traume' from 1948.⁶⁹ In his very late, posthumously published poetry volumes *Schneepart* and *Zeitgehöft*, Celan's usage of 'Bild' seems to drop somewhat. Nonetheless, even here, for instance in the 'Ohnebild' of his 1968 poem 'Aus dem Moorboden' (KG, 335) (from *Schneepart*), we have strong traces of an apophatic (Neo-)Platonic 'Urbild'⁷⁰ that envisions the possibility of a 'messianische' 'Sprache', as Hamacher holds in his authoritative exegesis of the poem.⁷¹ The image is a central trope in Celan's poetry that deeply shapes and is shaped by his conception of language and poetic voice.⁷²

⁶⁸ Celan, *Mikrolithen sinds, Steinchen* (note 3), p. 194.

⁶⁹ Koch, 'The Image in Celan's Poetics' (note 4), 440–5. Indeed, Celan's use of the term 'Bild' is more frequent in his earlier works than in his later ones.

⁷⁰ See for instance Meister Eckhart's notion of God as 'aller bilde entbildet'; Meister Eckhart, *Predigten. Traktate*, ed. Niklaus Largier, tr. Ernst Benz *et al.*, 2 vols, Frankfurt a. M. 2008, II, pp. 326–7. On this passage in Eckhart, see Kreuzer, 'Von Augustinus zu Eckhart' (note 33), p. 85.

⁷¹ Werner Hamacher, *Keinmaleins: Texte zu Celan*, Frankfurt a. M. 2019, p. 28.

⁷² Many thanks to two anonymous reviewers for their feedback, to Robin Steedman for her ever patient and diligent comments on my work, and to Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst e.V. for partly funding this research. Paul Celan's two poems 'Tenebrae' and 'Bei Wein und Verlorenheit' from, respectively, *Sprachgitter* (1959) and *Niemandrose* (1963) are reprinted courtesy of S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt a. M. I am very thankful to S. Fischer for letting me reprint these poems free of charge.